

Powell pushes for int'l coalition to snub Iraq

European Parliament warns US against military action

AFP, Johannesburg

US Secretary of State Colin Powell told the European Union on Wednesday that he stressed "international coalition-building" in addressing the Iraq crisis, the top EU representative said.

Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, whose country is current EU president, said Powell "stressed the importance of international coalition-building and he underlined that the United States attaches the strongest importance to the involvement of the international community in the Iraq case."

"I fully agree (with him)," Rasmussen told reporters. Rasmussen said their talks, on the sidelines of the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, had been "very fruitful" with "a very interesting exchange of views."

"There is agreement between the European Union and the United States that here and now we should concentrate our efforts on ensuring that international weapons inspectors get free and unrestricted access to Iraq in order to investigate the situation," he said.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Saddam Hussein is a problem, no doubt that he has the capability of producing mass destruction weapons and from experience we know that he has the willingness to use them. Furthermore we know that he has breached several UN resolutions."

Rasmussen reiterated the EU's position that all steps against Iraq should be decided within the framework of the United Nations.

He added: "I think it is of vital importance to pursue the UN track ... the international community should put maximum of pressure" on President Saddam to ensure "free and unhindered access."

"It's premature to make considerations on what, when or should happen if international weapons inspectors are not allowed to get access to Iraq," Rasmussen said.

The meeting took place amid mounting European opposition to a unilateral US strike on Iraq, which Washington says is striving to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

Meanwhile, the leaders of all of the European Parliament's main political groups on Wednesday warned the US against launching a military campaign against Iraq without UN backing.

"Unilateral intervention without the support of the United Nations would have devastating effects on the entire Middle East," said Enrique Baron Crespo, president of the Socialist group, speaking during a debate on the issue at the parliament's main base in Strasbourg, France.

Liberal leader Graham Watson said support from the Arab world was essential for any intervention. "If there is a war, it must be led by the international community and by the UN," he said.

Deranged man stabs 9 children in S Korea

REUTERS, Seoul

A knife-wielding man claiming he was driven by voices urging him to kill slashed nine young children on Wednesday in a church school cafeteria in the South Korean capital, police said.

"A deranged man rushed into the church cafeteria and slashed nine children who were having lunch," the detective in charge of the case told Reuters by telephone.

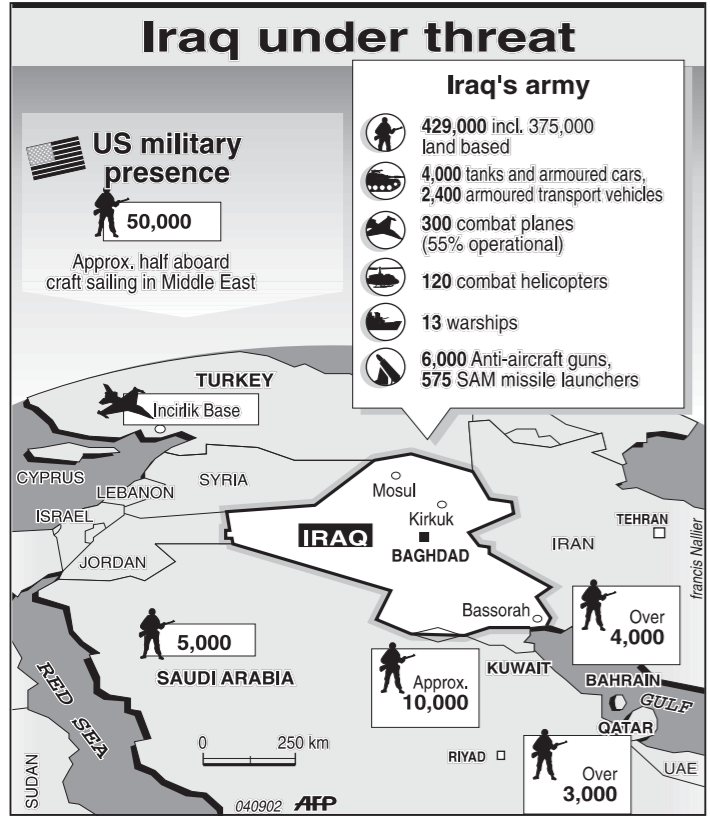
"Some of the kids are seriously injured," he added. The semi-official Yonhap news agency had earlier reported 10 children wounded by the assailant, a 53-year-old jobless man who was arrested 30 minutes after the attack in the Gunja neighbourhood of eastern Seoul.

