

## Bush defers moving US embassy to Jerusalem

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush announced Wednesday that he was deferring for six months the process of moving the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

In a memorandum for US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Bush said the decision was "necessary to protect the national security interests of the United States."

"My Administration remains committed to beginning the process of moving our Embassy to Jerusalem," said the president, who had pledged during the 2000 White House race to support the controversial relocation.

Both Bush and his predecessor, Bill Clinton, have always used the six-month waiver power they have under the 1995 law that calls for the move.

## US admn assails Iran vote as undemocratic

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush yesterday charged that Iran's upcoming presidential election "ignores the basic requirements of democracy" and accused Tehran of backing international terrorism.

"Iran is ruled by men who suppress liberty at home and spread terror across the world. Power is in the hands of an unelected few who have retained power through an electoral process that ignores the basic requirements of democracy," Bush said in a statement released by the White House.

"The June 17th presidential elections are sadly consistent with this oppressive record," said the US president.

## EU to put comatose charter on ice

AFP, Brussels

EU leaders were expected to put the bloc's comatose constitution in the deep freeze at a crucial summit that started yesterday, as they grappled with the main item on their plate, a high-stakes budget row.

While the funding standoff was generating the most heat, the future of the EU charter -- cast into doubt by stunning French and Dutch "no" votes -- was widely seen as the more fundamental problem for the expanding bloc.

"The patient is in a coma, which can continue for a long time. In the end, the patient may come back to life, in five years' time say. Or it may just die," said Marco Incerti of the Centre for European Policy Studies.

The European Union has been

plunged into one of the deepest crises in its 50-year history after French and Dutch voters rejected its new constitution, meant to fend off decision-making gridlock in the expanding bloc.

The ensuing turmoil has raised wide-ranging questions about the EU's entire direction, from how it communicates with ordinary Europeans to its plans to enlarge further and even over the future of its single currency, the euro.

What is worse, the 25-member bloc has been deeply divided over how to respond to the double ballot blow from founder EU states France on May 29 and the Netherlands on June 1.

Initially the EU's Luxembourg presidency, backed by traditional heavyweights France and Germany, demanded that the ratifi-

cation process continue in all countries, despite the French and Dutch rejections.

But this position was called into question notably when Britain, which takes over the EU's reins from Luxembourg next month, confirmed that it was suspending plans for its own referendum.

And then came the domino effect: opinion polls rapidly showed that voters in other countries, emboldened by their French and Dutch counterparts, may well dig the EU leaders even deeper into a hole if they are allowed to vote.

As a result, calls have grown for a "pause for reflection" -- EU speak for putting the issue on ice -- in the hope that changed circumstances will make it easier to deal with at some point down the line.

## US House votes to limit Patriot Act rules

AP, Washington

Advocates of rewriting the USA Patriot Act are claiming momentum after the House, despite a White House veto threat, voted to restrict investigators from using the anti-terrorism law to peek at library records and bookstore sales slips.

Wednesday's 238-187 vote came as lawmakers ramped up efforts to extend the Patriot Act, which was passed quickly in the emotional aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. When Congress passed the law, it included a sunset provision under which 15 of its provisions are to expire at the end of this year.

Since the Patriot Act passed, liberals and libertarian-oriented conservatives have pressed for changes, citing privacy and civil liberties concerns. The administration has said weakening of the act would draw a veto from President Bush.

"No question, this is a real shot in the arm for those of us who want to make changes to the USA Patriot Act," said Rep. Bernard Sanders (news, bio, voting record), I-Vt., sponsor of the provision that would curtail the government's ability to investigate the reading habits of terror suspects. He said the vote would help "rein in an administration intent on chipping away at the very civil liberties that define us as a nation."

## Friends better than family to help you to live longer

AFP, Paris

Elderly people who have a network of good friends rather than close family ties have a better chance of living longer, according to a study published yesterday.

In 1992, nearly 1,500 Australians aged 70 years and above were questioned about their health, economic and social background.

Ten years later, those with the strongest group of friends and confidants were found to have lived longer than those with the fewest friends.

A network of good friends was, in statistical terms, equivalent to a 22-percent reduction in the risk of dying during this period when compared to those who had close ties with their children or relatives.

## Man married for 80 years dies at 105

AP, London

Percy Arrowsmith, who with his wife set the record two weeks ago for the world's longest marriage, died Wednesday, his wife of 80 years by his side. He was 105.

Arrowsmith died at his home in Hereford, northwest of London, his bishop said.

Arrowsmith and his 100-year-old wife, Florence, celebrated their 80th wedding anniversary and a place in the Guinness Book of World Records on June 1.

"Percy and Flo were very happy when I saw them on their anniversary," said the Rev. Anthony Priddis, bishop of Hereford. "They were still very much in love with each other."



