

HILLARY CLINTON TO BUSH

# No attack on Iran without Congress approval

AFP, REUTERS, Washington/  
Tehran

US Senator Hillary Clinton warned President George W. Bush Wednesday against going to war against Iran without the approval of Congress.

Clinton said the Bush administration would be wrong to assume it could attack Iran based on the 2001 Congress resolution allowing force against those responsible for the September 11 attacks and a 2002 vote authorising war against Iraq.

The 2008 Democratic presidential hopeful voted in favour of the Iraq

war in 2002, a vote that she has refused to say was a mistake despite calls by anti-war Democrats for her to recant it.

"It would be a mistake of historical proportion if the administration thought that the 2002 resolution authorising force against Iraq was a blank check for the use of force against Iran without further congressional authorization," Clinton said in the Senate.

"Nor should the president think that the 2001 resolution authorising force after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in any way authorises force against Iran," she said.

"If the administration believes

that any, any use of force against Iran is necessary, the president must come to Congress to seek that authority," she said.

Her comments came as Bush said an elite force of Iran's Revolutionary Guards was the source of powerful new bombs used by insurgents against US soldiers in Iraq, although he said he was unsure whether Iran's leaders were behind the shipments of arms.

The allegations of Iranian bombs in Iraq and Washington's dispute with Tehran over its controversial nuclear programme have raised concerns of a possible war.

But Bush said Wednesday there

was "good progress" toward solving the nuclear dispute "peacefully."

On Monday, he dismissed talk of a likely US attack on Iran as "noise" from his critics.

Western powers fear Iran would use its nuclear technology to build a nuclear bomb, but Tehran insists its programme is solely to meet its energy needs.

A dozen lawmakers in the House of Representatives, including Democrats and members of Bush's Republican party, introduced legislation last month barring the White House from attacking Iran without Congress's green light.

## Armed Maoists blocked from Nepali parliament UN to finish disarming rebels this weekend

AFP, Kathmandu

Police stopped two armed Maoist bodyguards from entering Nepal's parliament yesterday, a home ministry spokesman said.

The bodyguards of two Maoist parliamentarians were prevented by police from entering parliament after they found the two men were carrying Chinese-made pistols," said Baman Prasad Neupane.

He said the bodyguards were not detained, but declined to give further information.

Under a peace deal signed late last year, Nepal's Maoists have been given 83 seats in a new 330-seat interim parliament, but have not yet been given any cabinet positions.

As part of the landmark peace pact, the rebels have agreed to

place their weapons and army under United Nations monitoring.

Initial registration of Maoist weapons and soldiers is expected to be completed by the weekend.

As part of the peace deal, the rebels are allowed to keep some of their weapons for the protection of Maoist VIPs.

At least 13,000 people were killed in the Maoist "people's war" that began in western Nepal in 1996.

Meanwhile, the United Nations said yesterday it expects to finish the first phase of registering thousands of Nepal's Maoist guerrillas this weekend under a peace deal that will see the former rebels join the government.

The rebels, who waged a 10-year civil war that cost 13,000 lives, agreed to UN monitoring of its fighters and arms as part of the deal,

which has given them more than 80 seats in the new 330-seat interim government's parliament.

"We aim to complete the registration process and lock up our weapons in the containers by Friday," said Shantu Darai, a Maoist commander.

"It's possible it may be Saturday," Ian Martin, the head of the UN mission in Nepal, told AFP.

He said the number of weapons and soldiers registered in this first phase would only be revealed after the UN had consulted with the rebels and government.

The second phase of UN registration will involve verification that the registered soldiers are over 18. The UN and rights groups have repeatedly accused the rebels of recruiting children.