The agency said three of the children, including a six-year-old boy, had suffered severe head and neck injuries. All the victims were attending the church preschool.

Yonhap said the knife assault took place as 45 children and three adults were eating lunch in the church cafeteria. The detective said 24 children and two teachers were present.



A South Korean mother helps her child, one of the victims of slashing in a church, at a hospital in Seoul on Wednesday. A knife-wielding man slashed nine children while they were at lunch. The 53-year-old unidentified man burst into the church canteen where the children were having lunch and stabbed nine of them in the face and neck. All nine children were sent to hospital with three listed in serious condition.



US deeply connected than ever to Asia

AFP, Washington

In the seismic shift in world geopolitics sparked by the September 11 attacks, the United States has found itself more engaged in Asia than at any time since the Vietnam War.

A year on from the assaults on New York and the Pentagon, events have proved that though distant from the mainland United States, Asia plays a more crucial role than ever in the security of the world's last superpower.

Within months of the attacks, Washington launched a war in Afghanistan, a graveyard for centuries of foreign invaders, in pursuit of terror suspect Osama bin Laden, and his Taliban protectors.

Simultaneously, with its Afghan campaign on the line, Washington was forced to step in to cool boiling tensions between India and Pakistan, with the nuclear rivals, both trying to twist the US anti-terror

war to fit their decades-long struggle, heading towards war.

And as it flushed out bin Laden's al-Qaeda network from the caves and mountains of Afghanistan, Washington was forced to look elsewhere for the group's potential hiding places, forcing it to rejig its policy on Southeast Asia.

Washington's strategy has been to encourage Asian nations to crack down on extremist groups by prioritising law enforcement, border controls and intelligence cooperation.

And it has placed renewed importance on its alliances in the region, bolstered by tens of thousands of troops in Japan and South Korea.

"For 50 years the United States has been the balance wheel of security in Asia," said Secretary of State Colin Powell in a speech to the Asia Society in June.

Gujarat BJP rally postponed for third time

AFP, Ahmedabad

The ruling party in the riot-hit Indian state of Gujarat has again postponed a controversial procession by Hindu nationalists which police and Muslims fear could re-ignite religious tensions.

The state government, headed by Chief Minister Narendra Modi, has been planning a Gujarat Gaurav Yatra (Pride of Gujarat) procession by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which controls the state and the federal government.

It was first postponed in July and slated for September 3. On Sunday it was put off until September 7.

The BJP announced late Tuesday the procession would again be postponed -- this time until September 8 -- because of security reasons.

"Since September 7 is the occasion for a big festival for the people of Gujarat, there would be huge crowds in all the pilgrim places. This can cause security problems," Gujarat's BJP chief Ranjendra Rana said.

Israel expels bomber's kin

Lebanese soldier, 3 more Palestinians killed in fighting

REUTERS, Jerusalem

An Israeli army convoy began deporting a Palestinian brother and sister from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, executing a military decree the Palestinian Authority branded a "war crime."

But the deportation -- Israel's first use of the internationally condemned tactic during a Palestinian uprising -- coincided with signs of movement on the political front.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said in a newspaper interview he had agreed to hold his first high-level talks with the Palestinians in months in a bid to reopen dialogue aimed at ending nearly two years of conflict.

