

Iraq insists inspectors will find no banned arms

UN sends more staff to Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

Baghdad repeated Sunday that returning UN inspectors would find no prohibited arms in Iraq, as the Bush administration signalled it might acquiesce to President Saddam Hussein remaining in power if he were to give up his alleged weapons of mass destruction.

"The inspectors will not find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq for a simple reason, which is that Iraq is free of such weapons. But let them search because the United States has a complex ... reflected in its plans to attack us," said Ath-Thawra newspaper, mouthpiece of Iraq's ruling Baath party.

"We the Iraqi people are the weapons of our country, the arms made of flesh and blood," the daily said, mocking US President George W. Bush as "Clown George".

"The United States ... thinks that its policies can scare the world and force it to submit to the US will, but in fact, it is the opposite that happened," it said. Washington's conduct "led to the world's awakening, which in turn led to the isolation of the United States and made them look like clowns, chiefly clown George whether in his declarations or his performance."

The United States should realise that "its arrogant, condescending attitude with others and its violation of the UN Charter and international law harm its image," Ath-Thawra said.

Ath-Thawra's comments came on the eve of the arrival in Baghdad of the first team of UN weapons inspectors who will resume the search for Iraq's alleged prohibited arsenal on Wednesday after a four-year break.

The Bush administration earlier gave its clearest indication to date it might consent to Saddam Hussein staying in power if he agreed to give up its suspected weapons of mass destruction.

The United States continues to insist that regime change in Iraq remains its official policy.

But US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told CNN that Iraq's verifiable disarmament — without Saddam leaving office — could be a solution to the current standoff.

AP adds: More staff and equipment landed here Saturday as the UN monitoring agency prepared to resume the hunt next week for any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

A half-dozen staff members, along with communications gear and computers, flew in from a UN rear base in Cyprus, UN spokesman Hiro Ueki said. Eighteen weapons inspectors are scheduled to arrive Monday.

The first inspection will probably take place Wednesday, when a UN team is expected to revisit one of the many sites inspected in the 1990s.

The inspectors are back in Iraq under a new Security Council resolution demanding the Iraqis give up any weapons of mass destruction or face "serious consequences."

From 1991 to 1998, UN expert teams destroyed large amounts of chemical and biological weapons and longer-range missiles forbidden to Iraq by UN resolutions after the Gulf War. They also dismantled Iraq's nuclear weapons program before it could build a bomb. The inspections were suspended amid disputes over UN access to Iraqi sites and Iraqi complaints of America infiltrating spies into the inspection teams.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian boy watches while his father carrying his younger brother is questioned by an Israeli soldier as a curfew is imposed on the West Bank town of Hebron on Saturday. While on a visit to the south of Jerusalem on Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told security forces to hit Palestinian militants hard, as his troops swept the West Bank in retaliation for a suicide bombing earlier in the week that killed 11 people in Jerusalem.

Fresh surge of violence in Kashmir: 14 killed

Attempt on minister

AFP, Srinagar

Three security men were among 14 killed in overnight clashes in Indian-controlled Kashmir Sunday in a fresh surge of militant-linked violence belying the promised healing touch by the region's new leader.

In a separate incident the state's rural development minister survived an attempt on his life, police said.

Peerzada Mohammed Sayeed was on his way home when suspected militants opened fire at his motorcade near Kokernag in the southern Anantnag district.

"The fire was returned by his security guards," a police spokesman said, adding there were no casualties.

Suspected Islamic militants overnight shot dead two policemen in two busy markets of Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir.

Another policeman was injured in the attacks and was being treated in Srinagar's main hospital, police said.

In Anantnag township, 50 km south of Srinagar, security forces shot dead a deranged man they had mistaken for a militant, police added.

In the neighbouring Tral area of

the southern Pulwama district, gunmen shot dead an employee of Kashmir's main jail, police said.

Suspected militants also shot dead a Muslim man and a woman in the village near Tral township late Saturday, police said.

Police said the victims were labelled "security informers" by the militants.

