



Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe (R) attends the opening ceremony of the 11th African Union Summit in the Sinai resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt yesterday. Mugabe attended the summit in Egypt amid growing calls for African leaders to shun the Zimbabwean president over his widely discredited election win.

China resists bid for Zimbabwe sanction

AP, Beijing

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged China on Monday to back UN Security Council action to punish Zimbabwe, saying the time for mere statements was over.

Speaking to reporters traveling with her in Beijing, Rice also noted progress in stripping North Korea of its nuclear programmes and urged China to sincerely engage Tibet's exiled Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama.

Additionally, Rice called on Beijing to unshackle the Internet and said she raised several individual cases of detained activists.

Chinese officials have offered little to prompt optimism in Washington over tough new action over Zimbabwe, a Chinese ally and trading partner in Africa.

Rice said the Bush administration agrees with China that African nations need to play a bigger role, but said additional action is needed.

"We'd like the Africans to take the lead but it is not an African

issue alone. It is also an issue for the Security Council," she said. "When we go to the UN we're going to need something that is not just another statement."

China holds a veto in the Security Council and its backing, along with that of Russia, will be essential to any move in the body to penalize President Robert Mugabe and his top aides for allegedly instigating political violence.

The White House wants to impose an international arms embargo on Zimbabwe and place travel bans on Mugabe and his cronies. But after meeting Rice, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said Beijing favors negotiations between Mugabe, who was sworn in for a new term Sunday, and the opposition.

"The most pressing path is to stabilize the situation in Zimbabwe," Yang said at a news conference with Rice on Sunday.

"We hope the parties concerned can engage in serious dialogue to find a proper solution."

His comments hewed to China's standard line, but they signaled that Beijing had not been moved by the case Rice made for sanctions.

Rice says the US plans to introduce a resolution in the council this week. The United States holds the council's presidency until July 1, but appears to face an uphill battle in getting several important members to agree to any penalties.

Rice said she raised the issue again with Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao on Monday.

But in brief comments before those meetings began the subject was not mentioned, with both men instead thanking Rice for US assistance after the May 12 earthquake in China's southwest Sichuan province that killed nearly 70,000 people.

On other topics, Rice said the leaders discussed progress in the six-nation talks hosted by China that aim to permanently disable Pyongyang's nuclear programmes.

6 die as medical helicopters collide over Arizona

AP, Flagstaff

Two medical helicopters collided Sunday about a half-mile from a northern Arizona hospital, killing six people and critically injuring a nurse, a federal official said. Two emergency workers on the ground were injured after the crash.

The helicopters crashed on a forested hill east of Flagstaff Medical Centre and a few hundred yards away from a neighbourhood, which was spared falling debris. "We were very lucky it was south of a residential area," said police spokesman Sgt. Tom Boughner, who, like other officials, was unable to provide an account of what preceded the crash.

An explosion on one of the aircraft after the crash injured two emergency workers who arrived with a ground ambulance company. They suffered minor burns, but their injuries were not life-threatening. The crashed also sparked a 10-acre brush fire that was contained.

Just a yr needed to finish Tigers: Lanka army chief

Fresh fighting kills 32

AFP, AP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's army chief said yesterday his forces had wiped out the military capability of the Tamil Tigers, and that they needed just one more year to totally defeat the rebels.

Sri Lankan soldiers seized a large swath of Tamil Tiger rebel-held territory while scattered battles elsewhere in the embattled north killed 30 rebels and two soldiers, the military said Monday.

Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas had been forced to resort to hit-and-run attacks.

"From about the beginning of the year, the LTTE has lost its conventional capability," Fonseka told Colombo-based foreign corre-

spondents. "They are no longer fighting as a conventional army."

He said the Tigers were not using heavy artillery and mortars, but that there were clashes in the island's embattled northern areas on a daily basis.

"We have already defeated them (as a conventional army). They have lost that capability. Although they are fighting with us, it is not in the same manner."

"Earlier, we couldn't move one kilometre for two, three months. That type of resistance is not there anymore."

He estimated that the Tigers would lose even their current reduced capability in about a year but he cautioned that a Tigers' insurgency could rumble on indefinitely.

The Tamil Tigers still have a few

fixed-wing planes and a formidable sea-going capability, a rarity for any guerrilla outfit in the world.

