

## Sharon against Arafat exile, firm on fencing

### Israeli barrier risks ME peace: EU

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon appeared yesterday to rule out expelling Yasser Arafat, playing down an Israeli threat against the Palestinian leader that had drawn international outcry and US misgivings.

But in remarks to an Israeli newspaper Sharon stood firm on erecting a vast barrier in the West Bank, saying he was ready to defy US opposition despite Washington's warnings that it might cut loan guarantees to the Jewish state.

"Our calculations for years have been that expelling him would not be good for Israel," Sharon told the conservative Jerusalem Post when asked about last month's decision in principle by his security cabinet to "remove" Arafat.

Some hawkish members of Sharon's cabinet had even proposed killing Arafat, an idea the prime minister dismissed at the time and which Foreign Minister Silvan

Shalom then ruled out. Israel has not said how or when it might take action against Arafat.

Responding to Sharon's comments, Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said: "This is not a retraction of the Israeli position to kill or deport Arafat. There's an Israeli government decision to do so which wasn't canceled."

With US backing, Israel accused Arafat — largely confined to his West Bank headquarters for nearly two years — of fomenting violence, charges he denies. But Washington opposes harming him or exiling him from Palestinian areas.

Asked if there could be a diplomatic breakthrough before Arafat is dead, Sharon replied: "I didn't say dead, but in my opinion, as long as he is in control, the chance for progress (toward peace) is non-existent."

Similarly controversial has been Israel's construction of a barrier in the West Bank with plans to loop it around Jewish settlements inside occupied territory. Palestinians

condemn it as a land grab that prejudices borders that should be negotiated.

Israel defends the barrier as necessary to keep out suicide bombers who have killed hundreds of its citizens in a three-year-old Palestinian uprising for independence.

While backing Israel's right to self-defense, Washington has said it may deduct the cost of some of the project from \$9 billion in US loan guarantees to Israel. Sharon was unfazed.

"I myself might tell the Americans that although we won't be happy about it, if you decide to remove money, then do it. We need to build a fence in places where we know it is integral for Israel's security," he told the Jerusalem Post.

Erekat said Israel's continued construction of the barrier and expansion of settlements "kills the chance for peace."

AFP adds: European Union leaders warned yesterday that Israel's construction of a "security"

wall in the West Bank risked making it impossible to reach a peace deal with two states living side by side.

But they also urged the Palestinian Authority to crack down on anti-Israeli attacks, according to the draft conclusions of their two-day summit here.

The EU said it was particularly concerned about the route of the Israeli barrier through the occupied West Bank, which the Palestinians regard as a land grab by the Jewish state.

"The envisaged departure of the route from the 'green line' could prejudice future negotiations and make the two-state solution physically impossible to implement," the EU draft said, referring to the current border between Israeli and Palestinian territory.

The UN General Assembly is to hold a special session on the barrier Monday after the United States this week vetoed a resolution condemning it at the UN Security Council.

## Senate defies Bush's Iraq finance request

AFP, Washington

The US Senate dealt a blow to President George W. Bush's request for aid for Iraq and Afghanistan, passing an amendment to his 87 billion dollar budget supplement request that requires half the 20 billion for Iraqi reconstruction to be in the form of loans.

The Bush administration had lobbied hard against the amendment, arguing that all 20 billion dollars should be in outright grants.

Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle said that in adopting the amendment, the Senate "sent a strong, bipartisan message to this administration: It must do more to ensure that America's troops and taxpayers don't have to go on shouldering this costly burden virtually alone."

The amendment was adopted by a 51 to 47 vote, with eight Republicans voting in favor and four Democrats against, following a long and impassioned debate that left the outcome hanging until the final moments.

The House of Representatives, where there is a large Republican majority, earlier defeated similar amendments conditioning aid to Iraq.

House and Senate representatives must now meet to work out a compromise version that would become law when signed by Bush.

