

## 'Big-5' close to Iraq accord

### US renews travel warning

AP, Moscow

The UN Security Council's five permanent members are moving significantly closer in their positions toward an Iraq resolution, Russia's foreign minister was quoted as saying Friday.

Russia, France and China oppose a toughly worded US proposal that Iraq rid itself of weapons of mass destruction or face dire consequences, which are believed by the three nations to include US military action. They want to ensure that Iraq is given a chance to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors before any military action is authorised.

Britain backs the US proposal.

"In the last few days we have succeeded in bringing the approaches of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council ... closer," the Interfax news agency quoted Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov as saying.

"We have converged on a whole series of positions."

The United States said Thursday it was working on "a tweaked version" of its resolution. In Washington, a senior U.S. official told The Associated Press the changes would reflect the views of Russia and France without altering the tough provisions demanded by the United States and Britain.

However, Russia still insists that the draft resolution give no one the right to use force, Ivanov said.

Moscow "firmly opposes any formulation that would allow anyone unilaterally to automatically proceed to the use of force," Interfax quoted him as saying.

"We insist that in case problems come up with the inspectors' activity and Iraq violates the UN Security Council's decisions, this question be returned to the Security Council and be carefully examined there, in order to decide on how to proceed further," Ivanov said.

As permanent council members, each of the five nations has veto power over resolutions.

The Security Council received the US draft on Oct. 23 and the members have spent three sessions since then reviewing it line by line and suggesting changes.

Britain's UN Ambassador Jeremy Greenstock said contacts between key capitals are continuing but no council meeting has been scheduled on Iraq,

and the issue likely will be taken up again next week.

AFP adds: The United States again warned its citizens Thursday not to travel to Iraq as agreement appeared near on UN disarmament action and Iraqi Kurds prepared for a change in regime in Baghdad.

Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke with French and Russian leaders in an effort to produce a compromise UN Security Council resolution demanding Iraq disarm.

In issuing the renewed travel warning, the State Department made no mention of possible impending military action against Iraq, but rather said there was a risk foreigners might be kidnapped there and that Baghdad had in the past used civilians as shields to protect against outside attack.

However, the move is sure to be seen in some quarters as a sign of US determination to disarm Baghdad with or without the support of the United Nations.

Although Washington has always insisted its travel warnings are not intended to send political messages, the issuance of the new alert had been debated within the State Department for weeks, officials said.

Some in the department feared renewing the warning before significant progress had been made at the United Nations could be seen as a sign Washington was unwilling to work with other nations in dealing with Iraq.

That, officials said, might have hurt efforts to forge a consensus on a tough new resolution.

State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher said Powell had spoken by telephone with counterparts Igor Ivanov of Russia and Dominique de Villepin of France about possible compromises.

France and Russia are the two main opponents of a US-British proposal for the resolution.

China said it had "noted" US and British efforts to address concerns on the pending resolution, but still refused to specify what action it supported beyond the return of UN weapons inspectors.

The inspections should "provide the UN with the basis for further assessment," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said in an apparent expression of Beijing's longstanding opposition to unilateral action by Washington.



PHOTO: AFP  
Palestinian artist Nabil Anane places a replica of the Statue of Lady Liberty in front of the destroyed Muqataa, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Thursday. Anane built the statue with the torch facing down, saying it symbolised the US's support for Israel's policies of destruction which makes the United States' values of liberty "down" too.



## ROK president's second son gets 42 months in jail

AFP, Seoul

South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung's second son, Kim Hong-Up, was on Friday sentenced to three and a half years in prison for corruption.

His lawyers said Hong-Up was convicted of accepting millions of dollars from businessmen through influence peddling and avoiding tax for political donations.

He was also slapped with 1.06 billion won (860,000 dollars) in fines for avoiding tax.

## US envoy meets Benazir amid PPP split rumours

AFP, Washington

A senior US diplomat met here this week with self-exiled Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto this week amid widespread reports that President Pervez Musharraf is trying to lure members of her party to join the government, the State Department said Thursday.

Benazir saw Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca on Tuesday for talks about the situation in Pakistan as well as the region, spokesman Richard Boucher said.

"We've had regular meetings with Pakistani opposition leaders, including Ms Bhutto, in order to stay in contact with all the significant political leaders of this country," he told reporters.

## Cracks emerge in Pak Islamic party bloc

AFP, Islamabad

Three weeks after its breathtaking gains in October 10 polls, cracks have emerged in Pakistan's Islamic party alliance, with the two main parties bickering over key government posts, analysts and party insiders said Friday.

The six-party Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal landed the balance of power in the national assembly, sparking concerns among liberals they would use their new influence to enforce Islamic law and throw US troops and intelligence agents out of the country.

But veteran observers have said the fragility of the alliance, which unites traditional rivals, could see it break up before becoming a powerful political force.

Simmering tensions between the fundamentalist Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) erupted Wednesday when JI chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed was nominated to lead the MMA in the national assembly.

