

Documents detailing Iraq's nuclear plans found

LONDON (AP) — U.N. experts trying to unravel Saddam Hussein's nuclear program got a lucky break: They stumbled on a half-ton of documents that described Iraqi plans for building a bomb.

Biological and chemical weapons inspectors were not so lucky. They never found any secret documents and the Iraqis did not turn over any files, so the full scope of Baghdad's biological and chemical warfare activities probably will remain a mystery.

As diplomats from 175 nations gather at the United Nations today to try to keep the lid on nuclear weapons in the 21st century, Iraq offers the best example of the difficulties in controlling the spread of atomic arms and of all weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran in the 1980s, and there were fears it would use them during the 1991 Gulf War. But it was the discovery of Iraq's secret nuclear program after the Gulf War that shocked and galvanized the international community.

"It was thanks to Iraq that we realized the holes in the international attempts to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction," said Patricia Lewis, a nuclear physicist who heads the Verification Technology Information Center in London.

"Since then, there have been many fingers in the dike trying to plug these holes," she said.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which failed to detect Iraq's extensive nuclear program, has proposed new measures to make it more difficult for countries to cheat. These include sampling air, water and dust to detect whether weapons-grade uranium and plutonium are being produced and expanding inspections of nuclear facilities.

The U.N. conference will focus on extending the

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the cornerstone of international efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. The pact's provisions are administered by the IAEA, a U.N. organization based in Vienna, Austria.

As for other weapons of mass destruction, the Chemical Weapons Convention to ban the use of such arms was signed in 1992 but not enough nations have ratified it to put it into force. The Biological Weapons Convention is being reviewed to try to give it some teeth against cheaters. The Missile Technology Control Regime, a less formal agreement on stopping the spread of missile technology, has gotten many more signatures since the Gulf War.

As part of the Gulf War cease-fire resolutions, the U.N. Security Council set up a special commission to find and destroy Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and gave U.N. experts the right to conduct intrusive inspections.

But after four years, the commission still has serious questions.

Last week, Rolf Ekeus, who heads the commission, said there is "a high risk" that Baghdad is trying to develop biological weapons. He accused Iraq of failing to fully disclose its past military biological program and material acquired for it.

Maurizio Zifferero, the IAEA's deputy director general, said the IAEA is satisfied Iraq's nuclear program has been dismantled. He credited that to the haul of documents confiscated in September 1991 by IAEA inspector David Kay.

Until then, "the Iraqis were far from being cooperative with us," Zifferero said in an interview. "I think the fact that we had in our hands original Iraqi documents which pointed out all the different facets of the program forced them to be more forthcoming."

Supervised oil sale plan rejected by Iraq

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — Iraq began preparing its beleaguered citizens for more hardship Sunday after formally rejecting a U.N. offer to sell \$2 billion worth of oil to buy food and medicine.

State-owned radio and television constantly interrupted normal programming to remind Iraqis that they shed "rivers of blood and offered the dearest sacrifices" in their fight against America.

"You may have to do that again," said the stern-faced announcers.

Earlier, the government said it would not accept U.N.-supervised oil exports to pay for urgent humanitarian needs, calling the proposal "nothing but a U.S. maneuver" to prolong sanctions.

The formal decision by President Saddam Hussein's Cabinet was announced after a five-hour meeting. "The resolution seriously compromises Iraq's sovereignty and national unity," state-run radio said.

The decision was no surprise. Iraqi officials had blasted the offer Saturday, and thousands of government employees took to the streets of Baghdad, chanting anti-U.S. slogans in government-orchestrated rallies.

Still, many Iraqis thought the oil sale could ease their hardships.

"We had high hopes that our government will accept the plan. Now we see there is no ray of hope for us," said one middle-aged woman, after reading banner headlines in the state-run newspapers. She was too afraid to give her name.

The U.N. Security Council voted Friday to allow Iraq to sell up to \$2 billion worth of oil to buy food and medicine.

Israeli security forces kill three Palestinians

HEBRON, West Bank (AP) — Israeli security forces Sunday ambushed and killed three Palestinians who the army said were en route to a planned attack on Israelis.

As the army clamped a curfew on nearby Hebron, leaders and supporters of the Hamas fundamentalist group to which the men belonged said others would take their place and continue attacking Israelis.

"If you think you killed three Hamas people then you are mistaken," Marwan Abu Shuker shouted at Israelis checking the bodies. "We are all Hamas. The whole city is Hamas."

Abu Shuker, 35, who lives next to the ambush site, said the Israelis were dressed as Arabs and ambushed the men as they drove through an olive grove, firing "until they were sure the Palestinians were dead."

The Israeli army spokesman's office said security forces clashed with a "terrorist cell" and three Palestinians were killed.

"Preliminary reports show the terrorists were on their way to carry out an attack," the statement said, adding that two assault rifles, ammunition, a pistol and Israeli army uniforms were found in the car.

The Israeli army identified the dead as Adel Falah, 23, and Jihad Ghulmeh, 25, both wanted men, and 22-year-old Tarek Natche.

Maj. Gen. Ilan Biran, Israel's top West Bank commander, said they were suspected of several attacks, including a shooting on a bus last month in which two settlers were killed.

Islamic militants have killed 65 Israelis since October. The attacks are aimed at derailing Israel-PLO talks on expanding Palestinian self-rule set up in the Gaza Strip and West Bank district of Jericho last May.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Israel would continue its

battle against Hamas in the Hebron area. He said he believed that Yehiya Ayash, a Palestinian chemist who tops Israel's wanted list, was in Gaza.

"He is alive and active [and] will try and continue to attack us, but as every guerrilla finds his end, so will he," Rabin told Israel television.

He also said he would consider offering the Palestinians a state in the Gaza Strip. "If they would agree to receiving a Palestinian state only in Gaza and leave the West Bank alone, I would consider it seriously," Rabin said.

PLO leader Yasser Arafat rejected the idea, saying the Palestinians wanted back all the territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war — Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

In an interview with ABC-TV, Rabin also defended the lagging peace process, declaring that century-old conflicts cannot simply be halted "with a stopwatch." But he urged Arafat to crack down harder on the militants.

Arafat, in Gaza City, told a crowd of 20,000 in a soccer stadium that he was open to dialogue with his Islamic fundamentalist opposition, but only if it accepted the peace process with Israel.

"I am telling my brothers 'yes' to national dialogue, but only on the basis of their commitment to what the PLO signed," he said, adding that extremist attacks were giving Israel a pretext to delay extending autonomy to the rest of the West Bank.

Hebron — site of a massacre last year when a Jewish settler killed 29 Muslim worshippers — has been under night curfew since last month's attack. The curfew was extended round-the-clock on Friday for the Jewish Passover holiday, lifted at dawn Sunday and reimposed following the clash.

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