



Visiting Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf (L), accompanied by his wife Sahba (2nd L), is greeted by Japanese Emperor Akihito (2nd R) and Empress Michiko (R) for their luncheon at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo on Thursday. Musharraf is now in Tokyo on a four-day visit.

Bush vows to 'deal with' Saddam

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush vowed Wednesday to "deal with" Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, as Vice President Dick Cheney tried to rally regional support for Washington's hard line toward Baghdad.

"He is a problem, and we're going to deal with him. But the first stage is to consult with our allies and friends, and that's exactly what we're doing," Bush told reporters at a White House press conference.

He warned "all options are on the table" without elaborating, stressing "one thing I will not allow is a nation such as Iraq to threaten our very future by developing weapons of mass destruction."

The US leader's comments came as Cheney toured the Middle East seeking support for expanding the US-led war on terrorism beyond the military action in Afghanistan -- possibly to Iraq.

"What the vice president is doing, is he's reminding people about this danger and that we need to work in concert to confront this danger," Bush said.

Cheney's Middle East tour has taken him to Jordan as well as

Egypt, and he is scheduled to travel on to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Yemen. He will also visit Israel and Turkey.

Earlier Wednesday, the vice president told US soldiers serving with peacekeeping forces in Egypt's Sinai peninsula that Washington's next objective was to prevent terrorists and terror-backing regimes from threatening the United States or its allies with weapons of mass destruction.

However, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak predicted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would re-admit UN weapons inspectors, in line with UN demands.

"We'll try hard with Saddam Hussein to accept the UN inspectors," Mubarak told a US journalist, who asked whether toppling the Iraqi leader was the best way to keep the world safe from nuclear threats or other new forms of terror.

"I think, as far as my knowledge is, he's going to accept the inspectors," Mubarak said, adding Arab officials had been consulting with Saddam on the subject.

Washington has long accused Baghdad of nurturing close ties to



terrorists and seeking to add nuclear arms to an arsenal already thought to comprise chemical and biological weapons which it could put at their disposal.

Bush, who declared a global war on terrorism after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, has dubbed Iraq part of an "axis of evil" along with North Korea and Iran.

His stand -- and US hostility towards Baghdad since the 1991 Gulf War -- has sparked international concern Washington may attack Iraq, brushing aside objections from the Arab world and key US allies elsewhere.

US officials, however, have insisted no military action is im-

minent and that the "axis" designation was a successful effort to draw global attention to those regimes' nature and activities, especially possible ties to terrorists.

"I am deeply concerned about Iraq," said Bush, whose father, former president George Bush waged the 1991 Gulf War with Cheney as his defence secretary.

Iraq "is a nation run by a man who is willing to kill his own people by using chemical weapons; a man who won't let inspectors into the country; a man who's obviously got something to hide," he added.

Bush's comment came as the Times of London reported that British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw believes Iraq is just five years away from developing a crude nuclear device unless its weapons program is halted.

The warning was contained in a document prepared for a private briefing late Tuesday for members of parliament of the ruling Labour Party.

In Afghanistan, some 500 mainly Canadian infantry troops were taking part in Operation Harpoon -- to destroy the remaining pockets of Taliban and al-Qaida elements," in

the Shahi Kot Valley and Arma mountains, Lieutenant Luc Charron, a spokesman for the Canadian Light Infantry Battalion, told a briefing.

"This is a very risky mission but our people are well trained and well prepared to deal with all the situations over there," Charron said Thursday.

US Major Bryan Hilferty, a spokesman for the US-led forces, said the focus Thursday of Operation Anaconda was now on "sensitive site exploitations" of caves used by the Taliban and al-Qaida.

Hundreds of Afghan troops returned to their barracks Wednesday after claiming victory in a 12-day operation to wipe out the Taliban and al-Qaida in their last stronghold.

But as US and allied troops celebrated their success in Afghanistan, tensions were on the rise on the Korean peninsula where North Korea threatened to review all agreements with the United States over a reported US nuclear strategy which targets seven countries -- including the communist state -- for possible strikes.

Mugabe faces uncertain fall-out from vote slammed by West, backed by Africa

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe's longtime President Robert Mugabe was Thursday facing an uncertain fall-out from his presidential election win, denounced by the opposition and the West as flawed and fundamentally unfair.

But African nations rallied around the 78-year-old Mugabe, who has held power since independence from Britain in 1980, marking a sharp split in world response to the controversial hard-fought vote.

