



PHOTO: AFP

Photo taken on September 4 shows parliament speaker Ahmad Qorei (R) talking with Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas during a meeting at the Palestinian Legislative Council in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has asked Qorei to become prime minister to succeed Abbas, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) executive committee said Sunday.

Palestinian PM nominee seeks US, EU guarantee

REUTERS, Abu Dis

Palestinian Parliament Speaker Ahmed Korei, Yasser Arafat's nominee for prime minister, said yesterday he wanted US and European guarantees of support for peace-making before accepting the post.

Arafat chose Korei Sunday to replace Mahmoud Abbas, who had resigned in frustration a day earlier, complaining that the Palestinian president and Israel had obstructed his peace efforts and the United States had not given him enough backing.

Korei's credentials as a highly regarded moderate and an architect of the 1993 interim Oslo peace accords with Israel could endear him to the United States and could raise hopes of salvaging a battered US-led peace plan.

There was no immediate reaction from Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who was leaving on an official trip to India on Monday. But he has ruled out talks with a Palestinian leadership controlled by

Arafat.

Israeli Health Minister Danny Naveh, of Sharon's rightist Likud party, said Korei's nomination would not bring a resumption of dialogue because "the man who is pulling the strings and controlling everything is one person, and it's Yasser Arafat."

Korei, a veteran politician but one who has little grass-roots support among Palestinians, appeared to recognize the difficulties he faces if he takes the job.

"I am not prime minister as yet... I want to see the Americans -- what kind of guarantee... they will (give)," he told Reuters.

"I want to see Europe, what kind of guarantee and support... they will (give). I'm not ready to go for a failure. I want to see whether peace is possible or not," he said in English in his office in the West Bank village of Abu Dis near Jerusalem.

Soon after Arafat's decision Sunday, Israel launched the latest in a series of missile strikes against Islamic militant groups. Helicopter gunships attacked the home of a member of Hamas's military wing,

wounding 15 people, medical workers said.

The army said the building was used as a weapons arsenal and that ammunition and explosives blew up after the missiles hit.

Arafat's nomination of Korei, approved Sunday by the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee and the Fatah faction, came in the midst of a deep political crisis.

Israeli officials said Abbas's decision to quit was a blow to peace hopes and renewed calls for Arafat's expulsion. Arafat had appointed Abbas in April under intense international pressure for reform.

The nomination of Korei, 65, could ease weeks of political confusion in the Palestinian Authority, which has heightened concern that the US-led "road map" leading to peace and a Palestinian state by 2005 may now be beyond saving.

UN must help US in Iraq: Bush

\$87b sought for Iraq & Afghanistan

AFP, Washington

In his first major speech on Iraq since May, President George W. Bush urged the United Nations to overcome bitter "past differences" over the US-led invasion of Iraq, appealing even to opponents of the war for troops and money.

"Members of the United Nations now have an opportunity, and the responsibility, to assume a broader role in assuring that Iraq becomes a free and democratic nation," he said in a rare prime-time speech late Sunday.

Speaking from the White House's Cabinet Room, Bush somberly warned the US public that rebuilding Iraq "will take time, and require sacrifice," and said he would ask Congress for 87 billion dollars for policing and rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan over the next year.

"Iraq is now the central front" of the global war on terrorism, said Bush, who launched that campaign after the September 11 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center two years ago.

"We will do what is necessary, we will spend what is necessary, to achieve this essential victory in the war on terror, to promote freedom, and to make our own nation more secure," he said in the 18-minute speech.

Washington, battered by a rising price tag and a post-war death toll that has surpassed that of the original invasion, now

seeks a new UN resolution creating a multinational force for Iraq.

Bush cemented the policy about-face, appealing for help to UN Security Council members like France, Russia and Germany, whose opposition deprived the March 19 attack of the council's explicit endorsement.

"I recognize that not all our friends agreed with our decision to enforce the Security Council resolutions and remove Saddam Hussein from power, yet we cannot let past differences interfere with present duties," he said.

