

Vajpayee calls for AIDS-like campaign to combat TB

AFP, New Delhi

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said yesterday that India, which has the most tuberculosis cases in the world, needed a TB awareness drive like the one in place against AIDS.

"It seems to me that mass awareness campaigns about tuberculosis are not commensurate with the threat it poses," Vajpayee told a New Delhi conference on tuberculosis.

"In recent years people's awareness about HIV/AIDS has increased significantly and we need a similar approach in the case of TB," he said.

"Even today not all TB patients know it is completely curable."

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated that 4.5 million Indians have tuberculosis. It has more TB cases than any country in the world, the WHO's Global Tuberculosis Report has said.

India accounts for 30 percent of the world's tuberculosis patients, according to a report by a private anti-TB alliance released Tuesday.

US overseer sets goals for Iraq power transfer

Rocket hits Baghdad hotel, new clashes in Fallujah

AFP, Baghdad

US civil administrator Paul Bremer delivered Wednesday a televised address to the Iraqi people laying out the goals of US-led coalition less than 100 days before a handover of sovereignty.

He referred repeatedly to the contrast in Iraq compared to when former president Saddam Hussein was in power.

Meanwhile, a rocket slammed into a major Baghdad hotel yesterday in a new targeted attack calculated to add chaos to the already complex process of returning sovereignty to the Iraqis at the end of June.

In the restive town of Fallujah, at least three Iraqis were killed and several people injured, among them two US soldiers, in a series of incidents overnight and into Wednesday morning.

The violence comes as the US civilian administrator, Paul Bremer, was due to deliver a major

address to Iraqi officials to mark the start of the last 100 days until sovereignty is returned to the Iraqi people.

The rocket in Baghdad caused no injuries when it hit the sixth floor of the heavily-fortified Sheraton hotel at just after 4:00 am (0100 GMT), but it shook awake guests and sent panic through the area.

Normally darkened like the neighbouring Palestine Hotel at that hour, most lights were on at the Sheraton, which is popular with Western contractors and the media, and lifts could be seen busily shuttling up and down.

In Fallujah, three Iraqis were killed and five people wounded, including two soldiers, overnight when the soldiers came under attack, civilian and military officials said.

US missions in UAE shut on 'specific threat'

AFP, Dubai

The US embassy in the Emirati capital and its consulate in Dubai closed yesterday after a "specific threat" to the embassy, following Israel's killing of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the mission announced.

"The embassy in Abu Dhabi and consulate in Dubai have temporarily suspended operations for Wednesday March 24 in light of a specific threat to the embassy in Abu Dhabi," it said in an official statement.

The embassy and consulate will be assessing their security posture on the Thursday-Friday weekend with regard to the re-opening Saturday.

"We have no specific threat information against the American community in the United Arab Emirates however the Department of State has issued a new worldwide caution and a new Middle and North Africa public announcement in light of the killing of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin."



Relatives of the victims of the 11 March bomb attacks in Madrid sit as they wait for the start of the memorial mass at Madrid's Almudena cathedral yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

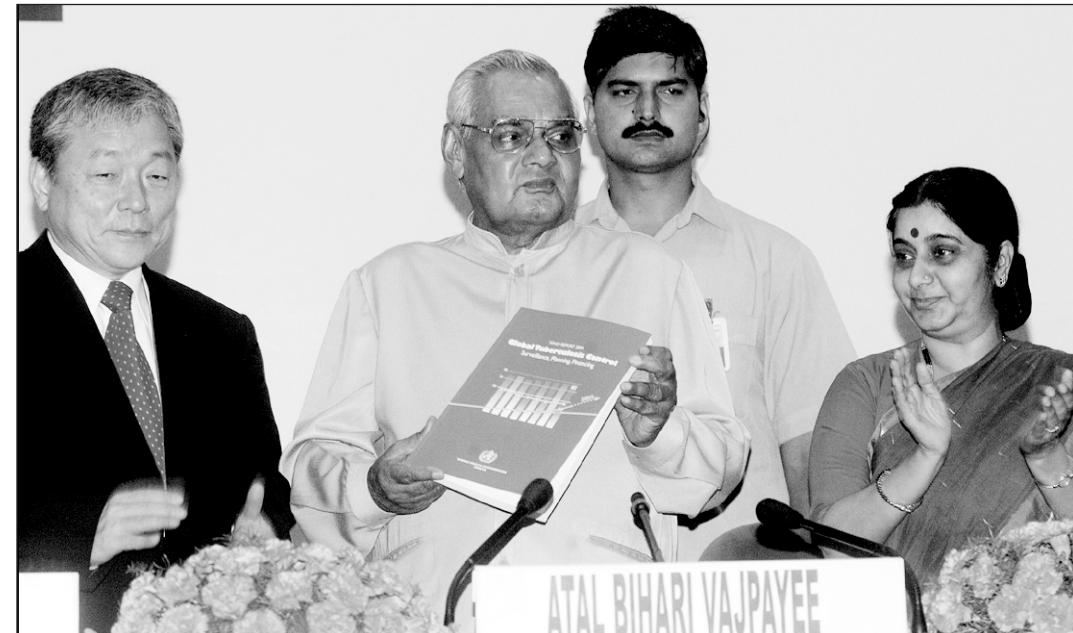


PHOTO: AFP
Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (2-L) holds a copy of a report on Tuberculosis as Indian Health Minister Shushma Swaraj (R) and Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr. J.W. Lee (L) look on during the inauguration of the second meeting of the Stop-TB Partners forum on World Tuberculosis Day in New Delhi yesterday.

