

Russia calls for new UN resolution on Iraq

AFP, Moscow

Russia said yesterday that only a new UN Security Council resolution on Iraq would legitimize the temporary government set up by Washington and a political peace process.

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said in an official statement that Russia -- which has veto power within the UN council -- "would be able to recognize the temporary leadership of Iraq" if a new resolution was drafted.

But Ivanov's statement said the new UN resolution must also set "precise dates for agreeing a new constitution and holding democratic elections" in Iraq.

The statement showed signs of Russia approving current US-led efforts to set up a political peace process for Iraq, but also seeking a role in the efforts.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to speak before the UN General Assembly next month, with his address most likely to touch most heavily on Iraq.



PHOTO: AFP
An Iraqi spits on a portrait of Jordanian King Abdullah, taken from inside the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, where a car bomb killed at least nine people yesterday. Dozens of angry Iraqis stormed the embassy after the blast and tore apart the Jordanian flag while burning pictures of King Abdullah and his father, the late King Hussein.

US general sees Saddam on the run in disguise

REUTERS, Tikrit

The US general leading the hunt for Saddam Hussein around the fugitive ex-dictator's home town said on Thursday that Saddam was on the run, wearing a disguise and moving frequently to evade American patrols.

"He's on the run. He's moving every three to four hours," Major General Ray Odierno told a news conference at the 4th Infantry Division headquarters in one of Saddam's lavish former palaces by the banks of the River Tigris in Tikrit.

"He is clearly moving three to four times in a single day," Odierno said, citing intelligence reports. "My guess is he's in disguise some way, in unassuming clothes."

The 4th Infantry Division has mounted frequent raids around Tikrit, hunting Saddam loyalists and guerrilla

fighters who have killed 53 US soldiers since Washington declared major hostilities over on May 1. A US civilian contractor was also killed by a land mine just north of Tikrit on Tuesday.

Officers in Tikrit said they had seized three suspected guerrilla leaders in night raids early on Thursday.

One man arrested overnight after 39 men were turned out of a workers' hostel, handcuffed and questioned by soldiers may have been a "national-level Fedayeen leader," funding and arming resistance to the US occupation beyond Tikrit itself, raid commander Lieutenant Colonel Steve Russell said.

The man may also be linked to an attempted attack nearby on US forces 24 hours earlier, he said, when troops shot a man who they said was about to fire a rocket-propelled grenade.

The two others were believed to have been generals under Saddam and were detained in separate raids at an undisclosed village south of Tikrit, 105 miles north of Baghdad. About a dozen other people there were still being questioned.

In Tikrit, as Abrams tanks and armored vehicles sealed the area and helicopters clattered overhead in the dark, troops charged up stairways, banging on doors. They made men kneel in the street, heads down and hands cuffed behind their backs with plastic ties. Interpreters handled the flow of questions.

The targeted suspect was taken away blindfolded and the 38 others held at the city hostel were released.

"As we cast a wide net for sharks, we catch dolphins too," Russell said. "And we apologize."

On Wednesday, the 4th Infantry

said raids north of Baghdad had netted 18 Saddam loyalists and a large arms cache, and the previous day Iraqi police seized a brother of Adnan Abdullah Abid al-Mussli, a close personal bodyguard of Saddam's family who was himself arrested around Tikrit a week ago.

Washington says it wants to put a democratic Iraqi government in place as soon as possible and then end its widely resented occupation. Last month it appointed a 25-member Iraqi Governing Council as an initial step toward self-rule.

The Council says it plans to set up a committee soon that will oversee the drawing up of a new constitution -- a key precondition for elections. It also plans to name ministers within a week, one of the council members told Reuters.

Kenyan hotel attack suspects to be tried in higher court

AFP, Nairobi

Five suspects detained over the bombing of a hotel in the Kenyan coastal city of Mombasa were remanded in custody Thursday after they saw their charges dropped by a lower court but then filed anew before a High Court judge.

The suspects, who pleaded not guilty to 15 counts of murder, were charged afresh before High Court Judge Tom Mbaluto, soon after a magistrate in a lower court order their release following the prosecutor's decision to drop charges.

Last month, the judiciary changed its rules of procedure, removing jurisdiction over murder cases from the magistrates' courts.