"Terrorists in Iraq have attacked representatives of the civilized world and opposing them must be the cause of the civilized world," he said, an apparent reference to the devastating bombing of the UN's Baghdad headquarters.

Bush's portrayal of Iraq stood in stark contrast to the triumphal tone of his last speech to the nation, on May 1, when he declared the war "one victory" in the struggle against terrorism, beneath a banner that read "Mission Accomplished."

On Sunday, he seemed to dash hopes of a quick return of US troops and rebuff calls for sending more American soldiers to Iraq, saying that "the current number of American troops, nearly 130,000, is appropriate to their mission."

But he also said that commanders there sought a third multinational division, to join two others led by the British and

the Poles.

Earlier, US Secretary of State Colin Powell told NBC television the new UN resolution might result in the deployment of just 10,000-15,000 more soldiers from US allies.

Powell will meet representatives of other nations this month to discuss contributions to the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, followed by a similar conference on Iraq in October, said Bush.

"Europe, Japan, and states in the Middle East will all benefit from the success of freedom in these two countries and they should contribute to that success," he said.

The US leader said 66 billion dollar of his new funding request would go towards military and intelligence operations in Iraq and Afghanistan over the next year. The rest would go towards reconstruction.

The administration gave no details on how it would finance the new expenditures, which could push the record US budget deficit well beyond 500 billion dollars.

But initial response to the speech suggested the request was likely to garner congressional support.

The top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee commended Bush on his move towards multilateralism. "I think it took a big man to do that, and I plan on supporting him," said Senator Joseph Biden.

'100 Maoists killed in gun battle in Nepal'

Schoolboy killed as blasts rock Kathmandu

AFP, Kathmandu

As many as 100 Maoist rebels could have been killed in a huge battle with security forces in western Nepal, army sources said yesterday.

The sources, quoting witnesses to Sunday's clash near the village of Sini in Achham district, said the bodies of 35 insurgents had been carried away, while altogether as many as 100 rebels could have been killed in the heavy fighting.

There was no way of independently verifying the death toll from the clash which took place in a remote part of the Himalayan kingdom.

"We are waiting for a detailed report on the incident," an army source added.

On Sunday, army officials said five rebels and two troops had been killed in the violence, which they said began after a group of Maoists

attacked an army patrol.

The state-run English daily, The Rising Nepal, also said up to 100 guerrillas could have died, quoting the Achham District Administration Office.

"Eyewitnesses said the Maoists had carried away the bodies of their dead in bamboo baskets or simply chopped off their heads to conceal their identities," the newspaper said.

Meanwhile, a schoolboy was killed and seven people injured Monday as a series of bomb blasts blamed on Maoist rebels rocked the Nepalese capital, police said.

The boy, who was on his way to school, was killed when a bomb went off in front of the Nepal Rastra Bank (Central Bank) in central Kathmandu, about 200 metres (660 feet) from the prime minister's official residence, police said.



PHOTO: AFP

A Nepalese army security expert checks fragments close to a hole made by a bomb at a Revenue Office at Kalanki near Kathmandu yesterday.

SAARC information ministers' meet in Islamabad on Sept 18

IANAS, Kathmandu

Communications and Information ministers of the seven SAARC countries will meet in Islamabad from September 18 to September 19 to discuss issues related to improvement of communication in the South Asian region.

Islamabad is also hosting the 12th SAARC Summit from January 4 to January 6.

The meeting of Information ministers will be held in the wake of the two-day regional conference of the SAARC Teachers' Federation in Colombo that started on Monday.

Senior teachers from five of the seven member countries -- India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh -- will discuss the common problems they face in meeting the national goals set by their Governments.

The conference will also discuss the possibility of holding an international meet of educationists in Islamabad on the eve of the SAARC Summit.

WHO warns of SARS resurgence

REUTERS, Manila

The head of the World Health Organisation warned health specialists Monday of a possible resurgence of the deadly SARS virus later this year and urged countries to boost surveillance to contain the threat.

