

US blocks action on Israeli 'wall'

Palestinians vow to press on against fence with UN

BBC ONLINE, REUTERS, United Nations

The United States has vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Israel's controversial West Bank barrier.

The draft, introduced by Arab states, declared that the structure was illegal under international law and that construction must be halted.

Israel says the barrier is necessary to protect Israeli civilians from attacks by Palestinian gunmen and suicide bombers.

Other international mediators had been urging Israel to end construction of the fence.

But President George Bush had merely called the barrier a "problem".

The vote came at the end of a day-long, bitter debate, with Israel's UN ambassador Dan Gillerman clashing with Palestinian observer Nasser al-Kidwa.

"The establishment of the expansionist conquest wall by the occupying power (...) is a crime of the same magnitude as a crime against humanity," Mr al-Kidwa said.

Mr Gillerman retorted: "No lie is so bold and audacious as the one which pretends that Israel's actions occur in a vacuum and are not in response to years and years of terrorism."

Most of the countries taking part in the debate criticised the construction of the barrier, saying it will inflame tensions.

Angola, Chile, China, France, Guinea, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Spain and Syria voted in favour of the resolution.

Bulgaria, Cameroon, Germany and Britain abstained. The US was the only one vote against the draft.

Seeking to sidestep a fresh US veto in the UN Security Council, the Palestinians have vowed to press on with their drive to try to prevent Israel from building a security fence deep into the West Bank.

Palestinian UN envoy Nasser al-Kidwa said Arab states would now take his draft resolution to the 191-nation UN General Assembly, where the United States, Israel's closest ally, has no veto and the Palestinians enjoy strong support.

While Security Council texts can carry the force of international law, assembly resolutions simply represent the will of the international community.

Russia unhappy with new US resolution on Iraq

AFP, Moscow

Russia remains dissatisfied with the latest US draft resolution on Iraq and believes the United Nations should not vote on the proposal in its current form, a foreign ministry official said yesterday.

Russia believes that "in its current form, the resolution should not be put to a vote," the Interfax news agency quoted Deputy Foreign Minister Yury Fedotov as saying.

He said disagreements remained over "two or three key issues."

Russia along France and Germany had earlier proposed a series of amendments that would establish a more dominant role for the United Nations in Iraq.

The three nations, which opposed the US-led war on Iraq, are also pressing the United States to present a more concrete timeline for when Iraq would win back its sovereignty.

But Fedotov said that Washington has not taken Moscow's concerns into full account in its latest draft, which provides no timeline for Iraq's independence, and keeps US control over the military operation.

"We recognise that (the United States) took additional steps in favour of the position of Russia and other UN Security Council members," Fedotov said.

Diplomat's daughter raped in Delhi!

PTI, New Delhi

The daughter of a foreign diplomat was allegedly raped while coming out from the International Film Festival of India, being held in New Delhi's Siri Fort auditorium, late Tuesday night.

The incident took place after the girl boarded her car at the auditorium's parking lot. Two unidentified men also got into the car and allegedly raped her, sources said.

According to one version, the car was abandoned near Panchsheel road, about 10 km away from the auditorium, in the high-security diplomatic enclave before the two men escaped in darkness, sources said.

Senior officials from the Chankapuri police station visited the residence of the diplomat in the morning. No one from the police department was willing to comment on the issue.



PHOTO: AFP

Iranian women chant slogans as Iranian human rights activist, feminist lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi speaks upon her arrival at Tehran's Mehr-Abad airport Tuesday. Ebadi was given a hero's welcome from thousands of fans as she returned to Iran

Shirin Ebadi says fight for rights will go on

Iran's Nobel laureate gets hero's welcome

AFP, Tehran

"The defence of those facing political accusations has always been a priority, and this will continue," the petite and softly spoken jurist told reporters. She also repeated her "hope" for all political prisoners to be freed.

Ebadi, who was given the prize last Friday for her efforts to promote democracy and human rights, was welcomed by thousands of fans as she returned to Iran late Tuesday.

Some 10,000 people, a majority of them women, descended on Tehran's Mehrabad airport for her homecoming, with bumper-to-bumper traffic bringing an area around the airport to a standstill.

Many in the crowd shouted political slogans, echoing Ebadi's calls for political prisoners to be set free, and chants directed against embattled reformist President Mohammad Khatami who earlier Tuesday poured scorn on the value of the prize.

Prize is not very important, the ones that count are the scientific and literary prizes.

"I hope that Mrs Ebadi, who comes from a religious family and has expressed her love for Islam, will pay attention to the interests of the Islamic world and of Iran, and not allow anyone to exploit her success."

Echoing comments already heard from Iranian hardliners, he added there were "political criteria" behind the Nobel committee's decision.

