



Emergency services work by the collapsed footway of the new terminal 2E at Roissy airport, outside Paris yesterday. Six people, including three police officers, were killed and at least three others were injured when heavy slabs of concrete from a roof crashed onto a boarding footway which in turn collapsed onto airport service vehicles parked below at Charles de Gaulle airport in France.

Party rift widens

Top Republican questions Bush's foreign policy

AFP, Washington

A prominent US Senate Republican with life-long involvement in foreign affairs has questioned the way the administration of President George W. Bush is conducting the war on terror, arguing it "will not be won through attrition."

The warning, delivered by Richard Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in a graduation address at Tufts University, laid bare a widening rift between the president and moderate Republicans, who are increasingly concerned by the escalating conflict in Iraq and fraying US relations with traditional allies.

Bush rushed to Capitol Hill Thursday in a bid to persuade members of his party that, despite increasing violence, his Iraq policy will eventually bear fruit as well as to reassure them about sagging opinion polls, some of which show presidential approval ratings in the low 40s.

But Lugar's speech Saturday

indicated the pep rally did little to assuage the deep concern about the overall direction of US foreign policy harbored by the Indiana Republican.

"Unless the United States commits itself to a sustained program of repairing and building alliances, expanding trade, pursuing resolutions to regional conflicts, supporting democracy and development worldwide, and controlling weapons of mass destruction, we are likely to experience acts of catastrophic terrorism that would undermine our economy, damage our society, and kill hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people," the chairman warned.

Taking military action against terrorists and their supporters and improving homeland defence "are not the same as executing a global strategy designed to overcome terrorism," Lugar said.

"The war on terrorism will not be won through attrition -- particularly since military action will often breed more terrorists and more resent-

ment of the United States," he admonished.

The comments appear to be in stark contrast with the doctrine of pre-emption laid out by the Bush administration in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, under which success in the war on terror can only be achieved by taking it to the enemy.

Vice President Richard Cheney reaffirmed this approach just last Friday, saying at a fundraiser in Texas, "We will engage the enemy, facing him with our military in Afghanistan and Iraq today, so we do not have to face him with armies of firefighters, police, and medical personnel on the streets of our own cities."

But while he never challenged the administration directly, Lugar seemed to take issue with the doctrine as he decried what he called heavy reliance "on military options and unilateral approaches that weakened our alliances."

New govt struggles to forge a common working agenda

AFP, New Delhi

Having assumed power, the real work still lies ahead for India's new Congress-led coalition as it tries to forge a common working agenda balancing the interests of its varied allies, analysts said.

Manmohan Singh, sworn in as India's 13th prime minister on Saturday at the head of the left-leaning United Progressive Front alliance, will have to pull along such contrasting allies as hardline Marxists from West Bengal state to Laloo Prasad Yadav, the maverick leader of Bihar state's Rashtriya Janata Dal, they said.

The first draft of the working agenda -- the alliance's basic manifesto -- has focused on policies such as cheap loans to farmers, aid for the poor and taking profitable state firms out of the privatisation programmes.

The outgoing Hindu nationalist government came under furious

attack from leftist leaders for selling off government's stakes in profitable state firms including in the strategic oil and telecom sectors.

The draft also says the coalition "rejects the idea of automatic hire and fire."

It also talks about a guaranteed job to every rural worker for 100 days and increasing federally administered taxes on the middle class and channelling these to provide education to the rural poor.

The emphasis on agriculture stems from Congress's stunning electoral defeat of the ruling Hindu nationalists, who were swept out on a tide of rural anger at being left out of India's economic boom, analysts say.

At the same time, the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) has struck a balance by pledging to welcome foreign investors, ramping up infrastructure such as roads, ports and airports, and cutting back the fiscal deficit.

Iran warns US over Iraq

Iranians try to storm British embassy

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran said yesterday it had sent a formal message of warning to the United States about its actions in neighbouring Iraq.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi also denied suggestions made by some US officials in recent days that Iraqi Governing Council member Ahmad Chalabi had passed sensitive US intelligence about Iraq to Iran.

"We have warned the Americans about Iraq," Asefi told a weekly news conference. "It is natural for two countries which do not have diplomatic relations to exchange messages."

Asefi did not comment on the contents of the warning, but officials and religious leaders in Shia Muslim Iran have expressed outrage in recent weeks about the presence of US-led forces in the holy Shia Iraqi cities of Najaf and Kerbala.

Asefi said the diplomatic message was sent via the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, which represents US interests in Iran. Washington broke ties with Iran in 1980.

