

Cabinet reshuffle likely Thai protestors demand PM's resignation

BANGKOK, Oct 20: About 2,000 protestors blocked traffic Monday in the heart of Bangkok's central business district demanding that Thailand's prime minister step down, reports AP.

At the same time, all 48 ministers in the deeply unpopular government prepared to resign to pave the way for a Cabinet reshuffle.

The protestors gathered at lunchtime, knocking over crowd barriers and blocking the busy street while they chanted slogans against the premier for wrecking Thailand's economy. About 100 riot police stood back as the crowd — mostly office workers and businessmen — peacefully protested. Many wore T-shirts printed with Chavalit's face and a caption: "Unwanted!"

The protest came as newspaper reported a showdown was looming between Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchahud and

Chatchai Choonhavan, leader of the No 2 party in the coalition that could topple the premier.

"It's time the prime minister resigned," said Pairoj Phosongphan, 35, one of the protestors, denouncing higher prices and lost jobs due to the bad economy. "No one can stand him anymore."

Protest leaders called for Prem Tinsulanonda, a former prime minister and privy councillor to King Bhumibol Adulyadej, to form a caretaker government until elections can be held under a recently approved constitution aimed at cleaning up political corruption.

Leaders of Chavalit's New Aspiration Party and Chatchai's Chart Pattana Party planned separate meetings later Monday, and a major government shakeup was considered imminent.



Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu-Kashmir (left), presents a "samawar," the Kashmiri traditional teapot to Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral at the International Convention Centre in Srinagar Sunday. Gujral was in Srinagar to address Indian and foreign industrialists for making investments in the state. At least 20 delegates from different countries participated in the conference. —AP/UNB photo

'Israel to limit settlements to a necessary minimum'

JERUSALEM, Oct 20: Israel will limit construction in Jewish settlements to a "necessary minimum" its foreign minister said Monday amid reports that the government is ready to freeze new building projects on disputed land for several months, reports AP.

Israel's offer came as US Mideast coordinator Dennis Ross shuttled between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to try to ensure progress in renewed peace negotiations.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to meet with Ross on Monday morning. The United States had demanded a "timeout" in settlement construction.

The Haaretz daily said Netanyahu would tell Ross that Israel will not start new building projects in settlements for several months, but that construction already under way would be completed.

The offer was unlikely to satisfy the Palestinians who

have demanded a complete halt of building in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where they hope to establish a future state.

Asked about a possible construction curb, Levy told Israel Radio: "We want to move forward and not create a situation that would make all our efforts to advance the process irrelevant. Therefore, there are efforts to continue with (only) the necessary minimum" of construction.

Jewish settler leaders also said Monday that they had learned Netanyahu was ready for compromise.

"We heard there is an intention to carry out a freeze," Aharon Domb, spokesman of the council representing the 144 settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, told The Associated Press.

However, Zvi Hendel and

Hanan Porath, two legislators who represent the settlers, told Israel Radio that Netanyahu assured them there would be no "timeout" in construction.

Jerusalem's Mayor, Ehud Olmert, said there would be no slowdown in construction in east Jerusalem, where Israel is building a large Jewish neighbourhood. The eastern sector is claimed by the Palestinians as a future capital, and the start of construction in March triggered the breakdown of peace talks.

Olmert said Israel was determined to complete the neighbourhood.

It can't be otherwise. It's an indivisible part of Israel's national consensus," Olmert said on Israel Radio.

Netanyahu has made conflicting promises in the past in an attempt to please the Americans as well as far-right members of his coalition who have enough support to topple his government.

BRIEFLY

Strong typhoon hits Philippines

Officials shut down power to the northern province of Cagayan to minimize damage and casualties Monday after a powerful typhoon hit the Philippines, knocking down trees and power lines, AP reports from Manila.

Another powerful typhoon was headed toward Japan after ravaging the Northern Mariana Islands. Typhoon Ivan, with sustained winds of 165 kilometres per hour (105 mph) and gusts of up to 200 kilometres per hour (125 mph), landed early Monday near the town of Aparri in Cagayan province, weather officials said.

