

Brown calls for radical UN, IMF, WB reforms

'New world order' must reflect rise of Asia

AFP, New Delhi
British Prime Minister Gordon Brown called yesterday for the radical reform of world institutions to help meet the new challenges of the 21st century, and take more account of the rise of Asia.

On a two-day visit to New Delhi, Brown told business leaders the changes should be inspired by the post-war "visionaries" who set up the United Nations and other bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

But he said the "new world order" should be more representative of what he called "the biggest shift in the balance of economic

power in the world in two centuries" -- the Asian economic boom of countries like India.

"Only with international institutions that promote cooperation out of shared interest and predictability and accountability can large numbers of states consistently work together for the benefit of all," he said.

"But to succeed now, the post-war rules of the game and the post-war international institutions -- fit for the Cold War and a world of just 50 states -- must be radically reformed to fit our world of globalisation; 200 states, an emerging single market place, unprecedented individual autonomy and the increasing power of informal

networks."

He added: "We can and must do more to make our global institutions more representative. I support changes to the IMF, World Bank and the G-8 that reflect the rise of India and Asia."

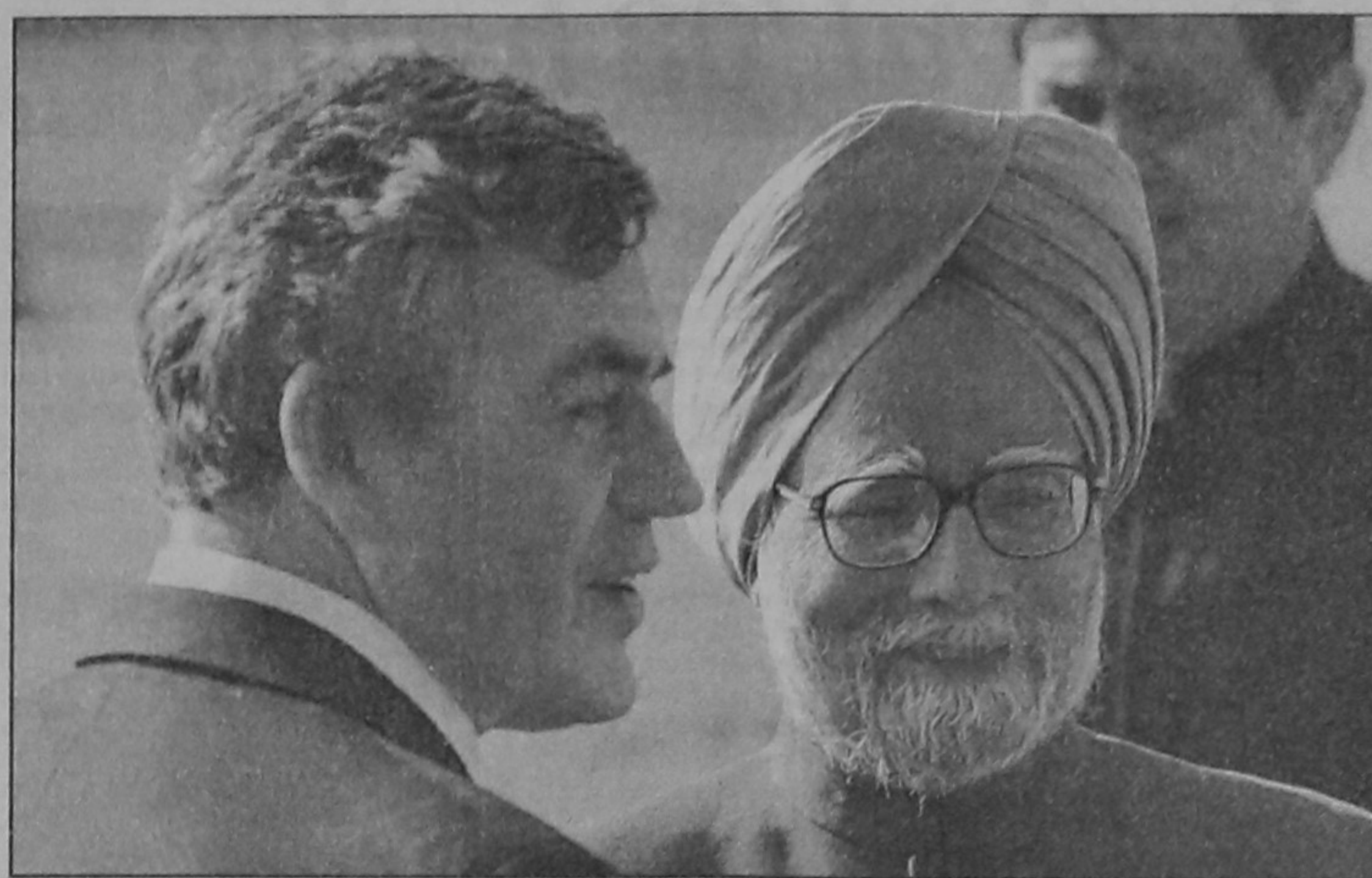
The keynote speech was billed by his office as an outline of one of Brown's main foreign policy priorities, and an attempt to secure Indian backing for his plan due to its growing clout on the world stage.