Suspected rebels also killed a Muslim shopkeeper Abdul Aziz in downtown Srinagar, police said.

A security force officer and a militant were killed in overnight clashes in northern Kupwara district, which borders Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Indian troops shot dead two militants in a fierce gunbattle in the Poonch district near the de facto border dividing India and Pakistan.

Three more people died elsewhere in Kashmir, police said, but did not give details.

More than 37,500 people have died in Kashmir since the start of an anti-Indian rebellion in 1989. Separatists put the toll twice as high.

Nearly a dozen guerrilla groups are fighting for Kashmir's independence or merger with Pakistan.

Pakistan, N Korea swapped arms expertise: NY Times

Islamabad dismisses report

REUTERS, New York

Pakistan has been helping North Korea's nuclear weapons program in return for missile technology that would strengthen its hand against India, the New York Times reported on Saturday.

The paper, quoting unnamed officials and experts in Washington, Pakistan and South Korea, said the relationship between North Korea and Pakistan "now appears much deeper and more dangerous than the United States and its Asian allies first suspected."

"The accounts raise disturbing questions about the nature of the uneasy American alliance with (Pakistani President Pervez) General Musharraf's government," it said in a report published on its Web site.

"In transactions intelligence agencies are still unravelling, the North provided General Musharraf with missile parts he needs to build a nuclear arsenal capable of reaching every strategic site in India," the paper said.

"In a perfect marriage of interests, Pakistan provided the North with many of the designs for gas

centrifuges and much of the machinery it needs to make highly enriched uranium for the country's latest nuclear weapons project, one intended to put at risk South Korea, Japan and 100,000 American troops in Northeast Asia."

The North Koreans acknowledged in October that they had a secret uranium enrichment project for making nuclear weapons, in violation of a 1994 accord with the United States.

A CIA analysis released this week said North Korea was building a plant that by the middle of the decade could produce enough uranium for two or more nuclear weapons a year.

The New York Times quoted the officials and experts as saying Pakistan had continued its "murky" relationship with North Korea even after it sided with the United States in ousting the Taliban and hunting down al-Qaida leaders in Afghanistan.

"While the United States has put tremendous diplomatic pressure on North Korea in the past two months to abandon the project ... it has never publicly discussed the role of Pakistan or other nations in supply-

ing that effort," the papers said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan on Sunday strongly denied a report that it had helped North Korea develop its nuclear weapons program in return for missile technology that would strengthen its hand against India.

"There is no truth in these reports whatsoever," said presidential spokesman Major-General Rashid Qureshi.

"I do not know where the New York Times gets its information from. I am convinced that they need to update their intelligence gathering system," he told Reuters.

The newspaper said in a report on its Web site on Saturday that the relationship between North Korea and Pakistan "now appears much deeper and more dangerous than the United States and its Asian allies first suspected."

Quoting unnamed sources in Washington, Pakistan and South Korea, it reported Pyongyang had provided Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf with missile parts allowing him to build a nuclear arsenal able to reach "every strategic site in India."