Led by 53-year-old Velupillai Prabhakaran, the LTTE also has a band of suicide bombers known for their spectacular strikes, including a damaging attack on the island's only international airport in July 2001.

General Fonseka himself narrowly escaped assassination in April 2006 when a woman suicide bomber targeted him inside the high-security army headquarters complex.

Fonseka said security forces had just wrested control over the entire coastal district of Mannar, along the north-western sea board of the island, after nine months of fighting which claimed the lives of 170 government troops.

During the same period, the Tigers lost at least 2,000 fighters, Fonseka said, while revising upwards the current Tigers' strength to 5,000 combatants.

He admitted that previous military estimates of the Tiger strength had been too low.

Meanwhile, troops shot dead 30 rebels in the districts of Vavuniya, Mannar and Mullaitivu on Sunday, the ministry said, adding another 34 were wounded.

Security forces suffered two soldiers killed and 13 wounded, the ministry said.

Fighting has escalated in this Indian Ocean island in recent months. Government forces say they are steadily moving into rebel territory, capturing villages and small towns and causing heavy casualties among the insurgents.

US seeking Russian sanctions on Iran

AFP, Moscow

US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson said here yesterday he would discuss with Russia's leaders the possibility of imposing new sanctions on Iran.

Asked on Echo of Moscow radio if he thought additional sanctions were needed he said "yes" and added he would encourage Russia to follow the European Union, which last week imposed new sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

"We believe that multilateral cooperation is the most effective," said Paulson ahead of a meeting with President Dmitry Medvedev.

In comments voiced over with a Russian translation, he added that the United States was hoping to work with the Russian government and banking system in its efforts to tighten the screws on Tehran.

The new EU sanctions on Iran notably ban the country's largest bank, Bank Melli, from operating in Europe.

Russia, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has taken a cautious approach to the sanctions issue.

Washington suspects the Islamic republic of developing a nuclear weapons programme, something Tehran denies.

However in May Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told a French newspaper he did not think Iran was trying to acquire nuclear weapons, echoing Moscow's long-standing assertion that it has seen no evidence supporting the claim.

The US treasury secretary added he hoped US legislators could make enough progress on legislative changes to allow Russia to join the World Trade Organisation before US President George W. Bush leaves office in January.

"I would very much like to see Russia's accession to the WTO. We're making progress on Russian accession," Paulson said.



US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson (R) meets with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin during his visit to Moscow yesterday. Paulson said on Monday that he would discuss with Russia's leaders the possibility of imposing new sanctions on Iran.

Anwar leaves Turkish refuge

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim yesterday left the Turkish ambassador's residence, where he fled after being accused of sodomy, after the government guaranteed his safety.

Anwar, a former deputy premier who was sacked a decade ago and jailed on sodomy and corruption charges, accused the government of concocting new sex claims by a 23-year-old male aide and said he feared an assassination attempt.

"I pray enough will be done for my security," he told reporters after emerging from the ambassador's residence.

Anwar said the charges were an attempt to derail his political comeback at the helm of a resurgent opposition, and came as he was poised to re-enter parliament with the backing of four defectors from the ruling coalition.

"That is why they brought these allegations against me," he said. "It is an attempt to destroy my political career."



Sudanese firefighters douse fire on the wreckage of a cargo plane as policemen inspect the site of its crash in Khartoum yesterday. A cargo plane burst into flames and crashed shortly after takeoff from Khartoum airport Monday, killing four Russian crew members and narrowly missing residential buildings before blowing apart.

US transfer of Shia province to Iraq cancelled

AFP, Diwaniyah

The handover of security control of the Shia province of Diwaniyah from the US military to Iraqi forces has been cancelled, a local government official told AFP on Monday.

Sheikh Ghanim Abid Dahash, spokesman for Diwaniyah provincial council, said the transfer has been postponed "indefinitely" because there is no coordination between the central government and the US forces.

Dahash did not give details but the US military also confirmed that the transfer had been cancelled.

Dahash said a curfew which was imposed in the province on Sunday evening to prevent any insurgent attacks during the handover ceremony was also lifted.

Diwaniyah, formerly known as Qadisiyah, was to be the 10th of

Iraq's 18 provinces to be taken over by local forces from US-led foreign troops, amid a push to transfer security control of the entire country back to Baghdad.

