

BRIEFS

NATION

WASHINGTON

Jurors have yet to reach verdict in CIA leak trial

Jurors reached no verdict Thursday on whether former White House aide Lewis "Scooter" Libby obstructed the investigation into who leaked the identity of a CIA operative married to a prominent Iraq war critic.



LIBBY

In a day and a half of deliberations, the eight women and four men have issued only two brief written notes, which suggested they are methodically reviewing the evidence against the former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney.

They requested a large flip chart, masking tape, Post-it notes and a document with pictures of the witnesses.

In addition to obstruction of the leak investigation, Libby is charged with lying to the FBI and a grand jury about how he learned and who he told about CIA operative Valerie Plame.

Prosecutors say he concocted a story to avoid losing his job for disclosing classified information to reporters without authorization. Libby said he gave investigators his best recollection of what happened and any errors in that resulted from memory flaws.

WASHINGTON

New passport laws will not apply to children

Children will be exempt from new rules that will require travelers to show passports when entering the United States at land or sea borders, the Bush administration announced on Thursday.

The new passport requirements will take effect as soon as January 2008. In a change from earlier plans, children aged 15 or younger with parental consent will be allowed to cross the borders at land and sea entry points with certified copies of their birth certificates rather than passports.

Children aged 16 through 18 traveling with school, religious, cultural or athletic groups and under adult supervision will also be allowed to travel with only their birth certificates.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff was expected to discuss the relaxation in rules at a speech in Detroit on Thursday afternoon. The department described the details in a written statement.

FRANKLINTON, N.C.

Bush pushes use of alternative fuel

Trying to draw attention to his domestic agenda, President Bush on Thursday extolled the science of turning grasses and wood chips into ethanol to lessen the U.S. thirst for foreign oil.

"If you really want to reduce the amount of oil that you consume, you have to reduce the amount of gasoline you use," Bush said on a road trip to push energy initiatives he announced last month in his State of the Union address.

Bush has proposed ramping up the production of alternative fuels such as ethanol made from something other than corn. The president wants to require the use of 35 billion gallons a year of ethanol and other alternative fuels, such as soybean-based biodiesel, by 2017, a fivefold increase over current requirements.

The call for sharp increases in ethanol use will get bipartisan support in Congress. But production of ethanol from corn is expected to fall far short of meeting such an increase.

WASHINGTON

Jobless claims drop after jump last week

The number of laid-off workers filing for unemployment benefits dropped sharply last week after having been driven higher the previous week by storm-related layoffs.

The Labor Department reported that applications for jobless benefits totaled 332,000 last week, down by 27,000 from the previous week.

The prior week jobless claims had jumped by 46,000, the biggest one-week increase since September 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Part of that big increase occurred because of winter storms that boosted layoffs in such industries as construction.

The four-week moving average for claims edged up from 326,700 to 328,000, the highest level for this average since early December.

THE WAR IN IRAQ

U.S. trying new tactics in Iraq



AP PHOTOS

U.S. Army soldiers listen as gunfire erupts during a joint operation with the Iraqi army in Buhriz, Iraq, on Thursday.

Forces stationed within communities across country

By LAUREN FRAYER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BUHRIZ, Iraq

In a muddy, half-collapsed police station northeast of Baghdad, in the heart of insurgent territory, 30 American and 60 Iraqi troopers hunker down amid constant mortar fire and study how to undermine an enemy who is literally next door. Such ramshackle compounds are likely signs of the future in Iraq.

Militants, once dismissed as "dead-enders" on their "last legs," continue to confound American tacticians, and U.S. war planners are shifting strategy.

Instead of storming an area to drive away militants and then withdrawing to the relative safety of big bases, select forces are being stationed among the insurgents themselves in the heart of communities around Iraq, where soldiers are warned to be "ready each day to be greeted with a handshake or a hand grenade."

The idea is to fight the "three-block war" — in the words of the Pentagon's first new counterinsurgency manual in 20 years, a 242-page document written in part by the new commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus.