## Rice misled Congress on Iran, says ex-aide

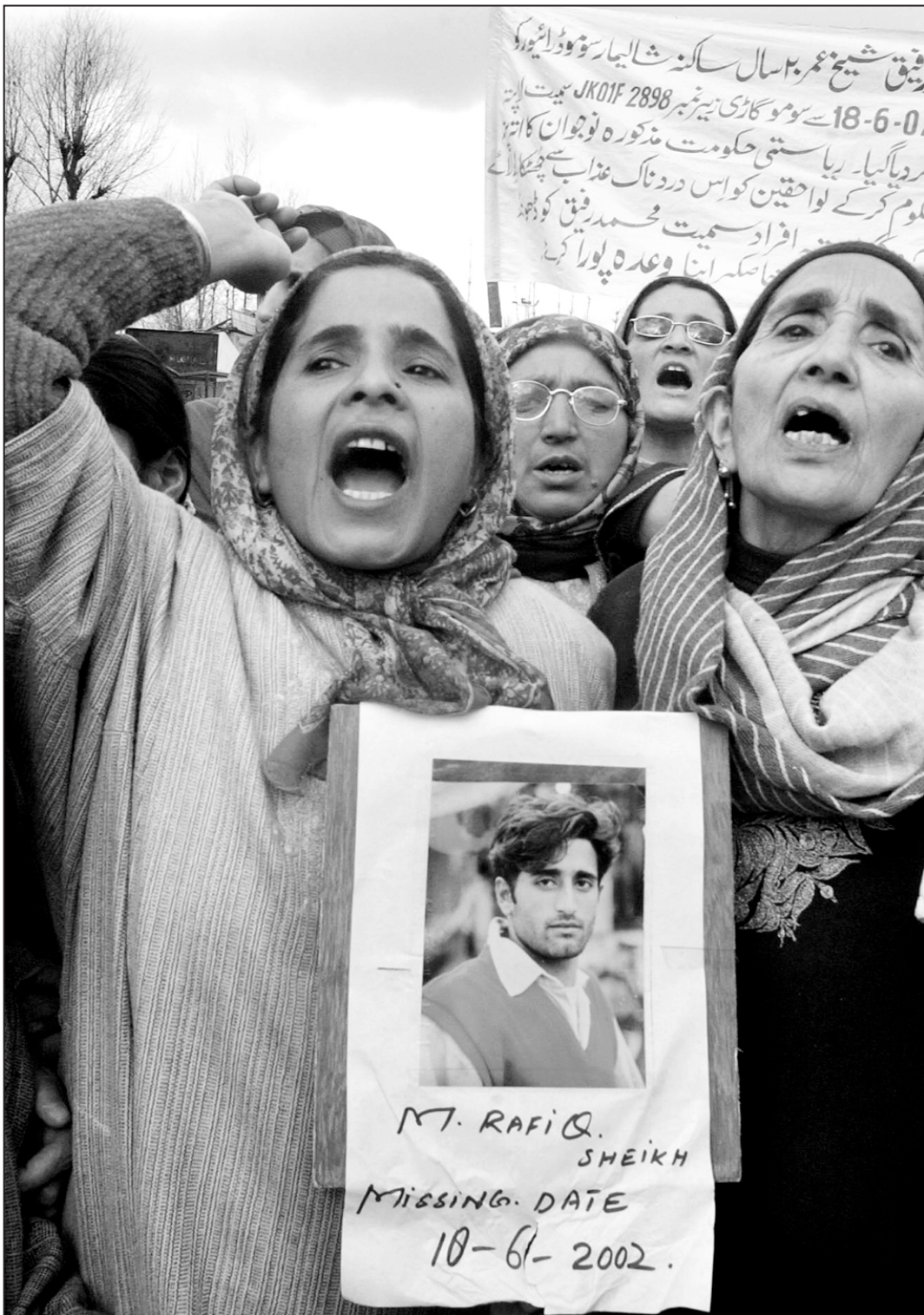
REUTERS, Washington

Controversy over a possible missed US opportunity for rapprochement with Iran grew on Wednesday as former aide accused Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of misleading Congress on the issue.

Flynt Leverett, who worked on the National Security Council when it was headed by Rice, said a proposal vetted by Tehran's most senior leaders was sent to the United States in May 2003 and was akin to the 1972 US opening to China.

Speaking at a conference on Capitol Hill, Leverett said he was confident it was seen by Rice and then-Secretary of State Colin Powell but "the administration rejected the overture."

Rice's spokesman denied she misled Congress and reiterated that she did not see the proposal.



Kashmiri Muslim women shout slogans along with others as they hold photograph of missing relative Mohammad Rafiq, who allegedly went missing in the custody of security forces, during a demonstration on the outskirts of Srinagar yesterday.

## Train bomb trial begins in Madrid

REUTERS, Madrid

A Spanish trial began on Thursday of 29 people charged with involvement in the Madrid train bombings, which killed 191 people three years ago in the deadliest al-Qaeda-related attack in Europe.

Hundreds of policemen surrounded the brick courtroom before dawn. Spanish radio called the start of the trial a "historic day we've all been waiting for."

Leading newspaper El Pais said it was "the trial of the biggest Islamist massacre in Europe."

Twenty Arab men and nine Spaniards face charges that range from belonging to a terrorist group to stealing dynamite from mines in northern Spain to sell to the bombers, often in exchange for drugs.

## Koreas agree to meet, paving way for aid

REUTERS, Seoul

North and South Korea agreed yesterday to restart high-level talks, paving the way for food aid to resume after this week's breakthrough energy-for-disarmament deal with Pyongyang.

Officials from the two Koreas, which are technically still at war, agreed to hold ministerial talks in Pyongyang on February 27.