Asefi described as "baseless" accusations made by unnamed US officials in some US media that Chalabi -- whose Baghdad headquarters were raided by US troops and Iraqi police last week -- had leaked information to Iran that the officials said could "get Americans killed."

"We have not received any classified information, neither from Chalabi nor any member of the Iraqi Governing Council," he said.

"What is going on between us and members of the Iraqi Governing Council and all groups in Iraq is negotiation, the exchange of views and clear and transparent cooperation."

Asefi said the accusations against Chalabi, a former favorite of the Pentagon, were part of an effort to deflect attention away from

Washington's problems in Iraq.

AFP adds: Demonstrators attempting to storm the British embassy in Tehran yesterday clashed with riot police guarding the building in the fourth such incident in a week, an AFP journalist witnessed.

Some 400 Islamic students pelted stones at the embassy, demanding the withdrawal of British forces from Iraq and the expulsion of the British ambassador.

Hundreds of police formed a cordon around the embassy to stop the demonstrators approaching.

The protestors who gathered after a call by Islamic militias at universities tried to force their way past the cordon around the embassy in the centre of the capital.

They called for the embassy to be closed and British Ambassador Richard Dalton to be expelled. "Go home," they chanted.

BJP pales before Cong's extra shine

THE STATESMAN/ANN, New Delhi

The BJP may be missing its glitter in the 14th Lok Sabha, thanks to the extra shine the Congress has in its new leaders and many other winners who are veterans in parliamentary politics. In stark contrast, the BJP looks pale with many of its stalwarts having bitten the dust at the hustings.

Also, the party dominated the scene in the 13th Lok Sabha due to its Rajya Sabha members who could participate in Lok Sabha discussions as ministers. People with good oratorical skills like Jaswant Singh, Arun Jaitley, Sushma Swaraj, Pramod Mahajan and Venkaiah Naidu (till they were ministers) and Ravi Shankar Prasad fell in this category. Among those missing, who could have made a difference in Lok Sabha debates are Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, Yashwant Singh, Ram Naik, Shah Nawaz Hussain, Vinay Katiyar and Kirit Somayya. All of them were unceremoniously shown the door by the electorate.

Those who can still hold the fort for the BJP are Atal Behari Vajpayee (his pregnant pauses notwithstanding), LK Advani, Vijay Kumar

Malhotra, Sumitra Mahajan and Vinod Khanna. The BJP also has on its side veterans such as George Fernandes, Nitish Kumar, PA Sangma and Maneka Gandhi. Fernandes in particular remains a formidable parliamentarian (remember his stirring defence of the Morarji government in 1978). The new entrant Navjot Singh Sidhu would also be a special treat to watch. Whether he tones down his "Sidhuisms" and adds more substance to parliamentary debates remains to be seen. Kalyan Singh is the new veteran who has joined the new entrants from the BJP's side.

On the ruling side there will be Sonia Gandhi, Dr Manmohan Singh, P Chidambaram, Mani Shankar Aiyar, Arjun Singh, Pranab Mukherjee, Jaipal Reddy, Kamal Nath, Kapil Sibal, Jagdish Tytler, Shankersinh Vaghela, Santosh Mohan Dev, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Ajit Jogi, Sunil Dutt and Subodh Kant Sahay.



A Pakistani newspaper vendor arranges magazines featuring the picture of the new Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, which are displayed at his shop in Islamabad yesterday. Manmohan Singh, the 71-year-old soft-spoken Sikh economist who became prime minister of the world's largest democracy Saturday was born in the Pakistani village of Gah in Chakwal district, some 80km south of the capital Islamabad.

Fresh snags hold up Lanka peace talks

AFP, Colombo

Sharp differences have re-emerged between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels holding up an expected agreement to revive negotiations, despite international pressure, officials said.

