

US opposes Australian bid to set up new regional security

CANBERRA, July 10 : Australia has moved to set up new regional security arrangements including cooperation on air and sea surveillance and intelligence exchanges despite vigorous pressure from the US not to do so, reports Xinhua.

Australia is likely to extend air surveillance operations in the South China Sea has indicated its acceptance of Brunel as a member of the five power defence arrangement and is negotiating a range of new bilateral security agreements according to government sources, reports Xinhua.

Australian officials in southeast Asia are actively discussing other proposals including greater cooperation in air and sea surveillance, increased intelligence exchanges, new procedures for handling incidents at sea and a wider regional security community according to a report today by the Sydney Morning Herald.

The report said Washington had pressured Canberra not to take regional security initiatives because it may give the Soviet Union the opportunity to undermine US strategy in the Pacific.

Australia has responded positively to a Malaysian proposal to extend the area of operation of Australian surveillance aircraft to cover the seas around Malaysia's eastern Coast

Saddam escapes assassination in Karbala, say Shi'ites

DAMASCUS (Syria), July 10: An Iraqi opposition group claimed Tuesday that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein escaped assassination in an attack that killed at least three members of his entourage, reports AP.

The Islamic Action Organisation said in a statement that "popular forces in Iraq ambushed Saddam Hussein's motorcade during a visit to Karbala," a holy Shi'ite Muslim city 60 miles (100 kilometers) south of Baghdad.

The group, which has offices in Syria and Iran, said "many of Saddam's escorts were killed or wounded."

There was no way to verify the claim, and the group did not say when the alleged attack occurred.

The Islamic Action Organisation is part of a multi-party coalition of Shi'ite factions that rose against Saddam after his defeat in the Gulf war in February.

The Shi'ites, who make up 55 per cent of Iraq's 17 million population, are largely opposed to Saddam's regime. He and key members of his government come from the Sunni Muslim minority.

The statement identified three of those allegedly killed in the attack as Ali Majed, a representative of the ruling

Arab Baath Socialist Party in Karbala; Ahmed Hassan, chief of intelligence in the city and Salah Ali al-Khayyat, a security officer.

The wounded, it said, included Gen Abdel Khaleq al-Samerat, Karbala's military governor, and his deputy, Brig Faek Jalal al-Obaidi.

The statement said that after the attack, Saddam's Republican Guard launched a "large-scale attack campaign in the city," which had been devastated in clashes before the army crushed the rebels in late March.

Reuters from Washington adds: President George Bush on Tuesday expressed irritation at critics who charge that the Gulf war victory was hollow since Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein remains in power and Kuwait is still run by a non-democratic government.

At the end of a speech to defence lobbyists Bush criticised what he said were attempts to revise original objectives of the war to include such goals as swiftly bringing democratic rule to the Emir.

"I have never been more convinced that what we did was worthwhile some are moving the goal posts, some are trying to redefine what the war was about. Was it instant democracy in Kuwait? was it

total demise of Saddam Hussein? It wasn't these," Bush said.

In my view... we did something noble. We kicked aggression right out of Kuwait. We said to the aggressors that the international community and international law won't stand for this kind of behaviour in the future, he said.



Some political commentators have complained that the United States after the assistance it gave Kuwait, should be able to persuade Kuwait's Emir to move towards democracy at a much faster pace.

The Emir has promised democratic election for October 1992.

Critics have also faulted Bush for coming to the aid of the displaced Kurdish refugees too late. They add that Saddam remains in power and a possible threat to regional stability despite the massive bombing

campaign and destruction of much of Iraq's army.

The second guessing has come at the end of an extended period of national self-adulation spurred on by Bush over American successes in the Gulf.

One of the reasons we were successful in proving to the world that aggression would not stand, was because of the men and women of the armed forces and because we had the technology to make our words of warning count, the President said.

Off the Record

Ape on rampage!

LARGO (Fla) : An escaped ape got into a neighbour's house, terrorized the homeowners, ran after their dogs and left the place a mess, reports AP.

The 3-foot (1-metre) Celebes ape named Roscoe escaped Sunday from its cage a few streets away and entered Shirley and Norton Craig's home.

"It just blew by me," said Craig. "He was a mean-looking thing. He looked like King Kong in miniature."

By the time police arrived, Roscoe was racing from the mantle to chairtops to behind the TV and to any other place that seemed safe.

Wildlife Rescue director Vernon Yates corralled the ape behind an aquarium.

"I just walked over, grabbed him by the arm and walked him out of the house," Yates said. "Then I said, OK, guy, you're under arrest."

2,000 to follow Mao's historic swim

BEIJING: Nearly 2,000 swimmers plan to cross the Yangtze River on the 30th anniversary of a reported swim by revolutionary leader Mao Tse-tung, an official report said Tuesday, reports AP.