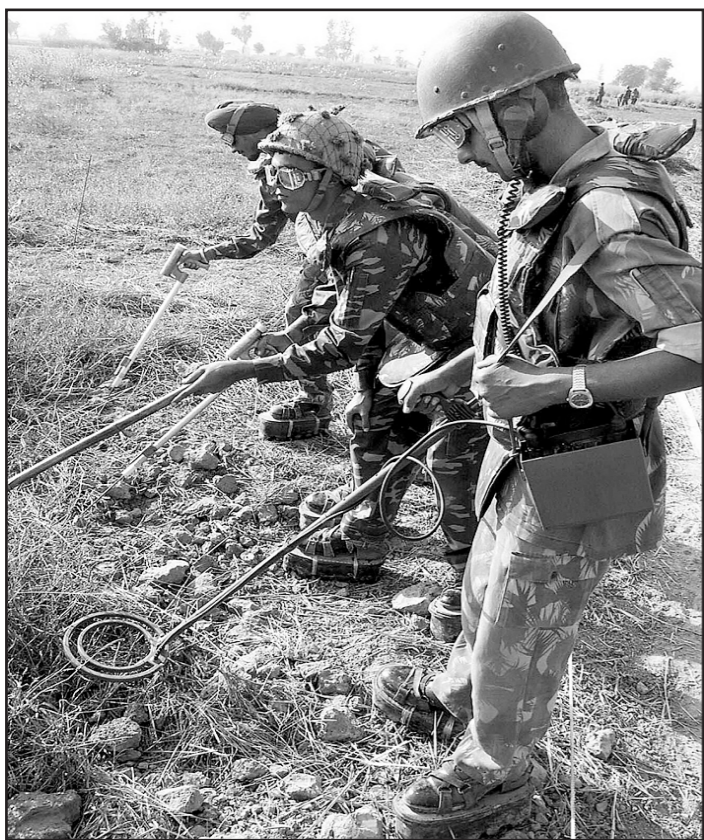


PHOTO: AFP

Indian soldiers search for mines on Sunday at Cheema village near the Indo-Pak border, in Punjab state. Border areas were mined a year ago by the Indian army after the December 13, 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament. The attack led to heightened tensions between India and Pakistan. The Indian army said last week it will pull back the majority of its hundreds of thousands of combat troops from its shared borders with Pakistan by the end of next month.

Israeli army surrounds West Bank mosque

Palestinian dies in Israeli tank fire

AFP, Jenin

The Israeli army Sunday surrounded a mosque at Tubas, in the northern West Bank, where a Palestinian militant was believed to be holed up, witnesses said.

The troops used loudspeakers to call on Mohammed al-Qilani, of the radical Islamic Jihad movement, to give himself up, they added.

Tubas was under its third day of a curfew imposed when the army launched a new crackdown in the West Bank following a deadly suicide attack on a bus in West Jerusalem on Thursday.

In other incidents some 15 tanks and other armoured vehicles entered Qalqilya, also in the northern West Bank, and troops fired automatic weapons to enforce a curfew.

A Palestinian security source said an unidentified Palestinian had

also been arrested by the army in nearby Yamoun, while further south Israeli public radio reported exchanges of gunfire with no casualties in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem.

Meanwhile, a 70-year-old Palestinian man died Sunday after he tripped and fell while fleeing Israeli tank fire at the entrance of the reoccupied northern West Bank city of Nablus, medics and witnesses said.

Ahmed Shteyeh, 70, was trying to travel via Nablus from his village of Salem in the north to Tel, south of the city, to visit his daughter when an Israeli tank opened fire on a Palestinian crowd trying to enter the city, which is under strict curfew.

Shteyeh fell while fleeing the fire, hitting his head and dying shortly afterwards of his injuries, the same sources said.

Nigerian city returns to calm after riots

Miss World contestants in London

AFP, Kaduna

Calm returned on Sunday to the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna after two days of sectarian riots there fuelled by opposition to the Miss World beauty pageants.

Authorities in the flashpoint northern city had imposed a tough overnight curfew after three days of clashes around the country between Muslims, Christians and security forces left hundreds dead or injured.

"We haven't heard a single shot since 9am (0800 GMT) on Saturday morning. The curfew was respected on Saturday night, unlike that of the night before," said Regis Bouffartigue, the French manager of a brewery in the south of the city.

On Saturday hundreds of local residents took shelter in the brewery to avoid marauding gangs in the run-down, religiously mixed sub-

urbs nearby. Bouffartigue said they had left for home on Sunday morning.

In the north of the city, where the fighting had first begun on Thursday, another Western expatriate, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP by telephone that the curfew had also been respected there.

Meanwhile, Miss World contestants arrived in London on Sunday after the pageant pulled out of Nigeria following riots by Muslims opposed to the event, the organisers said.

Around 90 beauty queens arrived at Gatwick airport on a chartered red-eye flight from Abuja, looking forward to a final that will now take place in London on December 7.

Protests against the pageant by Nigerian Muslims, who regard it as immodest and offensive, degenerated into rioting this week.



