



Four-year-old Ali Shehata rides on his father's back holding a sign in support of the Palestinians, during a peace rally against a possible war led by the United States on Iraq, in Sydney on Saturday. Some 3,000 people gathered at the rally, backed by a broad coalition of community and church groups, to protest their views against US foreign policy in the Middle East and the Australian government's support of the US.

Key powers snub Bush as anti-war demos spread

Iraq eyes massive US casualties in event of war

AFP, Moscow

A US-British diplomatic drive to win support from key world powers for a snap strike on Iraq faced a hard sell in Moscow on Saturday after crashing in France, while anti-war protests gathered steam.

US State Department official Marc Grossman was to arrive later Saturday in Moscow in a bid to persuade Russian officials to back a strongly worded UN resolution to disarm Iraq.

The New York Times reported that Washington's draft of the resolution would give Iraq just seven days to agree and 23 more days to open up totally to inspections or face military strikes.

Meanwhile in London, more than 100,000 protesters were expected to turn out for a "Don't Attack Iraq" demonstration that organisers hope will be one of the biggest anti-war marches ever in Europe.

Some 1,000 people marched through Sydney on Saturday to oppose Australian involvement in any military action against Iraq, chanting "no blood for oil".

And 2,000 anti-war protesters gathered Friday outside a Republican fundraiser in Denver, Colorado, where US President George W. Bush defended himself against charges of war-mongering.

"I'm willing to give peace a chance to work. I want the United Nations to work," Bush said.

But he cautioned that if Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein did not disarm on US terms, Washington would commit troops and do the job.

Clearly setting the tone for a tough mission for Grossman, the Russian foreign ministry put out a statement hailing efforts by Iraq and the United Nations to resume arms inspections.

Russia "hails both sides' intent to carry out a responsible and constructive dialogue" and "deems it essential to guarantee that (these talks) produce substantial results so as to speed up the deployment of inspection units on Iraqi territory," the ministry said.

The UN's chief arms inspector was to hold talks in Vienna on Monday with Iraqi officials.

Hans Blix, chairman of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), was to reopen negotiations on practical details of resuming work in Iraq after a gap of four years.

Meanwhile, Iraq on Saturday raised the nightmare scenario for Washington of huge numbers of US casualties if war is unleashed on Baghdad.

"Iraq will fight," vowed Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz.

"The assault against Iraq will not be a cakewalk for the Americans but a fierce war during which the United States will suffer losses they have never sustained for decades," he warned.

Kidnapped Ivory Coast ministers released

AFP, Abidjan

Two government ministers abducted by mutinous soldiers in the Ivory Coast have been freed, national television announced late Friday.

Sports Minister Francois Amichia was kidnapped in the country's second city of Bouake, where he had gone to watch a football tournament, on September 19, the day the mutiny erupted in the West African nation.

"We were abducted by elements of the national armed forces and then taken to a place of detention," Amichia told national television, RTI.

Amichia, who was held at the air base in Bouake, said he was freed the next day by Ivorian soldiers "who were seeking to break away from the those who led the operation", and then hidden by private citizens in the city.

US wants 7-day deadline for Iraq to disarm

AP, United Nations

The draft of a tough US resolution calls on Iraq to reveal all materials relating to weapons of mass destruction and to give UN weapons inspectors unfettered access to presidential sites, according to American officials and Security Council diplomats.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would have seven days to agree to the UN resolution calling on him to disarm and then he would need to quickly present the council with a list of banned materials in Iraq's possession.

If he fails to comply, the resolution would threaten the use of "all necessary means" against him, officials told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The language in the draft is borrowed from a previous Security Council resolution and appeared aimed at winning the support of France, Russia and China.

The three, who are permanent members of the Security Council and hold veto power, have said they didn't want a resolution that

would threaten force before inspectors returned to Baghdad.

The draft resolution, to be jointly proposed by the United States and Britain - the other permanent members of the Security Council - has not been made public. But details were disclosed Friday, three days before the chief UN weapons inspector was to discuss preparations for his staff's return with Iraqi experts in Vienna.

According to officials, the draft resolution gives the inspectors the right to designate "no-fly" and "no-drive" zones in Iraq. Currently, "no-fly" zones in the north and south of the country are patrolled by US and British warplanes.

The resolution also would nullify assurances UN Secretary General Kofi Annan gave Saddam in 1998 that restrict inspections of presidential sites, including Saddam's palaces.

According to the deal between Annan and Iraq, inspectors were not allowed to spring surprise inspections on any of the eight so-called presidential sites, which encompass a total of about 12

square miles and include several palaces.

