

Yasser Arafat weakened by stomach flu, aides say

REUTERS, Ramallah, West Bank

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has been weakened by a bad case of flu and Egyptian doctors hope to have a clearer picture of his health after completing tests Thursday, aides said.

"He is not dying," a Palestinian official close to the 74-year-old Arafat told Reuters, denying a report in the British newspaper The Guardian that he had a mild heart attack last week.

A senior aide said an Egyptian medical team headed by President Hosni Mubarak's private physician had examined Arafat at his headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"They took blood samples and carried out several tests," the aide said. "Their initial findings were that he had a very strong flu and stomach virus, but the final results will be given to us tonight."

As a result of the illness, Arafat did not eat solid foods for 10 days and could not even keep soup down, aides said.

Arafat had lost a lot of weight but his appearance had improved over the past three days and he has been more alert, the aides said.

In remarks to the Palestinian daily al-Quds Thursday, Arafat said he had suffered stomach pains but was recovering and intends to attend a session later in the day of the Palestinian parliament, where the new emergency cabinet will be presented.

US moves legislation for sanctions against Syria

EU not likely to follow US sanctions move

BBC ONLINE, AFP, PTI, Washington, Brussels

The United States has approved a legislation that would slap diplomatic and economic sanctions against Syria over its alleged role in supporting terrorism and developing weapons of mass destruction.

The US House of Representatives' International Relations Committee on Wednesday gave consent to the Bill -- the Syria Accountability Act -- by a vote of 33-2 and is expected to come up for debate in the full House of Representatives during the week of October 13-17, according to a committee summary. There is a companion bill in the Senate, but that legislation has not left the committee.

The measure would keep Syria on the Department of State's list of nations that sponsor terrorism, demand that Syria withdraw its troops from Lebanon and hold Syria responsible for terrorism against US military forces in Iraq.

The Bill calls for sanctions to be imposed until such time as President George W Bush declares that Syria has stopped sponsoring terrorism and has halted chemical and biological weapons programmes.

The sanctions bill is now expected to go before the full House of Representatives next week.

The BBC's Jon Leyne in Washington reports that the White House had initially opposed the legislation - but now that US President George Bush has dropped his objections, it is likely to become law.

Our correspondent says the bill is part of an increasingly hard line being taken by the US administration against Syria.

The move to toughen sanctions comes after Israel's air raid on an alleged Palestinian training camp in Syria at the weekend - a strike which President Bush refused to condemn.

"Syria needs to change course, change its behaviour, stop harbouring terrorists," White House spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters on

Wednesday.

The State Department has also dropped its opposition to imposing new sanctions on Syria.

Department spokesman Richard Boucher said US Secretary of State Colin Powell had made clear during a visit to Damascus in May that legislation would probably follow unless there were significant moves against extremist groups in Syria.

"And that's what we are seeing unfold, because Syria hasn't taken any significant action against terrorist groups," he said.

The legislation, to be known as the Syria Accountability Act, includes a ban on a number of US exports to Syria, specifically weapons and items that can be used in weapons programmes.

Once passed, it would also call on US President George Bush to select two sanctions from a list of six, ranging from freezing Syrian assets in the US to reducing diplomatic and business links.

During the Iraq war, Washington accused Damascus of harbouring fugitives from Saddam Hussein's regime.

The European Union has no plans to follow the United States in moving to impose wide-ranging sanctions on Syria, the European Commission said yesterday.

"It is obviously not our position, we are in the process of negotiating an association agreement with Syria," said Emma Udwin, spokeswoman for External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten.

"The policy of isolating Syria is not the most productive," she added.

On Wednesday, a key US congressional body, the House International Relations Committee, voted in favour of diplomatic and economic sanctions against Damascus, accusing it of supporting terrorism and developing weapons of mass destruction.



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi police officers treat an injured colleague on the site of a suicide car bomb attack on a police station that left nine Iraqis dead including three Iraqi police officers in Baghdad's al-Sadr City neighbourhood yesterday. 12 people were also injured.

