

Diplomats see UN deal on Iraq resolution in days

REUTERS, Beirut/Washington

Key UN Security Council members are likely to resolve their deadlock over Iraq and reach a deal on a US compromise resolution in days, diplomats said.

French diplomatic sources with President Jacques Chirac at a summit of French-speaking nations in Beirut said talks on a revised US draft which drops an explicit authorisation to use force against Iraq were still progressing.

"An agreement is not settled yet. The five permanent members of the Security Council still have to meet. Then we have to pursue the negotiations with all the members of the Security Council," a French diplomatic source said. "It will take a matter of days to get an agreement."

French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin returned early to Paris from the Beirut summit, prompting speculation that real progress had finally been made at the Security Council.

"The return of Foreign Minister de Villepin to France on Friday is a sign that a deal could be near," one Western diplomatic source said.

France, which as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council has veto power, has led opposition to initial U.S. proposals calling for the immediate use of force against Iraq if any Security Council member judges it to be impeding inspections to determine whether Baghdad was developing weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq denies it has such weapons and has agreed to let UN arms inspectors back into the country after a four-year absence.

In Baghdad, President Saddam Hussein's term as chairman of the ruling Ba'ath Party was extended Saturday for another seven years, following his victory in an uncontested presidential election with a 100 percent vote of approval.

Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz said Iraq would not comment on the new U.S. proposal until it received a draft, but reiterated Baghdad's view that no new resolution was necessary.

Russia was said to be considering proposals of its own, and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stressed the priority was for inspectors to return to Iraq, a ministry statement said.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Friday the United States was flexible on a UN resolution, but added that the Bush administration's approach was quite different from that of France, which says only the Security Council can authorise military action.

Boucher said Washington envisaged chief UN arms inspector Hans Blix first reporting to the Security Council if Iraq did not comply with UN resolutions. "Our preference is that the Security Council take action if Iraq doesn't comply," he said.

But Washington reserved the right to launch a military strike at any time if President Bush decided it was in the interests of U.S. national security, Boucher said.

Norway peace brokers in Lanka

AFP, Colombo

Norway's deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen arrived here Sunday to finalise arrangements for the next round of peace talks amid a deepening political crisis on the island, diplomats said.

Helgesen is scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Monday and leaders of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on Tuesday, diplomats said.

The visit comes ahead of the next round of Norwegian-backed peace talks scheduled to open in Thailand at the end of the month and brewing trouble in the cohabitation arrangement governing Sri Lanka.

The government of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has been trying to clip some of the executive powers of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, but the Supreme Court has virtually put a stop to the move, official sources said.

UK to call up reservists for Iraq action

AFP, London

Britain will begin calling upon reservists for possible military action against Iraq within ten days, according to a report in a British newspaper published Sunday.

Around 1,000 reserve troops will receive their call-up papers by the end of the month, The Sunday Telegraph said.

"We've got to move on this by the end of the month to keep to the timetable," the weekly broadsheet quoted a senior defence ministry official as saying.

Civilian employers of reservists need some two months notice to arrange cover, the paper said, adding that most of the part-time soldiers were likely to be specialist staff needed to supplement the army's under-strength medical service. The army is said to be particularly short of

surgeons and anaesthetists.

Responding to the report, a defence ministry spokeswoman said "no decisions" had been taken to mobilise reservists.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw made it clear Friday that Britain and the United States were prepared to take military action against Iraq, even without a new UN resolution, if Baghdad refuses to allow arms inspections.

"We reserve the right to act within international law in respect of the use of force, which may or may not be covered by a new resolution," Straw told the BBC.

He added: "It is entirely appropriate for America, as for us, to reserve their position if the UN does not meet its responsibilities."

Straw stressed that Britain was "completely committed to a United Nations route -- if that is successful."

Tips to win heart of Indian women

AFP, New Delhi

Indian women want their men to be virgins before marriage, they hate dishonest, disloyal men but love those who understand them.