The resolution also envisions an end to the Iraqi practice of assigning government guides to accompany inspectors as they moved through the streets of Baghdad and elsewhere around the country.

It also would detail Iraq's violations and specify what Baghdad must do to correct them, especially "full, final and complete destruction" of weapons of mass destruction.

In the meantime, Britain and the United States continued to lobby for support from France, Russia and China.

Bush called French President Jacques Chirac to try to win his backing for the US-British proposal. But Chirac resisted, telling Bush he opposed threatening Iraq with military force upfront.

Chirac, instead, urged Bush to back a French approach for two resolutions - a first one calling for full compliance and cooperation with inspectors, and a second one authorising force should Iraq fail to comply.

700 feared drowned in Senegal ferry disaster

AFP, Dakar

Rescuers continued to search on Saturday for almost 700 people missing and feared drowned after a passenger ferry capsized and sank in stormy seas off the coast of the West African nation of Senegal, as hopes were fading that any more survivors would be found.

The Senegalese military said 41 bodies have been recovered, and that 59 survivors had been plucked from the sea by rescue vessels and passing fishing boats after the disaster late Thursday.

The ferry, the Joola, was carrying 796 people when it left Ziguinchor, the main town of the southern Senegalese province of Casamance, for the capital Dakar, officials said.

Four fishing boats during the night brought 10 shocked and exhausted survivors and the bodies of 31 of the victims to Dakar. Other boats arrived Friday in Dakar and in the Gambian capital of Banjul.

Rescue services said they would continue operations all day Saturday, although the chances of finding more survivors was growing increasingly slim.

The passengers are said to have included an unspecified number of foreigners, including some from France and other European countries.

Prime Minister Mame Madior Boye said according to early information the boat had capsized under the combined effects of wind and heavy rains. "For the moment the boat's condition is not in any doubt," she said.

Officials said the Joola, which returned to service on September 10 after more than a year under repair, overturned in a storm at around 11:00 pm (2300 GMT) on Thursday.

One of the survivors, Patrick Sauverey, told local radio that the ship capsized so quickly that passengers had no time to don life jackets.

"We were watching a video," Sauverey said. "It was raining a lot and the wind was blowing hard."

Maritime officials said on Friday the vessel had been designed to carry only 500 people.

Some passengers on the ferry's first trip following its repair -- when two government ministers hosted Senegalese journalists on board -- also reported that the vessel appeared to have problems with strong winds.

Salman caught in car crash

AFP, Mumbai

Bollywood star Salman Khan surrendered Saturday to police after he allegedly lost control of his car and drove into four people sleeping on the pavement, killing one of them.

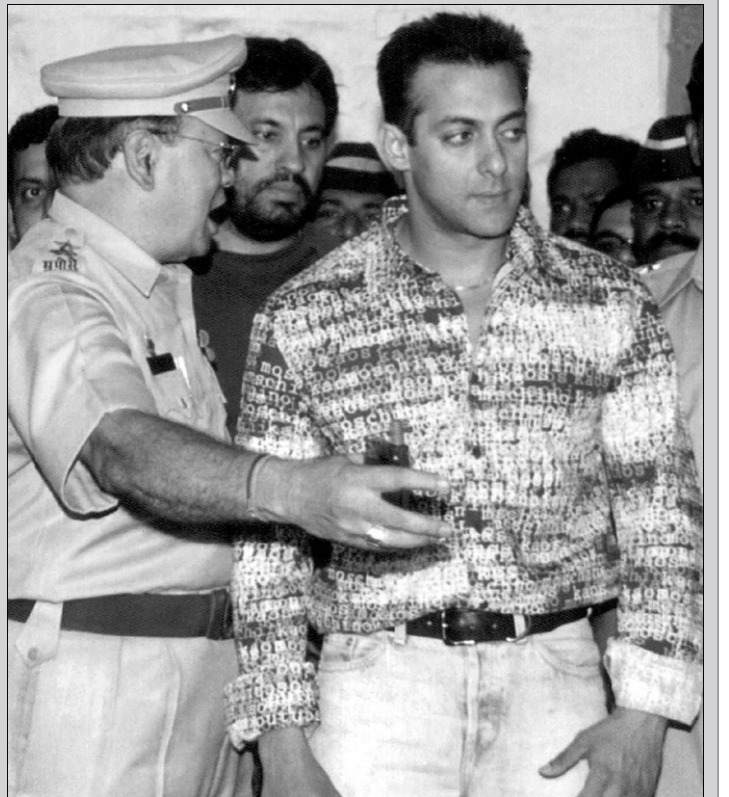
The Indian heartthrob's Toyota Land Cruiser drove off the road in Bombay's upscale Bandra district at around 3:00 am (2130 GMT Friday), a police spokesman said.