The event is just one of many references to Mao that have resurfaced in recent weeks.

The Xinmin Evening News reported in its Monday edition, seen in Beijing on Tuesday, that Wuhan, an industrial city in central China, plans to mark the anniversary of Mao's July 16, 1966 swim.

On that day, Mao, then 73, reportedly plunged into the river near Wuhan and swam 9 miles (14.4 kilometers) in a record-breaking 65 minutes.

The swim was intended to dispel rumours that Mao was seriously ill and had lost control of the nation, which had just embarked on the chaotic, ultra-leftist 1966-76 Cultural Revolution.

The official media reported that Mao "was vigorous and showed no signs of fatigue." But many Western scholars doubt Mao actually made the swim.

The Xinmin Evening News said Mao first swam the Yangtze in 1956 and crossed it 12 times in the following decade.

A sex shop with govt assistance

COPENHAGEN (Denmark): Two unemployed Danish women opened a sex shop last week in a small Danish town with the financial aid of the government, reports AP.

Tina Mortensen and Ina Kartin said Helsingor Elsinore in Shakespeare's play Hamlet — had no porn store of its own and it seemed like a good business opportunity.

"We needed to find something that did not already exist," Kartin said.

To learn about the trade, the women first visited a sex-shop district near the railroad station in downtown Copenhagen.

But then they needed financing.

The two women applied for a loan but one bank rejected them on moral grounds. A second bank said it would provide funds if the women first got state help.

The two women had previously held office jobs, but Mortensen, 26, had been out of work for six months and Kartin, a 47-year-old mother of three, had been jobless for nearly a year.

Both were covered by state benefits providing long-term unemployed persons with 5,300 kroner (dfls 760) in monthly aid for up to 31/2 years to help create their own businesses.

"As long as the businesses stay within the law and are tax-registered, they can receive these payments," said Henning Hammer of the state unemployment agency in Helsingor, north of Copenhagen.

"I thought the girls came up with an unusual idea and I backed them up," Hammer said.

Japanese Minister cutting own salary

TOKYO : Japanese Finance Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto said Wednesday he is cutting his own salary by 10 per cent for three months to take responsibility for inadequate supervision of the nation's scandal-tainted top brokerages, reports Reuter.

Hashimoto told reporters that four other senior Finance Ministry officials had received strong warnings. Two had agreed to 10 per cent salary cuts for three months from July.

2,046 Algerians held in army crackdown

ALGIERS, July 10: Military authorities enforcing a state of siege in Algeria said on Tuesday more than 2,000 people had been arrested since June 30, the date the two top leaders of the Islamic opposition were detained, reports Reuter.

The army in a statement carried by Algeria's APS news agency said 2,046 people had been arrested by security forces cracking down after weeks of fundamentalist unrest.

It said 1,067 people had been brought to court and 545 detained. The statement said 1,050 were freed 520 of them provisionally.

It did not explain the discrepancy in the figures.

Only June 30, Abassi Madani and Ali Belhadj were arrested.

They are leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front whose militants had clashed for weeks with security forces. The two are charged with leading and forming an armed conspiracy against the state.

The unrest led to a state of siege being imposed general election postponed and the government replaced.

The statement said the military had opened six centres to receive people whose activities threatened security and public order APS reported.

UK to axe armed forces by 20 pc

LONDON, July 10 : Britain said on Tuesday it would reduce its armed forces by about 20 per cent under defence cuts aimed at reaping a peace dividend from the end of the cold war, reports Reuter.

Defence Secretary Tom King said that with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, NATO now faced one million fewer troops than only two years ago.

"Our determination is to produce forces which, while smaller, are well equipped, properly trained and housed, and well motivated," he said.

Britain will cut 62,000 troops over three years from its 308,000-strong armed forces, he said in a defence policy statement he called the most important in 30 years.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation would remain the focus of Britain's defence policy, according to the statement, which also warned that the Soviet Union should not be written off as a military power.

The Soviet Union remains an unstable military superpower, whose capabilities need to be counterbalanced if stability is to be preserved in Europe.

"The capabilities still present the most serious, if not the most immediate, threat to western security," it said.

Britain's defence spending is expected to fall by a total of six per cent over the next three years in real terms. That would be less than the cumulative drop over the past five years, senior defence sources said.

The cost of the Gulf war was more than 2.5 billion pounds (four billion dollars) but Britain's allies contributed about two billion pounds (3.2 billion dollars).

Under the defence review, cuts in manpower will be sharper than reductions in spending on military hardware, reflecting a desire to keep Britain's forces well-equipped, the sources said.

The army faces the biggest reduction of the three armed services — a cut of more than 40,000 to 116,000 — but details of which of Britain's famous regiments will be scrapped or merged will not be released until later this month.

