

Bush pushes for UN action against Syria

AP, AFP, Washington/ Beirut

President Bush on Friday said the UN should deal quickly and seriously with a report implicating Syria in the assassination of Lebanon's former prime minister...

the long-awaited truth about the assassination and about Syrian interference in Lebanese affairs. Pro-Syrian politicians vigorously criticized the findings.

The United Nations investigative report, which Bush called "deeply disturbing," made a link between high-ranking Syrian officials and their Lebanese allies in the car bombing that killed Rafiq Hariri and 20 others in February.

The findings and the reaction to them marked the latest escalation in tensions between the United States and Syria. US officials have accused Damascus of harbouring terrorist groups and permitting fighters to cross into Iraq to attack US, Iraqi and other forces there.

The report, issued Thursday to members of the UN Security Council, did not implicate Syrian President Assad directly, but said his government did not cooperate with the inquiry.

Bush spoke in California after helping dedicate a new pavilion at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum.

He said he had telephoned Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice earlier in the day and instructed her to

call on the United Nations to convene a Security Council session "as quickly as possible to deal with this very serious matter."

Bush was not specific about what steps the international community should take. He said the United States has started talking with UN officials and with Arab governments about that.

"Today a serious report came out that requires the world to look at very carefully and respond accordingly," Bush said.

The United States and France are reading Security Council resolutions critical of Syria.

The Security Council, which can impose political and economic sanctions, was already scheduled to meet next Tuesday to consider the report from German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis. The US mission said Friday it had no plans to call for an earlier meeting.

Separately, the UN will soon receive another report on Syrian compliance with last year's UN demand that it quit Lebanon and allow political self-determination there.

Rice, on a trip to Tuscaloosa, Ala., said, "Accountability is going to be very important for the international com-

munity."

Rice and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, with whom she was travelling, called on Syria to show good will toward Lebanon by establishing diplomatic relations with the country. Syria must "fully understand" that it must not intervene in Lebanon and must respect its sovereignty, Rice said at a joint news conference.

Rice gave no hint what plans the United States has for a Security Council meeting on Syria. The issue must be thoroughly debated, she said.

The council "will have no real credibility if it does not take seriously the implications of this report," Rice said.

In a similar vein, Straw said the council must show the international community that "it is standing up for justice."

Separately, the head of the State Department's Near East Bureau said Hariri was the victim of a "political crime."

"We would like to see those responsible for this crime and others in Lebanon brought to justice," Assistant Secretary of State C. David Welch said in Washington.



A Lebanese woman chants slogans in front of the tomb of slain former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri during a demonstration to thank German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, who led the UN investigation into the murder of Hariri, and to call for the resignation of the presidents of Syria and Lebanon Friday in downtown Beirut.

India, US to draft plan to implement nuclear deal

REUTERS, New Delhi

India and the United States agreed on Friday to draft a plan to implement a controversial nuclear deal as Washington assured New Delhi it would not raise the bar on the landmark agreement.

US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns reaffirmed Washington's commitment to the deal, and said President George W. Bush's administration hoped to get Congress to approve it in early 2006, ahead of a Bush visit to India.

Under the deal, Washington would help energy-hungry India's civilian nuclear programme to boost growth in Asia's third-largest economy.

Washington also promised to help New Delhi -- a nuclear power which has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty -- be treated as a permanent exception at the 44-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which bars nuclear cooperation with non-NPT members.

In return, India promised to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities and place the civilian ones under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards to ensure US nuclear supplies are not diverted for military use.

Friday's talks between Burns and Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran were the first substantive discussions over the pact agreed by Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Washington in July.

Strong opposition to the deal in the US Congress and what India saw as ambiguities over the timing of steps the two countries have to take under the agreement, had sparked doubts in New Delhi over Washington's commitment.

Saran said the two sides had agreed to draft a plan.

"We will be looking at precisely what are the kind of modalities that we need to put in," Saran said.

"What we had today was an initial exchange of views on these modalities. We sought certain clarifications from the American side and the American side also asked for clarifications from our side," he said.

Although many Congress members, both Republican and Democrat, were opposed to the deal, Burns said he was convinced the legislation would be approved as more information in support of the agreement was placed before Congressmen.

The NSG this week put off action on a US proposal to lift restraints on transferring nuclear technology to India and another meeting of the group is not expected until May.



