

Bush leaves APEC summit without softening stance

AFP, Los Cabos

President George W Bush left an Asia-Pacific summit without visibly softening opposition to his firm line on Iraq, despite time spent wooing fellow leaders ahead of a week of high stakes drama in the UN Security Council.

Fresh from an early morning jog beside the sun dappled Pacific at this luxury golf and beach resort, Bush lunched with leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, before heading off to stump for congressional candidates in Phoenix, Arizona.

But he left with new controversy building on the US struggle to push a firm resolution through the UN Security Council which would include triggers for military action should Iraq not cooperate with a new programme of weapons inspections.

US officials warn that time is fast running out to forge consensus on a new resolution but France on Sunday laid down a fresh challenge to Washington -- warning it was considering tabling a counter resolution.

French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin warned Saturday: "If there is no breakthrough, we shall obviously officially submit our own document."

De Villepin proposed in an interview published Monday that a meeting of the UN Security Council be called at ministerial level to try to reach an agreement on a resolution on how to disarm Iraq.

"I put forward this idea to several colleagues, including (US Secretary of State) Colin Powell, who welcomed it," the minister told Le Figaro newspaper.

Bush, betraying signs of impatience with the pace of UN bartering,

warned here that he was still prepared to go it alone and disarm Iraq President Saddam Hussein, if fellow Security Council members did not fall into line.

"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," he said.

Secretary of State Colin Powell, who has spent weeks lobbying Washington's fellow UN Security Council members, warned it would be an "abject failure" if the world body came up with what he described as a "weak resolution."

The Iraq question tested the bonhomie between Bush and summit host Vicente Fox during a joint appearance on Saturday.

Mexico, currently a member of the UN Security Council is known to favour Russia and France's push for a two-step process, that would require the council to reconvene to decide on what action to take if Saddam Hussein refused to comply with inspections.

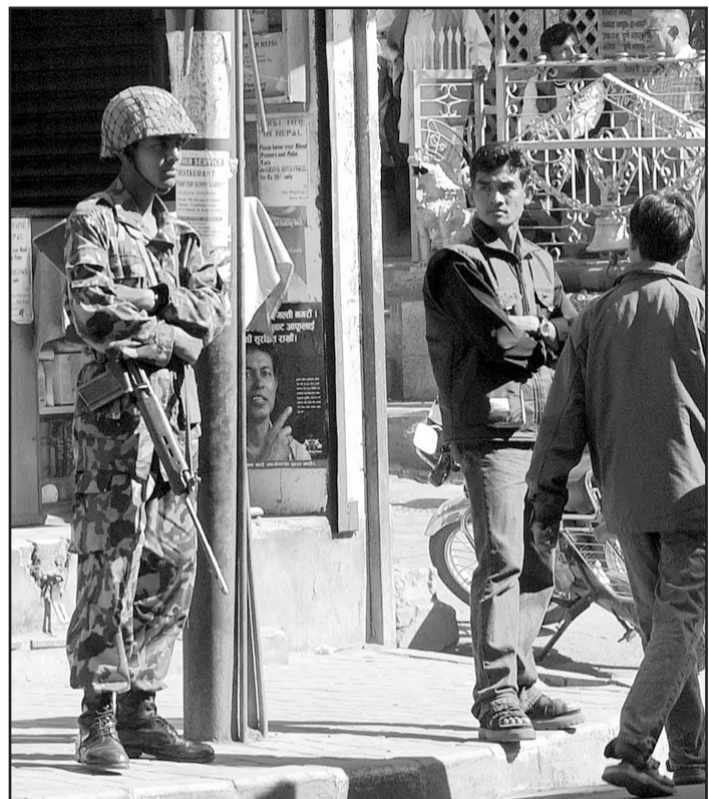
Fox said the APEC conference had a "general position" that would require "searching through the Security Council for consensus" and backed sending weapons inspectors to Iraq first before threatening military action.

