



PHOTO: AFP
IAEA director general and nuclear watchdog Mohammed El Baradei (L) speaks to chairman of Board of Governors Antonio Nunez Garcia-Sauco during the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) board of governors' meeting in Vienna yesterday to review Iran's nuclear programme and revelations of South Korean nuclear activities.

No deadline for Iran's nuclear probe: UN

IAEA to continue investigating S Korea

AFP, Vienna

UN nuclear chief Mohamed ElBaradei said yesterday that there was no deadline for ending an investigation into Iran's nuclear programme.

"It's an open process and we will be finished with Iran when we are finished," said ElBaradei, who heads the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Western countries, headed by the United States, which suspect Iran of seeking to develop nuclear weapons, have been pushing for the IAEA to set a deadline for completion of the Iranian investigation.

An Iranian representative, Hossein Musavian, said that his country expected the IAEA investigation to be wrapped up in November.

"I believe that in November everything should be finalized," he

said.

He said the Iranian file "should be closed and go to the normal way and be followed up in safeguards," a reference to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The UN nuclear watchdog will continue investigating South Korea for uranium enrichment and plutonium experiments Seoul had failed to report, in what is "a matter of serious concern," IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei said yesterday.

ElBaradei told a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors that he would report again to the board on the investigation by its next meeting in November.

Meanwhile, the head of Israeli military intelligence, General Aharon Zeevi, claimed yesterday that Iran could be in a position to develop nuclear weapons without outside help within six months.

UN, aid agencies pull staff from Afghan city

US-led forces kill 22 Taliban

AFP, Herat

The United Nations and several non-governmental aid agencies withdrew staff from the troubled Afghan city of Herat yesterday after their offices were targeted in deadly rioting.

More than 60 workers were relocated after demonstrators attacked aid offices on Sunday in protest at the sacking of long-time governor Ismael Khan. Four people died and more than 50 were injured.

"All international and some national United Nations staff are being relocated to Kabul," said one UN official who did not want to be named.

"They are obviously relocated for security reasons."

He said 33 members of about 10 non-governmental organisations

were also evacuated, with 61 workers pulled out in total. The UN refugee agency has also suspended repatriations from nearby Iran.

United Nations staff fled to bunkers as about 500 demonstrators ransacked buildings used by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and three non-governmental groups on Sunday.

Gunfire rang out throughout the day and American and Afghan forces were on the streets, with US military helicopters flying low over the city. Hospital sources said the four deaths and 53 injuries were mainly caused by gunshots and shrapnel.

Calm returned yesterday after a televised appeal by Khan and a

government warning that any more violence would be met by military force -- allowing the aid workers to survey the devastation.

"Oh my God, what have they done to our office?" said Abdul Karim, an employee of the non-governmental International Organization for Migration whose premises were reduced to a smouldering ruin.

Meanwhile, twenty-two suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda militants, including three Arabs, were killed in a fierce gun-battle with US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan, the US military said yesterday.

"Twenty-two anti-coalition militias were killed -- three of them were Arabs," military spokesman Major Scott Nelson told a news conference in Kabul.

'Top officials knew of prisoner abuse at Guantanamo in 2002'

AFP, London

Top officials in US President George W. Bush's administration knew of prisoner abuse at Guantanamo Bay by late 2002, according to extracts from a book by a US journalist published in the Guardian newspaper.

In his new book "Chain of Command," US journalist Seymour Hersh quoted a Pentagon advisor as saying some prisoners were left in strait jackets in intense sunlight with hoods over their heads, the Guardian said yesterday.

Such incidents occurred, it said, even though the Bush administration repeatedly assured critics it granted recreation periods to the prisoners in Guantanamo, the US military base in Cuba which held hundreds of people captured during the US war in Afghanistan.

'Iraq elections to go ahead on schedule'

AFP, REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's elections will go ahead as scheduled in January even if some Iraqis are unable to vote due to the security situation in the country, interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi said in an interview published yesterday in the several western daily newspapers.

The Iraqi leader acknowledged that there were currently problems in his country, especially in the violence-wracked city of Fallujah, but said these would not prevent the elections being held.

In the interview, published in several British and US dailies as well as in the French paper Le Figaro, Allawi declared: "If for any reason 300,000 people cannot have an election, cannot vote because terrorists decide so, then frankly 300,000 people... is not going to alter 25 million people voting."

If the elections were prevented in the flashpoint city of Fallujah --

where US military strikes were again underway on Monday -- its inhabitants could vote later, the prime minister said.

"Militias have to disband. Criminals have to be surrendered to the government. Foreign fighters have to be surrendered and the Iraqi police and national guard have to be fully deployed in Fallujah," he added.

