



Two Taiwan firefighters clad in full protective gear spray water to disinfect a building of the Taipei Municipal Heping Hospital on Wednesday. The hospital was closed on 24 April, 2003 and has been empty since Thursday last week when 900 medical staff and 200 patients were transferred to the other hospitals for treatment and quarantine.

# SARS crisis in Taiwan deepens

China records five new SARS deaths, 55 new cases

**AFP, Taipei**

The SARS crisis in Taiwan took a turn for the worse yesterday as six new deaths and 18 cases were reported, and the virus showed signs of spreading to remote corners of the island.

Concern about Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in Taiwan has been growing after allegations of a cover-up at a major Taipei hospital and the World Health Organisation's decision to designate the capital a SARS blackspot.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) said the new figures Wednesday took the total SARS death toll to 31 from 238 cases.

The six new victims included two patients and one nurse who had worked at the Taipei Municipal Heping Hospital -- the center of the island's first mass infection. The 29-year-old nurse was the third medical worker in

Taiwan to succumb to SARS, for which there is no cure or vaccine.

Soldiers in full protective gear were Wednesday cleaning the hospital premises, and once it is disinfected the hospital is to serve as a center for the treatment of SARS.

The mass infection of medical staff at the hospital has been strongly criticised by President Chen Shui-bian and the hospital's superintendent was removed from his post this week following allegations that attempts to cover up the scale of the outbreak had made matters worse.

The health authorities also confirmed new infections at the Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in the southern county of Kaohsiung, but played down the scale of the outbreak.

New confirmed or suspected deaths from SARS were also

recorded in the eastern city of Hualien and the remote southeastern town of Tainan, the first time the virus has been recorded in these areas of Taiwan.

As the SARS outbreak fuelled anxiety in Taiwan, the government announced it would ban the export of protective facemasks because of shortages. It also said it would commandeer five million masks from customs warehouses and sell them to the public.

Taiwan's powerful General Chamber of Commerce (GCC) also said it was mulling a proposal that Taiwan enforce a 10-day island-wide quarantine to contain the virus effectively.

The proposal -- which calls for a 10-day home quarantine for everyone in Taiwan with the exception of health, medical, military and police personnel -- has triggered a mixed reaction with opponents warning of heavy economic losses.

Meanwhile China yesterday reported five new SARS deaths and 55 new cases, the health ministry said.

It takes the nationwide death toll to 267 and the cumulative number of cases to 5,124. All the latest fatalities were in Beijing.

Twenty-four provinces across the sprawling country of 1.3 billion people reported no new cases and it was the lowest number of cases nationwide, and in Beijing, since the government admitted covering up the extent of the epidemic on April 20.

Beijing has reported a total of 139 deaths and 2,370 confirmed cases. An additional 95 suspected cases were also noted, taking the nationwide tally to 2,349. Of these 51 were in Beijing for a total of 1,308. So far, 1,811 people have recovered and left hospital.

# Pakistan raises Kashmir issue at UNSC

**PTI, United Nations**

For the first time in several years India and Pakistan did not attack each other directly while talking about the Kashmir issue in the UN Security Council with New Delhi maintaining that differences are best settled through bilateral negotiations and Islamabad stating that a solution to the problem can be achieved only after fulfilling the aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

The issue was first brought up by Pakistan Foreign Minister Kasuri.

During a Security Council debate on Pacific resolution of conflicts, UN Ambassador Vijay K Nambiar repeatedly stressed during his presentation on Tuesday that resolution of issues through bilateral negotiations is advocated by the world body's charter and that such a course is also seen by "distinguished jurists" as the "most preferred methods of settlement of disputes."

As it involves bargaining and

may involve elements of give and take, there is a greater probability of the parties carrying out the agreement faithfully, he said, adding imposed solution is likely to be reopened by the aggrieved party and thus would be no real settlement.