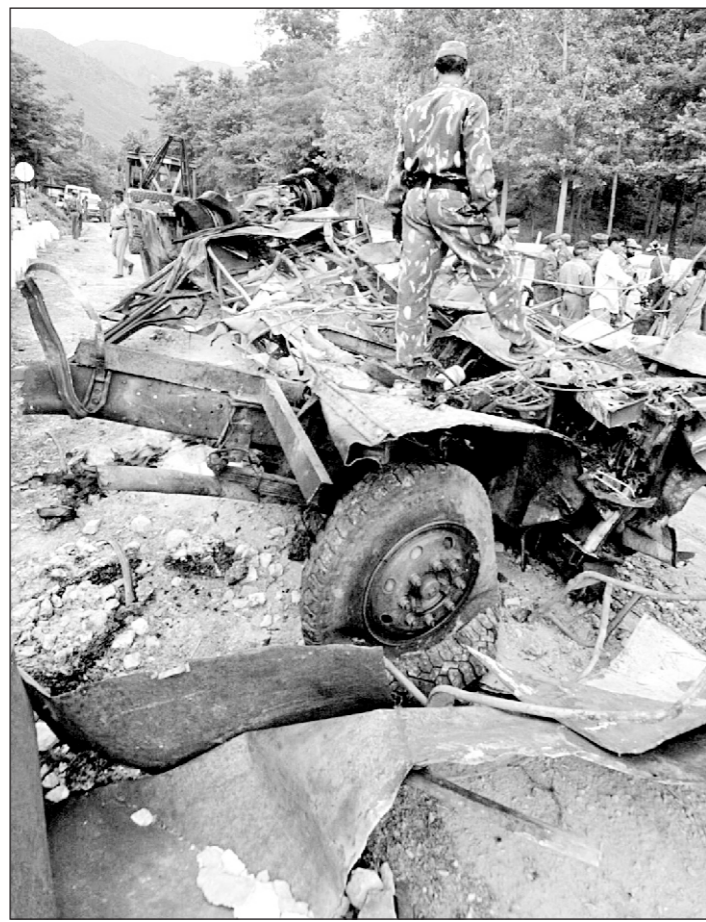
Officials close to the Norwegian-led peace process say the government and guerrillas were about to clinch a deal 10 days ago on re-starting talks on hold since April last year.

But they said new problems arose over the agenda for talks, with the government insisting that elements of a final peace deal be taken up while the Tigers want to discuss their plan for interim self-rule.

There were also differences on where the talks should be held and the level of media access to be allowed. The Tigers want high-profile talks staged overseas, while the new Colombo government favours negotiations in the island with little press attention.

Norway's top peace envoy Erik Solheim is due here this week on a previously arranged visit that will now focus on ironing out the differences, diplomats said.

"The original plan was for Solheim to try and arrange a time and place for opening talks," a diplomat said. "But now the challenge is to get parties to decide on an agenda."



A member of India's Border Security Forces stands on top of the wreckage of a BSF bus, damaged by a landmine explosion as it lies on the main Kashmir Highway at Lower Munda, some 80km south of Srinagar yesterday. Twenty-eight soldiers of the BSF were killed and 12 people, including three civilians, were injured, in the blast.

N Korea provided Libyan uranium: NY Times

REUTERS, New York

North Korea secretly provided Libya with nearly two tons of uranium in early 2001, The New York Times reported Saturday, citing unnamed US officials and European diplomats.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said there was 1.7 metric tons of uranium hexafluoride, a standard raw material for enrichment through feeding centrifuges, but experts told the newspaper the uranium was far short of the potency needed to make a nuclear weapon.

A large quantity of uranium hexafluoride was turned over to the United States by the Libyans earlier this year as part of leader Muammar Gaddafi's agreement to give up his nuclear programme. At the time, the United States identified Pakistan as the likely source.

However, the IAEA told The Times it found evidence that the uranium came from North Korea. The agency based its conclusion on interviews of members of the secret nuclear supplier network set up by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the former head of Pakistan's main nuclear laboratory.

While saying he could not confirm the information, White House spokesman Trent Duffy said, "That's why it's imperative that we continue with our policy of making sure that North Korea disarms in a complete, verifiable and irreversible fashion."

EXPERT TELLS ASIA-EUROPE EDITOR FORUM

Winning hearts vital in war on terror

THE NATION/ANN, Bangkok

In their efforts to dismantle global terrorism networks, the United States and its allies need to pay more attention to the "propaganda war" to win the hearts and minds of militants, said a Singapore-based analyst of terrorism, Kumar Ramakrishna.

Speaking at the Asia-Europe Editor Forum, organised by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung - a Germany-based foundation that promotes democracy - Ramakrishna said the US still had to focus on cracking down on individuals deemed as terrorists, but that alone could never stamp out terrorism.

Instead, it would be wise for the US to comprehend the psychology of those who have been "inspired" by the global "jihad" movements. Ramakrishna made his remarks on the topic of "Globalisation in Terrorism: al-Qaeda's Links to Southeast Asia" to 25 European and Asian journalists visiting Thailand for three days.

