



An Israeli soldier pushes a Palestinian child in the divided West Bank city of Hebron yesterday. Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qorei called on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories reoccupied since the start of the intifada to allow elections in June 2004.

# Arafat seeks talks with Israel to end violence

"The West Bank barrier is a new Berlin Wall"

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, branded an obstacle to peace by his arch-rival Ariel Sharon, called for a resumption of peace talks but said his life was under threat "day and night" from Israel.

"It's time for dialogue instead of military means, violence, assassinations and destructions," the veteran leader told MPs in the West Bank town of Ramallah in a session of parliament to approve a new Palestinian government.

"It's time for us and you Israelis to get out of this destructive cycle which will not give us or you peace or security," said Arafat, who stressed that Israelis also had the right to live in peace.

The Israeli government of Prime Minister Sharon has refused to talk with Arafat, whom it has described as an "absolute obstacle" to peace and kept under virtual house arrest in Ramallah for almost two years.

Israel has given a luke-warm reception to the new line-up, which includes many outgoing ministers, but promised to "give a chance" to incoming premier Ahmed Qorei and repeated it was ready to renew contacts.

Arafat nevertheless slammed

Israel's policies, especially the separation barrier being erected in the West Bank which he described as "a new Berlin Wall".

The barrier was "depriving our people of their land, their rights and independent state and sacred Jerusalem," Arafat said.

A new United Nations report said Tuesday the barrier, which Israel says is designed solely to keep out Palestinian militants, will lead to severe humanitarian consequences for more than 680,000 Palestinians.

Only 11 percent of the route of the barrier conforms to the "Green Line", the boundary between Israel and the West Bank, said the survey by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The Palestinians regard what they describe as the "apartheid wall" as an attempt to pre-empt the borders of any future two-state settlement and seize their most fertile land.

"Little consideration appears to have been given by the Israeli government to the wall's impact on Palestinian lives," the report said.

Arafat, whose health has been the subject of much speculation in recent weeks, also complained that his life was under threat.

"I am telling you and the entire

world that my life is threatened day and night by the Israeli government but my life is no more important than that of any Palestinian child," he said.

The Israeli security cabinet approved Arafat's "removal" in September with one minister saying that the veteran leader's assassination was considered an option.

Sharon has since insisted that there are no plans to kill his long-time foe.

Qorei, who gave a long speech to flesh out his programme, reiterated the Palestinian government's call for the siege on Arafat to be lifted.

The prime minister also urged Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories reoccupied since the September 2000 start of the intifada to allow elections to be held in June 2004. His new 24-minister line-up, which is expected to be comfortably passed by the deputies, was only agreed upon after weeks of bitter struggle between Arafat and Qorei on the key position of interior minister.

Arafat came out on top once again and the deadlock was broken on Friday when the premier confirmed that his preferred candidate, General Nasr Yusef, had been dropped to make way for close Arafat associate Hakam Balaawi.

## Prabhakaran likely to meet Norwegian facilitators today

PTI, Colombo

The elusive LTTE supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran, is expected to meet the Norwegian peace facilitators, Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, and Special Envoy, Erik Soleim, in Kilinochchi on Thursday, according to reliable sources.

But the Norwegian embassy was unwilling to confirm or deny the meeting. Asked to comment on a lead story in Daily Mirror on Wednesday about the meeting, a spokesperson of the Norwegian embassy told Hindustan Times, "We are to meet the LTTE's leadership. We cannot say whether it is going to be Prabhakaran or the political wing leader, Tamilchelvam. We'll know for sure only tomorrow."

On an earlier occasion, the Norwegians had expected to meet Prabhakaran, but ended up meeting Tamilchelvam. Prabhakaran does not meet foreign envoys, unless he thinks it is absolutely necessary. He may avoid to convey displeasure too.

However, according to other informed sources, Prabhakaran would meet the Norwegians. He is expected to assure the Norwegians that he would play ball with the Sri Lankan state provided, of course, the hawks in the establishment did not take any hostile action.

## Bush warned of al-Qaeda threat during UK tour

AFP, London

Britain's most senior policemen have warned that al-Qaeda terrorists using the cover of anti-war protests are a real threat to the safety of US President George W. Bush during his state visit to London next week.

"We are not so concerned about some anti-war protester throwing rotten fruit at the president. Our worry now is the more dangerous elements who may be here," said a senior Scotland Yard source quoted in The Times newspaper yesterday.

The report came the day after anti-war demonstrators accused the government of blocking their right to protest in central London against Bush's visit from November 18 to 21.

The Stop the War Coalition, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and the Muslim Association of Great Britain intend to organise a 100,000-strong march on November 20 around the main government buildings.

