

## Kissinger calls for conference on Iraq

AFP, London

Former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger called yesterday for an international conference to thrash out the future for strife-torn Iraq.

The 83-year-old political heavyweight said that a collapse of control in Iraq would lead to disastrous consequences that would drag the West back into the Middle East.

The diplomat also called for America to open dialogue with Iran, warning that a confrontation would occur without a negotiated solution to the stand-off over the Islamic republic's nuclear programme.

"We have to move at some early point to some international definition of what a legitimate outcome is -- something that can be supported by the surrounding states and by ourselves and our allies," Kissinger told BBC television from his Connecticut home.

# World leaders press for fresh N Korea N-talks

AFP, Hanoi

Major Asia Pacific powers issued a compromise statement Sunday that called for swift talks to curb North Korea's nuclear weapons drive but glossed over divisions on how far to push Pyongyang.

The statement on the closing day of the Apec summit in Vietnam, which came after days of diplomatic wrangling, was not officially published and only read out to reporters at a press conference after leaders had left the venue.

It expressed "strong concern" at the North's October 9 test, endorsed UN sanctions against the Stalinist regime and called for an early resumption of stalled six-way talks on putting an end to its nuclear ambitions.

But the way it came out underscored the delicacy of the behind-

the-scenes manoeuvring to try to restart six-party negotiations involving the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting offered leaders of five of the six -- North Korea is not a member and so was not present -- a rare chance to confer on the sidelines of the Hanoi summit.

"We did not avoid this issue," Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet told journalists, but said it was "not the major item" of the summit.

An Asian diplomat said the Vietnamese hosts would likely not have wanted a written statement as it would have been recorded as an official Hanoi summit document.

"They didn't really want to be involved with the issue," she told AFP, "but probably couldn't refuse

the pressure.

"Delivering the statement in the oral form, I think the Vietnamese probably found more comfortable," North Korea stunned the world on October 9 when it detonated a nuclear device for the first time, triggering global condemnation and UN sanctions.

Amid fierce pressure, including from its closest ally China, it agreed two weeks ago to return to the six-way negotiations it abandoned a year ago in protest at US financial sanctions.

Negotiators have been struggling since then to fix a date for a resumption, with Washington demanding Pyongyang first take "concrete steps" to show it is serious.

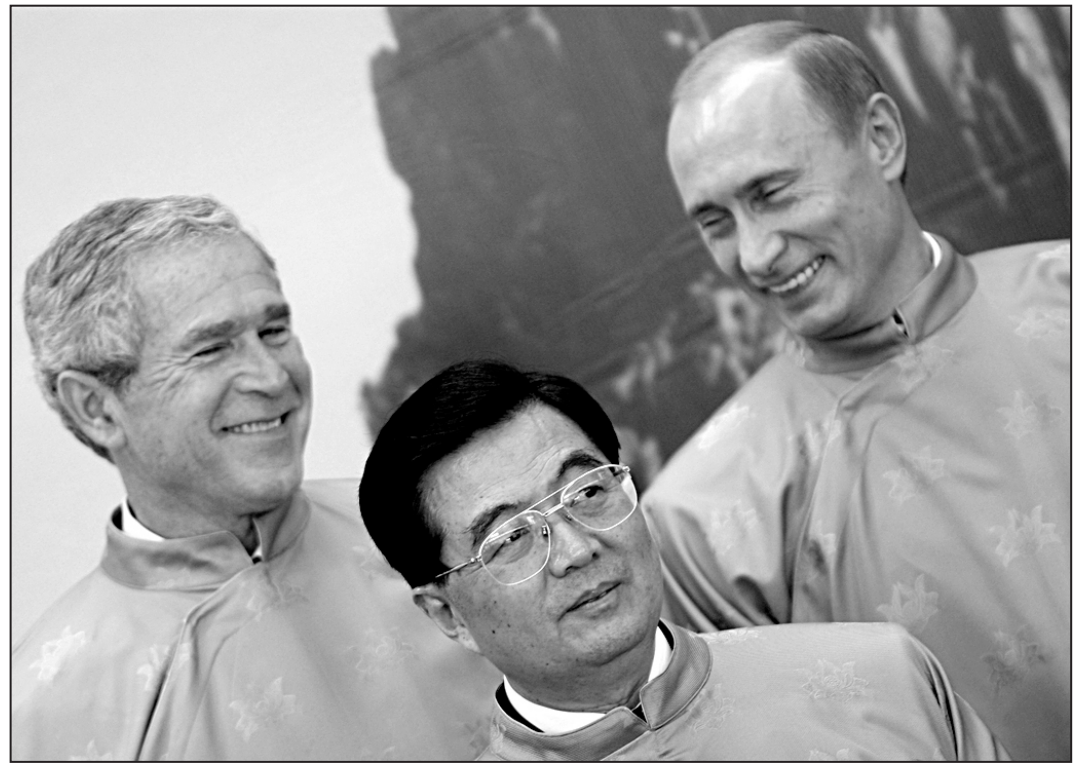
US deputy national security advisor David McCormick dodged questions about whether the

