

Bush hints at bypassing UN on Iraq action

Marchers around world protest US policy

AP, Cabo San Lucas

The White House said Saturday it would be "not very hard at all" to assemble an alliance to confront Saddam Hussein without the United Nations, a clear signal that President Bush's patience with the international organisation is reaching its limits.

As France, Russia, Mexico and other allies seek to water down his zero-tolerance approach to Iraq, Bush renewed his call for the UN to confront Saddam or stand aside while the United States acts.

"If the UN does not pass a resolution which holds him to account and that has consequences, then, as I have said in speech after speech after speech, if the UN won't act if Saddam Hussein won't disarm we will lead a coalition to disarm him," the president said at the 21-nation Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Later, Secretary of State Colin Powell said the prospects for a tough resolution may be slipping away.

"I don't want to say that we're near a solution because it may evade us," he told reporters. "But I think we have successfully narrowed down the differences to a few key issues. And if we can resolve these few key issues in the days ahead, then I think we might get a resolution that would be strong."

"I don't think there's any doubt that the threat of force and the threat of consequences ... must be there or we know that Iraq will not respond," Powell said.

Bush spoke at the side of Mexican President Vicente Fox, who hosted an economic conference of Pacific Rim nations. Mexico does not support the hard-line resolution Bush seeks.

Asked whether there would be consequences for any nation that does not support his views, Bush said, "The only consequence, of course, is with Saddam Hussein."

Fox, speaking through an interpreter, said he stressed with Bush his hopes the United Nations could resolve the impasse. But the Mexican leader gave no indication he would yield to Bush's demand for a resolution with consequences.

"We are listening and talking and we want to search for and do everything possible for a strong resolution, a resolution that will result in the prompt return of inspectors, that Iraq complies with the existing agreements with the United Nations," Fox said.

Bush was asked after the appearance whether he heard what he wanted to hear from Fox on Iraq. He shook his head and said yes.

"We did talk about world peace and Iraq," Bush said in the brief exchange with reporters. Though he speaks some Spanish, the president had the aid of an interpreter.

He noted that Mexico is a member of the UN Security Council. "We discussed how to keep the world peaceful, how to hold people to account, how to make sure the United Nations is effective."

Bush is unrelenting in his demand for a resolution that promises consequences, potentially military action, if the Iraqi president does not give up his weapons programs, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

AFP adds: Opponents of US policy toward Iraq staged rallies Saturday in cities around the world, including Washington, where some 50,000 protesters circled the White House and speakers denounced President George W. Bush as a war criminal.

Many of the demonstrators also denounced Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and US support for Israel.

In Washington, the protesters — estimated by organisers at 100,000 — beat on drums and chanted slogans reminiscent of the huge anti-Vietnam war protests of the 1960s and 1970s, such as "1-2-3-4, we don't want your racist war."

Organisers from the coalition of mostly leftist groups had expected the rally here to be the largest since the Vietnam war era.

Speakers, including veteran civil rights advocate Jesse Jackson, also compared the new protest movement to the massive nonviolent campaign led by Martin Luther King Jr in the 1960s to end discrimination against blacks.

"Thank you for taking your place today in the long historic chain of struggle," Jackson said.



Anti-war protestors march past the White House in Washington, DC on Saturday to protest US President George W. Bush's policy advocating war against Iraq. Washington police spokesman Quentin Peterson said the protesters had requested a permit for 20,000 marchers but an estimated 50,000 may have shown up. Speakers included musician Patti Smith and actress Susan Sarandon.



India's main opposition Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi (L) and leader of the Kashmir's People's Democratic Party Mufti Mohammad Sayeed (R) give a press conference in Dew Delhi on Saturday. India's main opposition Congress Party and the Kashmir's People's Democratic Party forged a formal coalition to form a provincial government in Indian-administered Kashmir. "Mufti Mohammad Sayeed will be leading the government in Jammu and Kashmir (state)," Sonia Gandhi announced after the meeting.