More than five years after the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, security in nearly half of Iraq's 18 provinces is still in the hands of US-led forces.

The nine provinces which have been handed over to the Iraqis are Maysan, Muthanna, Basra, Dhi Qar, Najaf, Karbala, and the three Kurdish provinces of Dohuk, Sulaimaniyah and Arbil.

Diwaniyah has often been rocked by fighting as rival Shia militias vie for supremacy.

The province has seen fierce clashes between supporters of anti-American Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and his rival Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council.

Hamas emboldened by Hezbollah prisoner swap

AP, Gaza City

Gaza's Hamas rulers hinted yesterday they would raise the stakes for a captured Israeli soldier, emboldened by Israel's decision to trade a Lebanese prisoner convicted in a brutal attack for the bodies of two other Israeli servicemen.

Hamas-affiliated militants captured Sgt. Gilad Shalit two years ago in a cross-border raid. Three weeks later, Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon burst across Israel's northern border and seized Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, touching off a monthlong war between Israel and the militant group.

After nearly two years of German-brokered negotiations, Israel's Cabinet overwhelmingly agreed Sunday to trade Goldwasser and Regev's bodies for Samir Kantar. The Lebanese militant was

convicted to 542 years in prison for his role in a 1979 infiltration attack that Israel perceives as one of the cruellest in their nation's history.

Gaza strongman Mahmoud Zahar, speaking to the independent Al-Quds radio station, said Hamas would take advantage of this decision "to release people Israel accused of having blood on their hands like Samir Kantar. We have to take advantage of this to release our prisoners."

Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev would not comment on Zahar's remarks.

Under a June 19 truce between Israel and Hamas, stepped-up negotiations are to begin on Shalit's release, with Egyptian mediation.

Hamas has demanded freedom for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Israel, which is holding about 10,000

Palestinians, has balked at releasing many of the people on Hamas' list because they have been involved in deadly attacks on Israelis.

Critics of the Lebanese prisoner swap deal have argued that swapping bodies for Kantar would offer militant groups an even greater incentive to capture soldiers and less of a reason to keep captives alive.

"I'm afraid Hamas, drawing a lesson from this deal, will harden its position," Housing Minister Zeev Boim, one of three government ministers to vote against the Hezbollah swap, told Israel Army Radio.

Unlike his comrades in Lebanon, Shalit has sent letters and an audio tape to his parents and is believed to be alive, though he has not been seen since his capture and the Red Cross has not been permitted to visit him.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Hollywood shows way for first black US president

AFP, Los Angeles

A slew of African-American presidents portrayed in film and television has helped US voters get used to the idea of electing the country's first black commander-in-chief, analysts say.

Whether it's a seven-year-old Sammy Davis Jr in the 1933 comedy "Rufus Jones for President" or Morgan Freeman in 1998's "Deep Impact," Hollywood has been installing blacks in the Oval Office before anyone had heard of Barack Obama.

But academics believe the increasingly frequent portrayal of black presidents in blockbuster films or hit television shows has helped to make the electorate more receptive towards Obama than they otherwise might have been.

John W. Matviko, author of "The American President in Popular Culture," believes that Obama's overwhelming popularity amongst young voters may be partially explained by the Hollywood factor.

"One of the functions of popular culture is that it introduces ideas that are just a little bit on the edge of what we traditionally find acceptable, so that after a while, it becomes acceptable," Matviko told

AFP. "It's a very subtle form of persuasion."

"Part of Obama's popularity might be because there have been some very positive portrayals of black presidents. So the idea of it has become commonplace, and not really an issue anymore," he said.

Since 1972's "The Man," starring James Earl Jones as what is viewed as the first major screen portrayal of a black president, only a handful of films and television series have had similar roles.

Yet actor Dennis Haysbert, who played one of the most high-profile black presidents during two seasons on the hit television show "24" before his character was assassinated, believes they have been influential.

Haysbert told the Los Angeles Times in a recent interview that he was in no doubt his character had helped change mainstream attitudes.

"Frankly and honestly, what my role did and the way I was able to play it and the way the writers wrote it opened the eyes of the American public that a black president was viable and could happen," Haysbert told the paper.

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Date/Time
Sun 6th July
10 am - 5 pm

Venue/Contact Details
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