INTERNÄTIONAL

The Daily Star

Bush urges Arafat to halt violence

region

Ari Fleischer said

exercise restraint

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush Thursday urged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to help break the latest cycle of Middle East violence. shortly before a car bomb tore through an Orthodox-Jewish Jerusalem neighbourhood.

Bush's telephone call to Arafat was his first since the US leader took office January 20 and ushered in a more hands-off approach to Washington's role in the peace process than the one embraced by his predecessor, Bill Clinton.

"The president reiterated our support for a just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians and he urged Chairman Arafat to help stop the violence and calm the situation," White House spokeswoman Mary Ellen Countryman said.

"The two of them discussed the peace process after Israel's election as well as the means to strengthen bilateral cooperation," senior Arafat

advisor Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP in Gaza City.

"It's another reminder of the need

to create a just and lasting peace in

the Middle East, to bring an end to

the cycle of violence" that has

claimed some 400 lives over four

months, White House spokesman

Richard Boucher said Washington

one woman injured, as "a cowardly

act of violence," but said both the

such as this," Boucher said

"There's no excuse or no iustifica-

"We do call on both sides to take

State Department spokesman

tion for any other course of action other than 100 percent effort against The White House later conterrorism." demned the attack, which sent

Boucher said US Secretary of tremors through Israel two days State Colin Powell, who spoke to the after hawkish leader Ariel Sharon Palestinian leader after the bombing, told him of the need to counsel was elected prime minister, calling it "another reminder" of the need to caution and prudence. forge a comprehensive peace in the

"Asking all the parties to take all the steps they can ... clearly encompasses an attitude, a request to take action, if there is action that can be taken in a case like this," he told reporters, describing the call.

Powell also spoke Thursday about the Middle East situation with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Tunisian President Zine el-Abidin Ben Ali, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Boucher said.

condemned the attack, which left "We want to avoid a cycle of provocation and counter provoca-Palestinians and Israelis needed to tion," he said. "We want the parties to take steps not only to avoid violence in general and take steps against terrorism." all steps they can to prevent acts



Israeli security men ask ultra-Orthodox Jews to stay away from the scene of the car bomb which exploded in the west Jerusalem neighbourhood of Beit Israel on Thursday. One woman was lightly injured in the explosion, just two days after the election of Ariel Sharon as Israel's prime minister.

Collapse of thousands of buildings in Gujarat quake India vows to get tough with corrupt architects, engineers

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Urban Development Minister Jagmohan is promising to get tough with the corrupt architects and engineers blamed for the collapse of thousands of buildings in the Guiarat earthquake

The straight-talking politician, a former administrator of the troubled state of Kashmir now dubbed "demolition man", has forged a reputation for ruthlessness by tearing down illegally-built houses in New Delhi.

He also ruffled feathers among the elite by kicking out senior politicians who had overstayed their tenure in government bungalows

And now he is turning his fire on those responsible for the shoddy standard of buildings in the western state of Gujarat which contributed to the tens of thousands of deaths in the huge January 26 quake.

Jagmohan is promising to present landmark legislation to parliament later this month aimed at ensuring engineers and architects can be held accountable to professional standards.

"Stringent action would include cancellation of licences of engineers for any wrong certification." the minister warned.

"The proposed law will only permit duly-registered and licensed engineers to prepare and submit structural drawings and plans to competent authorities and certify safe and proper constructions according to prescribed

Thaksin as PM

Thai parliament elects

norms." he said.

Government sources said Jagmohan decided to take on India's powerful construction lobby after most state administrations did not respond to his orders to change local municipal laws and continued flouting existing

"Once he sinks his teeth into a subject, the minister does not let go until he is satisfied," an official at Jagmohan's ministry told AFP, asking to remain anonymous.

Jagmohan, a trusted aide of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vaipavee, is looking to capitalise on anger over the unnecessary collapse of many modern buildings in the guake to railroad the legislation through parliament.

