

## Arroyo lifts emergency

INQUIRER/ ANN, Manila

After being assured by her advisers that the coup threat has eased, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo lifted the state of emergency exactly a week after she issued the controversial declaration to quell an attempt to overthrow her government.

"Today, a week later, I am happy to report that the cabal is broken and it is time to get back to the real business of governing," Arroyo said in a speech aired on radio and television nationwide.

"I am confident that order has been restored. Therefore, with the power vested in me by our Constitution, I declare that, effective immediately, the state of emergency is no longer in effect," Arroyo said.

Arroyo declared the state of emergency last Friday (Feb 24) to counter what she said was an alliance of communist rebels and "military adventurists" aimed at toppling her.

But Arroyo also warned that she would not hesitate to resort to another tough action if these adventurists and opportunists who would put the economy and security in peril would force her hand.

## INDO-US NUKE DEAL

# Bush faces tough task to get Congress nod

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush faces an uphill fight to win passage of the US-India nuclear pact in the US Congress, which has given a decidedly wary election-year welcome to the agreement.

As lawmakers waited for the White House to provide details of the deal, Bush on Friday defended the accord from charges it weakens safeguards against the spread of nuclear weapons in the age of the war on terrorism.

"India has been an excellent partner in nonproliferation over the past decades," the US president said during a roundtable with young entrepreneurs in Hyderabad, India.

"Therefore, I can tell the American people that this is an important agreement to help deal with the proliferation issue," said Bush, who made the agreement the centerpiece of his

maiden visit to India.

Some influential lawmakers, while praising warmer US-India ties, have taken a wait-and-see approach to the deal, which must get through the Senate and House of Representatives as well as the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard Lugar, to whom Bush's Republicans often defer on international affairs, said through a spokesman that he "looked forward to learning the details of the progress made on the nuclear power agreement with India and getting draft legislation" from the White House.

That will decide which committees, in addition to Lugar's and the House International Relations Committee, will take up the deal and could make changes that may send US negotiators back to talks with their Indian counterparts.

Republican Henry Hyde, Lugar's counterpart in the House, said that his panel will "thoroughly examine" the deal, which comes as lawmakers of both major US parties seek to polish their national security credentials ahead of November legislative elections.

Under the agreement, New Delhi has agreed to separate its civilian and nuclear facilities and put 14 of its 22 nuclear reactors under international inspections.

The nuclear fuel supply from the United States is key for the civilian reactors that India would build in the future to produce energy to power its rapidly growing economy.

Critics have zeroed in on a provision giving India leeway to declare so-called fast-breeder nuclear reactors untouchable by international inspection. Such reactors can be critical to developing nuclear weapons.

And some have said the agreement, which effectively ends India's status as a nuclear pariah even though it has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), will harm efforts to curb the spread of atomic weapons.

"With one simple move the president has blown a hole in the nuclear rules that the entire world has been playing by," said Representative Edward Markey, co-chair of the Bipartisan Task Force on Nonproliferation and senior Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Bush "has now pushed over a nuclear domino that falls against 187 other nations -- all signers of the Nonproliferation Treaty -- to review why they should honour a document which the nuclear superpowers no longer respect," he said in a statement.



US President George W. Bush (C) looks at a woven hat while seeing a display of fibre products with Chief Minister of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh Yedugiri Sandinti Rajasekhara (2L) during a demonstration at the Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University in Hyderabad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Kashmiri Muslim protesters throw stones towards Indian policemen during a demonstration in Srinagar yesterday against the visit of US President Bush to India and the publication of cartoons depicting Prophet Hazrat Mohammed (SM) in European papers.

PHOTO: AFP

## Anti-Bush protests rock Pakistan ahead of visit

AFP, Karachi/Quetta

Pakistani police fired teargas and baton charged protesters calling for the head of US President George W. Bush as anti-US demonstrations erupted hours before he was due to visit the country.

The protests in several major cities came at the same time as a paralysing nationwide strike called by a coalition of key Islamic parties to protest controversial cartoons of Prophet Hazrat Mohammed (SM).

In Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city, police fired teargas to disperse around 1,000 stone-throwing Shiite Muslim protesters chanting "The nation wants the head of Bush" as they tried to reach the US consulate, an AFP correspondent said.

A suicide car bomb attack outside the consulate on Thursday killed a US diplomat and three others, further heightening security fears ahead of Bush's maiden trip to Pakistan.

