

Thatcher tried to halt German unification?

LONDON, Oct 10: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher lobbied former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and other world leaders in an unsuccessful attempt to block German unification, according to a British newspaper, reports Reuter.

Reporting on what it said were extracts from her memoirs to be published by German magazine Der Spiegel, the Sunday Express said Thatcher tried in 1989 to win backing for democratic elections in East Germany rather than rapid unification.

"Mrs Thatcher's view was that Germany was hovering between aggression and self-doubt," the newspaper reported without quoting directly from the memoirs "The Downing Street Years".

"She believed it was a mistake to treat the German question as too sensitive a subject for open discussion," the paper said.

Reports of Thatcher's intervention on German Unification

do not appear in the official serialisation of the book in the Rival Sunday Times. They are, however, expected to be covered in next week's instalment.

The book itself is being published on October 18. There have been a series of Thatcher articles in British papers apparently in an effort to steal a march on the Sunday Times exclusive rights to the Thatcher memoirs.

The Daily Mirror ran alleged leaks from the book last week and the Sunday Times won court injunction preventing other Sunday newspapers printing other excerpts.

None, however, have yet mentioned the German story.

The Sunday Express said Thatcher went to Russia in September 1989 to tell Gorbachev she was concerned about the prospect of German unification. That was followed in November by a telephone call from Chancellor Helmut Kohl said to be "deeply moved" by the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Rao plans to try top BJP men for razing Babri Mosque

NEW DELHI, Oct 10: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao has taken the first step towards prosecuting top Hindu politicians for the razing of the Babri Mosque, shaking off 10 months of inaction ahead of critical state polls, reports AFP.

But the move, aimed at appeasing Muslim voters and mending Rao's reputation for indecision, could ultimately boomerang on the ruling Congress (I) Party in November elections in the northern heartland, analysts say.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whose two top leaders have been named as offenders in a criminal complaint filed in court Tuesday, is not cowering in right at the prospect of seeing them in the dock or in jail.

Instead, the party, at the vanguard of a Hindu-revivalist crusade, has taken an aggressive posture and is mulling over how best to exploit the issue.

BJP chief Lal Krishna Advani, tipped as a future Prime Minister, and his senior colleague Murli Manohar Joshi were among 40 people charged by federal investigators with complicity in the December 1992 razing of the mosque.

Both men were present in the holy town of Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh state, when hordes of Hindu zealots armed with tridents and pickaxes reduced the 16th century shrine to rubble, triggering Hindu-Muslim riots countrywide.

They were accused of criminal conspiracy, trespass, international destruction and defiling of a place of worship in the complaint filed in an Uttar Pradesh High Court, the first step towards prosecuting offenders.

Advani, alleged the complaint, had asked Hindu followers to block a highway to prevent federal forces from reaching Ayodhya to save the

mosque. At a press conference Friday in the southern city of Trivandrum, the soft-spoken Hindu hardliner debunked the criminal complaint as "factually spurious, legally untenable and politically malafide".

The 66-year-old politician accused Rao of trying to malign the BJP and woo Muslim voters in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh by bringing the formal charges just before the November elections there.

"It is a desperate political gamble... and it will boomerang," predicted Advani, whose party was at the forefront of an emotional campaign to replace the Moghul-built mosque with a Hindu temple to the warrior "God Rama".

"Not everything is done with electoral considerations in mind," said Congress (I) spokesman Vithal Gadgil. There are few takers for the

explanation. "The Congress... is desperately looking around for something which will brighten its waning fortunes," commented the Indian Express.

The Statesman said it would only succeed in bringing religion back to the forefront, at a time when polls show the temple-mosque issue is receding from voters' minds.

Muslims surveyed by newspapers dismissed Rao's belated effort to bring the guilty to book as a political stunt. The strongly anti-BJP communists say Rao has only given the BJP an opportunity to exploit the issue.

Kalyan Singh, the BJP's Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister who allowed the mosque to be razed, is positively elated at what he calls a "god-sent opportunity" and hopes he will be sent to jail.

"We will just have to print posters giving my message from behind bars and see the impact it will have," he said.

6 more killed in Afghan fighting

KABUL, Oct 10: Rocket and artillery fire between rival guerrilla parties in the Afghan capital Kabul today killed six people and injured more than 40 in the heaviest fighting in recent weeks, hospitals said, reports Reuter.