Bush did manage to secure a fresh vow of support from one leader here -- Australian Prime Minister John Howard, but as Canberra's backing was already secured, he was preaching to the converted.

Uncertainty still surrounded China's exact position, following a pre-APEC summit between Bush and Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Texas on Friday. Jiang did not comment on China's voting intentions.



A member of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) stands guard on a Srinagar street yesterday. Security has been tightened in Kashmir ahead of the expected formation of the next government this week.



A Nepalese soldier stands guard on a street in Kathmandu yesterday during a day-long strike called by Maoist supporters.

13 Maoists killed in gunbattle with Nepalese troops

Bid to storm airport foiled

REUTERS, Kathmandu

At least 13 Maoist rebels and a soldier were killed in Nepal when the guerrillas, fighting against constitutional monarchy, tried to raid a rural airport, the country's interior secretary said yesterday.

The rebel attempt to attack the airport in Rumiatar in Okhaldhunga district, 250 km east of the capital Kathmandu, was made late on Sunday, resulting in a fierce gunbattle with security forces, Tika Dutta Niraula said.

The latest violence follows the death of 16 rebels in separate gunbattles with troops early on Sunday in the Himalayan nation wedged between India and China.

The rebels have stepped up attacks since King Gyanendra appointed Lokendra Bahadur Chand as interim prime minister earlier this month after sacking Sher Bahadur Deuba who wanted to delay national elections set for November because of the threat from rebels to derail the vote.



Bollywood actress Diya Mirza performs on stage during an entertainment extravaganza on Sunday organised by the Bombay police ahead of "Diwali" festival in Bombay.

Israel destroys homes of 3 Palestinian activists

AFP, Jenin

Israeli troops early yesterday destroyed the homes in Jenin and the city's refugee camps of three Palestinians implicated in Israeli attacks, a Palestinian security source said.

The soldiers dynamited and bulldozed the house of Alis Afouri, a local leader of the Al-Quds Brigades, the armed branch of the radical Islamic Jihad movement, and the home of Abdel Karim Awes, an official of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed group linked to Yasser Arafat's mainline Fatah movement.

The third house to be razed was that of Mohammed Hassanein, a member of the Al-Quds Brigades and one of the two suicide attackers who used a car bomb to destroy an Israeli bus on October 21 killing 13 Israelis.

The Israeli army considers the destruction of activists' homes a means of "Dissuasion and fighting against Palestinian terrorism."

Terror suspect Bashir removed from hospital

AFP, Solo

Indonesian police clashed with hundreds of supporters of terror suspect Abu Bakar Bashir yesterday as they removed the elderly cleric from hospital here.

Stones flew as some 150 police officers tried to clear the hospital grounds of an equal number of Bashir supporters, said Muzakir, a close aide of the Muslim cleric.

"The police took him away, possibly to the airport, about 15 minutes ago," Muzakir told AFP.

Witnesses said at least four policemen were injured by stones thrown by the supporters while at least a dozen supporters were left bloodied by anti-riot police rattan canes.

The clash stopped after about 30 minutes when leaders of the supporters calmed the crowd.

Bashir was taken from his hospital room in a wheelchair and put into a van that took him to an undisclosed destination, witnesses said.

About 50 armed soldiers were also at the hospital but did not intervene.

"We will use various means to express our position. This includes exchanges with North Korea where we will make clear our position," he said.

Kong made the remarks after Chinese President Jiang Zemin met his South Korean counterpart Kim Dae-Jung for talks where Pyongyang's secret nuclear program topped the agenda.

The summit took place at Kim's luxury hotel at the Mexican seaside resort of Los Cabos just after the conclusion of a summit of the Asia

Tough tasks ahead for Lula

Working class leader elected Brazil's new president

AFP, Sao Paulo

Leftist former union chief Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was elected Brazil's president by a landslide Sunday in a historic vote that gave Latin America's biggest country its first working class leader.

The head of the Workers Party (PT) had 61.46 per cent of valid votes, election authorities said with 90 per cent of ballots for the second round runoff counted.