Nambiar throughout his address did not name either Pakistan or Kashmir. But he did criticise continuous low-intensity proxy wars through infiltration, cross border terrorism and other means using force and said such a situation did confer right on victim state to take all necessary measures in self-defence just as would be the case if there is an armed attack.

He also effectively rejected the Pakistan's contention that there should be UN supervised plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir pointing to the fact that events have overtaken such an approach.

"At Agra summit in July 2001, Pakistan and India almost succeeded in launching a framework for revived talks," he said but did not blame anyone for the failure.

He referred to the Kashmir issue and the Council resolution adopted following negotiations and agreement between the two countries which, he said, promised a "free and fair plebiscite under UN auspices to enable the people of Jammu and Kashmir to determine whether they wish to join India or Pakistan."

But he did not directly blame India, saying that the process ran aground due to cold war when the Council could not persuade the parties to implement the resolution and then went on to say that the Shimla agreement and the Lahore declaration support solution through bilateral discussion.

He did say that no durable peace is possible unless aspiration of people of Jammu and Kashmir are taken into consideration and called for flexibility, goodwill and wisdom on both side to resolve the issue. He sought support of international community to the fresh endeavour of two countries for peace but did not call for its intervention.

In an apparent reply to Kasuri's mention of the Security Council resolution, Nambiar, who spoke later, said where member states have agreed to implement resolution of the UN, they are justified in expecting such implementation to be complete and in the sequence agreed to without "emasculating, revision or re-interpretation."

Nambiar's reference obviously was to the provision in the resolution that Pakistan must first vacate the territory under its occupation before the subsequent provisions could be put into operation. Islamabad did not implement that provision.

"Where attempts are made to apply such resolutions selectively or in partial, self-serving manner, they have obviously not worked but have only served to subvert their original spirit. In some cases, their subtext has changed and they have proved obsolete, defunct and overtaken by events."

## Myanmar approves UN envoy's visit

**AFP, Yangon**

Myanmar's junta has given permission for United Nations special envoy Razali Ismail to make his first visit to the military-ruled state in over six months, a diplomatic source said yesterday.

Razali would journey from his native Malaysia to Yangon next month to resume his task of helping speed up national reconciliation talks between the country's generals and the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD).

"We have heard that the approval has been given for Razali's visit, and he will be coming in June," a Malaysian diplomat here told AFP.

Razali, whose latest trip to Yangon was in November last year, is credited with brokering landmark secret talks between the military and NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, which began in October 2000 and were aimed at promoting national reconciliation and political reform.



A Palestinian woman collects her belongings from the rubble of a house demolished by the Israeli army during a raid on the southern Gaza Strip city of Khan Yunis on Wednesday. Twenty-six Palestinians were injured during the overnight incursion and Israeli military officials said two abandoned buildings and other structures used as sites for mortar attacks were destroyed.

# Sharon, Abbas to meet in wake of Saudi blasts

**AFP, Jerusalem**

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmud Abbas, will hold their first meeting this weekend, a Palestinian official said Tuesday as deadly attacks in Saudi Arabia cast a new shadow over the region.

Earlier, US Secretary of State Colin Powell tried to reassure the Palestinians over the future of the international roadmap for peace with Israel, even as Sharon said the thorny issue of Jewish settlements was not on his agenda.

Powell said on the Jordanian leg of a regional tour that the United States would not "rewrite" the roadmap during Sharon's visit to Washington on May 20 aimed at securing concessions for Israel.

"Israel has some comments on

the roadmap and we will listen to their comments but we do not plan to rewrite or renegotiate the roadmap," Powell said at a news conference in Amman.

He was speaking shortly before heading for Riyadh, where suicide attacks blamed on the Al-Qaeda movement blasted three compounds for foreign workers on the edge of the Saudi capital.

Palestinian officials had expressed concern that Israel would not comply with the blueprint drafted by the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia to end violence and move towards the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005.

Powell met with Sharon and Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, on Sunday but left the next day with nothing to show, having failed

to secure Israel's official acceptance of the plan.