Up to 900 rockets and mortar bombs pounded the city after fighting between the Iranian-backed Shi'ite Hezb-i-Wahdat and the hardline Sunni Muslim Ittehad-i-Islami erupted before dawn today and raged into the afternoon.

Injured were pouring into the Kartes hospital in the Hezb-i-Wahdat western district of Kabul and doctors reported at least six dead and 40 injured, including 20 seriously wounded.

Residents said it was the fiercest fighting for many weeks in a city where several people die almost daily in battles between the rival Mujahideen parties that make up the fractious coalition Islamic government.

Each side accused the other of starting the latest round. In the Karte Se hospital, shopkeeper Ghulam Abbas lay unconscious in intensive care with severe shrapnel injuries to the head.

"Ghulam was just coming from his home to check his shop... when a rocket exploded nearby," said a friend who had brought him to the hospital.

150 Filipino rebels surrender

ISABELA (Philippines), Oct 10: About 150 Muslim guerrillas who said their exiled leaders had stopped sending them support surrendered Saturday, police said today, reports AFP.

The surrender of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) members came before planned peace negotiations in Indonesia between the Philippine government and Middle East-based MNLF chief Nur Misuari.

BRIEFLY

One dies in US tanker blast: An oil tanker explosion felt four miles (6.5 kilometres) away killed at least one crew member Saturday night, sent 26 others to the hospital and ignited a raging fire on board, AP reports from Texas.

Two crew members were missing after the 8 pm CDT (0100 GMT) blast near the mouth of the Houston Ship Channel, said Coast Guard spokesman Dennis Schaefer of the New Orleans district office.

IFJ condemns arrest of Xi Yang: The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) on Saturday condemned China's arrest of Hong Kong reporter Xi Yang on charges of espionage, Reuter reports from Brussels.

"The International Federation of Journalists... is deeply disturbed by the arrest of our member Xi Yang," the Brussels-based organisation, which represents more than 320,000 journalists in some 75 countries, said in a statement.

Mafia boss held in Sicily: A reputed Mafia boss has been charged with masterminding the car-bombing death of a top prosecutor last year, AP reports from Sicily.

Salvatore Profeta was the fourth main suspect charged in the July 1992 killing of Paolo Borsellino and five of his guards. Profeta was arrested late Friday in Piombino, a coastal city about 120 kms (75 miles) southwest of Florence.

Prosecutor Giovanni Tinbera said on Saturday that some details about Profeta's alleged involvement came from mob suspects who offered information in exchange for protection from prosecution. Mobsters-turned-informants have played a key role in the government's recent anti-Mafia crackdowns.

Greek oil tanker runs aground: A Greek oil tanker ran aground off the Peloponnese peninsula Saturday, spilling oil into the sea and threatening miles of coastline, the Marine Ministry said, AFP reports from Athens.

The Illade, transporting 82,000 tonnes of oil, ran aground on rocks at the entrance to the Port of Pylos, on the southwest of the Peloponnese, forming two separate oil slicks, the ministry said.

Anti-pollution teams were dispatched to the scene to stop the oil reaching the coastline while the tanker was towed off the rocks, a ministry spokesman said.

Algeria sending aid to India: Algeria is sending tents, food, blankets and medicine to survivors of last month's earthquake in India in which 22,000 people died and thousands were left homeless, Reuter reports from Algiers.

The Foreign Ministry said Saturday the aid would be flown by military aircraft to Bombay and handed over to the Indian authorities by Algeria's ambassador Ahmed Attal.

Police officer killed in NY: A standoff between residents and police towing cars ended in the death of an officer hit in the head by a bucket of plaster pitched from a rooftop, police said, AP reports from New York.

Two vehicles were being hauled away Friday night in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighbourhood when a hostile crowd of at least 100 people confronted police and two truck operators.

Housing police officer John Williamson and other officers were called in to help. Williamson was standing by his car under a six-story building when a person threw the 30-pound (13-kilo) bucket from the roof, bashing him in the head, said Sgt. Tina Mohramann, a police spokeswoman. Williamson died at a hospital.

2 hikers killed in West Bank: Two hikers were killed Saturday in an apparent guerrilla attack in a deserted stretch of the occupied West Bank, Israeli army radio reported, AP says from Jerusalem.