"Khan was driving the car. One person died on the spot and the injured have been admitted to the hospital," the spokesman said.

After the accident, Khan left the scene but his police bodyguard went to the Bandra police station and lodged a complaint which said the actor was driving "rashly", the spokesman added.

Khan later surrendered at the Bandra police station where he was arrested and taken to a hospital to test for traces of alcohol in his blood, officials said.

A city court released him on bail. Khan, 36, has appeared in dozens of films, mostly starring as a romantic hero. Known for his off-camera fits of anger, Khan is famous -- or notorious -- for appearing topless to provide the audience with a full view of his muscular body.



Bollywood actor Salman Khan (R) surrenders himself to police on Saturday in Mumbai. Salman Khan allegedly lost control of his car and drove into four people sleeping on the pavement, killing one of them.

Major admits having affair

AFP, London

John Major, an outwardly unassuming and conventional married man who served as Britain's prime minister after Margaret Thatcher, has admitted to having had a love affair with a fellow-Conservative politician who later went on to become a minister, the Times newspaper reported on Saturday.

The admission by Major, who said he was "most ashamed" of the episode, came as the Times published an interview with the former Conservative minister Edwina Currie, who revealed that she began a four-year adulterous affair with Major back in the days when both of them were members of parliament.

"It is the one event in my life of which I am most ashamed and I have long feared it would be made public," Major, who is now 59, told the Times in a statement.

The former prime minister added that his wife Norma "has known of this matter for many years and has long forgiven me."



Former British Prime Minister John Major with Edwina Currie at the launch of the Conservative European Manifesto in central London, May 23, 1994. John Major and his Conservative colleague Edwina Currie had a four-year love affair when serving as ministers, Currie said Saturday.

UNSC asks Israel to lift siege

Ireland blames Tel Aviv for flouting UN resolution

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council demanded on Friday that Israel end its siege of Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah in the West Bank, its current president, Bulgarian ambassador Stefan Tafrov, said.

Tafrov in a brief statement said Israel should apply a text adopted on Tuesday, known as Resolution 1435, and firmly enforce it, but made no other commentary.

The resolution was adopted in the early hours of Tuesday, after 16 hours of consultations and public debate, at the request of the Arab group.

The council said it was "gravely concerned at the reoccupation of the headquarters of the President of the Palestinian Authority in the City of Ramallah" and demanded "its immediate end."

The text demanded that Israel "immediately cease measures in and around Ramallah, including the destruction of Palestinian civilian and security infrastructure."

The resolution was adopted by 14-0 votes, with the United States abstaining.

A top official with the Israeli government, however, told AFP late Friday, on condition of anonymity, that the United Nations could demand all it wanted.

"Israel will continue with its operation" until its objectives are reached, the diplomat said.

Meanwhile, Ireland Friday accused Israel of flouting the will of the UN Security Council and demanded an immediate end to the siege of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank.

Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Brian Cowen also called for an end to attacks by Israeli forces on heavily populated Palestinian civilian areas.

"In spite of the resolution, (1435, adopted Tuesday) Israeli forces are still besieging the presidential compound in Ramallah and maintaining their oppressive occupation of the Palestinian cities in the West Bank," Cowen said in a statement.

On Thursday, Israeli forces launched a helicopter strike on a car in a crowded area of Gaza City which killed two members of the Islamic radical group Hamas and injured 25 Palestinians, 10 of them children.

"This attack shows disregard for the opinion of the international community and an unwillingness to respect international law," Cowen said.

"I call on the Palestinian Authority to fulfill its obligations, as well as on the government of Israel to immediately comply in full with the requirements of resolution 1435 and to conduct itself in a manner which is fully consistent with international humanitarian law."

Resolution 1435 demands an end to the reoccupation of Arafat's headquarters and that Israel "immediately cease measures in and around Ramallah, including the destruction of Palestinian civilian and security infrastructure."

Moreover, hundreds of Palestinians took to the streets of most towns and refugee camps in the Gaza Strip Saturday morning, with thousands more expected in Gaza City later to mark the second anniversary of the Intifada.

Groups of hundreds of Palestinians, mainly students, were staging marches in the southern towns of Rafah and Khan Yunis, the central town of Deir al-Balah and the refugee camps of Nusseirat and Jabalya.

'Sharon after Arafat to kill him'

AFP, Cairo

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon could soon kill Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who has been besieged for over a week in his Ramallah headquarters, senior negotiator Saeb Erekat said in remarks published Saturday.

