

IAEA adopts resolution sharply rebuking Iran

AP, Vienna

The UN nuclear watchdog agency censured Iran for past cover-ups in a resolution adopted yesterday, and warned Tehran to be more forthcoming if it wants an investigation of suspect activities to end.

The resolution submitted by three European powers — France, Germany and Britain — was a product of days of diplomatic maneuvering at a meeting of the 35-member board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It did not hand down sanctions against the country.

The document, passed by consensus, "deplores" that "Iran's cooperation has not been as full, timely and proactive as it should have been. It notes "with concern that after almost two years," since Iran's undeclared program came to light that "a number of questions remain outstanding."

Hours before the resolution was adopted, the United States accused Tehran of bulldozing sites to prevent discovery of evidence of a nuclear weapons program.

Agreement on the text came despite Iranian efforts to substantially tone it down, including tactics that forced IEAE head Mohamed ElBaradei on Thursday to acknowledge mistakenly accusing Tehran in one instance of holding back information.

The IAEA is investigating nearly two decades of covert nuclear activity by Iran. Tehran says its nuclear program is for generating electricity, but the United States claims it is for making weapons.

ElBaradei admitted he incorrectly stated in a report to the board that Iran did not report the purchase of 150 magnets for centrifuges it was building secretly.

His admission came after Iran submitted an audiotape recording an IAEA inspector being informed about the purchase.

The report also said Iran inquired about buying thousands of such magnets on the black market.

"We still have no concrete proof that this has a military dimension but we are still are not in a position to say that this is exclusively for peaceful purposes," ElBaradei said Thursday.

The resolution notes that Iran was slow to give information about its centrifuge program and in some cases the information has been "incomplete and continues to lack the necessary clarity."

The resolution "deplores" the fact that "Iran's cooperation has not been as full, timely and proactive as it should have been." It also notes "with concern" that questions remain about Iran's nuclear program nearly two years after it came to light.

As the three European nations put last touches on the text, diplomats speaking on condition of anonymity said the agency was looking at intelligence that Iran was razing parts of a restricted area next to a military complex in a Tehran suburb.

Satellite photos showed that several buildings had been destroyed and top soil had been removed at Lavizan Shiyan, one diplomat said.

But Iran's chief delegate to the Vienna meeting, Hossein Mousavian, denied the allegation and told The Associated Press the IAEA was free to visit the site.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher later accused Iran of deception that "has gone to the extent of bulldozing entire sites to prevent the IAEA from discovering evidence of its nuclear weapons program."

Boucher said commercial satellite photography shows the complete dismantling and the razing of a facility at Lavizan Shian, previously disclosed as a possible weapons of mass destruction location.

Most of the questions the agency wants answered relate to the sources of enriched uranium, including weapons-grade samples, found in Iran and the scope of Iran's centrifuge program, used to enrich uranium.



PHOTO: AFP
European Commission Chairman Romano Prodi (L) greets EU commissioner in charge of external policy Chris Patten at European headquarters in Brussels yesterday for the second day of summit talks in a bid to agree on a historic constitution for the expanded bloc and a new chief for the European Commission.

NUCLEAR CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

Pak team in Delhi for 'result-oriented' talks

PTI, New Delhi

A high-level Pakistani delegation arrived in New Delhi yesterday for crucial expert level parleys with their Indian interlocutors on Nuclear Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), saying they are carrying "positive suggestions" and looking forward to "result-oriented talks".

"We are coming with a positive spirit and positive suggestions. We are here for result-oriented talks," Tariq Usman Haider, leader of the six-member Pakistani delegation told reporters at Delhi airport.

He said "delegations of both India and Pakistan have a responsibility for the people of the two countries".

Asked what were Pakistan's expectations from the two-day meeting starting on Saturday he said, "We don't negotiate through the media".

The two sides will discuss a range of issues covering nuclear risk reduction and strategic stability at the meeting.

Haider, Additional Secretary in the Pakistan Foreign Office, will be assisted by former Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner in New Delhi and at present Director General of South Asia, Jalil Abbas Jilani and top nuclear and defence officials.

The delegation also includes Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman Masood Khan.

The Indian side will be headed by Sheel Kant Sharma, Additional Secretary in the External Affairs Ministry.

The two sides are expected to pick up threads from the February, 1999 Memorandum of Understanding dealing with nuclear CBMs signed in Lahore during the visit of then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.



PHOTO: AFP
Jamie S. Gorelick (L) and Thomas H. Kean of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (9/11 Commission) listen to testimony in Washington, DC on Thursday at the headquarters of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The 9/11 Commission was wrapping up its series of hearings on events leading up to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001.

SPECIAL COMMISSION SAYS American air defences 'unprepared' for 9/11

REUTERS, Washington

US fighter jets had virtually no chance to shoot down or intercept four hijacked planes on Sept 11, 2001, because of confusion and poor communication among "unprepared" officials responsible for America's air defences, a special commission said Thursday.

The confusion was shared by Vice President Dick Cheney, who wrongly believed at one point that the military had downed "a couple" of aircraft under orders he conveyed, the panel said.