"The people of Zimbabwe know better," said challenger Morgan Tsvangirai, who according to official results announced Wednesday got 42 percent of the vote against 56 percent for Mugabe.

"This election... does not reflect the true will of the people of Zimbabwe," lamented Tsvangirai.

Observers warned the result could spark fresh violence in a nation that has seen two years of political violence, targeting mainly

opposition supporters, and whose economy is suffering.

But Tsvangirai urged his supporters not to be provoked into confrontation over what he described as the "massively rigged" polling.

Turnout across the southern African country was an estimated 66 percent in an election fraught with violence, intimidation and intense legal wrangling over civic rights and electoral rules.

Tsvangirai called an immediate popular consultation on the results, complaining of "state-sponsored terrorism" against his supporters, the "insidious disenfranchisement" of voters in urban opposition strongholds and intimidation in rural areas by Mugabe's ZANU-PF party that offered "unfettered opportunities" to rig the outcome.

"There is a massive consultation taking place and (the people) will have to decide what to do. They are the ones who have been cheated," he said.

The influential Zimbabwe

Congress of Trade Unions, whose members form the core of Tsvangirai's support, was set to meet Thursday to decide how to react, ZCTU President Lovemore Matombo told AFP.

Celebrations by Mugabe supporters were few and far between in the capital, with the occasional small parade or horn-blasting convoy of pickup trucks.

"There's no joy at all," said Emmanuel Magoche, a doctor who said the Mugabe win was "embarrassing."

"We were the hope of Africa... Look at us now. We are a basket case," he said.

Mugabe kept a low profile after the announcement of his win, having yet to claim victory and making no public appearances.

Western nations, who have made the independence hero a pariah and slapped him with personal sanctions, denounced the result and said more sanctions could be on the way.

Recent Israeli actions 'not helpful' for peace: Bush

3 Israelis, 3 Palestinians killed

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush on Wednesday criticised recent Israeli incursions into the Palestinian territories, saying they could complicate the peace efforts of US special Middle East envoy Anthony Zinni who is due in the region shortly.

In addition, a senior State Department official said Washington had asked Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to withdraw troops from the territories, particularly the West Bank town of Ramallah, before Zinni's arrival on Thursday.

"Frankly, it's not helpful what the Israelis have recently done," Bush told reporters at a White House news conference. "I understand someone trying to defend themselves and to fight terror, but the recent actions aren't helpful."

The president called on both sides "to work hard to create the conditions of a potential settlement" and expressed optimism that his decision to send Zinni to press Israel and the Palestinians on a ceasefire.

"He's got a lot of work to do, but if I didn't think he could make progress, I wouldn't have asked him to go," Bush said.

Bush's comments came as Israel continued a huge military push into Ramallah in the Jewish state's biggest attack inside the Palestinian territories since 1967.

At least four people were killed on Wednesday bringing to 1,517 the number of people killed in the intifada

(Palestinian uprising), including 1,172 Palestinians and 340 Israelis.

Zinni met with Secretary of State Colin Powell on Wednesday for a last-minute briefing on the mission following talks in the region between US Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer and Sharon and Ronald Schlicher, the US consul general in Jerusalem, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, officials said.

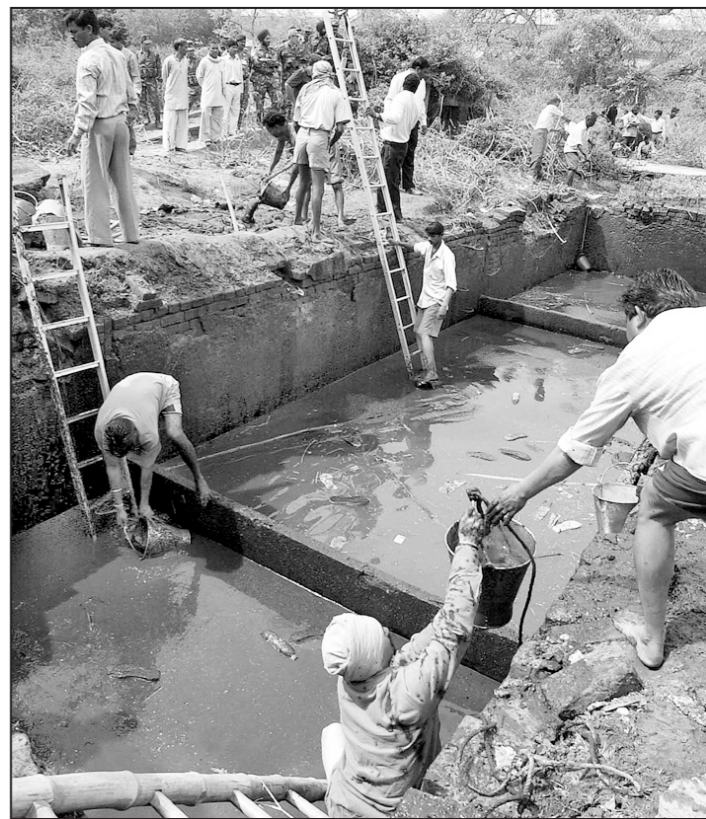
State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Kurtzer and Schlicher had impressed on Sharon and Arafat the need to take steps to ease rising violence.