UNSC on collision course over Hamas killing

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council was on a collision course Tuesday after the United States and the Palestinians vowed no compromise over Israel's assassination of a militant Islamist leader.

Capping two days of fractious talks, the council adjourned in deadlock as the United States insisted it would not accept condemning the killing of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin without reference to Hamas, the militant group he founded.

But the Palestinians, represented by lone Arab council member Algeria, said they would not agree to any resolution that mentioned Yassin's Hamas group, which has claimed scores of deadly attacks on Israel in the past three years.

"He preached hatred and glorified suicide bombings," said the US ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte.

"Yassin was opposed to the existence of the state of Israel and actively sought to undermine a two-state solution" in the Middle East, Negroponte said.

"This Security Council should not, and the United States will not, support initiatives which ignore this reality."

Israel killed Yassin, the wheelchair-bound cleric who founded the radical Islamist group, in a helicopter strike in the Gaza Strip on Monday, drawing condemnation from leaders around the globe.

Algeria forced an open debate at the council on Tuesday after Negroponte blocked a council statement that would have condemned the killing without reference to Hamas's history of attacks on Israel.

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China throws out US plan to fingerprint its citizens

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday rejected plans by the United States to fingerprint its citizens applying for non-immigrant visas, calling it a discriminatory move that infringed on human rights.

"This measure has caused strong dissatisfaction among the Chinese people and in different social circles," the foreign ministry said on its website, a day after it called off its human rights dialogue with the US.

Beijing suspended the dialogue after Washington announced it would propose a resolution to condemn China for rights abuses at the ongoing annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

The foreign ministry statement said China had made "solemn representations" to the United States through diplomatic channels on the fingerprinting issue.

"They pointed out that this measure is discrimination against Chinese citizens. It has harmed the Chinese citizen's dignity and right to privacy. It is a method that infringes on their human rights," it said.

The US embassy in Beijing began on Monday collecting fingerprints as biometric identifiers for non-immigrant visa applicants.

21 villagers gunned down in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Tribal rebels shot dead 21 villagers from a rival ethnic group in their homes and at a marketplace in the revolt-wracked northeastern Indian state of Assam yesterday, police said.

Ethnic Kuki rebels barged into homes of ethnic Karbis in the village of Dillai before dawn and sprayed them with automatic gunfire, killing 16 people, Assam police chief Khagen Sharma told AFP.

"About a dozen militants armed with automatic weapons descended on the village and shot the villagers as they slept. Four people are still being treated for their injuries," Sharma said.

In the afternoon, gunmen believed to belong to the same rebel group, the Kuki Revolutionary Army, opened fire in the market of the nearby village of

Joy Terong, killing five people and wounding two, Sharma said.

Kuki and Karbi rebels are engaged in a bloody turf war in ethnically mixed areas of Assam about 330km east of the state capital Guwahati.

Before Wednesday's massacres, the bloodshed had already claimed more than 100 lives since early 2003.

Assam, better known to the outside world for its sprawling tea plantations, is torn by insurrections and ethnic strife. Insurrections against the Indian state - mostly by ethnic Assamese and Bodos - have claimed more than 10,000 lives in the past two decades.

In November at least 54 settlers from India's Hindi-speaking Ganges plain were killed by ethnic Assamese in bloodshed set off by a dispute over hiring practices at the state-run railways.

India says no to US 'non-Nato ally offer'

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, New Delhi

There was no return to the Indo-US bonhomie of a week ago, and the government in effect said no Wednesday to the American offer to give India "major non-Nato ally" (MNNA) status, saying the offer had not been considered.

Continuing to express displeasure against the US for keeping it in the dark about Pakistan's special MNNA status, the external affairs ministry spokesman said, "we have not given any consideration to that kind of relationship with the United States."

A call had been made by the US

Secretary of State, General Colin Powell, to the external affairs minister, Yashwant Sinha, over the weekend, to make amends, and during their conversation, the spokesman said, "Secretary Powell referred to the way in which

the US announcement about designating Pakistan as a major non-Nato Ally had emerged, and said that their intention had not been to spring a surprise on India."

Powell had been trying to call Sinha ever since the announcement was made in Pakistan, but could not reach the minister who was campaigning in his constituency.

He and other top officials of the Bush and Clinton administrations had been aboard the vehicle as it was carrying out a patrol on the road leading south from the town of Podujevo.

"One international policeman and one Kosovo policeman have been shot dead," said UN police spokesman Derek Chappell.

Two officers from the international police force, one local policeman and an interpreter had been aboard the vehicle as it was carrying out a patrol on the road leading south from the town of Podujevo.

"It attempted to stop a vehicle on the highway. As it did so it was attacked by at least one gunman who sprayed the car with bullets," said Chappell.

2 dead after UN police vehicle attacked in Kosovo

AFP, Pristina

A UN and local police officer were killed when a UN police vehicle was attacked late Tuesday in northern Kosovo, a UN police spokesman said.

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