Talks were frozen and the South suspended food and fertilizer aid to its impoverished neighbour in the wake of Pyongyang's defiant missile and nuclear tests last year.

The rapprochement follows Tuesday's six-country agreement in Beijing on dismantling the communist state's nuclear arms programme, which could also bring a thaw between old foes Washington and Pyongyang.

A South Korean news report said nuclear negotiators Kim Kyegwan of North Korea and the US State Department's Christopher Hill would visit each other's capital soon.

## OIC mulls Muslim peace force

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The 57-member Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) said yesterday there was growing support within its ranks to form a Muslim peacekeeping force as part of plans to bolster its image.

"At the moment we do not have a mechanism (for a peacekeeping force) but I think there is a demand," said OIC secretary general, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu.

"I think it is in the interest of the Muslim community to have a peacekeeping force under the OIC banner," he told reporters at the sidelines of a gathering of lawmakers from the grouping's parliaments here.

Delegates said the formation of an OIC peacekeeping force was expected to be discussed at the summit on Friday.

Lawmaker and parliamentary speaker from Burkina Faso, Toure Solimane, told AFP OIC peacekeepers would provide a better alternative to resolving conflicts in OIC member countries such as Iraq.

"I think it is a good idea. Look at what is happening in Iraq. When the US sends its troops there is trouble. The violence escalates. This is because the US has other interests. They eye the natural resources," he said.



Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi (C) gestures as he talks with India's United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government Chairperson Sonia Gandhi (L) as his wife Flavia Franzoni (R) looks on, prior to a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi is on state visit to India from February 10 to 15.

## Confrontation should be avoided to promote multi-polar world

### Say FMs of India, China & Russia

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Foreign ministers of India, Russia and China have said cooperation among them would promote a multipolar world and reiterated it was not directed against any other country.

India's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and his Russian and Chinese counterparts Sergey Lavrov and Li Zhaoxing told reporters here on Thursday at the end of their three-hour talks that confrontation should be avoided to solve disputes on issues concerning the international community.

"They agreed that cooperation rather than confrontation should govern approaches to regional and global affairs", a joint statement issued after the talks said.

The three ministers called for strengthening the United Nations to promote the "democratisation of international relations" to build a multi-polar world.

This was the second time that the foreign ministers of the two Asian powers and Russia met in the last two years. They had met in Vladivostok, Russia, in June 2005.

Besides, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao held a first trilateral summit meeting in St Petersburg in Russia in July last year.

"India, Russia and China, as countries with growing international influence, can make substantive positive contribution to global peace, security and stability", Mukherjee said.

Lavrov said cooperation rather than confrontation should govern approaches to regional and global affairs.

All the three countries agreed that international terrorism should be tackled "under central and coordinated role of the UN", the statement said.

The idea of trilateral relationship between India, Russia and China was first mooted by former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov during a visit to India in 1998.

However, all the three countries have denied that they are ganging up against the United States' dominant rule in international affairs.

## Lanka to deal terrors with iron fist

REUTERS, Beijing

Sri Lanka will deal with Tamil Tiger "terrorism" firmly, a government minister said on Thursday, arguing the island nation was faced with more suicide bombers than the entire Middle East.

Palitha Kohona, head of the government's peace secretariat, rejected foreign criticism of the government's recent offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, saying it was dealing with terrorism like any other country would.

"Hardly a day passes without a time bomb, or a claymore mine or a hand grenade being thrown at military personnel or citizens by the LTTE and its supporters," Kohona told a news conference in Beijing.

"The LTTE has deployed suicide bombers by a far larger number in Sri Lanka than in the whole of the Middle East combined," he added. "The government will deal with terrorism firmly and decisively. All over the world, no country deals with terrorists with kid gloves."

More than 67,000 people have

been killed in Sri Lanka since the conflict erupted in 1983 -- around 4,000 of them since last year.

Rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in December declared the Tigers were resuming their independence struggle. Analysts said this meant the island's long-running civil war would likely escalate, though a 2002 truce is still technically in place.

Major aid donors like the United States, European Union and World Bank have called on Sri Lanka to halt its declared offensive to wipe out the Tigers' military capability.

Kohona, in Beijing to pave the way for an official visit by President Mahinda Rajapakse later this month, said that attitude puzzled his government, adding the army's attacks, especially in the east, had been successful.

"Sometimes it does intrigue us as to why Sri Lanka should be asked to deal with terrorists in a different manner to the way the United Nations has dealt with terrorists," he said.

"After the government adopted

this approach of cleaning up the east, the number of attacks has been reduced considerably."

