

# UN considers new resolution on ME

## Israel to stop EU delegation from meeting Arafat

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations Security Council members Thursday were expected to resume private discussions of a draft resolution designed to increase pressure on Israel to end its siege of Palestinian towns in the West Bank.

Diplomats said that after discussions began behind closed doors late Wednesday, the United States asked for more time to consider the Arab-sponsored text and that Syria -- acting on behalf of the Arab group -- decided not to press for a vote.

Council members were expected to hold a formal session on the draft resolution later Thursday, after completing their private discussions.

The text, submitted late Wednesday by Syria on behalf of the Arab group of states after a day-long public debate in the council, would demand the complete and immediate implementation of Resolution 1402, adopted on Saturday.

Resolution 1402 called on both sides to "move immediately towards a meaningful ceasefire" and on Israeli forces to pull out of cities including Ramallah, where Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat remains under siege.

The Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Yehuda Lancy, told the council that Israel had not rejected 1402, but insisted that the ceasefire must come first.

Diplomats said that the United States, which voted for 1402, refused to put extra pressure on Israel and that Britain was trying to persuade members to accept a more softly worded version of the Arab text.

The British ambassador to the UN, Jeremy Greenstock, told the council that Resolution 1402 -- like Resolution 1397, which affirmed the vision of a Palestinian state -- "need no further interpretation."

"These two resolutions have to be implemented," Greenstock said.

"They are routes out of the desperate position in which the parties have got themselves. They provide, succinctly and forcefully the basis for real peace. The whole UN system should be directed to implementation."

Russia's ambassador, Sergei Lavrov, who chaired the public session as council president for April, said there was a risk of all-out war unless the crisis ended.

"Both sides are behaving suicidally," he said. "The madness must stop before it is too late."

After the public debate ended, the Palestinian representative to the UN, Nasser Al-Kidwa, could be seen in earnest consultation in the council chamber with the US ambassador, John Negroponte, and other council members.

Negroponte gave no public indication of how he might vote

if Syria insisted on a vote on its draft.

"The United States has been supportive of a constructive Security Council role during this crisis," he said.

He recalled that on March 12, the United States introduced Resolution 1397, "which affirmed a political vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, within secure and recognized borders."

Meanwhile, Israel will not allow a high-level EU delegation to visit besieged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, an Israeli official close to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told AFP Thursday.

"We will not permit a European delegation to break the isolation which we have imposed on Arafat," said the official, who asked not be named.

"The Europeans' only aim is to provide Arafat with a public platform and that we will not allow," he added.

He was speaking as EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Pique left Luxembourg for Jerusalem to try to tackle the escalating conflict in the West Bank.

Israel invaded Ramallah on Friday after a spate of bloody suicide bombings it accused Arafat of inciting, and has penned him into his office building in the West Bank town.

Since then it has taken over a succession of West Bank towns and cities.



PHOTO: AFP  
Israeli armored personnel carriers (APCs) are positioned outside a tall building in the West Bank city of Nablus on Thursday. Dozens of rounds of tankshells and heavy machinegun fire were heard as a convoy of Israeli tanks and APCs approached the city from all sides, launching an attack on the West Bank's largest city late Wednesday.



PHOTO: AFP  
Activists from the Communist Party of India (CPI-M) hold a placard calling for the ouster of Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon during a demonstration in New Delhi on Thursday. Some 400 protesters demanded Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian land and freedom for besieged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat who has been bottled up in his battered headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah for a week.

## 2880 could be doomsday for Earth

AFP, Washington

The asteroid 1950 DA, measuring some 1.1 kilometers (more than half a mile) in diameter, could collide with Earth on March 16, 2880, a team of international researchers concluded in Friday's issue of the journal Science.

Within a period of about 20 minutes on that day, there will be a one in 300 (0.33 percent) chance of collision, according to the research team, led by Jon Giorgini of NASA's

Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Though the probability of that happening may seem practically infinitesimal, it is about three times greater than the risk of any other asteroid collision, Giorgini said.

