

Bush rebukes Taiwan over referendum

Taiwan defends referendum plan

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush delivered a stunning personal rebuke to Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian over his plans for a referendum, in the politically charged setting of talks with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

Wen had travelled to Washington seeking to extract a firm US condemnation of Chen's plan for a March 20 vote critical of Beijing's military posture.

"We oppose any unilateral decision by either China or Taiwan to change the status quo," Bush said, seated with Wen in front of a crackling log fire in the Oval Office.

"And the comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the status quo, which we oppose."

Washington is a strong supporter of democratic Taiwan, and is bound by law to offer it the means of self-defence, but insists it has a right to criticise actions which impinge on stability and its own

security.

Bush recommitted the United States to the "one-China" policy, and the three joint communiques that are the bedrock of Sino-US relations, then sat back as Wen delivered his own stern warning to Taiwan.

"The Chinese government respects the desire of people in Taiwan for democracy," Wen said.

"But we must point out that the attempts of Taiwan authorities, headed by Chen Shui-bian, are only using democracy as an excuse and (an) attempt to resort to (a) defensive referendum to split Taiwan away from China.

"Such separatist activities are what the Chinese side can absolutely not accept and tolerate."

Beijing has repeatedly warned it will use military force against Taiwan, which it sees as a rebel province, if it declares independence.

AP from Taipei reported that after receiving his sharpest rebuke from America since taking office three years ago, Taiwan's leader

assured Washington yesterday that he had no plans to provoke China by seeking a permanent split with the communist giant.

But President Chen Shui-bian refused to back down on the issue that's causing the rare friction with the United States: his plans to hold a March 20 "defensive referendum" demanding that China remove hundreds of missiles pointing at Taiwan.

"A defensive referendum is for avoiding war and to help keep the Taiwanese people free of fear," Chen said. "It is also for preserving the status quo" with China.

Chen responded to Bush's comments while meeting with visiting Congressman Dan Burton, R-Ind., who is a strong supporter of Taiwan.

As he spoke, the defiant Taiwanese president used chopping gestures with his hands to emphasise his points.

"We have no intention to change the status quo, and we won't allow the status quo to be changed," Chen said.



US President George W. Bush waves with Premier of China Wen Jiabao along the colonnade prior to a meeting in the Oval Office at the White House on Tuesday in Washington, DC. Wen delivered a new warning to Taiwan not to seek independence, as he sat side by side with Bush.

PHOTO: AFP

Hundreds of Iraqis protest 'terrorism'

AFP, Baghdad

Hundreds of Iraqis, watched over by US Apache helicopters, demonstrated yesterday to condemn "terrorism" in their country.

More than 200 protesters from the Iraqi National Congress and other political parties, women's groups and sheikhs in traditional dress gathered near the National Theatre.

As more demonstrators arrived, they said they would march for a mid-day rally outside a central Baghdad hotel.

"This is the national campaign against terrorism and sabotage," said Abo Thaeer, 55, a member of the Iraqi Communist Party. His party members turned out with giant red flags bearing the hammer and sickle.

Participants said similar rallies would be held in other major Iraqi cities to mark international Human Rights Day.

A similar protest last Friday in the capital attracted about 1,000 Iraqis.

American-led occupying forces who toppled dictator Saddam Hussein in April are battling daily

attacks by insurgents whom they regularly brand terrorists.

On Monday a suicide car bomber wounded 58 US soldiers at their base near the northern capital of Mosul while in Baghdad a bomb killed three worshippers at a Sunni mosque.

"Terrorism ... will delay the process of rebuilding," said Eklash Khudhir, 30, one of four women holding a banner from the Iraqi Women's Organization.

She said it was their first protest against terrorism.

Hussein al-Musaya, a former Iraqi exile who helped organize the rally, said numerous political parties had come together to state their opposition to terrorism.

"It's also a message of thanks to the coalition force for liberating Iraq from the dictator," said Musaya, an official with the Liberal Republic Iraqi Party.

As he spoke another man chimed in. "We will not allow the fascists to come back," said Farook al-Shamari, 63.

"I don't belong to any party but I am against terrorism and fascism. We lived under the aggression of fascism for 40 years," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Activists of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) display a placard during a demonstration staged to mark the World Human Rights Day in New Delhi yesterday. The TYC protested against human rights violation in Tibet by the government of China and demanded the United Nation to take immediate measures.

US rejects N Korea nuclear offer

BBC ONLINE

The United States has rejected an offer by North Korea to freeze its nuclear activities in return for a series of concessions from Washington.

North Korea said such a move would clear the way for fresh talks on the crisis with the US and regional powers.

But President George W Bush dismissed the offer, insisting North Korea end its nuclear weapons programme entirely.

The Chinese prime minister, who is in Washington, also ruled out an imminent return to talks, US officials said.

The goal of the United States is not for a freeze of the nuclear programme.

"They [the Chinese] indicated that they felt... we had not yet reached the point where a new round, a second round, of six-party multilateral talks could be convened," an unnamed official told reporters.

A first round of talks, in Beijing, in August, involving North Korea, South Korea, the United States, China, Japan and Russia, ended without much progress.

North Korea's offer appeared to be a counter-proposal to a plan drawn up last week by the US, Japan and South Korea to try to end the stalemate.

The text of the plan has not been released, but it is believed to propose a series of "co-ordinated steps" between the US and its allies and North Korea.

A North Korean statement on Tuesday said Pyongyang would "freeze" its nuclear activities if the US removed it from a list of countries that sponsor terrorism and provide energy aid.

But President Bush dismissed the offer as insufficient.

"The goal of the United States is not for a freeze of the nuclear programme," Mr Bush said at a press conference with Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao.

