

Iraq scraps more missiles to avert US-led war

War planners grapple with diplomatic setbacks

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq destroyed more banned Al-Samoud 2 missiles and was to sit down for talks on germ weapons Sunday, apparently hoping last-minute compliance with UN disarmament demands could avert a seemingly unavoidable US-led war.

Teams of UN experts drove to two sites on Baghdad's outskirts to supervise the bulldozing of the prohibited systems, as the first concrete technical talks were due to start here late Sunday with newly-arrived UN inspectors to quantify the biological and chemical weapons Baghdad says it destroyed.

"Destruction of six missiles started at 9:00 am (0600 GMT) at Al-Taji," a huge military complex, some 20 kilometres (12 miles) north of Baghdad, said Uday al-Tai, director general of the information ministry.

A casting chamber used in the manufacture of the missiles was also to be destroyed at Al-Rashid, south of the Iraqi capital, Tai told AFP.

UN weapons inspectors' spokesman Hiro Ueki confirmed that more Al-Samoud 2 missiles were to be destroyed at Al-Taji and one casting chamber was to be scrapped at the Al-Rashid facility.

Asked about the number of missiles to be destroyed, Ueki said he did not want to comment "before our team of inspectors returns back and reports to us."

Iraq on Saturday destroyed the first four of its banned Al-Samoud 2 missiles in a six-hour operation, the first since UN chief inspector Hans Blix ruled earlier this month the missiles exceeded the 150-kilometre (93-mile) range allowed under UN disarmament terms and must be scrapped.

Ueki said Saturday's destruction process was "successful in the end".

Blix's deputy Dimitri Perricos spent several hours at the Al-Taji facility Saturday afternoon following technical talks with senior Iraqi officials on the modalities of the destruction of the missiles.

Perricos said Saturday there was no deadline for the destruction of the missiles, adding that he hoped the work would be completed within two weeks.

Iraqi authorities said there are about 100 Al-Samoud 2 missiles. Of those, about 73 have been delivered to the army, according to diplomats.

UN inspectors recently arrived in Baghdad were to hold "a technical meeting on the question of anthrax and VX at 7:00 pm (1600 GMT) to discuss the Iraqi proposal to quantify the amount of anthrax and VX that they claim to have unilaterally destroyed in July 1991," Ueki said.

Meanwhile, Ankara's rulers and US war planners on Sunday assessed the Turkish parliament's shock refusal to allow US troops to deploy in Turkey amid signs that war on Iraq could be less than three weeks away regardless of military or diplomatic setbacks.

More than 240,000 US, British and Australian troops were massed in the Gulf awaiting orders to strike Iraq, accused of failing to give up weapons of mass destruction.

More indications emerged that an attack was imminent amid intensive lobbying efforts to win UN Security Council approval for military action and reports that allied forces are prepared to strike with or without a UN green light and are undeterred by the setback with Turkey.



Iraqi trucks are carrying Al-Samoud 2 missiles head to an undisclosed location for destruction from the Al-Taji military complex, some 20 km north of Baghdad on Saturday. Iraq has destroyed the first 4 of its banned missiles and started destroying another six to avert US-led attack.

UN convoy comes under attack in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Up to eight gunmen opened fire on a United Nations two-car convoy as it travelled in southeastern Afghanistan, but there were no injuries, a spokesman for the organisation said Sunday.

The UN's David Singh told reporters that one of the vehicles, an unmarked rental car carrying two government workers and an Afghan World Food Programme (WFP) employee was riddled with bullets in the attack Friday.

UN road movements have been suspended following the incident on the route between Wazakhan and Khairkot in Paktika province, Singh said.

While the gunmen hijacked the unmarked car, the WFP vehicle following it turned back to fetch help.

"They returned to the scene of the incident with local authorities, they found the three passengers unharmed by the side of the road," Singh said.



Officials and members of the media view the damaged trains on Mount Ali, or Alishan, near Chiayi in southern Taiwan on Sunday, a day after the train derailed. At least 17 people were killed and more than 150 injured on Saturday when the train carrying tourists to Mount Ali derailed and rolled over.

