

BRIEFLY

UN official rejects Iraqi invitation:

The head of the UN commission overseeing the elimination of Iraq's mass destruction weapons has declined an Iraqi invitation to supervise the next inspection mission, sources said Wednesday, AP from United Nations says.

Iraq wanted Rolf Ekeus, chairman of the UN Special Commission, to be present when the 50-member team — the largest yet — travels to Baghdad on Friday.

The Baghdad government had wanted Ekeus in charge because of his reputation for being tough and because of his close ties with the Bush administration to provoke an incident before the UN presidential election.

On Wednesday, Ekeus consulted with Security Council members and decided not to travel to Baghdad to head the team because doing so would have been seen as giving in to Iraq's political concerns, said diplomatic sources, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Palestinian prisoner dies:

A Palestinian prisoner died in an Israeli hospital of heart failure on Wednesday, three days after ending a two-week hunger strike, the Israeli prison authority said, reports Reuter from Jerusalem.

Hussein As'ad Obeidat, 24, from the village of Jabel Mukaber in occupied East Jerusalem, was on hunger strike with thousands of other Palestinian prisoners who were demanding an improvement in prison conditions.

"He served three years of a six-year sentence for belonging to a terrorist organisation," said prison authority spokeswoman Shulamit Meiri.

Bombmaker gets life-term in Paris:

The chief bombmaker of the terror group Direct Action, which carried out a campaign of bombings, kidnappings and assassinations in the mid-1980s, received a life prison sentence Wednesday, AP from Paris adds.

Maxime Frerot, 36, was convicted of murder and attempted murder for the bombing of a police station July 9, 1986 that left a senior inspector dead and about 30 officers injured.

Ferot will serve at least 18 years on Wednesday's sentence. It was not clear whether the penalty would be concurrent or consecutive to an 18-year sentence he is already serving for other offenses.

An accomplice, Gilbert Vecchi, 38, accused of conspiring with Frerot to commit the bombing by providing him information on the police station, received a 10-year sentence.

Int'l Day of Handicapped Dec 3:

The UN General Assembly declared December 3 an International Day of the Handicapped, AFP reports from United Nations.

In declaring the day, the General Assembly called on all UN members to boost their efforts on behalf of the disabled.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali called for governments and the United Nations to increase their cooperation to aid the handicapped.

Gorbachev's passport withheld:

The Russian government on Wednesday withheld former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's diplomatic passport, forcing him to cancel a trip to Italy, reports AP from Moscow.

The government's actions supported an order by Russia's Constitutional Court to revoke Gorbachev's right to travel abroad until he testifies in a landmark trial on the legality of the Communist Party.

The court agreed to lift the ban for humanitarian reasons so that Gorbachev could attend Saturday's state funeral in Germany of former Chancellor Willy Brandt.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Galina Sidorova said the temporary lifting of the ban did not include Gorbachev's trip to Italy. She said the government withheld his diplomatic passport until after commercial flights had left for Italy on Wednesday.

Khmer Rouge blows up bridge violating truce

PHNOM PENH, Oct 15: Guerrillas of the radical Khmer Rouge blew up a major bridge in a very serious violation of Cambodia's ceasefire, officials of the UN peacekeeping force said Thursday, reports AP.

The bridge on National Route 6 was blown up between Tuesday night and early Wednesday, said Eric Berman, a UN spokesman.

Route 6 crosses almost the length of the country, from near the Thai border in the northwest to near Phnom Penh in the southeast. The demolished 27-meter (30-yard) bridge is about 120 kilometers (74 miles) north-east of Phnom Penh.

The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia is studying whether it marked the start of an offensive against the Vietnamese-installed government, said UN military spokesman Lt. Col. Richard Pak.

"It is a very serious ceasefire incident because it is the first time we have had a demolition occur on a major arterial route in Cambodia since UNTAC arrived" in March, said UN military commander Lt. Gen. John Sanderson.

"Everything points to a deliberate, rather than a spontaneous, attack and everything points to it being an NADK action," Sanderson said. He was referring to the Khmer Rouge army, the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea.

Sanderson called an emergency meeting Thursday of the military heads of Cambodia's four factions to discuss the attack.

Berman did not know what evidence UN investigators found to implicate the Khmer Rouge. He said the guerrillas also demolished a minor bridge along Route 21 in the northeast.

The Khmer Rouge massacred Cambodians during its fanatical rule in the 1970s. It fought a Vietnamese-installed government for 13 years until signing a peace agreement last October. However, the Khmer Rouge has violated almost every provision of the accord, and small skirmishes with government forces have continued.