"Sharon wants to undermine Arafat and could kill him soon because (Arafat) insists on an Israeli withdrawal to the borders of 1967, and the creation of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as capital," Erekat told the Egyptian daily Akhbar Al-Yom.

"The Palestinian president has become a target of the United States and Israel because of his attachment to his principles," Erekat added, saying they would fail in trying to find someone to replace the 73-year-old leader.

Tigers, troops swap POWs amid emotional scenes

AFP, Omani

Troops and Tamil Tiger rebels on Saturday swapped prisoners at an emotional ceremony in northern Sri Lanka marking the island's biggest public display yet of rapprochement.

Government soldiers and their long-time enemy, the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), met inside what is officially a no-man's land at this de-facto frontier post in the island's north.

Under a plastic sheet tent, Sri Lankan troops and the LTTE exchanged 18 prisoners held by the two sides, some for as long as nine years, who were immediately reunited with their families.

Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary Austin Fernando chaired the swap at Omani, 270 km north of the capital Colombo, where the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) acted as the go-between.

"This (prisoner swap) is another significant milestone to a negotiated settlement of what was at one

time considered an intractable conflict," Fernando said.

He said Saturday's exchange, which had been delayed by more than a month due to legal snags, signifies the beginning of a partnership between the government and the rebel LTTE as they pursue Norwegian-sponsored peace talks.

The government freed 11 members of the LTTE here, including a senior member of the group's elite suicide squad known as the Black Tigers. Another two Tigers were reunited with their families in the capital Colombo.

For their part, the LTTE freed seven security personnel they had been holding for over eight years.

Fernando said he was urging the LTTE to look into whether there were any more government security personnel in rebel custody.

However, an LTTE spokesman said the Tigers were on Saturday releasing the final batch of security personnel held by them.

"While expressing our sense of satisfaction in the reunion of these families we expect that similar

steps be initiated for the release and reunion of several hundreds of Tamil youth languishing in Sri Lankan prisons," he said.

Government soldiers and LTTE fighters dressed in their camouflaged uniforms were seen shaking hands and engaging in light-hearted banter as the ceremony supervised by the Red Cross got underway.

Sri Lanka's army chief Lionel Balagalle sat flanked by two senior LTTE leaders, self-styled colonels Bhanu and Theepan. Such scenes were unthinkable before a truce went into effect in February.

The two parties met along a 500-metre (-yard) stretch of road regarded as the no-man's land here where civilians cross from government-controlled area to the rebel-held Wanni region.

Omani town serves as a de facto frontier post for travellers.

As the POWs were released after the Red Cross completed its formalities, the men were reunited with their immediate families.

9 killed in Kashmir Attack on 2 polls candidates

AFP, Srinagar

At least nine people including four Muslim rebels and two Indian troops were killed in Kashmir, as two contestants in the ongoing elections here survived assassination attempts, police said Saturday.

Three people were killed and a woman candidate was injured Saturday in a powerful landmine blast in the district of Kulgam, 70 km south of Srinagar, the turbulent summer capital of Kashmir, police said.

A police spokesman said Khalid Mustaq of the opposition National Congress Party was injured, but added that the identity of the three killed in the ambush was not immediately known.

None of Kashmir's two dozen Muslim rebel groups, who oppose the elections to Kashmir's 87-seat legislature, has claimed responsibility for the latest attack.

Mustaq's seat is up Tuesday in the third leg of the staggered elections which began September 16.

Mustaq's constituency is Devsar, which adjoins the Noorabad seat of Kashmir's only woman government minister Sakina Itoo, who has faced four assassination bids.

Muslim rebels Friday night fired rockets at the house of a candidate from the ruling National Conference party, Syed Abdul Rashid, in a village near Kokernag, 70 km from Srinagar, the official said.

"The militants also opened fire," he said, adding one of the rockets hit the house causing some damage. However, there were no casualties.

Rashid, who is contesting from the Kokernag legislative seat, was at home when the gunmen struck.

Kokernag is part of Anantnag district, which along with adjoining Pulwama and two other districts goes to the polls on Tuesday.

Two militants and a federal policeman were, meanwhile, killed in a four-hour gunbattle that broke out when counter-insurgency police, backed by paramilitary forces, cordoned a village in the central district of Budgam to look for guerrillas.



A girl dressed as "Mother India" leads several masked youths representing terrorism and corruption during a rally in New Delhi on Saturday. The youths were protesting against the policies of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which they claim have led to widespread corruption and a crisis in the economy.