PHOTO: AFP

Some of the members of Miss World organisation sit in the bus departing to Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja late Saturday. The Miss World pageant slated for Nigeria on December 7, was cancelled and relocated to London following violent protest by Muslims against the hosting of the event by the country.

Pak press ambivalent about new govt

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's press looked towards a democratic future with ambivalence Sunday, a day after its first civilian prime minister and cabinet in three years was sworn into office.

President Pervez Musharraf, the army general who stole power in a bloodless 1999 coup, administered the oath of office to Zafarullah Jamali from the military-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) on Saturday.

Jamali's 21-member cabinet, which includes 12 PML-Q members, six dissenters from the opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP), two minor pro-military party members and an independent, was sworn in immediately afterwards, ending weeks of inter-party haggling over the formation of the government.

Key portfolios were distributed to federal ministers late Saturday, with PPP dissenters scoring the plum defence and interior ministries in return for their support, which

was crucial to Jamali winning the prime ministership last week.

The News warily called the new administration's line-up "more a cabinet of political convenience than a cabinet of talents, as should have been appropriate after three years of lecturing by military rulers..."

"Now that the time had come for the pay off, the prime minister had to give priority to the promises above all else to ensure his government's survival."

In a view shared by analysts, it predicted that the government was unlikely to see out its five-year term, given Jamali's razor-thin majority of one in the 342-member national assembly.

The press also noted that Musharraf's transfer of power back to the people was only partial — under contentious constitutional amendments he introduced ahead of the October 10 elections, he handed himself the power to sack parliament and gave the military a firm role in overseeing government.

Musharraf promises to restore Constitution by Dec 31

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has promised to revive the Constitution fully from December 31 this year, which would activate the Anti-defection law that he had kept in abeyance to enable Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali win the election for post of Prime Minister with the help of defectors from the opposition.

Musharraf has proclaimed through a back-dated order before swearing in of Jamali yesterday that the rest of the constitutional provisions including the Anti-defection Law would come into operation after the polls of the Senate, likely to be held by December 25.

The entire Constitution, including the clauses that guaranteed the fundamental rights of the people would be restored by December 31, local daily The Nation said.

On November 15, Musharraf

partially revived the Constitution which incorporated his controversial amendments empowering himself and the army.

The complete revival of the Constitution could pose a threat to the longevity of Jamali's Ministry as it survived by a slender margin of 172, which was one vote more than the required majority in the 342 member house.

As of now, Jamali is comfortable as the House has operational strength of only 334 members. The by-elections for the rest were expected to be held within the next two months.

Given the importance of the 10 dissidents of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) headed by former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, Jamali has accommodated six of them in his 21 member ministry that took oath yesterday, giving cabinet portfolios to three, which included the powerful Defence and the Interior ministries.

5 dead as UK firefighters continue strike

AFP, London

Britain's Labour government came under increasing criticism on Saturday over its handling of a national firefighters strike as five people suffered fire-related deaths and a striking fireman's home was torched.

As the eight-day strike by firefighters over pay went into a second day, there were warnings of wider industrial unrest.

Some 52,000 firefighters began striking on Friday after last-ditch talks between the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and their local authority employers failed to reach a breakthrough.

Across England on Saturday, four people were killed in separate house fires while the charred remains of a man were discovered following a caravan blaze, police said.

They added that a mother and her two children escaped a suspected arson attack on the home of a firefighter in central England.

33 killed in Philippine bus accident

AFP, Manila

More than 33 people were killed and six injured when a commuter bus plunged into a ravine in Quezon province southeast of the Philippines capital early Sunday, police and civil defence officials said.

The bodies of 33 people had been recovered from the wreckage of the bus which fell into a ravine in Quezon province, civil defence officials said, adding that about 12 bodies were still believed buried under the wreckage.

Saudi aide denies link with Sept 11 hijackers

REUTERS, Washington

An aide to Crown Prince Abdullah denied on Saturday that the Saudi government had sent money to two of the hijackers in the Sept. 11 attacks and said his country was pursuing al-Qaida mercilessly.

