

'UN risks being destroyed if Saddam Ignored'

AFP, Blackpool

British Prime Minister Tony Blair was on Tuesday to warn in a key-note speech to his Labour Party's annual conference that failure to disarm Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein would "destroy the authority of the United Nations", official sources said.

Blair was also expected to repeat that the UN was Britain's preferred route for dealing with Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction but that the right to use military force should be retained in case all diplomatic efforts failed.

Blair's speech, which he was due to deliver at 2:30 pm (1330 GMT) in Blackpool, northwest England, comes as a new poll indicated British public support for a possible war on Iraq has dropped from 37 percent to 33 percent in the past week.

US spl envoy holds talks with Pak officials

AFP, Islamabad

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca held talks here Tuesday with senior foreign ministry officials ahead of a meeting with President Pervez Musharraf, officials said.

Rocca met Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Inamul Haq and foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar for almost one hour, they said.

Details of the discussions were not immediately available. Haq told reporters on Monday that her talks with Pakistani officials would focus on "bilateral issues."

Nepal blows up Maoist memorial

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's army said it Tuesday blew up a memorial set up by Maoist rebels marking the launch of their insurgency six and a half years ago.

The monument was in the Rolpa district, some 390 km west of the capital Kathmandu, where the guerrillas on February 13, 1996 declared a "people's war" to topple the constitutional monarchy and establish a communist state.

Army spokesman Colonel Dipak Gurung did not give details about the marker or any casualties, but called it "the most important monument" of the Maoists.

'India can sustain air deployment against Pakistan for a year'

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian air force can sustain its present level of deployment against Pakistan along the country's western borders for at least another year, Air Chief Marshal S. Krishnaswamy said Tuesday.

"I am more than satisfied with the way we are poised," Krishnaswamy told reporters in the Indian capital.

"The air force can sustain (deployment) for a long time ... even one more year, I have no problem," he added.

West turns blind eye to HR abuse in Chechnya

AFP, Moscow

Three years since Russia sent in troops to bring breakaway Chechnya to heel, Russian soldiers continue to execute, torture and rape with impunity, while human rights groups rage in vain at Western passivity and official restrictions.

"Since the September 11 attacks on the United States the West has been far too relaxed about Russia's human rights record," complained Lyudmila Alexeyeva, chief of the Helsinki Human Rights group. She said this was especially the case with regard to what Moscow says is its "anti-terrorist" operation in Chechnya.

The international community's blind eye to abuses prompted all the more anxiety as "Russian soldiers already think they can do anything they want on condition that both some witnesses like reporters or rights groups are not around", Alexander Petrov of US-based Human Rights Watch said.

Exactly three years have passed since Russia poured troops into the southern republic to put down a separatist insurgency.

Independent witnesses have testified to wide-ranging human rights abuses against the local population, ranging from harass-



The chairman of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), Hans Blix (C), is surrounded by media as he arrives on Tuesday for a second day of talks with Iraqi officials on the return of UN arms inspectors to Iraq. UN weapons experts are to hold a second day of logistics talks in hope of striking a deal to launch inspections in Iraq, but Washington has asked them to delay until the UN agrees on tough new terms.

4 killed as Israel maintains noose around Arafat

Army points gun at Ramallah HQs

AFP, Nablus

After three Palestinians and an Israeli soldier were killed in renewed violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Israeli army quietly redeployed around Yasser Arafat's office, keeping the Palestinian leader in close check, officials said Tuesday.

The deaths came as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was trying to regain some steam in Moscow, before returning to Israel to face the fallout from his humiliating Ramallah siege fiasco and Labour party threats to withdraw from his coalition government.

Late Monday, the Israeli army cracked down on Palestinians in the West Bank city of Nablus defying the curfew, sparking fierce clashes which left two Palestinian children

and an Israeli soldier dead.

Ten Palestinians were injured, an 11-year-old critically, in the firefights which took place mainly in Nablus' Old City, army and Palestinian medical sources said.

The army continued its sweep for wanted militants in the West Bank all night, arresting more than 30.

Meanwhile in the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian man working as a watchman on a farm was hit by Israeli bullets as two tanks and a bulldozer rolled into the Al-Shujayiah district on the eastern edge of Gaza City, Palestinian medics said.

The tanks opened fire with machine-guns as an Apache helicopter flew overhead and fired at least two missiles on an unidentified target, security sources said.

The deaths brought to 2,543 the

number of people killed since the Intifada erupted two years ago, including 1,877 Palestinians and 615 Israelis, the difference being made up of foreigners.

Meanwhile in Ramallah, the situation remained volatile as Israeli guns were again pointed at Arafat's office, two days after the army withdrew its forces from the veteran leader's compound.