Heathrow holds stone age secrets

AFP, London

The building of a new terminal at Heathrow airport is providing an unexpected trove of information about the people inhabiting this expanse of land, going back to the hunter gatherers of the stone age 8,000 years ago.

A team of about 80 archaeologists has been working alongside the construction teams preparing the 100-hectare (250-acre) site, where Heathrow airport's fifth terminal will be built.

The archaeologists have found Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, Saxon, medieval and later remains as well as traces of stone age culture.

The researchers have identified 80,000 archaeological objects including 18,000 pieces of pottery, 40,000 pieces of worked flint and the only wooden bowl found dating to the Middle Bronze Age, more than 3,000 years ago.

Shedding new light on the development of farming, the archaeologists found that field boundaries laid down as early as 2,000 BC continued to be shown on maps in the 20th century.

100 days after end of war

Bush still tied up with Iraq

AFP, Washington

One hundred days after he declared major combat in Iraq over, US President George W. Bush is still tied up with the Iraqi dossier -- and facing criticism from some of his Democratic opponents, who accuse him of dragging the United States into war.

By announcing on May 1 an end to large-scale military operations in Iraq, Bush inaugurated a second phase of the US-British intervention, which involves rebuilding and democratizing the country.

The backdrop chosen for this announcement was an aircraft carrier cruising near the coast of California. Bush landed on its deck wearing the uniform of a fighter pilot, which gave the scene a triumphal aspect.

But since then, more than 50 American soldiers have been killed and many others have been wounded as a result of guerrilla operations, and the plan for Iraq's

reconstruction has stumbled more than once.

The first US civilian administrator for Iraq, Jay Garner, was quickly replaced by Paul Bremer. The establishment of an Iraqi provisional government theoretically to be followed by elections is just one of the difficulties he faces.

The Bush administration is also the target of a barrage of criticism for allegedly hyping information on Iraq's suspected weapons of mass destruction in order to persuade Congress and the American public to support the war.

These weapons have still not been found.

In this situation, Bush is trying to place the invasion of Iraq in the context of the war on terror.

"The rise of a free and peaceful Iraq is critical to the stability of the Middle East, and a stable Middle East is critical to the security of the American people," Bush underlined during a July 30 press conference,

days before his departure for a four-week vacation at his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

Administration officials point out that the president has never tried to conceal that the post-war period in Iraq would not be easy.

They compare present criticism with attacks on the administration a few days after the beginning of combat, when opponents of the president charged that the US army was poorly prepared to face resistance from troops loyal to Saddam Hussein.

Another thorn in the White House's side is that four months after the fall of Baghdad, the deposed Iraqi leader still remains at large.

The July 22 deaths of his two sons, who were killed by US soldiers, is the main success chalked up by the Bush administration which has exploited that fact to the hilt, publishing photographs of the men's bodies.

Breakthrough in search of Ebola vaccine

AFP, Washington

The United States has developed an experimental vaccine believed to be capable of protecting primates from the Ebola virus in what is seen as a major breakthrough in fighting one of the deadliest diseases known to man, the government announced Wednesday.

Ebola, which has already ravaged several African countries, normally kills 90 percent of its victims.

"This research has enormous public health implications not only because it might be used to limit the spread of Ebola virus ... but also because this vaccine strategy may be applied to other highly lethal viruses, such as the Marburg and Lassa fever viruses, and the SARS coronavirus," commented Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Europe continues to bake in deadly heat

AP, Rome

Rivers and ponds were drying up, while wildfires blazed in several countries as Europe staggered through a deadly heat wave forecast to last until September.

The death toll from the heat and flames stood at 37 Wednesday night.

Belgium's Royal Meteorological Institute predicted the temperature could reach 104 on Thursday -- the highest it has ever forecast since its founding in 1833.

Records have been broken in several French cities and on Wednesday, London registered its highest-temperature ever -- 95.7. Two deaths were linked to the heat in Britain, officials said.

Wildfires, fanned by hot winds, were reported in Croatia, Greece, Spain, Portugal and France.

The discovery of two bodies in a

charred forest 190 miles northeast of Lisbon brought the death toll in that country to at least 14. Two others died in Croatia.

Forest fires fanned by hot winds near the French Riviera last week killed four people, and a fifth person died in Corsica when he tried to put out a fire near his home.