Vajpayee, Advani on LeT hit list

PTI, New Delhi

Lashkar-e-Taiba has issued a fresh threat to unleash a spate of suicide attacks in India and targets include Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee among others, reports Pakistani media.

Noted Pakistani weekly The Friday Times quoted LeT chief Hafeez Saeed's taped speech, played at a mosque in Rawalpindi, as saying "listen o (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee, we are about to unleash a spate of suicide attacks. I have ordered my warriors to undertake this duty."

Lashkar also threatened Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani saying that his days were numbered, the weekly reported.

In yet another sign of continued failure of Pakistan

President Pervez Musharraf to rein in the terrorists, Saeed said in his speech "Listen o Musharraf! we shall not submit to you or your government... We will not allow you to besmirch the jihad..."

The speech, which was in clear violation of law, did not spare the US ambassador to Pakistan Nancy Powell and said, "We cannot tolerate unholy presence of Nancy Powell... Pakistan should cleanse itself from her unholy existence."

Meanwhile, a former army general, Lt Gen Nishat Ahmed warned that chances of war with India were ripe because Islamabad was not keeping its word.

"Cross-border infiltration is on. The government may not be supporting it but it is certainly looking the other way."

China develops new type of N-reactor

PTI, Beijing

China has become the fifth country in the world to develop high temperature gas-cooled nuclear reactor, which has started generating clean energy for the Chinese capital, the state media reported.

"The development of the reactor represents a major step in China's safe use of nuclear energy to resolve its energy shortage," Professor Wu Zongxin of the Nuclear Energy Technology Institute at Tsinghua University in Beijing said.

The reactor began generating power in full swing in Beijing recently and China is the fifth country in the world to master the technology for building this type of reactor, following the US, Britain, Germany and Japan, Xinhua news agency quoted Wu as saying.

Construction of the reactor began in 1995, at a total cost of 250 million yuan (\$30 million). The reactor has undergone 100 safety tests since it began thermal state testing in December 2000.

Clinton urges India against Hindu-Muslim polarisation

AFP, New Delhi

Former US president Bill Clinton urged India not to polarize itself along religious lines if it wanted to be the "right kind" of world power.

Clinton, in a speech broadcast to a New Delhi conference late Saturday, said the Hindu-Muslim riots that left 2,000 dead last year in India's state of Gujarat were one of the saddest events since he left office in 2001.

He urged India to sort out its communal problems as it headed to becoming a "giant" on the world stage.

"To identify and categorize people based on faith will keep India from becoming the right kind of giant in the 21st century," Clinton said in remarks released by the conference's host, India Today magazine.

Clinton, who is widely respected in India for his 2000 state visit, had helped raise funds for the victims of an earthquake in Gujarat

that killed 20,000 people and left 250,000 homeless.

The former president said the quake, which came weeks after he left the White House, had showed him that Hindus and Muslims could work together in the western Indian state.

Riots broke out across Gujarat, the largest state ruled by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party, after a Muslim mob in February 2002 torched a train carrying Hindu activists, killing 58.

Most of the victims of the subsequent bloodshed were Muslim, and the state administration was accused by human rights groups of turning a blind, or even sympathetic, eye to the vigilante violence.

The Indian government was blasted over the riots by the opposition and human rights groups, but the United States and other major Western countries refrained from publicly criticizing the handling of the violence.

US will do all it can for India, Pakistan: Powell

Musharraf ready to work with Delhi to fight terrorism

AFP, Washington

The United States will do all it can to broker dialogue between India and Pakistan, Secretary of State Colin Powell said in remarks released here Saturday.

Powell praised both sides for standing down troops from a high state of alert which last year provoked fears of the world's first nuclear exchange in an interview with Radio Pakistan.

"I also congratulate the leaders of the two countries for recognizing that it was more important to find a peaceful way forward and to begin a demobilization, which is well underway," Powell said.

