

'CIA, Iraqi dissidents planned to kill Saddam Hussein'

LONDON, Oct 31: Secret negotiations over a plot to assassinate Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein were held in London between the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and leading



Saddam Hussein

8 die in Hyderabad bldg collapse

NEW DELHI, Oct 31: A 70-year-old building collapsed in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad today, killing eight occupants, state-run television reported, says AFP.

Twelve others were injured when the two-storey building in Begum Bazaar housing six families caved in, the network said.

Iraqi dissidents, the Sunday Times said, reports AFP. But the plot was "cancelled and then betrayed by Washington" after the covert talks last November the newspaper said today, citing an Iraqi opposition leader in exile.

After the snub by the US administration, conspirators inside Iraq were arrested and in most cases probably executed, the weekly said.

Three days of talks were held in a London hotel between a CIA official and three Iraqis, retired armed forces officer Jassem Muklus, Jordan-based dissident Sheikh Taleb al-Suhel and British-based Sa'ad Jabr, who spoke to the newspapers.

Under the plan, formulated by the Iraqis, the United States was to bombard two military installations to the north and south of Baghdad, where senior officers were preparing takeovers, Sa'ad Jabr said.

Months later Washington snubbed the plan, but Iraqi opposition forces pressed ahead and scheduled the attack for July 17, the date of a military parade in Saddam's presence, the newspaper said.

Two days before the attack, hundreds of active and retired officers were imprisoned and interrogated in Iraq, while the time and place of the parade were altered, the newspaper added.

Aristide apologises to China

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 31: Haiti's exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide Saturday apologised indirectly to China for advocating the seating of Taiwan in the United Nations, reports Reuters.

A Security Council statement supporting Aristide's return to power in Haiti was delayed for a day while Chinese envoys awaited an explanation from Haiti's UN delegation.

The compromise was a "Not verbal" or diplomatic letter that would be circulated to all members of the United Nations.

A draft of the document, in French, says in part that a 1971 UN General Assembly res-

olution would be the only "pertinent" one governing relations between Haiti and China.

The note was revised Saturday morning several times. "He (Aristide) offended the sentiments of the Chinese people," China's Deputy Ambassador, Chen Jian, said. Chen, however, indicated that the document was a compromise only, a saying "We take note of this action."

"We have strong objections to what he said about recognising the republic of Taiwan as this question has been resolved once and for all in 1971," he added.

Taiwan was ousted from the United Nations in 1971 when the assembly voted to give China's seat to Beijing.

Aristide, in a major speech to the UN General Assembly Thursday, prominently mentioned Taiwan although no one is certain what prompted him to do so.

As he began his address he said, "I cannot overlook all the other friends who are so dear to our hearts, those in the Caribbean, in America, in Europe and Asia who have given us such warm-hearted welcome."

"We are thinking particularly of the republic of China, Tai-

wan, which, it is our hope, will regain its place in the great family of the United Nations."

Taiwan recently has been wooing Central American and Caribbean states. A number of them earlier this month asked the assembly to consider giving Taiwan separate UN membership. But China strongly objected to the move and the item faded even to get onto the assembly's agenda.

China, a permanent Security Council member with veto power, considers Taiwan a part of its territory and is vehemently opposed to granting it separate UN membership.

Tamil refugees attack aid convoy, seize 4 UNHCR workers

COLOMBO, Oct 31: Hundreds of Tamil refugees Saturday seized four UN aid workers after attacking a food convoy taking supplies to a refugee camp in Sri Lanka's war-torn north, officials said, reports AFP.

The workers attached to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were still at the camp late Saturday, but were expected to be "allowed to resume their work in the camp" and leave once they distributed the food, the officials added.

Refugees at the Madhu Refugee Camp in Mannar district attacked and damaged a vehicle carrying UNHCR worker Christine Neveu, a French national, and three other Sri

Lankans who were at the head of the food convoy, they said.

UNHCR officials in the capital said they did not have any details of the incident, but believed Neveu and the other workers were safe.

The refugees were protesting the government's August decision to halt the distribution of dry rations to some 8,000 persons living in Madhu camp, the officials said.

Tension in the camp had decreased "considerably" late Saturday after the government promised the refugees that they would be provided with two weeks supply of dry rations, they said.