US sticks to arms embargo against Y'slavia

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: The United States on Wednesday ruled out relaxing an international arms embargo against former Yugoslavia to allow Bosnian Muslims to acquire weapons for self-defence, reports Reuter.

"Are we considering a change in the arms embargo? No, we continue to support the UN arms embargo the way it is," said State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher. "We don't support actions that we think could worsen the conflict."

"That possibility has been discussed, as have a number of others. But I don't believe there's any administration decision to do so," he said.

Minorities Forum call to solve Babri Mosque dispute

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The all India minorities forum Wednesday appealed to the leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities to make an all out effort to solve the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute at the earliest, so as to save the future generations from facing an atmosphere of hatred and suspicion, reports PTI.

Warsaw, Oct 15: A Russian envoy presented Poland with documents on Wednesday proving that Soviet dictator Josef Stalin ordered the secret massacre of 15,000 Polish officers during World War Two, reports Reuter.

Rudolf Pikhoya, a special envoy for Russian President Boris Yeltsin, handed copies of previously top-secret papers to President Lech Walesa and said that all former Soviet leaders, including Mikhail Gorbachev, knew about the crime.

Move to monitor violation of 'no fly' zone US plans to install AWACS data centre in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 15: The United States plans to install AWACS data centre in Bosnia-Herzegovina to monitor any violation of the UN-imposed no-fly zone over the former Yugoslav republic, diplomatic sources said late Tuesday, reports AFP.

The centre would be established near the headquarters of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) under construction in Bosnia, and the information gathered by the radar-equipped, Reconnaissance Aircraft (AWACS) would be passed on to the UN forces commanded by French General Philippe Morillon, the sources said.

The United States, Britain, France and Russia — four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council — have been discussing since

Monday how to monitor the air exclusion zone that was imposed over Bosnia on Friday.

A senior UN official was attending the talks, which do not include China, the sources said.

The four council members have also discussed sending dozens of observers to airfields in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro in what is shaping up to be a prominently European surveillance mission.

According to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation sources in Brussels, four AWACS have been assigned to UN surveillance missions in the Adriatic and may already be monitoring Bosnian airspace with the help of an additional French AWACS.

But if Serbian forces in Bosnia keep their promise to move their 30-fixed-winged combat aircraft from the Banja

Luka Air Base in Bosnia to Serbia, Montenegro, strong surveillance operation would be unnecessary, experts here concurred.

The offer, made Tuesday by Bosnian Serb Leader Radovan Karadzic, does not include helicopters.

UN special envoy Cyrus Vance Wednesday told the Security Council UNPROFOR General John Wilson of Australia was heading to Banja Luka on Thursday to discuss details of Karadzic's offer with a Yugoslav military official.

Meanwhile, Washington has adopted a "wait and see" stance on the possible use of the military to enforce the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina.

