

## Arab anger mounting

AFP, Paris

Anger is mounting in the Arab world over Israel's actions against the Palestinians, Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher warned Saturday, stressing the need for the US to take a "more balanced position" in the conflict.

"There is a growing anger in the Arab world against the Israeli actions a fact which (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon should take good notice of," Maher said in an interview on French television news channel LCI.

Maher, accompanying Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on a trip to Paris, said Israel "can not continue to wage this clandestine undeclared war, but every day we see the effects on the Palestinian people".

Maher said Europe could do more "and could do better".

## 'No possibility of military rebellion in Venezuela'

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela faces no risk of military rebellion, President Hugo Chavez said late Saturday, in his first public comments on recent demands for his resignation by thousands of civilians led by a uniformed colonel.

"There is no risk" of a military uprising, Chavez said during a four-minute exclusive interview with Chilean National Television that was broadcast in Venezuela.

On Thursday, Air Force Colonel Pedro Soto publicly demanded Chavez's resignation and led a march of thousands of supporters to the presidential residence in Caracas.

Chavez called Soto, 49, a "traitor."

"This petition means that there is no serious opposition. It means that the opposition has no leadership, no alternative plan," said Chavez.

## Parts of Jakarta again flooded

AFP, Jakarta

Parts of the Indonesia capital Jakarta were again under water Sunday after two days of rain, but the flooding was not as serious as that of two weeks ago, officials said.

"Several areas, especially in north Jakarta and at the outskirts of the city, have seen floodings again, but this time they are not as serious as the inundation earlier this month," said Jakarta Flood Center official Najimuddin.

The water was on average around 50 centimeters (20 inches) deep but some areas in Tambora, West Jakarta and Lebak Bulus in South Jakarta were under about one metre of water, he said.

## Nepali PM faces a turbulent parliament

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal premier Sher Bahadur Deuba will be facing a turbulent winter session of parliament beginning Sunday when he is expected to face a two-pronged attacks from the opposition and his own party lawmakers.

"All the major political oppositions in the 205-member house of representatives are expected to press Deuba to end the state emergency imposed in November to combat the Maoists, and ask him not to extend it for another three months as per the constitutional provision," political analyst Hari C. Shrestha said.

The main opposition Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) in the meantime placed some demands for constitutional amendment to let the political parties to exercise their constitutional rights as a precondition for supporting Deuba's emergency rule, NCP-UML spokesman Pradip Nepal told AFP.

## Thousands of civilians flee Liberian fighting

AFP, Paris

Tens of thousands of civilians have been forced to flee "in total panic" following an upsurge in fighting in Liberia, humanitarian organisation Action Against Hunger (AAH) said Saturday.

"Today, the civilian population is trying desperately to reach safe areas, taking dirt paths to avoid military roadblocks," the Paris-based group said.

Expressing "great concern," the group said people "were forced to flee in total panic" following an attack by government forces Thursday night against the rebel-held town of Klay, 40 km from the capital, the organisation said in a statement.

# US charts Iraq mission map

## Israel gets green signal to hit back if attacked

AFP, Los Angeles

The administration of US President George W. Bush is engaged in a major Iraq policy review that may result in massive military action against the government of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, The Los Angeles Times reported Sunday.

The administration expects to complete this long-delayed Iraq policy review by the time Vice President Richard Cheney makes his Middle East tour next month, so that he can outline American plans to Arab leaders, the daily said, citing senior US officials.

The emerging new Iraq policy is based on two premises, according to the report.

First, the Iraq problem has to be solved, not simply managed as it was during the previous US administrations.

Second, Washington is prepared to push beyond the limitations imposed by international sentiment, Arab public opinion and even the original UN resolutions that opened the way for Operation Desert Storm 11 years ago, The Times said.

According to the report, policymakers are considering three basic scenarios.

A diplomatic option calls for working through the United Nations to pass new "smart sanctions" and press Saddam to allow the return of UN arms inspectors ejected from Iraq in 1998.

Also under consideration is a military campaign, probably relying heavily on air power and potential defections within the Iraqi military, the paper said.

The administration may also opt for tightening the political noose around Baghdad's neck with more coercive actions by neighbouring states and the

international community, according to the report.

Meanwhile, the US administration has given Israel the nod to strike back at Iraq if the regime of President Saddam Hussein attacks it during a possible US operation against Iraq, the Israeli daily Haaretz said Sunday.

The daily said that after visits by Israeli Prime Minister Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, senior US officials told Sharon they understand that Israel "will not sit quietly" if attacked.

An unnamed senior US official was also quoted as saying that Israel would be told in advance if strikes against Iraq are to go ahead.