The government had wanted them to move into neighbouring

areas that had been recovered this year by army troops from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas.

But the refugees refused to leave Madhu for the "cleared areas," demanding they be allowed to remain in the camp where more than 20,000 other Tamil refugees lived, officials said.

The Madhu camp is a main refugee centre in the war-torn north, large parts of which are under LTTE control. Thousands of Tamils in northeast Sri Lanka have been displaced by the ongoing war between government troops and the LTTE, which is seeking to establish a separate state in the region for Sri Lanka's minority Tamils.

Ex-Salvadoran rebel leader assassinated

SAN SALVADOR, Oct 31: Unidentified gunmen on Saturday shot and killed a former leftist guerrilla commander, the second ex-rebel military leader slain in less than a week, reports AP.

Hernan Heleno Castro, 36, was shot three times Saturday morning in Santa Cruz Porriño, east of San Salvador, the capital. His body was found in his car on a highway, authorities said.

Castor, known as Comandante Carmelo, was a senior commander with the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in its 12-year civil war with the US-backed government.

New cabinet in Sudan

CAIRO, Oct 31: Sudanese President Omar El-Beshir announced Saturday the composition of a new government, the Egyptian agency Mena reported, says AFP.

The new administration, which was announced after a 10-day wait, showed few changes in comparison with its predecessor, the agency said in a report from Khartoum.

Beshir confirmed the October 20 nominations of Al-Zubair Mahmud Saleh and Hassan Abdel Rahman as Vice President and Defence Minister respectively.

Beshir had previously held the defence portfolio. Hussein Soliman Abu Saleh was retained as Foreign Minister, while Culture and Information Minister Soliman Mohamed Soliman was replaced by Education Minister Abdel Bassat Sidrat, the agency said.

The new cabinet replaced the government which stood down on October 17 following the dissolution of Sudan's Revolutionary Council (CCR), which had run the country since a 1989 coup and appointed Beshir president.

Japan to review defence plan

TOKYO, Oct 31: Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa said today there was a need to review Japan's basic defence plan in the context of the post-cold war era, and indicated the possibility of an early revision, reports Reuters.

"We must ask ourselves what a meaningful defence policy would be for this changing world," Hosokawa told some 5,000 troops in an annual review of the self-defence forces.

"The basic defence plan is no exception. We must give careful thought and ask ourselves if the plan meets the demands of the period," he said.

Hosokawa also indicated he was prepared to move forward the date for reviewing the defence plan currently targeted for fiscal 1995/96.

The speech, which also touched upon the need for arms reduction, was a departure from the rallying oratory of past prime ministers.

BRIEFLY

Ramos to visit White House: Philippine President Fidel Ramos will visit the White House next month after meeting with President Bill Clinton at an Asia-Pacific summit in Seattle, AFP reports from Washington.

"The visit of President Ramos offers an opportunity to revitalize our friendship on a basis of mutual economic and security interests and a shared commitment to democracy," the White House said in a statement Saturday.

Clinton and Ramos will discuss bilateral investment and trade "a economic links become the foundation of the relations," the statement said.

Mudslide claims 2 in Costa Rica: A mudslide buried part of a village Saturday in mountainous northeastern Costa Rica, killing two people, rescue officials said. Six people were missing, Reuter reports from San Jose.

Two Houses, a school and a community centre were buried under tons of mud when the earth gave way in the village of Laguna De Arancibia about 105 miles (170 km) from the capital, said Red Cross spokesman Olman Esquivel.

He said the mudslide followed heavy rains in an area that is severely deforested. Rescue workers digging to find the six missing people were hampered by lack of equipment, Esquivel said.

Rebels kill policeman in Egypt: Suspected Islamic militants killed a policeman in southern Egypt on Saturday, police said, AFP reports from Cairo.

Zaghul Ishak Henain, a Coptic Christian, was in front of his house in Manfalut, an Islamic fundamentalist powerbase some 400 kilometres (250 miles) south of Cairo, when the assailants blasted him with gunfire, killing him instantly. The murder brings to 223 the number of people killed since militants started a violent campaign to overthrow the government last year.