BRIEFLY

Dalai Lama in Moscow: Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama arrived in Moscow on Wednesday head of ceremony in Siberia to mark the 250th anniversary of the recognition of buddhism in Russia the republic's news agency said, Reuter from Moscow reports.

The Independent Russian Information Agency said on Tuesday the Dalai Lama would stop in Moscow on his way to the city of Ulan Ude, capital of Buryatia, where the ceremony would be held.

The official Soviet news agency Tass said Tibet's spiritual and temporal God-King who fled into exile after a 1959 uprising against Chinese rule also planned to meet local Buddhists in the surrounding regions.

3 killed in US blast: An explosion rocked a gas pipeline construction site Tuesday, killing three workers and injuring five others, authorities said, AP reports from Brule.

A drilling crew was using a backhoe to lay explosives when the explosives ignited, Douglas County Undersheriff Dan Jensen said.

They were transferring dynamite on a piece of equipment. It just blew," Jensen said.

Three workers were killed, Jensen said. One critically injured person was being treated at St. Mary's Medical Center in Duluth, Minn., about 40 miles northwest of Brule, nursing supervisor Mary Vincent said.

Two injured people were hospitalized with less serious injuries and two suffered injuries that did not require hospitalization, Jensen said.

Barb Clinton, an attendant with Iron River Ambulance Service, said she heard the explosion from her home about five miles away. "The windows in my house shook," she said.

Chinese PM in Saudi Arabia: Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng arrived Tuesday on the fourth leg of a Middle East swing that coincided with accelerated efforts to curb arms sales to the volatile region, reports AP from Jeddah.

During his three-day stay, Li will hold talks with King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdullah and the minister of defense and aviation, Prince Sultan, on Middle East developments and issues of mutual concern, Chinese ambassador Sun Bigan told reporters.

Li's first visit to Saudi Arabia coincides with the first anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in July last year.

"The visit represents an important diplomatic move by the Chinese government to augment cooperation with developing countries," Sun said.

He said he hoped the visit would help boost trade relations, estimated at 300 million dollars.

He did not say if the discussions also would touch on arms sales.

Ex-Life editor dead: George P. Hunt, who was managing editor of Life magazine from 1961 to 1969, has died of cancer, the magazine announced Tuesday. He was 72, AP from New York says.

Hunt died Saturday at his home in Hobe Sound, Fla., the magazine said.

Hunt began working at Time Inc. in 1940 as an office boy. He worked in Life's art department in 1941 before joining the Marines. During World War II, he won a Silver Star and Navy Cross.

After the war, Hunt rejoined Time Inc. as a writer for Fortune magazine. He transferred to Life as a writer and held various positions including Washington bureau chief before advancing to managing editor.

A native of Philadelphia, Hunt graduated cum laude from Amherst College in 1939.

He is survived by his wife, Anita Eller Hunt and their three children: George P. Hunt Jr. of Roanoke, Va.; Dona Clarke, of Palm Beach, Fla. and Barre Hunt O'Neill, of Pound Ridge, N.Y.

Pak college official shot dead: Gunmen shot dead a Pakistani college administrator in his office on Tuesday as he spoke by telephone to his son, reports Reuter from Hyderabad.

Mushtaq Ali Jafria, government Deputy Director for College Education in the volatile southern province of Sindh, was shot by two unidentified youths police said.

Jafria, an immigrant from India, was a college principal before his appointment to the government post last February in Hyderabad.

UN envoy to visit Iraq: Iraqi authorities gave a UN envoy permission Tuesday to visit the south where tens of thousands of Shi'ite Muslims reportedly are hiding after a failed rebellion against President Saddam Hussein, AP from Baghdad says.

Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan who is overseeing UN humanitarian efforts in the Gulf, is expected to travel to Nasseriya on Thursday, according to a UN official who refused to be named.

The official Iraqi News Agency quoted deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz as expressing Iraq's "full readiness to cooperate with the efforts of the United Nations and its specialized agencies regarding humanitarian aid."

UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar last week ordered Sadruddin to visit the region following a UN report about high-levels of Iraqi military activity in the region and increasing risks of starvation and epidemics among the Shi'ites.

Senate asked to slash non-nuclear forces: President Bush formally asked the Senate on Tuesday to approve a landmark treaty slashing non-nuclear forces in Europe, calling it "the most ambitious arms-control agreement ever concluded," AP from Washington says.

He said the treaty "will be of major importance in laying the indispensable foundation for the post-Cold War security architecture in Europe."

The treaty was signed by 22 nations in Paris last November, but Bush later decided to hold it on his desk, accusing the Soviets of going back on their word. He said they were trying to escape the treaty's ceilings by transferring some equipment to coastal defense units and asserting that ground forces assigned to naval units were exempt.

BJP supports Congress govt

NEW DELHI, July 10: India's opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) extended vital support to the new minority Congress government on Tuesday as Parliament began a crucial budget session, reports Reuter.