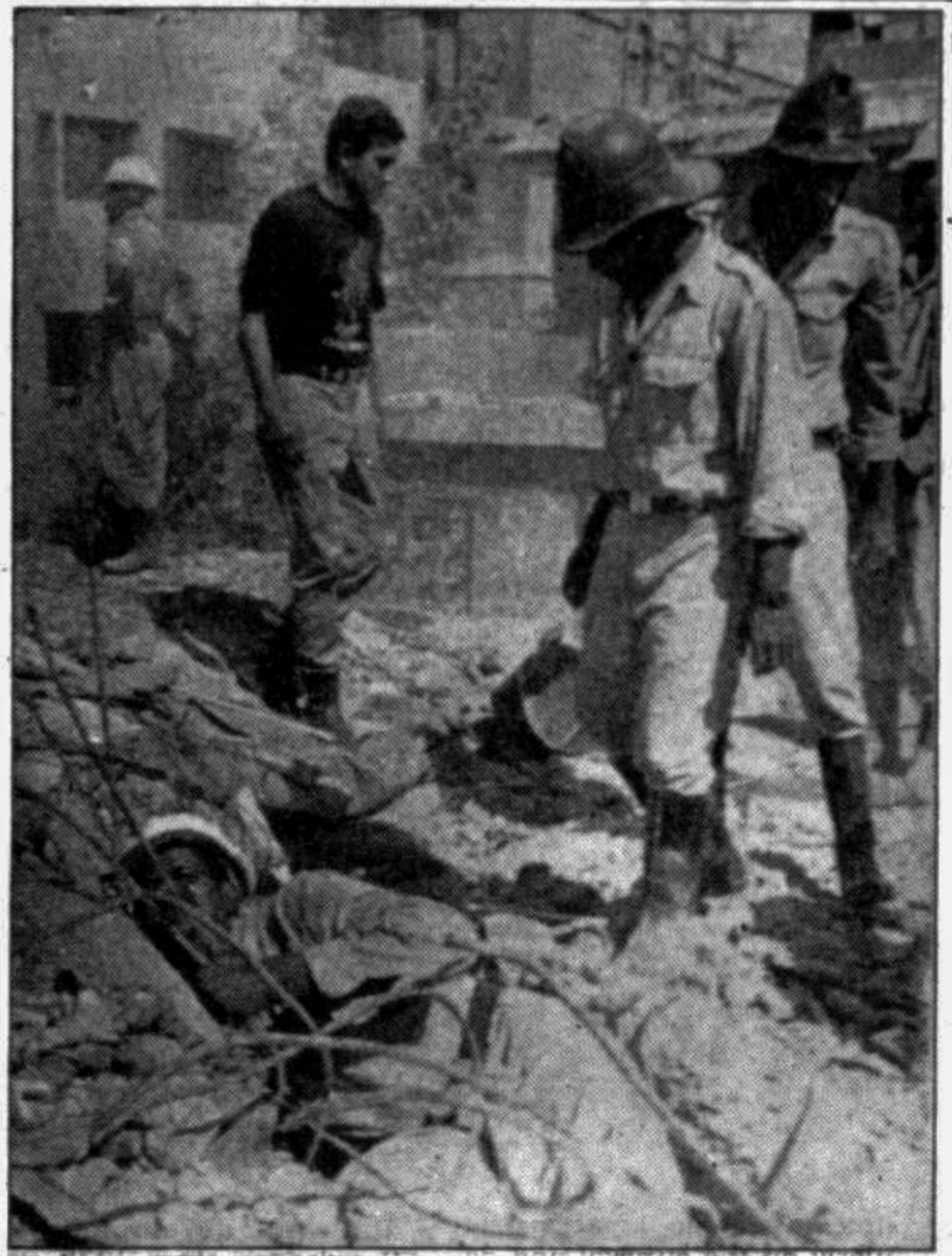
The UN Resolution has been violated on several occasions by Serb forces, but

Washington has said it would seek to learn the exact circumstances of the violations before taking further action.

French Ambassador Jean-Bernard Merimee, who presides over the Security Council this month, said no new Resolution on the situation in former Yugoslavia was needed at present.

Asked whether the Council would base any future action on information provided by the United States, Merimee replied that only "official information coming from UNPROFOR" would be considered.

From what is being discussed here, it would appear that UN peacekeeping forces lack the technical means to carry out their increasingly complex mission in former Yugoslavia.



CAIRO: Rescue workers search for the bodies of the victims in the ruins of a 16-storey building in Heliopolis district of Cairo October 14. Hundreds died in the Egyptian earthquake because of the deadly game played by construction firms who ignore building regulations in this overpopulated country. — AFP/UNB photo

Ban on my foreign trip arbitrary: Gorbachev

MOSCOW, Oct 15: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev Wednesday branded as "arbitrary" the decision by the Russian authorities to uphold tight restrictions on his foreign travel, reports AFP.

The decision to stop him visiting Italy was "flagrantly arbitrary," he told a small group of journalists in his office at the Gorbachev Foundation here.

"The decisions by the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Security Ministry are illegal," he charged.

The constitutional court banned Gorbachev from travelling abroad on October 2 because of his refusal to testify at the trial of the Communist Party.

He claims the trial is a political stunt organised by his rival Russian President Boris Yeltsin to discredit him.

The court has relaxed the ban to enable Gorbachev to attend the funeral of the late German Chancellor Willy Brandt in Berlin on Friday, but blocked the Italian trip.

"I hope to make the trip to Italy soon, as well as others," Gorbachev told reporters.

Later he told Italian radio station GRI that Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev had told him of the

travel ban.

"I only had a telephone conversation with the Minister Kozyrev, who told me the Russian government was obeying the constitutional court ruling," Gorbachev said.

"But shortly afterwards the President (chief justice) of the Court (Valery) Zorkin assured me that he had raised no objections (to his Italian trip)," he added.

Gorbachev said he intended to return to Russia immediately following Brandt's funeral.

Meanwhile, Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato told the Russian Ambassador to Rome Wednesday of his "extreme surprise and deep regret" at the Russian government's decision to ban the Gorbachev visit.

Such moves were "incompatible with the democracy process in Russia," he said.

Foreign Ministry Emilio Colombo attacked the "inadmissible nature of the ban which runs counter to the great hopes which we had for changes in the East."