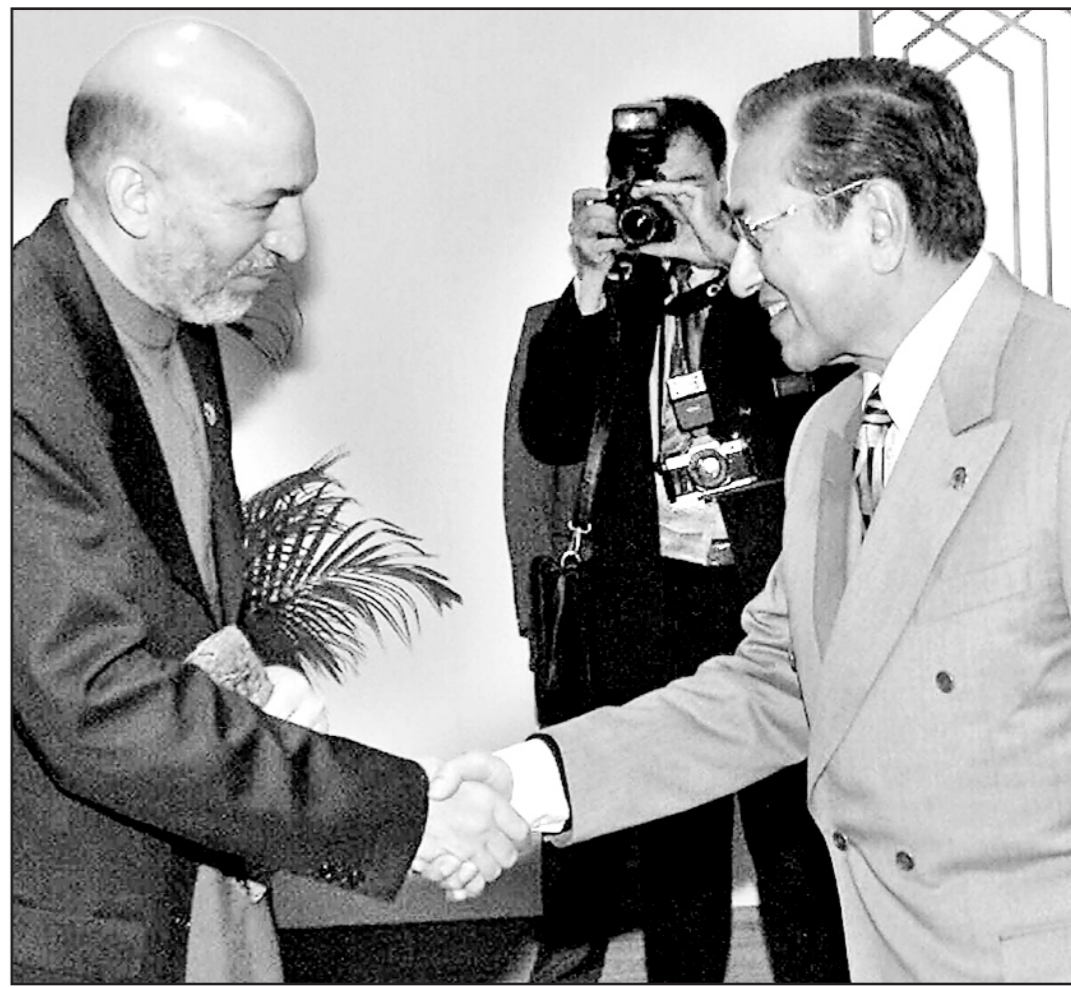


PHOTO: AFP

Malaysian President Mahathir Mohamad (L) shakes hands with his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai (R) prior to a meeting on the sidelines of the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Malaysia's administrative capital Putrajaya yesterday. Muslim leaders closed ranks around Malaysian premier after his attack on Jews caused a firestorm of protest and overshadowed their troubled bid for unity on Iraq at the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit.

