

Saddam urges Iraqis to turn a page on past

BAGHDAD, July 17: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein today urged his countrymen to close ranks and "turn a page on the past" in a speech marking the 23rd anniversary of the ruling Baath Party, reports AFP.

"All Iraqis should take part in the new democratic experience within the framework of national unity.... (and) turn a page on the past," the President said in a pre-recorded speech broadcast on television.

Mr Hussein paid tribute to the "glorious people of Iraq" and "his brave army."

He accused the US-led anti-

Iraqi coalition, which drove Iraq out of Kuwait in February, of having "mortgaged the future" of his country.

The US-led "aggression" was aimed at "shutting the door on Iraq's future," Mr Hussein said.

But nevertheless, he expressed his "conviction" that the Iraqis people had the capability of "pursuing the reconstruction" of Iraq.

Iraq's state-run television began to broadcast the hour-long speech at 11.05 am (0705 GMT) amid newspaper reports here that Mr Hussein's statements would be "important and historic."

Protesters force Mayor of Sofia to flee

SOFIA, Bulgaria, July 17: A crowd of anti-Communist demonstrators forced the mayor of Sofia to flee in a police car after he refused to allow a protest near state television headquarters, state radio reported Tuesday, reports AP.

The broadcast did not say whether Mayor Alexander Karakachanov was injured in the incident Monday. It reported that Karakachanov was rushed "by a large group of aggressive people."

The protesters were seeking the firing of Ognyan Saparev, head of the state television network, alleging he was pro-Communist, said the broadcast.

After Karakachanov turned down their demand to demonstrate in front of television headquarters, the demonstrators massed outside his office and rushed the mayor as he came out, the report said. Karakachanov, ducking fists and umbrellas, was bundled into a squad car by his two bodyguards and fled the scene.

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BRIEFLY

Canada investigating plane crash: Canadian authorities investigating last week's crash of a chartered jet in Saudi Arabia that killed 261 said on Tuesday it may take a month to determine the cause, Reuter reports from Ottawa.

The crash is being investigated by Ottawa officials at the request of the Saudis.

The investigators on Tuesday received flight data and cockpit voice recorders from the wreckage of the DC-8, which was chartered from Montreal based National.

The jet crashed at the airport in Jeddah minutes after take off killing 261 mostly Muslim pilgrims returning to Nigeria, fourteen Canadian crew member also died.

Bush wants to end Iraqi arms programme: US President Bush said Tuesday he would seek the "complete elimination" of Iraq's ballistic missiles and biological and chemical weapons programs, AP from London says.

The US focus has been on opening Iraq's nuclear facilities to international inspection and insisting on its destruction.

But Bush, in a letter to Congress released here, said Iraq also had concealed chemical weapons and ballistic missiles and has refused to acknowledge it was trying to develop biological weapons.

"We will not allow these Iraqi actions to succeed," he said. "We will continue to insist on the full identification and complete elimination of all relevant items."

Bush to keep troops in ME: US President George Bush on Tuesday informed Congress that he intended to keep troops in the Middle East "as long as required by the situation in Iraq," reports AFP.

In a letter released by the travelling White House in London, Bush also said he would thwart Iraqi efforts to hide its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

"We will not allow these Iraqi actions to succeed," he said, but would continue to insist on the full identification and complete elimination of such weapons as well as the imposition of a thorough and effective monitoring regime to assure Iraq's long-term compliance.

Washington and its allies would also continue to monitor Iraq treatment of its citizens.

Gulf Allies fail to defend Emirate: Kuwait and its seven Arab Gulf War Allies have failed to set up a joint force to defend the tiny Emirate from any new attack from its giant northern neighbour Iraq, reports Reuter from Kuwait.

Foreign Ministers from the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plus Egypt and Syria said on Tuesday after a two-day meeting that no force would be sent to Kuwait or the Gulf region.

Individual countries could instead seek military help from Allies in times of crisis they said.

ICRC suspends activities in Afghan towns: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Tuesday it had suspended its activities in two Afghan towns for lack of security, reports Reuter from Kabul.

