

## Apec turning into a security forum, warns Mahathir

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Outgoing Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has warned the Apec forum is in danger of turning into a security grouping as the United States pushes for a greater military role in the region considered a hotbed of terrorism.

His warning came hours after US President George W. Bush announced that Thailand would become the second Southeast Asian nation to be elevated as Washington's major non-NATO ally, after the Philippines.

The two Southeast Asian nations, which would be eligible for priority delivery of defence material in the exclusive US club, are at the forefront of Washington's anti-terror campaign in the region after the September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda attacks in the United States.

"Apec was formed as an economic cooperation group. But we

don't agree with taking away economic matters into security, military or politics, which are not really for Apec," Mahathir told Malaysian journalists.

Without identifying the United States, he said "there is a tendency to have agenda of strong countries inserted into Apec."

Apec, set up in 1989 as a forum for Pacific Rim economies to forge economic cooperation, should stick to its original objective, he said.

Mahathir, Southeast Asia's longest serving leader who retires at the end of this month after 22 years in power, and Bush are in Bangkok attending the annual Apec summit meeting.

Aside from efforts to revive stalled World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks to frame more effective global trade rules, the meeting here is expected to be dominated by the US-led anti-terror campaign.

Asian diplomats said a US plan

to include in the Apec joint statement restrictions on the production and sale of surface-to-air shoulder-launched missiles as part of the anti-terror fight had faced protests from Malaysia.

Bush fears the so-called man-portable air-defense systems, known as MANPADS, could be used by the al-Qaeda terror group to shoot down commercial planes, particularly American aircraft, they said.

"Malaysia feels MANPADS is more of a security issue that cannot be addressed in Apec, which should concentrate on its main theme: economic issues," a diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Bush has signalled he will use the two-day summit, which began under extremely tight security Monday, to shore up regional alliances in the battle against terrorism.

Mahathir said he would use his farewell appearance to bring Apec back to what he called its original

reason of formation, Malaysia's Bernama news agency reported.

"I want to explain our stand on what Apec should focus. We think it should focus on items like fair trade, equitability and not enlarging its present scope," he said.

Asked whether Apec was in danger of turning into a security forum, Mahathir said this could happen due to what he termed "the present situation."

"We know security matters are very important. But I think we should discuss it at other forums, security does not only affect certain countries but the whole world," he said.

Malaysia, which has a majority Muslim population, set up this year a regional anti-terrorism centre originally proposed by Bush, but dropped Washington as a fully-fledged partner in the scheme after being at pains to stress that no American forces would be involved.



PHOTO: AFP  
Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (C) gestures as he speaks on the second day of the APEC CEO Summit at the Shangri-La hotel in Bangkok yesterday.

## Jakarta sees terror strike imminent

AFP, Jakarta

The threat of terror attacks in Indonesia is imminent with suspects who are still at large determined to commit further atrocities, the top security minister said yesterday.

"The threat of terrorist attacks is imminent. We know that they are still planning further attacks," Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono told a business lunch.

Yudhoyono said that despite the arrest of dozens of people in connection with last year's Bali bombings and the car bombing at the JW Marriott hotel in Jakarta in August, the nation must remain vigilant.

"From the perpetrators of the Bali and Marriott bombings, we have learned that others still not caught are still determined to launch attacks," he said.

The Bali bombings in October 2002 killed 202 people, mostly foreigners, and the Marriott blast claimed 12 lives. Three people have been sentenced to death and many

others jailed for the Bali blasts.

The al-Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) regional terror network is blamed for both bombings and a string of other attacks or attempted attacks in Southeast Asia.

Police are still looking for a former Malaysian university professor and bomb-making expert Azahari Husin, and several other people in connection with the Bali and Marriott attacks.

Security at Jakarta hotels, offices, apartment blocks and other premises has been tightened markedly since the hotel bombing. Vehicles are searched and individuals checked with metal detectors.

Yudhoyono said that during his meeting with US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Washington last month he demanded that Indonesia be given direct access to alleged terror chief Hambali, who is in US custody at a secret location.

## Saddam calls for Jihad in letter

AFP, Baghdad

The US-led coalition in Iraq faced the threat of more bloodshed after messages attributed to fugitive foe Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, as the post-war US combat death toll climbed to 103.

