

# Pressure builds to give UN arms experts more time

Blair, Bush reiterate need to disarm Iraq

REUTERS, Davos/Baghdad

Secretary of State Colin Powell will try to win over Europe for a possible attack on Iraq on Sunday after wooing Turkey over the use of its bases, as pressure builds to give UN arms inspectors more time.

The inspectors are due to report to the UN Security Council on Monday on progress in their search for banned nuclear, chemical and biological weapons Washington says Baghdad possesses. Iraq denies having such weapons programs.

US officials said the report would kick off a final phase of consultations as the United States neared a decision on toppling Iraqi President Saddam Hussein by force if necessary.

The Washington Post, citing UN officials, said chief weapons inspector Hans Blix will tell the Security Council key questions remain unanswered by Iraq, which it said had given "no signs of major movement" toward full disclosure.

UN inspectors said they had failed to persuade two Iraqi scientists and an expert to agree to private interviews.

Powell will take on skeptical European allies in a major speech to persuade them not to shy away from force if Iraq does not voluntarily hand over banned weapons.

The speech, in the Swiss winter resort of Davos, venue for an annual gathering of politicians and business people, is part of a rhetorical offensive by the US administration to run in parallel with its military preparations to attack.

On Saturday, Powell discussed the use of Turkish bases in a meeting with Prime Minister Abdullah Gul and ruling AKP party leader Tayyip Erdogan on the sidelines of the Davos gathering.

"They understand our needs," Powell said afterwards.

President Bush also discussed Iraq with the leaders of Italy and Japan. Greece, which holds the rotating European Union presidency, said there

was an emerging consensus in the 15-nation bloc that the inspectors should be given more time if they ask for it.

"There is a consensus that, yes, we should give them the necessary time if they ask," Foreign Minister George Papandreou said.

He said he expected EU foreign ministers meeting in Brussels on Monday to declare full support for UN efforts to deal with the problem of Iraq's suspected weapons of mass destruction and urge a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

In Damascus, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Lebanese Islamic militant group Hezbollah, warned Washington an attack on Iraq would lead to an Arab war against the United States. He was speaking at a conference on boycotting Israel and its allies.

In return for Turkish cooperation, Washington was offering an economic and military aid package worth nearly \$14 billion over three years.

US officials have already accused Iraq of unacceptable "willful defiance" in what they said was its refusal to allow private interviews with scientists. They cited what they said were other violations proving Baghdad's unwillingness to disarm.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Tony Blair held a telephone conversation with US President George W. Bush on Friday in which the two allies reaffirmed their commitment to disarming Iraq, by force if necessary, Downing Street said.

Blair has remained firmly on Bush's side as France, Russia and China, veto-holding members of the Security Council, and key European ally Germany, have voiced strong opposition to a rush to war.

"Both remain agreed that Saddam Hussein has to be disarmed, that he has been offered a peaceful way to do that, but if he fails to comply, cooperate fully and disarm his weapons of mass destruction, then he will have to be disarmed by force," Blair's spokesman said on Saturday.



PHOTO: AFP

A US soldier guards the crash site of US spy plane, AF-80 U-2, at Hwasung, 70 km south of Seoul on Sunday. The American spy plane crashed in a remote area south of Seoul on Sunday, South Korean military authorities said. A spokesman for the South Korean joint chiefs of staff said the pilot of the plane survived the crash, while three farmers nearby were slightly injured.

## Palestinians pick up pieces after massive Israeli raid

12 more killed during incursion

AFP, Gaza City

Palestinians picked up the pieces Sunday after the biggest attack on Gaza City by Israeli troops since the Palestinian Authority was created in 1994. At least 12 dead and 64 wounded.

And in an act of defiance shortly after the Israelis pulled out following a heavy overnight battle, Palestinian militants fired another home-made rocket into Israel from the Gaza Strip.

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz justified the operation as an attempt to halt the firing of the Qassam rockets, seven of which were launched at Israel on Friday without causing casualties.

He also warned of more operations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat called the raid by more than 25 tanks and other armoured vehicles backed by helicopter

gunships, a demonstration of force linked to Tuesday's Israeli general elections, which right-wing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is tipped to win.

Hospital sources said at least 12 Palestinians were killed and 64 injured, six of them seriously, in exchanges of fire between armed Palestinians and Israeli units which rolled into Gaza City from three directions.

The sources identified one of those who died as Saed Kahil, 20. They said he was not armed, but the others killed and wounded may have been Palestinian fighters.

The latest deaths brought to 2,897 the number of people killed since the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada, or uprising, 28 months ago, including 2,154 Palestinians and 687 Israelis.

The funerals of 11 of the slain started later Sunday morning, while authorities tried to confirm the identity of the last person.

The army destroyed business premises and other buildings, including metal workshops in the town believed to produce rockets and other arms to use against Israeli targets, a Palestinian security source said.

An Israeli army spokesman told AFP that troops had gone into the Askoula district in the southeast of Gaza City, acting on information that there were "important terrorist infrastructures in place."

