

Israel defiant over 'wall'

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel vowed on Wednesday to press on with construction of its vast barrier in the West Bank despite a UN resolution condemning the project and demanding it be halted.

"The fence will continue being built and we will go on taking care of the security of Israel's citizens," Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told Israel Radio, reaffirming the longstanding position of Israel's right-leaning coalition.

Late on Tuesday, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a resolution calling the sprawling network of fences and walls a "contradiction to international law" and ordering Israel to "stop and reverse" its construction on Palestinian lands.

Olmert said the Israeli government would defy what he called "the dictates of an automatic, hostile, inconsiderate and misguided (UN) majority that always acts against Israel."

Israel says it is a security fence to keep out suicide bombers. Palestinians call it a new "Berlin Wall" that cuts deep into territory they want for a state. The United States, Israel's chief ally, has expressed misgivings about the project.

Persistent violence has stalled a US-backed peace plan for the region. Israel's military said it killed two Palestinian militants in the West Bank on Wednesday after carrying out deadly air strikes in Gaza this week.

Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat told Reuters: "The Israeli statement reflects an Israeli determination to continue violating international law and continue the path of occupation and settlement rather than peace and reconciliation."

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said in an interview last week that Israel would complete the barrier -- which will eventually run 210 miles -- despite a US threat to reduce \$9 billion in loan guarantees to the Jewish state.

Washington is concerned the project prejudices borders that should be decided in negotiations.

Arab states took the dispute to an emergency session of the 191-nation General Assembly after the United States last week vetoed a similar measure in the 15-nation Security Council.

Tuesday's vote on the resolution was 144-4 with 12 abstentions. The United States and Israel voted 'no' along with the Marshall Islands and Micronesia.

Unlike the UN Security Council, the General Assembly is not empowered to pass resolutions that are legally binding and acts more as a bellwether of world opinion.

The vote capped six hours of haggling between European Union and Arab governments over the text of the measure, which initially had been drafted by Palestinian UN envoy Nasser al-Kidwa and took a harsher line against Israeli actions.

US Ambassador John Negroponte said last week that the measure he vetoed was biased against Israel. To avert a veto, it would have had to condemn suicide bombings and those groups that have taken responsibility for suicide attacks in Israel.

EU diplomats said the compromise hammered out on Tuesday was far more balanced than the vetoed resolution. It condemned a suicide bombing in the Israeli city of Haifa earlier this month that killed 21 people and last week's bomb attack in the Gaza Strip that killed three US security officers.

It also criticised Israeli settlement activities in Palestinian areas and "any activities involving the confiscation of land, disruption of the livelihood of protected persons and the de facto annexation of land."

Mahathir lashes out at state terrorism

REUTERS, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Outspoken Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said on Wednesday state terrorism was worse than that committed by individual groups and accused countries advocating democracy of terrorising the world.

His comments in this central Java city came on the same day President Bush visited the Indonesian resort island of Bali for talks with President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Muslim leaders in a bid to explain Washington's war on terror.

Mahathir, who steps down at the end of this month after 22 years in power, has been making headlines in his final days in office with state-

ments about his belief that Jews rule the world.

That subject didn't come up in a wide-ranging 30 minute speech here as he accepted an award from a regional engineering association, but the topic of terrorism did.

Mahathir said "terror attacks are not just by irregulars acting on their own."

"Indeed, we see states launching massive retaliation, not just to curb suspected terrorists, but his family, his home, his village and his town."

"It would be ridiculous to think that such attacks do not terrorize the innocent. In fact, the terrorism is even greater, for it is systematic and executed with heavy weapons in the hands of trained soldiers."

"It would seem that the great

exponents and practitioners of democracy believe that the way to spread the doctrine and to break down resistance is by terrorising the world."

The 78-year-old did not name the country or countries he had in mind, and declined to answer when asked later by a reporter, but he has been a frequent critic in the past of US, Australian and Israeli policies, among a number of others.

A recent remark by Mahathir that "Jews rule the world by proxy" brought widespread criticism, which Mahathir said only proved he was right.

"The reaction of the world shows that they control the world," he said earlier this week.

PHOTO : AFP
A Palestinian woman argues with an Israeli soldier after she was not allowed to cross the West Bank checkpoint of Kalandia to Jerusalem yesterday.



PHOTO : AFP
Kashmiri protestors shout anti-Indian slogans yesterday during a protest against the arrest of influential pro-independence leader Yasin Malik in Srinagar. Police detained Malik, the chairman of the pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and three of his senior colleagues, sparking protests by their supporters.

