



Mori survives censure vote

Embattled Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori on Wednesday survived a motion of censure in parliament, but his ruling party openly kept up the debate on elections to choose his successor.

The ruling coalition, led by Mori's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), voted down the motion in the parliamentary upper house, an official said.

"The motion was rejected, with 105 votes for and 138 against the censure," the parliamentary official told AFP.

The censure vote was tabled on Tuesday by the four main opposition parties and a group of independent lawmakers, citing the premier's mismanagement of a submarine tragedy off Hawaii in February that left nine Japanese dead.

Momoedonu sworn in as Fiji PM

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News of the appointment came after deposed prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry was formally dismissed as the first step by newly reappointed President Josefa Iloilo in the country's return to constitutional rule.

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AFP, Suva

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Revival of Indo-Pak talks on Kashmir tops Annan's agenda

UN Secretary General arrives in Delhi today

AFP, New Delhi

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is due to arrive in India today for a three-day visit aimed at pushing forward a resumption of the stalled Indo-Pakistan dialogue over Kashmir.

India is the last leg of the South Asian tour that has taken the UN chief to Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

While Annan is expected to avoid delving too deeply into India and Pakistan's long-running territorial dispute over Kashmir, he will stress the need for a revival of bilateral talks frozen since the Kargil border conflict in Kashmir in 1999.

A 1948 UN resolution envisages a self-determination referendum in Kashmir, but India has refused to allow a plebiscite, insisting that Kashmir is an integral part of its territory.

Annan's clarification in Islamabad that the resolution could not be imposed on either country was taken in India as a de facto endorsement of New Delhi's stance on Kashmir, which also rules out any third-party interference.

"A visit by a UN secretary general is always a very important one, although I don't see any burning issues which bring him here," said former foreign secretary Salman Haider.

"He will certainly say India and Pakistan should start talking again. It was a clearly a very considered line which he took in Islamabad," Haider said.

Muslim majority Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan in 1947 but remains claimed by both. A Muslim separatist rebellion on the Indian side has claimed more than 34,000 lives since 1989.

Analysts said India would be expecting a pat on the back for taking the unilateral initiative of suspending counter-insurgency operations against Kashmir militant groups back in November.

Pakistan responded by withdrawing troops from the tense border and calling for a three-way dialogue including Kashmiri leaders, but New Delhi has refused to hold direct talks until Pakistan stops backing "cross-border terrorism" -- a charge Islamabad denies.

Kashmir's main political separatist alliance -- the All Party Hurriyat Conference -- has sent a senior representative to New Delhi in the hope of securing a meeting with Annan.

It will be Annan's second visit to India and he is scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and Defence Minister George Fernandes, as well as calling on President K.R. Narayanan. The visit has a significant business component, with Annan due to address India's main industry lobbies in Delhi and the southern city of Hyderabad.



Activists from the National Akali Dal burn an effigy of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee during a demonstration near Parliament yesterday. The demonstrators were calling for the BJP government to resign in the wake of a damaging arms bribery scandal implicating top-level politicians, including the ruling party BJP president Bangaru Laxman.

Indonesia urges US to lift ban on military aid

AFP, Washington

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab on Tuesday called on the United States to lift a ban on military aid, warning the restriction had crippled his government's battle against separatism.

A day after meeting top officials including Secretary of State Colin Powell, Shihab said it was time for US-Indonesian relations to move on from the trauma caused by East Timor's bloody struggle for independence.

Shihab told a major conference on Indonesia-US ties at the US Congress that "bilateral military cooperation" must be normalised.

"The suspension of US military assistance to Indonesia has resulted in the curtailment of the Indonesian military's ability to help the National Police in emergency situations," he said.

"It has eroded the capability of Indonesia to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity -- when it is to the interest of the United States and the Asia-Pacific region that such sovereignty and territorial integrity be effectively protected."

US military aid was suspended by the administration of former president Bill Clinton, after Indonesia's armed forces were

implicated in a storm of violence which followed East Timor's vote for independence in 1999.

The US embassy in Jakarta was last week forced to issue a statement clarifying the US stance after the Washington Post wrote in an editorial that some members of the new Bush administration were mulling renewing help.

The military, the paper said, would be a "decisive power broker" if, as many fear, the battle over President Abdurrahman Wahid's struggle to stay in power turned violent.

Powell on Monday told Shihab that any US role in Indonesia's internal political situation was "unthinkable," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

In a speech to the US Indonesia Society, Shihab called on Washington to ensure that its policy towards Indonesia, which he called the world's "third largest democracy," complied with geopolitical realities and was not "media driven."