His government was "determined to win the war against the terrorists, and establish democracy in Iraq," said, who was appointed last June when the United States put in place an interim Iraqi administration to run the country until the elections.

The Iraqi premier also said he expected the captured former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to go on trial before the end of the year.

He said he hoped the trial would help establish a clear distinction between members of Saddam's Baath Party who committed crimes

during his rule, and those who simply joined the party because they had to. Of former Baath Party officials who did not commit crimes, he said: "We are not interested in pursuing them. They should be part of the civil society of Iraq, part of the political process."

Meanwhile at least 45 people died in a wave of bombings and battles between US troops and rebels on Sunday as the United States expressed confidence the violence would not halt the elections.

Loyalists of alleged al-Qaeda chief in Iraq, Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, claimed attacks on the heavily fortified central Baghdad compound housing the government and the US embassy and on the notorious Abu Ghraib prison.

In Washington, US Secretary of State Colin Powell said the United States was confident elections could be held in Iraq on schedule despite the insurgency.

N Korea says it blew up mountain

BBC ONLINE

North Korea has given its first explanation for a huge blast last week which prompted speculation it had carried out a nuclear test.

The country's foreign minister, Paek Nam-sun, said the blast was in fact the deliberate demolition of a mountain as part of a huge, hydro-electric project.

His remarks came in response to a call for information by the visiting UK Foreign Office minister, Bill Rammell.

North Korea had said nothing about the incident until now.

After meeting with Paek, Rammell said North Korea had agreed to his request that a British diplomat be allowed to visit the scene of the blast, near the country's northern border.

Rammell welcomed the fact that North Korea had provided an explanation for the blast and agreed to the request.



PHOTO: AFP
Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) and the members of Cabinet of Ministers are seen during their meeting with regional leaders in Moscow yesterday. Putin announced steps to tighten Kremlin control over Russia's regions and called for "radical" moves to improve security in the north Caucasus after the Beslan school hostage tragedy.

Putin calls for 'radical' shakeup in N Caucasus

Helicopter shot down in Chechnya

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin called for a "radical renewal" of government structures and operations in the north Caucasus in order to fight terror.

"The fight against terrorism demands a radical renewal of the entire policy in the north Caucasus," Putin said yesterday at the start of a meeting with regional leaders.

Putin said that national unity was the main requirement for the needed restructuring.

His comments were made in the wake of the hostage-taking drama in Beslan that left more than 300 dead,

including some 150 children.

Putin stressed that improving state social support in the north Caucasus was a matter of strategic importance for Russia and that weakness in this area made the region a stronghold for terrorism.

Unemployment in the north Caucasus, for example, was "several times higher" than in the rest of Russia and health care was substantially worse there than elsewhere in the country, he said.

The Russian leader announced the creation of a new federal committee to study the situation in the north Caucasus to be headed by Dmitry

Kozak, the chief of staff for the government.

Meanwhile, a Russian military helicopter that crashed in Chechnya over the weekend was shot down by Chechen rebel fighters, Interfax news agency said yesterday quoting military investigators.

"The helicopter was shot down with a grenade launchers while it flew at an altitude of 10 to 15 meters" (33 to 50 feet), a defence ministry spokesman told the agency. He said it was also hit by automatic weapons fire.

Democrats make few gains in HK polls

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong pro-democracy candidates, stung by scandal, made limited gains against the Beijing camp in legislative polls as voters wary of alienating their communist rulers chose stability, results showed yesterday.

The election Sunday for the 60-seat Legislative Council had been portrayed by democrats as a virtual referendum on gaining the right to elect all the city's leaders. But the whiff of scandal, Beijing's carrot-and-stick policies and a complicated voting system favored pro-Beijing politicians.

"I am disappointed. It shows how unacceptable the electoral system is," said Martin Lee, ex-chairman of the Democratic Party, referring to the Byzantine proportional representation system.

In a blow for pro-democracy forces, their candidates won 18 directly elected seats, just one more than in the last election and well below expectations, despite a record 55.6 percent voter turnout, final results showed.



PHOTO: AFP
Beijing-backed Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) party member Ma Lik (L) speaks with former chairman of the Democratic Party, Martin Lee (C), and current chairman, Yeung Sum (R), after the results of the elections were announced in Hong Kong yesterday. Pro-democracy parties made gains in Hong Kong's weekend elections but failed to make major inroads as expected in the Legislative Council controlled by pro-Beijing parties according to full results.