Ranariddh, Hun Sen off to Beijing: Phnom Penh Cambodian co-premiers Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen left Sunday for Beijing to take the country's new cabinet list to King Norodom Sihanouk for approval and to wish him a happy birthday, AFP reports from Phnom Penh.

The king turned 71 in a Beijing hospital today while undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. Cambodian legislators approved the line-up for the cabinet on Friday following more than one month of negotiations between the two major parties, the formerly communist Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the Royalist Funcinpec Party.

Tornado kills 3 in Georgia: A tornado killed a mother and her two children and injured at least 27 other people Saturday when a series of storms ripped through southwest Georgia, authorities said, AP reports from Leesburg.

Six houses and 15 mobile homes were destroyed, said Gov Zell Miller, who surveyed the area by helicopter with emergency management officials. About 40 houses were seriously damaged, he said.

The woman and her children, ages 3 and 14, were killed north of Albany, when the tornado hit their home, said Sandra Pressley, a sheriff's dispatcher.

Arafat iterates call to free founder of Hamas

WASHINGTON, Oct 31: PLO leader Yasser Arafat again urged Israel to release the founder of the Muslim fundamentalist movement Hamas from prison in an interview published Saturday by US news and World Report, says Reuter.

In the interview, conducted this week at Arafat's headquarters in Tunis, the Palestinian leader said it was imperative to release Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who is ill.

"It is not a bribe, it is a matter of principle," the magazine quoted him as saying.

Arafat said he had repeatedly discussed the issue with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Who has pledged to "go after the Hamas Movement."

"I told him we are now in a new atmosphere. I am responsible for all Palestinians," he said.

"The Islamic resistance movement, Hamas, opposes the Palestinian self-rule deal Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation signed in Washington September 13."

Jewish settlers go on rampage in West Bank

JERUSALEM, Oct 31: Jewish settlers went on a rampage through the occupied West Bank on Saturday night to vent their anger at the killing of an Israeli by Muslim guerillas, reports Reuter.

Firefighters said the settlers set fire to about 50 houses, a bus and at least a dozen cars and caused heavy damage in the Palestinian towns of Ramallah and El Bireh.

Security forces earlier discovered the charred body of Jewish settler Chaim Mizrahi, who was abducted on Friday, in a car near Ramallah.

The Muslim fundamentalist movement Hamas, which describes Israel's peace pact with the Palestine Liberation Organisation as a sell-out and has vowed to fight on against the Jewish state, said it killed him.

"We kidnapped the settler Chaim and stabbed him and burned his body and took his personal weapon which is an UZI machinegun," a Hamas spokesman said in a telephone call to the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation.

Thousands of settlers throughout the West Bank

A Muscovite (L) shows his passport before signing in favour of the "Choice of Russia" party near the Kremlin yesterday. Political parties are obliged to gather 100000 signatures by November 1 in order to be registered for the upcoming December parliamentary elections. — AFP photo

Georgian troops abandon two western towns

LONDON, OCT 31: Georgian government troops have abandoned the western towns of Khobi and Senaki following a counter offensive by rebel forces that according to Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze left many people dead, reports AFP.

Shevardnadze told the Georgian information agency that "a terrible tragedy" had taken place in Senaki after his forces pulled out.

"According to witnesses who managed to get out of Senaki, not only military personnel but also many civilians were shot, he said in a report carried by Itar-Tass news agency and monitored by the BBC.

Panic-stricken government forces were forced to retreat Friday evening as Shevardnadze arrived in the region to lend

moral support to his troops.

The soldiers were attempting to regroup on the outskirts of Senaki and military commanders said the units might launch an attack on Zugdidi, headquarters of ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. In a bid to quash the fighting.

The rebel offensive also forced contingents of Russian troops deployed along a vital railway link near Senaki to abandon their positions. Interfax reported quoting the press center of the Russian troops based in the Transcaucasus.

Russia had sent soldiers to Georgia following a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) accord with its newest member state, Georgia.

Shevardnadze said he had met Saturday with troops deployed around the rail lines.

Georgian troops seized Senaki two days ago and battled for control of Khobi — which they captured but only briefly Friday — in their drive to reconquer all of the territory in western Georgia seized by rebels in the past month.