The daily said Sharon had been given the assurances during talks with US President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice.

Washington did not give details of the next phase in its war on international terrorism, although Israeli media have said it will focus on Iraq, which one Israel daily said last week could be attacked in May.

In addition, a joint US-Israeli defence group will be reactivated in March, the daily said.

The Defence Policy Advisory Group (DPAG), which has not visited Israel since October 2000, shortly after the start of the Palestinian uprising, will resume meetings when a Pentagon delegation headed by Defence Undersecretary Doug Feith arrives next month.

Iraq fired 39 Scud missiles at Israel in the 1991 Gulf War, killing two people and injured hundreds.

# Kidney trade & a trail of misery

AFP, Holalu

H.S. Jayaramu, 40, can barely sit, let alone walk, after one of his kidneys was removed under the pretext of drawing blood at a hospital in southern India.

Jayaramu, who lives in a hut with no electricity in Holalu village about 120 kilometres (75 miles) south of the Karnataka state capital Bangalore, is among more than 40 villagers here who were duped into losing a kidney in a flourishing human organs trade.

"I had no idea," said Jayaramu. "They said if I took my ration card and donated some blood I would be given some money."

"After they operated on me, the hospital authorities said they had taken one of my kidneys. I did not know what a kidney was," said Jayaramu who received 20,000 rupees (430 dollars).

Villagers said most of the poor labourers in Holalu had at one time or another been approached by "agents" and promised sums of money if they sold their kidneys. These "agents", they said, earned about 120,000 rupees while the donor was in some cases paid as little as 10,000 rupees.

Few had any idea what they were getting themselves into and were

partially blinded by their need to settle crippling debts or provide dowries for their unmarried daughters.

Narayana Shetty, a resident of Garibi Colony (Poor Man's Colony) in Holalu said his neighbour, Lakshmi was one such example.

"She had taken a loan of 30,000 rupees to marry off her elder daughter and later borrowed another 40,000 rupees to build a house. She sold a kidney and now she cannot work like she used to," Shetty said.

India's Transplantation of Human Organs Act 1994 stipulates prison terms of more than two years and a fine of between 10,000 rupees and 20,000 rupees for the unauthorised trading of organs.

"Unrelated transplants" -- from a donor to a recipient who is not a relative -- are prohibited if any cash or other payment is known to have been made, and the Karnataka state government has a special screening committee.

Of more than 1,000 cases brought before the committee in the last four years, the vast majority were approved, but the extent of the scams and the coercion used by the "agents" came to light a month ago.

One Holalu villager, Doddamaada Shetty, roused the suspicion of the committee when he

applied for permission to become a donor, having been offered 40,000 rupees by an agent.

"I started shaking when they questioned me," Shetty, a labourer wearing torn clothes and a woollen cap said. "I was told by the committee to come after a week and soon the police came knocking on my door."

The police found that Shetty's residence papers had been forged, as the agent had wanted supporting documents to back up the false claim that Shetty had known the donor recipient for eight years.

"The police registered a case of forgery against me," Shetty said. "I was innocent as one agent, who took me to a Bangalore hospital for check-up, told me to put my thumb impression on a piece of paper."

Police officials said one of the main "agents" in Holalu had committed suicide last month after the scandal broke.

"It is good that everything has finally come to light. Otherwise at least 80 percent of the villagers were ready to donate their kidneys," Narayana Shetty said.

Jayaramu regretted his decision and said his son, daughter and wife were now forced to work.



PHOTO:AFP

**H.S. Jayaramu, 40, shows a scar on his abdomen in Holalu village some 120 km south of Bangalore on February 6. Jayaramu, one of whose kidneys were removed under the pretext of blood donation at a hospital in Bangalore, is among the more than forty villagers of Holalu who were duped into losing a kidney in a flourishing human organs trade.**

## Royal family in mourning

AFP, London

Britain's royal family was Sunday mourning the loss of Princess Margaret, younger sister of Queen Elizabeth II, who died aged 71 after suffering her fourth stroke in three years.

While the queen was at Windsor Castle, the venue for the princess's private funeral on Friday, other members of the royal family were set to join heir to the throne Prince Charles at the side of the Queen Mother in Sandringham, eastern England.

The queen was staying at Windsor, west of London, to oversee the funeral arrangements, though she was also expected to carry out a number of planned official engagements over the coming week.

Princess Margaret, whose private life was as turbulent as it was gilded, died early Saturday after years of failing health.