First observed on February 23, 1950, the 1950 DA asteroid disappeared from sight after 17 days and reappeared for the first time on New Year's Eve 2000.

Using doppler radar in March 2001, researchers measured the orbit of the asteroid, at a distance

## Vajpayee takes a swipe at Gujarat leadership

AFP, Ahmedabad

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Thursday expressed shame and chastised his Hindu-nationalist allies ruling riot-torn Gujarat state as he visited for the first time thousands of Muslims made homeless by the violence.

A visibly angry Vajpayee delivered his most direct rebuke to the state's Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, a member of his BJP party who riot victims accuse of turning a blind eye to the bloodbath that has claimed more than 800 mostly Muslim lives.

"Government servants must understand their responsibility and

work for the people. Politicians must understand their responsibility to work for the people," Vajpayee, with Modi at his side, said at a camp housing 10,000 displaced Muslims.

"I am talking to officials and to politicians. I have come to tell you that you are not alone. The whole country is with you."

The frail premier earlier visited Godhra where he climbed into a train compartment that was torched by a Muslim crowd on February 27, which killed 58 Hindus and set off the riots.

The victims had been travelling back from Ayodhya, where Hindu hardliners -- many affiliated with Vajpayee's BJP -- are campaigning

## Nepal relaxes emergency

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal on Thursday relaxed a controversial four-month-old state of emergency, authorizing political parties to hold meetings and easing restrictions on local media.

But under the directive, issued by King Gyanendra on recommendation of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, political parties and the media are still barred from "encouraging Maoist terrorism."

The state of emergency was

imposed on November 26, two days after Maoist rebels broke a four-month ceasefire by launching a string of bloody attacks on the army and police.

The stringent measures have been denounced by opposition parties and human rights groups, but were extended by parliament for three months on February 21 after the Maoists launched the deadliest offensive of their six-year "people's war."

Under the relaxed measures,

## Hundreds detained over plot to oust Karzai

AP, Kabul

Hundreds of people linked to a hard-line Islamic group have been arrested in Kabul in the past week for allegedly plotting to overthrow the government of interim Prime Minister Hamid Karzai, Afghan officials said Thursday.

The plot, the most serious threat yet to Karzai's fledgling administration, included plans to set off bombs throughout the capital, said Gen. Din Muhammad Jurat, the director general for security at the Interior Ministry. He said most of those arrested were members of Hezb-e-Islami, a hard-line Islamic group headed by former prime minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

"They wanted to launch a coup d'etat against the government," said Mohammed Naser, the security director at the Kabul governor's office. He said 350 people had been arrested, most in the past three days.

Lt Col Neal Peckham, spokesman for the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, said peacekeepers were not involved in the operations, but in many cases

were given prior knowledge that arrests would be made so that they could stay clear of a particular part of town.

Another western official in Kabul said 600 people had been rounded up, and 250 of them released. Ten people were being held on suspicion of serious offenses, including terrorism, the official said while speaking on condition of anonymity.

Afghan police on Monday raided the home of Hekmatyar's one-time aide, Wahidullah Sabaun, but there was some confusion Thursday over his whereabouts. Jurat and Naser said Sabaun was among those arrested in the sweep, but Peckham said the man was still at large.

Sabaun was once the military chief of Hezb-e-Islami and served as Afghanistan's defence minister in 1995 when Hekmatyar became prime minister under President Burhanuddin Rabbani. When the Taliban took over the country in 1996, Sabaun allied himself with the northern alliance resistance.

## Angola, UNITA rebels sign a ceasefire

AFP, Luanda

Angolan army chiefs and the rebel National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) officially signed a ceasefire in the capital on Thursday, to end 27 years of civil war.