"The political community on both sides of the relationship need to appreciate more that strong and stable US-Indonesian relations is in the national interests of both sides."

The stress on national interest appeared to be aimed at the new US administration and at campaigners

who oppose military aid to Indonesia on the grounds that the armed forces are involved in grievous human rights abuses.

As well as his meetings on Monday with Powell, Shihab also met National Security Advisor Condeleezza Rice and Deputy Secretary for Defense Paul Wolfowitz.

His visit to Washington coincides with mounting concern here over increasing popular protests in Jakarta aimed at toppling Wahid and raging ethnic and sectarian strife threatening Indonesian national unity.

There have also been several months of tense relations between Jakarta and Washington.

In its annual human rights report, the US State Department last month said the government had been "ineffective" in tackling rampant ethnic and religious violence, despite making progress towards accountable politics.

And in an earlier upset, Indonesia bristled last year when the US ambassador to Jakarta Robert Gelbard engaged in a war of words with senior Indonesian officials who objected to his criticism of the government.

Anticoagulant drug can prevent spread of cancer: Study

AFP, Washington

Heparin, a common anticoagulant drug, can help prevent the spread of cancer, researchers said in a study published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The study by researchers at the University of California, San Diego, found the drug, delivered intravenously, works by interfering with interactions between platelets (a type of normal blood cell) and specific molecules on cancer cell surfaces, preventing them from spreading to new areas of the body.

"The notion of using anticoagulants to inhibit metastasis is not new. However, our new findings suggest that heparin therapy to prevent the spread of cancer in humans should be revisited, with a completely new paradigm in mind," said the study's author, Ajit Varki.

Studies in the 1960s and 1970s showed heparin stemmed the spread of cancer when delivered intravenously, but research into the subject fell out of favour when follow-up studies were unable to repeat the results with anticoagulants taken orally.

Published Wednesday, the new study shows how heparin works and explains why the earlier trials failed.

US renews sanctions on Iran, warns Russia over arms sales

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush on Tuesday renewed sanctions barring US trade and investment in Iran as Washington warned Moscow that possible arms sales to Tehran could have "serious ramifications" for US-Russian ties.

"The actions and policies of the Government of Iran continue to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States," Bush said in a statement on the sanctions, which would have expired Thursday.

Iran supports international terrorism, aims to undermine the Middle East peace process, and is working to acquire weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them, he said.

The sanctions, imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, mainly affect US petroleum companies, barring them from investing in Iran's energy sector.

Separately, White House spokeswoman Mary Ellen Countryman said that Russian President Vladimir Putin's statement Monday that Moscow is poised to expand nuclear and

weapons cooperation with Tehran "doesn't help bilateral relations."

Washington fears the new relationship, coupled with Putin's adamant defence of Russia's decision to scrap an agreement with the United States barring arms sales to Iran, will help Tehran develop nuclear weapons.

Bush "is concerned about any sales -- in particular of missiles -- by Russia to Iran, and the US has made those concerns known through the State Department," presidential spokesman Ari Fleischer added.

At the State Department, spokesman Richard Boucher said Washington was still not clear about what type of weapons and other sensitive technology Putin was referring to when he said Russia was prepared to help Iran with "defensive weapons."

But he told reporters that any Russian sale to Iran of advanced conventional weapons, missiles or missile technology would draw a strong US response.

"The first important thing is to find out what they mean by 'defensive' weapons, what they intend to sell, and whether they have any contracts," said the spokesman.

Four German tourists kidnapped in Egypt

AFP, Luxor, Egypt

An Egyptian tour guide kidnapped four Germans here in a bid to trade them for his two sons overseas in the custody of his estranged German wife, officials said Tuesday.

In Berlin, German Foreign Ministry officials said that regular contact had been established with the hostage-taker, who they said was armed with a pistol and grenades, and that a crisis cell had been set up.

Egyptian security officials said they were in telephone contact here with the kidnapper and were urging him to surrender on a promise that the foreign ministry would try to bring his children back, police said.

They added that the hostage taker was holed up in a home in the Kamak neighbourhood of Luxor with the four hostages, who were seized on Monday.

The guide, Ibrahim Said Mussa, said earlier when AFP reached him on his mobile phone that he wanted to regain custody of his two sons who were overseas with his estranged wife. "All I want is my children," he said.

"My wife left nine months ago with my children: Karim, who is eight, and Rami, who is three and a half," he said.



Charred vehicles seen on the al-Udairi desert training range, 50 km south of the Iraqi border, where a stray 500-pound bomb dropped by a US Navy F/A-18 fighter jet killed six military personnel -- five Americans and one New Zealander -- and wounded at least five others on Tuesday during a close air support exercise.