Israel's Supreme Court ruled on Tuesday the army could expel Kifah and Intisar Ajouri because they helped their brother Ali, accused of planning a suicide bombing that killed five people in July, to hide from security forces and transport explosives.

The brother, Kifah, and sister, Intisar, headed to Gaza, where they were due to be confined for the next two years, in a seven-vehicle convoy that left an Israeli military detention center at Beit El in the West Bank, witnesses said.

Israel said the expulsion -- its first since a Palestinian revolt erupted against Israeli occupation in 2000 -- aimed to deter potential attackers.

The London-based human rights group Amnesty International called the expulsion a violation of international norms.

"This is a war crime," Palestinian cabinet minister Saeb Erekat said, accusing Israel of invoking "the law of the jungle."

"It has replaced international legitimacy with collective punishment and systematic state terror," he told Reuters.

Hamas, the militant group behind suicide bombings that have killed scores of Israelis, vowed to retaliate against the expulsions by mounting further attacks.

AFP adds: A Lebanese soldier and three Palestinians were killed in fighting Wednesday morning between the army and the Abu Nidal group in the Al-Jail refugee camp in Baalbek, eastern Lebanon, sources from both sides said.

The soldier, who belonged to an armoured vehicle transport unit, was hit in the forehead by a bullet fired from Palestinian fighters inside the camp, a Lebanese security source said.

No details were given on the identity of the three Palestinians also killed in the fighting that started at 6:15 am (0315 GMT) and which was continuing at scattered intervals by mid-morning.

The clash left 11 other Palestinians wounded, including two in serious condition. One of them is a member of the camp popular committee, a body made-up of all Palestinian factions and which runs the camp.

Protesters ridicule Powell

Environmentalists stage walk-out from summit

AFP, Johannesburg

Protesters drowned out a speech by US Secretary of State Colin Powell at the Earth Summit here Wednesday as he defended biotech food and his country's record on the environment and attacked Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe.

Security guards hauled a protester out of the plenary chamber, and demonstrators unfurled a banner reading: "Betrayed by governments". South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, chairing the session, repeatedly called for order and warned she might suspend the meeting.

Powell told the demonstrators, "Thank you very much, I've now heard you. I ask that you hear me, before he was able to resume and finish his speech."

"No American secretary of state has ever been booed the way that

Secretary Powell was booed by delegates today," said Bill Clap, director of the US National Environmental Trust.

"There is a very clear reason why. He has come with a simple message (to the world): our priorities are no longer your priorities," said Clap, the first of many US environmentalists to slam the administration of President George W. Bush for playing a destructive role at the summit.

The United States has been under intense fire at the summit, mainly for its rejection of the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. Its isolation was compounded by Bush's refusal to attend the meeting.

The protest erupted at a point in Powell's speech where he referred to the worsening food shortages that have afflicted six drought-stricken southern African countries, and blasted Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe for his controversial

seizure of white-owned farms.

"In one country in this region, Zimbabwe, the lack of respect for human rights and the rule of law has exacerbated these factors, to push millions of people forward towards the brink of starvation," Powell said.

Meanwhile, environmentalists staged a walk-out from the Earth Summit in Johannesburg Wednesday to protest against an action plan for the future of the planet that they believe was gutted by compromises and leaves big business dominant.

The Plan of Implementation, slated for adoption by world leaders at the summit, has been "successfully orchestrated by the multinational corporations and the governments to pull the rug from under a programme to close the poverty gap around the world to save the world's environment," Australian Greens Senator Bob Brown told reporters.

Chandrika seeks nominee at talks with Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is at odds with the government over the peace process with Tamil Tiger rebels, has asked to be represented at crucial talks in Thailand, her spokesman said Wednesday.

Harim Peiris said Kumaratunga had asked the government to "consider" including a presidential nominee at the formal negotiations due to open in Thailand on September 16.

"Our request has been conveyed to the government very recently... We hope this could be done through consensus," Peiris told reporters, adding that the president welcomed the start of the Norwegian-arranged negotiations.

