



Russian television channel NTV shows the members of the Chechen rebel group (L and R are females and explosive is fixed on their bodies) and their leader Movsar Barayev (unmasked C) speaking to the journalists inside the theatre building captured by them in Moscow on Friday. Armed Chechen rebels hold 700 hostages and demand the end of the war in Chechnya.

Al-Qaida targeting railways: FBI

REUTERS, Washington

The FBI sent out a national alert to law enforcement officials on Thursday, warning that al-Qaida may be planning another attack on the United States, possibly targeting the railway sector.

The FBI also cited possible future attacks against the global petroleum sector and said U.S. intelligence continues to receive general threats on the airline and maritime industries, the financial sector and government facilities and installations.

The FBI said it distributed the warning across the country on Wednesday, citing information from recent debriefings of detained al-Qaida members.

It said al-Qaida has considered directly targeting U.S. passenger trains, possibly using operatives who have a Western appearance.

'Benazir, Sharif can't return to politics'

PTI, Islamabad

Claiming that people have rejected politicians in the general elections who looted the nation, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said that former Premiers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif can not come back to take part in active politics.

"Nawaz and Benazir are enjoying abroad and do not care for the country. Now it will be a dream for them to come to power," Musharraf said.

Sharif can not come to Pakistan as he went abroad on an exile after a deal with the government, he told a Kuwait-based Arabic newspaper.

Asked about the political situation in Pakistan after the general elections, he said, now the ball is in the court of politicians. "If they want to see Pakistan a prosperous country, they should elect Prime Minister with consensus. The government is not interfering in the affairs of the political parties".

3 terror groups operating in Thailand

AFP, Bangkok

Thai police are aware of three 'terrorist' movements operating in the country and believe that the predominantly Muslim south is the most likely target for a terrorist attack, a senior officer said Friday.

"There are three terrorist groups actively operating in the four southernmost provinces. These groups have 200 to 300 members each," the officer told AFP, on condition of anonymity.

He did not specify if the groups were linked to any regional or any international terrorist organisations.

US using armed drones over Iraq

AFP, Washington

Armed US Predator drones have fired missiles at Iraqi air defences over southern Iraq for the first time, opening a new dimension to the cat-and-mouse warfare, US military officials said Thursday.

Air Force General Richard Myers disclosed that the unmanned aircraft were being used for quick-response attacks on Iraqi air defences in the south, saying their missiles are effective against some targets.

"It's over the target area for long periods of time and it can move between targets. That's the first advantage," he told reporters.

EU thrashes out deal on costs of expansion

AFP, Brussels

The European Union was thrashing out the final details Friday of a deal on the costs of its historic expansion into ex-communist Eastern Europe, after striking a last-minute compromise on the key issue of farm aid.

EU leaders gathered for a crunch last phase of talks on the second and final day of the summit to finalise an agreement and avoid derailing the bloc's expansion to include 10 new countries in 2004.

Diplomats were quietly confident that an agreement would be reached on schedule by Friday evening.

"The tough talks have now begun," a Danish presidency source told AFP. But he added: "Everyone agrees on what to offer to the candidates, and I find it impossible to imagine that any one prime minister would want to take responsibility for failure."

"I think we will finish on time tonight," he said. The summit had been threatened with delay or even failure over the key issue of farm subsidies which eat up nearly half the current annual budget of 95 billion euros (dollars).

The impasse was finally broken at a pre-summit meeting between French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

"France and Germany are committed to EU enlargement and are working together to seize this historic chance to further the EU's development in a peaceful way," Schroeder said.

Although there was general optimism, some officials warned that several

EU states were still demanding more details of the Franco-German accord. The Netherlands in particular has been hardline in demanding an end to direct farm aid.

In a draft accord released early Friday, the EU endorsed a recommendation by its executive arm that the 10 candidate countries "fulfil the political criteria and will be able to fulfil the economic criteria and to assume the obligations of membership from the beginning of 2004."

The 10 candidates - Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia - are expected to be formally invited to join at a December EU summit in Copenhagen and sign accession treaties in Greece in April.