"Soldiers, backed up by helicopter gunships and armoured vehicles destroyed more than 100 workshops where Qassam rockets, mortar shells and other weapons were being produced," he said.

He said they met strong resistance, including from automatic weapons fire, anti-tank grenades and explosives charges. The soldiers responded, hitting at least six of their attackers, he added.

Neither side has announced details of the discussions, but party officials said a pact could follow.

"The president is confident that an alliance with the JVP will be good for the party," said a leader in Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA), Alavi Maulana.

Maulana, also the governor of the Western Province, said Wickremesinghe's government had failed to tackle the rising cost of living which was fuelling social

# India shows off military might

REUTERS, New Delhi

India celebrated its Republic Day on Sunday with a show of military might, including nuclear-capable missiles designed to reach neighboring Pakistan.

Security was tight as authorities shut off the airspace over capital New Delhi, where the main parade to mark the 53rd anniversary of the country's founding as a republic was being held, and in the financial center Bombay on the west coast.

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, the guest of honor, sat with President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in a bullet-proof enclosure as a 21-gun salute kicked off the parade.

On Saturday, Khatami and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee joined a host of nations in seeking a peaceful solution under the supervision of the United Nations to the crisis in Iraq.

India and Iran have long had good relations and few in India share Washington's view of Iran as a part of an axis of evil along with Iraq and North Korea.

India's 1.1 million strong military was in full flow on Sunday after last year's truncated show because the bulk of the force was deployed on the border with Pakistan following an attack on Indian parliament blamed on Pakistan-based guerrillas.

Both nations ended the military stand-off late last year, but tense

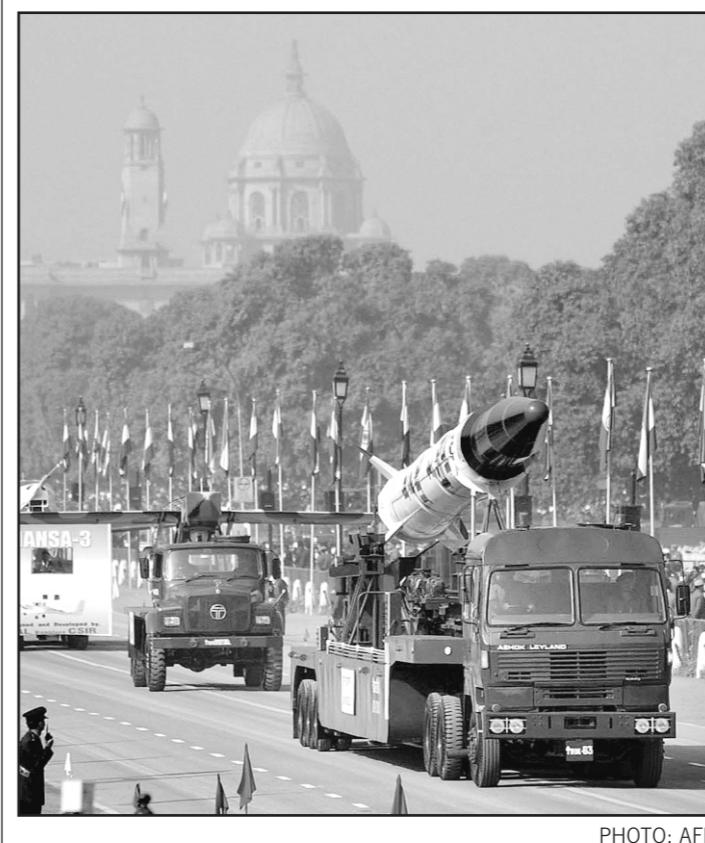


PHOTO: AFP

A truck carrying the Agni-1 surface-to-surface ballistic missile rolls down Rajpath during India's Republic Day parade on Sunday in New Delhi. India held its 54th Republic Day celebrations with unprecedented security amid fears of attacks by Kashmiri militants and other rebels. The Agni missile has a range of 700 km and carries a payload of 1000 kg.

## US plans using nukes in Iraq

AFP, Washington

The United States is considering using nuclear weapons in a possible future war against Iraq to destroy underground command posts and stop Iraqi forces from using weapons of mass destruction, a top US private military expert warned Saturday.

Citing multiple sources, William Arkin said plans for using nuclear weapons against Iraq are being fleshed out at the US Strategic Command in Omaha, Nebraska; inside planning offices of the Joint Staff at the Pentagon and at an "undisclosed location" in Pennsylvania where US Vice President Richard Cheney used to spend time during terrorism alerts.

An administration official, who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity, would not confirm the report, but said that "as in all cases, the United States reserves the right to act in defense of itself and its allies by whatever means necessary."

Defense Department spokesman Major Ted Wadsworth said the

reported plan, whose existence he could not confirm, was "something that policymakers have to talk about."

Washington has already warned Baghdad that any attempt on its part to resort to weapons of mass destruction might have the most severe consequences, a diplomatic phrase for nuclear strike.

In an article slated for publication in The Los Angeles Times Sunday, Arkin writes that nuclear weapons have always been part of the arsenal discussed by war planners.