A senior State Department official said Kurtzer had told Sharon that pulling Israeli troops out of the Palestinian areas, preferably ahead of Zinni's arrival, was one step the United States would like to see.

Meanwhile, three Israelis were killed and three others injured early Thursday when a booby trapped bomb exploded next to a convoy near the Netzarim Jewish settlement in the south of the Gaza Strip, military sources said.

The convoy included military vehicles that were escorting Israeli settlers. An armoured vehicle was destroyed in the blast, a source said, without indicating if the casualties were military personnel or settlers.

Moreover three Palestinians, both members of the Palestinian security forces, were shot dead by Israeli soldiers early Thursday at the entrance to the Al Amari refugee camp near the West Bank city of Ramallah, a Palestinian security official said.



Volunteers empty waste from a septic tank with buckets to search for bodies of boys who fell in after the cover gave way on Thursday in Lucknow. At least 21 potential army recruits were killed after they fell into a large septic tank after some 5,000 youths gathered for an army recruitment drive.



Sadhus, Hindu holy men, watch members of the paramilitary Rapid Action Force (RAF), file by during a flag march through the streets of Ayodhya on Thursday as a show of strength.

Troops deployed after violence in Gujarat

AFP, Ahmedabad

A curfew was imposed and federal troops dispatched Thursday in a rural area of India's Gujarat state after several thousand Hindu tribesmen attacked and burned Muslim homes in a fresh outbreak of sectarian violence.

Around 2,000 Hindus attacked the Muslim village of Kavant in Vadodara district, some 200 kilometers (120 miles) south of Gujarat's commercial capital Ahmedabad, on Wednesday afternoon.

"They were armed with bows and arrows and began looting and burning shops and homes," said police sub-inspector R.S. Solanki, adding that there were no reports of any casualties.

Many Muslim families had already fled Kavant a week ago in the wake of the worst sectarian violence to hit India in nearly a decade that claimed 700 lives across Gujarat.

The unrest, triggered by a February 27 attack on a train carrying Hindu activists, was quelled by the deployment of federal troops, but stray incidents such as the looting in Kavant have continued to fuel Hindu-Muslim tensions.

Police Superintendent Keshav Kumar said a curfew had been imposed in the district around Kavant from Thursday midday and added that an army unit from Vadodara town had been sent to maintain law and order in the area.

3 killed as bomb goes off in train in Punjab

AFP, New Delhi

Three people were killed and about 30 injured when a suspected bomb went off in a train in the northern Indian state of Punjab, railway officials said Thursday.

The Dhanbad Express was on its way from Doraha to Ferozepur, 122 kilometres (75 miles) from Punjab's provincial capital Chandigarh, when one of the railway officials on board noticed a fire in one of the compartments at about 11:00 pm (17:30 GMT) on Wednesday.

"Rescue operations started immediately and the fire was brought under control about 20 minutes later," said Davinder Sandhu, a spokesman for the northern railways.

25 N Koreans seek refuge in Spanish embassy in Beijing

AFP, Beijing

A group of 25 North Koreans burst into the Spanish embassy in Beijing on Thursday and appealed for refuge, threatening to kill themselves rather than be returned to their repressive homeland.

Witnesses saw the group shove their way past guards outside the embassy in Beijing's Sanlitun diplomatic district, just before 10:00 am (02:00 GMT).

Serbian, Montenegrin sign accord on Yugoslav future

AFP, Belgrade

The leaders of Serbia and Montenegro signed an EU-brokered accord Thursday setting out a landmark deal to maintain the troubled Yugoslav federation.