The draft, which must still be approved by the 15 EU members, calls for a commitment to "stability" in the much-criticised CAP for the next budget period over 2007-2013 and for similar spending restraint across the entire EU budget, in line with a breakthrough agreement between France and Germany.

Chirac and Schroeder agreed Thursday that overall farm spending would only rise in line with inflation from 2007.

The draft document said farm subsidies for newcomers should be phased in from 2004, with their farmers initially receiving 25 percent of the allocation for current member states, rising to 100 percent in 2013.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw welcomed the Franco-German accord, but voiced concerns shared by some member states that it did not go far enough in overhauling the unwieldy CAP system.

North Korea demands non-aggression pact with US to end crisis

AFP, Seoul

North Korea proposed a non-aggression pact with the United States on Friday and laid out other conditions for resolving the latest nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula.

"If the US legally assures the DPRK (North Korea) of non-aggression, including the non use of nuclear weapons against it by concluding such treaty, the DPRK will be ready to clear the former of its security concerns," the foreign ministry said.

The statement released by the official Korean Central News Agency was the fullest North Korean response so far to the crisis sparked by its recent admission that it was developing nuclear weapons.

The North said it was ready to seek a negotiated settlement of the crisis if Washington agreed to the

non-aggression pact and two other conditions.

Under the two other conditions, Washington must recognise North Korean sovereignty and agree not to interfere in the country's economic development, taken as a reference to a lifting of US economic sanctions imposed on the North.

"The DPRK considers that it is a reasonable and realistic solution to the nuclear issue to conclude a non-aggression treaty between the DPRK and the US," the statement added.

The 1,200 word statement was released ahead of summit talks Saturday in Mexico between US President George W. Bush, South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung, and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on how to handle the crisis.

Washington revealed last week that the North had admitted it was

running a clandestine nuclear weapons programme based on enriched-uranium in violation of a 1994 arms control deal.

Washington said the North also declared the 1994 deal, the Agreed Framework, "nullified," during US envoy James Kelly's October 3-5 visit to Pyongyang.

The North's stunning admission alarmed South Korea and other Asian neighbours and prompted the United States to demand the "immediate and verifiable" scrapping of the programme.

Kelly said that North Korean officials made the admission after he confronted them with evidence of the programme.

In its statement, Pyongyang did not directly confirm that it was running a nuclear weapons programme, and denied that the US envoy produced and "evidence" that it was doing so.

Pakistan emerging as a terrorist state: Vajpayee PM plays down rift within coalition

PTI, New Delhi

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Friday attacked Pakistan saying it was emerging as a "terrorist state" and asserted India had the resolve to eliminate the "demon" of terrorism.

Addressing an NDA rally in New Delhi organised to mark the completion of three years of its Government, he said while Pakistan was claiming to fight terrorism, it had no hesitation in sending terrorist suicide squads into India to kill innocent people including women and children.

"This demon has to be eliminated," the Prime Minister said, adding that it might not happen immediately but "we have the resolve to end it. For that we have to prepare ourselves mentally".

"Pakistan is emerging as a terrorist state," Vajpayee said adding India had been fighting Pakistan-sponsored terrorism for the last 20

years but the world did not pay any heed to it and still it was not doing.

Condemning all those using terror as a weapon, the Prime Minister said it was a challenge for the entire humanity and the whole world would have to unite to face it.

"We are ready to make our contribution in this fight," he said, emphasising that more preparations were needed to face the situation. Recalling the terrorist attacks on Parliament and Akshardham temple, Vajpayee said that Indian security forces did not allow the attackers to go back alive.

Referring to the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and in Bali, the Prime Minister regretted that the culprits were still at large.

AFP adds: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Friday played down differences within his coalition and said that too much had been read into his week-long disap-

pearance due to ill health. The 77-year-old premier, looking stronger and speaking more forcefully than in recent weeks, addressed a rally in New Delhi of his Hindu nationalist BJP party, his first public appearance since Sunday.

Vajpayee had Sunday cut short a trip to his home constituency, the northern city of Lucknow, complaining of a sore throat.