Britain already supports moves to make India a permanent member of the UN Security Council -- a reflection of its status as an emerging economic powerhouse increasingly courted by world leaders.

Chief among his proposals was making the World Bank "an environmental bank" to tackle climate change and more proactive work by the IMF to spot and intervene in financial crises like that affecting Britain's Northern Rock bank.

And he also called for a new standby civilian force to go into failed states under the auspices of the UN to work in tandem with international peacekeepers.

Brown arrived in India from China on Sunday. Both countries are among the world's fastest growing economies and like many European countries, Britain is keen to court them to boost lucrative trade ties and other links.



British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (L) and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh speak during a reception ceremony at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown called for the radical reform of world institutions to help meet the new challenges of the 21st century, in particular the rise of India and China.

6 killed as Thai PM visits south: Police

AFP, Yala
Six Muslim men have been killed and eight soldiers injured in suspected rebel attacks in Thailand's restive south, police said yesterday, as the army-appointed premier toured the region.

The spate of shootings began Sunday, when two Muslims who worked for local government were killed in Yala province and another man was shot dead in front of his house in Narathiwat province, regional police said.

Violence continued as Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont headed to the insurgency-hit region Monday morning, with three Muslims shot dead in separate attacks in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat provinces.

A bomb attack in Narathiwat on Monday also injured eight soldiers on patrol. Local police said the blast was detonated by mobile phone, and prompted a five-minute gunfight between separatists and troops.



European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana (R) welcomes Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf before their bilateral meeting yesterday at the EU headquarter in Brussels. Musharraf arrived in Brussels on Sunday at the start of a European tour with his international credibility badly tarnished by months of political chaos.

Amnesty calls for pressing Musharraf on human rights

AFP, London
European government and business leaders meeting with President Pervez Musharraf in the coming days must press him on the human rights situation in Pakistan, Amnesty International said Sunday.

Musharraf began his eight-day Europe tour by holding talks with members of the Pakistani community in Brussels on Sunday, before beginning his official programme on Monday. He is also set to visit Britain, France and Switzerland.

"As President Musharraf embarks on a tour of Europe... those who meet him have both the responsibility and opportunity to demand that his government bring to an end the human rights violations that have characterized the recent period of Pakistan's history," Amnesty Secretary General Irene Khan said.

In the statement, Khan added: "Arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappear-

ances, and torture and ill-treatment -- coupled with pervasive political violence undermine the prospect of free and fair elections planned in February."

"Amnesty International has collected a wealth of evidence on human rights violations and the breakdown of rule of law, which are sowing the seeds of a political catastrophe, with devastating consequences for ordinary people."

"The international community must give a clear and unequivocal message to President Musharraf that restoring respect for human rights and the rule of law is key to establishing confidence in the forthcoming elections and arresting the spate of political violence in Pakistan."

Musharraf is expected to face thorny questions in his talks here over his commitment to fighting extremism after the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto and on Pakistan's slow progress to democratic elections set for February 18.

Arabs hold crisis talks over Gaza

Blackouts as lone Gaza power plant closed

AFP, Cairo
Arab League officials gathered yesterday for an emergency meeting to discuss the Israeli blockade of Gaza, which has been sealed off since Thursday when Israel closed all crossing points into the territory in response to continued rocket attacks.

Permanent delegates to the 22-member body were to meet at the league's headquarters to ask the international community to pressure Israel into lifting its lockdown of Gaza, Assistant Secretary General Ahmed bin Hilli said.

Gaza's only power plant shut

down late Sunday for lack of fuel plunging the impoverished coastal strip into total darkness.

The Gaza Strip, where most of the 1.5 million residents depend on aid, has been sealed off since Thursday when Israel closed all crossing points into the territory in response to continued rocket attacks.

On Saturday, Arab League chief Amr Mussa warned of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza and said Israeli actions could hamper ongoing peace talks.

He urged the so-called international quartet -- made up of the United Nations, European Union,

Russia and the United States -- to exert pressure on Israel.

"The quartet must immediately move to stop the series of aggressions and to allow humanitarian aid to enter Gaza in order to end the humanitarian crisis... and to avoid the collapse of current Palestinian-Israeli talks," Mussa said.