LTTE to present crucial power-sharing plan

AP, Colombo

After several delays, Tamil Tiger rebels of Sri Lanka have finally set a date next week for handing over the long-awaited power-sharing plan which is hoped to kickstart fresh peace talks with the Sri Lankan government.

"We have contacted the Norwegians and will hand over the proposal next Friday," rebel spokesman Daya Master said yesterday.

The proposal was originally expected in September, and on Monday a senior rebel leader said it would be handed over before October 26. But Master said that the Tigers will definitely hand over the document on October 31.

Master said that LTTE's political chief SP Thamilselvan would meet

Tamil political parties this week to brief them on the proposal.

Thamilselvan is expected to meet members of the Tamil National Alliance later on Wednesday, in the northern rebel-held town of Kilinochchi, Master said.

The rebel leader will also meet Periyasamy Chandrasekaran, leader of the Upcountry People's Front on Thursday, and Arumugam Thondaman, leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress, on Saturday, Master said.

The Tigers' proposal outlining their demand for political and financial powers to run Tamil affairs in the island's northeast is seen as a signal of their willingness to resume negotiations.

Saudi Arabia denies any military deals with Pakistan

ANI, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia Defence Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz has said that his country did not strike any military deals with Pakistan during Crown Prince Abdullah's recent Islamabad visit.

"No military agreements were concluded between the kingdom and Pakistan during Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz's visit to Islamabad," The News quoted the Saudi minister as saying in an interview with the daily Okaz.

The statement was published in the paper's Tuesday issue.

The clarification came in the wake of speculations that Saudi Arabia was holding secret dialogue with Islamabad requesting it to deploy Pakistani "nuclear war-heads" on its territory.

Bush makes no apologies for US foreign policy

AFP, Kuta

US President George W. Bush made no apology Wednesday to Muslims angry over the war in Iraq and the strong US relationship with Israel, defiantly declaring: "I'm proud of our foreign policy."

Anti-US sentiment in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, has soared of late. A June opinion poll found that only 15 percent of Indonesians have a favorable view of the United States, down from 75 percent three years ago.

Asked during a joint press conference here with Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri how he rebutted charges that Washington is biased in favor of Israel, Bush renewed his support for creating a Palestinian state.

"I'm the first (US) president to ever articulate such a vision, and I still believe it is possible," said the US president, here for three hours as part of a whirlwind six-nation tour of Asia and Australia.

"In order to achieve a Palestinian state living side by side in peace, there needs to be leadership willing to fight off the terror that is trying to prevent the state from emerging," he said.

Later, Bush joked about what some critics call Washington's go-it-alone approach to global problems, ribbing a US reporter who was poised to ask a question at the expense of local media.

"Wait a minute, you're crowding out the host press. This is unbelievable. This is unilateralism at its worst," he said, drawing laughter from the crowd.

French reporter killed in Abidjan

BBC ONLINE

A French journalist has been shot dead by a police officer in Ivory Coast's main city of Abidjan.

Diplomats and eyewitnesses say Jean Helene, the Abidjan correspondent for Radio France International (RFI), was killed outside a police station while waiting to interview a number of arrested Ivorian opposition activists.

An officer who allegedly fired the fatal shot in the head has been arrested and is being questioned, Abidjan police said.

French President Jacques Chirac said he was saddened by the news of Tuesday's incident, and demanded Ivory Coast authorities "shed light on everything about this assassination," a president's spokeswoman said.

Mr Helene, 48, was an experienced journalist who had reported

from Africa for many years.

"The security service of the French embassy confirms the death of Jean Helene after an argument with a policeman turned sour," said spokesman for the French embassy in Abidjan, Francis Guenon.

According to eyewitnesses at the police station in the centre of the city, a policeman had come in and told his superior that a "white man" was waiting outside.

"His boss told him to forget it, that the man was only waiting to interview the freed man, and the policeman went back out again," one of the eyewitnesses told the AFP news agency.

The eyewitnesses said the policeman then left the building and a shot was heard afterwards.

Several people went outside and saw a body lying in a pool of blood near a parked car.

Khamenei declares Iran not seeking nukes

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared Wednesday the Islamic republic was determined to generate nuclear power and would not develop nuclear weapons, the day after Iran bowed to international demands it open up its nuclear programme to tougher UN inspections.

"We have always said we have no need of nuclear weapons because the possession of such arms does not signify power. We believe the possession of strong human potential to master modern science, faith and the will to resist is what brings power," the all-powerful leader was quoted as saying by state television.

N Korea laughs off US offer of security

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea dismissed as laughable a US offer to provide multilateral security guarantees in exchange for Pyongyang ending its nuclear weapons program, saying it was not worth even considering.