France pledges to wage cultural war

BEAUNE (France), Oct 31: French Culture Minister Jacques Touban has accused the United States and Japan of fostering a cinematographic monopoly and pledged to wage a cultural war to safeguard the French film industry, reports AFP.

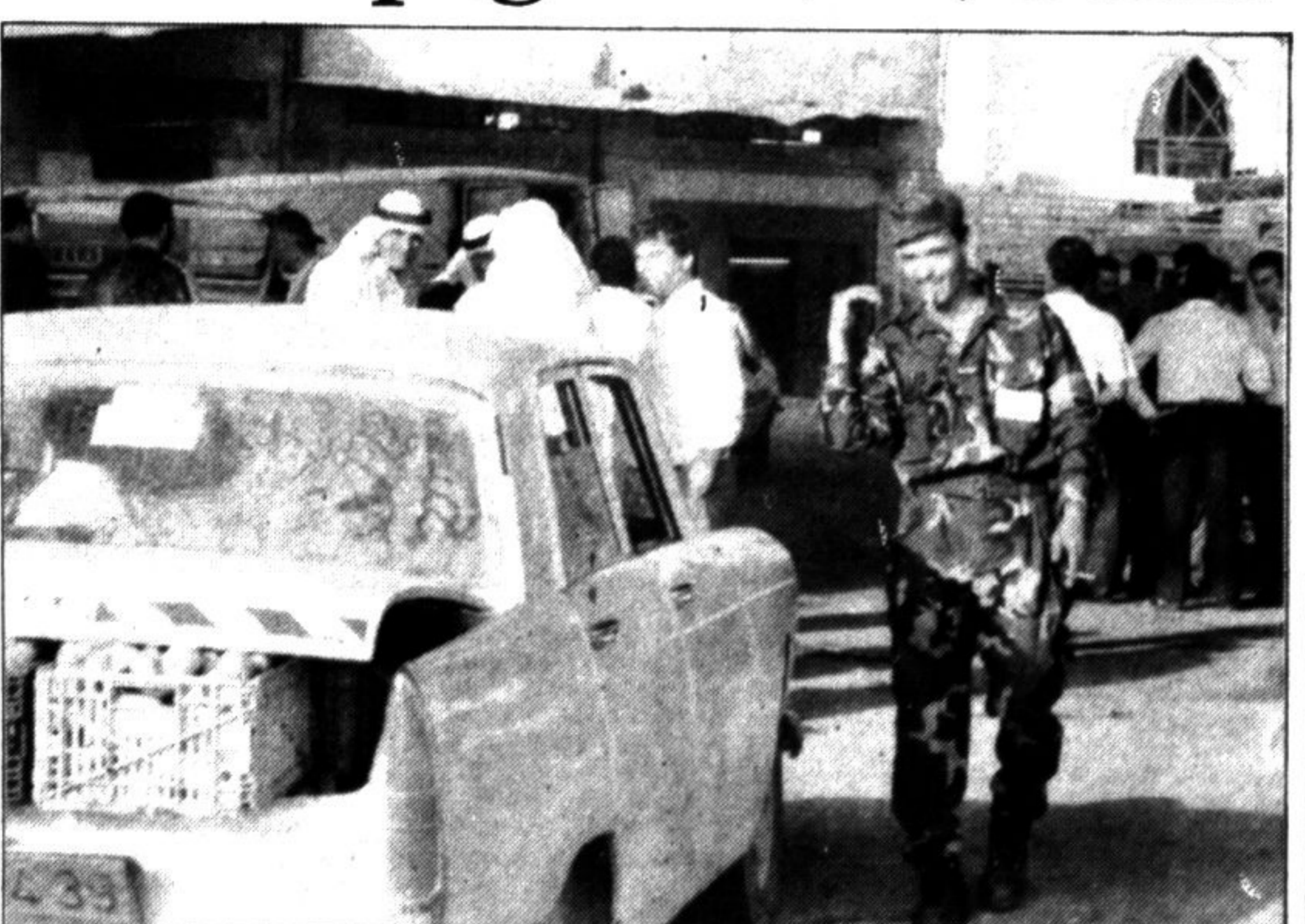
Touban told a cinema forum in this eastern central French town on Saturday that a "battle" had been declared in the name of multi-culturalism and against the "Japanese-American monopoly" in the audiovisual and cinema sectors.