absence of a written statement from Apec was a blow to the hardline US stance.

"I guess I would focus on the substance of the question, which is have the members, have the leader countries, have the leaders agreed to a common view and a common approach on North Korea, and I think the answer is yes," he told reporters.

His superior, national security advisor Stephen Hadley, had said Saturday that a statement was "pretty well agreed" although he alluded to the wrangling by saying there were a couple of outstanding issues "dealing mostly with the form, not the substance."

The eventual statement, as delivered, restated Apec's commitment to peace and security.



US President George W Bush (L), Chinese President Hu Jintao (C) and Russian President Vladimir Putin pose in their traditional Vietnamese "Ao Dai" clothes yesterday in Hanoi at the end of the Asian-Pacific leaders (Apec) summit. PHOTO: AFP



Anti-US activists and supporters shout slogans yesterday against US President George W Bush during a demonstration in Bogor, West Java, where Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono will meet and entertain his US counterpart. PHOTO: AFP

## Chaos out of the gate for Democratic majority in US Congress

AFP, Washington

Infighting among US Democrats after their victory in the November 7 elections has led some to wonder if the party is up to the task of controlling Congress.

The first week of legislative work since the elections brought a personal defeat to incoming speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, who will become the first woman to be number three in the constitutional line of succession -- behind the president and the vice president.

While trying unsuccessfully to impose a close ally as her right-hand man, she gave her followers reason to doubt her political skills.

"Nancy Pelosi has managed to severely scar her leadership even before taking up the gavel as the new speaker of the House," The New York Times commented in an editorial. "The new majority -- led by a presumably wiser speaker -- must realise by now that intramural vendetta is hardly a substitute for productive government."

In spite of the lack of clarity of their legislative agenda and the limited powers granted them by the

US Constitution, congressional Democrats have received a mandate from US voters.

An opinion poll published Thursday revealed that 51 percent of Americans are counting on Democrats to take the initiative in leading the country as opposed to 29 percent who expect it from President George W. Bush.

With all eyes now on the upcoming 2008 presidential race, Democrats' ability to create a credible alternative to the Bush presidency will be crucial in convincing voters to allow them to take back the White House in two years.

For the moment, the Democrats, who will be sworn in in January, have two months to prepare for operating from the position of strength.

The problem, however, is that Democrats have campaigned throughout the country on the theme of change.

"They didn't have a detailed plan and they're now having to assemble one, and they have a small majority, so it's not like they can be very bold in what they propose," said Darrell West, professor at Brown University.

## Indonesian anti-Bush rallies pick up steam

REUTERS, Jakarta

Thousands of protesters ranging from militant youths to mothers carrying babies demonstrated across Indonesia against US President George W Bush yesterday, a day before he visits the world's most populous Muslim country.

Indonesia is a key regional ally for the United States in its "war on terror" and looks to America for trade and investment, but many Bush administration policies, especially in the Middle East, are unpopular here.

"Punish Bush the war criminal," "Bush Master Terrorist" and "Bush shii" read posters carried by several thousand Indonesians who marched to the presidential palace in Jakarta.

Several groups participated, including the militant Islamic Defenders Front (FPI).

"Essentially, we all agreed that Bush is a murderer in the eyes of Muslims across the world," FPI member Alnurdin told reporters as the protest tangled traffic on a hot and sultry day.

## 'CIA analysis finds no Iranian nuclear weapons drive'

AFP, Washington

A classified draft CIA assessment has found no firm evidence of a secret drive by Iran to develop nuclear weapons, as alleged by the White House, a top US investigative reporter said Saturday.