The ICRC said in a statement in Kabul that it was withdrawing its expatriate staff from the western town of Herat and from Mazar-i-Sharif in the north until clear assurances about their security.

ICRC Afghan Delegation Chief Didier Helg said four ICRC staff members were killed in the past year and there had been at least one serious security incident a month in the past two-and-a-half years. The incidents included abduction, armed assault and shooting.

Afghan peace remote: UN official: A senior United Nations official said on Tuesday prospects of talks to end Afghanistan's civil war looked remote, Reuter reports from Geneva.

Benon Sevan, UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar's Representative for Afghanistan, said none of the country's main guerrilla leaders were prepared to talk publicly with the Kabul government.

"Until that taboo is removed there can not be an all-inclusive Afghan dialogue," he told a news conference.

Sevan said the Afghan problem was not simply one of government versus the opposition.

US West to modernise Soviet phone system: US West said Tuesday it will install new switching equipment in the Soviet Union to eliminate a major bottleneck that frustrates millions of people trying to call into or out of the country, AP from Washington says.

Separately, a consortium that includes US West said it reached agreement with Soviet authorities to install a cellular phone system in Moscow.

The American telephone company said it plans to invest \$18 million in the new switching equipment, to be manufactured in Yugoslavia and installed in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev. US West said it hopes to complete the project by the end of next year.

Currently, there are only about 1,200 international circuits serving the country of 285 million people. With the tremendous increase in interest in the Soviet Union in recent years and a more open political climate, the telephone system is overwhelmed by would-be international callers, who may spend hours or days trying to get a call out.

The digital electronic switching system, similar to those used throughout the world, will increase capacity nearly 20 times, the company said.

Gates' confirmation as CIA chief delayed by 2 months

WASHINGTON, July 17: The US Senate Intelligence Committee on Tuesday put off for two months confirmation hearings for Robert Gates, President Bush's nominee to head the CIA, while it seeks further answers to questions about what Gates knew of the Iran-contra affair, reports AP.

The panel, with the concurrence of the White House, voted unanimously to begin the hearings Sept. 16.

The committee also voted to grant limited immunity from further prosecution to Alan Fiers, a former CIA official who has told prosecutors that top agency officials covered up their knowledge of the affair and Oliver North's secret network to supply guns to Nicaraguan rebels.

Fiers has pleaded guilty to two counts of withholding information from Congress in the scandal in a plea bargain with prosecutors.

Committee Chairman David Boren said the decision to delay the hearings came after consultations with Gates and senior White House officials,

who had concluded that delaying the start of hearings would be better than a start-and-stop process that could drag on for months.

Bush himself had delivered an emotional defense of Gates just four days earlier, calling for immediate hearings and accusing the senate panel of panicking and running "like a covey of quail" under public pressure to scrutinize Gates further.

Since then, however, Bush has come to understand the legal and procedural problems the committee faces, and has changed his mind, said Boren, an Oklahoma Democrat.

Boren and senior committee Republican Frank Murkowski said they may also issue subpoenas later — but without any guarantees of immunity — for Clair George, CIA director of operations during the Iran-Contra period, and for Jerry Gruner, then chief of the agency's Latin American division.

George retired from the CIA in 1987. Gruner still works for the agency as a station chief in

a European capital. His name had not been made public until Boren did so Tuesday.

North's calendars show that he was in contact with Gruner during 1986 when Gruner was chief of the CIA's Latin American division. Gruner was Fiers' immediate superior.

Fiers has told prosecutors that he told George of the diversion of arms sale proceeds to the rebels late in the summer of 1986, but that George already knew about it when Fiers told him. Fiers says George directed him to hide his knowledge of the North network from Congress.

"This nomination is not in trouble," Murkowski declared to reporters. The best course for Gates is to "face facts against the dark rumours that are out there," he added. "The nomination is on track."

Boren agreed, adding: "There is nothing I have seen at this point in time — and I underline 'at this point in time' — that would be disqualifying" to Gates.

He said Gates had told him, "If I did not have a clear con-

10-storey govt headquarters was to be blown up Plot to wipe out top Indian politicians unearthed

NEW DELHI, July 17: A plot to wipe out India's top politicians in one massive strike has come to light 10 months after the failed plot, in a report Tuesday by the Press Trust of India (PTI), reports AFP.

