

# Bush okays arms package for Taiwan but defers request for Aegis radar system

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush has agreed to sell Taiwan submarines and destroyers but not the state-of-the-art Aegis radar system Taipei wanted and Beijing warned would cripple Sino-US ties, congressional sources said Monday.

The two officials, speaking on condition of anonymity after the White House briefed lawmakers, said Bush had deferred but not denied the Aegis request.

"It's unclear whether they (Taiwan) have been cleared for Aegis in the future," said one source.

Taipei will get eight electric/diesel submarines, to be made in the United States but not of US design; four modernised Kidd-class destroyers; 12 P-3 Orion "sub-hunter" airplanes; and self-propelled artillery, the sources said.

Even though the list omits Aegis, which China worries could anchor a theatre missile defence shield over what it considers a renegade province, it is likely to further strain Sino-US ties already frayed by a bitter feud over a downed US spy plane.

Beijing warned Monday that Bush could endanger rapidly expanding US trade ties with his decision, in the latest round of its sabre-rattling campaign against US arms sales to Taiwan.

"The United States will definitely lose more than it will gain if it continues to sell weapons to Taiwan," said a commentary published in the country's leading English-language newspaper, the China Daily.

Approving the sale of Aegis would have a "devastating impact" on relations, said a spokesman for China's embassy here, Zhang Yuanyuan.

US officials stressed that Bush made his decision based on a 1979 law requiring Washington to meet the defence needs of the island, which Beijing considers a breakaway province, and not as a result of tensions since he took office January 20.

"This is an annual occurrence that took place last year, it'll take place next year. It's a part of an ongoing obligation of the United States government to help Taiwan secure its defensive needs," said White House spokesman Ari Fleischer.

Despite the still simmering spy plane row, sharp exchanges on human rights and the detention of several US-based scholars in China, the decision "is not in any different context," he said.

The decision -- which comes one year after then-president Bill Clinton also deferred Aegis sale -- comes at an especially tender time for relations between Beijing and Washington.

Since Bush took office, vowing a tough line towards Beijing, relations have seriously degenerated, culminating in the crisis sparked when a US EP-3 spy plane collided April 1 with a Chinese fighter jet, whose pilot was killed.

The crippled US surveillance plane, packed with sensitive intelligence equipment, made an emergency landing on south China's Hainan island, where authorities held the 24-person crew for 11 days.

## US arms package for Taiwan

Taiwan will be offered the right to purchase:

- Four 1970s vintage Kidd class destroyers equipped with upgraded radar systems. Eight diesel-powered submarines
- Up to 12 P-3 Orion subhunting surveillance planes.
- The Palladin self-propelled artillery system.
- MH-53E minesweeping helicopters.
- AAV7A1 amphibious assault vehicles.
- MK-48 Mod-4 torpedoes, but not the most advanced version.
- Submarine-launched and surface-launched Harpoon missiles.



The older Kidd class destroyers (top) and MH-53 helicopters are among the weaponry Taiwan will be offered for purchase.

# SC deals another blow to Musharraf

Parts of anti-corruption ordinance described as 'repugnant'

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court has dealt its second blow to military ruler General Pervez Musharraf in as many weeks, describing parts of his draconian anti-corruption ordinance as "repugnant."

In a judgement on petitions challenging aspects of the military regime's National Accountability Ordinance, the five-member bench ruled that some of its harshest provisions were contrary to law.

The ordinance was introduced in the days following Musharraf's bloodless coup in October 1999, when the military swept aside the Nawaz Sharif government and vowed to stamp out rampant corruption.

Dozens of politicians and senior bureaucrats have been imprisoned under the ordinance, which has been criticised by human rights

groups and political parties here as little more than a blunt tool to silence the opposition.

Among other things, it allows the special National Accountability Bureau (NAB) police force to detain suspects for 90 days without charge, puts the onus of proof on the accused and carries punishments including a 21-year ban on holding public office.

But the court's 342-page judgement proposed a series of amendments in line with constitutional guarantees of justice and fundamental rights.

In particular, it said the "prolonged detention of an accused without sufficient cause... is a violation of personal liberties of citizens guaranteed under the constitution."