Seymour Hersh, writing in an article for the November 27 issue of the magazine The New Yorker released in advance, reported on whether the administration of Republican President George W. Bush was more, or less, inclined to attack Iran after Democrats won control of Congress last week.

A month before the November 7 legislative elections, Hersh wrote, Vice President Dick Cheney attended a national-security discussion that touched on the impact of Democratic victory in both chambers on Iran policy.

"If the Democrats won on November 7th, the vice president said, that victory would not stop the administration from pursuing a military option with Iran," Hersh

wrote, citing a source familiar with the discussion.

Cheney said the White House would circumvent any legislative restrictions "and thus stop Congress from getting in its way," he said.

The Democratic victory unleashed a surge of calls for the Bush administration to begin direct talks with Iran.

But the administration's planning of a military option was made "far more complicated" in recent months by a highly classified draft assessment by the Central Intelligence Agency "challenging the White House's assumptions about how close Iran might be to building a nuclear bomb," he wrote.

"The CIA found no conclusive evidence, as yet, of a secret Iranian nuclear-weapons programme running parallel to the civilian operations that Iran has declared to the International Atomic Energy Agency," Hersh wrote, adding the CIA had declined to comment on that story.

## China extends guarded support to India's N-energy quest

PTI, New Delhi

China has expressed guarded support to India's quest for civil nuclear energy and rejected perceptions that the growing relations between New Delhi and the US were aimed at containing it.

"Every country has the right to develop nuclear energy in any form, including nuclear power, to meet its development needs," Chinese Ambassador Sun Yuxi said in an interview ahead of President Hu Jintao's maiden visit to India.

Sun, however, said that objectives of non-proliferation should also be maintained and strengthened.

When referred to India's contention that it abides by all non-proliferation rules although it has not signed NPT, he said "anything which can strengthen non-proliferation effort should be welcomed by the international community."

He said Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon had recently apprised him about the issue and told him that India is trying to strengthen non-proliferation regime.

"I (would) like to take his word... If India is making effort, if any effort (is being made) to strengthen non-

proliferation, I agree," he said.

This is the clearest statement on India's quest for civil nuclear deal by China, which has so far remained vague on the issue.

The Chinese envoy, however, refused to comment on the Indo-US civil nuclear deal as it was a bilateral issue.

The remark is significant as China is being seen as one which could cause problems when India's case comes up in the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

Several American experts, including former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, recently said that China would ask why an exception is being made with regard to India.

Sun also rubbished the perception that growing relations between the US and India were aimed at containing China.

"It is only speculation, some thinking of legacies of the Cold War," he said.

Sun noted that US President George W Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had both said that development of the relations between the two countries are not targeted against any third country.

## Hu seeks to balance ties with India and Pakistan

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Hu Jintao will seek to balance his nation's relations with nuclear powered neighbours India and Pakistan when he begins back-to-back visits to the South Asian rivals today.

Hu will spend three days each in India and Pakistan on his first visit to both nations by any Chinese president in a decade.

Hu's first stop will be India, where he will hold talks with President Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other leaders while also visiting Mumbai and Agra.

"In their talks, the leaders will

map out the future direction of the relationship," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu told journalists.

"They will also show the world that the development of relations between China and India will not only provide opportunities to the two countries, but will also play a positive contribution to world peace, stability and development."

Since the end of the Cold War, when China and India viewed each other as adversaries, both capitals have worked to overcome long-standing suspicions.

These have often centred on New Delhi's concerns over China's

cozy relationship with Pakistan. Su Hao, a security expert at the China Foreign Affairs University, told AFP.

India has particularly bristled over Beijing's strong support for Pakistan's nuclear power industry and its deep military ties with Islamabad.

"(But) following the Cold War, China has focused on improving relations with all of its neighbours as China needs peaceful regional conditions for domestic economic growth," Su told AFP.

"To do this, China has had to earnestly adjust its relations with both India and Pakistan.

## World may have averted bird flu pandemic: Expert

AFP, Sydney

The world may have already averted a bird flu pandemic by widespread chicken culls and the isolation of infected humans, Australia's chief medical officer said in a report released Sunday.

But if a new flu virus did begin spreading rapidly among humans all the world's preparations might be shown to be insufficient, John Horvath wrote in the Medical Journal of Australia.

"It may be that the world has already averted an influenza pan-

demia by actions it has taken in response to H5N1, such as extensive culling of poultry and isolation of infected humans," he said.