Annan to name interim Iraq envoy

BBC ONLINE

The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan is to name a New Zealand official as his new interim envoy to Iraq, UN diplomats have said.

UN sources said Ross Mountain, a veteran humanitarian aid official, will temporarily replace Sergio Vieira de Mello, killed in a bomb attack on the UN's headquarters in Baghdad in August.

Mr Annan has been under pressure to name a new Iraq envoy and has said he will do so early next year.

The UN pulled its staff out of Iraq following a spate of attacks.

Mr Mountain is currently the UN assistant emergency relief co-ordinator and director of the UN office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva.

He has travelled to war zones in Africa, the Middle East and Asia and has been at the forefront of relief operations in countries there.

Mr Annan is expected to officially appoint the interim envoy on Wednesday.

He will also release a report on his assessment on the future of UN operations in Iraq.

Last month, Mr Annan said the UN was considering whether to establish a regional office in either Jordan or Cyprus to monitor activities in Iraq.

Iran hails Iraqi decision to expel armed militants

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday hailed a decision by Iraq's US-backed interim leaders to expel the Iranian armed opposition People's Mujahadeen, but denied suggestions of a secret deal involving the extradition of detained al-Qaeda members from the Islamic republic.

"The decision taken by the (Iraqi) Governing Council is very positive. We have been saying to the fighters not to be stubborn and to surrender, in which case we will show leniency," Intelligence Minister Ali Yunessi told reporters.

When asked if Iran could now hand over top members of al-Qaeda it says are in its custody, Yunessi said "there is no link".

"When it comes to terrorists, we do not do deals," added government spokesman Abdollah Ramazanadeh.

"The judiciary will decide on what to do with them if they have not committed crimes against Iraqis and if there are no Iranian complaints against them," he added, repeating statements that some detained al-Qaeda members

here could be tried in Iranian courts.

Several Western diplomats have said Iran has been resisting handing over top-ranking al-Qaeda fugitives, complaining that the United States had failed to deal with the People's Mujahadeen after the invasion of Iraq.

"We have very good relations with the Governing Council, and we have had discussions (on the People's Mujahadeen) and this decision is the result," added Vice President Mohammed Ali Abtahi.

Iraq's interim Governing Council decided unanimously Tuesday to expel several thousand members of the People's Mujahadeen, branding the Iranian opposition force a "terrorist organisation".

The statement did not say where the people would be sent when they are expelled, but that its offices would be closed and its arms and financial resources confiscated.

The money would "be given to the compensation fund for victims of the former fascist regime" of Saddam Hussein.

Taliban claims killing Pakistani engineer

REUTERS, Spin Boldak, Afghanistan

Taliban officials said their fighters killed a Pakistani engineer in southern Afghanistan this week and accused two kidnapped Indian road workers of being intelligence agents who were also likely to be killed.

The Pakistani engineer Anwar Shah was killed and another Pakistani wounded when a group of armed men ambushed their car in southern Afghanistan on Monday. The two Indians were abducted from a US-funded road project on Saturday.

Mullah Sabir Momin, the Taliban's deputy operations commander in the south of Afghanistan, said Shah was killed by Taliban fighters because he was an "American agent".

"We have repeatedly said that no work should be done in

Afghanistan in the presence of Americans," he said in a telephone call to Reuters late on Monday. "It does not matter whether those involved in such works are engineers, drivers, doctors or others."

"Anyone who assists America or the Afghan government is liable to death. American agents will not be spared even if they are Muslims. They will be killed at an appropriate time."

Taliban intelligence official Mullah Abdul Samad said the two Indians, a soil sampler named Murali and a foreman named Vardharai, employed on the Kandahar-Kabul road, were Indian intelligence agents.

He said documents and maps found on them showed they were involved in bomb blasts at the Afghan-Pakistan border to damage relations between the countries.

Theif of Baghdad!

AFP, Baghdad

Robbers stole a huge sum of money from an unguarded bank in northern Baghdad, the Iraqi police chief said yesterday.

"Thieves managed to get hold of one billion dinars equivalent to 500,000 US dollars on Tuesday from a bank in Kadimiya because the policemen who are supposed to guard it were not there and left the entrance without protection," Ahmad Ibrahim told Iraqi television.

The robbers held up the staff, took the cash and left without hindrance.

"We will take sanctions against these policemen and we have some information to help find the robbers and bring them to justice."

Ibrahim called for more policemen to be trained to fight crime.

"We are increasing the number of police stations in Iraq," he added.

'India recorded 475 custodial deaths in last 3 years'

PTI, New Delhi

There were 475 custodial deaths during the last three years (between 2000-2003) in police stations across India, the Rajya Sabha was informed yesterday.

While 183 custodial deaths were reported in 2002-2003, as many as 127 and 165 deaths took place during 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 respectively, Minister of State for Home ID Swami said in a written reply.

He said that Malimath Committee on Reforms of Criminal Justice System in its report has recommended to make

section 497 of the IPC, 1860 which is regarding offence of adultery, as gender neutral.

The state governments and Union Territory Administrations have been requested for their views on the recommendations contained in the above mentioned Report as the Criminal Law and the Criminal Procedure are on the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution, he said.

Swami Informed the house that 29 persons were killed and 118 injured during Kumbh Mahotsav at Nasik during August-September this year.



PHOTO: AFP

A bunch of flowers are seen at the wall of "National" hotel, as passers by look at the place of suicide explosion on Tuesday opposite the Kremlin in downtown Moscow. Russia was still under shock yesterday, one day after a female suicide bomber killed six people near the Kremlin walls in an attack authorities say may have been aimed at the nearby parliament building.