These are some of the findings of a nationwide survey conducted by Outlook magazine and pollsters Cfore that revealed the "new Indian woman" and what she wants from men.

A total of 2,150 women across 10 Indian cities were polled.

"It wasn't money, property or career prospects, or even looks and a good body, that mattered the most," the magazine said.

"What did was how sensitive a man was to a woman's needs. He had to listen to her, treat her as an equal and be honest to be in her good books. Interestingly, the illiterate women prized quality even more than the well-educated."

Interestingly too, the myth of the saree-clad, shy Indian girl was also shattered as "good sex was almost unanimously considered most important for a good relationship -- it was very important even for older women".

'Cyborg' plans to implant silicon chip in his brain

AFP, Bangalore

British scientist 'Cyborg' Kevin Warwick has a wish for his 60th birthday that will be coming up in 12 years time -- to have a silicon chip surgically implanted in his brain.

The 48-year-old professor in March 2002 conducted an experiment named 'Project Cyborg' in which doctors placed a silicon chip into his arm for a second time while linking his nervous system to a computer.

"Memory is the thing to go for now," Warwick told AFP in an interview. "I will be happy to have a brain implant when I am 60 years old. My body will be pretty worn out by then."

Warwick's first implant in August 1998 earned him the title of 'Cyborg', a person whose physiological functioning is aided by or dependent on a mechanical or electronic device.

It also means being partly human and partly machine, as per characters in sci-fi movies such as "The Terminator".



A young woman, wearing a bandage and showing facial wounds, breaks down while women dressed as angels pass through the crowd at the 'Australians Together' open air service at the Domain in Sydney on Sunday. The service was part of a national day of mourning to honour the dead and injured Australians in the Bali bomb blasts.

Thousands join Australians in mourning Bali victims

AFP, Sydney

Australians gathered in heartbreak Sunday on a national day of mourning for more than 100 of their friends, relatives and compatriots killed in last week's bombing in Bali, a tragedy being lived here as Australia's September 11.

Tens of thousands packed churches, sports fields, parks and private homes across the nation, praying, crying and voicing fears that their country -- long seen as too care-free and far removed to attract hate -- would never be the same again.

"Our pain is beyond comprehension," said the family of Angela Golotta, 19, the only Australian victim to be positively identified so far.

"The sheer futility of this sense-

less act of terrorism in the name of religion makes no sense," they said in a statement from their home in Adelaide.

Grief shared the stage with anger at memorial events across the country.

"On October 12, that cruel act of flagrant disregard for innocent and joyful lives has created within us an overwhelming sense of pain, of rage and of a sorrow which does not abate," the governor of New South Wales, Marie Bashir, told some 30,000 mourners in Sydney park.

"We imagine those bright and beautiful Australians whose love of sun and surf and sporting prowess is renowned," she said.

"We have lost them in the full bloom of life, exuberant, open minded and accepting of others,

loyal Australians, international ambassadors."

After a week of grieving and heartbreak as distraught families hunted for missing loved ones or grappled with the loss of those confirmed dead, many emotions turned Sunday to anger and even fear of a world suddenly become vulnerable.

"It's just about on our doorstep, what's going on?" asked one emotional young woman, Carolyn, as she attended a memorial in the Sydney suburb of Coogee for six members of a local rugby team killed in the bombing.

"You really don't know if you walk out the front door on a morning whether you're going to return."

India-US to hold war games at Agra

AFP, Agra

India and the United States are due to conduct joint air defence exercises here in this Taj Mahal town this week, officials said Sunday.

Details of the show have been kept a close secret with officials unwilling to confirm when exactly the drills will begin.

However, sources said the advance teams of US and Indian troops had already arrived in the city and could begin the exercises as early as Sunday afternoon.

In May, Agra was the venue of another joint exercise between troops of the two countries, particularly paratroopers.