JUI executives, whose leader

Maulana Fazlur Rehman was nominated as prime minister, stormed out of the MMA meeting in fury, claiming the JI reneged on an agreement to keep the post free for Rehman should he lose his bid for the premiership.

"This decision makes a mockery of the alliance as the MMA has already named Maulana Fazlur Rehman as candidate for the slot of prime minister," a JUI leader told AFP, declining to be identified.

The JI agreed it would get the parliamentary leadership only if Rehman secured the post of prime minister.

If Rehman misses out on the prime ministership, he will have no post in the national assembly, as a JI candidate has been named for the parliamentary speakership and a non-JUI candidate has been nominated to chair the senate.

JUI and JI have a history of enmity but sidelined their differences to forge an alliance with four other religious parties to contest October 10 polls.

## Pollutant-eating bacteria found

AFP, East Lansing

Scientists have found an elusive microbe that could break down a major environmental pollutant known as TCA, according to a report published Thursday in Science Magazine.

"TCA was one of the remaining ground water pollutants for which biodegradation had not been resolved" said James Tiedje, researcher, Professor of Microbiology at Michigan State University and one of the authors of the study.

TCA is a cancerous industrial solvent found in nearly half of the toxic waste sites undergoing clean-up under the supervision of the Environmental Protective Agency (EPA).

It also contaminates soil and groundwater and when released in the atmosphere, contributes to the destruction of the ozone layer.

The Michigan State scientists found the bacteria in contaminated sediments from New York's Hudson River, but pointed out that it also occurs naturally in Michigan's Kalamazoo river.

## Indian troops head home from Pakistan border

AFP, Jodhpur

Hundreds of Indian combat troops were heading back to barracks Friday after being withdrawn from the country's western desert border with Pakistan, a defence spokesman said.

Defence spokesman Major Xavier Thomas, based in Jodhpur city in the western desert state of Rajasthan, said some troops had already been pulled back but the process would be stepped up from November 10.

"A few units belonging to the main strike core posted on the India-Pakistan border have started returning to their regimental centres," Thomas told AFP.

"The pull-out constitutes a huge logistical exercise and we have requested the Indian Railways for special trains from the border towns of Bikaner and Jaisalmer to transport soldiers, their luggage and equipment."

A spokesman for the state-run Indian Railways said batches of 100 to 200 soldiers had already begun

boarding trains from Jodhpur city on a daily basis.

"We will only be able to comply with the army's request for more trains by November 10. There is a major rush right now for train seats as the Diwali holidays are here."

On October 24, Defence Minister George Fernandes said India had begun withdrawing troops and he personally wanted beleaguered soldiers who had been holed up in trenches for the tough 10-month deployment to reach their homes or peacetime locations before Diwali.

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, is on November 4.

"Army jeeps with officers and their personal staff have been whizzing down the Jaipur highway in large numbers," said a witness.

An army source said that senior officers had been granted leave and were going home for the holidays from the border outposts of Barmer, Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Ganganagar.

"There is a skeleton staff of army officers belonging to the strike core at the border," said the source.

Fernandes has said that the first of nearly half-a-million troops would be withdrawn from the borders of Rajasthan and Gujarat states, followed by Punjab.

Last month, India said it would withdraw troops deployed for 10 months on its frontiers with Pakistan, but said the build-up would remain in place on the Line of Control -- the de facto border between Kashmir's Indian and Pakistani controlled sectors. Pakistan reciprocated the Indian announcement a day later but said New Delhi must start moving its troops first.

India is expected to pull back some 500,000 troops but retain 150,000-200,000 soldiers in its zone of disputed Kashmir. Pakistan's scaling-down would involve around 300,000 combat personnel.

The South Asian rivals, which both have nuclear weapons, have between them had nearly a million troops on their borders after an attack in December by armed militants on the Indian parliament.

## US attack on Iraq to foment more violence: Arafat

AP, Ramallah

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat warned Thursday against any U.S. strike on Iraq, saying it would have catastrophic consequences in the Middle East and urged resolving the conflict through the United Nations.

In a joint interview with Associated Press Television News and an Israeli TV station, Arafat also predicted the Israel-Palestinian conflict will worsen now that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon depends on far-right and religious parties to cling to power.

Warning against a U.S. strike on Iraq, Arafat said, "I hope that this war will not take place because this will lead to a catastrophe in the whole area of the Middle East."

"I hope that such conflicts will be resolved in the United Nations since the Iraqis have accepted (UN weapons) inspectors back," he said.

Arafat also said he remains committed to achieving peace with Israel despite two years of fighting and said he considers suicide attacks against Israeli civilians to be immoral.

## Toll rises to 24 Italian village mourns quake deaths

AFP, Rome

Rescuers held out little hope Friday of finding more survivors from an earthquake in southern Italy that killed at least 24 people, most of them children buried under a crushed village school.

