

Kerry calls for end to 'Made in America' tag on Iraq occupation

AFP, Washington

Democratic presidential contender John Kerry yesterday called on President George W. Bush to get rid of the "Made in America" tag on the US-led occupation of Iraq in a new campaign attack.

Kerry used the Democratic Party's weekly radio address to make a new appeal for a dramatic change to US policy in the country US force invaded in March 2003 and where they are still struggling to restore order.

"Staying the course does not mean stubbornly holding to the wrong course," said the Massachusetts senator who will take on Bush in the November 2 presidential election.

"In order to complete our mission, we must review our tactics. We need strategies that reflect realistic goals and the facts on the ground."

Kerry said Bush and other US leaders had to be "honest with the American people about the difficulties we face in Iraq" and more troops must be sent to secure Iraq.

"Third, we must remove the 'Made in America' label from the Iraqi occupation."

Kerry said the an international mission approved by the United Nations must be set up to organise elections, restore government services and help rebuild the Iraqi economy.

"Finally, we should transform the military force in Iraq into a NATO security force under the leadership of an American commander, so that the United States is not shouldering the burdens and risks alone."

Kerry said "the failure of the administration to internationalise the conflict has lost us time, momentum, and credibility."

Chinese chlorine gas explosion kills 9

Gas leak forces evacuation of 150,000

AP, Beijing

Leaking chlorine gas exploded at a chemical plant in China's southwest, killing as many as nine people and forcing 150,000 to flee their homes, the government said yesterday.

The explosion occurred Friday evening at the Tianyuan Chemical Industry Plant in the city of Chongqing, the official Xinhua News Agency said. It said seven people were confirmed dead and two were missing.

At least seven containers of liquefied chlorine were leaking fumes, which could be smelled nearly a quarter-mile away, the report said.

State television attributed the accident to outdated equipment and employees using it incorrectly.

Firefighters were spraying a mix of water and lye into the air in hopes of clearing away some of the gas, Xinhua said.

The leaks were first detected late Thursday, Xinhua said, citing Vice Mayor Zhou Mubing. Minor explosions were heard later that night, but the report didn't mention injuries at that time.

Residents were evacuated from areas within two miles of the plant, Xinhua. Most had returned to their homes by midday Saturday, but 30,000 remained in schools and

other government buildings, the agency said.

In December, a gas well leak near Chongqing sent a toxic cloud spreading across villages, killing 243 people in one of China's deadliest reported industrial disasters.

On Wednesday, China's Cabinet accepted the resignation of the chairman of the country's biggest oil producer, which owned the well.

More than 9,000 people were treated for injuries after the disaster and some 60,000 were forced to evacuate.



PHOTO: AFP

Recently released senior Myanmar's opposition leader U Lwin (C) celebrates the reopening of the party's headquarters that was sealed off by the ruling junta a year ago, with party workers and supporters in Yangon yesterday. Myanmar's opposition said it was expecting its leader Aung San Suu Kyi to be freed "very soon."

US asks Syria to control border with Iraq

AFP, Washington

The United States on Friday said it had renewed a warning to Syria this week to prevent insurgents from crossing its border into Iraq, suggesting that increased vigilance of the frontier was in Damascus' own interests.

The message came in the form of an "oral message" from US Secretary of State Colin Powell to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that was delivered to Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara by US ambassador to Syria Margaret Scooby on Thursday, the State Department said.

The message "was focused on the

fact that Syria has a huge stake in the emergence of a unified and stable Iraq," spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters.

"It urged Syria to work closely with the rest of the international community to promote a stable Iraq," he said. "It also made clear to Syria that it needs to control the transit of its border by terrorists and people supporting the insurgents in Iraq."

"We feel that Syria had taken some steps, but that there is more that they can and should do in that regard," Boucher said.

Syria's official Sana news agency reported Thursday that Powell had

asked Assad for help in bringing peace to Iraq where violence has spiralled in recent weeks amid US accusations that insurgents using Syria as an entry point to the country.

According to Sana, Powell asked Syria to do everything in its power to assist with the "pacification of the situation in Iraq" while preserving its unity.

That report came shortly after General Richard Myers, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in Baghdad that foreign fighters were still infiltrating Iraq from Syria and Iran, calling the situation unacceptable.