"But the Bush administration's decision to actively plan for possible preemptive use of such weapons, especially as so-called bunker busters, against Iraq represents a significant lowering of the nuclear threshold," he points out.

US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld signed in December 2001 a classified nuclear posture review that opened the possibility for nuclear weapons to be used against targets able to withstand non-nuclear attack and added nations such as Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Libya and Syria to the list of possible

targets.

According to Arkin, the review also called upon the military to develop plans to attack foreign weapons of mass destruction facilities, even if the enemy did not resort to them first.

This work is currently under way at the Strategic Command, which Arkin says has already prepared a "Theater Nuclear Planning Document" to be used by the administration of President George W. Bush and the Central Command, which will be executing an invasion of Iraq if Bush opts for one.

As the Pentagon prepares for a possible military campaign in Iraq, the command, which used to deal exclusively with nuclear-related issues, saw its responsibilities expand, according to the expert.

Last month, Rumsfeld sent Bush a memorandum asking to place Stratcom commander Admiral James Ellis in charge of dealing with foreign weapons of mass destruction and Bush approved the request earlier this month, according to Arkin.

Aamir Khan, Naseeruddin Shah among Padma award winners

PTI, New Delhi

Well known actors Aamir Khan, Naseeruddin Shah, Odissi dancer Sonal Mansingh and senior journalist Prabhu Chawla are among this year's Padma award winners.

Former Sikkim chief minister Kazi Lhendup Dorji, during whose leadership Sikkim merged with India, and Mansingh share the country's second highest civilian award of Padma Vibhushan with Bal Ram Nanda (literature and education) and Vaid Bhrishpati Dev Triguna (Medicine-Ayurveda).

For the second consecutive year, the highest civilian honour of Bharat Ratna has not been conferred on anyone. Altogether 92 Padma awards, including 34 Padma Bhushans and 54 Padma Shris, have been conferred this year.

## Chandrika in talks with Marxists to topple govt

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has opened talks with a Marxist party on an electoral pact in a bid to sack her government and win fresh elections, party officials said Sunday.

Kumaratunga, who is in an uneasy cohabitation arrangement with the 13-month-old administration of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, warned last week she may dismiss the government.

She has held closed-door talks with the Marxist JVP, or the People's Liberation Front, on a possible new alliance.

Neither side has announced details of the discussions, but party officials said a pact could follow.

"The president is confident that an alliance with the JVP will be good for the party," said a leader in Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA), Alavi Maulana.

Maulana, also the governor of the Western Province, said Wickremesinghe's government had failed to tackle the rising cost of living which was fuelling social

unrest.

Seniors in Kumaratunga's party said she believed the JVP, which is the third largest party with 16 out of the 225 seats in parliament, and her PA could return to power if they contest polls together.

Wickremesinghe currently has a slender two-seat majority in the assembly.

Under the proportional representation system, the largest single party in each district gets a bonus seat, an advantage Wickremesinghe's party had at the December 2001 polls as the leftist vote was divided between the JVP and the PA.

Kumaratunga's PA has previously had agreements with the JVP. In October 2001 when it was in power it staved off a threat by Wickremesinghe's United National Party with a prop from the JVP.

However, that administration collapsed in the face of mass defections to the UNP. The shift prompted her to call a snap election despite pledges not to go for an early vote the country could ill afford as it was facing a recession.

## DPRK demands crisis talks with US

Hard bargaining looms

REUTERS, Seoul

Between volleys of abuse, North Korea demanded Washington meet to discuss the nuclear crisis as a South Korean envoy prepared on Sunday to go to Pyongyang and the UN nuclear watchdog considered delaying an emergency meeting.

The latest flurry of diplomatic activity aimed at persuading the communist North to renounce its atomic arms ambitions appeared to have given the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency pause in its plans for an emergency session as early as February 3.

"The IAEA has discussed whether to meet on February 3 but they have not decided yet when to meet," Chon Young-woo, an official at South Korea's Foreign Ministry in charge of UN affairs, told Reuters.

"The decision will be made

tomorrow (Monday)," he said.

Seoul's Yonhap news agency quoted a spokeswoman for the atomic watchdog as saying no final decision had yet been taken on the date for the meeting that could set the stage for moving the issue to the UN Security Council. The council has the power to impose sanctions on the communist North.

AFP adds: The United States and South Korea are trying hard to repair their tattered joint approach to North Korea, but neither side yet appears ready to compromise fundamental and often contradictory positions.

More is at stake than simply what to do about North Korea's nuclear programs -- as disagreements over handling Pyongyang and anti-US sentiment in South Korea have cast doubt on the health of a half-century-old alliance.



PHOTO: AFP

The winner of the Miss Chinese International pageant 2003 Rachel Tan Weng Kin from Kuala Lumpur (C) poses with first runner-up Tiffany Lam Man Lee from Hong Kong (L) and second runner-up Diana Wu Dan from Toronto on Saturday. The annual pageant was held this year in Hong Kong.