The accord was signed by UNITA military commander Abreu Karmorteiro and by the chief of staff of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA), Armando Da Cruz, in the presence of President Jose Eduardo dos

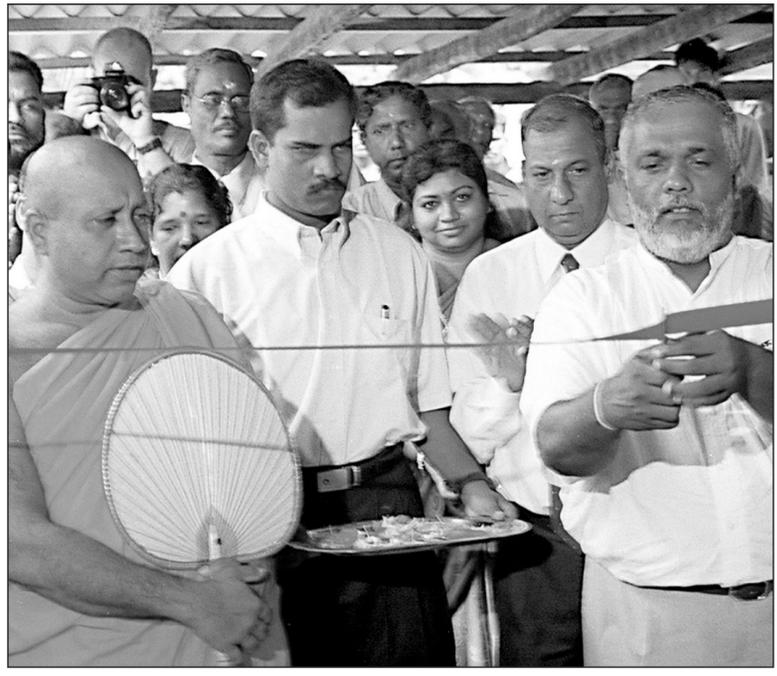


PHOTO: AFP  
Sri Lankan Buddhist monk Siyambalagaswewa Wimalasara (L) takes part in the opening of the first Tamil Tiger political office in the northern government-held town of Vavuniya on Wednesday. In the centre is Tamil Tiger political activist S. Malarawan and at right is Harsha Navaratne, a member of the majority Sinhalese community.

## Cash crisis may force WFP to stop aid to Afghans

AFP, Islamabad

Vital aid to alleviate the effects of drought and decades of civil war on millions of Afghans may grind to a halt unless more money is found, a United Nations agency warned Thursday.

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP), which has launched a 285 million dollar operation to bring short-term relief to Afghanistan, says it will be unable to complete its project unless it receives more financial backing.

## Lanka clears floor-crossing hurdle ahead of peace talks

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka announced plans on Thursday to allow MPs to vote on issues in parliament according to their conscience, which could help ensure a political settlement to the long-running Tamil separatist war.

Constitutional Affairs Minister G. L. Peiris said the government would move amendments to the constitution to remove provisions that prevent MPs from defying party discipline and voting according to their conscience.

"We are trying to take away the divisiveness and introduce a culture of consensual politics in our country and we will make a start with the

national question," Peiris said.

The Sri Lankan government is set to open face-to-face talks in May with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who have been fighting for an independent homeland for the island's Tamil minority.

The peace prospects follow a truce between the two parties that began on February 23.

Peiris said any settlement to the long-running conflict, which has claimed more than 60,000 lives, would require a two-thirds majority of the 225-member parliament.

The ruling United National Party (UNP) does not have a two-thirds parliamentary majority and must depend on the main opposition

## Fernandes tours tense border in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes Thursday toured the disputed Kashmir border with Pakistan, which New Delhi insists must be fully sealed from Islamic insurgents before it eases a military build-up.

Fernandes travelled with senior army officials to forward posts in Baramulla and Kupwara districts on the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border that divides the Himalayan territory between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, army sources said.

The 742-kilometer (460-mile) LoC winds through Himalayan peaks and has been the scene of frequent cross-border exchanges of

artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire between the Indian and Pakistani armies.

The arch-rivals have amassed more than 800,000 troops along their official and unofficial borders, including the LoC in Kashmir, after gunmen attacked the Indian parliament on December 13, leaving 14 dead.

Meanwhile, suspected Muslim militants shot dead four members of a family, including two women, in a village in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said Thursday.

The assailants armed with pistols and assault rifles barged into the house of Mohammed Khan, a militant who had surrendered, and sprayed the family with bullets, police said.