

## US faces new challenge in war on terror in Asia

AFP, Washington

In the fight against terrorism in Asia, the United States faces a new dilemma: Devising strategies against violent national armed groups in Asia that have potential to internationalise their operations. While Washington has branded at least 10 high-profile groups in the region international terrorist organisations and crippled their financial networks, there are others which cannot be isolated due to local sensitivities and ambiguity of their operations, officials and experts say. Moving aggressively against these groups could backfire as they are seen as localised problems requiring national or regional solutions. But the groups could pose international problems if not nipped in the bud, experts told a Washington symposium which reviewed the US war on terrorism in Asia since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. "It is actually quite sensitive," William Pope, the principal deputy coordinator for counterterrorism in the State Department, told the

"Strategic Asia and the war on terrorism" meeting last week. "It is very difficult to deal with that kind of thing." There are several movements in the region "that clearly are terrorists but still seem to have principally a kind of secessionist agenda or local agenda or something like that," Pope said. "Definitely (they are) terrorists but not global or international type terrorists." Pope did not identify them but there are several groups from India, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Pakistan on the radar screens of US counter-terrorism officials. "There are certainly international connections to some. It is something that we work on, that we try to follow. We do look at it on a case by case basis." "There is no formula. I wish we had one," Pope said. But he said the United States would not hesitate to brand groups as international terrorists if their violent activities harmed foreigners. "When it is international terrorism, we will call it that. When foreigners are involved then it becomes an act of international

terrorists whatever the nationalities of the perpetrators," he said. Among Asian groups which the United States has been asked to label as terrorists are GAM, the separatist movement in the Indonesian province of Aceh, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), seeking an independent state in the southern Philippines. The MILF has forged a ceasefire with the Philippine government, with which it has held several rounds of initial peace talks. The Indonesian authorities have declared martial law in Aceh and are involved in fierce battles with GAM guerrillas seeking independence for the small oil-rich province in the northern tip of the island of Sumatra. Dana Dillon, senior policy analyst for Southeast Asia at the US-based Heritage Foundation, said Washington should list GAM as a foreign terrorist organisation as part of support for Indonesia's battle against terrorism.

## Pearl slaying suspect killed in Pakistan

AP, Karachi

Paramilitary police killed a suspected top al-Qaeda operative, wanted for alleged involvement in the kidnapping of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, during a four-hour shootout Sunday at a southern Pakistan house, the information minister said. At least two other men were arrested. Amjad Hussain Farooqi was wanted for his alleged role in the kidnapping and beheading of Pearl in 2002 and two assassination attempts against President Gen. Pervez Musharraf in December 2003. "I as chief spokesman for the government of Pakistan confirm that our forces have killed Amjad Hussain Farooqi," Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed told The Associated Press by phone from Amsterdam, where he has gone on an official trip with Musharraf. Ahmed said "two or three other people were also arrested during a big firefight." He declined to identify them but said they were still being questioned by authorities and were "very important." "This is the work of our security agencies, and they have done a great job," Ahmed said.



Sri Lankan police guard the Norwegian embassy in Colombo yesterday as the entrance is blocked with the coffin of slain Tamil politician, Somasundaram Warnakulasingham. The body of Warnakulasingham, shot dead by suspected Tamil Tiger rebels in Colombo on Sept 23, was left outside the embassy of Norway, which is acting as Sri Lanka's peace broker.

## Tamils dumps corpse outside Norwegian embassy

AFP, Colombo

For a second time in a week, protesters yesterday dumped the coffin of a Tamil politician killed by suspected Tamil Tiger rebels outside the Norwegian embassy in the Sri Lankan capital. The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a member of the ruling coalition, dumped the corpse of Somasundaram Warnakulasingham. They accused Sri Lanka's peace broker Norway of encouraging a climate of violence by taking a soft line with Tiger rebels. Demonstrators shouted slogans blaming Norway for the killings allegedly carried out by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who suspended their participation in peace talks in April last year. Warnakulasingham, a top member of the EPDP, was gunned down here Thursday. Last week the body of another EPDP activist was left outside the embassy after he was also gunned down by a suspected Tiger gunman. The EPDP staunchly opposes the LTTE.



Constance Kenney surveys what is left of her father's bedroom after the home was blown apart by winds caused by Hurricane Jeanne Sunday in Sebastian, Florida. Jeanne, which has been downgraded to a tropical storm, moved across the state of Florida after making landfall the night before.