With air conditioning uncommon in much of Europe, natives and tourists alike struggled to find ways to cope.

On the Croatian island of Pag, residents were banned from washing cars, watering gardens or taking showers at beaches.

In Amsterdam, about a hundred soccer fans in a crowd of 47,000 Ajax boosters who came to a kind of open-house day Wednesday received first aid after feeling sick, dehydrated or overheated.

N-programme peaceful, homegrown: Iran

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran denied yesterday that nuclear scientists from Pakistan, North Korea and other countries had helped its atomic program and reiterated that its nuclear aims were confined to civilian purposes.

The LA Times newspaper reported earlier this week that Iran was on the verge of being able to produce atomic weapons thanks largely to clandestine assistance from Russia, China, Pakistan and North Korea.

"This paper's claim about Iran's cooperation with other countries for obtaining nuclear technology is a sheer lie," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said.

"This report is irresponsible and is an obvious misuse of professional journalism," the official IRNA news agency quoted him as saying.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry on

Tuesday flatly denied that Pakistan had provided any help to Iran's nuclear program. Iran is known to have imported some uranium from China in the early 1990s and Russia is helping Iran complete its first nuclear energy reactor in the southern port of Bushehr.

Iran insists that it has no intention of building nuclear weapons and says it merely wants to use nuclear technology to generate electricity.

"Iran's nuclear technology has been developed based on Iranian scientists' efforts and it is purely for civilian and peaceful purposes," Asefi said.

"Iran has openly announced that nuclear weapons have no place in its military and security doctrine and we basically believe that obtaining weapons of mass destruction is immoral, inhuman and against religious beliefs," he added.



PHOTO: AFP
Pallbearers carry the coffin of Government weapons expert Dr David Kelly at St Mary's Church in Longworth, Oxfordshire on Wednesday. Around 160 mourners including Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott and Lord Hutton, who is leading the inquiry into Dr Kelly's apparent suicide, took part in it.

Arnold Schwarzenegger says goodbye to filmdom for politics

AFP, Los Angeles

US action hero Arnold Schwarzenegger on Wednesday announced he was giving up movies to fight for the governorship of the state of California, in a surprise twist worthy of a Hollywood script.

The Austrian-born "Terminator" star's decision to compete in October elections came in an interview with US talk show host Jay Leno in Los Angeles and stunned fans after weeks of "will he, or won't he" speculation.

"It was a very difficult decision to make, one of the most difficult decisions I have made in my entire life," the 56-year-old told Leno of his bid for the leadership of the most populous, and most broke, US state.

"After two weeks, I came to the conclusion that there will be a lot of sacrifices to be made," the Republican candidate told reporters after the show.

"Less hours for the children, moving to (the state capital) Sacramento and no movies. But it is my duty to jump into the race and to bring hope to the people in California."