Speaking from inside the crumbling building which was besieged for 10 days, Arafat aide Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP Israeli troops occupied two Palestinian houses in front of the Muqataa compound and pointed their guns out of the windows towards Arafat's offices.

UN, Iraq resume talks

US asks for inspections to be put on hold

AFP, Vienna

UN experts pushed ahead Tuesday with talks on the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq, seeking an agreement with Baghdad despite a US call to put the inspections on hold.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said late Monday that UN weapons inspectors should delay any mission to Iraq until the UN Security Council finishes deliberations on a possible new resolution that would tighten up the inspection regime.

But chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix made clear as he returned to UN offices in Vienna for a second day of talks with Iraqi officials that his marching orders came from the UN's top decision-making body, and not Washington.

"I am asked by the Security Council to do this job and I do it," said Blix.

"We are moving forward with our discussions under our mandate and will of course take into account any directions from the Security Council," spokeswoman Melissa Fleming of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said.

"We are moving forward with our business. We have to proceed as if we will return," she said.

While UN experts reported progress during the first day of talks on Monday, Powell neverthe-

less took a cautious tone, saying that Blix should wait for the Security Council to have its final say.

"I think also he will have to wait and see whether or not the United Nations Security Council comes up with new guidance or additional resolutions that might require him to modify his plan," he said.

Discussions on Monday focused on access to sensitive sites such as Iraq's defence ministry, garrisons of the elite Republican Guard and the headquarters of President Saddam Hussein's ruling Baath party, UN officials said.

The Iraqis were "trying their best ... to expedite our requirements for effective inspections," Blix said after the first of two days of talks in Vienna, the first such meeting since inspectors left the country four years ago.

The talks in Vienna are seen as crucial for Baghdad to avoid a war, with the United States pressing for a headline UN resolution mandating rapid and unlimited inspections and threatening military action if Iraq fails to comply.

UN officials have made clear the talks were based on previous UN resolutions on Iraq inspections, which the administration of US President George W. Bush does not accept.

Baghdad is adamant that it will not accept a new inspections regime.

With another showdown between Washington and Baghdad looming, Powell made clear the United States would likely block another round of UN weapons inspections under the old rules.

Asked whether Washington maintained that UN inspectors should not go to Baghdad until the UN Security Council came up with a new resolution, Powell responded: "That is our position."

Blix said in Vienna that the talks with the Iraqis were only designed to resolve logistics questions so that inspectors would be ready to go "if and when" they get the green light from the Security Council.

He said however that he hoped to have an advance party in Iraq "around the middle of October."

IAEA head Mohammed El-Baradei said larger issues such as visits to key sites like presidential palaces in Iraq and the tougher UN resolution demanded by the United States were not being discussed in Vienna.

IAEA spokesman Mark Gwozdecky said: "I think both sides are mindful that there are other players, other discussions in the context of the Security Council and we're very mindful that they could change certain stances but for the time being we are operating on the basis of existing resolutions."

UNICEF calls for trials of child abusers

AFP, Colombo

A United Nations agency on Tuesday called for special tribunals to try war crimes against children and said two million boys and girls have died in armed conflicts in the past decade.

UNICEF, the UN agency responsible for child welfare, said there should be accountability and an end to impunity for those responsible for war crimes against children.

Ted Chaiban, Sri Lanka's UNICEF representative, told a seminar on "violence against children in armed conflict" that there were an estimated 300,000 child soldiers worldwide.

The three-day seminar organised by the Save the Children charity is being addressed by child rights experts and representatives from humanitarian agencies.

"The abuse of children is frequently a deliberate tactic of war," said Chaiban. "Those who commit war crimes against children must be held accountable for their acts."

US war on Iraq may cost \$9b a month

AP, Washington

Fighting a full-scale war with Iraq would cost up to \$9 billion a month, congressional budget experts said as the Senate prepared to open debate this week on a resolution authorising President Bush to wage that war.

Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld continued to press the need for tough action against Iraq, citing 67 incidents in the past two weeks of Iraq firing on U.S. and British warplanes patrolling no-fly zones in the country.

"With each missile launched at our air crews, Iraq expresses its contempt for UN resolutions" demanding that Iraq allow unimpeded weapons inspections and disarm, Rumsfeld said Monday.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office in a report Monday

said uncertainty about the length and intensity of a war with Iraq made predicting the cost difficult.

But it estimated that deploying U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf would cost from \$9 billion to \$13 billion, and that the monthly cost of combat by either heavy ground or air forces would be \$6 billion to \$9 billion.