Anguished parents held a tearful vigil as rescuers toiled through the night in a frantic search for those still trapped in the rubble of the school, in the hilltop village of San Giliardo di Puglia, that collapsed when the devastating quake struck Thursday morning.

"It would take a miracle. The rescue teams can no longer hear any voices, any signals," said a local hospital official as the rescue effort entered its second day. "They are probably all dead."

Rescue officials said 24 corpses had been recovered, 22 of them children.

## UN climate talks bogged down over emission cuts

AFP, New Delhi

Sharp divisions between the world's rich and poor countries over greenhouse gases are thwarting efforts by delegates at a high-powered UN meeting here on global warming to agree on a draft declaration, officials said Friday.

Environment ministers and experts battled until dawn Friday, seeking consensus on a Delhi Declaration due to be adopted later in the day but failed, Indian officials told AFP.

Discussions resumed mid-morning in an attempt to break the impasse, and were expected to drag on once again into the night.

The officials said the talks grounded when some industrialised nations, led by the European Union (EU), demanded that developing countries at least begin talking about reducing greenhouse

gas emissions beyond 2012.

The Kyoto protocol demands that developed countries follow a specific programme on cutting back on the emission of gases which cause global warming by 2008-2012, but makes no such demands on developing countries.

Instead it says poorer countries must make inventories of their emission levels and develop national action plans for reducing these -- with financial and technical help from developed nations.

The Indian officials said that during the all-night discussions, developing countries had resisted proposals that the Delhi Declaration include a demand that they begin talking about reducing emissions after 2012.

"(Developed countries) want that the process of talks should start, but developing countries

have made it clear it is out of the question," one Indian official said.

"The situation is very difficult and not much flexibility is being shown," senior EU delegate Steen Gade told AFP when the talks broke up around 5.30 am Friday (0000 GMT).

The EU, he insisted however, "has shown flexibility."

He confirmed that talks on future action on emission reductions beyond 2012 was a key factor holding up the negotiations.

"This is one of the big issues," he said.

T.R. Baalu, the president of the meeting, the eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change -- known as COP-8 -- said, however, he was confident a declaration would be framed sometime Friday.

## Pak suspension from C'wealth reviewed

AFP, London

Commonwealth ministers were meeting in London on Friday to review Pakistan's suspension from the group in the light of last month's legislative elections which were supposed to restore civilian rule.

Pakistan was suspended from the ministerial councils of the 54-member Commonwealth, though not from the body itself, after President Pervez Musharraf ousted the elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a 1999 military coup.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) in London may decide to retain Pakistan's suspension until it sees how relations between Musharraf and the new civilian authorities develop, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer indicated.

meeting, told the BBC: "I don't think there will be agreement quite at this stage to bring them (Pakistan) back into the councils of the Commonwealth."

"I think the decision is more going to be to recognise the substantial progress back down the path to democracy."

Musharraf hailed October's legislative polls as a return to democratic rule. But opposition and human rights groups accused him of keeping hold of power through a series of new decrees.

More than three weeks since elections that were supposed to transfer power from his military regime to civilians, Musharraf had by Wednesday still not set a date to convene the first national and provincial parliament in three years, or for the election of the future prime minister.

Downer said: "We will have to

wait and see what powers the parliament and the government that emerges end up having before a final decision on whether they should return to the Commonwealth will be made.

"If the parliament ends up by having proper powers and if the prime minister and his ministers who emerge from the parliament also have proper executive power, then maybe the president's powers will be substantially reduced... and in those circumstances there would be I think a positive view about Pakistan returning to the Commonwealth."

Commonwealth election observers declared October's legislative polls "for the most part transparent," but said there were doubts over whether there was a "truly level" playing field.

China has chosen to get more involved in peacekeeping and I am happy to say that I think we are going to see a bigger Chinese presence in operations in the coming years," he

## China eager to play bigger role in UN peacekeeping

AFP, United Nations

China has said it is willing to play a bigger part in United Nations military missions by supplying noncombatant support units, the head of peace-keeping operations, Jean-Marie Guehenno said.

In an interview this week, he said he also hoped more European Union countries would provide "force multipliers" such as communications, transport and special units.

Guehenno said he visited China this summer and was told it was ready to provide medical and engineering teams for missions in Africa.

"China has chosen to get more involved in peacekeeping and I am happy to say that I think we are going to see a bigger Chinese presence in operations in the coming years," he

said.

Last month, China had 84 civilian police officers, 54 military observers and one soldier on duty in UN missions.

It was the smallest contribution of the five permanent members of the Security Council, which is primarily responsible for international peace and security and authorises peace-keeping missions.

Britain, with a total of 700 people under the white and blue UN flag, was the biggest contributor among the five and also -- apart from Portugal -- of the EU states.

By far the largest suppliers of manpower are developing countries in Asia and Africa, a dozen of which have more than 1,000 troops in the field.



PHOTO: AFP  
Anti-War protesters on Parliament Square display placards urging the British government not to attack Iraq in London on Thursday.