Kashmir's new coalition plans to end militancy

Sayed set to become CM

AFP, New Delhi

A new coalition of political parties poised to assume power in Indian Kashmir Sunday offered sweeping measures to end Islamic militancy in the disputed region.

"We emphasise that we have to win the hearts of the people without any discrimination and that will be our challenge" said chief minister designate Mufti Mohammed Sayeed.

India's main opposition Congress party and Sayeed's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Saturday officially announced that they would join forces to form a

coalition government in the state following recent elections.

In an eight-page agenda, the coalition pledged to put an end to 13 years of separatist violence and said the new government would try to rectify the mistakes of the past.

In a 31-point common minimum programme, Sayeed said all cases of custodial killings and violations of human rights abuses would be investigated and those responsible for them would be identified and punished.

"The coalition government shall form a comprehensive release and rehabilitation package for those families affected by militant violence

over the past decade," the programme says.

"The state government will reach out to the children, widows and parents of the deceased militants and make endeavours to provide education to the militancy-affected orphans."

It also said the coalition government would look into releasing all those being held in detention who have not been formally charged.

Together the two parties have 36 seats, still eight short of a majority in the 87-member assembly. Smaller groups and independents have pledged their support to the coalition.

Israeli Labour threatens to quit unity govt

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's centre-left Labour party threatened Sunday to vote down the 2003 budget plan and bolt the country's national unity coalition if funds for Jewish settlers are not slashed as part of the government's austerity package. "The settlers are privileged. They are the only ones not touched by the planned cuts in the budget, and we cannot accept this," said Transportation Minister Ephraim Sneh.

"We will not vote for the current budget with all the consequences that it will bring," Sneh said, quoted by military radio.

Deputy Defence Minister Shiri Weizman, a confidante of Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer, who heads Labour, said the party would give hawkish Prime Minister Ariel Sharon an ultimatum on the settler issue Sunday.

118 hostages killed in rescue operation

Russia faces tough questions on gas

AFP, Moscow

Russia was facing hard questions on Sunday over its gas attack on Chechen hostage-takers as authorities said the death toll mounted to 118 people, with hundreds more seriously ill.

Anxious relatives kept vigil outside hospitals, desperately waiting to know if loved ones had made it through the ordeal in a Moscow theatre, which ended when Russian forces used gas to subdue the rebels and then attacked.

Deputy Interior Minister Vladimir Vasilyev denied reports that the gas had caused the hostage deaths but doctors said they did not know how

to treat the ailing because they had not been told what the "special substance" was.

Speculation in the foreign press that Russian forces may have used nerve gas was sure to put further pressure on President Vladimir Putin over his handling of the crisis, being seen here as Moscow's own September 11.

If confirmed, use of a chemical gas would surely unleash an avalanche of criticism of Putin, elected more than two years ago on a wave of support for his hardline stance against Muslim separatists in Chechnya.

APEC leaders agree to crackdown on terror

AFP, Los Cabos

Asia-Pacific leaders will wrap up a summit here Sunday with a crackdown on terror, adopting a slew of new security measures and condemning a tide of violence from a Bali car bomb massacre to a bloody Moscow hostage drama.

In a crucial mini-summit here Saturday, the United States, Japan and South Korea also demanded that North Korea immediately halt its quest for nuclear weapons.

While erecting a stronger anti-terror shield, lining up behind US President George W. Bush, leaders of the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum promised to protect the heart of the global economy — the free flow of goods and people.

That promise, a central aim of the forum since the September 11 attacks, appeared to be under threat as the leaders met, guarded by warships, an air exclusion zone and a 3,000-strong security force.

Bloodshed in the Moscow theatre hostage siege forced President Vladimir Putin to pull out of this gathering, a Bali nightclub blast killed 190 people two weeks ago, and a spate of bomb attacks rocked the Philippines this month.

"President Bush and other APEC leaders issued a statement condemning in the strongest terms the recent terrorist attacks in Bali, Indonesia, the Philippines and Moscow, and pledging to accelerate counter-terrorism cooperation," the White House said.

