

## UN calls for withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council Thursday adopted a resolution calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon and respect for its sovereignty, after deleting a reference to Syria that would have doomed it to failure.

Nine of the 15 council members voted for the resolution and six abstained.

Resolution 1559, originally proposed by France and the United States, came as Lebanese legislators prepared to vote Friday on a controversial constitutional change demanded by Syria that would allow pro-Damascus president Emile Lahoud, set to leave office November 24, to remain for an extra three years.

"We thought that we had to act now because the situation in Lebanon is moving very quickly," said US Ambassador John Danforth.

"The government of Syria has imposed its political will on Lebanon and has compelled the cabinet and the national assembly to amend its constitution and abort the electoral

process. We believe Lebanon should be allowed to determine its own future and assume control of its territory."

The resolution said upcoming Lebanese presidential elections should be "free and fair elections according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence."

The council "reaffirms its call for the strict respect of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence under the sole and exclusive authority of the government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon."

The resolution had been amended from its original version to ensure its passage. A demand "that Syrian forces withdraw without delay from Lebanon" was changed to a demand "that foreign forces withdraw without delay from Lebanon."

It calls "for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias," and "supports the extension of the control of the government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory."

## Nepal tries to assure Muslims after riots

### Move on to bring back Nepalis from Iraq

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal pledged action yesterday against rioters who ransacked Muslim shrines and businesses following the murder of 12 Nepalese in Iraq, amid mounting criticism over the government's failure to save the hostages.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba met Islamic clerics on a visit to the capital's main mosque, the Jama Masjid, whose possessions including hundreds of Korans were torched by the mob two days ago.

"What happened is a matter of great sorrow. We are investigating and will punish those who were involved in this crime against this historic mosque," Deuba said.

His government Friday formed a committee to draft a report within seven days on the unprecedented inter-religious riots including "lapses in security and recommendations for the future," a cabinet official said. Nepal has also contacted inter-

national bodies to help bring back at least 1,000 Nepalese who went to work in Iraq and around half of whom are still there, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat said.

Deuba spoke to a nearly empty mosque in Kathmandu amid a curfew imposed after the riots.

The curfew was relaxed for three-and-a-half hours from 6:00 am (0015 GMT) to allow Kathmandu's 1.5 million people to buy essentials, but few Muslims used the opportunity to head to the mosque which is now guarded by soldiers.

"Every Friday about 8,000 Muslims assemble for prayers at the Jama Masjid but today they prayed at home," said Sayed Yusuf, an administrator of the mosque.

Leaders of Nepal's opposition also visited the mosque Friday to express solidarity and to accuse Deuba's four-month-old coalition government of incompetence.

"The government has been depending on inefficient ambassadors to Qatar and Saudi Arabia instead of sending ministers to explain to the Iraqi militants that the Nepalese youths were not employees of the US army," said Ravindra Bahadur Thapa, a leader of the opposition Nepali Congress.

Nepal has declined US requests to send troops to Iraq, saying its army had its hands full fighting an increasingly bloody Maoist insurgency.

Meanwhile, Nepal said yesterday it was working to bring back at least 1,000 nationals either in or trying to enter Iraq after 12 Nepalese were murdered by insurgents.

Some 1,000 Nepalese are estimated to have gone to Kuwait to work in Iraq, of whom half have already crossed over, Nepal's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat said.



Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba (C) listens as Muslim men point towards damage at a mosque in Kathmandu yesterday while normal Juma (Friday) prayer services were suspended. Nepalese authorities briefly lifted a curfew to let people carry out essential tasks after a quiet night following riots that left two dead.

## Celebrations as Indian hostages back home

AFP, New Delhi

Three Indian truck drivers freed after a six-week hostage ordeal in Iraq were headed to their villages yesterday for a night of celebration after a rousing dawn welcome at New Delhi's airport.

The former hostages, who were greeted by excited relatives and government officials after arriving on a flight from Kuwait, said they had been well treated by their kidnappers but were relieved to be home.

Tilak Raj, Sukhdev Singh and Antaryami, who uses only one name, were kidnapped July 21 along with an Egyptian and three Kenyan colleagues by an Iraqi group called the Holders of the Black Banners.