Defence officials here said the exercises were likely to continue through the week.

Saddam pardons all prisoners

Francophone nations insist on UN role

AP, AFP, Baghdad

The Iraqi government announced an amnesty Sunday for all Iraqi prisoners as a thank-you to the nation for re-electing President Saddam Hussein.

The statement, attributed to Saddam, said the "full and complete and final amnesty" applied to "anyone imprisoned or arrested for political or any other reasons." It was read on television by Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhafa.

Those convicted of murder, the statement said, would only be released if the victims' families agreed and those convicted of theft would have to work out a way to repay their victims before being released. Soldiers accused of desertion and those awaiting execution of their death sentences were included.

The announcement came as the Iraqi government tries to rally domestic and international support in the face of US determination to topple it.

"We are shifting the responsibility of reforming them to their families and society after we have provided them with this opportunity," the statement said. "We ask God that we will not regret this decision."

The amnesty was intended to thank the Iraqi people for their support of Saddam, who claimed a 100-percent 'yes' vote in a presidential referendum last week, the statement said.

"It's a unanimity that other nations are incapable of achieving and it is unparalleled, but it is a great truth and came from this faithful people at this time," the statement said. "The referendum honoured us before the whole world."

As al-Sahhafa completed his statement, Iraqi television switched to file footage of Iraqis celebrating Saddam's elections victory, chanting his name and pledging support.

Iraqi exiles and the United States scoffed at the vote and the reported results. Saddam was the only candidate and Iraqis were asked to vote "yes" or "no" on whether he should serve another seven-year term.

President Saddam Hussein on Sunday pardoned all prisoners in Iraq, as the 56-nation Francophone organisation adopted a resolution insisting on the "essential role" of the United Nations in the crisis over Iraq's alleged weapons programmes.

Amid US threats to launch military action against Iraq, Saddam announced a "complete, comprehensive and final amnesty for all those

jailed prisoners, fugitives and detainees," as well as political prisoners.

The Francophone organisation's resolution, which is to be integrated into the final declaration of a three-day summit in Beirut, stressed the "primacy of international law and the essential role of the United Nations" in resolving the crisis, sources close to the meeting organisers said.

With his country leading opposition to a single tough UN resolution on Iraq, French President Jacques Chirac said Saturday the fight against terrorism must respect human rights.

"The fight against terrorism will be without mercy," Chirac told the summit of Francophone leaders, including 41 heads of state representing more than a quarter of UN member states.

"But it should be conducted with respect to human rights and the rule of law," he warned.

Chirac and Arab leaders opened the summit with a call for a resolution of the Iraq crisis through the United Nations and, if possible, without military action.

"In Beirut, let us reaffirm this fundamental credo: recourse to the use of force can only be a last resort," Chirac said Friday, warning that the "logic" of international law should take priority, to counter "adventurism".

The United States has softened its position in the face of world opposition and offered a compromise Security Council resolution that does not call for the automatic use of military force to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, who is accused of developing weapons of mass destruction and harbouring terrorists.

France has repeatedly called for two UN resolutions on Iraq -- one defining a tough new mandate for the UN weapons inspectors, and a second that could threaten the use of force if Baghdad failed to comply with UN demands.

But Washington and London still insist they could attack Baghdad without UN backing.

UN diplomats are still haggling over the fine details of a proposed compromise resolution.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told US Secretary of State Colin Powell Saturday that Moscow remained committed to a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

Russia, which holds a veto within the Security Council, has until now been opposed to the tough US stance on Iraq.



South Korean Unification Minister Jeong Se-Hyun (L) and his North Korean counterpart Kim Ryong-Song eat cold noodles in a restaurant in Pyongyang on Sunday after prickly exchanges at inter-Korean talks over the North's nuclear program. The high-level meeting on inter-Korean rapprochement was overshadowed by concerns over the North's reported admission of its nuclear program.