The BJP, which at first said it would challenge Congress for the position of Speakers of the House — who directs the often boisterous debate in the Indian Parliament — decided to support the Congress nominee.

In return, Congress, agreed to support the BJP's candidate for Deputy Speaker.

Prime Minister Narasimha

Rao's Congress Party, which put up veteran parliamentarian Shivraj Patil as its candidate, said it was traditional for the ruling party to choose the Speaker.

BJP spokesman Jagdish Prasad Mathur said the understanding between his party and the Congress was confined to the issue of choosing a Speaker.

"Be sure, it's a very limited understanding. We are going to oppose the government on the vote of confidence," Mathur told Reuter.

The Speaker's job is important because Congress is hoping to find a consensus in

India's always acrimonious lower house on its sweeping reforms.

The new Congress government over the past two weeks has announced a series of dramatic initiatives to deal with the country's worst economic crisis since independence in 1947.

It has devalued the rupee by almost 19 per cent against the dollar and announced a sweeping reform of the country's protected trade regime.

Similar reforms on industrial regulation and foreign investment are also expected before the delayed 1991/92 budget is unveiled on July 24.



PARIS : File photo dated 30 May 91 shows United Arab Emirates President Sheik Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan (foreground) who owns 77 per cent of the scandal-hit Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI). — UNB/AFP photo

Pakistan, Thailand under external strains : Sharif

ISLAMABAD, July 10 : Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Pakistan and Thailand have been undergoing parallel external strains resulting from the interventions and occupations by foreign troops in Afghanistan and in Kampuchea, reports Xinhua.

He stated this at the banquet hosted by him here last night in honour of Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn of Thailand who arrived here on Tuesday afternoon for a six-day official visit to Pakistan.

The Prime Minister said the withdrawal of the foreign troops from these countries

could not substantially alter the situation in Afghanistan and Kampuchea and the ordeal of these people was not yet over noting that Pakistan and Thailand continue to host a number of refugees.

The peace in Afghanistan could not be restored as long as the right to choose their government among others was denied to Afghanistan. He said, pointing out that Pakistan wanted to have a peaceful settlement of the Afghanistan issue which could enable the Afghan refugees to voluntarily return to their homeland with honour and safety.

On Kashmir, the Pakistan government leader said the people in the India-occupied Kashmir are struggling to get their right of self-determination.

India, Pakistan and the United Nations had pledged to the Kashmiris four decades ago that they would be allowed to determine their own destiny, he recalled.

The Prime Minister expressed his confidence that the visit by the Prince would further strengthen mutually beneficial relations between Pakistan and Thailand.

Longest solar eclipse of the century

MEXICO CITY, July 10: Millions of people all over Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America will be treated Thursday to one of the longest and most spectacular solar eclipses of the century, reports AFP.

During the impromptu twilight, which will last nearly seven minutes in some areas temperatures will drop the stars will shine cocks will crow, animals will act strangely and the plankton will sparkle in the seas.

Hundreds of scientists have converged on the Mexican capital to watch the eclipse because the city is one of the best observation points but the phenomenon will be visible first from the Pacific ocean southeast of Hawaii at around 1700 GMT.

During the total eclipse the moon will come between

the sun and earth, casting a 250-kilometer wide (160 miles) shadow the darkness will travel 15,000 kilometers (9,000 miles) to Brazil where the residents of the village of Santo Domingo will be the last to watch the solar spectacle.

In Mexico, the eclipse will be seen in its first stage at about 11.23 am local time (1723 GMT) when darkness will fall on the western Baja peninsula. There the darkness will last nearly seven minutes longer than any place else.

Night will fall over Mexico city's 18 million residents about two hours later, switching on automatic street lights and forcing drivers to turn on their headlights.

Some 630 scientists from

around the globe will take the brief opportunity to catch a glimpse of the usually invisible solar atmosphere and the gas eruptions and other activities on the surface of the huge star.

A team of US scientists is scheduled to launch a rocket some 60 kilometers (35 miles) into the sky to get a closer look while a Japanese team will be posted atop the popocatepetl volcano, which rises 5,425 meters (18,000 feet) above the capital.

The eclipse coincides with the most active period in the solar cycle and fiery ring will appear around the moon in a windfall for astronomers.

Several groups have planned festivities for the event and thousands of visitors are ex-

pected to converge on archaeological sites all over this country where ancient civilisations worshipped the sun.

Anthropologists say a total eclipse of the sun sent panic through Mexico in pre-Columbian times particularly among the aztecs or sun people, who believed that the darkness was a warning from the gods.

Even today some link eclipses with natural disasters such as droughts, famine and earthquakes beliefs that anthropologists say stem from ancient religions.

A traditional ceremony of fire has been planned by representatives from ethnic groups in central and northern Mexico to be held at site of the mythical city of Aztlan, the birthplace of the aztec people.