## Jeanne leaves swath of destruction in Florida

6 people die as countless homes smashed

AP, AFP, Miami

Hurricane Jeanne tore a fresh path of destruction and despair as it continued its march up storm-ravaged Florida, where the fourth major hurricane in six weeks shut down much of the state and prompted recovery plans on a scale never before seen in the nation. Florida began yet another mop-up job after countless homes smashed and a million households without electricity. At least six people died in the storm, which plowed across Florida's midsection in a virtual rerun for many residents still trying to regroup from hurricanes that have crisscrossed the Southeast since mid-August. Rocketing debris scattered in earlier storms, Jeanne came ashore around midnight Saturday with 120-mph winds, striking its first blow in the same area hit three weeks ago by Hurricane Frances. It was expected to weaken into a tropical depression later yesterday while

moving east of the Panhandle, where 70,000 homes and businesses remained without power because of Hurricane Ivan less than two weeks ago. "Adversity makes us strong. This dynamic state will return," Gov. Jeb Bush said at the Indian River County emergency operations center Sunday, where nearly all of the county was without power and residents were told to boil tap water before drinking it to avoid contaminants. Jeanne ripped off roofs, left stop lights dangling precariously, destroyed a deserted community center in Jensen Beach and flooded some bridges from the mainland to barrier islands straddling the Atlantic coast. More than 2.5 million homes and businesses were without power. Florida was the first state to withstand a four-hurricane pounding in one season since Texas in 1886 a milestone that came with two months remaining in the hurricane season.

## Musharraf's birthday gift for Manmohan

AFP, New Delhi

A meeting with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf brought an unexpected birthday present for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Singh readily admitted to being unsure about his date of birth after his mother died young. His official birthday became the day he entered school, September 26. But Musharraf helped clear up some of the uncertainty on Friday in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly when he handed over school reports from the Indian leader's early days in what is today Pakistan. "According to school records, I am entering my 72nd year," on September 26, Singh told reporters aboard his flight home via Geneva on Sunday. "I really don't know my birthday. This (September 26) is the date mentioned in my school records," he told the Press Trust of India. "I have no confirmed indication from my parents that this is really my date of birth," the economist added.

## Govt urges Nepalis to defy Maoist strike

AFP, Kathmandu

The government yesterday urged Nepalese to defy a two-day strike call by Maoist rebels fighting to overthrow the monarchy. Security would be strengthened across the country, an official statement said, urging people to go to work as normal today and tomorrow. State radio and television broadcast the appeal and told people not to fear the rebel call, home ministry spokesman Gopendra Bahadur Pandey said. The Maoists have ordered all shops and schools to close and traffic to stay off the roads in the capital and much of the rest of the country. Parmeswar Upadhyay, a senior member of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, warned that transport, schools, factories and other services would be hit. The stoppage coincides with one of the biggest religious festivals in the tourism-dependent Himalayan kingdom. But the Maoists said in a communique that the strike would not affect the three-day Kumari harvest festival which began Monday. The Kumari, a young girl worshipped as a goddess, was paraded by chariot through Kathmandu to a crowd of thousands including King Gyanendra and foreign tourists. The king traditionally goes again to the goddess's temple to seek her blessings on the festival's final day. Tourism supports 1.25 million jobs in the cash-strapped country. The kingdom has already seen a tumultuous month, with riots on September 1 after the murder of 12 Nepalese workers by Islamic militants in Iraq. These followed a week-long Maoist blockade of traffic entering or leaving Kathmandu. The Maoists also ended a one-month shutdown of 47 industries after the government released two top rebels and the companies opened talks on improving working conditions.

## Arafat remains defiant despite confinement

2 Palestinians killed in Gaza

AFP, Ramallah

The Intifada has developed into one of the grimmest chapters in the life of Yasser Arafat, who is confined to his headquarters, showered with death threats and the target of growing calls for reform. Now aged 75, the man who once shuttled from capital to capital to promote the Palestinian cause has not ventured out of his West Bank offices since they were surrounded and then pounded by Israeli forces in December 2001, some 15 months after the outbreak of the uprising. Appeals to Israel for an end to the siege have fallen on deaf ears and the veteran leader appears to have no plan B to execute a reversal of fortune. Over the last 12 months, his arch enemy Ariel Sharon has given him ever more reason to fear the consequences if he dares leave his confines. Israeli premier Sharon's inner cabinet voted in principle last September to "remove" Arafat from his headquarters, known as the Muqataa. While Arafat responded by

insisting Israel "will never take me alive", subsequent events show his killing is a red line Israel may be prepared to cross. Israel came in for a welter of criticism in March when it assassinated the founder of the Islamist movement Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, in an air strike in Gaza. It accounted for his successor, Abdelaziz Rantissi, in similar fashion the next month. Asked in a recent interview whether he saw any difference between Yassin, Rantissi and Arafat, Sharon replied: "I don't see any difference... The way we've dealt with other murderers is the way we'll deal with Arafat." Meanwhile, Israeli troops shot dead two Palestinian militants in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday as they tried to plant a bomb near an Israeli security fence, Palestinian and Israeli sources said. The Popular Resistance Committees, an armed group partly composed of former members of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah party, said it had dispatched the two militants.