He pointed out that young Muslims could be made to feel that they were part of the transnational Islamic community. They could be urged to fight what they believed as

aggression and injustice against Islam without joining al-Qaeda or Southeast Asia's Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist networks, he said.

The US has to be more "propaganda-minded" and seriously consider the implications of its policies on counter-terrorism, he said.

He cited the US-led war in Iraq as a "catastrophic failure of leadership of the so-called liberation force", saying that the US has thus far been unable to verify that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.

Force should be used at a minimum and a campaign for their hearts and minds needs to be emphasised, he said.

But, Mahfuz Anam, editor of Bangladesh's The Daily Star, said that addressing terrorism by waging a propaganda war would only trivialise the issue. Instead it should focus on how the majority treats the minority.

Willi Germung, Germany's Berliner Zeitung correspondent, said it should not be forgotten that propaganda tactics did not enable the US to win the Vietnam War.

Arab leaders adopt reform plan to send it to G8 summit

AFP, Tunis

Arab leaders adopted an unprecedented joint pledge here yesterday to promote political reform and fight terrorism, while also seeking international support to end conflicts in the volatile region. The leaders, expected to present the pledge to a G8 summit next month, also condemned for the first time attacks on "civilians without discrimination," referring to both Israelis and Palestinians.

The 13-point reform document approved Sunday said Arab leaders were determined to pursue and intensify the process of political, economic, social and educational reform -- but according to their own national and cultural requirements, their religious values and their own "possibilities."

Other points called for fighting terrorism and expanding the bases of democracy and promoting human rights, as well as women's rights.

In its preamble, the document links reforms to a just settlement of the conflicts facing the region, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Now we have the first collective government commitment to reform," an Arab minister attending the summit told AFP.

"The consensus that emerged was very good given the political and social scene in the Arab world," the minister said on condition he not be named.

The rescheduled two-day summit, delayed for eight weeks after Tunisia abruptly cancelled it amid a row over reform proposals, opened amid popular Arab rage over the abuse of Iraqis at US-run prisons in Iraq and deadly Israeli military raids in the Gaza Strip.

Critics say the Arab leaders are powerless to do much against the US occupation of Iraq and Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The summit was marred on its opening day when Libya's Colonel Moamer Kadhafi walked out.

He made unspecified protests about the agenda and alluded to his previous complaints the Arab League was powerless to defend the Iraqis and Palestinians.

However, the Libyan delegation appeared to have approved the reform document.

In a satellite link-up from his headquarters in the West Bank, confined Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat urged his Arab counterparts on Saturday to lobby for international protection for his people and help rescue peace talks from more than three years of violence.

No formal mandate was given to Egypt and other Arab countries to discuss the reform plan with the international community, because of opposition from hardline Syria, delegates said.

Germans elect Horst Koehler as president

AP, Berlin

Horst Koehler, a former head of the International Monetary Fund who has called for bolder economic reforms in Germany, was elected yesterday as the country's ninth postwar president.

Koehler, nominated by opposition conservatives, defeated Gesine Schwan, a university professor backed by Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's government who sought to become Germany's first female head of state.

Koehler, a 61-year-old finance expert, won by a vote of 604-589 in balloting by a special assembly of lawmakers and state delegates in Berlin's Reichstag parliament building.

He replaces Johannes Rau, a member of Schroeder's Social Democrats who is stepping down after a single five-year term. Rau made history in 2000 as the first German to give a speech in the Israeli parliament.

Indo-Pak nuclear talks postponed

AFP, Islamabad

Talks between Pakistan and India on reducing the risk of nuclear war between the South Asian rivals have been postponed at the request of the new Indian government, the foreign office here said yesterday.

New Delhi Sunday conveyed its decision to Islamabad to delay the talks, which had been scheduled to start Tuesday, a foreign ministry statement said.

"The government of India has requested us for the postponement of the talks on nuclear CBMs (confidence-building measures) because, as a result of the recent transition in leadership, an external affairs minister of India had not yet taken office," it said.

Senior foreign ministry officials of the nuclear-armed neighbours were

to discuss the confidence building measures on May 25 and 26.

The nuclear talks were scheduled under a calendar of activities agreed during the outgoing government of Atal Behari Vajpayee.

India has proposed that the nuclear talks could be held two days before foreign secretary level talks, without giving an exact date.

Under a timetable prepared by the two countries on February 18, the foreign secretaries are to meet in June for talks on Kashmir and security issues.

Foreign ministers are slated to meet in August to review progress.

Foreign office spokesman Masood Khan last week said the talks would focus on "strategic stability, crisis management and nuclear risk reduction."