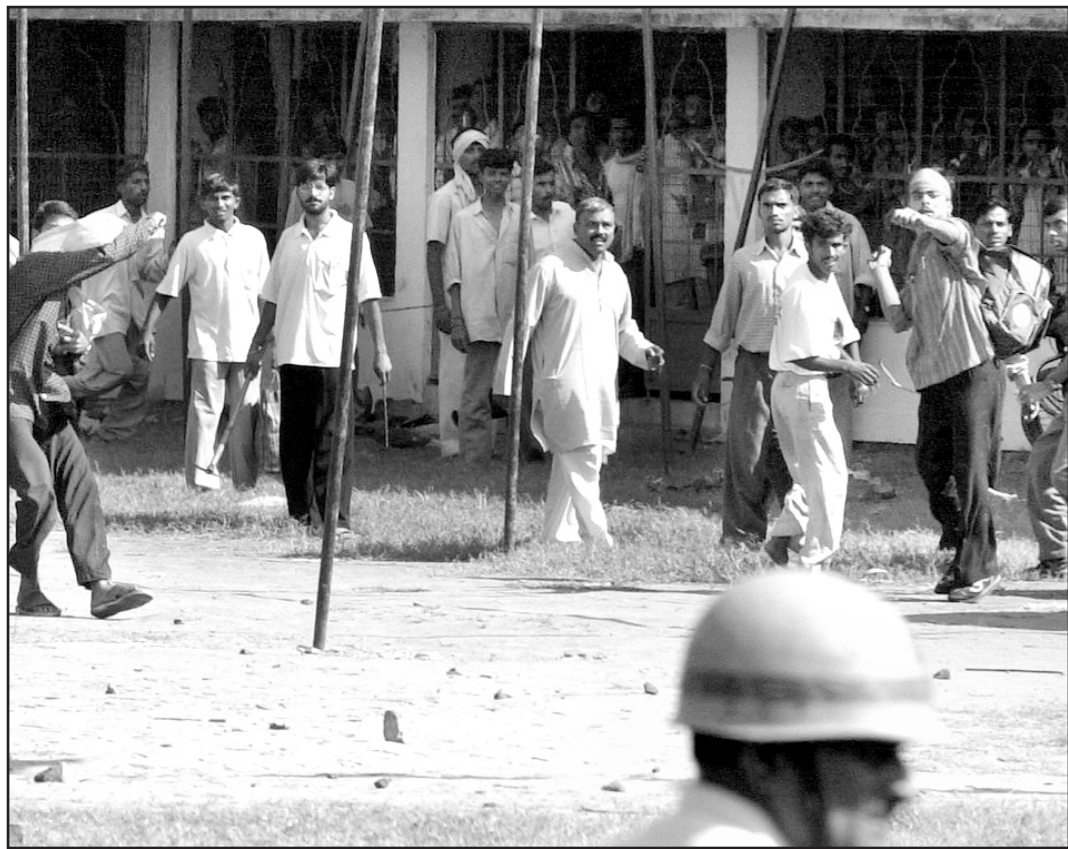


PHOTO: AFP

Indian members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) throw stones at police during a demonstration in Ayodhya yesterday. Police fired teargas at the mob of Hindu zealots attempting to break a security cordon in this north Indian temple town after a trainload of about 1,000 activists arrived in Ayodhya despite a ban on a public assembly.

## Ayodhya tense as cops break up VHP rally

AFP, Ayodhya

Simmering tensions erupted into violence yesterday in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya as police prevented Hindu zealots from staging a mass rally on the ruins of a razed mosque at a disputed holy site.

Police fired rubber bullets and teargas at a mob of Hindu zealots attempting to break a security cordon, an AFP correspondent witnessed.

Activists of the right-wing Hindu nationalist organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP or World Hindu Council) had been collecting here in defiance of a ban, to participate in a rally on the disputed ruins of the destroyed 16th century Babri Mosque.

Trouble began soon after a trainload of about 1,000 activists arrived in Ayodhya on Friday morning.

They were taken by police to the Karsewakpuram, an open complex used for meetings, for an "organised arrest."

However, as police began mak-

ing arrests, the activists attacked them with iron rods and stones.

The zealots then locked themselves behind the iron gates of the complex and climbed on the roof of a building, from where they began throwing stones at the policemen.