Ivan eyes Cuba, Mexico after slamming Caymans

REUTERS, GEORGE TOWN, Cayman Islands

Hurricane Ivan, one of the fiercest Atlantic storms recorded, headed toward Cuba yesterday after pummeling the Cayman Islands, Jamaica and Grenada on a track that eventually will bring it to the US coast.

A monster storm with sustained winds near 160 mph that has killed at least 47 people, Ivan sent seawater surging over the low-lying Caymans, a British territory and wealthy offshore finance center of 45,000 people.

Forecasters said the rare and deadly Category 5 hurricane was expected to pass near or over extreme western Cuba on Monday evening. They warned of a 20- to 25-foot storm surge of seawater to the east of where the center makes landfall in Cuba.

On Grand Cayman, the largest of the three Cayman Islands, homes and businesses were flooded, an airport runway was submerged and roofs were torn off, witnesses said.

'Arafat assured of election victory'

Fatah likely to lose out: Analysts

AFP, Jerusalem

Yasser Arafat's re-election in polls planned for early next year looks almost certain, despite the veteran Palestinian leader's isolation by both Israel and the Americans, but his mainstream Fatah party will probably be hurt over failings in the Palestinian Authority, analysts said.

Despite increasing criticism over his autocratic methods and widespread corruption, Arafat appears to have no rival in sight to challenge his position as leader of the Palestinian struggle for the past 40 years.

By contrast, his ruling Fatah party, which has long held the dominant position in parliament and other government bodies, was likely to pay a heavy price for the failures of the Palestinian Authority (PA). It looks set to lose ground to other groups, notably Hamas, if the radical Islamic movement should decide to participate in the elections.

"Arafat is not likely to encounter problems, unlike Fatah," said political analyst Zakaria al-Qaq, saying the ageing leader was certain to win

reelection.

In the eyes of the public, Fatah is responsible for all the PA's failings since it was set up in 1994 after the signing of the Oslo Accords, which brought about Palestinian autonomy, he said.

"The PA and Fatah have not carried out their main duty: protecting the Palestinians from Israeli attacks and from corruption," Qaq said. "They have not even been capable of protecting themselves."

Hamas boycotted the first Palestinian elections in 1996, but could carve out a major place for itself if it fields candidates this time around, he said.

"If Hamas takes part in the elections, it could become a key player on the political scene and would have its say in the decision-making process," he said.

Gaza-based analyst Hassan al-Kashef has no doubt that Hamas will participate and will enter into government, which was likely to bring about a change to the movement's strategy.

Bush whipped in lingerie video?

AFP, London

As if Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11 wasn't enough, Republicans now get steamed up by a four-minute video of a ruthless dominatrix whipping US President George W Bush in the Oval Office.

For its 10th anniversary, up market London corset and lingerie boutique, Agent Provocateur, has now put a clip on its website showing Bush, or rather an actor who looks like him, excitedly awaiting an after-lunch visit from his dome.

In she struts on killer black stilettoes, tying up the leader of the free world by the wrists, then twisting his nipple with a plumber's wrench before performing a striptease and whipping him on his boyish white briefs.

The kinky scene reaches its climax, when another man crawls into the room like a dog, dressed head to toe in black latex.

Off comes his hood, and it's a goofy-grinning lookalike of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. "It's tongue and cheek," said Dee Modha, a spokeswoman for the store. "It's just meant to be seen as a bit of frivolous fun, really."

BJP ruled states to enact separate terror laws if Pota repealed

AFP, New Delhi

Six Indian states ruled by Hindu nationalists will pass their own anti-terror laws if the new government goes ahead with plans to scrap a sweeping law enacted after 9/11, a party official said yesterday.

"If the federal government repeals Pota (Prevention of Terrorism Act), our state governments will bring in laws that will be equally effective to deal with terrorism," said Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, spokesman for the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The decision was taken at a meeting of BJP chief ministers in New Delhi at the weekend, Naqvi said.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act was voted into law by the then-BJP government in March 2002 in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States and an Islamic rebel raid on the Indian parliament three months later.

The BJP-led alliance, which lost April/May polls to a Congress-led

alliance, was criticised for using the law disproportionately against Muslims, especially in the western state of Gujarat where at least 2,000 people were killed in sectarian riots in 2002.

Pota broadened the scope for the imposition of the death penalty and gave prosecutors extra powers to detain and interrogate suspects.

Soon after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh came to power in May, his coalition government promised to scrap Pota while vowing to deal firmly with terrorism.

Singh's government had said it would table a motion calling for the repeal of Pota in the last session of parliament, which ended last month. But it failed as the sittings were paralysed by frequent adjournments and walkouts.

The BJP now administers six of India's 28 states, including Gujarat and Rajasthan.

"The response from the six chief ministers was very positive," Naqvi said.