

## Rights court faults France over WWII war criminal

AFP, Strasbourg

The European Court of Human Rights ruled yesterday that France violated the legal rights of convicted war criminal Maurice Papon after his 1998 trial.

Lawyers for Papon, 91, who is serving a 10-year term for crimes against humanity committed during World War II, lodged the suit three years ago on the grounds that he had not been able to take his conviction to France's highest appeals court, the Cour de Cassation.

The European court said in its ruling that "regard being had to all the circumstances of the case, the applicant had suffered an excessive restriction of his right to access to a court, and therefore of his right to a fair trial."

It awarded Papon 29,192 euros (29,198 dollars) in costs and expenses.

Lawyers for Papon immediately said they would now take his case back before the Cour de Cassation.

Papon lost his right to an appeal on a technicality because he failed to deliver himself into custody on the eve of the hearing in October 1999. Instead he absconded to Switzerland, where he was swiftly captured.

The European Court has ruled in similar cases that the French law requiring appellants to hand themselves in was a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the provision was taken off the statute books in 2001.

In its ruling Thursday, the court said, that "the fact that (Papon) had been prosecuted and convicted on charges of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity did not deprive him of the protection of Convention rights and freedoms."

Papon was found guilty of complicity in crimes against humanity for his role in the deportation of 1,560 French Jews from the city of Bordeaux, where he was a senior official in the wartime Vichy government.

The European Court of Human Rights, which sits in the eastern French city of Strasbourg, is an emanation of the Council of Europe, through which 44 nations act together on mainly human rights and cultural issues.

## Warm sea threatens Great Barrier Reef

REUTERS, Sydney

Sea temperatures at Australia's Great Barrier Reef last summer were the warmest on record and this year's El Nino event means the risk of mass coral bleaching has increased considerably, scientists reported yesterday.

The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) has just completed an atlas of sea temperatures over the past decade and amalgamated it with historical data to show 2002 was the warmest year for water temperatures off northeast Australia since 1870.

The rise in temperatures around the world's largest living organism coincided with mass bleaching earlier this year that affected around 60 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef's 133,300 square miles of coral.

"Unless the corals can adapt and become acclimated then obviously the long-term future for the coral is at risk," said AIMS oceanographer Craig Steinberg.

"The outlook isn't good. If coral can't adapt then they're going to bleach and you get mass mortality."

The sea temperature over the last century has risen by just half a degree Celsius.

But corals tend to live within one to two degrees of their maximum temperature threshold and a tiny increase is therefore enough to ensure a major impact.

Bleaching occurs when coral becomes stressed. It involves a breakdown in the symbiotic relationship between the coral and algae and in severe cases the coral will die.

# Israel draws UNSC ire over air strike

## \$43m of frozen PA tax revenue to be released

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel on yesterday faced fierce criticism in the United Nations Security Council over an air strike that killed 15 Palestinians including a top Hamas commander and nine children in Gaza City.

Nation after nation said during a late-night debate that Tuesday's attack was unacceptable and unwarranted. But US officials said Washington, Israel's closest ally, would oppose a draft resolution condemning the attack if it were put to a vote.

The US decision meant Israel was unlikely to suffer anything more than a tongue-lashing in the Security Council as it tries to limit the damage done to its image by the civilian deaths in the attack on the militant's home in a crowded area.

In a gesture that appeared designed to ease the criticism, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Israel would release some \$43 million of frozen Palestinian Authority tax revenues and take other steps to ease the hardships of 700,000 Palestinians living under Israeli curfew in the West Bank.

"We are making every effort to ease the escalation (since the Gaza strike)," Peres told Army Radio.

Hamas has vowed to kill hundreds of Israelis to avenge the attack by an F-16 warplane which fired a one-ton guided missile at the house of Salah Shehadeh, commander of the Islamic group's

military wing called the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam brigades.

In new violence on yesterday, Palestinian gunmen killed an Israeli motorist near a Jewish settlement in the West Bank, the army said. A coalition of militant groups called the Popular Army Front said in a statement that it was behind the attack.

The Palestinians called

Tuesday's attack in Gaza City a war crime and Arab ambassadors urged the 15-member Security Council to adopt a resolution demanding troops leave the seven cities.