His office said Tuesday he had been diagnosed with a viral infection and told to rest for two to three days. Vajpayee held a dinner with right-wing Hindu groups Thursday.

"I had a sore throat in Lucknow and I did not speak. The next day I saw in newspapers, 'Vajpayee ran away from Lucknow.' Lucknow is my terrain, why would I run away? But even newspapers have freedom," said the premier, a former journalist.



Children hold placards as they protest during the Eighth Conference of Parties (CoP 8) to the United Convention Framework for Climate Change in New Delhi on Friday. Indian industry, one of the largest among developing countries, is looking at the billion-dollar-a-year opportunity of trading carbon emission credits with industries in developed nations. Under the Kyoto protocol on global warming, which is expected to come into force next year, companies based in developed nations failing to meet their emission reduction targets can buy credits from firms that have reduced their emission levels, even if they are in a developing nation.

Divided UNSC debates action against Iraq

Quick UN vote on Iraq risky: Russia

REUTERS, United Nations

Amid intense lobbying in New York and elsewhere, the 15 UN Security Council members on Friday debated U.S. proposals for Iraqi disarmament for the first time since Washington introduced its draft resolution.

Both Russia and France have strong reservations about the U.S. draft because of language they fear could trigger military action before UN inspectors report on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

In Moscow Russia's deputy foreign minister, Yuri Fedotov on Thursday called the American draft full of "unrealistic and unfulfillable demands" and cautioned against a

quick vote.

French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin was less critical, telling reporters in Brussels that progress had been made but "we still need some clarification."

The proposed U.S. resolution, co-sponsored by Britain and presented to the full council on Wednesday, give the arms inspectors far-reaching rights and privileges in ferreting out any weapons of mass destruction programs in Iraq.

It declares Iraq in "material breach" of UN resolutions and warns Iraq of "serious consequences" if it thwarts UN weapons inspections, language Russia and France fear the United States can

interpret as sufficient for military action.

"And that is what we expect to be the main argument in Friday's consultations," said one council envoy.

The United States, Britain, France, Russia and China are permanent Security Council members with veto power.

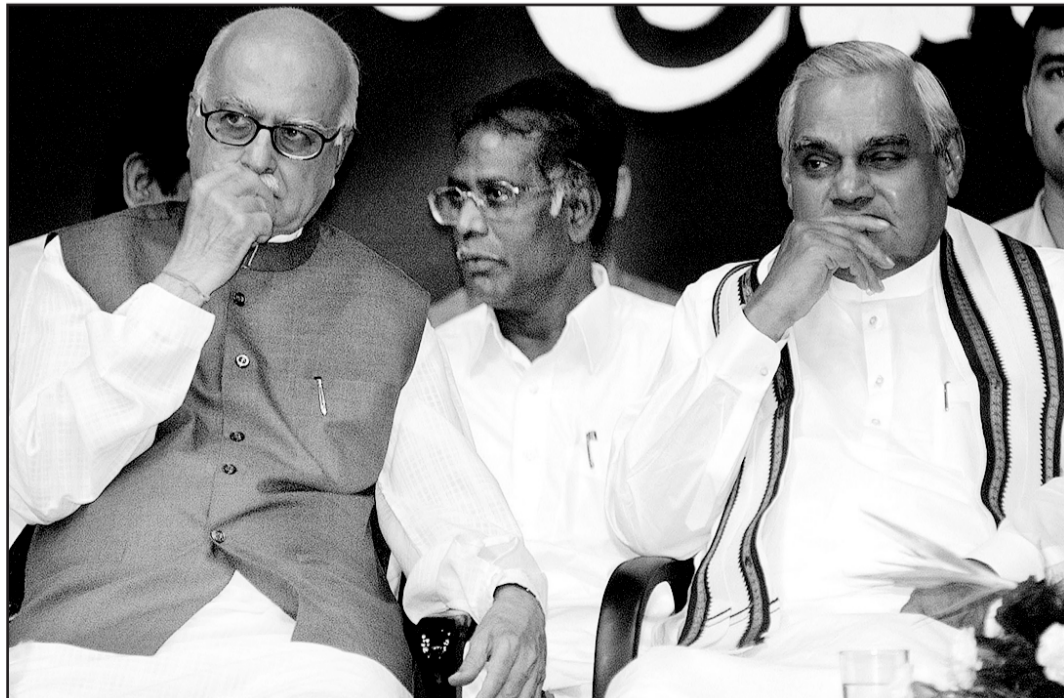
The council is expected to spend most of Friday going through the text paragraph by paragraph. On Monday chief weapons inspector Hans Blix and Mohammed Elbaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, give their views.