Another \$5 billion to \$7 billion would be required to bring the troops home after a war. The monthly cost of a post-war peacekeeping force excluding humanitarian aid, reconstruction and the dismantling of weapons of mass destruction would be \$1 billion to \$4 billion.

"This debate should not be driven by how much it will cost US taxpayers," said Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad, D-N.D. But he said it was important to keep in mind that three months of combat with a heavy ground force

and a five-year occupation by a large US force could cost more than \$272 billion.

Saying that Iraq's biological and chemical weapons stockpiles and its attempt to attain a nuclear capability are an immediate threat to U.S. security interests, the Bush administration is urging both Congress and the UN Security Council to approve resolutions authorising the use of military force if Iraq does not abide by past demands to disarm.

"We believe that one resolution with consequences in it is the way to achieve Iraqi compliance," Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman said Monday night in a speech to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. If Iraq feels the UN Security Council is divided, Grossman said, or that "nothing will happen, then nothing happens in Iraq."

INS starts registration of Muslims on arrival

Mahatir upset at new US entry policy

BBC ONLINE, REUTERS, Washington

The United States Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) is starting to register people from selected Arab and Muslim countries on arrival into the country.

Under the new policy, immigration staff will routinely fingerprint, photograph and question potential entrants, checking their pictures and prints against criminal and terrorist databases.

The US Justice Department has also issued a directive that anyone who has frequently visited the Middle East, North Africa, Cuba or North Korea can be taken aside too, if they do not have what it calls a credible explanation for their trip.

The policy is aimed at preventing a repeat of the security lapses which allowed the 11 September hijackers

to live undetected in the US for so long.

The measures, introduced nationwide on Tuesday, could potentially apply to any of the 35 million foreign visitors who come to the United States every year.

But all citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Sudan will be targeted, and visitors - especially men - from other Muslim and Middle Eastern countries may also be subject to the new measures.

The Arab-American community has reacted angrily to the news, saying people will be targeted on the basis of their race and religion.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad also hit back, saying the new policy was a reflection of "anti-Muslim hysteria".

"Of course, I am upset," Dr Mahatir said. "Because of the acts

of a few people, the whole Muslim world seems to have been labelled."

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad said Tuesday he was upset the United States was targeting Muslims, including Malaysians, under a new immigration policy to stop would-be terrorists.

From Tuesday, US immigration officers will register, fingerprint and photograph anyone they feel fits a terrorist profile. Men from some Islamic countries, including Malaysia, are most likely to be picked out.

"There is already a general anti-Muslim hysteria. Because of the acts of a few people the whole Muslim world seems to have been labelled," Mahatir told reporters on the sidelines of Ha bio-technology conference.

Ivory Coast rebels seize new town

AFP, Abidjan

Rebel soldiers in Ivory Coast overnight seized the town of Sakassou, about 42 km southwest of the rebel-held central city of Bouake, residents told AFP Tuesday.

"The town is under the control of rebels. I don't know if there are any dead or wounded," the wife of the doctor in charge of Sakassou's hospital said.

A high school teacher said he had heard no firing but added that all the town's residents were staying indoors Tuesday.

Government officials in Sakassou could not be reached by telephone.

French troops meanwhile took up positions Tuesday between rebel-controlled areas in the centre and the north to stem their possible advance to the south, where the de facto capital Abidjan is located on the Atlantic coast, sources on the ground said.

47 feared dead in Guatemala bus crash

REUTERS, Guatemala City

As many as 47 people may have been killed when a bus heading through western Guatemala to the Mexican border plunged 275 yards off a mountain road and into fast-flowing rapids, authorities said on Monday.

Francisco Cifuentes, police chief for mountainous Huehuetenango department, said rescue workers had recovered the bodies of 14 victims and that as many as 33 corpses were believed still trapped in the vehicle.

HK marks nat'l day with noisy protests

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa led some 600 officials and guests to mark China's national day Tuesday at a flag-raising ceremony here amid noisy protests from political activists and Falungong practitioners.

A group of slogan-shouting protesters from the pro-democracy April Fifth action group, carrying a makeshift coffin, called for an end to communist party rule on the mainland and staged a march to the ceremony venue.



Virn Pisey, a 29-year-old HIV-positive carries her three-year-old daughter Sok Kea, also an HIV-positive as they participate in a march in Phnom Penh on Tuesday. More than 500 HIV-positive Cambodians marched through the capital demanding equal rights and access to free antiretroviral (ARV) medication in the AIDS-ravaged nation.

Int'l polls observers meet Pak opposition leaders

AFP, Islamabad

Commonwealth election observers met opposition parties here Tuesday ahead of next week's polls, which could sway an upcoming review of Pakistan's suspension from the 54-member body over the 1999 military coup.