In a report that included chilling quotes from hijackers commandeering the doomed aircraft, the commission's staff found a White House order to shoot down hijacked planes did not reach Air Force jets until after the last airliner had crashed.

Although fighter jets were airborne seven minutes after the first plane crashed into the World Trade Centre, military officials received insufficient notice of the other hijackings to stop the planes, the staff statement said.

The civilian Federal Aviation Administration came under particular attack. "I think (FAA) headquarters blew it," said panel member Bob Kerrey, a former Democratic senator.

Gen. Ralph Eberhart, commander of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), said that if the FAA had immediately reported all it knew to the military command, jets could have shot down the planes.

The earliest notice the military had of any of the hijackings was nine minutes before a plane crashed.

The report was presented at the final hearing of the 10-member government-established panel investigating the Sept. 11 attacks, which killed nearly 3,000 people. In the audience sat grieving relatives of some of victims, several clutching photographs of their loved ones.

The report said NORAD and FAA officials were "unprepared for the type of attacks launched against the United States on Sept. 11, 2001," and "struggled under difficult circumstances to improvise a homeland defence against an unprecedented challenge."

It said many front-line military and aviation personnel responded well, despite confusion, inaction and sometimes wildly inaccurate information at higher levels.

In the two hours between the takeoff of the first hijacked plane at 8 a.m. and the fourth plane's crash, officials raced against time to discover the extent of the crisis.

"We have some planes," a hijacker said from American Airlines Flight 11, which hit the north tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 a.m. EDT. "Nobody move ... If you try to make any moves, you'll endanger yourself and the airplane."

Vajpayee takes blame for BJP's defeat

PTI, Puri

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee yesterday said he owned "maximum" responsibility for BJP's (Bharatiya Janata Party) defeat in the Lok Sabha elections and that he would do "penance" for it.

"I take maximum responsibility for the defeat because the elections were fought in my name. I will do penance for it," he told reporters.

Asked what he meant by penance, he said he would work very hard. "There will be no lacking in hard work," Vajpayee said.

To a question whether the next election would be fought under him, the former Prime Minister said no one knows what will happen in future but he would work very hard.

Meanwhile, BJP Parliamentary Board, the party's highest policy making body, has been convened on June 20 to discuss Lok Sabha electoral debacle and the Gujarat issue.

Announcing this at a press conference, Party general secretary Pramod Mahajan, told reporters that the decision to convene the meeting was taken by party president M Venkiah Naidu after discussions with Lok ADVANI who spoke to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Former minister Jaswant Singh and he himself were present along with Naidu when Advani spoke to Vajpayee in Manali, Mahajan said.

There are nine members in the Board and one special invitee.

Mahajan said the Parliamentary Board was all powerful and was empowered to take any important decision.

The meeting comes ahead of the BJP National Executive meeting in Mumbai from June 22 to 24.

Mahajan said the outcome of elections would be discussed in detail at the unscheduled Parliamentary Board meeting where Gujarat issue would also be taken up.

Asked why political issues cannot be taken up at the National Executive, he said "you cannot discuss any issue threadbare where you have 150 people."

To a question if the Parliamentary Board has been convened in the backdrop of Vajpayee's statement on Gujarat, Mahajan said "the press is free to interpret".

About Vajpayee's today's comments accepting maximum responsibility for the party's defeat, Mahajan said the former prime minister was the supreme leader of the party and as a general accepted defeat and has not blamed anyone else.

Vajpayee has also said that it was a collective defeat, Mahajan said and added that in BJP victory or defeat is always collective. "We never blame one person for defeat or credit one person for victory. We win or lose collectively."

Asked whether Vajpayee made the remarks today under RSS pressure, Mahajan said he was never in the habit of working under pressure and "we don't want to give credit for his statements to anybody else."

Besides Vajpayee, Advani, Naidu, Jaswant Singh and Mahajan, the other members of the board are Murlu Manohar Joshi, Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitley, Sanjay Joshi and Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Secretary of the board.

Arafat vows to control Gaza after pullout

Mubarak holds talks with Palestinian PM

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has pledged to assert control over the Gaza Strip after an Israeli pull-out and fight militants who break the law, an Israeli newspaper reported yesterday.

Haaretz quoted Arafat as saying in an interview earlier this week that he "definitely" understands that Israel must preserve its character as a Jewish state under any future peace deal.

The liberal daily said it was the first time Arafat had made such a comment. But Arafat declined to say how many Palestinian refugees should be allowed to return to what is now Israel in any future peace deal, it said.

Arafat said his Palestinian Authority would control the Gaza Strip after an Israeli pullout, and noted that Palestinian police had been keeping the peace in Bethlehem since Israeli troops withdrew to the outskirts of the West Bank city last year.

Asked if he would not hesitate to fight against Hamas militants in Gaza if necessary, he said: "Even against anyone from Fatah who comes out against the law." Arafat heads Fatah, the largest faction in the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Hamas is one of the main militant groups responsible for suicide bombings that have killed hundreds of Israelis since the Palestinian uprising began in September 2000. Israeli forces have retaliated by assassinating Hamas leaders.