Afghan men raise their hands and shout slogans during a demonstration in Kabul yesterday. Hundreds of supporters of various candidates in the September parliamentary elections staged a demonstration against the UN-backed election commission, complaining of irregularities in the ongoing counting process.

Cancun flooded after Wilma hits Mexico

AFP, Cancun

Sea water rushed into the Mexican resort city of Cancun early yesterday as Hurricane Wilma whipped up a massive storm surge and unleashed heavy rain and driving winds over a resort area known for its picturesque beaches.

Although it weakened in the early hours and was downgraded to a category three storm, Wilma packed enough punch to fell trees and tear off roofs, as tens of thousands of tourists and residents covered in emergency shelters.

"The water is already reaching the third floor of some hotels," said Humberto Hernandez Uzon, a spokesman for the national weather service. "And the bad weather will continue for another 12 hours."

Quintana Roo state governor Felix Gonzalez Canto said the storm had affected the whole infrastructure of the region, but noted with satisfaction that so far his administration was not aware of any fatalities.

Bush deplors 'too many' illegals

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush sought yesterday to woo back his disenchanted conservative allies as he admitted having a problem with "too many illegal immigrants," but he also revived his pitch for a Mexican guest worker programme favoured by corporations.

A promise to "enforce our borders" came as Bush finds himself under fire from his own allies over his nomination of Harriet Miers for the Supreme Court, the administration's profligate spending, and failure to stem the flow of illegal migrants over the southern border.

Moving to close the rift on at least one of these issues, the president assured in his weekly radio address that his administration wanted "to stop people from crossing into America illegally."

"Our border patrol and immigration agents are doing a fine job, but we still have a problem," Bush said. "Too many illegal immigrants are coming in, and we're capturing many more non-Mexican illegal immigrants than we can send home."

KASHMIR BORDER OPENING Pakistan makes formal proposal

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan formally handed over details of President Pervez Musharraf's plan to open the border in disputed Kashmir and let people cross to help out quake-stricken relatives, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

"In pursuance of the proposal made by the president on 18 October 2005 to facilitate two-way movement of Kashmiris across the Line of Control, Pakistan has formally proposed the modalities to the government of India," the ministry said in a statement.

It said the proposal was handed to the Indian high commissioner (ambassador) by the foreign secretary Saturday at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Pakistan has also proposed a meeting of senior foreign ministry officials from both sides as early as possible, "preferably before the end of the month to finalize and

operationalise the agreed arrangements", it said.

Pakistan's announcement came hours after India said it plans to set up three relief centres on Kashmir's de facto border early next week to provide help for quake survivors from Pakistan's zone of the region.

The Indian government has approached Islamabad with its proposal and is awaiting a response, foreign affairs spokesman Navtej Sarna told a media conference in New Delhi.

Earlier India said that it plans to set up three relief centres on quake-hit Kashmir's de facto border which will provide medical and other assistance to people from Pakistan's zone of the disputed region.

The Indian government has approached Islamabad with the proposal and is awaiting a response, foreign affairs spokesman Navtej Sarna told a media conference here.

EX-TAIWAN PRESIDENT SAYS Free world appeasing 'slave state' China

AFP, Los Angeles

Taiwan's former president Lee Teng-hui on Friday accused China of running a "slave state" that uses the false promise of its booming economy to dupe the free world into appeasing its tyranny.

In an explosive speech in Los Angeles on the last leg of a 13-day US tour that has infuriated Beijing, Lee called for capitalist nations to shun investment in China that he likened to the 1930s appeasement policy towards Adolf Hitler and later towards Russian leader Joseph Stalin.

"As long as the capital from free countries continues to pour into China, China's already oppressive practices will become more entrenched and the ensuing and ever-expanding militarism will make the likelihood of transition to a peaceful country ever more unlikely," he said.

He said the United States and the world community can influence

whether China chooses to pursue regional domination or embrace democracy and should unite to promote freedom in the world's most populous country.

"Free nations must develop and strengthen their global and regional cooperation in both supporting the people of China in their struggle for freedom and democracy as well as taking measures to stop Chinese acts of oppression and aggression.

"Only in this way will we eventually see a China that is ready to take its place among the family of free nations in Asia," he added in a speech that received a standing ovation from around 100 academics, business leaders and US Representative Dana Rohrabacher.

Lee accused the West of using a double-standard in the way it engages communist China compared to its isolation of the former Soviet Union that ultimately contributed to its collapse.