"I do understand, however, that there is a need for dialogue to take place between India and Pakistan on all of the outstanding issues between those two nations, and especially the issue of Kashmir."

"The United States will continue to do everything we can to get a dialogue started," he said in the telephone interview conducted on Friday.

Powell has made several peace

shuttle missions to South Asia in the last 18 months and conducted a blizzard of telephone diplomacy, to persuade both bitter rivals to step back from confrontation.

Meanwhile, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said Sunday he was willing to join hands with rival India to fight extremism, but warned he would lose power if he compromised too much over Kashmir.

"If someone says in a positive manner that we want to solve it, then we are together on this issue of controlling every extremist," Musharraf told the Indian Hindi-language news channel Aaj Tak in an interview broadcast Sunday.

But he added that India and Pakistan should resume talks to "set the strategic direction" in the fight against extremism.

"Then we will solve this problem and all problems," he said.

Dialogue between India and Pakistan has been stalled for more than a year with tensions spiralling after an attack on India's parliament complex in December 2001.

India blamed the attack on

Pakistan-based Islamic extremists and the two sides deployed a million troops to their borders. The troops began to pull back in October after India said Musharraf had promised a US envoy he would stop support for the Islamic insurgency against Indian rule in Kashmir.

In the interview, Musharraf warned that no Pakistani leader could survive if he brushed aside the half-century Kashmir dispute and began mending relations with India in other areas such as trade.

"You need to understand the pulse of Pakistan. No Pakistani leader can come into politics and survive if they start doing all kinds of things with India -- talking trade, commerce, economy with India. He will be kicked out," Musharraf said.

"Let us understand the ground reality and let us start talks. Let us start talks on all issues including Kashmir."

New Delhi says Islamabad trains and funds rebels fighting for 14 years in Kashmir, a third of which is also administered by Pakistan.

US in 'dirty tricks' to win UNSC vote on Iraq war

AFP, London

The US is waging a secret "dirty tricks" campaign targeting UN Security Council delegations in New York in its battle to win votes in favour of war against Iraq, the Observer reported Sunday.

The British weekly said it had obtained a document providing details of a surveillance operation which involves interception of the home and office telephones and e-mails of UN delegates.

The paper said the disclosures were made in a memorandum written by a top official at the National Security Agency (NSA), the US body which intercepts communications around the world, and circulated to senior agents in his organisation and to a friendly foreign intelligence agency.

The memo describes orders to staff at the agency to step up surveillance "particularly directed at... UN Security Council members" to provide up-to-the-minute intelligence on the voting intentions of

UN members regarding the issue of Iraq.

The leaked memorandum, dated January 31, makes clear that the target of the heightened surveillance efforts are the delegations from Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Mexico, Guinea and Pakistan at the UN headquarters in New York, according to the British weekly.

Along with Spain and the United States, Britain has sponsored a new UN resolution declaring Iraq in non-compliance with earlier UN demands that it disarm, which would in effect authorise the use of force against the Baghdad regime.

The resolution needs nine votes to pass while avoiding a veto by any of the five permanent members, and Britain and the US are lobbying feverishly for support.

The votes of the so-called 'middle six' delegations are being fought over by the pro-war party, led by the US and Britain, and the party arguing for more time for UN inspections in Iraq, led by France, China and Russia.



Delegates for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) make their way from the Great Hall of the People in Beijing Sunday after a preparatory meeting. Chinese lawmakers were converging on Beijing Sunday for the annual full session of the National People's Congress (NPC). NPC, with 2,900 members, starts its meetings today for completing a generational change in China's top political leadership.

Chinese legislature goes into session today

AFP, Beijing

Chinese lawmakers were converging on Beijing Sunday, as the capital prepared for the annual full session of the rubber-stamp legislature, state media said.

Ranking members of the country's nominal lower house, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), held a preparatory meeting in the afternoon, Xinhua news agency said.

The meeting decided that Jia Qinglin, one of China's most powerful politicians, would chair a meeting of the CPPCC's presidium, scheduled for Monday, according to the agency.

