

New attacks in KSA may be 'imminent': US

AFP, Washington

The United States said Tuesday that fresh terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia may be "imminent" and announced that it would close its embassy and consulates there from Wednesday at least through the weekend.

The State Department, through the US embassy in Riyadh, said there continued to be credible information about possible attacks following last week's deadly strikes at three compounds housing foreigners in the Saudi capital.

"The embassy continues to receive credible information that further terrorist attacks are being planned against unspecified targets in Saudi Arabia," it said in a notice sent to US citizens in a country.

South Korea warns North not to risk losing aid

AFP, Seoul

South Korea warned North Korea Tuesday not to risk losing the benefits of inter-Korean economic cooperation by escalating the nuclear crisis, pool reports said.

The warning came as South and North Korean officials met in Pyongyang to discuss how to reactivate inter-Korean reconciliation projects stalled by the seven-month-old standoff over the North's nuclear weapons ambitions.

"It is our precondition that North Korea's nuclear problem should not worsen to allow smooth progress in inter-Korean economic cooperation," South Korea's chief delegate, Vice Finance and Economy Minister Kim Gwang-Lim, said in an opening statement.

US compromises over UN role in Iraq but keeps control on oil

REUTERS, United Nations

hopes of getting strong UN support, the United States made some concessions in its quest to lift 13-year-old trade sanctions against Iraq, somewhat enhancing the role of the United Nations and opening the door for the return of UN arms inspectors.

But the resolution, expected to be adopted by Friday, still gives the United States and Britain wide-ranging powers to run Iraq and control its oil industry until a permanent government is established, which could take years.

On the political role of the United Nations, the draft calls for a high-level special representative with "independent responsibilities." The envoy would "work intensively" with the United States and Britain "to facilitate a process leading to an internationally recognized, representative government of Iraq" but his or her duties are still vague.

US Ambassador John Negroponte said Washington could offer further changes but it was unlikely. "Never say never," he said. "But ... we have gone just about as far as we can in meeting the concerns expressed by other delegations."

The resolution, he said, foresees no role for UN arms inspectors. But the new text mentions their mandate in UN resolutions since 1991, and opens the door for their return to verify Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction.

Most controversial is shielding Iraq's oil revenues and a special Development Fund set up to administer them until 2008 from

any lawsuits, attachments or claims. This is usual for a fund administered by the United Nations but not one over which the world body has no power.

However, the new text says buyers of Iraqi oil are not necessarily immune from suits, such as cases of oil spills.

Money from the fund can be spent by the United States and Britain for the benefit of the Iraqi people. An international board, including the United Nations, will monitor the fund.

Troubling to international law experts is the rewriting of the 1949 Geneva Conventions on the duties of occupying powers, such as the United States and Britain. They are not supposed to create a new permanent government or commit Iraq to long-term contracts, such as oil exploration, under the Geneva treaties.

"The United States is asking the Security Council to authorize it to do a series of things that would otherwise violate international law under the guise of ending sanctions," said Morton Halperin, a former State Department official and director of the Open Society Institute in Washington.

"The purpose of this resolution is to relieve the United States of both its obligations and the limits of what it can do as an occupying power under international law by having the Security Council supersede the requirements of the Geneva Convention," he said in an interview.

US, Philippines resolve to crush Abu Sayyaf

AFP, Washington

The United States and the Philippines agreed on a new joint military effort on Monday to stamp out the Muslim Abu Sayyaf group "once and for all."

President George W. Bush also offered Philippine President Gloria Arroyo 30 million dollars in new aid for training and equipping the Philippine armed forces, according to a joint statement issued after their talks during a White House state visit.

Bush had earlier publicly promised to make the Philippines a non-NATO ally of the United States, clearing the way for increased US military loans, cut-price US military equipment and other training benefits for Manila's armed forces.

"The two presidents reaffirmed their commitment to destroy the Abu Sayyaf (ASG) group once and for all," the joint statement said.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian woman runs for cover as militants of the Palestinian mainstream Fatah faction take position during clashes at the entrance of the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain el-Helweh in the southern Lebanese port city of Sidon on May 17, 2003. A member of Yasser Arafat's Fatah was killed and four civilians were wounded as the secular faction clashed with the Muslim fundamentalist group of Osbat al-Nour in the camp. The two sides traded fire with automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and anti-tank rockets, as they sought revenge for Fatah's near-fatal shooting of its leader, Abdullah Shraidi, on May 17.

Suicide bombings batter ME peace hopes

REUTERS, Jerusalem

A wave of Palestinian suicide bombings battered a tenuous US-led "road map" to Middle East peace and Israel redoubled threats to expel Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat whom it blamed for fomenting militant violence.

"We are convinced that first and foremost Arafat is the factor preventing this process from taking off," Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said on Monday after a woman suicide bomber killed three people in the Israeli town of Afula on Monday.

The Islamic Jihad group and Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an offshoot of Arafat's Fatah faction, both claimed responsibility for the attack outside Afula's main shopping mall -- the fifth suicide bombing in three days.