Communal riots in Egypt: 3 die

AFP, Alexandria

The usually peaceful Egyptian city of Alexandria was reeling yesterday from riots that left three dead and pitted police and Muslims protesting a play they charge is offensive to Islam.

The clashes -- which also left some 60 wounded -- were some of the worst communal violence Egypt has seen in years, underscoring the fragile religious balance of the Arab world's most populous country.

Some 5,000 Muslims had gathered Friday outside the Saint Girgis Coptic Orthodox church to protest against the recent DVD release of an amateur play produced by the city's Christian community.

Bludgeon-wielding riot police tried to contain the angry mob before lunging into the crowd and firing tear gas grenades. Witnesses also said police fired rubber bullets.

The interior ministry said in a statement it responded to "radical elements in the crowd" but the opposition Ghad party candidate for the upcoming parliamentary polls said security provoked the protesters.

Rights group accuses Pakistan of storing aid

AP, Muzaffarabad

A US-based human rights group yesterday accused Pakistani officials of storing tents and other relief supplies instead of immediately distributing them to earthquake survivors.

The government denied the accusation.

The charges came as the UN appealed for more aid two weeks after the Oct. 8 earthquake, warning of another wave of deaths if survivors do not get shelter and food before the Himalayan winter sets in.

Nato has agreed to send up to 1,000 troops to Pakistan to boost relief efforts.

"We urgently need tents, shelter and helicopters for inaccessible areas," said Jan van de Moortele, the UN's humanitarian aid coordinator for Pakistan. "Time is against us. We can buy everything with money, but not time."

Relief operations have taken on increasing urgency as temperatures drop. In Kashmir, snow has already fallen in the high mountains, and in upland villages, temperatures are below freezing at night.

Van de Moortele said at the current rate, some 200,000 tents will be in the country by winter only enough to house about half the homeless families.

New York-based Human Rights Watch accused civilian authorities, working under military supervision, of storing tents and other needed relief goods at a supply depot in Muzaffarabad, the city at the heart of the quake-shattered region in Pakistani Kashmir. Pakistani officials at the scene told the organization this was being done "so that they would be able to avoid problems when senior military and civilian officials demand supplies that otherwise would not be available," the group said in a state-

ment.

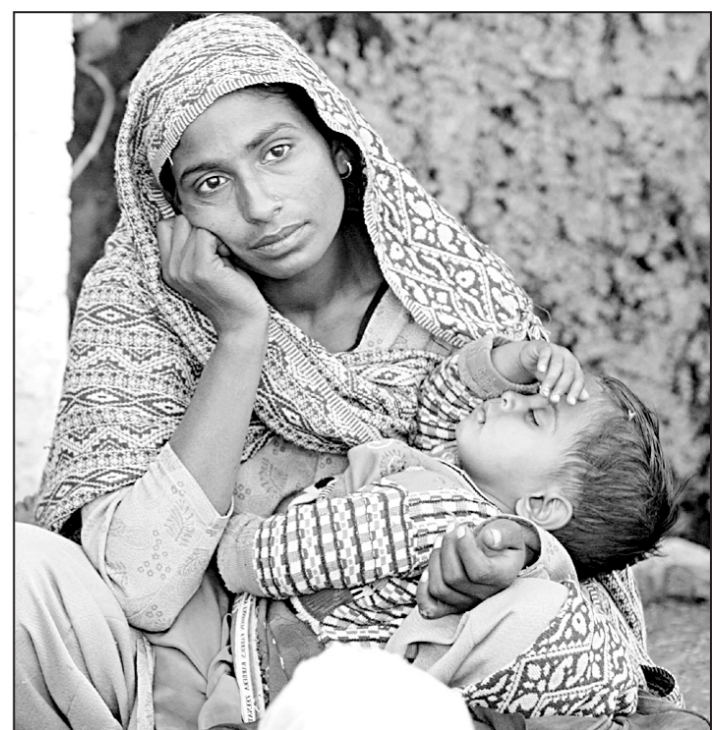
One official said he would be fired if he gave out tents, the group added.

"Tents are the difference between life and death," said Brad Adams, Asia director for Human Rights Watch. "It is essential for the public to know that aid is being handled in a non-arbitrary, non-discriminatory manner."

Pakistan's chief army spokesman, Maj. Gen. Shaikat Sultan, called the accusation "a totally baseless and wrong report."

"At present, there is no need to store, and there is no place to store these things, which we desperately need at this point in time to save tens of thousands of people rendered homeless due to the massive destruction," he said.