On Sunday, the British flag over Buckingham Palace continued to flutter at half-mast, for the first time since the death in 1997 of Princess



PHOTO:AFP

**Peace activists hold up placards during a demonstration in Tel Aviv on Saturday. Hundreds of Israelis and foreign peace groups joined the Israeli left-wing "Gush Shalom" movement to protest the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories.**

# Sharon returns without full US backing

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon returns to Israel on Sunday after obtaining a US pledge to pressure Yasser Arafat on militants, but failing to obtain Washington's agreement to cut ties with the Palestinian leader.

The Israeli leader returns from a three-day US visit to deal with a host of security issues, after a woman was killed in a West Bank shooting ambush late on Saturday and soldiers scoured a Palestinian-ruled village for accomplices in the killing of three people at a Jewish settlement on Wednesday.

Sharon obtained US President George Bush's promise at a White House meeting on Thursday to keep pressuring Arafat to crack down on militants, although Bush stopped short of cutting ties with the Palestinian leader as Sharon had hoped.

Meanwhile, a rift between the European Union and Washington on Middle East policy grew when EU foreign ministers said after a two-day meeting in Spain there should be less stress on security and more on political aspects of the conflict.

Instead, the EU gave momentum to its own diplomatic drive to revive deadlocked peace negotiations despite spiralling violence in which over 1,000 people have been killed since a Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation began in September 2000.

They also criticised Israel's isolation of Arafat who has been confined to the West Bank city of Ramallah by Israeli tanks since a spate of militant attacks in December.

"It is very important that we go back to putting politics in the centre of our discussions on the Middle East," said Josep Pique, foreign minister of current EU president Spain.

He said Israel could not ask Arafat "to make 100 per cent effort but at the same time limit and weaken his freedom of movement."

The EU ministers' view differs from those of Israel and the United States, which want a halt to violence before negotiations can resume.

Bush said during a joint news conference with Sharon after their meeting at the White House on Thursday that he would continue

demanding Arafat "reduce terrorist activity."

Bush sidestepped a reporter's question on whether the United States, Israel's staunchest ally, would sever links with Arafat as Sharon had demanded ahead of his Washington visit.

The EU has often urged Arafat to clamp down on militants, but rejects Sharon's attempts to side line him and has been irked by US reluctance to deter Sharon from pursuing this line.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Starw said he and German counterpart Joschka Fischer would travel separately to the Middle East next week to assess the situation.

France and the United States also has differences over a French call for a clear acknowledgement by Israel of the need for a Palestinian state and elections in Palestinian territories that would give the winner a mandate to negotiate peace.

Washington has already dismissed the French proposal as a distraction from its own Middle East priorities.

## Lankan truce hits signature snag

AFP, Colombo

Norway's attempts to arrange a formal truce in Sri Lanka has hit snags while Tiger rebels have stepped up extortion and recruitment in embattled regions, officials said Sunday.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) wanted a proposed truce to be signed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who has headed an uneasy cohabitation government since her party lost December parliamentary polls. "If Kumaratunga refuses, then LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran will also not sign it and relegate that duty to a senior deputy," said the privately run Sunday Leader weekly, quoting "informed sources."

Norway has proposed that both Kumaratunga and her arch political rival, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, sign the agreement "so that the ceasefire will have greater validity," the Sunday Leader quoted its sources as saying.

There was no immediate reaction from the government to the

newspaper report.

Military sources in the island's north said the Tigers had stepped up collection of "taxes" from local residents and businessmen and were conscripting young men and women.

The Tigers have denied allegations of recruiting child soldiers, saying they were only enlisting volunteers.

Officials said the Tigers had attacked two business organisations in the northern town of Vavuniya Saturday for failing to pay extortion money and that fishermen were forced to give the rebels cash and fuel.

Muslim residents in the island's eastern province last week staged demonstrations against extortion and forced recruitment by the LTTE.

Meanwhile, the LTTE is also reportedly arguing over the government's ban on fishing off the island's northern and eastern sea-boards. The navy and air force are strongly opposed to the revocation arguing that the rebels could ship in arms easily if it were done.

# New trilateral power axis in the making

IPS, New Delhi

With the prospect of extended US military presence in Central Asia now increasingly likely, Russia has revived a three-year-old proposal to rope India and China into a trilateral power axis.

When Russian leader Yevgeni Primakov first proposed a trilateral axis against a US-centred, unipolar world in December 1998, he did not elicit too much enthusiasm in either New Delhi or Beijing -- thanks to mutual suspicions lingering from the Cold War.

But Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's successful India tour in January, followed by the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, are believed to have fast forwarded interest in the idea to the point where "working towards informal alliance" was now possible, said an Indian spokesperson.

