INTERNÂTIONAL



Palestinian women, waving Fatah (2nd R) and national flags, dance during a demonstration in support of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Gaza City, organised by the Association of Women Committees for Social Work, yesterday. The Palestinians condemned the US veto on an Arab Security Council resolution opposing Israel's plan to expel Arafat, saying the move would encourage an "Israeli military escalation."

Palestinians blast US veto on Arafat

Israel postpones decision on barrier after US pressure

AP, AFP, Jerusalem, United Nations

The United States' veto on a UN resolution that called on Israel to halt threats to expel Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from the West Bank, generated sharp criticism from the Palestinians. US said it was "lopsided" and didn't condemn terrorist groups attacking Israel.

The Palestinians, who had generated wide global support for the resolution, said the vote showed the United States had lost its credibility as an honest broker in the Middle East. They feared the veto would be seen by Israel as a green light to move against Arafat.

"It's a black day for the United Nations," chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said by telephone. "I hope that Israel will not interpret the killing of this resolution as a license to kill Arafat.

Syria, the only Arab nation on the

Security Council, had been pressing for a vote since last week's decision by Israel's security Cabinet to "remove" Arafat in a manner and time to be decided. Israel blames Arafat for sabotaging the peace process and doing nothing to prevent terrorist attacks

Syria's UN Ambassador Fayssal Mekdad expressed regret at the vote, calling the resolution "highly balanced," and noting that most of the language came from previous resolutions that had been adopted by the Security Council "The fact that the US delegation

used its veto is something extremely regrettable." he said. "It only complicates a situation in the Middle East that is already very complicated." Nasser Al-Kidwa the Palestinian

UN observer, said the United States had lost its credibility to play an honest broker in the Middle East peace process. He warned that "serious consequences may follow the use of this veto, and the United States will bear the consequences

Meanwhile Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon postponed a meeting of his security cabinet which was due to decide Wednesday the path of a new section of a controversial West Bank security barrier after the United States warned it could dock loan guarantees as punishment for its construction.

The security cabinet had been

expected to decide whether the barrier should snake round the Jewish settlements of Kedoumin and Ariel, which lies some 20 kilometers (12 miles) over the Green Line which senarates Israel from the West Bank.

The meeting was delayed "until next week, not under pressure from the United State but because Prime

Minister (Ariel) Sharon has an overloaded timetable," said Sharon's office

But Housing Minister Effy Eitam told military radio that while the "Americans are allies of Israel who are helping the economic plan there should be limits to the interference by a foreign country on matters

of vital security for Israel." US President George W. Bush has called the barrier, which at times cuts deep into Palestinian territory, a 'problem'

The US State Department said Tuesday that Washington would penalize Israel for building in Palestinian areas by deducting the amount spent on such settlements from promised loan guarantees

At least 2,000 foreign fighters could be in Iraq: Rice

AFP, Washington

Up to 2.000 foreign fighters bent on harming Americans and other coalition soldiers in Iraq may have flocked to the Middle East country following its invasion by the United States and Britain, a top White House official acknowledged late

But national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said the administration of President George W. Bush would rather face them in Iraq than in other parts of the world.

"I've seen ... estimates of anything from several hundred -high hundreds -- to a couple of thousand," said Rice in an interview with ABC's "Nightline" program, adding that the precise numbers of foreigners fighting in Iraq remained

SAARC yes, but no summit with Pakistan: Indian FM

PTI. Islamabad

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Islamabad in January next to attend the Saarc meet need not necessarily provide a platform for a summit between India and Pakistan, said External Affairs minister Yashwant Sinha in an interview to Pakistan daily The

"I am bringing expectations down, because everyone thinks that if Vajpayee travels to Islamabad for the Saarc meet, summit-level dialogue will take place between India and Pakistan,'

"The point remains that there must be adequate preparation for a summit-level meeting, and I don't see enough time for such a summit to take place," he said.

Sinha also made it clear that Pakistan should take further mea-

when a suspected terrorist was

Tom Ridge said: "The creation of

Department of Homeland Security,

to analyse information and take

specific action to protect critical

infrastructure

screened or stopped.

sures to prevent militants from crossing the LoC and infiltrate into Jammu and Kashmir before India-Pak peace process gathered full

Referring to the current pace of the peace process initiated by Vajpayee five months ago, Sinha counselled patience.

"When you're dealing with relations between India and Pakistan, there is a need to be patient. I think impatience has spoiled things in the past, impatience may spoil things once again," he said. While expressing disappoint-

ment over Pakistan's reluctance to block the flow of individuals through the Line of Control, he said the new peace process, however, found a large number of supporters in both the countries which indicates that the process will remain sustainable

Sinha said barring an "accident", there was no possibility of the Indo-Pak tension becoming an election issue in the next general elections in India.

Asked whether there was any opposition to peace in India as it was poised for national elections next year, Sinha said, "Contrary to what might have been expected, the process initiated by Vajpayee has received wide support in India as indeed it has in Pakistan.