But US Ambassador John Negroponte said past council resolutions formed a "more than adequate basis to guide efforts to achieve a negotiated solution" and

the world should focus on "constructive diplomatic efforts."

The strike also prompted criticism in Israel itself and an inquiry by the army into the incident. But Haim Ramon, chairman of the Israeli parliament's foreign affairs and defence committee, said the buck stopped with the Israeli government.



Permanent Representative to the United Nations for Saudi Arabia Fawzi Bin Abdul Majeed Shobokshi (R) addresses a meeting of the UN Security Council as Israeli Deputy Permanent Representative Aaron Jacob (L) listens in New York on Wednesday. Israel was condemned in the Security Council for its air strike in Gaza City.

## Blast on Hindu pilgrimage route in Kashmir 10 hurt in grenade attack on bus station

AFP, Srinagar

At least 10 people were wounded in a grenade explosion in Indian Kashmir while Muslim rebels also attacked a Hindu pilgrimage route, police said yesterday.

The 10 were wounded when rebels hurled a grenade apparently at a security patrol in the Batamalo area of Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar Thursday morning, police said.

Batamalo is the site of Srinagar's main bus station and is constantly crowded.

Another grenade incident occurred overnight at a telephone exchange at Ashmuqam, 75 kilo-

metres south of Srinagar, a police spokesman said.

Militants caused minor damage to the exchange, which serves as the communication link between Srinagar and Pahalgam - the base camp for the pilgrims, police said.

No injuries were reported. A police guard at the exchange opened fire at the attackers, who escaped from the roadside village, which derives its name from a revered Muslim shrine.

Hundreds of Hindus pass through Ashmuqam towards Pahalgam, 100 kilometres south of Srinagar, to take part in the pilgrimage to the cave-shrine of Amarnath, which they believe is the abode of the god Shiva.

The telephone exchange blast came hours after another grenade attack left 20 civilians and four policemen injured at a bus station in Anantnag, also on the route of the pilgrimage.

Security all along the pilgrimage route has been tightened after the explosions, and Thursday morning troops were seen frisking passers-by and dogs were sniffing for potential landmines.

More than 15,000 troops have been deployed for the safe conduct of the annual pilgrimage, which more than 100,000 Hindus are expected to make within the next few weeks.



Picture dated November 14, 2000 shows an aerial photograph taken over the Great Barrier Reef showing the Malaysian cargo vessel Bunga Teratai Satu after it was refloated 12 days after it ran aground. Australia yesterday unveiled plans to restrict shipping near the Great Barrier Reef two years ago after the container ship ran aground on the natural wonder.

## Monsoon brings floods, death to South Asia

AFP, Guwahati

Monsoon rains lashing South Asia over the past three weeks have triggered flash floods and mudslides that have killed more than 300 people and displaced almost four million, officials and media reports said yesterday.

Nepal, Bangladesh and eastern India have been hit the hardest by the rains, which have been pounding the region again since the weekend following a lull of about a week.

In Nepal, at least 269 people have died in floods and landslides, which have swept through the Himalayan kingdom in the past four days, officials in the affected areas said.

Home ministry officials in Kathmandu said 972 families from 19 of Nepal's 75 districts have been affected by flooding and landslides, with the rains expected to rage on throughout the week.

In Bangladesh, more than 2.3 million people have been left stranded or homeless from surging floodwaters since the beginning of the month, disaster and health ministry officials said.

Some 200,000 homes have been submerged in 12 of the country's 64 districts.

At least 19 people died in the flooding, 16 of them due to waterborne diseases, the officials said.

They added that fresh monsoon rains have engulfed more villages in several southeastern hill districts since the weekend.

In India, floods have ravaged parts of the eastern states of Bihar and Assam, leaving at least two million people homeless and claiming at least 26 lives.

The tiny Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan, meanwhile, has experienced heavy landslides following torrential rains over the weekend.

A Bhutanese Transport Ministry official told AFP from the capital Thimphu that highways had been blocked and traffic disrupted.

## "Missile man" sworn in as Indian president

AFP, New Delhi

Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, known as "missile man" for his close association with India's nuclear and space programme, was yesterday sworn in as the country's 12th president.