Jose Serra of the ruling Brazilian Social Democratic Party, had 38.5 per cent and conceded defeat before the count was finished.

US President George W. Bush was among the first foreign leaders to congratulate Lula and raucous street celebrations marked the triumph by the 57-year-old, who rode to victory on widespread discontent over Brazil's social divide.

Attention in the United States and other countries will now be focused on whether Lula can keep promises to maintain fiscal discipline.

The election came at the height of a new financial crisis, which saw the real, the Brazilian currency, lose 40 per cent of its value this year and prompted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to offer a 30 billion dollar rescue package.

The crisis was widely blamed on negative investor reaction to the idea that the ex-factory worker with little formal education would become president of Brazil.

But the financial sector appeared to have come to terms with the idea after the October 6 first round, which Lula dominated.

Lula -- widely regarded as honest in a country plagued by corruption has recently moved closer to the political center, reached out to the business community, and pledged to aim for a budget surplus while carrying out wide-ranging social reforms.

Investors were keenly awaiting indications as to who Lula's key advisors will be.

Aides have said a 55-strong transitional team would include technocrats from outside the PT and

investors hope to see players close to the financial market among them.

The team will work alongside the current administration until President Fernando Enrique Cardoso hands over on January 1, and was expected to focus primarily

on the 2003 budget and November negotiations with the IMF.

Lula was expected to present the team Tomorrow, though it was not clear when he would announce his future finance minister and central bank chief.

The next president faces a formidable challenge sticking to the austerity demanded by the IMF, while responding to a clamour for social change in a country where 54 million people live in poverty and where crime is endemic.

The US president announced through a spokesman that he "looks forward to working productively with Brazil."

But asked whether the leftist leader would spur Latin America's troubled largest economy to recovery, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer was cautious, saying only: "We'll see ultimately what steps that he takes."

Lula picked up widespread all-class support in his home country. "We've had enough of economists and professors," said banker Henrique Denofrio, 33, in reference to Cardoso's administration.

"Now we are voting for a metal worker who will bring about social change," said Denofrio, as he cast his ballot in Sao Paulo, the country's financial and industrial megalopolis.

"This is a historic day," said the outgoing president, adding that the peaceful voting was a clear reflection of democracy in Brazil, which was ruled by a military regime from 1964 to 1985.

As polling concluded, flag-waving crowds took to the streets of Sao Paulo to celebrate Lula's victory.



Newly elected Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, of the Workers' Party (PT), celebrates after receiving notification of his victory at a hotel in Sao Paulo on Sunday.

China pledges to pressure North Korea on N-issue

AFP, Los Cabos

China will use its traditionally close ties with North Korea to express its unhappiness with the isolated country's attempts to develop nuclear weapons, a Chinese official said Sunday.

"We emphasize that the Korean peninsula should be nuclear-free, and we hope peace and stability can be maintained on the Korean peninsula," foreign ministry spokesman Kong Quan said.

"We will use various means to express our position. This includes exchanges with North Korea where we will make clear our position," he said.

Kong made the remarks after Chinese President Jiang Zemin met his South Korean counterpart Kim Dae-Jung for talks where Pyongyang's secret nuclear program topped the agenda.

The summit took place at Kim's luxury hotel at the Mexican seaside resort of Los Cabos just after the conclusion of a summit of the Asia

Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

"There are many reports and many views on (the North Korea) issue, and against this backdrop, China thinks it's important to have a very clear standpoint," said Kong.

"As a neighbour of the Korean peninsula, our view is that the problem should be solved through peaceful means and dialogue in order to protect the peace and stability of the area," he said.

The Asia Pacific needs a stable environment especially now, as countries in the region are battling with economic woes, he said.

Leaders of the APEC member economies Sunday called on North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program, and warned its economic isolation was guaranteed until it did so.

In a special statement, they urged North Korea "to visibly honour its commitment to give up nuclear weapons programs and reaffirm our commitment to ensure a peaceful resolution of this issue."