The quake measuring 7.9 on the Richter Scale razed more than 100,000 houses and killed at least 30,000 people. The value of the damage has been put at 4.5 billion dollars.

It also toppled 13 high-rise blocks, damaged 40 more and left huge fissures in 800 modern residential complexes in the state's commercial capital of Ahmedabad.

It has been noted that many of the traditional houses in the old part of Ahmedabad survived the temblor with minimal damage.

"There has been a serious lapse by those who have constructed these buildings ... Let the devastation be a case study for us to learn lessons," noted Jagmohan earlier this week

AP, Beijing

China to link

Tibet by train

China will move forward with a

decades-old plan to link mountain-

Engineers are conducting feasi-

CIA sees 'high risk' of an Indo-Pak war

AFP, Washington

US intelligence chiefs warned on Wednesday, they could not rule out new nuclear tests by India and Pakistan and pointed to an "unacceptably high" risk of war between the two neighbours

Both India and Pakistan have said they have no need to carry out repeats of their tit-for-tat tests in 1998 which sparked fears of a South Asian nuclear confrontation.

But George Tenet, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency said in prepared testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee that an escalation of the race for nuclear superiority on the subcontinent could not be ruled out.

"We still believe there is a good prospect of another round of nuclear tests," said Tenet, who added that India's military superiority over its rival in most areas meant Pakistan was the more reliant on its atomic capability

"I must report that relations between India and Pakistan remain volatile, making the risk of war between the two nuclear-armed adversaries unacceptably high," Tenet said.

"Their deep seated rivalry, frequent artillery exchanges in Kashmir, and short flight times for nuclear capable ballistic missiles

A maior humanitarian disaster is looming in Afghanistan with more people dying from hunger after decades of conflict and the worst drought in memory, UN officials

AFP, Geneva

million people, are being affected by warned on Thursday. drought, the United Nations said. "This is shaping up to be the worst crisis to hit Afghanistan since the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s." Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the

Taliban repeats offer to try Laden in Islamic country

AFP. Islamabad

he will be given a fair trial," spokes-Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia man Tahir Khushnood told AFP. "They are prepared to talk if the has reiterated its willingness to US is prepared to talk.' discuss sending indicted terrorist The United States has previously

Osama bin Laden for trial by Muslim clerics in an Islamic country, a Pakistani official said Friday. An interior ministry spokesman said the Islamic militia voiced its the bin Laden issue preparedness to consider such a Laden to stand trial for allegedly proposal in talks with visiting Pakistani Interior Minister

masterminding twin US embassy bombings in East Africa in 1998, but Moinuddin Haider in Afghanistan the Taliban insist he is a "guest" in this week "They are prepared to talk about Afghanistan and there is no evidence against him handing over Osama to a third

in Afghanistan: UN

media briefing

country ... if they are convinced that Washington has asked Pakistan to use its influence with the Taliban to secure bin Laden's extradition but Islamabad insists it is a matter for negotiations between the United States and Afghanistan.

rejected the idea, which the Taliban Pakistan is the militia's closest has suggested in the past as a way ally and one of only three countries of breaking the bitter deadlock over which recognise its unique brand of Islamic rule A US court has indicted bin

Khushnood said Pakistan was prepared to "mediate" between the Taliban and Washington on the third-party idea

but not on other matters.

for Afghanistan for 2001, it said.

Many Afghans already face a

'deadly situation" but the crisis, now

the hardest-hit, will "continue at

least for another year". Donini told

bordering on a famine for some of

India begins census AFP. New Delhi

India Friday launched one of the

world's biggest administrative exercises -- counting and charting the lifestyles of its billion-strong population. More than two million counters

Fridav more than a month after and administrators fanned out across India's 650,000 villages and an unprecedented parliamentary 5.500 towns and cities to carry out maiority. the first census for nearly a decade.