"None of us can predict what will happen later this year. Will SARS come back or not?" director-general Lee Jong-wook told a five-day WHO regional committee meeting in Manila.

"We have to prepare on the assumption that this will come back. Our challenge now is to enhance surveillance networks that will detect and deal with SARS if it does come

back," Lee said in his opening address.

Other officials said flu cases reported recently in China, Hong Kong and the Canadian city of Vancouver turned out not to be associated with SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome).

"We are certain that the human-to-human transmission of the virus stopped in July and it hasn't come back yet. But the virus is still out there," Peter Cordingley, WHO's head of public information in the Western Pacific region, told Reuters.

"We think it's quite likely lurking in the wild animal population in southern China. There's absolutely no guarantee that it won't jump the species barrier again and come back."

11 policemen, driver killed in landmine blast in east India

AFP, Patna

Eleven policemen and a civilian driver were killed Monday in a landmine blast in India's eastern state of Bihar blamed on extremists of the banned People's War Group (PWG), police said.

Those killed included two officers, eight constables and a police guard, a police spokesman said.

The blast occurred at 11:20 am (0550 GMT) as the group was travelling in Dabua Morh in Rohtas district.

The attackers also stole six rifles and a revolver, the spokesman said.

Indo-Pak FMs to meet in New York

AFP, Islamabad

The foreign ministers of rival neighbours Pakistan and India will meet later this month in New York, a Pakistani official said yesterday.

Pakistan's Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri and India's Yashwant Sinha will meet at two South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) ministerial meetings in the last week of September, Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Masood Khan said.

"They will meet twice in New York at the two SAARC meetings," Khan told AFP.

A meeting between the Pakistani and Indian foreign ministers would be the first since the nuclear-capable enemies came close to war last year.

However, bilateral Pakistani-Indian issues were not on the agenda.

"They are meeting within the context of a SAARC forum. Not on bilateral issues," Khan said.

The SAARC meetings are due to be held within days of the United Nations General Assembly session on September 24 and 25, which will be addressed by both Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

There has been no formal dialogue between the neighbours since July 2001, when Musharraf met Vajpayee in India's ancient city of Agra.

Democrats blast Bush for lack of candor on Iraq

AFP, Washington

US Democratic leaders accused President George W. Bush of showing a lack of candor on Iraq, but many still expressed grudging support for the president after he asked for a huge cash injection into the war-ravaged country in a rare primetime speech to the nation late Sunday.

The rallying of Republicans and centrist Democrats to the side of the commander-in-chief served as an early indication that his upcoming request for an additional 87 billion dollars to pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was likely to garner the congressional support needed for

passage.

Democratic Senator Joseph Biden said he believed the presidential address, which contained an appeal to the United Nations to play a more visible role in Iraq, marked a switch from unilateralism to multilateralism in Bush's approach to the war on terror.

"I think it took a big man to do that, and I plan on supporting him," argued the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Republican Jon Kyl, who chairs the Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, urged Americans, in an interview with CNN, to support the

president despite the growing cost of the war, and to "resist the American impulse to hurry up and get a job over with."

Congressman Richard Gephardt, a moderate Democrat running for the White House, said Bush's effort "to enlist our allies for help is long overdue."

Even Democratic presidential frontrunner Howard Dean, a vehement opponent of the war, warned that "failure in Iraq is not an option."

But the former Vermont governor expressed doubt Bush's televised address to the nation was going to convince the rest of the world to be part of Iraq's reconstruction.



PHOTO: AFP

A little girl pedals her tricycle past a stack of scrapped missiles, South Korea's Nike (L), US's Hawk (C) and North Korea's Scud, put on display at a war museum in Seoul yesterday. North Korea is actively pushing for the development of new missiles that can reach the United States.

N Korea to display new missile

AFP, Seoul

North Korea may showcase a new ballistic missile at a parade Tuesday to mark the Stalinist state's national day, according to a South Korean news report yesterday.

The Chosun Ilbo said development of the new missile, with a range of up to 4,000 km, had been completed and deployment was imminent.