The Commonwealth has deployed 22 observers from 18 countries, led by Malaysia's former deputy prime minister Dato Tan Sri Musa bin Hitam, to monitor the final leg of campaigning, voting and ballot counting.

Leaders of the two main opposition parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party met the delegation at a hotel in the capital to discuss pre-poll conditions.

The parties in earlier talks with observers from the European Union have alleged extensive "pre-poll rigging" by the military government of President Pervez Musharraf. Musharraf has denied the charges, saying the same claims were levelled before every election over the past 15 years.

The October 10 elections for the national and four provincial parliaments are the third Pakistani polls to be monitored by the

Commonwealth.

They are the first since Musharraf as army chief overthrew an elected government three years ago in a bloodless military coup, prompting Pakistan's suspension from the Commonwealth.

He declared himself president last year and in August amended the constitution to extend his terms as both president and army chief by three years.

The elections fall three weeks before Commonwealth foreign ministers meet in London under the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), where Pakistan's status will be on the agenda.

"CMAG will meet at the beginning of November and given that Pakistan is on the agenda, the foreign ministers will review the situation in Pakistan," the delegation's spokesman, Joel Kibazo, told AFP.

CMAG made the recommendation to suspend Pakistan in 1999.

Musa bin Hitam told reporters Monday that Pakistan's membership would be considered at the November 1 meeting, but refused to say whether the observers' report on elections would affect the review.

The observers' report will be submitted to Commonwealth

Secretary General Don McKinnon after the elections, and passed on to member states.

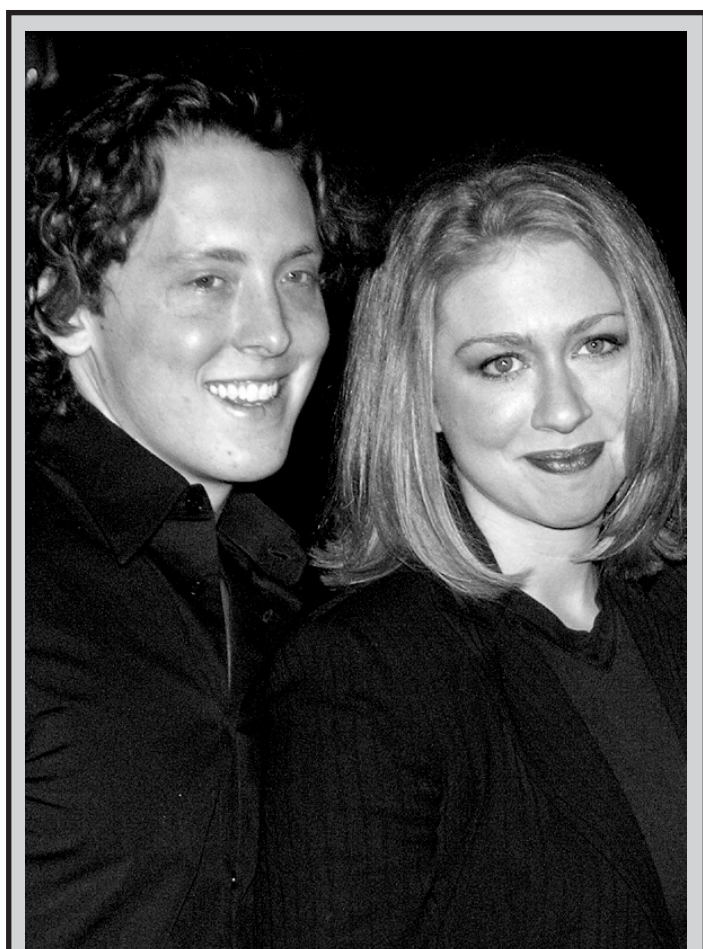
The team will also announce their findings in Pakistan.

Zimbabwe was suspended from the group in March over its elections, which were deemed by Commonwealth observers to have not been conducted freely and fairly. The observers' report was considered by CMAG earlier the same month when it met in Australia.

Musa bin Hitam was Malaysia's special representative to the Commonwealth in 1999 when the decision was taken to suspend Pakistan.

He travelled to Pakistan to meet Musharraf and politicians in the wake of the coup.

Politicians, observers and activists have levelled a barrage of criticism against Musharraf over the current election process, accusing his government of imposing laws to keep former premiers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif out of the race, harassing opposition candidates, and using state officials and funds to ensure pro-government candidates win seats.



Chelsea Clinton (R) and boyfriend Ian Klaus arrive at the Ziegfeld Theatre for the Premiere of "Red Dragon" on Monday in New York City.