It is the most detailed census ever carried out in India. which is closing the gap on China's 1.3 billion-strong population, and the results will provide a wealth of information on the state of the nation

in the new millennium. "The process has started without any problems all over India. We will be constantly monitoring the exercise as it proceeds," D.G.Mitra, deputy registrar general of the

The census in the world's second most populous nation formally got underway with officials making the rounds of chief ministers and governors of India's 27 states and five administrative regions.

houses of President K.R.Naravanan and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee later in the

"We are maintaining the tradition by starting the census in this manner, but we will also be conducting the exercise simultaneously in

Mitra said. India officially passed the

Billionaire businessman Thaksin Shinawatra was installed as Thailand's 23rd prime minister national elections that handed him

house Speaker Uthai Pimchaichon was to visit the royal palace later King Bhumibol Adulyadej for his endorsement.

Abdurrahman travelled to his sup-

porters' heartland in East Java

Friday and told them confidently he

would live to fight another day and

Wahid also told a crowd of some

2,000 cheering fanatical followers in

the Al Anwar mosque in this seaside

town that he was preparing to arrest

10 people will be arrested and they

are big people, not little fish," Wahid

however urged his followers to calm

attacking and burning the offices of

"In the next three weeks at least

10 major figures in Jakarta.

that efforts to impeach him in

Jakarta would flop.

the 10 were.

13 killed a lavish celebration party was

ous Tibet with the rest of China by train, building what state media on Friday claimed would be the world's highest railroad Despite the engineering challenges and enormous cost, the Chinese government has approved the project to promote the remote Himalayan region's economic development and political integration with China, the official Xinhua News Agency said. Chinese President Jiang Zemin personally expressed support for the link, which Xinhua said two decades of economic reforms had finally

Thaksin Shinawatra Thaksin's appointment Friday finally ends a tumultuous aftermath to the elections, which were marred by widespread allegations of corruption and violent protests over vote-buying and ballot-box tamperabout 1,500 meters (5,000 feet) in altitude

Police. militants clash in Assam:

AFP, Guwahati

given China the ability to build. bility studies along the 1,118kilometer (693-mile) route, Xinhua said. Most of the railway would run above 4,000 meters (13,000 feet). That's almost three times the altitude of America's highest city, Denver, at

To complete the final formalities, Friday to submit Thaksin's name to

Once the royal command is signed, Uthai will deliver it to Thaksin's riverside mansion where

At least 13 people, including nine paramilitary police, were killed in clashes between the security forces Thaksin's only real opposition and tribal militants in India's north-Friday came from the Democrats. eastern state of Assam Friday, police said. Militants from the Dima Halim Daoga (DHD) group opened fire on a convoy in the Cachar Hill district, killing nine police and wounding three others, police spokesman P.K. Singha told AFP.

census, told AFP. Humanitarian disaster looming

They were also due to visit the

"It's one of the world's forgotten crises." said Antonio Donini, head of the Office for the Coordination of day. Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan.

villages and among slum dwellers,

Thaksin pledged to devote himself to the people of Thailand and to the members of the House of Representatives who voted by a margin of 340 to 127 to appoint him to the nation's top job. "To receive such an overwhelm-

AFP, Bangkok

ing majority means that I have to work tirelessly for this country people are waiting for me to solve their problems," he said.

He welcomed the landslide vote in the 500-seat lower house, where his three-party coalition was bolstered by a host of smaller parties who decided to back his nomination.

"I believe that most of the votes supporting me were cast in relection of people's desire to see change in this country, and they want me to

perform the duties of prime minister." he said Thai Rak Thai's alliance with the Chart Thai and Chart Pattana par-

ties gives Thaksin a 325-seat majority in the lower house, the biggest in the history of Thai democracy. With 248 seats in parliament,

Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) only narrowly missed out on securplanned

and aircraft all contribute to an unstable nuclear deterrence."

Thomas Fingar, acting assistant secretary of state of intelligence and research agreed with Tenet's assessment.

"Both states have said that they do not need to conduct additional nuclear tests, but another round is possible. If pressures in India prompted another nuclear test, Pakistan has said it will reciprocate," he said in testimony.