Sharon's government announced only very minor goodwill measures, which sparked Palestinian fears Israel was trying to dump the roadmap altogether.

The document calls on Palestinians to crack down on militants, but also urges Israel to freeze all settlement activity.

However, Sharon said in an interview with the Jerusalem Post that this issue, a major stumbling block in any negotiations, was not even on his agenda.

"It is not something today that anyone is dealing with," Sharon told the English-language newspaper, saying Israel was under no US pressure to take any action even against unauthorised settlement outposts.



Indian people take a look at a huge wedding invitation card in the style of a newspaper in Bhopal on Wednesday. Mr and Mrs Choudhry, who issued the card on the occasion of their son's wedding to be held 1st June and planned to invite 10,000 people, sent a formal letter to the Limca book and Guinness book of records claiming it is the largest wedding card in the world.

## Sri Lanka heads for constitutional crisis

**AFP, Colombo**

Sri Lanka yesterday headed for a crippling constitutional crisis as President Chandrika Kumaratunga raised the stakes in her confrontation with the cohabitation government, officials said.

Kumaratunga rejected calls from the government to open a dialogue and refused to back down from her unilateral move Friday to take over functions of a minister, a presidential spokesman said.

He said Kumaratunga sent a four-page letter to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe arguing that her taking the Development Lottery Board (DLB), which was earlier under the Economic Reforms Ministry, was legal and that the premier cannot question it.

In the letter, she slammed the premier for sealing the state printing press at the weekend to prevent the DLB acquisition from being published in the official gazette.

She said Wickremesinghe bore responsibility for violence at the printing press, where according to her 300 pro-government activists damaged state property.

"I shall not be deterred in the exercise of my constitutional functions and duties by such acts," Kumaratunga said, asking for an "impartial investigation" into the incident.

"In the circumstances, I regret to inform you that I cannot reconsider my decision as regards the DLB, which remains unchanged and valid, even if the notification

sent to the Government Press for publication in the gazette is unlawfully prevented from being published," she said.

There was no immediate reaction from the prime minister's office to Kumaratunga's reply.

However, on Tuesday, government spokesman and Constitutional Affairs Minister G. L. Peiris told reporters that Kumaratunga's move was emerging as a "test case" for the cohabitation government.

He said Kumaratunga could not take over functions of any minister without consulting the premier.

"Tomorrow she could take over another ministry... The mandate we have got from the people is to govern the country," Peiris said, adding that the government disregarded Kumaratunga's order.

Political sources suggested one party should blink and involve the Supreme Court in a final interpretation of the 1978 constitution, which had not clearly envisaged a cohabitation arrangement.

Parliamentary elections in December 2001 brought Wickremesinghe to power, defeating the party of his arch-rival Kumaratunga who was elected separately as president.

Kumaratunga's letter was released Wednesday as visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca warned political parties here that their latest crisis should not undermine the fragile peace bid with the Tamil Tiger rebels.

## Eunuch in India loses mayoral post

**AFP, New Delhi**

A eunuch who had been mayor of an Indian city for a year and a half lost the post after a court ruled that he did not fit the requirement, a newspaper reported yesterday.

Amarnath Yadav had served as mayor of Gorakhpur, 700 kilometers (435 miles) southeast of New Delhi near the border with Nepal, since a November 2000 election.

But a judge ruled Monday that the election was null and void as Yadav was registered at the polls as a man while the position was reserved for a lower-caste woman, The Times of India reported.

He lost the post after refusing a

court directive to undergo a test determining his sex, the newspaper said.

The judge cited as precedent a ruling in February by a high court in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh that invalidated the election of a eunuch to another mayoral spot reserved for a woman.

Indian eunuchs are generally not castrated, but instead are transsexuals, transvestites and hermaphrodites.

Traditionally ostracised by their families, Indian eunuchs usually make a living by begging or singing and dancing at celebrations such as weddings.