The trouble subsided after about an hour with the arrest of top VHP Hindu leader Ashok Singhal and several of his followers.

"Five rounds of rubber bullets were fired in the air," said inspector-general of police V.K. Rai, who was slightly injured in the stone-pelting. There were no immediate details of other casualties.

"We wanted it to be done peacefully. Had these people not thrown stones and bricks, we would not have taken any action," he said.

After the arrests, the activists were taken away in buses to various jails and the Karsewakpuram complex was vacated.

Elsewhere, about 1.5 km away from the site of the ruins, a group of about 20 Hindu militants burnt an effigy of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

## Iran will not build nuclear weapon: Khatami

### Tehran denies harbouring al-Qaeda

AFP, Putrajaya

Iran's President Mohammad Khatami said yesterday his country would not build a nuclear weapon and would continue to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as a crucial deadline approaches.

"The issue of making a nuclear bomb is excluded," he told a press conference on the sidelines of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) here.

He said the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) demands were unfair but "we are continuing our cooperation with the IAEA."

"We have no major problem in principle but we insist on our right since we have no intention to build nuclear weapons. Because of our religious principles, our ideological principles and our dedication to dialogue among civilisations, we are totally against the proliferation of nuclear weapons."

"We never said we would not sign the protocol and cooperate with IAEA."

The IAEA has been pressing Iran to sign an additional protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which would give the watchdog the right to carry out unannounced inspections of suspect facilities.

Khatami said because his country had existing stocks of uranium, it had a legitimate right to continue enriching it for peaceful purposes.

The agency has given Iran until October 31 to answer questions on its nuclear programme, amid fears it is trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) head, Mohamed ElBaradei, who paid a flying visit to the Islamic republic Thursday to press for quick answers over its nuclear program, said he received assurances of Iran's "readiness" to

open up its suspect facilities.

Meanwhile, Iran's President Mohammad Khatami denied yesterday his country was harbouring al-Qaeda fugitives following a report this week that Osama bin Laden's son was helping to run the terror network from within the Islamic republic.

"They (al-Qaeda) have always been against Iran. They are hostile towards Iran and we are also against them. We are not going to provide safe haven for them in our country," Khatami told a press conference on the sidelines of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit here.

The Washington Post reported Tuesday that Saad, the eldest son of Osama bin Laden, had risen to the top ranks of al-Qaeda and is helping run the terror network from inside Iran.

## US plays down hopes for int'l troops in Iraq

AFP, Aboard Air Force One

The United States on Thursday played down prospects that more international troops would deploy to Iraq, despite the UN Security Council's unanimous approval of a new resolution.

"To the degree that countries are able to do this, to send troops, this helps them to be able to do it," a senior administration official told reporters on board President George W. Bush's airplane, which was headed to Asia.

"Now the truth of the matter is there's not much combat power in the world. There are a lot of countries that have concerns, restrictions that would probably minimize their ability to participate," the official said.

The new resolution "does at least open up the possibility of countries now starting their domestic considerations of whether or not they would be able to send troops."

The UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution on Thursday that appeals for interna-

tional troops to join the US led force seeking to bring order in Iraq and to contribute money toward the country's reconstruction.

Asked how long it could take for international troops to deploy, the official said: "Not right away. This is going to take a little bit of time. But I think we will get help."

The official also said that discussions were underway to ease the concerns of the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council over Turkey's decision to deploy troops.

## Bush, Koizumi put their focus on Iraq, N Korea

AFP, Tokyo

US President George W. Bush and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi met yesterday for talks at which Koizumi was expected to reassure his guest Tokyo will send troops to Iraq, following a promise of 1.5 billion dollars towards reconstructing the war-ravaged country.

Bush and First lady Laura Bush arrived late in the afternoon amid tight security, on the first leg of a tour aimed at boosting the fight against terrorism and seeking support for rebuilding post-war Iraq.

Shortly after 7:00 pm (1000 GMT), the two casually-dressed leaders met and shook hands at the Akasaka State Guest House before

going into a Japanese-style annex for a meal accompanied by Laura Bush, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda and his wife.