India, China move to end hostility AFP, New Delhi

India and China Thursday concluded a second round of security talks here by sharing "anxieties and worries" on a range of issues including regional security and nuclear proliferation, an official said.

Indian foreign ministry spokesman R.S Jassal said the security dialogue led by India's additional secretary T.C.A. Rangachari and Wang Yi, assistant minister at the Chinese foreign ministry, ended on a "forward-looking" note.

"It is in a spirit of friendship that the two sides discussed their anxieties and worries ... They discussed regional and international security concerns, disarmament and export control policies."

India last month successfully tested the Agni-II, which can be fired from a mobile platform and is capable of carrying a one-tonne nuclear warhead up to 2,500 kilometres -deep into Pakistani or Chinese territory.

China said it had noted the missile test and warned against any escalation of a South Asian arms race.

India in turn accuses China of providing nuclear and missile technology to its arch nuclear-rival Pakistan and is reported to have raised some of these concerns in the security dialogue.

Tensions over nuclear weapons and proliferation between India and China flared in mid-1998 when India carried out a series of underground nuclear tests and cited the perceived threat from China as justification

been pledged by donors out of the iournalists here 229 million dollars which United UN refugee agency, UNHCR, told a Nations agencies have requested

"It's really shaping up to be a

Donations were falling well short

potential major disaster." he added.

of what is required to stave off

disaster in a country where half the

estimated population, or about 12

So far 7.3 million dollars has



Supporters of Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid try to hit anti-riot policemen with a stick in front of former president Suharto's Golkar party office in Lamongan 40 kilometres west of Surabaya on Thursday. Thousands of Wahid supporters took to the street as legislators said they were trying to gather enough petition signatures to call for an emergency parliamentary session.

PHOTO: AFP

Indonesia is in worst condition since 1945: Megawati

10 'big' people to be arrested: Wahid

AFP, Jakarta

ment

Indonesian Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri on Fridav said the country was in its worst condition since independence in 1945 and lamented the growing climate of violence.

"We are now going through the worst times we have experienced in the last 56 years," the Detikcom online news service quoted Megawati as telling a national press day event audience in the town of Solo in Central Java.

"Especially since the 1997 (financial) crisis, problems have spread to other spheres such as politics, society and security, which is alarming," said Megawati, who also heads the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDIP), the largest party in parlia-

The daughter of the country's founding president Sukarno said she "strongly" opposed all kinds of violence.

"Violence should have not taken place in a modern democratic . country," she said.

Her comments came as alarm mounted in Jakarta against increasing violence by supporters of embattled President Abdurrahman Wahid in East Java province against attempts to force him to step down and hand power to Megawati.

But the vice president did not make it clear whether she was referring to the East Java violence or to the thousands who have died in the past two years, in separatist and communal violence in the provinces of Aceh, Irian Jaya and the Maluku islands

Singha said the ambush happened around 325 kilometres south of the state capital Guwahati.

"A two-vehicle convoy was on its way to Guwahati when a group of militants fired indiscriminately from a hilltop," said Singha, police chief of North Cachar Hill district.

In a separate clash, the security forces shot dead four Kuki tribal militants in the adjoining Karbi Anglong district, he said.

Thursday's attacks involved two of the smaller tribal militant groups fighting against Indian-rule in the northeastern region which has large oil, tea and timber resources

Ex-Malaysian said. He gave no indication of who opposition leader Joking and ebullient, Wahid convicted on the fury which has seen them sedition charge the opposition Golkar party through-

AP, Kuala Lumpur

A former opposition leader was convicted Fridav on a sedition charge of provoking racial discord in a speech during Malaysia's bitterly fought general elections in 1999.

Marina Yusof, vice president of the National Justice Party at the time, was fined 5,000 ringgit (dlrs 1,315) but was spared from prison for accusing the ruling party of sparking racial riots between ethnic Malay Muslims and Chinese in 1969 that killed hundreds. The maximum penalty could have been three years in prison

Marina allegedly made the remarks against the United Malays National Organization, led by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, at an opposition rally in the northern town of Butterworth ahead of the November 1999 elections.