Suicide bomber kills self, wounds one in West Bank

AFP, Jerusalem

A Palestinian suicide bomber wounded at least one person at an army checkpoint in the West Bank town of Tulkarem Thursday, Israeli military sources said.

The blast, which killed the bomber, took place around 2:00 pm (1200 GMT) at a window where permits are issued for residents of the West Bank to travel, the source said.

Public radio had reported that the bomber was a woman, but the military source said it still unclear if the attacker was a man or a woman.

"There are injured but we not yet know how many or their condition," he added.

A female suicide bomber from the Islamic Jihad group killed 19 other people on Saturday at a restaurant in the northern Israeli city of Haifa.



PHOTO: AFP

An Israeli border policeman stands guard on Wednesday as Palestinians wait for their chance to cross at a crossing in the security fence. Israel was set to mobilise thousands of troops to be deployed to the West Bank and Gaza.

Challenges ahead for Arnie

BBC ONLINE

Film star Arnold Schwarzenegger has admitted huge challenges lie ahead after his election as governor of California.

He said it was unclear just how big the budget deficit of America's richest state was, with some sources putting it at \$38 billion over two years.

The Republicans' newest governor reached out to the Democrats who otherwise dominate the state in a call to "rebuild" California together.

The Terminator star also warned fans he would have "no time for movies".

At his first news conference since winning by a wide margin, Mr Schwarzenegger said he wanted to have an independent audit of the state's finances to find out where money was possibly being wasted.

He said he was "unwilling" to raise taxes and promised to scrap a controversial new car tax.

But he also warned that Native

American casino operators - who reap annual revenues of \$5bn - would have to pay their "fair share".

Mr Schwarzenegger - who ousted the Democratic incumbent Gray Davis - announced that his transition team would be led by Republican Congressman David Dreier.

The new governor, who will take office next month, pledged to restore trust in California's government and instil fiscal discipline.

It is the first time in the state's history that Californians have voted to sack their governor mid-term.

President George W Bush congratulated Mr Schwarzenegger by phone, saying he looked forward to working with him.

With all the votes counted, Mr Schwarzenegger secured 48.7% - a much greater share of the vote than the polls predicted.

Republican activists had triggered the recall vote - the first in 82 years - following frustration at the budget deficit, high levels of unem-

ployment and struggling schools.

The BBC's David Willis in Los Angeles says the big political problem for Mr Schwarzenegger is that he is not fully in control of the money-raising process.

Large parts of the state budget are already earmarked for projects endorsed by referendums and cannot be tampered with.

His election has sent a shock wave across America in an age of discontent with conventional politics and could set a trend, our correspondent says.

Only one other governor has been recalled in United States history - North Dakota's Lynn Frazier, in 1921.

In a two-part ballot, voters were asked if they wanted to recall, or sack, Governor Davis.

Regardless of their decision on the recall, they also had to indicate who they preferred among the 135 alternative candidates running.

US resolution on Iraq looks unlikely

REUTERS, United Nations

The United States and Britain are making a last-ditch effort to overcome strong UN opposition to a US-drafted resolution on Iraq before dropping the measure entirely, diplomats said on Wednesday.

Britain, co-sponsor of the measure along with Spain, is particularly keen to get a resolution that would be palatable to the 15 Security Council members and is considering amendments, the diplomats said.

But whether the Bush administration would agree to substantive changes is doubtful. US Ambassador John Negroponte this week told reporters and Security Council members not to expect any radical amendments.

A State Department official said the United States was not optimistic that it could obtain an acceptable resolution, even with additional changes.

Asean to get in sync with partners

THE JAKARTA POST/ANN, Bali

In their bilateral summit with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on Wednesday, the leaders of China, Japan, South Korea and India, expressed their support for the Bali Concord II as a solid platform to achieve an ASEAN Community based on political-security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation, the summit chairperson President Megawati Soekarnoputri said on Wednesday.