US scraps aid deal with DPRK

S Korea pressures North to drop N-programme

AFP, Washington

The administration of US President George W. Bush has decided to scrap an accord with North Korea giving aid in return for a freeze on nuclear weapons development, The New York Times reported Sunday.

But a State Department official expressed surprise at the report, pointing out that US envoy James Kelly, who was questioned about the 1994 agreement in Seoul on Saturday, said no decision had been made.

"I don't know of any change since he gave his answer," the official said.

The paper quoted unnamed senior officials saying the decision will halt annual US shipments of 500,000 tonnes of fuel oil to the communist state.

Washington says North Korea admitted to visiting US officials that it was pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program, and that it accused the United States of forcing Pyongyang to nullify the accord.

Even if the North Korean program effectively suspended the deal, its abandonment is a US decision to give

Pyongyang a stark choice between ending the nuclear program and near-total economic isolation, the paper said.

"We think the framework as we knew it is dead," the paper quoted a senior administration official saying. "The North Koreans already told us they viewed it as nullified."

Abandoning the accord means the United States will urge Japan and South Korea to suspend or end a multi-billion dollar (euro) project to provide modern nuclear power plants to the North, the paper said.

It said the decision came after a lengthy debate within the White House.

"There are some who fear that it could tempt the North Koreans into a rapid breakout, to produce weapons as fast as they can," the paper quoted one official as saying.

But Bush has concluded the North Korean admission, made after the United States presented evidence of the breach, proves the accord was fatally flawed all along, according to the report.

Meanwhile, South Korea put

pressure on North Korea during "gloomy" talks Sunday to scrap its nuclear weapons program immediately and open a dialogue with the United States on the issue, officials said.

The South Korean demand came as both sides met in Pyongyang for their first talks since the United States said last week the communist North had admitted it was pursuing a uranium-enrichment program.

"Our side made clear that we are opposed to any nuclear development," said Rhee Bong-Jo, spokesman for South Korea's delegation to the cabinet-level meeting.

"We also urged the northern side to immediately open a dialogue with countries concerned and the international community and take appropriate measures."

He described the mood at the inter-Korean talks as "gloomy".

North Korea made no "concrete" response to the warning that its nuclear ambition violated a reconciliation accord signed by the leaders of the two Koreas at their summit two years ago, Rhee said.

Pakistan enacts tough anti-terrorist law

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police will be able to detain suspected terrorists for up to a year without charging them under a tough new security law, the government said Sunday.

The law "empowers the government to keep somebody who is a terrorist or is suspected of being a terrorist for a longer period of time," spokesman Anwar Mehmood told AFP.

Under the existing law authorities can detain a suspect for up to three months without filing any charges.

Under the new presidential ordinance, which is expected to come into effect this month, police and other security agencies can detain suspected religious extremists for one year, as well as probe the assets of their wives, children and parents.

Even after their release on bail, the suspects would be prohibited

from visiting any public places such as movie theaters, airports, parks, train stations or hotels.

The Anti-Terrorism Ordinance 2002 would also give police the right to pick up any person suspected of ties to groups involved in terrorism or sectarianism, whether or not they are banned, and jail them for up to a year.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, who took power in a military coup in October 1999, has made cracking down on extremists a priority for his administration.

But it is a move that has made few friends, particularly in southern Sindh province, where extremism and ethnic sectarianism has run rampant in recent years.

Asked whether the government feared criticism from human rights groups over the new ordinance, Mehmood said: "If you want to fight terrorism, you have to have these kinds of tools."



US Major General William Webster (L), deputy commander general, talks to troops participating in a Pakistani-US joint army exercise at an undisclosed location in Pakistan on Friday. More than 150 US infantry troops are participating in joint military exercises with Pakistani troops in exercises dubbed "Inspired Gambit," the first since Pakistani-US military ties were revived after a four-year suspension in the wake of Islamabad's 1998 nuclear tests.