US President George W. Bush, meanwhile, said the messages would only strengthen his resolve to fight terrorism.

Following the attack, a number of people in Fallujah chanted slogans in support of ousted strongman Saddam, toppled by US forces six months ago, and al-Qaeda, the Islamist militant group led by bin Laden.

One witness described it as the first reaction to bin Laden's declaration.

In two "messages" to the Iraqi

and American people aired by Qatar's Al-Jazeera television Saturday, a recorded voice claiming to be that of the al-Qaeda leader threatened to send suicide bombers to the United States and to attack any forces joining the coalition in Iraq.

Bush, in Bangkok for a state visit and an Asian economic forum, said the recording reinforced his resolve for Washington's "war on terror."

But another spectre emerged, as a letter purportedly from Saddam urged tribal leaders to launch holy war against the coalition and those who cooperate with them.

"I urge you to help your brothers in the resistance. Call the sons of your tribes to the jihad because the day of salvation is near," said the message, obtained by AFP.

## Arafat is 'impediment' to talks with Israel: Mofaz

AFP, Jerusalem

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is "a serious impediment" to the development of peace in the Middle East, Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said Sunday, branding Palestinian politics "in crisis."

"Arafat continues to prove that he is a serious impediment to the development of a regime that could enter into talks with Israel," Mofaz said at the weekly cabinet meeting.

"The current Palestinian political situation as one of crisis, lacking in security," he said.

Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qorei's "emergency government is hanging by a thread due to the obstacles Arafat has put in its way," Mofaz added in remarks published by the cabinet secretary.

An ongoing dispute between Arafat and Qorei over powers

allotted to the Palestinian cabinet has thrown the leadership into disarray, with Qorei poised to quit his post in early November.

It is the second time this year that Arafat has fallen out with a prime minister.

In September Qorei's predecessor, Mahmud Abbas, resigned over a power struggle with Arafat after less than five months on the job.

Although the uncertainty over the long-term direction of the Palestinian leadership has undermined any hope of a resumption in peace talks, Mofaz reiterated Israel's commitment to the internationally-backed "roadmap" for peace.

"In Israel's strategic view, US President George W. Bush's vision and the roadmap remain the primary context and framework for progress with the Palestinians.

## US slams Mahathir's remarks on Jews

AP, Bangkok

The White House yesterday condemned Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's statement that Jews rule the world, inserting President Bush into a simmering controversy at an international economic meeting.

Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, signaled the president's disapproval shortly before he sat down in the same room with Mahathir and 19 other leaders to open the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. It is the last of the annual forums that Mahathir will attend before retiring Oct. 31 after 22 years in power.

## Tigers to unveil power-sharing plan by end of month

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday announced they will unveil their first ever comprehensive power-sharing plan by the end of this month.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said over their Voice of Tigers radio that they will present a proposal for the setting up of an interim administration for embattled northeast on October 31.

A special announcement over the radio, monitored in the town of Vavuniya, 256 kilometres (160 miles) north of here, said the proposals will be given to peace broker Norway to be handed over to the Colombo government.

Diplomatic sources said the

rebel document would be an important landmark in attempts to politically end the island's drawn out ethnic bloodshed as it will be the first time Tigers would put down their position in writing.

"It has been a case of Colombo or Oslo making proposals and the Tigers saying 'yes' or 'no' rather than committing themselves to a position of their own," a Western diplomat said. "But, now it is changing."

The Tigers have been travelling in Europe meeting with their legal and constitutional experts to prepare a set of counter proposals to Colombo's July 17 offer of a Tiger-dominated interim administration for embattled areas.

A Tiger delegation returned

home Saturday after the latest round of talks in Ireland.

"We paid attention to the conflict resolution process in various parts of world with special emphasis on the interim arrangements that were put in place prior to a final resolution of the conflict," an LTTE spokesman Saturday quoted political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan as saying.

The Tigers pulled out of peace talks after the sixth round in March, saying the government was failing to fulfil its promises.

They made the setting up of an interim administration in the island's northeast a pre-condition to resume negotiations.

## 'World must prepare for recurrence of SARS'

AFP, Hanoi

SARS may have been contained for the moment but the international community must take immediate steps to prepare for a recurrence or the outbreak of a new disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday.