Butterworth Sessions Court Judge Siti Mariah Ahmad ruled Friday that Marina, who quit politics last year, made the comments to provoke minority Chinese against Malays, the dominant group in this Southeast Asian nation of 22 million people.

Victory of Sharon poses major challenges for Bush

IPS. Washington

Israeli rightwing leader Aariel Sharon's smashing defeat of Prime Minister Ehud Barak in Monday's elections poses major challenges to the new administration in Washington DC which has not even assembled its Mideast policy team.

So far, the administration of President George W Bush has confined itself mainly to statements urging restraint on Israelis and Palestinians, a message which Secretary of State Colin Powell is expected to convey rsonally when he travels to the region later this month.

But, despite the volatility of the situation on the ound, the administration is likely to wait until Sharon actually puts together a government that will indicate vhat be intends to do about the stalled peace process, if anything at all, according to analysts here.

The stakes, however, couldn't be higher for an administration, which assailed Bill Clinton for focusing too narrowly on the Palestinian Israeli conflict at the pense of US interests in the oil-rich Gulf region

US officials and independent analysts agree that Sharon's election will necessarily raise tensions in the

region and make it far more difficult for Bush to persuade Washington's Arab allies to co-operate in maintaining, let alone tightening, the 10-year-old sanctions against

"In order to do that, they need Arab co-operation of a time when Arab public opinion is going in the opposite direction," according to Shibley Telhami, a Mideast specialist at the Brooking Institution here. If violence flares up again between Israelis and Palestinians as a result of Sharon's election, he says, the growing gap on Iraq policy between Washington and its traditional Arab friends in the Gulf will surely grow wider.

Ideally for administration here. Sharon will succeed in his initial appeals to the defeated Labour Party to form a national unity government.

Such a move especially if coup-led with the naming of someone like former prime minister Shimon Peres as foreign minister, could at least offer some hope for reviving a peace process against which Sharon has campaigned in the past.

But analysts here rate the chances of a national unity government, let alone one with a commitment to guickly resume peace talks, as fairly low especially given the infighting in the Labour Party which is likely touched off by Barak's resignation.

"A national unity government is unlikely," according to Philip Gordon, another analyst at Brookings who worked on Middle East policy in Clinton's National Security Council. And without such a government, the notion that serious peace talks could resume" is practicallv nil." he said.

Barring an accord with labour, the greatest fear is here is that Sharon may form a narrow coalition of rightwing parties, which will not only make it much harder to re-start talks with the Palestinians, but could also spur more extremist elements to take actions, such as seizing land for new settlements or occupying buildings in East Jerusalem that would be certain to provoke maior new violence.

, "How will he restrain them?" Telhami asked rhetorically while noting that extremist parties could threaten to bring down Sharon's government

Any outbreak of major violence, according to Telhami, will strengthen more-militant elements on the Palestinian side and weaken Arafat whose ability to control popular outrage against Israel has fallen sharply

since last summer's failed negotiations at the US presidential retreat at Camp David.

And if Sharon, whose nickname is "the bulldozer." responds with severe repression, or worse, orders Israeli troops back into towns which had been handed over to the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo Accords, the reaction in Arab countries could be extremely harmful to US interests in the region gener-

The risk is very real, according to experts here. "We know Ariel Sharon guite well, too well in some cases" former US Ambassador to Israel told the Washington Post. "We've seen his absolute dedication to force in solving problems."

Despite the unprecedented margin by which Sharon defeated Barak, most analysts here agree that the 72year-old former general does not have a popular mandate for killing off the peace process once and for all. This is a rejection of Barak personally," said Telhami," it is not a rejection of the peace process or even the con cessions made by Barak to the Palestinians.

out East Java, vowing to defend him Meanwhile, embattled President with the "last drop" of their blood.

billion mark on May 11 last year and

ity that would have allowed it to rule in its own right.

it is expected to surpass China in