The plan was to blow up the 10-storey headquarters of the government of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, in Madras, where a national conference attended by then Premier Vishwanath Pratap Singh and his predecessor Rajiv Gandhi was to be held September 22, PTI said.

The Chief Ministers of vari-

ous Indian states and senior leaders from political parties, among others, took part at the unofficial national integration council meeting, which was designed primarily to promote communal harmony.

Mr. Gandhi, who has since been assassinated by unidentified assailants in a bomb attack in Tamil Nadu, must have been the primary target of the failed attack which was plotted by an unidentified Tamil military group, officials from Madras were quoted as saying.

The attempt failed when experts defused a powerful,

sophisticated bomb with a timer found planted outside the state headquarters hours before the conference was to open, said the officials who PTI did not name.

The eight-kilogram (17-pound) nitroglycerine bomb was first noticed by children playing in the open nearby, it said.

Some pamphlets left at the scene showed the plotters were from "Tamil pasarasai," or Tamil armed group, a hitherto unknown organisation.

The news agency did not say if the group was made up of

local Tamils from Tamil Nadu, or the neighboring island nation of Sri Lanka, which is separated from Tamil Nadu by the narrow palk strait.

Indian investigators believe that Sri Lankan Tamil militants from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) were responsible for the slaying of Mr. Gandhi some eight months later. He died May 21 when a bomb exploded as he arrived to address an election rally for his Congress (I) Party at Srirampurud town, some 50 kilometers (31 miles) from Madras.



WUHAN, China: An elderly man navigates his makeshift raft through a village street which was flooded by the overflowing Yangtze River in Wuhan July 16. The worst monsoon rains in China in a century and severe flooding have so far left 1,540 people dead and more than 17,000 injured. —AFP/UNB photo

Gorbachev won't leave London empty-handed, says Bush

LONDON, July 17: Leaders of the seven richest democracies on Tuesday pledged support to Mikhail Gorbachev and his "open and democratic Soviet Union." US President Bush said the Soviet leader would leave London empty-handed, reports AP.

But the Group of Seven, in their annual economic summit, were still searching for a common approach for translating well wishes into economic help. Gorbachev was to sit at the capitalists' table for the first time on Wednesday.

At their summit, the seven industrial democracies also endorsed a universal register for arms transfers, vowed to leave all sanctions on Iraq until it complies with remaining UN sanctions and endorsed President Bush's new push for a Middle East peace.

That effort, given new life with apparent conciliatory movement by Syria, may be the best chance yet for direct peace talks between Israel and her Arab neighbours, Baker told reporters. But he cautioned that there remain "plenty of hurdles".

In a political communique that highlighted the second day of the annual gathering, the leaders of the United States, Britain, Japan, Germany, France, Italy and Canada said their support for political and economic reforms undertaken by Gorbachev was as "strong as ever".

The scale of this undertaking is enormous: an open and democratic Soviet Union able to play its full part in building stability and trust in the

world," the joint statement said. It also credited Gorbachev with "new thinking" in foreign policy.

In private sessions, the summit leaders thrashed over what from Western assistance to Moscow should take.

"There's no chance that he

(Gorbachev) will leave here empty-handed", Baker said. "There are any number of things the countries here will agree we should be done."

Earlier, Bush was asked whether Gorbachev would leave the summit empty-handed. "No, no, absolutely not," he said.

Baker, however, seemed to rule out "cash grants," saying Gorbachev had not requested that in his 23-page letter to summit partners.