International affairs analysts say the vast US military presence in Central Asia, occasioned by the war in Afghanistan, have compelled the three powers to reconsider the Primakov proposal -- if not to counter the unipolar world order, then to protect their own interests in the strategic, fossil-fuel rich region.

According to Jean-Pierre Cabestan, Director of the Hong Kong-based French Centre for Research on Contemporary China, the growing US military and diplomatic influence in Central and South Asia is not in Beijing's interests.

"The US-led war in Afghanistan has compromised Beijing's fundamental and long-term objectives, increased the say that its Asian rivals (in particular Japan and India) have in regional security issues and on the whole weakened its image as a great power," Cabestan said in a lecture here last month.

Cabestan said Beijing has begun to take India more seriously as a result of its newly overt nuclear policy, its open-door economy and because of its status as a rival power that could get uncomfortably too close to the United States.

This trend is palpable in New Delhi's loud support for Washington's national missile defence (NMD) programme.

Russia wields considerable influence in both India and China as a major supplier of military hardware to both countries. Indeed India is finalising, this week, the purchase of an aircraft carrier, nuclear-powered submarines and long-range strategic bombers from Russia as part of a multi-billion dollar shopping list.

Ivanov used the opportunity to vigorously promote the idea of a trilateral axis and has sought to allay apprehensions that this would in any way be detrimental to India's rapidly improving ties, including military cooperation, with the United States.

In his State of the Union address last week, US President George Bush clubbed the three powers together when he said that America was "working with Russia and China and India, in ways we have never before, to achieve peace and prosperity".

Bush added: "In this moment of opportunity, a common danger is erasing old rivalries."

According to Rajiv Nayan, a researcher at the prestigious Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) a government funded think tank, it is important to note that at the present moment, none of three countries that would from the trilateral axis wants to be seen as a long-term dissident to US policy.

"All three want to be recognised as responsible countries of the international community and its institutions and norms so that occasional defiance is accompanied by rigorous attempts to integrate with the system," Nayan said.

On the other hand, said Nayan, the triangle as envisaged by Primakov "would not like to make the US a natural ally because the very objective of the triangle is to create a competing centre against the United States."

India, which throughout the Cold War years was aligned economically and militarily with the former Soviet Union, is now ruled by a right-wing coalition that has aggressively sought to increase its contacts at all levels with the United States.

But Nayan said India sought support from the United States rather than

from Russia in containing China and that is one reason why it cheered on the NMD enthusiastically and was among the first countries to offer support to the US in its anti-'jihadist' campaign after the Sep. 11 terrorist attacks.

Soon after India's nuclear tests in 1998, India's Defence Minister George Fernandes declared that China represented the main threat to India and that the government wrote to the then US President Bill Clinton to say that China (rather than Pakistan) was the important factor in this country's nuclear weapons programme.

Although relations between India and China have been steadily improving since their 1993 landmark agreement to maintain peace and tranquility along their common borders, a major irritant for New Delhi has been the continued proliferation of missile and nuclear weapon technology from Beijing to Islamabad.

"The reported nuclear and missile related transfer in January is indicative of the problem and India remains deeply suspicious in spite of China's denials," said Kanti Bajpai, professor of international relations at the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

He listed other areas of conflict as competing interests in Burma, rivalry between the navies of the two countries in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, the Tibet question and Beijing's non-recognition of Sikkim as an Indian state.

Bajpai said the proposed trilateral axis had, at once, the potential of building an Asian security system, tackling religious extremism, utilising Central Asian energy resources efficiently and handling better Washington's missile defence plan.

"Militarily, all three fear that the US could end up dominating outer space with both weapons platforms and reconnaissance capabilities that would give it unprecedented ability to use force offensively," Bajpai said.

Cabestan said that China is particularly worried by the NMD project because of it has a limited number of inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBMs), while Russia continues to have enough warheads to challenge the reliability of the US umbrella.

## 'NATO troops in Central Asia threaten Russia'

AFP, Moscow

NATO troops stationed in Central Asia pose a direct threat to Russia's security, Russian Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov charged late Saturday.

"Russia's security was based on the premises that it would take at least 20 minutes to reach the missiles that ensure Russia's safety, and which are placed in Krasnoyarsk and Altai" in Siberia, Zyuganov was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

However, now that NATO troops are stationed in Central Asia in the framework of the US-led anti-terrorist campaign, that balance has been upset, he continued.

"This undermines the security not only of Russia, but of China and several Arab countries, and ruins the entire system of international relations," Zyuganov fumed.

Russia earlier criticised the US military presence in the region, despite assurances from Washington that it has no plans to establish permanent bases in the former Soviet region.