Kohona, also the country's foreign secretary, insisted that a Norwegian-brokered peace process was not dead, despite the upsurge in violence.

"We hope that the Norwegian facilitators will continue to play a critical role in bringing the Tamil Tigers to the negotiating table," Kohona said.

"But as long as they (the Tigers) adopt terrorist approaches to achieving political objectives, the government will deal with them in an appropriate manner," he added.

Emboldened by the capture of a key Tiger stronghold, the government has vowed to go on the offensive to destroy the rebels' entire military machine.

Land and naval clashes, abductions, murders, ambushes and rights violations are now commonplace and the foes have ignored repeated international community calls to halt the hostilities.

## Britain worst place for children

REUTERS, London

Britain is the worst country in the industrialised world in which to be a child, closely followed by the United States, the United Nations Children's Fund said on Wednesday.

The Unicef charity looked at 40 indicators to gauge the lives of children in 21 economically advanced nations -- the first study of its kind -- and found Britain's children were among the poorest and most neglected.

Britain lagged behind on key measures of poverty and deprivation, happiness, relationships, and risky or bad behaviour, the study showed.

It scored better for health and safety of children but languished in the bottom third for all other measures, giving it the lowest overall placing, just below the United States.

The United States was ranked worst for health and safety and only Britain scored lower for relationships and risky or bad behaviour.

## Terror funded through Indian stock market Says official

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has seen terrorist groups manipulating its stock markets, including the benchmark Mumbai bourse, to raise funds, National Security Adviser MK Narayanan has said.

"Isolated instances of terrorist outfits manipulating the stock market to raise funds for their operations have been reported," Narayanan said at a security policy conference in Munich on Sunday.

His speech was only made available in India on Wednesday.

"Stock exchanges in Mumbai and Chennai have, on occasions, reported that fictitious or notional companies were engaging in stock market operations."

"Some of these companies were later traced to terrorist outfits," Narayanan added, without naming groups involved.

Narayanan said Islamist mili-

itants, who have launched attacks in India killing hundreds of people, as well as Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers had in part funded activities through legitimate businesses, including restaurants, real estate and shipping.

He also said militants' money transfers had been noticed.

"Many instances of funds received via banking channels from so-called safe locations such as Dubai and UAE (United Arab Emirates) intended for terrorist organisations have been detected by Indian counter-terrorist agencies."

The last major attack in India was in July last year when bombs planted on local trains and at rail stations in Mumbai exploded, killing 186 people.

Police blamed the blasts on Islamist militants and Pakistan's spy agency.

## Myanmar, India hold talks over crackdown on rebels

AFP, Yangon

Military-run Myanmar and neighbouring India have held security talks following the junta's major crackdown on Indian separatist rebels last month, state media said yesterday.

Security officials discussed "preventive measures" on border security and drug-trafficking, the official New Light of Myanmar daily said, without giving further details.

The countries share a 1,600-kilometre (1,000-mile) unfenced border that New Delhi says helps separatist rebels to make quick getaways to Myanmar after mounting attacks in India's tea, timber and oil-rich northeast.

The northeast is home to dozens of ethnic groups, as well as several separatist insurgent movements.

Myanmar, under military rule since 1962, has repeatedly

assured New Delhi that it will not let Indian rebels operate from its soil.

Last month the junta burnt down the headquarters and two camps held by the SS Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K) in a major military offensive in northern Myanmar, according to the rebels.

The NSCN-K, fighting for an independent homeland for Naga tribal peoples in the northeastern Indian state of Nagaland, has at least 50 camps with some 5,000 guerrilla fighters in northern Myanmar.

The group has been observing a ceasefire with New Delhi since 2001, though formal peace talks are yet to start.

The rebels say they are protecting their ethnic identity and accuse New Delhi of exploiting the resource-rich northeast.



Sri Lanka's former foreign minister Mangala Samaraweera (R) gestures as he addresses reporters, while former junior ports minister, Sripathi Sooriyarachchi (L) looks in Colombo yesterday.

## Ex-FM sees Lanka facing int'l isolation

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka faces international isolation for failing to pay close heed to human rights issues, former foreign minister Mangala Samaraweera warned yesterday.

He said he was troubled by the renewed violence and a rising number of deaths, as well as a big increase in unsolved kidnappings across the island.

"There is growing concern among (the) international community over allegations of abductions, disappearances and extra-judicial killings," Samaraweera told reporters.

"We have to allow international investigators to come here, otherwise we risk international isolation."

By ignoring outside pressure, Samaraweera said the government was strengthening the hand of the Tamil Tiger rebels, who have been fighting for an independent homeland since 1972.

"The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) are trying to project Sri Lanka as a violator of human rights. They want to bring a UN fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka to investigate," he said.