AFP, Tullamore

A top European Union official yesterday warned the world community had to repair "an awful lot of damage" arising from a historic US policy reversal on the Middle East peace process.

In hard-hitting comments, EU External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten said the new-found US support for unilateral Israeli measures risked sidelining moderate Palestinians and inflaming Arab opinion.

But Patten welcomed a reaffirmation by US President George W. Bush Friday, after talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, that a

settlement could only be reached through negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

"That's not entirely what was coming out of Washington earlier in the week," he told reporters as EU foreign ministers concluded a two-day informal meeting in central Ireland.

"I think what is worrying is that first of all, an awful lot of Palestinians will have taken the view as a result of this week that their aspirations for a two-state solution have been knocked on the head," he said.

"That's not very good if you want to encourage moderation in the Palestinian community."

US MILITARY SCHOLAR SAYS

Iraq war logic 'flawed'

AFP, Washington

The US military strategy in Iraq is based on a "flawed" logic because it is pursuing the mutually exclusive goals of changing the country's regime and doing it "quickly and on the cheap," an American military scholar has concluded.

Army Lieutenant Colonel Antulio Echevarria presented his findings in a report published last month by the US Army War College, which made a point of saying the study presented only the views of its author.

Echevarria said military operations designed to bring about regime change usually require a labor- and time-intensive effort.

But the administration of President George W. Bush, he argued, was driven by "the desire to win the war quickly and on the cheap."

It downplayed the possibility that the overall financial cost of the conflict would be high and even dismissed chief White House Economic Adviser Lawrence Lindsey, who had projected the conflict could cost between 100 billion and 200 billion dollars, according to the report.

"It lowballed the number of US troops and other personnel that might have to be put in harm's way to get the job done, and how long they might have to remain

deployed," the scholar wrote.

The analysis echoes warnings issued early last year by then Army chief of staff General Eric Shinseki, who told Congress several hundred thousand troops would be needed in post-war Iraq.

In a rebuke, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said the projection was "wildly off the mark," and Shinseki was sent into retirement soon thereafter.

Congressional critics have repeatedly stated since then that the Shinseki analysis was correct and accused the administration of feeding the public unrealistic rosy forecasts.

Cops nab 1,000 Nepalis as anti-king demo foiled

AFP, Kathmandu

Around 1,000 people were taken into custody yesterday as police in Nepal broke up new demonstrations against the royalist government and protesters torched two trucks, witnesses said.

Police took away about half of some 1,000 people who took to the streets at the call of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists to protest alleged harassment of media covering two weeks of mass anti-monarchy demonstrations.

The Federation said that among those detained were the media group's president, Taranath Dahal; Kunda Dixit, editor of the English-language weekly The Nepali Times, and Narayan Wagle, editor of leading daily Kantipur.

Another 500 demonstrators were rounded up in a separate demonstration led by Sher Bahadur Deuba, the prime minister dismissed for "incompetence" in 2002 by King Gyanendra who appointed his own unelected government.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian policemen inspect the scene of the aircraft crash in which Indian actress Soundarya was killed in the outskirts of Bangalore yesterday.

Indian movie star among 4 killed in plane crash

AFP, Bangalore

An Indian movie star campaigning in upcoming elections was among four people killed yesterday when their plane crashed after take-off near the southern city of Bangalore, police said.

Soundarya, 32, a leading light in Telugu-language cinema who has starred in more than 85 films, was travelling to the adjoining state of Andhra Pradesh on a campaign stop when the aircraft crashed, a police spokesman said.

The privately owned four-seater Cessna caught fire minutes after takeoff from Jakkur airstrip on the outskirts of Bangalore, the spokesman said. The bodies were charred beyond recognition.

'Bush planned Iraq war in Dec 2001'

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush was planning to attack Iraq in December 2001 despite public assurances Washington was seeking a diplomatic solution to the standoff with Baghdad, according to a new book whose excerpts were made public here.

The book, titled "Plan of Attack," was written by Bob Woodward, the Washington Post reporter who along with Carl Bernstein unveiled the Watergate scandal that led to President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974.

Woodward is currently an assistant managing editor at the Post.

He writes that Bush met repeatedly with his war cabinet in late 2001 – three months after the September 11 terror attacks on the United States – to plan the US attack on Iraq, according to excerpts made available to his newspaper Friday.