But, according to Stop The War coalition, police have said any demonstration through Parliament Square and Whitehall in the heart of the capital would be banned.

# Urgent Iraq talks at White House

## Bremer dashes to Washington for an emergency meeting as attacks continue

AP, AFP, Washington

US President Bush's top foreign advisers summoned Iraq's American administrator for hurried White House talks focused on their growing frustrations with the Iraqi Governing Council and a logjam in transferring political power to Iraqis.

One option under consideration: naming a new interim Iraqi leader with authority to govern the country until a constitution can be written and elections held, a Bush administration official said. That would be patterned after the model of Afghanistan.

The urgency of the visit Tuesday by American administrator L. Paul Bremer was underscored when Bremer abruptly cancelled a planned meeting in Baghdad with the visiting Polish prime minister before heading to Washington. At the White House, he met with Secretary of State Colin

Powell, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and other top officials.

The talks came at a time when Iraqi insurgents have stepped up attacks resulting in the bloodiest week for American soldiers since the end of major combat operations and as US and Iraqi leaders struggle over how to draft a new constitution, a key step in handing over power to the Iraqis.

With a re-election battle ahead, Bush faces a rising casualty toll in Iraq and criticism that he lacks a strategy for postwar Iraq. As of Monday, the US death toll was 394.

US officials have had growing concerns about the performance of the governing council, a senior administration official said, particularly the lack of progress toward a Dec. 15 deadline to set a timetable for writing a new constitution and hold-

ing democratic elections.

Bremer has expressed frustration to members of Congress that council officials are not working hard enough.

One idea being considered is the creation of an interim Iraqi leader with authority to govern until a new constitution is in place and elections are held, the senior administration official said, on condition of anonymity. In Afghanistan, the government of President Hamid Karzai was installed by the US-led coalition that ousted the hardline Taliban regime in late 2001.

The talks also focused on security issues, said another Bush administration official who also spoke on condition of anonymity. Some critics have proposed the recall of Iraq's army, disbanded shortly after the war. Pentagon officials and Bremer's aides have called that unworkable.

Even as they expressed disappointment in the council's work, adminis-

tration officials said Bush was not about to disband it.

"The notion that we are about to throw the council to the wolves is exaggerated," said a third senior administration official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "But there is a need to put some energy into the political transition. It is true they are not as together as we had hoped."

Many members of the US-picked governing council have complained, in turn, that they cannot move quickly and have no real power because Bremer rules the country. The council has not even decided how to choose delegates to draft the constitution, US officials noted in frustration.

Some US officials believe that key members of the 25-member Iraqi council are stalling in hopes of winning concessions from American leaders under political pressure to turn over power to the Iraqis.

## Vajpayee holds summit talks with Putin

PTI, Moscow

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee yesterday held crucial summit talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin covering issues relating to terrorism as well as bilateral, strategic and trade ties.

The two leaders first held one-on-one talks in which the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Brajesh Mishra was also present.

At the outset, the Prime Minister thanked Putin for hosting a private dinner on Tuesday night for him at his dacha (farmhouse) on the outskirts of the city. The two leaders were later joined by their respective delegations for detailed talks on various issues of mutual interest.

The two leaders held informal talks late Tuesday when Putin hosted Vajpayee for dinner at his country residence at Novo Ogaryovo, just outside Moscow, stressing the importance of regular top-level meetings between their two countries.

Vajpayee's three-day visit, accompanied by several ministers and nearly 100 businessmen, is his second Russian trip this year, and officials in both capi-

tals have been at pains to stress the importance of maintaining the rhythm of their contacts.

Russia remains the country's largest supplier of military hardware, more than 10 years after the end of the Cold War, accounting for more than 70 percent of army, air force and navy equipment.

Apart from the customary defence issues, officials are keen to raise the level of trade which, at 1.87 billion dollars (1.63 billion euros) in the first seven months of 2003, is considered unnaturally low for such long-standing allies.

Quoting a senior Indian chamber of commerce official, the RIA Novosti news agency said businessmen in New Delhi were hoping that trade with Russia could reach five billion dollars a year by 2005.

Sergei Prikhodko, deputy head of the Kremlin administration, told the ITAR-TASS news agency that Putin and Vajpayee planned to discuss military-technical cooperation, trade and economic relations, and contacts in the scientific sphere in addition to international issues.



PHOTO: AFP Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) welcomes Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at Moscow's Kremlin, yesterday.

## Saudis deny arresting Riyadh bombers

REUTERS, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia said Tuesday it had not yet arrested those behind the devastating suicide bomb attack on a housing complex in Riyadh, after diplomats said many people were detained for questioning.