Peace talks were relaunched in November between Israel and the Palestinians after a seven-year freeze, with US President George W. Bush predicting a peace deal before the end of his term in 2009.

Myanmar going 'downhill' on all fronts, says US

AFP, Hanoi
Myanmar is going "downhill on all fronts," a senior US diplomat said during a visit to Vietnam Monday, urging regional neighbours to pressure the junta running the country formerly called Burma.

"The regime in Burma is absolutely refusing to take any positive steps at all, either in response to its own people or to the international community," said US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scott

Marciel.

"It should be a cause of concern for everybody because the way Burma is going under this regime and its policies is sort of downhill on all fronts," he told a media briefing during a Hanoi stop on a regional tour.

"We talk about it mostly in terms of human rights and democracy and that's critically important to us, but it's beyond that," he said. "The economy is going downhill, the education system is getting ruined.

"The health care system isn't functioning... you're getting more and more cases of resistant strains of tuberculosis and malaria out of Burma. You've got refugee flows out of Burma. It's just a whole series of problems."

Myanmar faces mounting pressure for democratic reform after its crackdown on peaceful protests led by Buddhist monks last September triggered widespread international outrage and tighter Western sanctions.

GUJARAT RIOTS 11 Hindus awarded life behind bars

AFP, Mumbai
Eleven Hindu men were sentenced to life behind bars yesterday for the gang rape of a pregnant woman and the murder of her family during anti-Muslim riots in India's Gujarat state in 2002, media reports said.

The case, which drew global attention, has been regarded by human rights groups as central to providing justice to victims of some

of the worst religious riots in India since its independence in 1947.

A policeman was also jailed for three years for shielding the culprits, the Press Trust of India reported.

The crimes took place in western Gujarat state where the government, headed by hawkish Hindu nationalist chief minister Narendra Modi, was accused by rights groups of tacitly supporting the anti-Muslim riots.

Hillary, Obama court blacks ahead of S Carolina primary

AFP, Columbia
Hillary Clinton was set to pay homage to Martin Luther King yesterday in a bid to woo African-American voters ahead of this week's Democratic primary in South Carolina, where her top rival, Barack Obama, enjoys strong support in the black community.

The New York senator was set to take part in a church service and a march on the public holiday marking King's birthday, before clashing with Obama in a televised debate.

Heartened by another win in her White House quest, Hillary Clinton is making a major play for African-American voters, a vital Democratic powerbase leaning towards Obama.

On a perilous fault line of race and politics, the former first lady

and the Illinois senator hoping to be America's first black president, delicately renewed hostilities Sunday before the January 26 primary.

For Hillary Clinton, the contest is a chance to appeal to African Americans in the state and nearly two dozen others which vote on the closely contested Democratic race in a blitz of contests on "super-duper Tuesday" February 5.

For Obama, who triumphed in the opening nominating clash in Iowa, but fell to Clinton in New Hampshire and Saturday's Nevada caucuses, South Carolina is close to a must-win encounter.

It is also his first chance to benefit from a large turnout of African Americans, in a unique position as the first black candidate with a realistic hope of the presidency.

Both Hillary Clinton and Obama attempted to symbolically frame the week of campaigning in South Carolina Sunday, among African American worshippers.

In New York, Clinton accepted the endorsement of Reverend Calvin Butts, pastor of New York state's oldest African American Baptist Church.

Butts said someone asked him "why on earth as a black man in this country, I had chosen to announce my support for a white woman?"

"Well beloved... this was not and is not and will not be a race based decision for me," Butts said.

Obama Sunday made a symbolic appearance in Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, the launchpad for civil rights icon Martin Luther King's crusade.

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Palestinians trying to buy bread crowd outside a bakery in Gaza City yesterday. Gaza City slowly grinded to a halt Monday, with traffic dying down on the normally bustling streets and bread lines forming outside the few bakeries that had not closed for lack of fuel.

3-way standoff fuels ME violence

AP, Ramallah
Israel looks powerless to stop the barrage of rockets from Hamas-ruled Gaza. The Islamic militants, choked by a blockade of their territory, find it increasingly difficult to hold on to power.

And moderate Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is facing growing pressure to suspend peace talks because of Israel's strikes in Gaza.

No one appears able to win the upper hand in this volatile three-way standoff, and only an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal or an Israeli reoccupation of Gaza would likely break through the deadlock.

Yet the persistent cross-border violence the latest round killed 38 Palestinians and rained rockets on Israeli border towns jeopardises the very prospects for such an agreement. During his Middle East peace mission last week, President Bush held out hope for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal in 2008, but the latest fighting erupted while he was still in the region.

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