In this regard, he pointed out the support enjoyed by the initiatives on both sides to promote peopleto-people contacts.

"The recent people-to-people contact will show that the people of the two countries want peace.

"Therefore, barring an accident, I should think that Pakistan will not be an issue in Indian elections."

Flood situation in Bihar still grim

There was no let up in flood situation in Bihar on Wednesday with the Ganga flowing above its all time high level at Kahalgaon and Bhagalpur and other major rivers also in spate as the death toll shot up to 164 with five more death reported from flood-hit Vaishali and Purnia districts during the past 24 hours, official sources said.

A population of over 54.96 lakh spread over 3977 villages in 23 districts has been hit by floods, a relief and rehabilitation department press release said. It said standing crops in an area of 3.75 lakh hectares worth of over Rs 53.81 crore and 18,000 houses had been damaged due to floods.

Over 3,800 boats had been engaged for carrying out relief and rescue operation and 287 relief centres and 401 health centres are functional in flood-hit districts

US asks Tigers to end terror, return to talks

AFP, Colombo

The United States marked the first anniversary of Sri Lanka's stalled peace talks by asking Tiger rebels to abandon "terrorism" and make realistic proposals to allow the negotiations to resume, the US embassy here said Wednesday.

"It is unfortunate that this anniversary finds the talks in suspension," it said in a statement quoting a US State Department spokesman in Washington.

"... we call on the Tigers to abandon terrorism, including political assassination, and to comply with the terms of the ceasefire agreement they signed."

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been accused of killing more than 40 of its rivals and military and police intelligence operatives despite signing a

February 23 last year.

The United States said it strongly supported the Norwegianbacked peace process aimed at ending three decades of ethnic bloodshed that has claimed over 60,000 lives.

The first round of face-to-face talks opened on September 16 last year at a naval base in Thailand.

The Tigers suspended talks in April after accusing Colombo of failing to deliver on promises made during six rounds of negotiations. They said they would return

only if the government gave them political power to run the embattled northeastern part of the country. The guerrillas are yet to

announce their response to a government offer on July 17 of an interim administrative structure "We hope that the Tamil Tigers

Lanka and has also stepped up its military cooperation with the Sri Lankan security forces in recent

proposal for an interim administra-

tion will be realistic and will allow the

two sides to return to the table at an

The United States has been

early date," the US statement said.

taking a hands-on approach to

support the peace process in Sri

The latest US statement came as two top Norwegian peace brokers arrived in the island in a bid to jump start the stalled process.

Norway's deputy foreign minis Vidar Helgesen and special envoy Erik Solheim were starting a three-day visit to the island and were due to hold talks with political leaders of the LTTE.

screening system

IANS, Washington

The US has set up a Terrorist Screening Centre (TSC), to consolidate many screening mechanisms into a single, comprehensive, antiterror watch list that will become operational by December 1.

It will provide 24/7 operational support for thousands of federal screeners in the US and the world, said a Homeland Security Department press release

Attorney General John Ashcroft. Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director Robert Mueller and director of Central Intelligence George Tenet spoke on the TŠC.

They said the centre would ensure that government investigators, screeners and agents, were working on the same unified, comprehensive set of anti-terrorist information -- and that they had access to information and expertise that would allow them to act quickly,

US sets up terrorist | Iraq destroyed WMD 10 years ago: Blix

REUTERS, Sydney

The TSC does not provide any Former UN chief weapons inspector new law enforcement or collection Hans Blix now believes Iraq destroyed powers to any government official; it its weapons of mass destruction 10 simply consolidates information that years ago and that intelligence agenlaw enforcement, the intelligence cies were wrong in their weapons community, the State Department assessment that led to war. In an interview with Australian

and others already possess The TSC was established by a radio from Sweden. Blix said the presidential directive to the heads of search for evidence of biological, all departments and agencies. chemical or nuclear weapons would Powell said the programme has probably only uncover documents around 100,000 names of "potential at best. "The more time that has passed,

the TSC is one of several new anything will be found," Blix said in critical initiatives taken by this the interview, which was broadcast administration, to increase the on Wednesday sharing of information at all levels of "I'm certainly more and more to government. The department's new the conclusion that Iraq has, as they nformation analysis and infrastrucmaintained, destroyed almost all of ture protection unit allows the

what they had in the summer of 1991," Blix said. In 1991, the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) found what it called a secret nuclear weapons program in Iraq. It

spent the next seven years disman-

the more I think it's unlikely that

tling Baghdad's nuclear capability, until its inspectors were thrown out

Before ordering the invasion that toppled President Saddam Hussein, President Bush referred to an imminent threat posed by Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as a prime justification for war.

"In the beginning they talked about weapons concretely, and later on they talked about weapons programs...maybe they'll find some ocuments of interest," Blix said.

Blix spent three years searching for Iraqi chemical, biological and ballistic missiles as head of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission.