A Cambodian soldier stands among bystanders in front of Siem Reap International School in Siem Reap yesterday. A Canadian child was shot dead after police stormed the school in the northwestern Cambodian town of Siem Reap where gunmen were holding around 30 people hostage yesterday.

## IAEA inks limited inspection accord with Saudi Arabia

AFP, Vienna

The UN atomic agency signed yesterday an agreement with Saudi Arabia that limits inspections of its nuclear facilities, limitations the United States, EU and Australia had resisted, diplomats said.

The signing at the 35-nation board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) ends months of haggling over Saudi Arabia signing a Small Quantities Protocol (SQP), an arrangement in effect since 1971 to reduce inspections in nations with small nuclear programs.

Saudi Arabia, a key state in the tense Middle East, is not believed to be a direct nuclear proliferation threat, but diplomats were seeking to calm fears amid a major battle of wills with nearby Iran, which US officials suspect of seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

## EU in talks with Hamas

AFP, Jerusalem

The European Union said that it had opened contacts with officials from the radical Palestinian movement Hamas despite its status as a black-listed terrorist organisation.

Hamas also confirmed on Thursday that its officials had held talks with EU representatives both within the occupied Palestinian territories and abroad.

"We have had technical diplomatic contacts with Hamas but this does not signify any change in policy towards an organisation which is still included on the European Union's list of terrorist groups," an EU official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The political wing of the organisation, which has been behind the majority of attacks on Israelis during the near five-year Palestinian uprising, was placed on the blacklist in September 2003.

## Hillary, Kerry urge China to free dissident

AFP, Washington

Hillary Clinton and John Kerry are among 40 US senators who have sent a letter to Chinese President Hu Jintao calling on him to free high-profile dissident Yang Jianli amid torture claims. In the bipartisan letter, a copy of which was obtained by AFP Thursday, the senators described how 41-year-old US resident Yang had been "allegedly beaten and tortured by four prison guards with electrified wands."

"We strongly urge your government to exercise its discretion, in accordance with Chinese law, to release Dr. Yang," said the letter, which was dated Wednesday Washington time.

## Boy killed in Cambodian hostage standoff

AP, Siem Reap

Masked gunmen seized dozens of children at an international school in northwestern Cambodia yesterday, killing a 3-year-old Canadian boy and threatening to shoot the others one-by-one before police intervened to free the remaining hostages, police and government officials said.

The attackers stormed Siem Reap International School Thursday morning, seizing dozens of young children from several countries and demanding money, weapons and a vehicle before police ended the six-hour

standoff, taking four into custody, at least one of them wounded.

The gunmen killed the boy when authorities declined to meet all of their demands, and police then raided the school compound, Cambodian Information Minister Khieu Kanharith said, quoting the deputy national police chief, Neth Savoeun.

"They also threatened to kill the children one by one. Then our forces decided to storm the school," Khieu Kanharith said.

He described the victim as a 3-year-old Canadian boy, although that

could not be immediately confirmed by Canadian Embassy officials. A witness whose child used to attend the school also identified the victim as a Canadian boy about three years old.

Gunshots were heard by witnesses just before the children fled the school and the gunmen were seized.

Denis Richer, a Frenchman who said he teaches at another school in the booming tourist town, also said he saw one of the hostage takers laying wounded on the ground after police ended the siege. He said he saw the authorities take four men away.

## China tops voice against hasty UN reform

Bush, Putin talk changes in the world body

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday stepped up its opposition to any hasty expansion of the United Nations Security Council, and vowed to fight for increased representation by developing countries.

State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan, the former foreign minister, said the purpose of any reform must be to strengthen rather than weaken the United Nations.

"Any plan must take the opinion of most countries as a basis and have broad consensus, which is the most pure manifestation of democracy in international relations," he said at a meeting of the Chinese

Arab Cooperation Forum here.

"It will inevitably intensify the conflict among many countries if an immature plan is put to the vote or adopted.

"The United Nations will find it difficult to operate normally with its authority and influence severely weakened. We would not like to see such a result and that should be avoided through strenuous efforts."

US President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed reforming the United Nations on Wednesday, including whether to add permanent Security Council members, the White House said.

"The presidents agreed that we should look at the issue of security

council reform within the broader context of UN reform and that the goal of security council reform should be to make the council more effective," said spokesman Scott McClellan.

Bush and Putin, who initiated the 15-minute telephone conversation, also agreed "that it was important to build a broad consensus on the way forward," McClellan told reporters.

The Russian and US presidents did not discuss other issues of mutual interest, such as efforts to defuse the crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons programs or recent violence in Uzbekistan, said the spokesman.



A supporter of Iran's main reformist candidate Mostafa Moins holds a campaign placard as he flashes the "V" sign in northern Tehran for today's election. Iranian presidential hopefuls pulled out all stops yesterday to tip the balance in the Islamic republic's tightest-ever election, scenting the chance to push frontrunner Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani into power.