



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.

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.

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 capitals 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.

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-

Urgent Iraq talks at White House

Bremer dashes to Washington for an emergency meeting as attacks continue

AP, AFP, Washington

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.



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

Vajpayee holds summit talks with Putin

PTI, Moscow

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US punishing Syria for its support of Palestinians: Damascus

AFP, Damascus

Syria said yesterday that it was being punished for its support of the Palestinians, after the US Congress approved legislation providing for tough sanctions against Damascus.

"The Senate voted as expected for economic and diplomatic sanctions against Syria because of its support for the resistance of the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation," the official news agency SANA said.

Syria's ruling party newspaper, Al-Baath, said Wednesday that "Those who want any useful dealings with Syria must understand that only dialogue can bear fruit with it," adding that Damascus was "immune to outside pressure."

Syria "has no large foreign debt and its food security is assured", Al-Baath said in shrugging off the threat of sanctions.

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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 Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras." White horses with wide foreheads are considered Brahmins, while brown horses blessed

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 begins 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.

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