

OIC urges US to lift sanction on Sudan, Iran & Libya

KUALA LUMPUR, June 28 : The head of a global Muslim grouping has called on the United States to end its economic sanctions against three member states, saying they pose a "direct threat" to Islamic security, reports AFP.

Ezzedine Laraki, secretary-general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), says the sanctions also impede economic and social development in Sudan, Iran and Libya.

Laraki, in his political report to foreign ministers of the 56-member OIC meeting here, says unilateral imposition of the sanctions "constitutes a direct threat to the common Islamic security."

"They are also aimed at destabilising the region and undermining the development

process," he says in a copy of the report obtained by AFP Wednesday.

The US imposed sanctions on Sudan in 1997 on the grounds that it supported terrorism and threatened neighbouring countries.

Laraki says the US D'Amato Law is unjust and will impede the development and investment planning of Iran and Libya, adversely affecting economic stability.

Under the law which took effect in August 1996, the US imposed sanctions on foreign companies which deal with Libya or Iran in the field of oil and natural gas and have investment contracts exceeding 40 million dollars in one year.

Laraki urges the OIC and the European Union to reject the law.

He says Israel is continuing development of its nuclear program and terms this "a major threat to the security of Islamic countries."

Laraki urges OIC members to work together to support the concept of nuclear weapons-free zones.

The secretary-general also describes French rule of Mayotte island off east Africa as "unjustified." He says the international community recognises the Comoros as an integrated territory of four islands including Mayotte.

Laraki says he hopes negotiations with French authorities will bring positive results.

Turning to Bosnia, Laraki says the OIC pins great hopes on the role of the International Court of Justice in prosecuting war criminals in the Balkans.

International



Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Conferences (OIC) Dr. Ezzedine Laraki (front row, 3rd R) and the chairman of the 27th Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers Syed Hamid Albar (front row, 2nd R) and other delegates pose for a group photo at the Palace of the Golden Horses in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Islamic Foreign Ministers stressed unity to face economic and political challenges but remain divided on candidates to lead the 56-member OIC.

— AFP photo

BRIEFLY

NZ PM sacks minister: New Zealand's Minister for Maori Affairs, Dover Samuels, was sacked Wednesday after becoming embroiled in a scandal over an alleged sexual relationship with an underage girl. AFP reports from Wellington.

Prime Minister Helen Clark said Samuels could not be effective in his job while "allegations, controversy and public debate swirl around him."

Red Army hijacker in Tokyo: Japanese police took former Red Army militant Yoshimura Tanaka into custody Wednesday for the first time since the hijacking of a Japan Airlines passenger jet in 1970. AFP reports from Tokyo.

National television showed Tanaka smiling and bowing deeply to a media scrum after landing at Tokyo-Narita airport from Thailand, from where he had been extradited. "Tanaka had already been arrested by Japanese police in Bangkok on suspicion of hijacking the Japan Airlines flight," said a Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department spokesman.

China executes 17 more: Another seventeen convicted drug traffickers have been executed in China, lifting to at least 45 the number of people killed for narcotics offences in the week surrounding international anti-drug day, according to state media. AFP reports from Beijing.



Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai (R) and Thai Finance Minister Tarrin Nimanahaeminda (L) listen to the speech from the opposition member during the first reading of the country budget 2001 at Parliament House yesterday. Thailand's largest opposition party staged a mass resignation yesterday in a bid to force the government to call an early election. The New Aspiration Party (NAP) said 50 of its 116 MPs, including leader Chavalit Yongchayudh, had quit and 41 planned to follow later in the day—the first of the new parliamentary session.

— AFP photo

Thai opposition MPs resign en masse
Bid to force govt call early polls

BANGKOK, June 28 : Thailand's largest opposition party staged a mass resignation today, in a bid to force the government to call an election, reports AFP.

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The leader of the second biggest opposition group, the Social Action Party (SAP), asked Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai to withdraw the budget bill which was due to be tabled later Wednesday.

SAP leader Suwit Khunkitti backed the NAP's view that the budget should not be passed so close to elections, which must

be held before November. "If this government fails to win the next election, the budget will be a fair accomplishment for the new government," he told parliament.

He said that demolition of the Babri Masjid was also a criminal act.

Basu also regretted that RSS functionaries were being installed at the helm of various institutions. He was replying to the discussion on budgetary demands of grants of the home (personnel) department in the assembly.