The victims, who were not identified, were apparently shot to death. The bodies were found at about 2:30 pm (1230 GMT) in Wadi Kelt, a gorge cutting through the Judean Hills between Jerusalem and the West Bank town of Jericho, the report said.

Responsibility for the attempted infiltration was claimed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a radical PLO faction opposed to the Israeli-PLO accord on Palestinian autonomy.



KARACHI: Women belonging to the Mohajir Qumi Movement (MQM) chant pro-MQM slogans and raise their hands on Sunday. A celebration has started in urban Sindh due to the success of MQM candidates who contested in the Sindh provincial polls. — AFP photo

UN ban on Iraq may not go soon

MANAMA, Oct 10: Talks between Iraq and the United Nations on long-term weapons monitoring made little headway and there is no end in sight to the international embargo, UN disarmament chief Rolf Ekeus said, reports AFP.

Speaking in Bahrain late Friday following a week-long mission to Baghdad, Ekeus said "we made hardly any progress" in talks with President Saddam Hussein's government aimed at securing a deal on long-term weapons monitoring.

The Swedish diplomat said Iraq has still not acknowledged

UN Security Council Resolution 715, which sets down the conditions for long-term weapons monitoring.

"It is still an important point which is threatening any progress," said Ekeus, who heads the UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM).

"We cannot carry out our inspections in a fair and correct way" unless Baghdad accepts the resolution, he said.

"My feeling is that they will not recognise this resolution (715), which they consider a very heavy load on them, unless

they have assurances that the embargo will be lifted," he added.

The lifting of the embargo depended on both Iraqi acceptance of the resolution as well as its implementation of the long-term monitoring process, he said. A decision on the embargo would be made six months after implementation, he said.

Before leaving Baghdad on Friday, Ekeus said the commission had "received the answers" to its questions on Iraq's foreign suppliers, describing the

Nationalist China seeks int'l recognition

TAIPEI, Oct 10: Nationalist China celebrated its 82nd National Day Sunday with a colourful parade and a renewed call from President Lee Teng-hui for international recognition of the economically prosperous island, reports AP.

"The Republic of China on Taiwan is entitled to a proper international standing," Lee told an estimated 250,000 people crowded in a plaza outside the Presidential Palace.

"We should adopt pragmatic strategies so as to win for ourselves more room for our development in the international arena," he added.

Since 1988 when late president Chiang Ching-kuo died and Lee succeeded him to become president, Lee has championed a campaign for greater international recognition for Taiwan, including readmission to the United Nations.

Europe fails to define minority

VIENNA, Oct 10: Europe's leaders pledged Saturday to protect the rights of their countries' minorities. But their 32-nation meeting failed even to agree on what minority its, reports AP.

The two-day Council of Europe summit appeared to illustrate that the tug of national interests on a continent shaped by centuries of distrust remained stronger than the goal of breaking down barriers.

Against the ominous backdrop of ethnic warfare in former Yugoslavia, the Vienna Declaration, adopted by participants condemned "territorial ambitions" and "aggressive nationalism."

It proclaimed that "protection of national minorities is an essential element of stability and democratic security" across Europe. And it pledged establishment of new international human rights court to

give minorities due process. The recent coup attempt in Russia also overshadowed the meeting.

Delegates backed President Boris Yeltsin in his effort to reform Russia, but stressed that new elections were essential.

Yeltsin, who this week crushed a violent challenge to his authority in Moscow, earlier promised that he would build a modern parliamentary democracy on the ashes of the Communist system. Membership in the Council has been a stepping stone for countries emerging from decades of Communist rule, and Russia now is seeking to join.

Sources with access to the closed meeting said divergence interests of participating nations tripped up attempts to move toward an all-European yardstick for the treatment of national minorities.

Some countries, including Germany, have recently had

large influxes of Turks and immigrants from former Yugoslavia. Germany opposed defining national minorities purely by common language and customs, arguing that Turkish "guest workers," for instance, were not historically or culturally part of the country.

Other countries had different worries Britain and France would not be interested in any definition that would support separatist aspirations in Northern Ireland or Corsica, for instance.

The specter of Yugoslavia loomed over the conference. But Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar characterised the minority problem as troubling "not only central on eastern Europe but Europe as a whole."

"Human rights have human dimensions," he told reporters. "But collective rights have ethnic dimensions, that's the difference."