The Palestinian president condemned the violence and denied trying to wreck the peace

plan embraced by his reformist Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas with a view to ending a 31-month-old uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"We hope that we will continue the road map which has been declared by (US) President Bush and accepted by the Quartet," Arafat told Reuters, referring to Washington's mediation partners the United Nations, European Union and Russia.

Israel has balked at the peace plan on security grounds. In Washington, Bush said that despite the latest bombings he would persevere with the plan, which calls for an end to violence and the founding of a Palestinian state by 2005 alongside Israel.

The Afula bomber apparently eluded an Israeli crackdown in the Palestinian territories ordered after another suicide bomber killed seven people aboard a Jerusalem bus on Sunday.

US rejects IAEA call to send inspectors back to Iraq quickly

AFP, Washington

The United States on Monday rejected a call from the UN's nuclear watchdog for its inspectors to return to Iraq quickly, saying the uncertain situation on the ground did not yet allow for it.

The State Department said a decision on if and when to allow International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to return alone or as a part of a new mission by the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) would not be made for some time.

"I wouldn't expect either one to come about soon," one senior department official said.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said neither UNMOVIC nor the IAEA, which was an integral part of the

UNMOVIC operation, had the resources or ability to conduct inspections in the current military environment in post-war Iraq.

"Certainly, we don't think its time for the UNMOVIC inspectors to begin going back and, as you still have a largely military situation, I wouldn't speculate really one way or the other at what time that might be appropriate," Boucher told reporters.

"Coalition forces are best positioned to do this work and we will continue to do the work," he said.

Earlier Monday, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei urged the United States to allow its inspectors back in Iraq as a matter of urgency, warning of a safety risk at nuclear sites looted since the fall of Saddam Hussein.



Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey (C) arrives in South Korea on Tuesday from North Korea through the border truce village of Panmunjom. Calmy-Rey crossed the inter-Korean border to the South after spending four days in the isolated communist state meeting with North Korean leaders, including North Korean leader Kim Jong-Nam and Foreign Minister Paek Nam-Sun.

Truce holds in Lebanon camp after bloody battle

REUTERS, AFP, Ain El-Helweh, Lebanon

voked an exodus by hundreds of camp residents.

"The fighting broke out around noon when roughly 200 fundamentalist fighters holed up in three strongholds opened fire with all kinds of weapons on Fatah offices," a senior Palestinian official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Analysts say the clashes amount to a battle for control of the camp, where friction between Islamists and mainstream Palestinian factions has been mounting for weeks.

"We are maintaining a ceasefire based on a decision by Islamist groups in camp," said one Osbat al-Ansar official, who goes by the name Abu Obeida.

Palestinians estimate that up to 70,000 refugees live in tumble-down shacks in south Lebanon's Ain el-Helweh camp, which covers around one square kilometer. They were originally displaced by the creation of Israel in 1948 when the camp was founded.

Residents of the camp began venturing out of their homes to buy food, while children collected spent bullets to sell as scrap metal, witnesses said.

Meetings aimed at cementing the shaky peace and arranging the burials of nine people, including two killed in an ambush on Saturday, were set to continue through the day.



A damaged Iraqi T-72 tank is painted by children with an "End of war" message at the eastern entrance of Iraq's oil-rich city of Kirkuk on Monday. The northern city is scheduled to appoint a new local council and mayor next weekend, in what the United States hopes will serve as a much needed sign that a democratic post-Saddam Hussein administration is steadily taking shape.

Bush, Blair lose 'voices' on same day

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's official spokesman announced his resignation Monday, the same day that President George W. Bush's chief spokesman, Ari Fleischer, said he was quitting.

Blair spokesman Godric Smith, who has been working in tandem with former BBC journalist Tom Kelly, said he wished to leave "at some point later this year."

"It's a fantastic job, it's also a very demanding job and not one I think you can do forever and I suppose I just feel, having given it a lot of thought, it's time to do something different," Smith said.

"It's entirely my own decision, there is no drama or mystery. I don't know whether I will stay in the civil service or look outside."

Hurricane season to be more active than usual

AFP, Miami

The 2003 Atlantic hurricane season is expected to be especially active, US weather forecasters announced Monday, with as many as nine hurricanes anticipated over the five month-long period.

The 2003 Atlantic hurricane season will likely have above normal levels of activity, forecasters with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said in a statement, adding that of the six to nine hurricanes predicted, between two and four are likely to be classified as major storms.

The greater than usual hurricane activity is expected because of the "La Niña" weather phenomenon which has chilled the waters of the equatorial Pacific, but warmed the waters of the Atlantic.

US chopper crashes in Iraq: 4 killed

AP, Washington

A Marine Corps transport helicopter crashed Monday in central Iraq near Karbala with at least four people aboard, and there were no indications of survivors, Pentagon officials said.

Another servicemember drowned while trying to rescue the crew of the downed helicopter, a Pentagon official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Marine CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter crashed into a canal southeast of Karbala, the official said. Lt. Col. David Lapan, a Pentagon spokesman, said there was no indication whether or not it was downed by hostile action. Another official said it appeared to be an accident.