He said Gorbachev's plight would be discussed by European Community foreign ministers at Friday's EC summit in Birmingham, England.

ID card plan contrary to religious freedom: Benazir

ISLAMABAD, Oct 15: Pakistan's main opposition alliance on Wednesday attacked a government plan to specify citizens religion on identity cards, saying it would foster religious discrimination, reports Reuter.

"Pakistani citizens are being divided into different sects and different categories of citizens are being created," a spokesman for the people's democratic alliance told a news conference after a meeting in Islamabad.

Alliance leader Benazir Bhutto told reporters the plan,

announced by the government on Tuesday after pressure from Islamic fundamentalists, would "Open the way for the discrimination of one sect or another."

She said it was contrary to the concept of religious freedom envisioned by Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah, whom Pakistanis call Quaid-i-Azam (the great leader).

"I don't think this fits into Quaid-i-Azam's Pakistan," Bhutto said. "Why are they trying to divide Pakistan on religious and sectarian lines?"

After fundamentalist groups threatened a march on parliament, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government decided that each identity card must list the religion of the holder.

The fundamentalists from the majority Sunni sect demanded that members of the banned Ahmadi sect should not be identified as Muslims.

The Ahmadias insist they are Muslims but believe the 19th century Punjabi founder of their sect, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was an Islamic prophet.

This is considered heretical by other Muslims, who regard Mohammad as the last prophet.



KUALA LUMPUR: Firemen try to extinguish a fire at a control tower of Kuala Lumpur International Airport October 15. The pre-dawn blaze, thought to have been lit by an arsonist, destroyed the control tower and forced a temporary suspension of all flights. — AFP/UNB photo

Blast leaves 13 hurt in Kashmir

JAMMU Oct 15: Thirteen people were injured when a powerful bomb exploded in a passenger bus parked in the general bus stand here last night, reports PTI.

According to official sources, the bomb which was planted by the militants in the bus was so powerful that the bus caught fire when it exploded causing it extensive damage.

There was no one in the bus when the explosion, which took place at 2030 hours. All the 13 people who received injuries were standing nearby the bus.

ROK to open ties with Vietnam, Egypt

SEOUL, Oct 15: South Korea will open diplomatic relations with Vietnam within this year and with Egypt next year, a senior official said Thursday, reports AP.

Kim Hak-joon, the presidential spokesman, told a seminar that Seoul's representative office in Hanoi, set up last month, would be upgraded to an embassy after the establishment of diplomatic ties.

Vietnam has agreed to open a representative office in Seoul within this month.

The pro-West South sent more than 300,000 troops to fight alongside US soldiers in the Vietnam War. It was the second largest foreign contingent in the war after the US troops.

Off the Record

Imelda greets Ramos with kiss

LAOAG, Philippines: Imelda Marcos, for years the pariah of Philippine politics, Thursday welcomed President Fidel Ramos into her political stronghold in a show of unity with the man who helped oust her family from power, reports Reuter.

The flamboyant former first lady, who returned to the Philippines on Tuesday from a secrecy-shrouded trip to Hong Kong and Thailand, rolled out the red carpet and greeted Ramos with a kiss when he arrived in Ilocos Norte province for talks with local officials.

Ramos's visit to the mountain province, 400 km (250 miles) north of Manila, was the first by a Philippine president since late Dictator Ferdinand Marcos was overthrown in a 1986 popular revolt.

Ramos, a former national police chief, helped lead the uprising that installed Corazon Aquino in office and up to the time she stepped down in June to hand over the presidency to Ramos, Aquino deliberately avoided visiting the Marcoses political lair, leaving a hostile reception.



Coffee can depress you

BOSTON: People who drink as little as two cups of caffeinated coffee a day can suffer from withdrawal symptoms such as depression, listlessness and anxiety if they abruptly stop, a new study has found, reports Reuter.

The study, by researchers at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, found that more than half the people who regularly consume caffeine suffer withdrawal symptoms if they suddenly eliminate it from their diet.

The amounts of caffeine approximated the average intake of US adults, about 82 per cent of whom consume the stimulant each day. The researchers noted that consumption was twice the US average in some places, like Britain and Sweden.

"Caffeine withdrawal can be more severe and can occur in a substantially larger proportion in the general population than was previously recognised," the researchers said.

A Mao with a difference

BEIJING: This Mao wears a three-piece business suit, a silk tie, and talks free-market capitalism, reports Reuter.

Mao Shihwen, a distant relative of the late Chairman Mao Tseung, is in Beijing to attend this week's Communist Party congress.

