

AIRSTRIKE ON IRAN

Israel in talks for use of Iraq airspace

AP, REUTERS, London/Sydney

Israel opened negotiations to fly through US controlled airspace in Iraq to carry out strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, a British newspaper reported yesterday. Israel's deputy defence minister denied the claim.

The Daily Telegraph newspaper quoted an unnamed Israeli defence official as saying the talks were aimed at planning for all scenarios, including any future decision to target Iran's nuclear programme.

Israeli bombers would need a corridor through US-administered airspace in Iraq to carry out any strikes, the official was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

Ephraim Sneh, Israel's Deputy Defence Minister, told The Associated Press on Saturday that the report was incorrect. "This is baseless information," Sneh said. "Maybe people like to divert (attention from) the need for immediate economic sanctions (with) stories about imminent Israeli action, which is not on the agenda."

The international community's

focus should be on imposing economic sanctions on Iran for defying UN Security Council resolutions, he said.

Senior officials of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - Britain, the US, France, China and Russia and Germany are meeting Monday for an emergency summit in London to discuss measures against Tehran.

The US and its Western allies insist Iran must suspend uranium enrichment before any negotiations over its nuclear program take place and accused Tehran of using a civilian program as a cover to develop weapons.

Iran, has rejected the condition to suspend enrichment and insists that its nuclear program is peaceful.

Earlier Vice President Dick Cheney said yesterday that the United States and its allies must not allow Iran to become a nuclear power and raised concerns about Tehran's actions and "inflammatory" rhetoric.

In addition to Iran, the two leaders touched on issues ranging from the Iraq war to China and Australian Guantanamo Bay inmate David Hicks.

Italy president asks Prodi to stay PM, face vote

REUTERS, Rome

Italy's president asked Romano Prodi on Saturday to stay on as prime minister and face a confidence vote to test his majority in parliament.

Prodi resigned on Wednesday after he lost a vote on foreign policy in the upper house of parliament, the Senate, plunging the country into political uncertainty.

He must now win a vote in both chambers of parliament to show that he has enough support to govern. The votes are likely to be held next week.

"They have made some fairly inflammatory statements," Cheney said of Iran at a joint Sydney news conference with Australian Prime Minister John Howard. "They appear to be pursuing the development of nuclear weapons."

"We are deeply concerned and have made it very clear we're deeply concerned about Iran's activities," he said.

Iran insists that it is not trying to acquire nuclear weapons and its enrichment activities are for peaceful purposes.

In addition to Iran, the two leaders touched on issues ranging from the Iraq war to China and Australian Guantanamo Bay inmate David Hicks.



Indian workers of the Waqf Board and local Muslim residents bury unidentified victims of the Samjhauta Express train blasts during a mass funeral ceremony at the Mehrauli village outside Panipat, some 100 km north of New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Indians overran barriers at burial of unknown train blast victims

AFP, Mehrauli

Hundreds of Indian Muslims clambered across barricades Saturday to force their way into a mass funeral of 23 Pakistanis killed in a firebomb attack on a cross-border train.

"They may have come from across the borders but we are brothers," shouted Indian mourner Usman Ali as police cordoned off the mass burial site in the northern Indian village of Mehrauli, 100km north of New Delhi.

Undertakers, wearing surgical gloves and medical face masks against the stench of rotting flesh, lowered cheap wooden coffins into shallow graves as some mourners wiped tears.

But it was a funeral of strangers with the remains of 23 victims charred beyond recognition.

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