The CPPCC, named the "top advisory body" by Chinese spin doctors, is a powerless body consisting of representatives of non-Communist parties and other organizations.

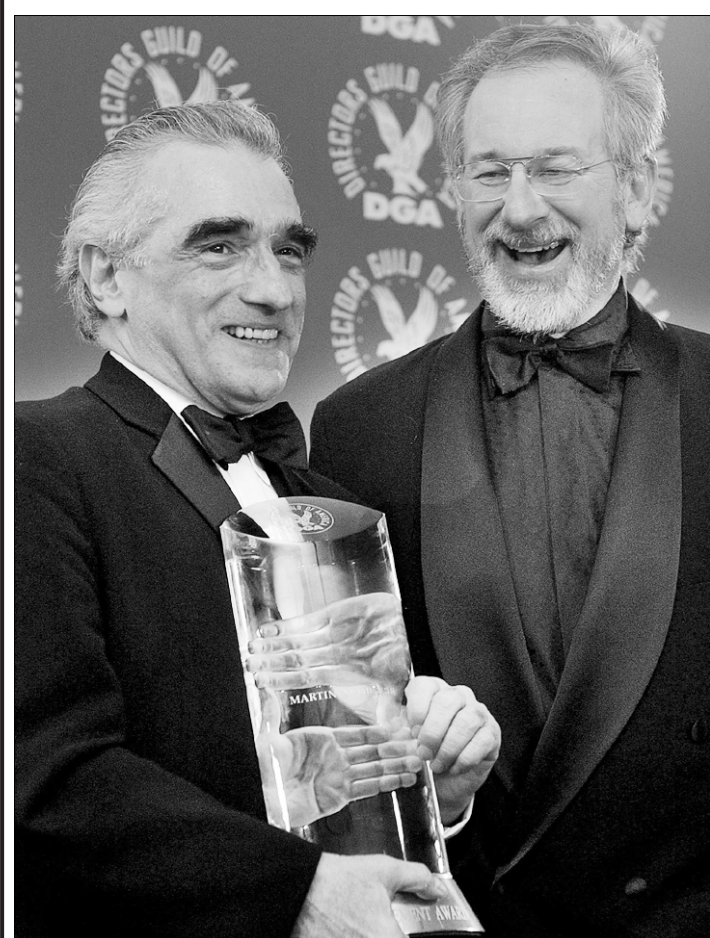
China's parliament, the 2,900-member National People's Congress (NPC), will start meetings on Wednesday, completing a generational change in China's top political leadership.

Hu Jintao, groomed for a decade to become China's next paramount leader, is expected to take over the largely ceremonial presidency during the NPC session.

Sixty-year-old Hu was made secretary general of the Communist Party during a key congress in November.

Deputies to the NPC session had arrived in Beijing in a steady stream over the weekend, Xinhua said.

Busy cameramen were particularly keen to get shots of delegates representing China's ethnic minorities because of the folkloristic costumes they are made to wear, according to the agency.



US director Steven Spielberg (R) presents US director Martin Scorsese with the Lifetime Achievement Award backstage at the 55th Annual Directors Guild Awards in Los Angeles, California on Saturday.

US accused of staging drill for surprise attack on North Korea

AFP, Seoul

North Korea on Sunday accused US intelligence of staging a secret drill for a surprise attack on its nuclear facility and warned that an attack would trigger "horrifying nuclear disasters".

Rodong Sinnun, the North's ruling Workers Party newspaper, argued the United States was pushing ahead with "actual military actions that came in accordance with the second Korean war scenario of aggression."

"What merits a serious attention is that a special operation group of the CIA staged a secret drill to make a surprise attack on the nuclear facility of the DPRK (North Korea) and destroy it," it said.

"The US projected attack on the nuclear facility of the DPRK presupposes a nuclear war."

Tensions along the world's last remaining Cold War frontier escalated last week after Washington's announcement that North Korea had restarted a five-megawatt reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium.

Rodong said its armed forces were ready to "mercilessly wipe out" a war of aggression.