It said provisions that detainees could not be released without the written consent of the NAB director was "repugnant to the concept of

independence of the judiciary."

The Supreme Court said people should not be held in remand for more than 15 days at a time or disqualified from public office for more than 10 years. Requests to hold a suspect for longer periods should have court approval.

But it also held that the burden of proof lay with the accused if the state made a reasonable case before the accountability court.

"It was held that placing the burden of proof on an accused... may not be bad in law in its present form but would be counterproductive when considered in juxtaposition with the principal of good governance," it said.

The court was answering 15 petitions, including one from deposed prime minister Sharif who was convicted of hijacking and tax evasion and exiled to Saudi Arabia last year.

Sharif's council, Aitezaz Ahsan, said the judgement was "significant" but fell short of expectations.

Independent advocate Nasser Ahmed said "the rigour of the law has been curtailed."

An annual US State Department survey of global human rights performance released in February criticised Musharraf for subjecting members of previous governments to "incommunicado detention."

Last week the Supreme Court accused Sharif and his cronies of rigging the corruption trial and 1999 conviction of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, Musharraf's most vocal critic.

Benazir, who has lived in exile since before the conviction, will be retried and faces other corruption allegations. But she has said the court has vindicated her and opened the way for her return to lead the democracy movement.

# 100 illegal immigrants arrested in UK

AFP, London

British police arrested more than 100 people in a series of pre-dawn raids against a suspected international operation smuggling illegal immigrants into the country.

The round-up, code-named Operation Leighton, is believed to be the largest of its kind in Britain. Hundreds of police were involved in swoops on 28 homes in Southampton, on England's south-east coast.

They also stopped vans carrying suspected illegal immigrant workers, several hundred of whom were later being quizzed by police. Many of them are said to be from Poland.

Police believe the Newtown area of Southampton may be at the centre of an international operation which smuggles people into Britain, and may itself be being run by illegal immigrants who arrived some time ago.

The suspected illegal immigrants are believed to have been working in the packaging and agricultural industries while staying in Southampton.

Officials said the immigration racket organisers could be withholding wages as payment for getting immigrants into Britain.

Police spokeswoman Susan Rolling said there were two elements to the raids -- tackling people-smuggling, then helping the illegal immigrants.

The illegal immigrants arrested Tuesday who want to return home could be deported within three days, although they have the right to apply for asylum.

## 'Mandela, Chirac most humorous world leaders'

REUTERS, United Nations

Secretary-General Kofi Annan told a youth magazine he considered former South African President Nelson Mandela and French President Jacques Chirac the most humorous world leaders he had met.

In an interview published in the May issue of Nickelodeon magazine, Annan was asked which world leader had the best sense of humour. "Nelson Mandela has a good sense of humour. And so does Jacques Chirac," he replied.

He was also asked in the interview, headlined "Kofi Break," what country he would like to see in addition to "some 90" nations he had visited.

"Mongolia. Historically it's interesting it's where Genghis Khan came from," Annan said, referring to the 13th century Mongol conqueror whose empire spanned from China to Europe.

# 12 more killed in Bihar poll violence

AP, Patna

Large-scale violence and vote fraud marred the fourth stage of local elections in India's most lawless state, where at least 12 people were killed on Monday, police said.

Those killed included two magistrates and one contestant, Press Trust of India news agency said. Details were not immediately available.

As many as 55 people have been killed so far in Bihar's five-phase staggered polls, which began on April 11. The voting will be completed by April 30.

Home Secretary UN Panjari said 33 people were injured in violence and more than 1,000 people were arrested for trying to capture voting stations and stuff the ballot boxes in seven districts.

Police seized 145 crude bombs, 14 guns, 31 locally made pistols and 307 bullets from those arrested.

# Lankan army on red alert as Tigers pull out of truce

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's police and army were placed on red alert yesterday as Tamil Tiger rebels withdrew from their one-sided truce, dimming prospects of early peace talks, officials said.

Security forces were asked to prepare for attacks by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the embattled northern and eastern regions as well as in the capital Colombo, military officials here said.

The army did not lower the guard before, but with the new development, the Tigers may try to escalate attacks to make a point, a military field commander in the north of the island said by telephone.