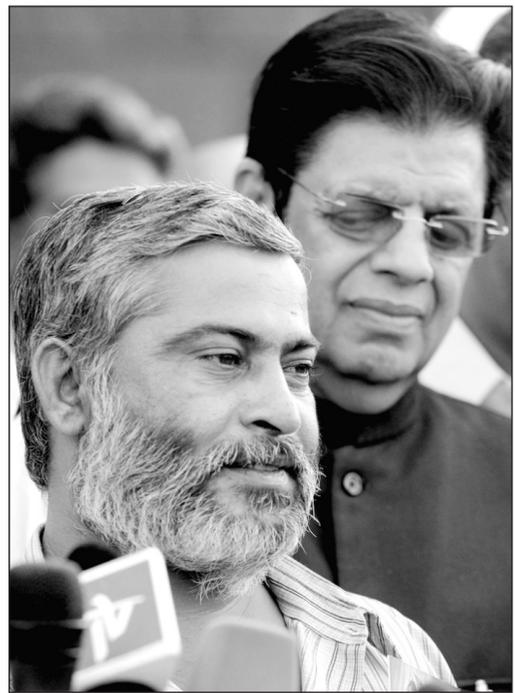
They were freed mid-week by their captors after their Kuwaiti employers, transport firm KGL, paid a ransom of half a million dollars.

The men were hugged by family members before climbing on to a podium where they thanked the government for helping secure their release.

"We are very grateful that the government worked day and night to free us," said Antaryami.

The hostages said they had not been ill-treated.

"We were well taken care of by the militants," Raj told AFP. "They did not threaten us or put us under emotional pressure at any time."



India's Deputy Foreign Minister E. Ahamed (R) looks on as freed Indian hostage Tilak Raj addresses media representatives after he and fellow detainees Sukhdev Singh and Antaryami arrived at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi yesterday.

## Chandrika wins new ally to push for peace

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's ruling coalition yesterday won crucial support from an opposition party to gain a simple majority for the first time since April elections and clear the way for reviving peace talks with Tamil rebels.

The Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), which has eight seats in the 225-member parliament, decided to support President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Marxist-backed Freedom Alliance, party leader Arumugam Thondaman said.

"We will extend our support unconditionally to the government and this will help them to carry forward their plans," Thondaman told reporters here. "The peace process was also stalled because the government did not have a majority."

Thondaman said his party which draws its support from Tamils of Indian origin brought to work in tea plantations by British colonial rulers in the 19th century, wanted self-rule for the island's indigenous minority Tamils.

The CWC supported the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) demand to establish an "Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA)" for the island's embattled northern and eastern regions, Thondaman added.

"My (late) grandfather also wanted an interim administration given (to the LTTE) for five years,"

Thondaman said. "We think the ISGA proposal can be the basis for starting negotiations with the LTTE. You have to start somewhere."

Thondaman said his party would vote with Kumaratunga's alliance at the November 10 national budget and would also support other electoral reforms proposed by the government, but which it had been unable to push through earlier.

The Freedom Alliance narrowly won the April 2 parliamentary election and lacked a simple majority in the assembly. It lost the first vote for the Speaker of the house.

However, with Friday's political realignment, the government would cross the 113-mark in the assembly to enjoy a simple majority, officials said.

Thondaman said the question of ousting the present speaker and electing a new chairman for the assembly was also up for discussion with the government.

Thondaman declined to disclose if he would accept cabinet portfolios from the government, but said it was up to the government to decide how their support would be used.

However, political analysts noted that although Kumaratunga gets a parliamentary boost in terms of numbers, she would also have to carry out a delicate balancing act with her main coalition partner, the Marxist JVP.

## Anwar Ibrahim flying out for treatment

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

High-profile Malaysian politician Anwar Ibrahim will fly to Munich today to seek treatment for a long-standing spinal injury, two days after his surprise release from six years of jail, aides said yesterday.

The former deputy premier, who won a final-chance appeal in the country's top court Thursday against his conviction and nine-year sentence for sodomy, had hoped to leave late Friday on a private jet offered by the Saudi Arabian government, his aide Azmin Ali told AFP.

But there was a delay in the arrival of the aircraft and Anwar is now expected to fly out late Saturday, Azmin said.

Anwar's wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, several family members and his personal doctor will accompany him to Germany where he is expected to undergo surgery for an injury he says was caused by a police beating after his arrest in 1998.

"He has been in a very jovial mood yesterday and today but he is in severe pain. We are worried about his health and we want to get him to Germany as soon as possible," said Ezam Mohamad Nor, youth chief of the National Justice Party led by Anwar's wife.

Anwar, who is still hearing a neck brace and moves around in a wheelchair, earlier Friday picked up a new passport at the immigration department before meeting hundreds of well-wishers streaming into his home in a Kuala Lumpur suburb.