"Yet all preparations may seem insufficient if the world comes face to face with a rapidly spreading novel virus like the one that emerged in 1918."

Scientists fear the H5N1 virus, which has spread from poultry to humans and killed more than 150 people worldwide, mainly in Asia, could mutate to become easily transmissible among people.

That could lead to a global flu

pandemic which could kill more than the tens of millions killed by the "Spanish Flu" in 1918.

Horvath noted that the changes in the world since previous pandemics, such as faster and cheaper international travel and more densely populated countries, would make it easier for disease to spread.

Leading immunologist Peter Doherty said in the same government-sponsored report that while some kind of pandemic outbreak was certain in the future researchers were divided over whether it would be caused by the H5N1 virus.

## Military build-up needed for 'territorial integrity' Says China

AFP, Hanoi

China yesterday said its rapid military build-up was needed to ensure the Asian giant's "territorial integrity", in a veiled reference to Taiwan.

"China is such a huge country and we are also faced with the question of national reunification," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao told reporters on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit here.

"We also have a large boundary, so we need an increase in military spending, and that is reasonable, I think."

Liu's comments came in response to an interview given Friday by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who told CNBC Asia that China's rapid military expansion "sometimes seemed

outsized" in comparison to its role in the region.

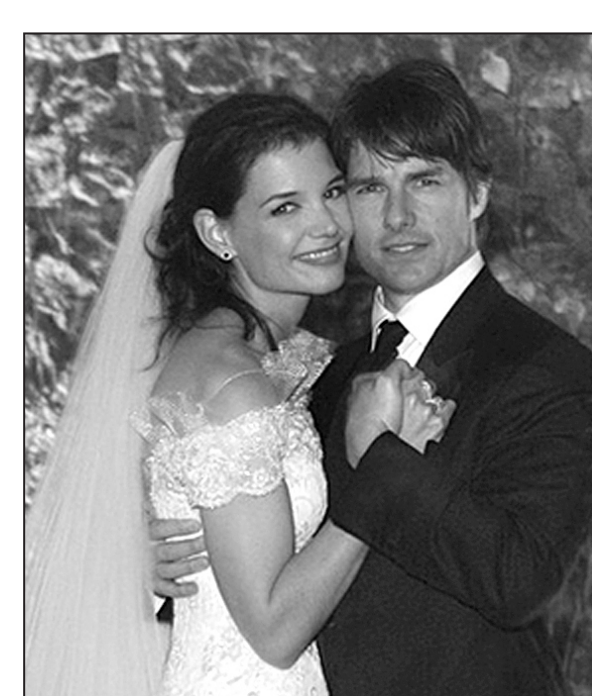
In the interview, Rice offered a list of US "concerns" about China -- its rapidly-growing economy, the value of the Chinese yuan, human and intellectual property rights and the size of the Asian giant's military.

"Those are the kinds of concerns we have. And of course there are concerns about Chinese military build-ups: it sometimes seemed outsized for China's regional role," she told CNBC Asia.

"Our increase is aimed at safeguarding territorial integrity and national security," Liu said.

"We hope to have the understanding of the American side."

China still regards Taiwan as part of its territory awaiting reunification, by force if necessary.



Actor Tom Cruise and actress Katie Holmes pose in their wedding attire on Saturday at the 15th-century Odescalchi Castle overlooking Lake Bracciano outside Rome in Italy. PHOTO: AP

## Cruise, Holmes tie the knot

AP, Bracciano

Officially, they got married in Los Angeles, but the spectacle of the wedding between Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes was here, in a 15th-century castle that evoked fairy tales and lit up with red, white and green fireworks for a cheering, celebrity-laden crowd.

There were fireworks inside, too, a "never-ending kiss" between the betrothed after they exchanged vows Saturday. The kiss lasted so long it caused guests to shout "stop, stop!" said Giorgio Armani, who attended the wedding and designed the outfits of the bride, the groom and their baby, Suri.

The couple flew out of Rome Sunday for a honeymoon in the Maldives, said Ciampino airport spokesman Adriano Franceschetti. The rest of the wedding party was due to fly to Los Angeles later in the day.

The ceremony was a lavish apex to perhaps the celebrity world's most closely watched relationship, proclaimed with Cruise's leap on Oprah Winfrey's couch, bestowed with the nickname "TomKat" and raised to a new level seven months ago when Holmes gave birth to their daughter.