Sultan said relief goods were being received and then distributed to forward bases in affected regions, where quake survivors could obtain them.



A Pakistani homeless mother sits with her child seeking shelter and food in Muzaffarabad, capital city of Pakistan-administered Kashmir yesterday. Pakistan's disaster relief chief said that 53,182 people were killed and 75,146 others injured in the massive October 8 earthquake.

WMD PROLIFERATION US blacklists 8 North Korean entities

AFP, Washington

The United States blacklisted on Friday eight North Korean entities as proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and froze whatever assets they have under US jurisdiction.

The action also prohibits all transactions between US citizens and the entities, according to a statement from the Treasury Department.

The move came as the United States prepared for another round of multilateral talks in Beijing aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear weapons programs.

"Proliferators of WMD often rely on front companies to mask their illicit activities and cover their tracks," said Stuart Levey, the Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence.

"Today's action turns a spotlight on

eight firms involved in WMD proliferation out of North Korea. We will continue to expose and designate these dangerous actors," he said.

Among those blacklisted were Hesong Trading Corporation and Tosong Technology Trading Corporation, whose parent company is Korea Mining Development Corporation.

The remaining six Pyongyang-based companies belong to parent company Korea Ryonbong General Corporation.

They include Korea Complex Equipment Import Corporation, Korea International Chemical Joint Venture Company, Korea Kwangsong Trading Corporation, Korea Pugang Trading Corporation, Korea Ryonbong Trading Corporation, and Korea Ryonha Machinery Joint Venture Corporation.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip watch (L) watch the Royal Marine bands beat retreat next to HMS Victory during the special ceremony to mark the 200th anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar on Friday in London.

Iraq to step up security for Saddam lawyers

AP, Baghdad

Iraq's interim government said yesterday it will step up security for defence lawyers in Saddam Hussein's trial, after one was abducted and killed by gunmen disguised as security forces.

The body of the Sunni Arab defence lawyer, Saadoun Sughayer al-Janabi, was found dumped on a street in Baghdad Friday just hours after gunmen dragged him out of his office. He had been shot twice in the head.

Shaken by her colleague's death, the 12 other defence lawyers demanded the government provide them protection.

"We have decided to take some measures to protect the lawyers," Gen. Hussein Ali Kamal, a deputy minister in the Interior Ministry, said Saturday. "We cannot give any details regarding those measures for security reasons," Kamal told The Associated Press. Kamal and other government

officials met until late Friday night to consider the attorneys' demands.

Saddam and his seven co-defendants face possible death sentences if convicted on charges of murder and torture for the 1982 massacre of 148 Shias in the town of Dujail north of Baghdad. The defendants have pleaded innocent. After the opening day of their trial on Wednesday, it was adjourned until Nov. 28.

Meanwhile, Iraqis were still waiting to know the outcome of the country's Oct. 15 constitutional referendum, and they likely will not learn the final results until next week.

Initial returns indicated the charter passed, prompting Sunni Arabs opposing it to level accusations of fraud. Electoral officials are auditing unusually high "yes" votes in some areas to ensure there were no irregularities.

Nepali police raid pvt radio station Journalists stage rally

AFP, Kathmandu

Police stormed into the office of a private radio broadcaster and seized satellite equipment after the government had earlier warned it to stop its transmissions to eastern Nepal, a station official said yesterday.

The raid on the offices of Kantipur FM radio station in Lalitpur, on the southern outskirts of Kathmandu, took place late Friday night, said the official, who asked not to be named.

About three dozen armed police, accompanied by technicians (entered) the station at around 11:15 pm and seized eight pieces of satellite uplinking equipment, including a satellite modem, encoder and digital audio recorder, the official said.

More than 1,500 Nepalese journalists, teachers, lawyers and other professionals demonstrated in Kathmandu

Friday against a strict new press law seen as an attempt by the government to further muzzle the media, witnesses said.

The journalists carried placards that read "Revoke black ordinance," and "Stop press intervention".

The rally, organised by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), was joined by members of the Nepal Bar Association, Nepal Teachers Association and other professional bodies.

On October 9, King Gyanendra promulgated a new ordinance tightening his grip on the press.

Earlier Friday, Ministry of Information and Communications officials had arrived at the station demanding that the broadcaster adhere to the provisions of a strict new law seen as a government attempt to further muzzle the media.