However, the president has been sending conflicting signals on the peace process, insisting that the government resist the rebels' main demand that the ban on them be lifted before the start of talks.

"We don't want to be an obstacle to the talks," Peiris said, even after the president warned Monday that there were legal avenues open to her in case the government went against her wishes and legalised the Tigers.

Peiris had earlier said that the president did not mind the ban on the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) being lifted after firm dates were finalised to start peace talks.

However, on Wednesday he backtracked on that position saying he had been merely "raising the question" on the ban and that the president wanted it lifted based on the progress of the talks.

Korean wins Asian Innovator of Year Award

AFP, Singapore

South Korean Kuhwan Kim, a self-professed "geek" has won the Asian Innovator of the Year Award for his contribution to the development of innovative technologies.

Kim, who holds a doctorate in computer communications, is the head designer and general manager at Wiznet Inc.

He was presented with the award here Tuesday night at Globaltronics 2002, an Asian electronics and manufacturing exhibition and conference, for designing the Ether-3100i2Chip TCP/IP chip.

Nepal EC meets all parties to ensure fair polls

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Election Commission (EC) is to hold an all-party meeting Wednesday to discuss how snap polls scheduled for November will be "free and fair," state-run radio said.

"The EC will also discuss how to make the parties follow the election code of conduct," the radio said.

The elections were announced for November 13 by King Gyanendra in May after he disbanded the 205-member house of representatives on the recommendation of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Karnataka, Tamil Nadu lock horns over water

AFP, Bangalore

India's southern state of Karnataka convened an emergency cabinet meeting on Wednesday to discuss a row over water sharing with the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu.

The meeting follows a Supreme Court verdict Tuesday, which ordered Karnataka to release 1.25 thousand million cubic feet of water from its four reservoirs each day to Tamil Nadu until a final decision on the sharing is taken by a federal body.

The Tamil Nadu government has said its farmers are facing crisis due

to severe shortage of water.

But the move could provoke violent protests from farming groups and political parties in Karnataka, police said.

"The cabinet may seek the opinions of various legal experts to explore the avenues open to it to seek a review of the Supreme Court order," H.K. Patil, Karnataka's minister for water resources said.

The Karnataka government had argued the court should not pass any judgement until the federal body arrived at a decision on how to share the water during times of drought.

Reforms to top WHO talks

AFP, Manila

Healthcare reforms and new strategies to combat poverty-linked diseases stifling economic growth in East Asia and the Pacific are among key issues to be discussed at an upcoming annual World Health Organisation (WHO) regional meeting.

The five-day ministerial meeting of the WHO's Western Pacific regional office will be held in Kyoto, Japan from September 16.

Shigeru Omi, WHO regional director for the Western Pacific, said a top priority was to beef up the region's medical arsenal against

tuberculosis (TB), HIV/AIDS and malaria -- diseases associated with poverty.

"We have to break the cycle between poverty and disease which are closely associated and with one reinforcing the other," he told AFP.

Citing TB as an example, he said the stark truth was that about 1,000 people in the region were dying of the disease every year "much higher than terrorism which is topping the news daily."