Adel al-Jubeir, foreign policy adviser to the kingdom's de facto ruler, told CNN from Riyadh that Saudi officials had worked closely with the FBI in investigating the funding allegations when they first emerged "seven or eight months ago."

According to US sources, a congressional inquiry into issues related to last year's Sept. 11 attacks was investigating a possible money trail from the Saudi government to two of the hijackers, Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi.

Pak agents tracking source of Laden tape

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani security agencies aided by American FBI officers are trying to find out how an audio cassette of what is believed to be Osama bin Laden's voice arrived in the country's capital, intelligence officials said.

The cassette was handed to an Al-Jazeera television correspondent in Islamabad on November 12 by an unidentified man who disappeared immediately.

The tape was aired by Al-Jazeera the same night.

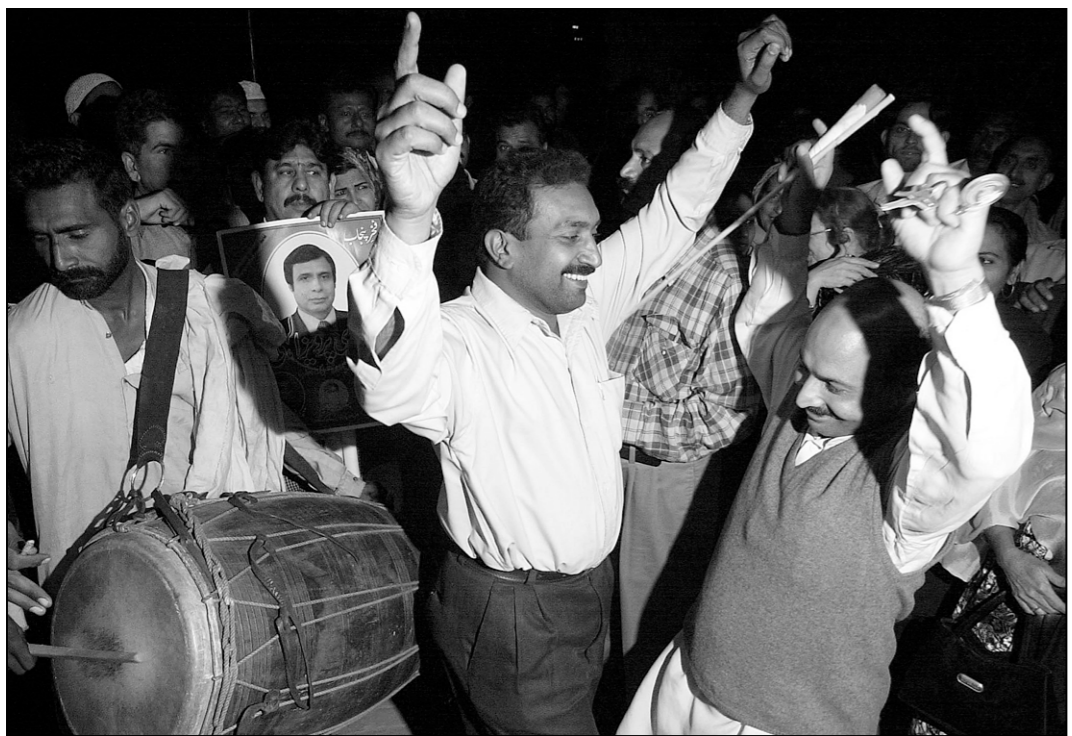


PHOTO: AFP

Supporters of the military-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) celebrate the party's entry in government in Lahore on Saturday. After three years of military rule, civilian executive power was restored in Pakistan on Saturday with the swearing-in of Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali as prime minister and his 21-member Cabinet.



PHOTO: AFP

US singer Alicia Keys performs during the HIV/AIDS awareness concert 'Staying Alive' in Cape Town on Saturday. The concert will premiere as a 90 minute special on MTV globally on December 1, World Aids Day.