"We cannot rest on our success so far. SARS may return and we should be ready for it," said Dr Shigeru Omi, the WHO's regional director for the Western Pacific.

His comments, read out on his behalf by Pascale Brudon, the UN agency's representative to Vietnam, came on the opening day of a two-day conference in Hanoi analysing strategies used to contain the recent SARS crisis.

Omi warned, however, that global health threats went beyond SARS.

## Iran reaches 'understanding' with IAEA for N-inspection

AFP, Tehran

Talks between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have resulted in an "understanding" that could lead to the Islamic republic signing up to tougher inspections of its nuclear facilities, a top Iranian official told AFP yesterday.

Iran's representative to the IAEA, Ali Akbar Salehi, said Iran "now has a more positive stance" towards the additional protocol of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) following two days of "intensive negotiations".

"We found a mutual understanding. We had indicated some ambiguities and, in the course of our discussions, the ambiguities were removed," he said, adding that "our observations were taken into consideration".

Salehi said it was now up to the Iranian leadership to decide

whether to sign the additional protocol, a key demand of the Vienna-based UN nuclear watchdog.

"I will remit my conclusions to my superiors, and we will have to wait to see what their decision will be."

He said he expected them to decide in "a matter of days or weeks" whether to accept the new understanding or seek further talks.

If Iran joins the 80 other signatories of the additional protocol, its nuclear facilities will be liable to snap inspections by the IAEA.

Implementation of the protocol, even before its formal signature, is one of a series of demands the nuclear watchdog made last month amid accusations Iran is concealing nuclear weapons development behind its civil energy programme.

Iran denies that it is developing nuclear weapons, but the IAEA says its inspectors need the extra powers

provided by the additional protocol to fully verify and accurately report on Iran's nuclear programme.

While Iran has never ruled out signing the additional protocol, it has expressed concern that giving the UN watchdog access to its facilities -- many of them sensitive and key to national security -- would represent a surrender of sovereignty.

Iran's concerns -- which it refers to as "ambiguities" in the protocol -- have been at the centre of this week's talks.

The IAEA also wants Iran to provide a whole raft of additional information about its nuclear programme by an October 31 deadline it set last month.

In particular, the IAEA wants to clarify the source of traces of highly enriched uranium found in samples taken by its inspectors.

## Blair back in business after heart scare

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair was embarking on a series of meetings yesterday, just a day after hospital treatment for a heart problem, while sections of the press asked how long he would carry on in his job.

Blair, 50, pulled out of making a statement later to parliament on last week's European Union summit in Brussels, with Foreign Secretary Jack Straw to deliver a speech on his behalf.

Despite doctors' advice to rest for 24 hours, Blair was going ahead with meetings at Downing Street, but would not be making any public appearances, his office said.

He was expected to be back at his desk full-time on Tuesday morning.

Blair, a father of four, was taken to hospital in London Sunday after complaining of chest pains.



PHOTO: AFP  
Sri Lanka Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (L) shakes hands with his Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee prior to a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Wickremesinghe began a series of meetings with India's political leadership during the first day of an official visit aimed at boosting defence and economic ties.

## Magician emerges after 44 days in box

AP, London

New York magician David Blaine emerged Sunday from 44 days of isolation in a clear plastic box, 50 pounds lighter and buoyed by crowds celebrating the conclusion of his self-imposed starvation stunt.

Thousands of people watched the 30-year-old Blaine leave the box, which was suspended by a crane, after it was lowered to the banks of the Thames River. After living on only water since Sept. 5, Blaine was taken to a hospital for examination.

"This has been one of the most inspirational experiences of my life," Blaine said feebly, pausing and looking as if he might pass out. "I have learned more in that box than I have learned in years. I have learned how strong we are as human beings."

Blaine shuffled as he took his first steps on solid ground, and was helped to a stage by attendants.

Cheering crowds filled the small park near London's Tower Bridge and lined the riverbanks to see Blaine in the final few hours of his latest endurance feat in a box measuring 7 feet-by-7 feet-by-3 feet.

Paul Kenny, a medic at the site, said Blaine would undergo blood tests at a private hospital and be given fluids intravenously before moving onto blended foods. It could be several days before he resumed eating solid foods, Kenny said.