The hope is that increased contact with ordinary Iraqis will pay off with goodwill and sharper tips on militant activity and let Iraqi soldiers learn how to rule the streets on their own. But there are obvious risks.

On Monday, a suicide bomber and gunmen laid siege to a similar post north of

"Our battle space is villages and towns, and you have to engage the people as much as you engage the enemy."

Col. David E. Sutherland

Commander of the 1st Cavalry Division's 3rd Brigade on soldiers being stationed within Iraqi communities

Baghdad, killing two U.S. soldiers and wounding 17.

"Our battle space is villages and towns, and you have to engage the people as much as you engage the enemy," said Col. David W. Sutherland, commander of the 1st Cavalry Division's 3rd Brigade and the top U.S. officer in this province.

On a recent patrol, American soldiers shadowed Iraqis going house-to-house handing out school supplies. Suddenly, all were forced to dive into a dusty roadside crevice when Buhriz reverberated with gunfire — first from what was believed to be a rooftop sniper, then from the deafening pop of a 25 mm machine gun mounted on a Bradley fighting vehicle. Shell casings whizzed across an intersection, and the Americans quickly evacuated.

"Buhriz embodies the new counterinsurgency plan, which tells us: 'Clear, hold, build,'" said Sutherland, 45, from Toledo, Ohio. But he notes it often is just a matter of keeping a foothold.

When soldiers first arrived in Buhriz, about 35 miles north of Baghdad, they found fliers taped to lampposts with an

ominous warning to residents: "If American forces come, go into your houses or we'll kill you, too."

Still, the unit launched a daring raid to reclaim the Buhriz police station, which had been abandoned by Iraqi forces and overtaken by insurgents months earlier. The operation required help from Apache choppers and more than 13,000 rounds of ammunition, and left a two-story section of the station flattened.

Hauling in food, cots, surveillance equipment and ammunition, soldiers set about making this crumbling cement structure their home. Crates of Gatorade and Pepsi are stacked in sooty corners. A medic plays solitaire on a laptop.

An adjacent barracks was refurbished, and, weeks later, skittish Iraqi soldiers were persuaded to move in.

The Buhriz police station is one of several joint U.S.-Iraqi patrol bases in the suburbs of Baqouba, a mostly Sunni town that extremists claim as the capital of an Islamic state. Fierce fighting rages as U.S. troops engage insurgents believed to be streaming out of Baghdad during a security crackdown.

Military: Insurgents using new attack methods

By KIM GAMEL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

The U.S. military warned Thursday that insurgents are adopting new tactics in a campaign to spread panic after troops uncovered a car bomb factory with propane tanks and chlorine cylinders, possible ingredients for more chemical attacks following three explosions involving chlorine.

Those blasts and a recent spate of attacks against helicopters have raised fears that insurgents are trying to develop new ways to confront U.S. and Iraqi forces. Any increase in chemical bombings could complicate the Baghdad security crackdown, now in its second week.

Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, the No. 2 American commander in Iraq, said he did not think the attacks signaled a more capable insurgency. Instead, he said they were merely an attempt to provoke fear.

"What they're trying to do is ... adapt in such ways where they can continue to create instability," Odierno said.

The general also said at least two suspects have been arrested in the downing of eight helicopters since Jan. 20, but he gave no further details.

The raid on the car bomb factory occurred late Tuesday in the volatile western province of Anbar, U.S. authorities said. U.S. troops discovered a pickup truck and three other vehicles that were being prepared as car bombs, as well as detonation material in five buildings.

"We also found ingredients to be used to devise or enhance explosives, such as fertilizer and chlorine cylinders," Odierno told Pentagon reporters by video-link.

Insurgents have detonated three trucks carrying chlorine canisters since late



Iraqis clear debris on the site of a house that was destroyed during fighting between U.S. forces and insurgents in the volatile Sunni city of Ramadi, Iraq, on Thursday.

January. The most recent attack occurred Wednesday in Baghdad, killing five people and sending more than 55 to hospitals.