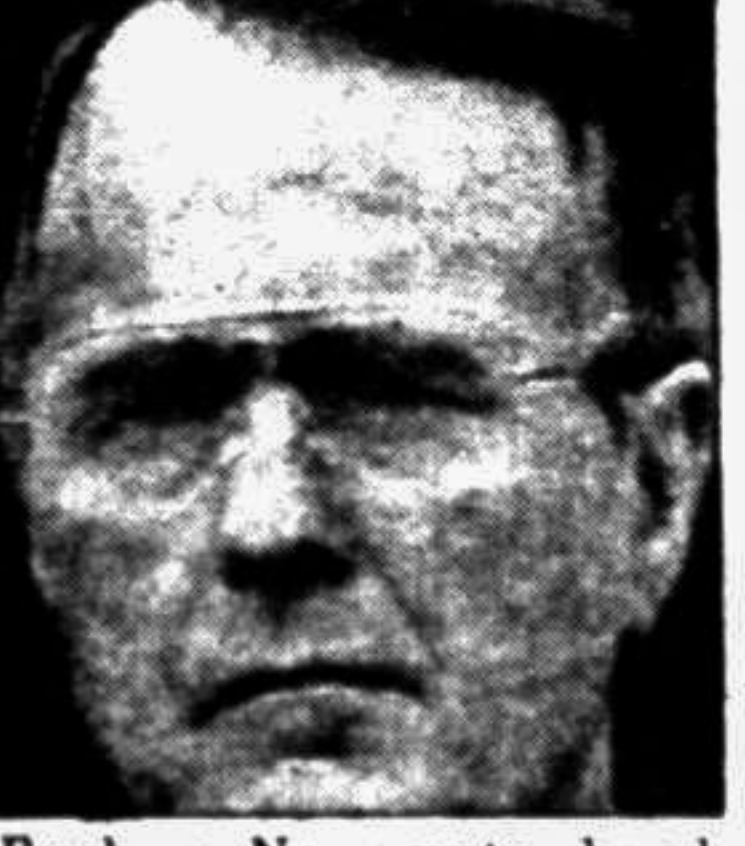
Baker suggested the West would offer Moscow help in converting defense industries to civilian use as well as helping to beef up the Soviet system for distributing goods and services.

Italian Foreign Secretary Gianni De Michelis said that after "open, frank discussion, the differences among the seven leaders were over timing and levels of assistance."

All seven nations agree that there should at least be some technical assistance and associate memberships for Moscow in the International Monetary Fund.

As he left Moscow for London, Gorbachev said he felt good about the upcoming talks. "I think everything will be all right. There will be a big discussion," he told reporters as he boarded a Ilyushin-62 jetliner.

The US secretary of state said he was "quite sure" the START treaty, which Bush has suggested is a prerequisite for a superpower summit in Moscow, would be discussed at Wednesday's lunch.



Bush: No empty hand



Gorbachev: Perestroika in danger

Business disputes leave 15 killed in Cambodia

BANGKOK, July 17: Fifteen people have been killed in the Cambodian border region recently in intensified business disputes following a ceasefire between Cambodia's warring factions, relief officials on the Thai-Cambodian border said Tuesday, reports AFP.

"This just goes to show that a ceasefire is not necessarily a peaceful time," said one official.

The officials said they had received reports of the execution-like killing of nine people early last month.

According to the reports the nine were traders who left the UN-administered refugee camp to return to Cambodia. They were detained by armed men inside Cambodia, tied up and shot in the head, the officials said.

Shamir rejects G-7 call

JERUSALEM, July 17: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on Tuesday rejected a call by leaders of the world's seven major industrial nations for a freeze on Jewish settlements in occupied Arab lands, reports Reuter.

The problem of settlements is very complex and belong to the type of problems which will be raised and discussed when the negotiations between Israel and the Arab states open, a statement from Shamir's office said.

The leaders of the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Canada and Britain issued declaration at their annual summit in London on Tuesday calling for a suspension of settlement and an end to the Arab boycott of firms doing business with Israel.

There is no connection between the two things, the Shamir statement said.

Rats invade Bucharest

BUCHAREST, July 17: Bucharest has more rats than human inhabitants and will have to import more than a quarter of a million dollars worth of poison to get rid of them, the state news agency Rompres said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

More than 2.5 million rats have invaded the city and fat ones can be seen even in central Bucharest, chasing each other or guzzling from waste bins.

Off the Record

Bush's motorcade amuses Britons

LONDON: The British are bemused, and a trifle annoyed, by the length of President Bush's motorcades, reports AP.