"The organisers had assured us

that they would not go to the US consulate but they violated the agreement and we had resorted to teargas to stop them," police officer Majeed Khan said.

The protest was organised by the Shiite youth wing, Imamia Students Organisation.

Riot police blocked the road leading to the consulate and chased protesters into the narrow lanes of the nearby commercial district, where shops were already shut because of the strike. Several demonstrators were arrested.

Earlier police baton-charged around 200 Shiite protesters shouting "Killer Bush, go home" outside a mosque in Rawalpindi, near Islamabad.

"They wanted to block the main road and we baton-charged them to disperse them when they defied the order to move," senior police officer Mohammad Basharat told AFP, adding that several people had been arrested.

# US to sell advanced arms to India

REUTERS, AFP, Washington

The United States said on the heels of a landmark civilian nuclear cooperation pact with India on Thursday that it was prepared to sell advanced warplanes and other high-tech arms to the south Asia nation.

"Where only a few years ago, no one would have talked about the prospects for a major US-India defence deal, today the prospects are promising, whether in the realm of combat aircraft, helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft or naval vessels," the US Defence Department said as President George W. Bush paid a three-day visit to India.

"The next step is to turn the talk of prospective sales into reality. The United States is committed to working with India to do this," the depart-

ment added in a statement released to coincide with the president's visit.

The Pentagon release did not mention any specific deals except to note that Washington was prepared to offer Lockheed Martin F-16 and Boeing F/A-18 jet fighters to India.

"It is our goal to help meet India's needs in the defence realm, and to provide important capabilities and technologies that India seeks. We are on a path to accomplish this," the Pentagon said in Washington.

"We have indicated our intention to offer both the F-16 and the F-18, both combat proven aircraft. As additional capabilities enter our force, we will work with the government of India to make them available," it added.

"Our proposal will also address India's interest in technology transfer and indigenous co-production."

India has said it wants to buy 126 multi-role fighter aircraft over the next 15 years to upgrade its forces.

Russia and France have been India's traditional suppliers of aircraft, but New Delhi is considering a range of fighter aircraft, including the US-built F-16 and F-18.

The Pentagon statement said it was aware that the Indians are concerned about the reliability of the United States as a supplier.

"We are committed to addressing this priority of India. The United States intends to be a reliable partner. It is in the US interest to do so," it said.

# Hamas leader, Russian officials begin talks

REUTERS, Moscow

Hamas leaders met senior Russian officials yesterday in their first talks with a major foreign power since winning a January 25 Palestinian election, but flatly rejected international demands to recognise Israel.

Shunned by Israel and the United States since the parliamentary poll, the Islamist militant group whose charter calls for the Jewish state's destruction hoped to gain a

measure of international standing from the Moscow talks before forming a government.

The six-member delegation led by exiled Hamas politburo chief Khaled Meshaal met first with Alexander Saltanov, a deputy Russian foreign minister. The visit was expected to last three days.

But even before the first meeting, Hamas dimmed hopes of a peace breakthrough by saying it was firm in its refusal to recognise Israel -- a key

Western demand.

"The issue of recognition is a done issue. We are not going to recognise Israel," Mohammed Nazzal, a senior official accompanying Meshaal, told reporters in Moscow.

Although the visit dealt a blow to US-led efforts to isolate Hamas, Russia's mediation is seen by some in the West as a chance to push the group into embracing more moderate views.

## Tribal militants occupy Pak govt buildings

AFP, Miran Shah

Pakistani tribal militants brandishing assault rifles briefly took control of government offices in protest at the killing of 40 rebels in an army raid on a training camp, officials said yesterday.

Up to 400 armed men gathered in the remote town of Miran Shah near the Afghan border on Thursday and forcibly occupied the irrigation department, a telephone exchange and several other buildings, a local administration official said.

But the men, most of whom were students of a local madrasa run by a hardline pro-Taliban leader, vacated the premises seven hours later following talks mediated by local tribal chieftains, the official told AFP.

"They were protesting the government raid in Saidgai village on

Wednesday which killed up to 40 militants, including some foreigners," he said.

"They were led by Maulvi Abdul Khaleq, a hardline pro Taliban leader, and leader of the seminary,"

A provincial government statement said the town's bazaar was also occupied by the "miscreants" -- Pakistani jargon both for local militants and al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents who fled Afghanistan in late 2001.