## Libya to pay \$35m for Berlin disco bombing

AFP, Tripoli

Libya signed a deal here yesterday to pay 35 million dollars (about 28 million euros) in compensation to mainly German victims of a Berlin nightclub bombing 18 years ago, an AFP correspondent said.

The deal, which was drafted on August 10, was signed by the secretary general of Libya's Kadhafi Foundation and a group of German lawyers led by Hans Joachim Ehrig.

The 1986 bombing at the "La Belle" discotheque, which was frequented by US servicemen, in then West Berlin killed two GIs and a Turkish woman and wounded more than 250 people.

Turkish and Libyan casualties of the blast are also to receive compensation under the deal but not two American victims.

Washington has welcomed the announcement of the deal, but said its nationals' families too should be compensated.

Libya has insisted that it should first receive US compensation for subsequent retaliatory air strikes, which killed 41 people and wounded 226 others.

In 2001, a German court sentenced four people to up to 14 years in prison and confirmed that Libya was partially responsible. Those

findings were reaffirmed by a tribunal in Berlin in June, some 18 years after the bombing.

Another member of the survivors' legal team stressed that Germany, which acted as an advisor to the team and as an observer at the negotiations, was not a party to the private settlement.

He said the negotiations for the deal between February and September amounted to "a relatively short period to unravel such a complex issue."

The German lawyers also praised the "essential and efficient role" of the Kadhafi Foundation, run by Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi's son Saif Al-Islam, in hammering out the deal.

The German compensation deal is part of an increasingly successful campaign by Libya to end its pariah status.

Tripoli has also accepted its civil responsibility in the bombing of a US airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in which 270 people died, and signed an accord with France to compensate 170 victims of the bombing of a UTA DC-10 over Niger.

Tripoli has also agreed to end its quest for weapons of mass destruction. It renewed diplomatic relations with Washington in June after a 24-year break.

## ROK denies wrongdoing amid nuclear probe

AFP, Seoul

South Korea admitted to embarrassment but no wrongdoing yesterday as international inspectors probed reports of clandestine enrichment of uranium at a government-run research center.

The government said it was fully cooperating with inspectors from the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that is preparing to depart Saturday after concluding a week-long inspection.

Revelations that scientists in South Korea had engaged in clandestine uranium enrichment four years ago, albeit in microscopic quantities, emerged at a time when Seoul is playing a leading role in efforts to end North Korea's nuclear weapons drive.

"It is embarrassing for us to face this issue at a time when the six-way talks are in a stalemate," an unnamed government official told reporters.

## 'Russia's child hostages now face deep trauma'

AFP, Paris

The children ensnared in the three-day hostage drama in North Ossetia will have probably suffered major psychological damage and some may never get over their ordeal completely, a French expert warned yesterday.

Gilbert Vila, a paediatrician who specialises in child trauma at Paris's Necker Hospital, said a child subjected to a deep shock of this kind was likely to show a long range of symptoms, including anxiety, depression, turbulence at school and problems in his family relationships.

"This case is of the gravest kind," he told AFP. "The psychological problems will be major."

Vila has authored several

studies into the psychological impact on children who suffer a catastrophic shock, including a group of primary-school children taken hostage at their school in the Paris suburb of Neuilly in 1993.

Detailed research into Cambodian children who were tortured under the Pol Pot regime and Armenian children who survived an earthquake shows that, for most victims, the big symptoms will gradually ease but for a minority the problems will be lifelong, Vila said.

In those cases, 90 percent of the children showed significant trauma symptoms during the first few weeks after their trauma.

That figure fell to 50 percent after six months, and to around 15

percent two or three years later. Some, though, were never completely cured.

In the Cambodian study, "some children who were aged between eight and 12 years at the time of their ordeal were still experiencing problems at the age of 30," he said.

More than half of the children in this category had problems that seriously hampered their daily life.

As for very young children and babies, "we still lack data" on the long-term repercussions, said Vila, noting however that there had been cases of children younger than four "who showed the same post-trauma symptoms as (US) Vietnam vets."

## Hurricane bears down on Florida 2.5 million ordered to flee homes

AFP, Miami

Thousands of people choked Florida's main highways yesterday after 2.5 million people were told to leave their homes -- the largest evacuation in state history, as Hurricane Frances, after pummeling the Bahamas, barreled toward the eastern US coast.

"We need to take this seriously, this is a deadly storm" said Florida Governor Jeb Bush, urging residents in threatened areas to board up their homes and seek shelter inland.

Most of Florida's densely populated east coast was placed under a hurricane warning, which means the storm could slam within 24 hours into the state that is still recovering from

the devastation of Hurricane Charley earlier this month.