Bush, Chinese President Jiang Zemin, and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi joined other leaders in agreeing to a security response drawn up by the United States.

Known as the Secure Trade in the APEC region (STAR) initiative, it aimed to enhance security while increasing trade, the White House said.

Bodo rebels kill 22 in Assam

PTI, Guwahati

At least 22 people were massacred in their sleep and several others injured when the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland militants raided a village on the Indo-Bhutan international border in Assam's Kokrajhar district early on Sunday morning.

A top police official told PTI here that the ultras opened fire on people sleeping in their houses in Dadgiri village under Basugaon police station area killing 22 of them on the spot and injuring several others.

The victims have been identified as Bihari Muslims and Nepalese who trade goods across the border to Bhutan. The NDFB has camps in Bhutan bordering Assam and has been active in the area.

Meanwhile, four policemen were injured, two of them seriously, when a bomb planted by militants under a bridge exploded, the official said.

The injured were members of a police party from Basugaon police station going to Dadgiri to investigate the massacre. Two of them have been hospitalised.

Environmentalists urge poor nations to rally against global warming

AFP, New Delhi

Environmental activists at a shadow conference to a high-powered UN meeting on climate change Sunday urged developing countries to join forces to demand urgent action on global warming.

"It is time to ask rich countries to pay back their ecological debt to you," Andrew Simms, policy director of the non-governmental UK-based New Economics Foundation, told representatives from poor nations.

"People in rich countries have taken away their share (of the environment), but it is worse than that, they are taking away your share."

"We have got to stop people like that from playing with your future," he added.

Environmental and social action groups, including Greenpeace,

Friends of the Earth and the Third World Network, held the two-day "Climate Justice Forum" in New Delhi to highlight issues which they say are being ignored at the two-week long UN conference.

They blamed the rich nations of the world for rampant and haphazard industrial development and said the resulting climate change was putting the lives of millions of poor people at risk.

Simms said the situation was like finding your home suddenly overrun by strangers who cause floods by leaving the tap running and fires by putting the cooking gas on.

"That is what it is with global warming and this is what the rich countries are doing to you. And they think they are helping you to develop, but the truth is it is the opposite," he headed.

US, Japan, ROK call for end to North's nuclear programme

AFP, Los Cabos

The United States, Japan and South Korea on Saturday demanded that North Korea immediately halt its quest for nuclear weapons at a summit called to reinvigorate their joint front against Pyongyang.

US President George W. Bush, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi signed on to a statement designed to frustrate North Korea's apparent bid to fray their consensus on the issue.

But despite firming up a joint roadmap out of a crisis that threatens the balance of power in North Asia, the text made no mention of punitive measures the partners would take should North Korea ignore their demand.