Playing Trinamool Congress for supporting the BJP, Basu regretted that some Congress legislators have joined TCM but inside the house they continued to function as Congress MLAs. "What can be more heinous act than this. These people have no character," Basu said.

CALCUTTA, June 28 : West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu yesterday accused the Vajpayee government of causing "great harm" to the country and said that BJP was trying to "divide the country on religious lines," reports PTI.

Lunching a frontal attack on the BJP in the state assembly, Basu said that Christians were attacked and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had to apologise for it.

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Sewage-loving bug can help clean environment

PARIS, June 28 : A bug found in sewage water has pointed the way to cleaning up tetrachloroethylene (PCE), a dangerous industrial compound that has become an environmental headache, the journal *Nature Biotechnology* reports in July's issue, reports AFP.

PCE, a suspected cause of cancer, is a colourless liquid solvent widely used in dry cleaning and metal degreasing, and also found in glues, polishes, pesticides and printing.

It does not dissolve in water, nor does it degrade when in contact with the air, meaning that the substance has to be expensively destroyed either by chemicals or incineration to stop it polluting the environment.

But an innovative way of cleaning up the hazard has been found by an international team of scientists from the University of Connecticut, South Korea's Jeonju University and the University of Milan.

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"The decision for talks will be taken by the high command of the opposition's Grand Democratic Alliance."

Military officials have said Musharraf, who seized power in a coup in October and suspended parliament, wants to meet "clean" politicians next week to discuss Pakistan's return to democracy.

But political and religious leaders said no invitations had been received and demanded Musharraf set out his agenda for the talks, touted as his first serious consultation with political leaders since the coup.

"It is still premature to say with whom they want to talk

and what is their definition of clean politicians," said Raza Rabbani, the deputy secretary general of Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party.

Ghafoor Ahmed, a central leader of Jamaat-i-Islami, said the party's central committee will decide how to respond to any invitation to a meeting with Musharraf.

"So far we have not been invited for talks," he said.

Former cricket hero and Pakistan Justice Party leader Inzamam Khan said "we will see what is the agenda" before deciding whether to participate.

Interior Minister Moiuddin Haider on Tuesday said Musharraf would start holding meetings with "clean" politicians next week but gave few details about what the talks would cover.

Musharraf has launched a major crackdown against corruption and has vowed to end the "sham democracy" of previous governments through far-reaching electoral reforms.

A Supreme Court ruling last month validated the coup but gave the general three years to complete his reforms and hold general elections.

It is unclear whether anyone from the former ruling party, the Pakistan Muslim League, will be invited to the proposed talks.

The PML is still being led by ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who is serving a life term for hijacking and terrorism and is also on trial for corruption.

Mars may have twice as much water beneath its surface
Albright pushes for Israel-Palestinian accord at summit

JERUSALEM, June 28 : Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak spelled out today the limits of a peace deal with the Palestinians ahead of a possible summit with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and US President Bill Clinton, reports AFP.

The theory is based on a comparison of the amount of deuterium, a heavier isotope of hydrogen, in a Martian meteorite discovered in the Antarctic, versus the amount found in the Martian atmosphere.

In evaporated water in the Martian atmosphere, the ratio of deuterium to hydrogen is five times greater than that found in water on Earth.

Hydrogen is lighter than deuterium, and scientists believed that over time, it escaped more quickly into the thin Martian atmosphere.

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majority of settlers will remain under our sovereignty in blocks of settlements."

Barak said 150,000 settlers in such blocks under Israeli sovereignty would be an imminent historical success.

Nearly 200,000 Jewish settlers, who strongly oppose giving large amounts of land to the Palestinians, currently live in some 150 settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Referring to press reports on how much land Barak would be prepared to hand over up to 92 per cent of the West Bank, and said the implementation of an agreement could only be discussed at a summit.

"I have very clear red lines," Barak said. "We will in no case return to the border of June 1967 when Israel seized the West Bank and east Jerusalem from Jordanian control.

Jerusalem will be united, there will be no foreign army west of the Jordan, and an absolute

majority of settlers will remain under our sovereignty in blocks of settlements."

Albright is in Israel and the Palestinian territories to assess the chances of a summit succeeding. The Palestinians say the gaps between the two sides are so wide they cannot be bridged.

Barak is also facing opposition to a summit from within his own coalition. The head of the National Religious Party, Yitzhak Levy, which has five seats in parliament, reiterated a threat Thursday to pull out if a summit were held.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright late Tuesday that Israel wanted to take part in a summit which would draw up a long-delayed framework agreement for a final peace deal can be forged.

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