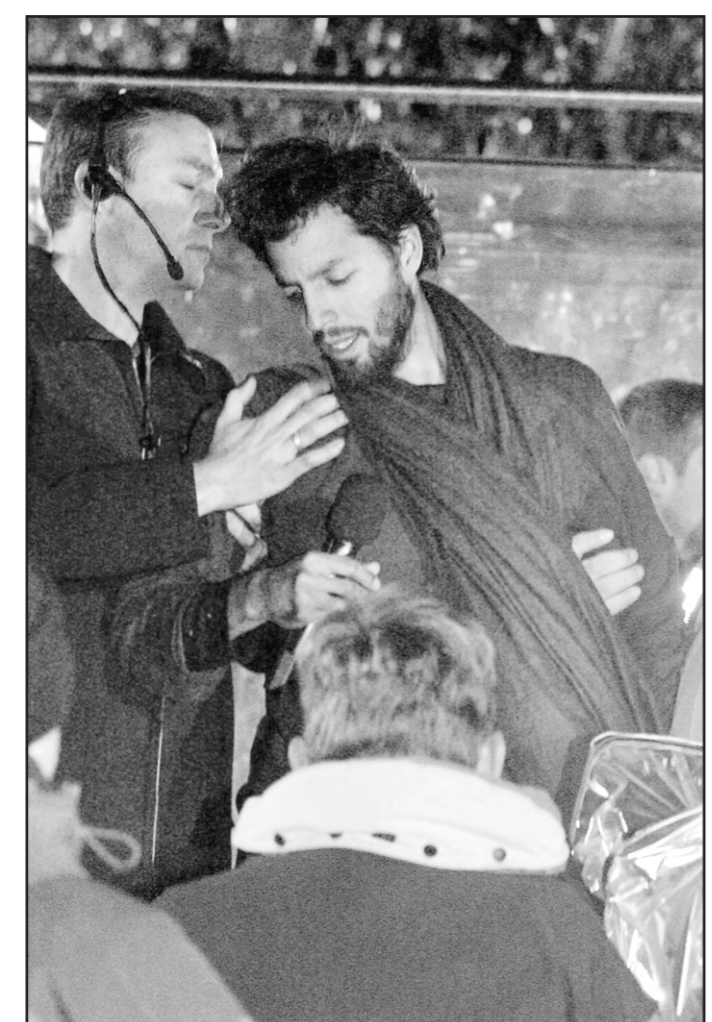


PHOTO: AFP  
American Illusionist David Blaine (C) is helped out of his transparent box after being lowered on Sunday near Tower Bridge in London where he spent 44 days suspended in isolation with only water to drink.

## US seeks to reassure donors ahead of Iraq reconstruction meet

AFP, Bangkok

The United States yesterday called on reluctant nations to give generously at this week's international donors conference for Iraqi reconstruction, with senior officials stressing that US-led occupation authorities would not control all the funds.

Secretary of State Colin Powell and national security advisor Condoleezza Rice sought to reassure potential contributors that their donations would be helping the pockets of US multinational firms.

"I hope they will come in a generous manner to help the people of Iraq, to make a statement to the Iraqi people that the international community is there with them and for them," Powell said in a speech to business leaders on the sidelines of the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

"(I hope) that the international community will come together not only to give them funds, but to give them hope, hope for a better future," he said.

Powell, who will be leading the US delegation to the two-day conference which begins on Thursday in Madrid, said reconstruction and stabilization efforts in post-war Iraq would succeed but only with international aid.

"We will be successful in Iraq, let there be no doubt about that," he said. "But it does require the assistance of the international community."

In a bid to overcome resistance -- particularly from anti-war France, Germany and Russia -- to providing large cash and in-kind donations, the United States has endorsed two key provisions giving non-US actors some say in how reconstruction funds are spent, officials said.

Both provisions are to be discussed in Madrid, where conference organizers are hoping to come as close as they can to meeting the need for an estimated 36 billion dollars in reconstruction aid between 2004 and 2007.

The first is the creation of an oversight committee, recognized in the latest UN Security Council resolution on Iraq that passed unanimously last week, to be run by the World Bank and the United Nations that will monitor expenditures of the Development Fund for Iraq.

That fund, created shortly after Saddam Hussein's ouster, is made up of Iraqi oil revenue, seized Iraqi assets and some US reconstruction assistance to which President George W. Bush has pledged an additional 20 billion dollars.