After weeks of trying to get French, Russian and Chinese

support, the United States and Britain launched efforts to convince the 10 temporary council members their proposals did not necessarily mean war if Iraq cooperated.

AP adds: Russia on Thursday warned that putting the new U.S. resolution on Iraq to a quick vote would be "counterproductive" and France said it was "very important" to hear whether UN weapons inspectors believe they can operate under its provisions.

In a move to spur UN action, the United States introduced a seven-page draft resolution to the full 15-member Security Council on Wednesday after six weeks of difficult negotiations by the five veto-wielding permanent members.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) and Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani (L) attend a rally celebrating 3 years of Hindu nationalist BJP government in New Delhi on Friday. Vajpayee played down differences within his coalition and said that too much had been read into his week-long disappearance after he cut short a trip to his home constituency, the northern city of Lucknow, complaining of a sore throat.

BJP wins temporary truce with RSS

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's dinner diplomacy with Hindu hardliners has won only a temporary truce as the rightwingers are bound to reassert pressure until the government implements their 'Hindu agenda', analysts said Friday.

"It's only a temporary truce," said senior analyst Mahesh Rangarajan. "The main aim is the implementation of their agenda - more importantly, legislation which would give them the piece of land in Ayodhya to build a temple."

Vajpayee held a dinner meeting Thursday with senior leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS or National Volunteer Corps), a rightwing Hindu nationalist organisation widely considered the ruling BJP's parent body.

The dinner followed weeks of bad-mouthing of the government and of Vajpayee's aides by RSS

leaders.

Media reports Friday said it had been agreed at the dinner that the public attacks on the prime minister's aides would stop in return for Vajpayee consulting Hindu hardliners on all "national issues".

Later, speaking at a government rally, Vajpayee indirectly took the RSS leaders to task, saying "there was no place for bad language in politics".

"Norms and values should be followed in politics," he said.

One of the top demands of the RSS and its affiliate, the hardline Hindu Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or World Hindu Council, is that they be allowed to build a Hindu temple at Ayodhya, in northern India, at the site of a razed 16th century mosque.

The mosque was demolished in 1992 by thousands of Hindu zealots who believe it was built by a Muslim ruler after destroying a Hindu temple.

Jiang-Bush to focus on global issues

AFP, Crawford

China hopes will show the stability of bilateral ties. "China and the US ought to step up consultation and cooperation in these fields, for this serves the common interests of the two countries," he told an audience at the George Bush Presidential Library on the Texas A and M University campus at College Station, Texas.

"We stand ready to keep in touch with the US, cooperate more closely with each other in search for a fair and reasonable solution to these problems, and promote peace and stability in the world," he said.

At the summit, Bush is expected to raise the situation between the two Koreas, which has been thrown into new uncertainty after a recent revelation that North Korea has been engaged in a secret nuclear program.

The United States and China are also at the centre of the UN Security Council debate on a resolution on Iraq. Both are among the five perma-

nent members who can veto any motion.

Washington wants a tough resolution which would warn of the use of force. China is only saying that it wants the United Nations to organise a "political solution" to the crisis.

Just hours after Jiang was speaking, US officials in Washington said the United States and China had set a date in mid-December for the resumption of a suspended human rights dialogue.

A US official also said the United States and China were expected to resume military consultations next month for the first time since the collision of a US Navy surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter last year.

In his speech, Jiang talked at length about Taiwan, an issue that regularly puts China and the United States at odds, but said it would be in the US interest if China could reunify with the island.