The US entourage stretched to 16 vehicles Tuesday, more than double the limit that economic summit organizers had set in order to restrict traffic snarls in the capital.

In contrast, British Prime Minister John Major has travelled between venues in a lone Jaguar, occasionally accompanied by a backup car, a Downing Street spokesman said.

White House aides said they have had to fight with Scotland Yard to tack extra cars onto their motorcade. One said arms talks "are nothing compared to the motorcade negotiations."

The Americans' motorcade includes a limousine for Bush, followed by two "war wagons" containing security forces and weapons, a spare car in case Bush's breaks down, staff cars, a van with communications equipment, a van for the press, and an ambulance bringing up the rear.

The entourage is standard for Bush, even for dinner out a few blocks from the White House.

Nine police on motorcycles ride with the motorcade to block traffic and pedestrians.

A Scotland Yard spokesman was clearly annoyed by what he viewed as another sign of American excess.

"That's just American style. Isn't it? Your cars are twice as long as ours, and normally your motorcades are, too."

Barbara charms patients

LONDON, July 17: US First Lady Barbara Bush joked with photographers and charmed patients on Tuesday on a visit to a world-famous spinal injuries centre near London, reports Reuter.

She broke into applause when one patient, Gerard Songuin, took a few faltering steps after gruelling physiotherapy. Asked by a teasing photographer to join in the exercises, President George Bush's wife laughed: "You know me too well. You know I'd do it."

Bush, and wives of other leaders of the seven richest nations at a London summit, were greeted by British entertainer and fund raiser Jimmysavile at Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

Savile, knighted for his charity work, raised 10 million pounds sterling (16.5 million dollars) to build the hospital's spinal injuries unit 10 years ago.

British Prime Minister Major's wife Norma, catapaulted into a limelight she would prefer to avoid, chatted animatedly with her guests.

The party, looking like a bunch of good friends out for the day, followed their tour of the hospital with Luncheon Chequers, Major's official country house.

While their wives took coffee and cake to the strains of string quartet, the leaders of the United States, Japan, Germany, Italy, Canada, France and Britain were thrashing out the question of what aid to give aid the Soviet Union.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev arrives later on Tuesday for special talks with the seven, but his glamorous wife Raisa was not expected to join the wives' social programme, which takes them next to dinner with Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace.



MOSCOW: On a busy Moscow street, a beggar cries for alms, while behind him an old woman sells blueberries to passersby July 16. More and more beggars are appearing on the streets of the capital, as consumer prices rise and state shops still do not carry enough food to meet demand. —AFP/UNB photo

Karmal opposed '79 Soviet invasion

KABUL, July 17: Former Afghan President Babrak Karmal, branded by many of his people as a Soviet puppet, has said he opposed the Soviet invasion in December 1979 that put him in power, reports Reuter.

Karmal said in an interview on Monday evening that he had been presented with a faith accomplice before he took power.

It was his first public statement since his unexpected return to Kabul three weeks ago after four years of virtual exile in the Soviet Union.

"I am and I always will be a patriot," Karmal said and the question should be not how much control over me the Soviets had, but how much of a greater tragedy my rule prevented."

In a dramatic turn around from his Marxist past, Karmal also said he favoured the eventual establishment of a western-style liberal democracy in Afghanistan in accordance with Afghan tradition.

Karmal, 62, was replaced by President Najibullah in 1986.

He left for the Soviet Union in May 1987 for what Afghan officials at the time termed health reasons.

Asked why he did not step-down if he opposed the Soviet invasion, Karmal said he had offered his resignation several times but each time his ruling party had not accepted it.

"While in power I ran the country with a heavy hand and to be away from my motherland for (four years in the Soviet Union) was torture," he said.

He said he would have preferred to be in Kabul's Pul-i-Charki prison, notorious for alleged human rights abuses during his rule "at least it would have been on Afghan soil," he added.

Looking in good spirits and describing his health as fine, Karmal said he had no desire to look for a political role in Kabul. Political observers here have speculated that Moscow might have sent him back to seed political problems for Najibullah.

He described as "golden" the last 10 years of the rule of King Zahir Shah.