In what is Bush's second visit to Japan since being elected in 2000, the US president and Koizumi are expected to discuss reconstruction efforts in Iraq, North Korea's nuclear crisis and economic issues, including foreign exchange rates.

Koizumi would tell Bush of Japan's plan to send 150 troops to the southern Iraq city of Basra in December as an advance party, with an additional 550 troops to be sent early next year, Japan's top-selling daily Yomiuri Shimbun said Friday, quoting government sources.

## 'Al-Qaeda replacing its top leaders'

AP, Jakarta

Al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in Asia have quickly replaced captured leaders with a new operations chief and top bomb makers who are plotting deadly attacks on international hotels and other Western targets in the region, intelligence officials told The Associated Press.

The arrest of Hambali Osama bin Laden's alleged point man in Asia and the cracking of a terror ring blamed for bombings in Bali did temporarily disrupt the loose Jemaah Islamiyah network, said a senior Indonesian intelligence adviser.

But the leadership vacuum left by Hambali's Aug. 11 arrest in Thailand was filled within three weeks, said the adviser, even as the Islamic militant group carried out a recruiting drive in Indonesia already home to about 2,000 of its 3,000 members.

## Gayoom set to sweep Maldives referendum

AFP, Colombo

Residents of the Maldives went to the polls yesterday set to approve a sixth five-year term for Maumoon Abdul Gayoom as president of the upmarket Indian Ocean tourist destination.

Men and women over the age of 21 were eligible to vote at the referendum to confirm Gayoom's re-election last month by a vote in the 50-member Majlis, or national parliament.

Boats left the capital island Male to deliver ballots for 414 polling stations around the archipelago of 1,192 coral islands scattered 800 km across the equator.

Ballots will be ferried back after the 11 hours of voting end at 1300 GMT with results expected to be announced within two days, Election Commissioner Ibrahim Rashad told AFP.

## India sends rocket carrying satellite into space

AFP, Sriharikota

India Friday successfully put a 1,360-kilogramme (2,992 pound) remote sensing satellite into space, an Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) official said.

The rocket carrying the satellite blasted off at 10:24 am (0454 GMT) into a cloudy sky on a drizzly day from this remote site, about 100 km north of the southern Indian city of Madras, an AFP correspondent saw.

After 18 minutes the satellite, named Resourcesat-1, was injected into orbit on schedule in what ISRO chairman Madhavan Nair described as a "textbook" launch.

"It was a tremendous achievement," Nair told reporters, adding that the launch vehicle, the locally-built Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, had proved "fail-safe" as it had already sent six other satellites into orbit.

## 2 soldiers killed in attack near Kashmir CM's house

AFP, Srinagar

Two soldiers of the Border Security Force were killed and an officer and two press photographers injured in a militant attack near the home of Indian Kashmir Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed yesterday, a BSF spokesman said.

Spokesman Neeraj, who uses only one name, said the injured officer had been moved to hospital.

Two huge explosions were heard at around 10:10 am (0440 GMT) near Sayeed's residence in downtown Srinagar followed by a burst of gunfire, police and witnesses said.

Sayeed was not in his home at the time of the blasts, the state information department said, having left at 7:00 am for an official function in Lucknow and Aligarh, central India.

However his daughter Mehbooba Mufti, who is president of

the ruling People's Democratic Party, was at home.

Kashmir's most senior police official Gopal Sharma told Zee TV that the chief minister's house was "not attacked".

"The attack took place on a road that also has the chief minister's residence. It was not on his house. There was no danger on his house," Sharma said.

"They (the militants) could not have reached the chief minister's residence as there was a lot of security there," another police officer, Mohammed Amin Shah, told AFP.

Sharma said two or three militants launched a grenade attack on a BSF patrol near the chief minister's home and then fled to the nearby Ali Jaan shopping complex about 30 metres (100 feet) away.

Troops surrounded the complex and civilians were being evacuated.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Border Security Force personnel take cover as shooting starts outside the residence of Indian Kashmir Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed in Srinagar yesterday.