He said troops manning defence lines were bracing for rebel assaults

while random checks in populated areas were being stepped up to prevent bomb attacks by the Tigers.

The LTTE said in a statement Monday that government forces had taken advantage of their unilateral truce and killed more than 160 rebels and wounded more than 400 since the cease-fire was called by them on Christmas Eve.

The LTTE also launched a scathing attack against the US, Britain, European nations and neighbouring India for not pressuring the Sri Lankan government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga to reciprocate the unilateral truce.

The government had earlier said that a timetable for Norwegian-backed peace talks with the LTTE would be announced by the end of this month.

However, with the sudden withdrawal of the LTTE from the truce,

political analysts and diplomats here said they feared the process may be further delayed.

The Tigers said they had not carried out attacks in Colombo in the past four months and had restored "relative stability" outside the island's embattled north-eastern regions.

"While our unilateral cease-fire provided the basis for hope and optimism and brought four months of peace and stability to the Sinhala south, the same period has brought war, violence, death and destruction among the Tamils in the northeast," the LTTE said.

The Tigers had warned last month that they would pull out of the truce unless the government stopped its offensive and reciprocated their ceasefire.

# Israel mulls peace plan, pledges to ease blockade

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel signalled yesterday that a Jordan-Egypt peace plan could help rescue talks with the Palestinians, and pledged to ease the choking blockade on the occupied territories after security chiefs agreed to work to restore calm after seven months of bloodshed.

The fourth version of this plan which has been presented to us could allow us to go into a discussion on fundamental issues," Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told Israeli public radio.

He said the first three versions of the proposal aimed at quelling the violence that has cost more than 480 lives were "not acceptable to us."

According to the Israeli media, the plan calls for steps to cease the violence and confidence-building measures, including a halt to Israel's settlement activities in occupied territory, a lifting of the blockade and a troop withdrawal to positions before the outbreak of the violence in late September.

The Palestinians would guarantee a renewal of security cooperation and end incitement to violence.

After a period of calm, negotiations would resume on a final status agreement, based on "progress" achieved during previous rounds, with a deadline of one year.

At a US-hosted meeting Monday night, Israeli and Palestinian security officials agreed to reduce violence and improve cooperation following a rash of bomb attacks that had threatened to derail efforts to end the fighting.

Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer said he was "encouraged" by the outcome, although previous such encounters failed to achieve much progress on the ground.

Israel, under its headline Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, last week unleashed a series of heavy bombardments of the Gaza Strip and briefly reoccupied Palestinian land in response to Palestinian mortar attacks on Israeli targets.

The conclusions are good but the problem is the implementation on the ground. Contrary to all the experts, Mr. Arafat controls the situation on the ground," Ben Eliezer told army radio, speaking of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

"It was enough for him to lift a

finger to halt the mortar fire because he understood that it harms his image and his international standing to be associated with terrorist activities."

But a senior security official was quoted by both radio stations as saying it was not possible to reach peace in the next decade with Arafat because he "has not abandoned the anti-Israeli strategy he adopted in the 1960s."

"He has given the impression to Islamic terrorist organisations such as Hamas and Jihad that they can continue their attacks in Israeli territory," the unnamed official added.

The armed wing of Hamas, the main Palestinian Islamic movement, on Monday claimed a suicide bomb attack in the Israeli town of Kfar Saba the day before that killed the bomber and an Israeli doctor and wounded dozens more.

Israel was on alert for more such attacks ahead of the country's independence day on Thursday, amid fiery speeches from an Islamic conference in Iran calling for an unrelenting war.

# Three security personnel killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Three Indian security personnel were killed and 21 people injured in separatist-linked violence in Kashmir yesterday.

An Indian soldier was killed and three others wounded when suspected militants attacked a camp of the Rashtriya Rifles -- the Indian army's counter-insurgency wing -- on the outskirts of Sopore, 50 km north of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar.

The area was immediately cordoned off and a search operation launched, a police spokesman said.

In another incident, two members of the paramilitary Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) -- one of them an officer -- were killed when their vehicle drove over a landmine in Vailoo village, 65 km south of Srinagar.

Twelve ITBP personnel and three civilians were also injured in the explosion.