He immediately set elimination of poverty and unemployment as one of his priorities.

Kalam, a Muslim who began his career as a paper boy and later became the architect of India's missile programme, was administered the oath of office by chief justice BN Kripal at a glittering ceremony in the central hall of parliament.

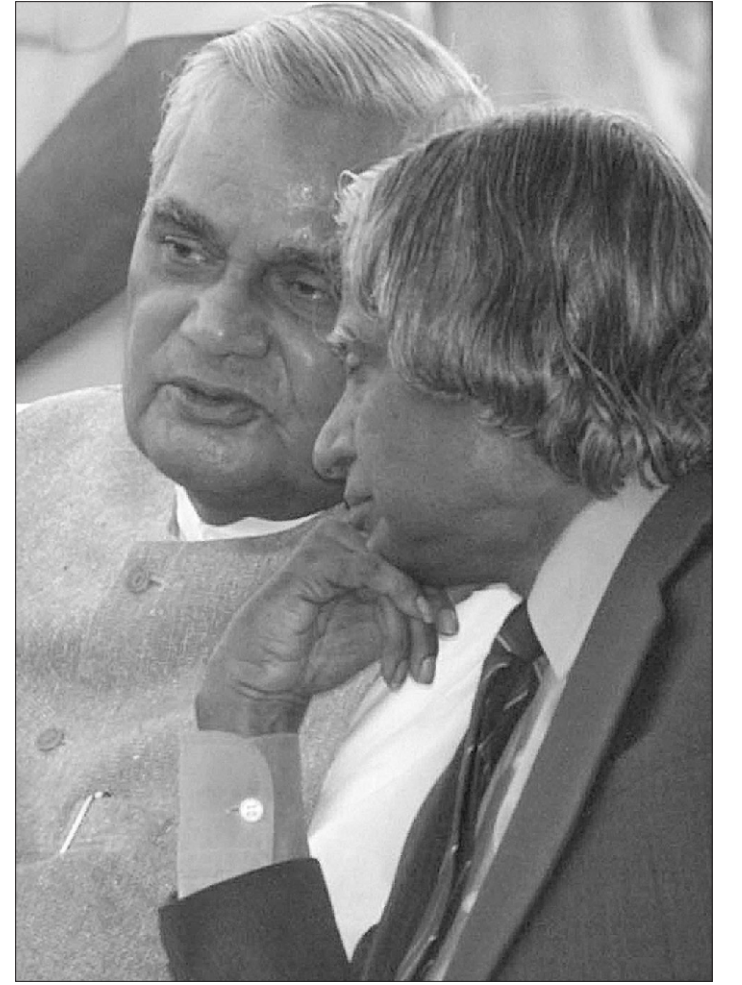
About 700 MPs from both the upper and lower houses of parliament, diplomats, industrialists and schoolchildren attended the function. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani and opposition leader Sonia Gandhi were among the guests.

The schoolchildren were invited to the function at the specific request of Kalam, who has set himself a goal of bringing 100,000 young Indians into the scientific community by 2020.

Kalam succeeds Kocheeril Raman Narayanan, who completed his five-year term on Wednesday, in the largely ceremonial post.

Kalam was escorted to the parliament house by mounted guards attired in traditional dress.

About 150 personnel each from the Indian army, airforce and navy gave the new president a ceremonial guard of honour. The president of India also holds the symbolic title of the "supreme commander" of Indian armed forces.



Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam talks to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (L) during a ceremony at the presidential palace in New Delhi on Wednesday. Kalam was sworn in as the 12th Indian president yesterday.

## Congress kicks Democrat out over kickbacks

AP, Washington

After nearly two decades of often outrageous, usually entertaining and never boring behaviour, Ohio Representative James Traficant exited the Capitol stage in defeat, taking his place in history as only the fifth House member to be expelled.

The anti-climactic 420-1 vote that ejected the nine-term congressman for taking bribes and kickbacks took just minutes Wednesday night. In that time, the maverick Democrat went from being a congressman with privileges and responsibilities to an ordinary citizen in his former district.

"I'm prepared to lose everything. I'm prepared to go to jail. You go ahead and expel me," he told his colleagues defiantly, maintaining his innocence and claiming that government prosecutors coerced witnesses to lie in order to convict him.