AFP adds: President Hosni Mubarak held talks with Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qorei here Friday, a day after a scheduled meeting was called off amid persistent rumours over the Egyptian leader's health.

The meeting held at Mubarak's private residence in the Cairo suburb of Heliopolis lasted 30 minutes, after which neither leader made any comment to reporters, said an AFP correspondent at the scene.

Qorei had been due to leave Egypt late Thursday, but delayed his departure for the meeting with Mubarak, Palestinian sources said.

Rebels capture Afghan provincial capital: 10 killed

AP, Kabul

Fighters loyal to several local warlords stormed a remote provincial capital and forced the governor to flee, one of the group's leaders and a government official said yesterday. At least 10 people were believed killed in the fighting.

The violence broke out on Thursday in Chagcharan, a small town that is the capital of western Ghor province, 220km west of capital, Kabul.

Din Mohammed Azimi, Ghor's deputy governor, said the governor had fled for either Herat or Kabul on Thursday afternoon. Azimi, who said he was speaking from a village a few kilometres to the north of the city, said at least 10 of his men were killed and that more than 1,500 fighters were preparing a counter-attack.

Ghulam Yahya, a former Ghor police chief who is now one of the warlords opposed to the governor, said he knew of only one person killed, but it was not clear if he was referring to casualties on his side.

Wanted tribal leader killed in Pak raids

AP, Wana

Pakistani troops killed a former Taliban fighter who led fierce resistance to the army's effort to flush out foreign militants from a rugged region near the Afghan border, the army spokesman said yesterday.

Nek Mohammed, who was allied with suspected al-Qaeda militants, was killed in an overnight mortar assault on a mud-brick fortress in the South Waziristan region. Four others were also killed.

"We were tracking him down and he was killed last night by our hand," Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan told The Associated Press in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital.

Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayyat on Friday told lawmakers in the National Assembly that Mohammed's killing was a "major success."

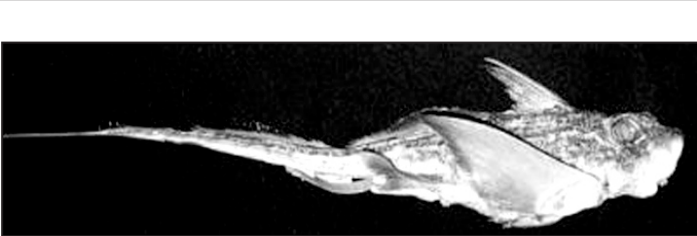


PHOTO: AP
A Hydrolagus mattallansi, which Brazilian scientists claim is a new fish species believed to have lurked deep in the south Atlantic Ocean for over 150 million years, is seen in a photo made available on Thursday.

New fish species found

AP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazilian scientists claimed to have found a new fish species believed to have lurked deep in the south Atlantic Ocean for over 150 million years. The fish, of the Chimaera genus, is about 12-16 inches long and is found at depths of 1,300 to 2,000 feet, scientists said Thursday.

"This is a fantastic discovery, because before this we believed there were no Chimaera off the Brazilian coast," said ichthyologist Jules Soto, who discovered the fish.

Soto is the curator of the Oceanography Museum at the Vale do Itajai University and co-author of the fish's scientific description, which will be published in the upcoming edition of the US scientific journal Zootaxa.

Soto said the fish was discovered on a Spanish fishing boat trawling off the coast of Rio de Janeiro state in 2001.

Soto said his students first photographed the Chimaera aboard the vessel as part of a research project, but they were unaware of the fish's importance and threw it back in the ocean.

Soto realised the significance of the discovery while examining the photographs.

"I could see right away it was a very different animal, just from the shape of the fins," Soto said by telephone from Santa Catarina state, 450 miles south-west of Rio de Janeiro.

It took Soto and his team two more years to locate more specimens and to complete the scientific work needed to prove it was a new species.

The fish, which Soto has named Hydrolagus mattallansi, has a snub nose, winglike side fins, a spiky back fin and stinger tail. It is closely related to sharks and skates.

The Chimaera can sense the presence of other animals by scanning the electromagnetic field around it, but it also has large eyes that can sense even the smallest bit of light, Soto said.

Ichthyologists called the new Chimaera an "important discovery."

"Deep water fish have been little studied here and it's very difficult to get information about that environment. The sad thing is that environment is being devastated by industrial fishing so species new to science are likely disappearing even before they are discovered," said Adriano Lima, an Ichthyologist at Rio de Janeiro's National Museum.

Scientists have identified about 25,000 fish species in the world but suspect there may be as many as 40,000 yet to be discovered.

Soto said it was rare that such a large vertebrate animal should be undiscovered but that the deep waters off Brazil's coast have not been extensively explored.

He claimed to have discovered three other new species that he is still in the process of describing.

Chimaera evolved 400 million years ago during the Devonian Period and are one of the oldest fish species alive today.



PHOTO: AFP
Two activists of the Pakistani People's Party (PPP) burn tyres to protest the killing of one of their leader in Karachi Thursday. Violent demonstrations erupted in the city after gunmen shot dead Munawwar Suharwardi a provincial leader of ex-prime minister Benazir Bhutto's opposition PPP.