In a commentary published late on Tuesday, the communist North's official KCNA news agency said Pyongyang wanted a bilateral treaty with the United States -- a reference to its desire for a non-aggression pact that Washington has ruled out.

During a Bangkok summit of Asia-Pacific leaders that ended on Tuesday, President Bush significantly shifted policy by saying he was sharing ideas on how to give North Korea security guarantees short of a non-aggression treaty. All 20 other summit leaders backed this stance.

North Korea was not present because it is not a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. But it lost little time in shooting down the idea and taking some shine off the summit.

"We have asked for the United States to stop its hostile policy and a bilateral treaty between North Korea and the United States, and not for some sort of security guarantee," said KCNA in a Korean-language commentary.

"It's laughable and doesn't deserve even any consideration that the United States gives a security guarantee on the condition that we drop our nuclear development."

Asked during a visit to Indonesia about his reaction to the North Korean remarks, Bush said Washington and its diplomatic partners "will stay the course" in dealing with Pyongyang.

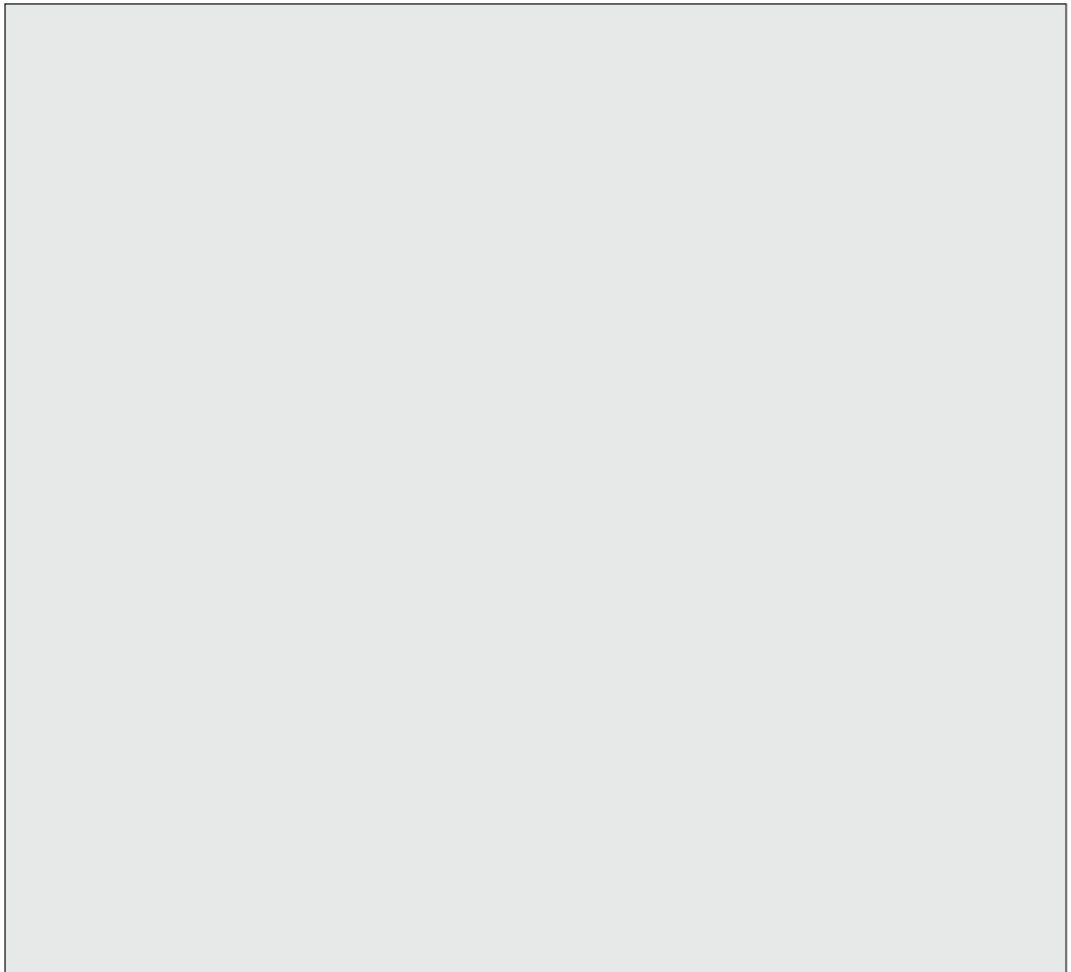


PHOTO : AFP
Thousands of protestors gather at a rally yesterday against the visit to Australia by George Bush which begins Thursday. The President is visiting to thank the Australian people for their support during the Iraq war and to lend weight to the forthcoming US-Australia free trade agreement but increasing numbers of ordinary Australians are wary of their own government's servile relationship with the United States.