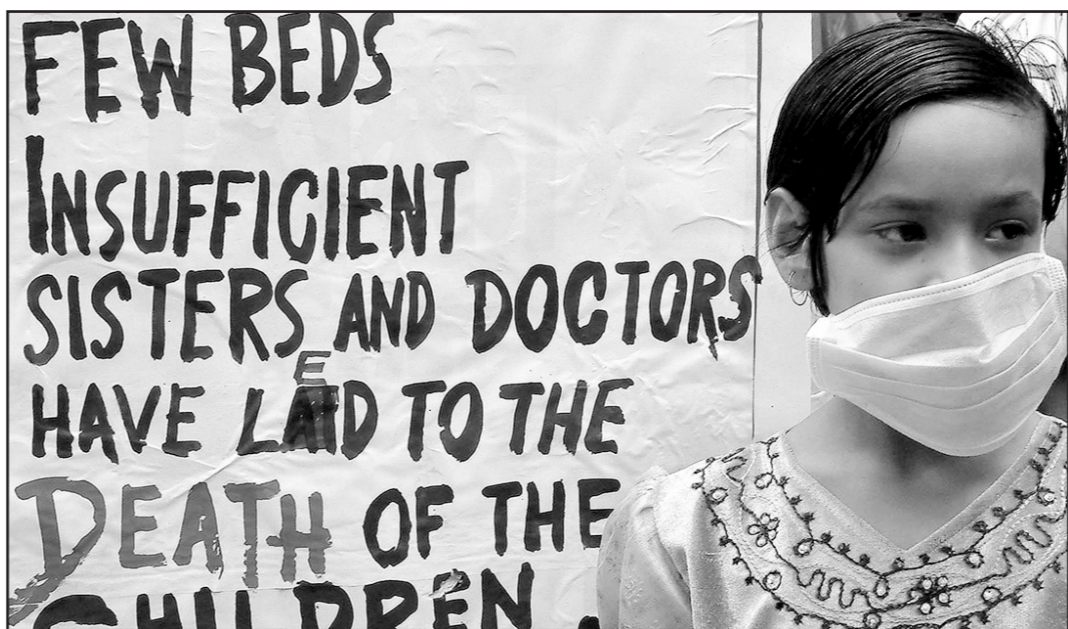
He said the benefits of diagnosing and treating TB far outweighed the economic costs of leaving the devastating disease untreated. China accounts for more than half of

notified TB cases in the region.

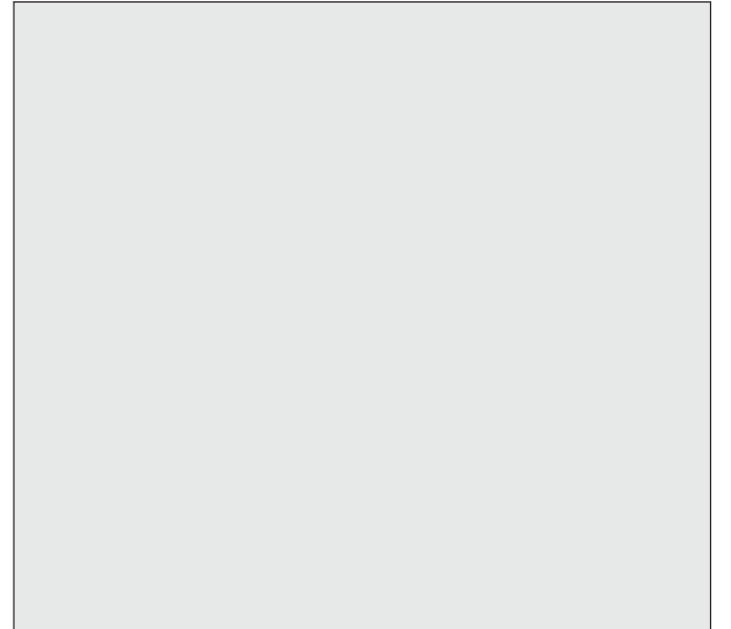
The Kyoto meeting would consider an eight-point action programme for governments to combat TB, including a review of national action plans to slash by half the prevalence and deaths due to the disease by 2010.

Aside from TB, the region is also grappling with threats posed by malaria and AIDS.

Although the prevalence of HIV - the virus that causes AIDS -- continues to be low in the region compared with prevalence rates elsewhere, there was a risk "this may lead to complacency," Omi said.



A child stands in front of a placard during a silent protest against child deaths at B. C. Roy Children Hospital in Kolkata on Wednesday. Three more children have died at the hospital in Kolkata, taking the death toll over the past four days to 18.



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