UN inspectors left Iraq in March this year as American and British forces prepared to invade. Calls for their reinstatement have been denied, with the US occupation authorities preferring instead to set up their own body, the Iraq Survey

Commission seeks Taiwan's help in Netaji probe

PTI, Kolkata

Justice Mukherjee Commission probing the disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, has requested the Taiwan Government to cooperate with it by providing some authenticated and specified documents concerning the alleged air-crash on August 18, 1945, at Taipei, of the plane allegedly carrying Netaji and others.

After hearing the deposition of three persons in the commission during the day, Justice Mukherjee on Tuesday said that even as the commission had come to know about an e-mail of the Taiwan government to an Indian journalist Anuj Dhar that it had no record of any plane crash at Taiwan between . August, 1945 and October, 1945, the probe panel sought cooperation of the Taiwan government as to what was the basis of such conclu-



The Dalai Lama and US actor Richard Gere address members of the news media Tuesday evening at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. They discussed the Dalai Lama's visit to NYC which will include a public talk in Central Park.

Is Sobhraj in Nepal?

IANS, Kathmandu

French national Charles Sobhraj, who attained notoriety worldwide for allegedly drugging and killing tourists, is in Kathmandu eyeing new ventures, a local daily reported on Wednesday.

Sobhraj was released from New Delhi's Tihar Jail six years

The 59-year-old former gangster, whose lurid career attracted fans as well as marriage proposals from girls in India and who was reported to have signed a movie and book deal with French actor-producer Yves Renier, has been camping in Thamel, the upmarket tourist hub of the capital, for a fortnight, The Himalayan Times said.

In a front-page report titled The Serpent Living Incognito in Thamel, the daily also carried five photographs of a man wearing blue jeans, a white shirt and blue jacket, his face hidden by a white cap pulled over the forehead.



Residents and vacationers head away from the Outer Banks, North Carolina, area Tuesday night towards inland areas on the emergency evacuation route as Hurricane Isabel approaches. Officials estimate as many as 100,000 people have evacuated in advance of the hurricane, which is expected to come ashore today.

US braces for Hurricane Isabel

Tens of thousands flee to safety

AFP, Kitty Hawk, North Carolina

US authorities ordered more than 150,000 people to leave the North Carolina coast, as the waning yet feared Hurricane Isabel steadily closed in to its expected landfall early

All along the US East Coast, people made contingency plans, as the US Navy ordered dozens of vessels out to sea to ride out the

Long lines of cars, pickup trucks and SUVs flowed inland in waves Tuesday as authorities ordered the evacuations along the North Carolina "We're leaving. Everybody's

leaving," said Nick Napolitano, the

owner of the Ocean Side Court

vacation cottages, whose occupants

sometimes ride these things out. 'This one had 160 miles-perhour winds and they were talking about 40-foot waves. We get something like that and the Outer Banks are going to end up in Raleigh." An Isabel now downgraded to

Category Two on the Saffir-Simpson scale from a top level Category Five at the weekend, was still nonetheless packing maximum sustained winds close to 177 kilometres (110 miles) an hour with higher gusts

Little change in Isabel's strength is forecast prior to landfall, the Miami based National Hurricane Center said at 0300 GMT Wednesday.

"Hurricane force winds extend outward up to 145 miles (233 kilometers) from the center ... and tropical storm force winds extend outward up to 260 miles (418 kilometers)," it added in a statement

Isabel is expected to make landfall early Thursday, according to the Center.

Forecasters said it would pack its first punch in North Carolina and then sweep up the seaboard towards Washington. Nearly 50 million people live in the path Isabel is expected to

North Carolina and Virginia both declared a state of emergency.

About 23,000 people in North Carolina's Dare county were affected by the evacuation order. In summer the Dare population swells to 150,000 but Frank Pierce, a state public safety spokesman, said there

ere few tourists in the county now. North Carolina Governor Mike Easley urged people to "stock up on needed supplies such as gasoline and water, and tune to news broadcasts to hear the latest updates from emergency management person

Easley Tuesday declared a state of emergency to accelerate relief, as officials warned more than 150,000 people to retreat inland.

Thousands of home and store owners from South Carolina to Virginia and Maryland rushed to board up windows and buy emergency food, batteries and first aid kits. Several hardware stores reported shortages

Trusted minister sacked by ROK president

AFP, Seoul

South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun Wednesday sacked his home affairs minister who had been targeted in a no-confidence motion in parliament over his handling of anti-US protests.

of trusted ally Kim Doo-Kwan, a 44year-old former dissident, whose ministry controls the South Korean nationál police. Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

Roh bowed to opposition

demands to accept the resignation

Minister Suh Sung-Kwan will replace him, the president's office said. The National Assembly voted two

weeks ago to oust Kim, the youngest nember in the cabinet formed in February when Roh took office. The conservative Grand National

Party which controls parliament accused Kim of taking a soft line on anti-US protests after a dozen activists stormed a US shooting range and burned American flags in early August in northeast of Seoul, provoking strong protests from US officials