The four dialog partners also told the 10 ASEAN leaders they were ready to support the regional group in countering terrorism and other forms of transnational crimes, as

well as the establishment of ASEAN economic integration. They are also committed to participating in the establishment of an Asian Bond as an alternative for regional financing and the efforts on containing and preventing SARS, HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases.

"The leaders (also) discussed several important issues such as the nuclear question on the Korean Peninsula, the future of East-Asian Cooperation, poverty alleviation, human resources development and the development of infrastructure for ASEAN integration," President Megawati stated as she read from her prepared speech after presiding over four separate sessions with the dialog partners.

US hostages in Colombia seen alive in video

REUTERS, Washington

A videotaped interview with three Americans held hostage by Marxist guerrillas in Colombia was broadcast Wednesday, their first appearance on television since their capture in February.

The three civilian contractors, dressed in the same military uniforms as their captors, said that they were "alive and well" and hoped to be released through diplomacy, warning that a rescue attempt would be deadly.

Thomas Howes, Marc Gonsalves and Keith Stansell spoke during an interview conducted in July by Colombian journalist Jorge Enrique Botero and previously reported in a Colombian magazine.

White House denies differences with Rumsfeld on Iraq

REUTERS, Washington

The White House Wednesday sought to paper over any differences with Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who complained he was not told of a postwar Iraq reorganisational shake-up.

Rumsfeld's annoyance at the White House emerged during an interview he gave to London's Financial Times newspaper, a rare display of public pique within President Bush's famously disciplined inner circle.

And it came at a time when the White House, confronting falling poll numbers, is launching an aggressive public relations push aimed at bolstering declining support among Americans for the Iraq mission.

Bush used a \$14 million fund-

raiser Wednesday night to reassure Republican campaign contributors that "America did the right thing" in Iraq and that the hunt for weapons of mass destruction was well under way.

"There's a lot more to investigate," he told 2,000 Republican donors. "Yet it is now undeniable -- undeniable -- that Saddam Hussein was in clear violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441," he said, citing evidence the top CIA weapons hunter presented this month.

"Iraq is free. America is more secure," Bush said.

Under pressure to bring stability to Iraq, Bush announced Monday a major reorganisation of US efforts to bring control to Iraq, headed by Rice,

and including representatives from the State Department and other key agencies.

In the Financial Times interview, Rumsfeld sounded annoyed that Rice, who heads the National Security Council, had decided to draw attention to a memo establishing the reorganization by giving a "background" briefing to The New York Times.

"I don't quite know what the purpose of the background was ... she gave a background, she said what she said, and the way I read the memorandum is that it is basically what the responsibility of the NSC is and always has been, which is what's been going on," Rumsfeld said.

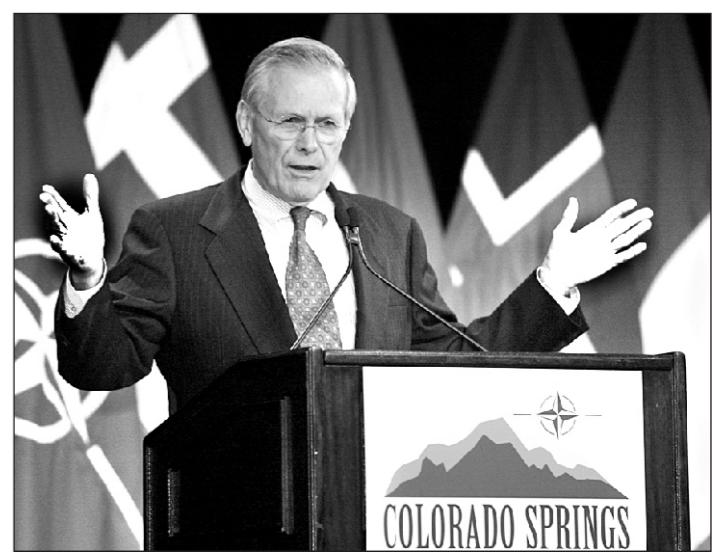


PHOTO: AFP

US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld talks to the media at the Informal Meeting of Defence Ministers in Colorado Springs yesterday. Rumsfeld acknowledged he was not consulted about a White House shakeup in the US reconstruction effort in Iraq, but did not feel his authority had been diminished.