The vehicle was on its way to Anantnag, after evacuating two personnel injured in another blast which took place at Badiyar village in Kokernag, 80 km south of Srinagar.

Suspected militants also triggered a landmine in Pampore, 15 km south of Srinagar, injuring one ITBP member.

# Japan to provide \$2.5m for Palestinians

DPA, Tokyo

Japan announced yesterday it will give almost 300 million yen (2.5 million dollars) to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to help Palestinians suffering economically as a result of the conflict with Israel.

Foreign Minister Yohei Kono informed the cabinet of the decision to provide the additional aid to the Palestinians in a bid to support the stalled Middle East peace process, the ministry said.

Last December, Japan decided to give 120,000 dollars in emergency assistance to the UNDP to help create employment for Palestinians who have lost their jobs since the latest wave of violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip erupted in late September.

Many Palestinians live in poverty due in part to an economic blockade imposed on the Palestinian Authority by Israel since the start of the latest uprising.



US Secretary of State Colin Powell (R) shakes hands with former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev (L) during a meeting on Monday at the Harry S. Truman State Department in Washington, DC.

# Montenegro sharply divided over independence move

AP, Podgorica, Yugoslavia

Election results showed Montenegro sharply divided over the question of independence Monday, raising fears of violence if the government presses forward with plans to split from Yugoslavia.

European leaders urged President Milo Djukanovic to back off the drive for independence bid after the narrow margin in Sunday's parliamentary elections. Results showed his secessionists winning around 42 per cent of the vote, compared to 40.6 per cent for opponents of independence.

Western nations have long feared that if Montenegro breaks from Yugoslavia, where it has resented domination by the larger republic, Serbia it could destabilise the Balkans further and fuel secessionist movements in Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia.

The near tie, however, makes Djukanovic dependent on even more fervent proponents of independence to keep his government in power.

Spokesman Miodrag Vukovic said Djukanovic would form a new governing coalition with the separatist-minded Liberal Party, which won 9 per cent of the vote, and that together they would push for a referendum on independence, perhaps as early as June.

That in turn, is sure to further radicalise the sizable pro-Yugoslavia faction, thereby increasing the possibility of violence.

Both Serbia and Yugoslav federal authorities say they would not use force to prevent Montenegro's secession. But any violence within Montenegro would likely draw in thousands of Serb volunteers who would fight on the side of the pro-Yugoslavia faction.

Belgrade, capital of Yugoslavia and Serbia,

Yugoslav leaders said they hoped Djukanovic would take the results as a signal not to hold a referendum.

"If rational thinking prevails after this... I hope the new Montenegro government will find more pros than cons for staying in the federation," said Yugoslav Interior Minister Zoran Zivkovic. He said he hoped Montenegro would enter talks with Serbia on ways to stay together.

European officials echoed that stance. "I see that the population is basically split," said Girard Stoudmann, a senior representative of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. A referendum "would not be wise," he said.

In Brussels, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana repeated the European Union stance opposing unilateral steps "contrary to the stability of the region."

The foreign minister of Sweden, which holds the rotating EU presidency, urged Montenegro to resume "serious negotiations" with Serbia "on their common future." Anna Lindh said the election results gave "no clear mandate" for going ahead with a referendum.

Pro-Yugoslavia voters have said they would boycott any referendum, which would likely doom it from the start since at least 50 per cent of all eligible voters must participate for such a plebiscite to be valid.

Earlier, before the closeness of Sunday's results became known, Djukanovic's "Victory Belongs to Montenegro" proclaimed its victory over the anti-independence "Together for Yugoslavia."

"We made a huge step toward independent Montenegro," Djukanovic said, as supporters chanted: "We want our country."

But the narrow margin emboldened both the opposition and the most fervent backers of independence represented by the Liberal Party.



Police vans escort trucks carrying highly radioactive nuclear waste yesterday as they leave the nuclear power plant in Neckarwestheim, Germany. Three wagons headed for Walheim, where the waste containers are being transferred to rail wagons to begin a journey to the British Nuclear Fuels reprocessing centre at Sellafield. The shipment left the nuclear power plant three hours behind schedule after anti-nuclear protesters again tried to block the shipment.