In contrast, the president's brother and reformist party leader Mohammad Reza Khatami told parliament that "the Nobel Peace Prize is one of the most honorary and most influential prizes, and we are grateful to the Nobel committee for awarding this prize to an Iranian citizen."

NATO launches new global response force

AFP, Brussel, Netherlands

NATO inaugurated yesterday a rapid response force designed to dramatically extend the military alliance's reach in the global fight against terrorism.

In a ceremony at NATO's northern European command headquarters, US General James Jones, NATO's top military chief, handed over the colours of the new force to its first commander, British General Jack Dovell.

"The passing of the colours... to General Dovell will mark what I consider to be one of the most important changes in the NATO alliance since the signing of the Washington Treaty," which founded NATO in 1949, Jones said.

The force represented "an unambiguous commitment of the alliance's intent to stay militarily relevant in a global context", the US supreme commander added.

"For the first time in its history the alliance will have a joint/combined air, land and sea and special operations force under a single commander."

US ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns said: "The NATO Response Force is an important, innovative new military capability for NATO, and further evidence of NATO's on-going transformation to meet the new threats from global terrorism."

The force, designed to deploy to hotspots around the globe within five days, will eventually total 20,000 troops when it reaches full capacity in 2006.

The contingent represents a radical departure for the 54-year-old Alliance from its roots as the West's protector from the Soviet threat.

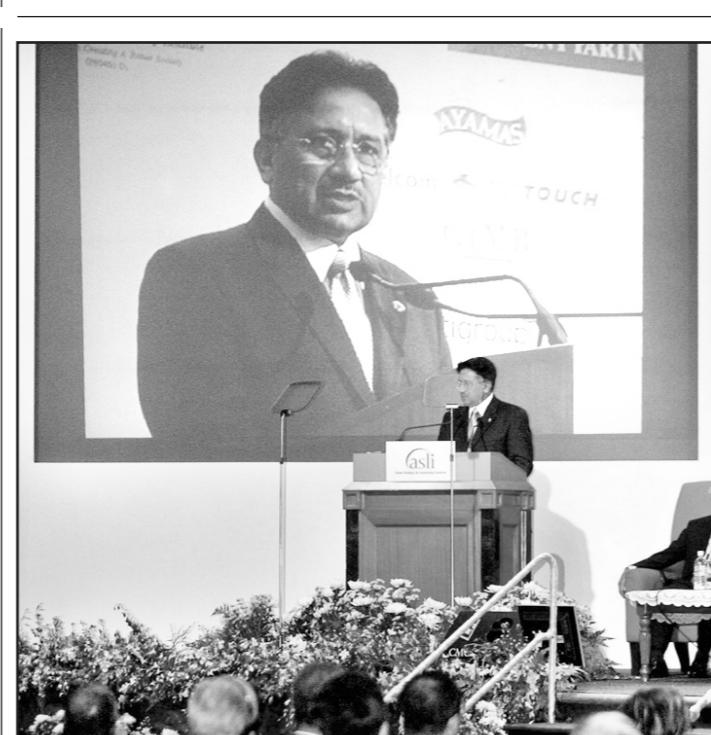


PHOTO: AFP
Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf delivers his keynote address at the special leaders forum of the 10th summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Countries (OIC) in Putrajaya, Yesterday. A sense of siege pervaded this designer-city of domes and spires as the world's Muslim leaders gathered for a summit opening 16 October in the shadow of a war on terrorism which many see as a war on Islam.

Excitement marks China's first manned space mission

AFP, Beijing

Passers-by stopped in their tracks, commuters brought their bicycles to a halt and those on lunch breaks postponed meals as people learning of China's first manned space flight glued their eyes to television screens.

Few knew that the launch was scheduled yesterday morning as China's state-controlled media had downplayed coverage in the run-up to the 9am (local time) lift-off.

But soon after the official China Central Television began a delayed broadcast of the launch from northern Inner Mongolia with astronaut Yang Liwei on board, small crowds began gathering near giant television screens outside shopping malls.

One man could not keep his eyes off a screen outside the Wonderful supermarket in central Beijing and nearly ran his cycle into a car.

"This is no doubt a very important milestone in the progress and advancement made by China in Moiseyev as saying.

"We welcome this development and congratulate China for joining the club of space powers that have their own manned space programs," ITAR-TASS quoted the first deputy of the Russian space agency Nikolai

Shenzhou V blast off on the supermarket's screen.

"This shows our country's scientific capabilities are rising. I want our country to be as strong as possible because then we can stand up a little straighter."

Russia, which sent the first man into space more than 40 years ago, congratulated China for accomplishing the same feat yesterday and joining the elite space club alongside itself and the United States.

"We welcome this development and congratulate China for joining the club of space powers that have their own manned space programs," ITAR-TASS quoted the first deputy of the Russian space agency Nikolai

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