

Tokyo authorities find unexploded bomb

Thousands of residents were evacuated in Tokyo yesterday while authorities dug up an unexploded 550-pound bomb, believed to have been dropped by the United States during World War II, a local official said.

The bomb, about 14 inches in diameter and 47 inches long, was detected earlier this month in a residential area in Tokyo's Katsushika ward by Self-Defence Force investigators, said Katsushika spokesman Takanori Kato.

About 3,900 residents within a 985-feet radius of the site were evacuated for 1.5 hours while troops removed the bomb, according to Kato.

The evacuation came after a diver found 59 unexploded shells in waters near Tokyo on Friday, believed to have been left by Japan's former Imperial Army.



Cherie Blair (C), wife of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair, during a visit to an ancient temple on the island of Gozo for the heads of government wives during the Commonwealth heads of government meeting (CHOGM) in Valletta on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Abuse in Iraq worse than Saddam days

Human rights abuses in Iraq now are as bad, or worse, than they were when Saddam Hussein was in power, the nation's first post-Saddam prime minister was quoted yesterday as saying.

In an interview with the Observer newspaper in London, Ayad Allawi pointed an accusing finger at the interior ministry, and alleged that "a lot of Iraqis" are being tortured or killed during interrogation.

"People are doing the same as (in) Saddam Hussein's time and worse," said Allawi, an prominent opponent of Saddam who steered the US-backed interim government in Baghdad until April this year.

"It is an appropriate comparison. People are remembering the days of Saddam. These were the precise reasons that we fought Saddam Hussein and now we are seeing the same things."

Allawi's remarks came two weeks after US troops raided a secret prison in Iraq and found about 170 detainees in need of water, food and medical attention.

Graphic pictures released by the Committee of Muslim Scholars, the main Sunni religious organisation in Iraq, showed prisoners with severe burns, massive bruising and welts on their bodies.

US military commanders and diplomats called the abuse "intolerable", pressuring elected prime minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari into ordering a joint Iraqi-US inquiry.

Interior Minister Bayan Baqer Solagh has denied claims that he commands death squads targeting the Sunni minority, adding that "only a few detainees were punched and hit" in the prison and that US forces knew of its existence.

Allawi told The Observer that the interior ministry, though not Solagh, was "at the heart of the matter".

Bush admn should be tried for war crimes

Iran's hard-line president said Saturday the Bush administration should be tried on war crimes charges, and he denounced the West for pressuring Iran to curb its controversial nuclear programme.

"You, who have used nuclear weapons against innocent people, who have used uranium ordnance in Iraq, should be tried as war criminals in courts," Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in an apparent reference to the United States.

Ahmadinejad did not elaborate, but he apparently was referring to the US military's reported use of artillery shells packed with depleted uranium, which is far less radioactive than natural uranium and is left over from the process of enriching uranium for use as nuclear fuel.

Since the Iraq war started in 2003, American forces have fired at least 120 tons of shells packed with depleted uranium, an extremely dense material used by the US and British militaries to penetrate tank armour. Once fired, the shells melt, vaporize and turn to dust.

"Who in the world are you to accuse Iran of suspicious nuclear armed activity?" Ahmadinejad said during a nationally televised ceremony marking the 36th anniversary of the establishment of Iran's volunteer Basij paramilitary force.

Iran has been under intense international pressure to curb its nuclear program, which the United States claims is part of an effort to produce nuclear weapons. Iran denies such claims and says its program is aimed at generating electricity.

Iran insists that it has the right to fully develop the program, including enrichment of nuclear fuel a process that can produce fuel for nuclear reactors or atomic bombs.

On Thursday, the European Union accused Iran of having documents that show how to make nuclear warheads and joined the United States in warning Tehran it could be referred to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions.

US unveils Iraq troop pullout blueprint

White House claims 'strong consensus'

The White House for the first time has claimed ownership of an Iraq withdrawal plan, arguing that a troop pullout blueprint unveiled this past week by a Democratic senator was "remarkably similar" to its own.

It also signalled its acceptance of a recent US Senate amendment designed to pave the way for a phased US military withdrawal from the violence-torn country.

The statement late Saturday by White House spokesman Scott McClellan came in response to a commentary published in The Washington Post by Joseph Biden, the

top Democrat of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in which he said US forces will begin leaving Iraq next year "in large numbers."

According to Biden, the United States will move about 50,000 servicemen out of the country by the end of 2006, and "a significant number" of the remaining 100,000 the year after.

The blueprint also calls for leaving only an unspecified "small force" either in Iraq or across the border to strike at concentrations of insurgents, if necessary.

Less than two weeks ago, McClellan blasted Democratic Representative John Murtha, saying that by calling for an immediate withdrawal from Iraq,

the congressman was "endorsing the policy positions of Michael Moore," a stridently anti-war Hollywood filmmaker.

Biden's ideas, relayed first in a November 21 speech in New York, however, got a much friendlier reception.

Even though President George W. Bush has never publicly issued his own withdrawal plan and criticized calls for an early exit, the White House said many of the ideas expressed by the senator were its own.

In the statement, which was released under the headline "Senator Biden Adopts Key Portions Of Administration's Plan For Victory In Iraq," McClellan said the Bush administration welcomed Biden's voice in the debate.

"Today, Senator Biden described a plan remarkably similar to the administration's plan to fight and win the war on terror," the spokesman went on to say.

He added that as Iraqi security forces gain strength and experience, "we can lessen our troop presence in the country without losing our capability to effectively defeat the terrorists."

McClellan said the White House now saw "a strong consensus" building in Washington in favour of Bush's strategy in Iraq.

4 US soldiers reprimanded

Two US soldiers have been reprimanded for burning the remains of Taliban fighters and two for using the incident to try to incite other fighters into battle, the US military said Saturday.

The incidents, which surfaced on Australian television in mid-October, angered many in Afghanistan. The burning of bodies violates the tenets of Islam and the US image here is already tarnished by abuse of detainees.

China rescuers rush to quake scene

Rescue teams rushed yesterday to a popular tourist spot in eastern China after a powerful earthquake killed at least 15 people in the region and left hundreds of others injured, officials said. Seven teams had been dispatched to the worst-hit areas to bring food, water and tents to the hundreds of thousands of people caught up in Saturday's quake, said Cao Junliang, an aid spokesman from the tourist city of Jiujiang.

The official Xinhua news agency said Sunday that 13 people had died and more than 450 were injured in the 5.7-magnitude quake, believed to be the strongest to strike the region in half a century.

Initially 14 people were thought to have died and some newspapers were saying Sunday that the toll was as high as 16.

CIA flight probes make governments squirm

A wave of investigations into whether the CIA broke laws and violated human rights while using Europe as a hub for secret transfers of terrorist suspects poses awkward questions for both European governments and Washington.

Pressure has grown on all sides in the past week to explain dozens of flights criss-crossing the continent by CIA planes, some suspected of delivering prisoners to jails in third countries where they may have been mistreated or tortured.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, preparing this week for his first trip to Washington since taking office, told Bild am Sonntag newspaper the reports gave "grounds for concern."

The European Union and at least eight member states said last week they

were seeking answers from the United States over the use of bases on the continent for such secret transfers, known as "renditions."

The Council of Europe, a leading human rights watchdog, set governments a three-month deadline to reveal what they know about the mystery flights and about a Washington Post report saying the CIA ran secret prisons in Eastern Europe.



PHOTO: AFP

A young boy jumps over cracks in the ground beside a destroyed farmhouse near the town of Ruichang yesterday after it collapsed during the 5.7 earthquake on November 26 in Jiangxi Province.