The official Xinhua news agency introduced him today as an example of China's new breed of local communist leader.

"Doing business is a sure way for local people to get rich," the younger Mao explained using terms that would make the orthodox Marxist "Great Helmsman" turn in his grave.

"What they feel ashamed now is failure to earn money or get rich," Mao Shihwen added.

While Mao Tseung's portrait still stares smugly from Beijing's Tiananmen Gate, Mao Shihwen and most of the other 2,000 delegates to the conference are plotting ways to make sure that his political and economic legacy stay good and buried.

'Protest Day' paralyses normal life in Manipur

IMPHAL, Oct 15: Normal life was paralysed throughout Manipur valley today as a result of the "protest day" called by three guerrilla outfits — the People's Liberation Army, Preparaung Kangleipak communist party — against the merger of Manipur with India, reports PTI.

Official sources here said that arrangements were made by the authorities to pick up government employees from different parts of Imphal valley with security escort and attendance in offices was reported to be "normal."

Shops, business houses and

other establishments in the valley, however, remained closed and private vehicles kept off the roads.

The Manipur State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) however, operated its long distance passenger bus services to Silchar (Assam), Dimapur (Assam), Moreh border town and Jessami area with heavy police escort.

The sources said that security forces, including plain clothes policemen, were deployed in the valley and there was no report of any untoward incident so far.

US poll will not disrupt trade ties, hopes China

BEIJING, Oct 15: China, worried by frontrunner Bill Clinton's tough rhetoric, said today it hoped the outcome of next month's US presidential election would not disrupt economic and trade ties, reports AP.

"I hope the election will not have any negative impact on economic and trade relations," said Foreign Trade Minister Li Lanqing.

US president George Bush has ignored domestic criticism to pursue a policy of engagement with China, upholding its most favoured nation (MFN) trading status despite repeated attempts by the Democrat-controlled Congress to attach

conditions to it.

In contrast, Clinton has promised an administration that will "not coddle tyrants, from Baghdad to Beijing" and has attacked Bush for doing "business as usual with those who murdered freedom in Tiananmen Square."

Chinese officials privately voice support for Bush, who was Washington's representative here in the mid-1970s.

Clinton, the Democrat Governor of Arkansas is an unknown factor, and officials here are unsure whether he is merely talking tough to garner votes or actually intends to come down harder on China if elected in November.

The Chinese Cabinet Minister praised the Bush administration for not allowing the election campaign to affect talks on a recently resolved bilateral trade dispute.

He said the agreement marked "a turn for the better," but warned that relations could still be badly damaged unless Bush reversed his decision to approve the sale of 150 F-16 jet fighters to Beijing's rival Taipei.

The decision had "cast a shadow" over trade relations, Li told a press conference, adding the two sides would only be able to come to an agreement if they reached a balance.

Stalin ordered massacre of 15,000 Polish officers

WARSAW, Oct 15: A Russian envoy presented Poland with documents on Wednesday proving that Soviet dictator Josef Stalin ordered the secret massacre of 15,000 Polish officers during World War Two, reports Reuter.

Rudolf Pikhoya, a special envoy for Russian President Boris Yeltsin, handed copies of previously top-secret papers to President Lech Walesa and said that all former Soviet leaders, including Mikhail Gorbachev, knew about the crime.

Walesa, fighting back tears, said: this is a handover of the most important documents dealing with a terrible crime against the Polish nation. My legs are trembling as I look at these documents.

The Soviet Union denied responsibility for the killings until 1990, but most Poles and western historians long blamed Moscow for the disappearance of the officers.

"The Russian government and President Yeltsin want to do away with lies in relations

between Poland and Russia. The handover of these documents is the proof that our pleas are genuine," Pikhoya said giving the documents to Walesa.

The papers include decision by the ruling Soviet Communist Party Politburo authorising the killing of the officers who were captured after the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany divided Poland in September 1939.

The authorisation for the killings was signed by Stalin

and other Politburo members, Walesa's press office said.

"All secretaries-general and secretaries of the central committee, from Stalin to Gorbachev, knew about this horrible crime," Pikhoya told Walesa.

Walesa praised Yeltsin for having the courage to hand over the documents and said the gesture would open a new chapter in relations with Russia.

"The fact that these documents are returned indicates

new correct relations between our countries," Walesa added.

Yeltsin's release of the documents was a new blow aimed at his political foe Gorbachev, who has refused to testify at constitutional court hearings investigating the communist party.

The Russian President's spokesman, Vyacheslav Kostikov, on Wednesday said in Moscow that the documents showed Gorbachev had actively helped to maintain the Soviet