Wednesday's raid on the militant hide-out came two days before US President George Bush, on his first tour of South Asia, was due to visit Pakistan for talks with President Pervez Musharraf on the "war on terror".

One soldier died and 15 others were wounded in the attack.

## INDO-US NUKE DEAL Asia cautiously optimistic

AFP, Beijing

The nuclear deal between the United States and India received a mostly positive response in the Asia Pacific, with Japan and Australia yesterday leading the upbeat assessments but China voicing caution.

US President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed the deal in New Delhi on Thursday that paves the way for the lifting of three-decade-old restrictions on sharing civilian nuclear technology.

Bush and Singh hailed the deal as historic, with the arrangement being seen as a landmark moment in bilateral ties that have steadily improved following decades of strained relations that date back to the Cold War.

China voiced the strongest official note of regional caution

shortly after the deal was announced when it said New Delhi and Washington must follow global nuclear non-proliferation rules.

"Cooperation must conform with the requirements and provisions of the international non-proliferation regime and the obligations undertaken by all countries," foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said on Thursday.

India and similarly nuclear-armed regional rival Pakistan have refused to sign on to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

However China, whose containment was believed to be one reason for the United States wanting to embrace India on the nuclear issue, publicly refrained from saying anything more critical.

Key regional US ally Japan, which is also seeking closer relations with India, welcomed the deal and rejected assertions that New

Delhi should be held to the same standards as international pariah North Korea.

"India is a country that shares the values of freedom, democracy, basic human rights and the rule of law with the United States and Japan," Chief Cabinet Secretary and government spokesman Shinzo Abe told reporters.

"It is wrong to discuss the Indian nuclear issue and that of North Korea on the same level."

Japan and the United States, along with China, South Korea and Russia, are involved in long-running diplomatic efforts to convince Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear weapons programme.

Like India and Pakistan, North Korea is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

## Manmohan teases Bush for not taking Laura to Taj

REUTERS, New Delhi

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could not resist teasing US President George W. Bush on Thursday for not taking his wife, Laura, to the Taj Mahal on his brief trip to India.

Bush has blamed "the George W. Bush schedulers" for not arranging a trip for him to the monument to love, although the truth is Bush is never much of a tourist on overseas travel.

In toast remarks during a US-Indian luncheon, Singh told Mrs. Bush: "I'm truly sorry that the president is not taking you to Taj Mahal this time. I hope he will be more chivalrous the next time you are here."

The audience chuckled, then Bush took the microphone and said the sore subject had come up at home.

"Mr. prime minister, I'm sorry you brought up the Taj Mahal. I've been hearing about it from Laura ever since I told her that we weren't going," Bush said.

"So we pledge to be invited back and come back and we'd love to see the magnificent part of your country that we will be unable to see this trip."

The Taj was built by emperor Shahjahan as a tomb for his lost wife. The white marble structure on the banks of the sacred Yamuna river took 20,000 workers 22 years to build.

The 350-year-old Taj, one of the wonders of the world, is just a short drive from Delhi.



The radical Palestinian group Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal (L) leaves the arrival hall of Sheremetievo II airport, outside Moscow yesterday. Meshaal lashed out at Israel as he arrived under high security for sensitive talks in Russia, saying Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands was the main obstacle to Middle East peace.

PHOTO: AFP

## Iraq violence may hinder pullout

AP, Washington

President Bush is expected to meet with top US military commanders next week, just as the escalating violence in Iraq threatens to complicate the administration's goal of withdrawing more troops this year.

So far, military officials say they have made no decisions on future troop withdrawals. They say they are sticking to current plans to send additional units to Iraq later this summer, and acknowledge that a decision will have to be made soon on whether to keep some of those troops home instead.

One Defence Department official said the military is waiting to see if attacks between the majority Shia Muslims and the Sunni Arabs escalate or slack off. Military units will continue preparing to go to Iraq because it is easier to cancel deployment orders than to restart preparations if troops are suddenly needed, said the official, who requested anonymity because troop decisions have not been finalised.

Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, a military spokesman in Baghdad, played down suggestions the fragile country is on the brink of civil war. He said Thursday there is a sense that this may just be another peak in the violence in Iraq, and it may not continue at the level seen in recent days.