About 2.5 million people along south Florida's Atlantic coast were told to evacuate their homes and move to safer areas as Frances approached with sustained winds of 195km per hour and higher gusts.

It was the largest evacuation in Florida's history, surpassing the 1.3 million people urged to leave when Hurricane Floyd threatened but missed the state in 1999.

"Preparations to protect life and property should be rushed to completion," said forecaster Lixion Avila of the Miami-based National Hurricane Center.

As a sign of how seriously forecasters took Frances, storm shelters were put up Thursday at the Hurricane Center.

## US Marine found guilty of abusing Iraqi prisoners

AP, Camp Pendleton

Wearing a khaki-and-green uniform adorned with service ribbons, a Marine reservist stood without reaction as a military jury convicted him of dereliction of duty and abuse of prisoners at a makeshift detention camp in Iraq.

Marine Sgt. Gary Pittman was cleared of two other charges Thursday, including abusing a 52-year-old Iraqi man who died in custody.

He faces a maximum sentence of nine months in prison and a dishonorable discharge. Sentencing deliberations were scheduled to begin Friday.

Pittman's wife cried as the nine-man jury's verdict was read following just four hours of deliberation. Pittman embraced his wife and attorney before leaving the courtroom accompanied by his brother, an Army major.

## Bush, Cheney 'refused' to go to Vietnam: Kerry

AFP, Springfield, Ohio

Democratic presidential contender John Kerry launched a furious riposte Thursday to a Republican onslaught on his record, accusing George W. Bush and his deputy Dick Cheney of deliberately avoiding Vietnam War service.

Kerry, speaking at an unusual midnight rally here shortly after Bush formally accepted the Republican nomination for president at his party's convention in New York, launched his most outspoken attack yet on his rival.

"I will not have my commitment to defend this country questioned by those who refused to serve when they could have and who misled America into Iraq," said the senator from Massachusetts, a

decorated Vietnam War veteran.

With Kerry and Bush running neck-and-neck in the campaign for the November 2 vote, the Democratic candidate was the target of relentless attacks at the four-day meeting of the Republican faithful.

At a speech late Wednesday, Cheney held Kerry up to ridicule and said he had consistently "made the wrong call on national security."

Kerry replied: "The vice president called me 'unfit for office' last night. Well, I'm going to leave it up to the voters to decide whether five deferments makes someone more qualified than two tours of duty."

Kerry earned three Purple Hearts for wounds and a Bronze Star and a Silver Star for valor serving on a gunboat in Vietnam while Bush was in the Texas Air

National Guard. A series of draft deferments kept Cheney out of military service.

The vice president has said "other priorities" stopped him from going to Vietnam.

"Let me tell you in no uncertain terms what makes someone unfit for office and unfit for duty," Kerry continued. "Misleading our nation into war in Iraq makes you unfit to lead our country."

"Doing nothing while this nation loses millions of jobs makes you unfit to lead this country," he said. "Letting 45 million Americans go without health care for four years makes you unfit to lead this country."

"Letting the Saudi royal family control the price of oil for Americans makes you unfit to lead this country."

## Iran ready to give guarantees on nuclear plan

AFP, Tehran

An Iranian nuclear official said Thursday that Tehran was ready to provide guarantees that its enrichment programmes would never be used for military purposes.

Hossein Mousavian, an aide to the head of Iran's nuclear programme, Hassan Rohani, told state television that Tehran's pursuit of enrichment has been the main concern of its European partners.

"The Europeans know that if Iran masters the technology for enrichment it has a potential (military) nuclear capability and that will change the (political) equation" in the region, he said.

But Mousavian said that Iran was prepared to guarantee that enrichment would not be used for military purposes.

"We are prepared to build trust and provide a guarantee that our enrichment activities will always be peaceful."

## Prison probe raises questions about CIA

AP, Washington

The latest Army investigation into the Abu Ghraib scandal is raising new questions about whether the CIA, operating outside military rules, contributed to the breakdown of military discipline at the prison.

The report cites the presence of unregistered "ghost detainees" who did not fall under the military's usual system of registration, interrogation and medical care.

But the CIA is rejecting much of the criticism. Spokesman Mark Mansfield said recently that the report, released last week, "makes broad allegations about the CIA that are not supported by the text."

The report by senior Army generals describes some of the CIA's detention procedures, shining a rare light on those practices. Yet it does little to describe the spy agency's actual interrogation methods at Abu Ghraib, beyond saying they contributed to the discipline problems.