"There have been no arrests of anyone up to now," Interior Minister Prince Nayef told the official Saudi Press Agency.

A diplomat close to the investigation said, however, that a number of people had been detained.

"Some were also detained and released after interrogation," the diplomat told Reuters, adding that some were still held. "The campaign to hunt down those responsible is continuing."

Saudi-born Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network is suspected of staging Sunday's attack in Riyadh, which killed at least 18 people, including five children, and wounded 120. Most of the victims were Arabs. In May, 35 people died in a triple suicide bombing of another housing complex in the capital.

Saudi officials and Washington blame al Qaeda for the weekend attack in which bombers posing as police blew up an explosives-rigged car in the Muhaya compound.

Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, was quoted by newspapers as saying the kingdom was "in a state of war against those terrorists."

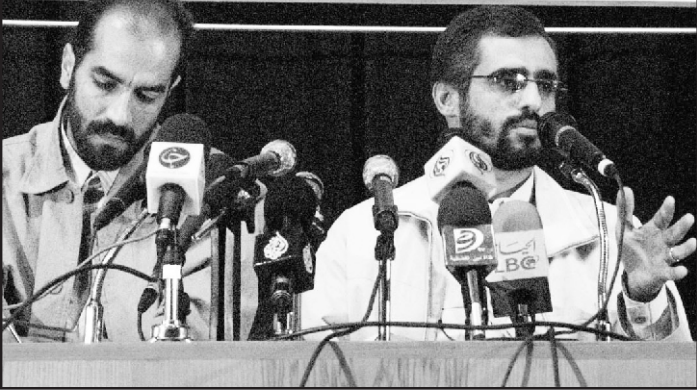


PHOTO: AFP Saeed Abou Taleb (R) speaks to the journalists as Sohail Karimi (L) takes notes during a press conference in Tehran yesterday. The two journalists with state-run television who were freed 03 November by US forces in Iraq after four months of detention have charged they were subjected to "severe torture" while in American custody.

# US Senate backs Syria sanctions

BBC ONLINE

The upper house of the US Congress has overwhelmingly backed a bill to slap sanctions on Syria if it fails to address long-standing security issues.

Senators backed the bill after a similar show of support in the House of Representatives in October.

The bill allows President George W Bush to impose sanctions if Syria is found to be backing terror groups or acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

The Senate amended the bill, meaning it must now go back to the House.

Under the amended bill - passed by 89 votes to four - President George W Bush will have more power to waive the economic and diplomatic sanctions if he deems it in the national interest.

It permits the president to "cali-

brate US sanctions against Syria in response to positive Syrian behaviour", explained Richard Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

No senator spoke against the bill, which bans any US trade with Syria in items which could be used in weapons programmes.

It also allows the president to choose at least two other sanctions such as barring US businesses from investing in Syria, restricting travel in the US by Syrian diplomats or banning exports of US products other than food and medicine to Syria.

The BBC's Michael Buchanan reports from Washington that trade between the two countries is paltry - around \$150m a year - and Syria receives no US foreign aid.

The biggest losers could be American companies who have been recently been contracted by Damascus to explore for oil.

## Horses given caste in Bihar!

IANs, Patna

As if dividing humans along caste lines wasn't enough, now even horses have been given castes in Bihar--with the "Brahmin horses" predictably being the fairest ones.

Horse traders at the Sonepur cattle fair in India's most caste-conscious state have separated their animals along lines of colour, size and behaviour to classify them under various castes.

An official in charge of the fair said: "The horses are identified just like humans -- as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras." White horses with wide foreheads are considered Brahmins, while brown horses blessed

with keen ears and broad chests are the Kshatriyas.

The Vaishyas are maroon in colour with thin legs and long necks. The Shudra horses are dark brown and generally considered to be of inferior quality, if a horse trader is to be believed.

"We decide the caste of a horse after a thorough check up of its colour, size, facial cut and behaviour," said horse trader Ramadhar Singh. The first rule for identifying the horse's caste is colour, followed by size.

"A particular horse behaves as per its caste, like Brahmin horses are handsome, calm and well behaved," insisted horse rider Maheshwar Pandey.

A Brahmin horse, the traders say, easily follows its rider's orders.

A Kshatriya caste horse is strong, tough and angry, while a horse of the Shudra caste is considered ill behaved.

The fair organises a horse race every year to encourage horse traders.

The 20-day cattle fair, which begin on Sunday at Sonepur near Patna, is considered one of Asia's largest. It attracts cattle traders from India as well as abroad. The products on sale range from elephants to household goods.

Tourists from Britain, France, the Netherlands and other countries have begun arriving for the event. An elegant tourist village has been made to lodge them.