On Tuesday, a bomb planted on a chlorine tanker left more than 150 villagers stricken north of the capital. More than 60 were still under medical care Wednesday.

A suicide bomber driving a dump truck filled with explosives and a chlorine tank also struck a quick reaction force and Iraqi police in the Sunni city of Ramadi on Jan. 28, killing 16 people.

Jeremy Binnie, an analyst with Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center, noted that it is unclear how many in the attacks died from the explosions and how many were victims of the chlorine itself.

U.S. and Iraqi officials pledged to adapt to fight the evolving insurgent tactics.

"What is obvious to us is that the ter-

rorists are adopting new tactics to cause panic and as many casualties as they can among civilians," Iraqi military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Qassim Moussawi, told reporters. "But our plans also are always changeable and flexible to face the enemies' new tactics."

Although relatively few people have been killed or seriously injured in the chlorine blasts, such attacks are unnerving and can cause panic among a people suffering severe psychological strains after nearly four years of war.

With low levels of exposure, chlorine, which was used as a weapon in World War I, can cause breathing problems and irritate the skin. At high levels, it is fatal.

Experts say chlorine is used as a disinfectant and is widely available in Iraq, which the U.N. long suspected of trying to build a chemical weapons arsenal.



Iranian students chant slogans during a demonstration supporting Iran's nuclear activities in front of the French Embassy in Tehran, Iran, on Thursday.

Demands by U.N. ignored

Iran expanding uranium program

By GEORGE JAHN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VIENNA, Austria

Iran has ignored a U.N. Security Council ultimatum to freeze uranium enrichment, a possible pathway to nuclear arms, and has instead expanded its program by setting up hundreds of centrifuges, the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency said Thursday. The finding paves the way for new U.N. sanctions.

Hours later, the United States said key countries would meet next week to try to develop a new U.N. resolution on the standoff.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said in a report to the Security Council and its 35-nation board that Tehran also has continued to build a heavy water reactor and related facilities, which, along with enrichment, could help it develop nuclear arms.

In addition, the report said Iran ignored a Security Council call to cooperate with the IAEA in its efforts to shed light on suspicious nuclear activities.

The conclusions, while widely expected, were important because they could serve as the trigger for the council to start deliberating on new sanctions meant to punish Tehran for its nuclear intransigence.

In Washington, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said he will travel to London on Monday to meet with the United States' negotiating partners to try to draft a new resolution on Iran.

"It is effectively thumbing its nose at the international community," he said of Iran.

Burns said he hopes the United States and other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany, can quickly draft a resolution to "see Iran repudiated again." He said it was too soon to say what provisions the resolution might contain.

In Tehran, the deputy head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Mohammed Saeedi, ruled out suspending enrichment, saying such demands were against Iran's "rights, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and international regulations."

Ali Ashgar Soltanieh, Tehran's chief delegate to the IAEA, said that sanctions against the Islamic republic only create "more solidarity of the Iranian nation to protect their inalienable rights."

The council issued three demands to Iran on Dec. 23: freeze uranium enrichment, stop building heavy water facilities and fully cooperate with the IAEA. It introduced limited sanctions and gave Iran 60 days to comply, a deadline that expired Wednesday.

The IAEA report prepared by director Mohamed ElBaradei showed Tehran has instead expanded its enrichment efforts — setting up nearly 1,000 uranium-spinning centrifuges in and above an underground bunker, enriching minute amounts of uranium and bringing nearly 9 tons of the gaseous feedstock into its underground nuclear facility at Natanz in preparation for enrichment.

Iranian officials also informed the agency that they would expand their centrifuge installations to close to 3,000 by May, the report said.

Iran's stated goal is running 54,000 centrifuges at Natanz to churn out enriched uranium — enough for dozens of nuclear weapons a year.

Iran maintains it only wants to develop enrichment to generate power and says its heavy water facilities at the central city of Arak — which will produce plutonium, another potential pathway to nuclear arms — are meant solely to generate isotopes for medical research and other peaceful purposes.