The two states reached agreement early Thursday to maintain their troubled federation in a deal that could see the name "Yugoslavia" gone for good.

"I want to express the satisfaction of all of us who have participated in the preparation of this

document," Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica told reporters after the signing.

Among the signatories were Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic, Serbian and Montenegrin Prime Ministers Zoran Djindjic and Filip Vujanovic as well as Kostunica and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

"The document sets the basis for redefining relations between Serbia and Montenegro. It is a political accord and an agreement which sets completely new outlines for

new relations" between the two republics, Kostunica said.

He added that the "political accord will be sent to the parliaments of Serbia and Montenegro and the federal assembly."

"After our parliaments have given their opinion, this political document will be transformed into a legal one, into a Constitutional Charter," Kostunica said.

Montenegro's demands for full independence from the more powerful Serbia had sparked fears of yet another Balkans conflict.

Lankan PM visits tough defence line in Jaffna

AFP, Nagarkovil

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe Thursday became the first premier in 20 years to visit this arid outpost deemed to be the toughest front line for government troops.

Soldiers engaged in fighting Tamil Tiger rebels consider Nagarkovil, 50 kilometres (30 miles) southeast of Jaffna town, to be their hardest assignment.

Day time temperatures here soar to more than 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in summer while bunkers are flooded by swampy water.

Vast, unspoilt beaches line the

coast, but there are no civilians here to enjoy the sun, sea or the sand, only hundreds of troops sweating it out while their feet rot in the bogs.

Wickremesinghe's visit comes after a Norwegian-brokered ceasefire between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and government troops went into effect on February 23.

Accompanied by Defence Minister Tilak Marapone and Rehabilitation Minister Jayalath Jayawardena, he went to the frontline and peered across at rebel-held areas -- something which just a few weeks ago his security advisors would have been considered far too dangerous.



Police officers from all over the United Kingdom show their warrant cards as they demonstrate about their pay and conditions at the House of Commons in London on Wednesday.

Thousands of police protest in London over pay, reforms

AFP, London

Thousands of off-duty police officers converged in central London in a rare public protest Wednesday over pay and proposed reforms to the service.

The Police Federation, which represents rank and file officers, said more than 10,000 officers took part in the demonstration, called to voice frustration over government plans to cut pay and introduce new community wardens with police-style powers.

Lockerbie bomber loses appeal, jailed for life

AFP, Camp Zeist

A Scottish court on Thursday upheld a life sentence against a Libyan agent convicted of murder for planting a bomb aboard a US airliner that crashed over the Scottish village of Lockerbie in 1988, killing 270 people.

Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, 49, was convicted on January 31, 2001 by a special Scottish court sitting on "neutral" territory in the Netherlands. His co-defendant, Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah, 44, was acquitted.

After 13 agonising years, the families of the victims were in the

bleak courtroom at the former American airbase - to witness the moment that brought the criminal process to an end.

Lord Cullen, the Lord Justice General, made a brief statement to the court, outlining that the five judges were unanimous that none of the grounds of appeal valid.

Al-Megrahi, dressed in traditional Libyan robes, sat impassively with his head bowed as his fate was pronounced. His wife burst into howls of sobs and had to be helped out of the courtroom.

DPRK threatens to review all agreements with US

AFP, Seoul

North Korea threatened to review all accords with the United States over a reported US strategy which targets seven countries, including the communist North, for possible nuclear attack.

The North's foreign ministry warned in a statement late Wednesday that the Stalinist state would have "no option but to take a substantial countermeasure" against the United States if the strategy proved to be fact.

"Now that nuclear lunatics are in

office in the White House, we are compelled to examine all the agreements with the United States in case the US plan for a nuclear attack on the DPRK (North Korea) turns out to be true," a foreign ministry spokesman said.

According to leaks to the US media, the US Defence Department's Nuclear Policy Review calls for a shift away from the Cold War posture of using the US nuclear arsenal to deter a nuclear strike from the former Soviet Union.

It sees China, Iran, Iraq, Libya,

North Korea, Russia and Syria as potential targets for US nuclear strikes, according to the Los Angeles Times report.

US officials have tried to allay international fears saying the report merely listed options at the disposal of US authorities.

But the North slammed the strategy as "a daydream of the reckless persons who do not hesitate to stifle" the communist country with nuclear weapons, according to a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).