Putin, Schroeder push for closer economic cooperation

AP, Yekaterinburg, Russia

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Russian President Vladimir Putin called on Thursday for stronger economic ties between their nations.

Putin also urged Germany to support Russia in its dispute with the European Union over energy prices.

Putin said the EU demand that Russia to raise its domestic energy prices to world levels as a condition for joining the World Trade Organisation was "unfair" and potentially disastrous to the Russian economy.

He appealed to German businessmen to lobby for Russia in the EU, saying that cheap domestic energy resources would benefit German companies, which top the list of foreign investors in Russia.

The volume of German investment has jumped 30 per cent since the end of last year to about \$11 billion, according to Russian gov-

ernment figures.

If Russia yields to EU pressure and quickly raises its energy prices, "it will result in the collapse of the entire Russian economy," Putin said at a meeting with Russian and German businessmen that was part of bilateral consultations in Yekaterinburg, a large industrial city in the Ural Mountains.

"EU bureaucrats either don't understand it or deliberately put unacceptable conditions for Russia to join the WTO," Putin said. "I can't understand why they are doing it," he added.

At present, oil and natural gas are supplied to the Russian domestic market at a fraction of their export prices. Foreign producers, especially in the European Union - Russia's biggest trading partner - claim that this amounts to a subsidy to Russian manufacturers and want the same price for all sales.



PHOTO: AFP

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (C) listens to the explanations of Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) and Archbishop Vikenty (R) before visiting the Cathedral built on the place of the execution of Zar Nikolay II and his family in Yekaterinburg yesterday.

Protests rock Turkey over Iraq troop decision

AFP, Ankara

Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets across Turkey Wednesday to denounce the government's controversial decision to send troops to Iraq, with police detaining some 60 Kurdish activists.

In Istanbul, protestors chained themselves to the wire fencing of an American high school and shouted "We will not allow our soldiers to be killed" and "We will not be soldiers for the US."

Anti-riot police detained six among the 100-strong group, Anatolia news agency reported.

About 500 people attended a separate demonstration on Taksim central square and a third rally was held outside the offices of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In the capital Ankara, dozens of members of trade unions, political parties and civic groups gathered in front of the parliament, where legislators on Tuesday voted for a gov-

ernment motion to dispatch troops to neighbouring Iraq.

"Turkey should take its hands off Iraq," the group chanted.

"Turkey has been dragged by the 8.5-billion-dollar carrot," opposition MP Haluk Koc, who joined the demonstrators, said in reference to the 8.5 billion dollars that Washington agreed to loan Ankara last month in return for its "cooperation" in Iraq.

"Don't send our sons to the Iraqi hell. Don't make them shields for American soldiers," protestors chanted in the northern city of Trabzon, the news agency reported.

In the southern towns of Mersin and Ceyhan, police used truncheons to break up Kurdish demonstrations against the deployment of troops after protestors began chanting slogans in favour of jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Forty activists, among them the local head of the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP), Turkey's

main pro-Kurdish movement, were taken into custody in Mersin, while another 23 people were detained in Ceyhan, party spokesmen told AFP.

"We are worried that the decision (to send troops) constitutes the start of a process with an uncertain future. The decision, taken despite opposition from the people, has brought Turkey to the edge of war," DEHAP said in a statement.

Turkish Kurds -- just as their kin in Iraq -- worry that Turkey's military involvement in Iraq could thwart further political gains by the Iraqi Kurds and increase pressure on the United States to clamp down on thousands of Turkish Kurd rebels hiding in the Kurdish-held north of the country.

Turkey and the United States have recently agreed on an "action plan" against the rebels, members of Ocalan's outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which both Ankara and Washington consider a terrorist group.