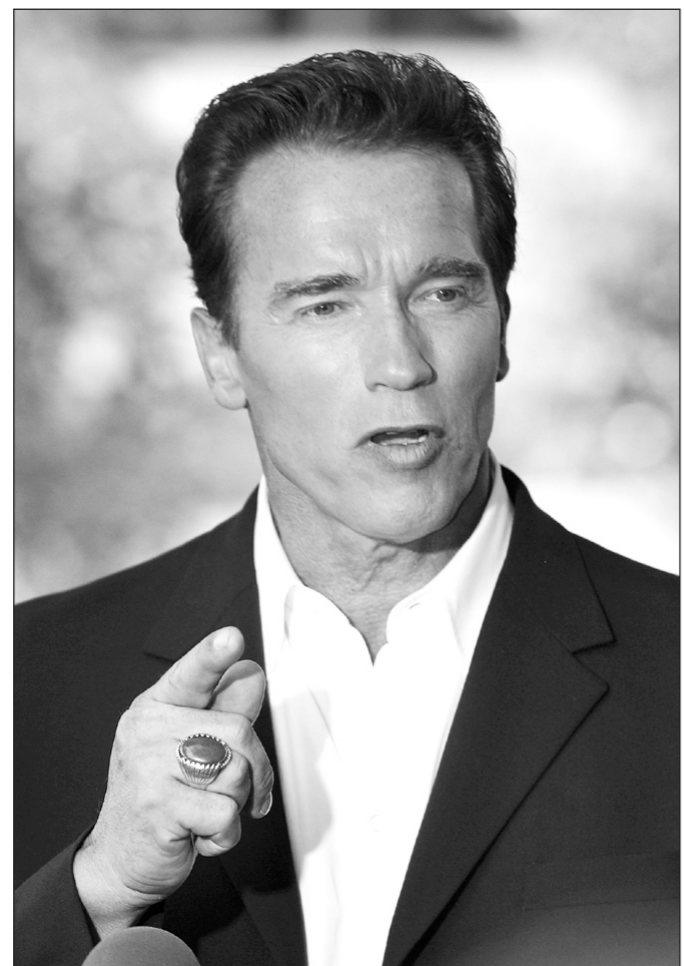


PHOTO: AFP
Arnold Schwarzenegger speaks to reporters outside NBC studios in Burbank, California Wednesday after announcing during the taping of "The Tonight Show" that he will run for governor of California in the special recall election of Gov. Gray Davis scheduled for October 7.

African peace force to move into Monrovia

REUTERS, Monrovia

West African peacekeepers were to advance into the war-battered Liberian capital on Thursday as President Charles Taylor prepared formally to announce his resignation.

The arrival of Nigerian troops has brought new hope to a land broken by 14 years of strife and especially to hundreds of thousands of hungry people packed into Monrovia in a sometimes vain attempt to escape bullets, bombs, murder and rape.

The peacekeepers, their numbers raised to more than 450 since Monday, will drive down the 45-km road from the international airport to the coastal city, where more than 2,000 people have been killed in fighting since June.

"People are eager for the peacekeepers, especially if they are deployed across the bridges," said Joseph Boutlin, among a large crowd near the road to the airport on Thursday morning. "Everyone is yearning to be reunited with their families."

The Nigerians have armored vehicles to protect them, but guns have largely fallen silent in Monrovia this week and in a hopeful sign of reconciliation rebels have embraced Taylor's fighters on the front line.

A seven-strong US Marine team has flown into Monrovia from warships offshore to liaise with the West

Africans, but the United States has yet to decide if it will commit ground troops to a country founded by freed American slaves.

The United States has repeatedly demanded that the first step for peace must be the departure of Taylor -- a former warlord accused of fanning years of regional conflict and wanted by an international war crimes court in Sierra Leone.

Taylor, who has been offered asylum in Nigeria, had always said he could not go before peacekeepers arrived because of fears that his own volatile fighters -- let alone the rebels -- might run amok in a power vacuum.

Now peacekeepers are on the ground, Taylor is due to announce his resignation formally on Thursday to a joint session of the houses of parliament before handing over power on Monday.

South African President Thabo Mbeki said he planned to travel to Liberia to attend a ceremony on Monday marking Taylor's handover. He said Taylor had assured him by phone he would fly into exile the same day or the day after.

Taylor has been indicted for war crimes by a UN-backed court investigating atrocities in Sierra Leone's brutal civil war. Officials said this week he wants the indictment lifted before leaving.

Rebels reiterated they would not pull back from Monrovia until Taylor goes.

Betel chewing products major cancer hazard

AFP, Paris

Betel chewing products, used from time immemorial in India and elsewhere in Asia as a mild stimulant and consumed even by children, are a major cancer hazard, according to a new study released on Thursday.

Countries where betel chewing is prevalent have higher rates of cancer of the mouth, pharynx and oesophagus, and Asian immigrant communities also suffer more from these diseases than the surrounding population, according to the report by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

"There are hundreds of millions of users worldwide, and there is great concern that the habit will spread to populations in North America and Europe not previously exposed to the habit," the agency said. Britain is the world's leading importer of betel products outside Asia, it added.

A common product known as betel quid is a kind of candy made from areca tropical palm nuts, slaked lime and spices, and wrapped in a leaf from the betel vine. Tobacco is often added to the mix.

The quid is held between the teeth and the cheek, where it slowly releases a stimulant called arecoline. People who use betel frequently over a long period of time usually have red teeth. They are also likely, the new study finds, to suffer from a hardening of tissue called oral submucous fibrosis, which can turn into cancer.