Inquiry launched into US bombing in Kuwait

AFP, Kuwait City

The United States and Kuwait on Tuesday set up a joint panel to probe how a live-fire exercise near the Iraqi border ended in the tragic deaths of six soldiers bombed by a US warplane.

"A joint US-Kuwaiti investigation committee has been set up to investigate the accident," Kuwait's Defence Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak al-Sabah told reporters outside parliament.

A stray 500-pound bomb dropped by a US Navy F/A-18 fighter jet killed six military personnel -- five Americans and one New Zealander -- and wounded at least five others Monday during a close air support exercise in the northern Kuwaiti desert.

"The accident will not alter joint Kuwaiti-US manoeuvres. These will continue," Sheikh Jaber stressed. "Accidents during exercises are not abnormal. Even during the 1991 Gulf War, coalition forces hit each other."

"All but three, one Kuwaiti and two Americans, of the injured have been discharged from hospital, and two injured Americans were taken to Europe for treatment," Sheikh Jaber said, adding that he and Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Abdullah al-Sabah had both visited the

hospitalised soldiers.

The US embassy in Kuwait said US investigators will arrive in the emirate "this week", but it could not give an exact date.

"US Central Command has appointed an accident investigation board to determine the facts and circumstances of the accident and to provide conclusions and recommendations," it said.

New Zealand's defence minister, Mark Burton, said Tuesday that Washington had agreed to a New Zealand observer during its investigation after Special Air Services (SAS) Major John McNutt was killed in the accident.

Burton said his government was awaiting an "urgent explanation as to how a large bomb could be dropped in an area of a training range where observers were based."

The troops were taking part in a coalition exercise -- usually held four times a year -- on the al-Udairi desert training range, 50 km south of the Iraqi border.

The US Central Command in Tampa, Florida, which is responsible for US forces in the Gulf, said it was a routine close air support exercise in which ground and airborne forces call in air strikes by fighter aircraft.

Yugoslav forces enter Kosovo buffer zone

AFP, Miratovac, Yugoslavia

For the first time in nearly two years, Yugoslav security forces started deploying in part of a tense buffer zone with Kosovo early Wednesday, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

Soldiers took up positions in Sector C of the buffer zone near the southern Serbian town of Presevo.

No incidents or unusual activities were reported as the deployment began, officials said.

They gave no indication of the number of troops to be deployed in the zone, although Milovan Coguric of the Yugoslav Defence ministry told AFP the number of troops deployed would be sufficient "for our task to be executed safely."

Reporters estimated that several hundred soldiers and policemen were involved in the operation.

The forces entered a section of territory where the eastern tip of Kosovo, southern Serbia and Macedonia meet, in line with an agreement signed Monday with the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo.

The five-km buffer zone that separates Kosovo from the rest of Serbia was imposed by NATO in

June 1999 at the end of its war with Yugoslavia. Since then, only lightly-armed Serbian police have been allowed in.

Several security units, some in jeeps, started from the village of Miratovac, at the edge of the buffer zone between Serbia proper and Kosovo province, taking up positions as agreed upon the Monday accord between Belgrade and KFOR.

Yugoslav army chief of staff General Nebojsa Pavkovic and General Vladimir Lazarevic, commander of the 3rd army in charge of southern Serbia as well as a number of high-level police officials were present in the area around Miratovac.

The redeployment of the Yugoslav troops followed the NATO-brokered ceasefire accord between Belgrade and ethnic Albanian guerillas operating within the zone and fighting for the last year to break away from Serbia.

Under the accord, Yugoslav troops can deploy in the southern tip of the buffer zone the rebels control, near southern Serbian town of Presevo, where Kosovo, southern Serbia and Macedonia meet.

70 dead as ore mine collapses in Congo

REUTERS, Kigali

At least 70 miners in the Democratic Republic of Congo were killed over the weekend after several tunnels in their ore mine collapsed, officials in the rebel-held town of Goma said yesterday.

Officials said the accident at the remote mine, located about 50 km (30 miles) northwest of Goma on the Rwandan border, occurred on Saturday. But details only came to light today.

"The total number of people (who died) when the mine collapsed is confirmed to be 70," Jean Pierre Kisanga, a spokesman for the rebel Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), said in a telephone interview from Goma.

He said the victims were working in several tunnels when they collapsed, possibly due to heavy rains that have been pounding the area.

"Exhuming (the bodies) is a challenging task because they were buried in the tunnels which are not easily accessible," Kisanga said.

Most of the victims were young men, some of them local farmers, who see mining as a way of getting rich in a region rife with war and poverty.