Traficant, 61, faces sentencing Tuesday for his federal jury conviction on 10 counts of bribery, racketeering and tax evasion. Prosecutors want him taken into custody at sentencing and for him to serve seven years in prison. He is expected to appeal.

From the blue and gold carpeted House floor, where his colourful tirades against the FBI, Internal Revenue Service and what he viewed as government inanity became a daily fixture, Traficant used his final remarks to plead with colleagues to reconsider.

"My people elected me and I don't think you should take their representative away," he said. But he added, "Vote your conscience. Nothing personal. I hope I'm back."

Traficant is seeking re-election this fall as an independent. Meanwhile, Republican Ohio Governor Bob Taft must now decide whether to hold a special election for Traficant's seat or let it remain unfilled until the 108th Congress is sworn in in January.

During Traficant's meandering, 45-minute statement Wednesday night, dozens of House members sat attentively in their seats, and the usually bustling chamber was quiet. Traficant argued that there was no physical evidence against him, accused the judge in his criminal trial of corruption and said government prosecutors had a vendetta against him.

The last time the House expelled a member was in 1980, when Rep Michael Myers, D-Pa., was kicked out for accepting bribes from FBI agents posing as Arab sheikhs. In its 213-year history, the House has expelled just three other members, all for treason during the Civil War.

Although he is not a lawyer, Traficant defended himself both during his nine-week trial in Cleveland and in front of the House ethics panel last week.

# Tough talk ahead for Powell in S Asia

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Colin Powell will face Indian calls to brand Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism, but is likely to instead endorse Islamabad's struggle against Islamic extremism when he arrives in South Asia this weekend.

Powell will be making his second trip to India and Pakistan this year, following up on his exhaustive interventions by telephone as tensions peaked several times in recent months between the two nuclear armed neighbors.

He is expected to hold face-to-face talks with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf.

The key issue of his short trip, (one overnight stay in India, but only a few hours in Pakistan) is likely to

be infiltration -- the movement of extremists from Pakistan-ruled Kashmir into the Indian sector of the disputed region.

India has made clear even before Powell leaves on Friday that it is deeply disappointed with Musharraf's deeds in following up his pledge to crack down on extremists and militant groups in Kashmir -- the spur for decades of South Asia mistrust.

"Terrorism remains a state policy of Pakistan," said Indian foreign ministry spokeswoman Nirupama Rao on Wednesday, arguing that infiltration of militants across the border into Indian controlled Kashmir is still going on.

The United States, citing its own evidence, says infiltrations have sharply decreased -- but appears nervous that another terror strike

like the one in Kashmir earlier this month which killed 28 Hindus could send India-Pakistan tensions back to the boil.

Pakistan, under firm pressure, emerged as a key ally of the United States in its campaign against Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, following the September 11 attacks, and despite India's dismay, Washington still regards Musharraf as a useful partner.

"President Musharraf, recognising the danger that extremism poses to his country, has denounced it and vowed to prevent the use of Pakistan as a base for extremists," said Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca last week.

The extremists, showing how threatened they feel by President Musharraf's actions, have struck

back. We are standing by Pakistan as it faces the brutal challenge of these ruthless extremists," she said in testimony to Congress.

Powell is the latest in a series of top Western politicians to visit South Asia in recent weeks, the last was British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw.

After lending an ear to India's complaints, Powell is likely to face more pressure from Islamabad to push New Delhi towards a dialogue on Kashmir, the cause of two of the India-Pakistan wars since independence from Britain in 1947.

But again, Powell is unlikely to deviate from established US policy -- that Washington can play the facilitator for talks, but believes it is up to India and Pakistan to get down to serious talking about Kashmir.

"We want to work with them on

how to develop a dialogue between them so that they can address the issues between them, including Kashmir," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher on Wednesday.

India has always rejected third party mediation of the Kashmir dispute, while Pakistan consistently campaigns for outside intervention.

Kashmir, India's only Muslim majority state, has been in the throes of an Islamic insurgency since 1989, which has claimed more than 36,500 lives so far.

India accuses Pakistan of fomenting the insurgency, a charge that Islamabad denies though it admits to extending moral, political and diplomatic support to the Kashmiris