As far as China was concerned, the statement was unusual, as Beijing usually prefers not to criticize North Korea by name in order not to anger the unpredictable rulers in Pyongyang.

Korean officials confirmed after the meeting that China had agreed to work with South Korea towards a diplomatic solution.

"They will work with us to solve this problem diplomatically," Kim Won-Soo, secretary to the South Korean president for foreign affairs told AFP.

Japan, South Korea and the United States on Saturday joined forces to order Pyongyang to give up the nuclear weapons program it admitted to a US envoy earlier this month.

South Korea's Kim Sunday briefed Jiang on his crucial summit on North Korea policy with Japan and the United States.

Mummified body found in living room

AFP, Tokyo

Police summoned to a southern Japan home to investigate a weird odor discovered a mummified body wrapped in a white cloth in the living room, they said yesterday.

Two women had been living in the Fukoka City home of an elderly couple and their 41-year-old son. It was the body of one of the women that police found, lying on a futon, when they came to the house at the

request of the son on Sunday.

The son said because he and his parents use separate entrances, he did not notice that something was amiss in the home. But after of foul smell lingered, he asked police to investigate.

An autopsy is underway to determine the cause of death, but no visible scars were seen on her body, police said.

"The situation is obviously unusual. We suspect it might be

related to some sort of a cult belief. It definitely reminded us of previous cases similar to this," a police spokesman said.

The online edition of the Yomiuri newspaper said the woman appeared to have died several months earlier.

It quoted the elderly mother as telling police: "The woman died of an illness and we were maintaining her body."

I'm not a drunken killer, says Salman

AFP, New Delhi

Bollywood action hero Salman Khan denied yesterday that he was behind the wheel when his vehicle ran over and killed a homeless man, saying media accusations that he is a drunken killer have left him stunned.

The actor said in an interview broadcast by the BBC that the Indian media had "such animosity" towards him that it simply printed the police version of events which portrayed him as a drunken driver involved in a fatal hit-and-run.

"What really hurts me is that nobody tried to get my side of the story and then they talk of me being rich and powerful. If I was so rich, powerful and famous how come I ended up in jail?" asked Khan.

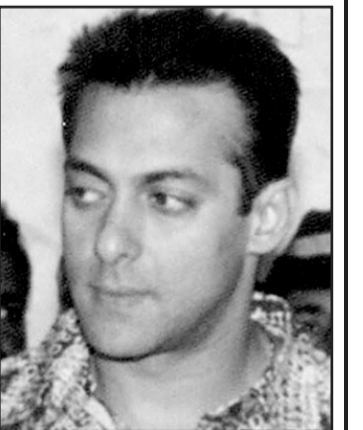
"I was not driving but it was my car which was involved in the accident. It was an accident, a mistake, then why is there so much of hatred and animosity towards me?"

"People with the power of the pen say I belong to an asylum, that I should be locked up. They think they know me, but are furious because they have no access to me. I keep my private life private. I don't think I need the psychiatric help they have suggested."

The media image of Khan has clearly changed in the last few years -- from the industry's muscular "pin-up boy" to that of a pining lover and now to an alleged killer.

Khan has been unable to develop a healthy relationship with the media, violently turning on a group of news photographers early last year.

Film industry writers say the 36-year-old actor's arrogance towards the media is now coming back to



haunt him as the public outrage against him has been largely triggered by a media backlash.

Police have charged Khan with culpable homicide, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in jail, for killing a homeless man and injuring four others.

The film star infuriated police for allegedly fleeing the scene of the accident on September 28 and driving his Toyota Land Cruiser without a valid licence.

"My car had never even been scratched before I was involved in this accident. I was always picking up people from the streets who had been unfortunate enough to meet with accidents. But I could not do so when my own car hit somebody," said Khan.

"That is the irony of life, that people came under my car and I could not help them. That was not because I ran away, I was there and did not want to leave but a mob gathered and just started throwing stones," he said.