## Consequences of Iraq war 'terrible and tragic': Blix

AFP, Stockholm

The United Nations' former chief weapons inspector, Hans Blix, said yesterday the consequences of the war in Iraq were for the most part "terrible and tragic". "A murderous dictator was removed but all the other consequences are terrible and tragic," Blix said. He was speaking in Stockholm, where he received France's highest award, the Commander of the Legion of Honour, from French Defence Minister Michele Alliot-Marie. Blix said the international community had other urgent weapons inspections and verifications procedures to undertake, notably in the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula. "The UN must be involved and the inspections must be professional, objective and independent," he said. Sometimes foreign policy should follow the same guidelines as doctors - "No prescription before a correct diagnosis" - Blix said.

## Carter foresees unfair voting in Florida

Debates give Kerry last chance to convince Americans

AFP, REUTERS, Washington

A repetition of problems that plagued the 2000 US presidential election is likely, former US president and veteran elections monitor Jimmy Carter said yesterday, charging that "basic international requirements" for a fair vote are missing in Florida. Reforms passed in the wake of the debacle have not been implemented due to lack of funding and political disputes, Carter observed in a hotly-worded opinion piece in Monday's Washington Post. "The disturbing fact is that a repetition of the problems of 2000 now seems likely," he said. "Some basic international requirements for a fair election are missing in Florida," including non-partisan electoral officials and uniformity in voting procedures, he said. Florida's top election official four years ago also chaired the Bush-Cheney 2000 campaign in the state,

and her successor is showing "the same strong bias," Carter charged. "A fumbling attempt has been made recently to disqualify 22,000 African Americans (likely Democrats), but only 61 Hispanics (likely Republicans), as alleged felons," he said. Florida Secretary of State Glenda Hood has also appeared eager to get independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader on this year's state ballot. "Knowing that two-thirds of his votes in the previous election came at the expense" of Democrat Al Gore, Carter went on. "She ordered Nader's name be included on absentee ballots even before the state Supreme Court ruled on the controversial issue," Carter said. Florida's governor, President George W. Bush's brother, has "taken no steps to correct these departures from principles of fair and equal treatment or to prevent them in the future," he said.

"It is unconscionable to perpetuate fraudulent or biased electoral practices in any nation," Carter wrote. "With reforms unlikely at this late stage of the election, perhaps the only recourse will be to focus maximum public scrutiny on the suspicious process in Florida." The Carter Center has monitored more than 50 international elections, most recently in Venezuela and Indonesia. Reuters adds: When President Bush and Sen. John Kerry open a series of debates on Thursday, voters will get their first chance to directly compare the White House candidates - and Kerry will get perhaps his last chance to convince Americans he is up to the job. After nearly two years of political skirmishing, the side-by-side appearances by Bush and Kerry in three 90-minute nationally televised encounters have the potential to tip a White House race that polls show is close but leaning to Bush.

## MUSHARRAF SAYS No reason to doubt Manmohan's sincerity

PTI, New York

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is committed to peace between the two countries and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity. "I think he (Singh) is very much interested in peace. I have no reason to doubt his sincerity," Musharraf told 'Newsweek' in an interview when asked if Singh was as committed to peace as former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Asked about the ongoing Indo-Pak dialogue and his hope for resolution of the Kashmir issue, Musharraf

said, "we won't be able to move towards a solution in the first meeting. All that we can expect is to set a direction for ourselves and be sure of the sincerity of each side." The interview, which was given before his meeting with Singh in New York, is being published in the upcoming issue of the magazine. During the meeting between the two leaders last week, described as "frank and constructive", Singh put across to the Pakistani leader that meaningful progress can be made on the Composite Dialogue process only if Pakistan firmly controlled terror acts emanating from its soil.

## Taj Mahal town fetes birthday of famed tomb to love

AFP, Agra

Tourists flocked to the Indian city of Agra yesterday for the start of marathon celebrations marking the 350th anniversary of the Taj Mahal, the architectural wonder built by a Mughal emperor in memory of his dead wife. Women in saris daubed the foreheads of tourists with colour and offered garlands at the airport, rail and bus stations as they arrived for the launch of six months of festivities feting India's most enduring tourist symbol. "This is our ancient custom of hospitality as well as a message there's a special event awaiting all," chief organiser D.K. Burman said as welcome arches greeted tourists arriving in Agra, 200km south of New Delhi.



Indian children carry the balloons released during the inauguration ceremony marking the 350th Anniversary of the Taj Mahal on the banks of Yamuna river in Agra yesterday.