Cuban exiles in Miami demonstrate against Castro

MIAMI, Oct 10: Tens of thousands of Cuban exiles marched in the streets of Miami on Saturday to show opposition to Cuban President Fidel Castro, reports Reuter.

Police estimates of the crowd ranged as high as 100,000 at the peaceful three-hour rally, at which marchers burned Castro in effigy and shouted "Cuba, Cuba," and "war, war."

A woman bound in chains and draped in a Cuban flag joined the march, while many demonstrators wore buttons reading "next Christmas in Havana."

"Many of my younger friends have died in Cuba. Fidel Castro kills," said Eduardo Valdez, who claimed he had spent five years in a Cuban prison camp and moved to Miami in 1990 with his wife and son.

The march was organised by several Miami-based Cuban exile groups.

Competition to capture ME arms market

ABU DHABI, Oct 10: The United States, Russia and other states are expected to fight a tough battle to grab a share of the growing Gulf arms market when they display aircraft at an international show next month, reports AFP.

While observers expect long-standing armament campaigns to lose momentum in Israel and in neighbouring Arab states as the peace negotiations advance, they expect them to gain pace in oil-rich Gulf countries.

Fears from Iraq and Iran have prompted Saudi Arabia and its partners in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to launch their biggest drive to bolster their armies in both men and equipment.

"It is the biggest armament drive in the Gulf since oil was struck," a military expert said. "According to my information, the six members will spend more than 40 billion dollars on

arms purchases until the year 2000."

GCC states — Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — realised their vulnerability when they watched helplessly as Iran struck Saudi and Kuwaiti facilities during its 1980-88 war with Iraq.

The second shock came in 1990 when superior Iraqi troops took Kuwait in a few hours and advanced towards Saudi Arabia, forcing it to call in troops from the United States and other western powers.

GCC nations are concentrating on aircraft in their arms purchases to offset a troop shortage given their relatively low indigenous population, which accounts for nearly half the total population of 20 million.

Some of them have also ordered anti-submarine helicopters after Iran, which is locked in an island dispute with

the UAE, acquired two Russian-Built Kilo-class submarines and is expected to get a third.

"Definitely there will be major deals at the show but we do not have details yet," said Gloria Giles, sales director at the London-based fairs and exhibitions, which is organising the air show in Dubai, next month.

But competition will be tough as many countries are bringing their state-of-the-art aircraft, they all want a share of the growing Middle East market.

The United States is displaying its F-16 and F-18 jets and several types of helicopters while cash-strapped Russia will exhibit for the first time its Sukhoi 35 in addition to other fighters and helicopters.

France will exhibit its Mirage fighters and Britain will bring Hawks and Harriers while China will display for the first time its

Kh-76 jet trainer. South Africa, a newcomer to the Gulf market, will display attack helicopters.

Defence ministers and top army officers from the GCC, Iran and other countries will visit the November 7-11 show, the third to be held in Dubai. Some 420 companies from 45 countries will participate.

"It is going to be the best air show in the world this time," Giles told AFP by telephone from Dubai. The other shows are losing momentum because of world recession but here the market is growing.

Organisers said the show would feature more than 80 types of warplanes and civilian aircraft and several of them would stage demonstrations.

Russia, in bad need of cash to finance reforms, has said it is ready to sell any type of aircraft to GCC countries and set up joint arms ventures.



NEW HAVEN: US President Bill Clinton hugs his wife, Hillary as she presents him with the Medal of Merit of the Yale Law School Association on Saturday while visiting his alma mater, Yale Law School. The two met at the school and are both members of the school's class of 1973. — AFP photo

Papandreu's party may win

ATHENS, Oct 10: Greece's 8.4 million voters were called to the polls today in general elections the Socialist Pasok Party of veteran leader Andreas Papandreu was widely tipped to win, reports AFP.

A traditional ban on the sale of alcohol came into force an hour before polling stations opened at 6:30 am (0430 GMT) and will affect cafes and restaurants for a 24-hour period. Polls close at 5:55 PM (1555 GMT).

Voting for the 300 seats in the single-chamber parliament is compulsory.

Campaigning continued right up to the last minute, in breach of election regulations, with supporters of outgoing Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis, 74, and his bitter rival Papandreu, also 74, continuing a vitriolic campaign for votes.

The election campaign has been dominated by the rivalry between the two leaders.