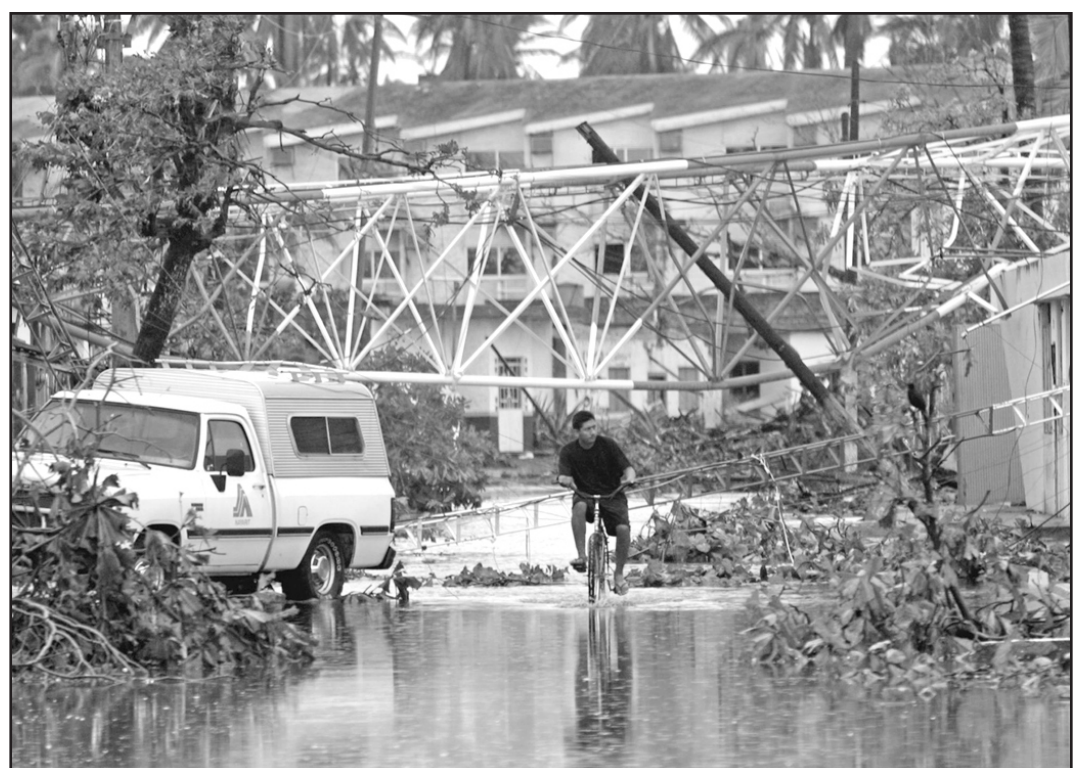
"North Korea's relations with the international community now rest on

North Korea's prompt and visible actions to dismantle its program to produce highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons," the statement said.

The leaders, meeting before the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum summit in this Mexican seaside resort town called on Pyongyang to dismantle its recently revealed enriched uranium program in a "prompt and verifiable manner."

North Korea must ensure it comes into "full compliance with its international commitments," the statement said.

Significantly, Bush, who has branded North Korea part of an "axis of evil," joined his colleagues in affirming strong support for Japan and South Korea's dialogues with Pyongyang.



A man bikes after hurricane Kenna passed through San Blas Nayarit located on the Pacific coast of Mexico on Saturday. Hurricane Kenna has rapidly lost steam and been downgraded to a tropical depression, after causing two deaths in Mexico's Pacific coast region, weather officials said.

3 killed in WB suicide attack

AFP, Jerusalem

Three people were killed and some 30 hurt Sunday when a Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up by a filling station at a Jewish settlement in the West Bank, witnesses and officials said.

The gas station is just inside the entrance to the major settlement of Ariel, 15 kilometres (nine miles) north of Ramallah, which has around 15,000 residents.

There appeared to be no major damage to the petrol station itself, although empty cars could be seen by the pumps, their doors still open after drivers fled the blast.

Residents who rushed to the scene said they heard a shot fol-

lowed by an explosion.

Resident Ariel Humna, 18, said the Palestinian had walked into the settlement by a side road and been spotted by a soldier, who tackled the man.

When he realised the Palestinian had a bomb, the soldier shouted to colleagues eating at a diner next to the garage, one of whom shot at the bomber.

However, the kamikaze managed to detonate his charge, killing the soldier who tackled him and two others.

"On the grass I saw two people, one of them a soldier in flames," said Humna. "On the pavement I saw a dead person. There was another person missing an arm and a leg,

who appeared to be still alive," he told AFP.

Around 20 ambulances rushed to the scene and the area was sealed off by the army.

Israel was quick to condemn the attack, which came just a day after US special envoy William Burns left after consulting with both sides on an internationally-backed "roadmap" to defuse the two-year crisis, which brought a chilly response from both sides.

"Israel is pursuing a roadmap for peace with the United States, the Palestinians have answered with a roadmap of more terrorism and murder," said Israeli government spokesman Dore Gold.