Defense analysts told South Korea's most widely read newspaper that Pyongyang may unveil the missile during celebrations marking the 55th anniversary of the foundation of the communist state.

North Korea will stage a "mammoth" parade to mark the occasion, Pyongyang's official media has announced. According to reports in Seoul, missiles and tanks have been moved to an airport outside the North Korean capital in preparation for the festivities.

South Korea's defense ministry declined to comment on the report.

Chosun Ilbo indicated that the new missile had a longer range than the Taepodong-1 missile which was test-fired over Japan in 1998, triggering international alarm.

Speculation has mounted that North Korea could choose Tuesday's celebrations to carry out a nuclear or missile test.

The United States has warned that North Korea would face "consequences" if it made good on a threat to carry out a nuclear test allegedly made at the six-way crisis talks in Beijing late last month.

European press hits out at Bush, Sharon over Abbas resignation

AFP, Paris

European commentators yesterday lamented the resignation of Palestinian prime minister Mahmud Abbas, blaming the United States and Israel for the latest blow to the Middle East peace process.

"Isolated at home, Abbas did not get the support from abroad that he had counted on," the French daily Le Figaro wrote in a commentary on Abbas' departure.

France's left-leaning Liberation sharply criticized US President George W. Bush for being the "poor godfather of a policy that is beyond him" and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for doing everything possible to block peace.

"Besides Abbas, none of the principal actors in this drama gave the impression of being all that interested in the roles they were playing," the paper said.

Abbas submitted his resignation to veteran Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Saturday, after the two had locked horns over control of the Palestinian security services.

Parliamentary speaker Ahmad Qorei, who has the backing of Arafat and top Palestinian officials, looked set to replace Abbas, who is heading a caretaker government for the next five weeks.

The United States and Israel sidelined Arafat from the Middle East peace process by anointing Abbas as their preferred negotiating partner -- a

political gamble that failed, according to several European commentators.

"By wanting to choose their enemy, they now find themselves without a credible interlocutor," Switzerland's La Tribune de Geneve wrote, slamming what it called Bush and Sharon's "erroneous strategy" with respect to Arafat.

"For the past four months, these two leaders -- one through intransigence, the other through inaction -- have made life difficult for Mahmud Abbas," the paper wrote, saying their plan had backfired and would only boost Arafat.

In a commentary entitled "Russian roulette with the roadmap," the Zurich daily Neue Zurcher Zeitung suggested that Sharon was relieved by Abbas's resignation, as he never had "the least intention of putting a complete stop to Israeli settlements in the occupied territories".

"The internationally underwritten roadmap, intended to give the Palestinians a state and the Israelis security, has run out of road," the Financial Times said in its editorial.

But some commentators pointed to Arafat as the main problem, with Britain's Daily Telegraph criticizing the Palestinian leader for "never giving his rival a chance to stop Hamas and other terrorist groups sabotaging negotiations with Israel".

5 Afghan troops killed in Taliban ambush

AFP, Islamabad

Five Afghan soldiers were killed when suspected Taliban ambushed their convoy in the restive southern province of Kandahar, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported yesterday.

"Five Afghan soldiers were killed on Saturday when Taliban attacked their vehicles," deputy military commander of neighbouring Zabul province, Major General Saifullah told AIP.

The ambush occurred in Shahwali Kot district, 25 km north of Kandahar city, the provincial capital.

Resurgent Taliban fighters, many of them believed to be regrouping inside Pakistan, are targeting soldiers, aid workers and Afghan officials in an insurgency apparently aimed at destabilising the government of President Hamid Karzai.

Saifullah said a "clean-up operation" to flush out suspected Taliban fighters has been launched in Shahwali Kot and across Zabul, where US and Afghan forces have been waging a massive offensive for the past fortnight.

Since August 25 around 1,000 Afghan soldiers supported by hundreds of US troops and aircraft have been pounding Taliban and al-Qaeda bases in Zabul's Daychopan mountains, 245 km northeast of Kandahar.