His comments were the latest in a series of declarations of solidarity by French public figures in the face of what are seen as threats to the future of the country's movie industry posed by a culture clause in the ongoing GATT talks aimed at liberalising world trade.

Stressing his support for excluding culture from the GATT provisions, Touban said: "we are fighting for openness for the freedom of creative people and audiences."

"We are not seeking protection, we want to keep a window open to allow various perspectives on the world."

Europe needed to set up its own major film companies with EC backing, he added.



A member of the newly constituted "Palestinian National Guard" directs traffic in the Jericho market on Saturday. PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat ordered the establishment of a 3,000 strong "National Guard" to maintain order in Gaza and Jericho. — AFP photo

Off the Record



US entertainer Madonna (C) and two members of the cast of her current production perform on Saturday at the River Plate Stadium in Buenos Aires as Madonna continues the South American portion of her ongoing world tour. — AFP photo

117 days in white plastic coffin

SAN SEBASTIAN, Spain: A businessman held hostage for 117 days by Basque separatists described the cell where he was kept as a white plastic coffin, reports AP.

Julio Iglesias Zamora was dropped off in the woods Friday night and returned to his home in San Sebastian, ending an ordeal that roused unprecedented public opposition to the ETA. The organisation has killed more than 700 people in its 25-year campaign for independence for the three Basque provinces of northern Spain.

At a news conference Saturday, Iglesias Zamora, who appeared to be in good physical condition, said he had barely enough space to stand up or lie down in the approximately 6-foot square (1.8-meter square), 5-foot (1.5-meter) deep plastic container where he was held.

"My first and last impression was that this was a coffin," said the 42-year-old engineer who manages a small electronics firm owned by his uncle.

Asked how his captors treated him, Iglesias Zamora said their concern was similar to being given suntan cream as protection against sunburn while nailed to a cross in the open air.

Iglesias Zamora was kidnapped July 5 by members of the Basque separatist group ETA as he left the plant on the outskirts of San Sebastian to celebrate the birthday of one of his children.

ETA, whose name is an acronym in the Basque language for Basque Homeland and Liberty, later demanded 3.8 million dollars for his release.

When asked if the ransom had been paid, Iglesias Zamora said he didn't know.

News reports a month ago indicated most of the ransom had been paid. A family spokesman denied the reports at the time, but did not mention the issue at Saturday's news conference and was not asked about payments.

Donor gets what he paid for

KINGSTON: A man who donated 100 dollars to a police departments K-9 unit was arrested on drug charges after his four-legged beneficiaries allegedly sniffed him out, reports AP.

Bruce Rappaport was arrested Wednesday after drug-sniffing dogs from the Town of Ulster police allegedly uncovered cocaine and other drugs in his home. He was jailed in lieu of 225,000 dollar bond.

During their search, officers found a thank-you note from the police department for the donation Rappaport made.

"Obviously, he got what he paid for," said Daniel Miller, the Town of Ulsters chief of police.

Rappaport was charged with possession of a controlled substance, sale of a controlled substance and unlawful possession of marijuana.

Rappaport made the donation after police investigated an accidental fire at his home last year, Miller said.

Detectives in the community near Albany began investigating Rappaport about four months ago. Undercover officers said they bought an eighth of an ounce (3.5 grams) of cocaine from Rappaport on Wednesday and police returned to his house later that night with the dogs and a search warrant.

Maniac kills himself

El Cajon, California: A man opened fire from his apartment window on a group of children playing in a parking lot Saturday, killing a 2-year-old boy and a woman and wounding five other toddlers, police said, reports Reuter.

The man, in his 60s, then set fire to his apartment and apparently died in the blaze, police Chief Jack Smith said in the San Diego suburb of El Cajon.

Algerian rebels to free 3 French consular staff

ALGIERS, Algeria, Oct 31: Three French consular workers kidnapped a week ago will be freed Monday, according to a tract released Sunday by the Islamic extremists claiming to hold them, reports AP.

The release will coincide with the 39th anniversary of the revolt that led to this North African country's independence from French rule, the tract said.