Flash flood claims 19 in ME: Torrential rains throughout Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Palestinian-controlled territories have killed 19 people over the weekend, with more rains forecast for later this week, AP reports from Jerusalem.

In Israel the bodies of a 7-year-old Bedouin shepherdess and an Israeli man were discovered Sunday in the Negev Desert in flash floods caused by the first heavy rains of the season. Saturday's flooding across southern Israel and in the West Bank, has so far killed 13 people, including six who died when their van skidded on wet roads and smashed head-on into a truck. The crash victims reportedly were five Romanian workers and their Bedouin driver.

Japanese Empress turns 63: In interviews to mark her 63rd birthday, Empress Michiko expressed deep sympathy Monday for the two children of the late British former Princess Diana, AP reports from Tokyo.

"My heart goes out to her bereaved family in their sorrow and I only pray that the two young princes she left behind will grow up sound and healthy," the empress said in a statement. Diana, who visited Japan three times and met with Michiko each time, was killed in a Paris car crash on Aug 31. Michiko, the first commoner to marry the crown prince, now Emperor Akihito, 63, has two sons and a daughter. She recalled seeing Diana for the first time at her wedding.

Fresh quake hits Italy: A fresh earthquake measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale hit central Italy on Sunday, the latest in a series of strong quakes that left thousands homeless over the past three weeks, Reuter reports from Rome.

A spokesman for the National Institute of Geophysics in Rome said the latest tremor hit at 6 pm (1600 GMT) its centre was in the same region of Umbria hit by quakes measuring 5.5, 5.6 and 4.9 since September 26.

Heavy rains in Kenya kill 9: Heavy rain washed out a bridge and triggered a mudslide Sunday, killing nine people on Kenya's Indian Ocean coast, AP reports from Mombasa, Kenya.

The deluge caused a mudslide in western Mombasa that killed a family of five, whose house was destroyed along with a dozen others, said police spokesman Sammy Maritim. Four people were killed when a truck plunged into the Bogolo River, where a flash flood had washed out a bridge.

US, ROK to conduct war games: The United States and South Korea will conduct a two-week field training exercise later this month, the US military command in Seoul said Monday, AP reports from Seoul.

Code-named "Foil Eagle," the annual drill will take place from October 27 through November 8 in various parts of South Korea and involved most of South Korea's 650,000-strong military and the 37,000 US troops stationed in Seoul, it said. The exercise, the 36th since 1961, is "designed to test rear area protection operations and major command, control and communication systems," the command said.

Mahathir cancels trip to London: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has cancelled a trip to London to recover from a bad bout of influenza, his office said yesterday, AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The prime minister is recovering well from his flu but needs more rest. His official visit to London from October 21 and 22 where he is scheduled to address several conferences has been cancelled," the office said in a statement. The 72-year-old premier will, however, attend the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland, from October 24-27.



A jet takes off from the deck of the US Navy aircraft carrier USS Nimitz in the Persian Gulf near Iran Sunday. The Nimitz arrived in the area Oct 11, two weeks ahead of schedule to keep Iran and Iraq in check after their warplanes violated a no-fly zone over southern Iraq in September. — AP/UNB photo

'Fall of UP govt may pave way for general election'

NEW DELHI, Oct 20: The imminent fall of Hindu nationalist government in one of India's key northern states could pave the way for general elections, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

The predicted collapse of the Uttar Pradesh government, which is expected to lose a confidence vote on Tuesday, could trigger a shift in national alliances which would throw the future of India's fragile minority coalition in doubt, they said.

The Hindu nationalists, the main opposition party in New Delhi, look set to lose power in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, after a power sharing agreement collapsed after one month.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, (BJP, Indian People's Party) had hoped the link with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a party

representing low-caste Hindus, could be duplicated in other states.

On Sunday, however, the BSP withdrew from the alliance, accusing the BJP of discrimination against lower castes. The BJP will go into Tuesday's confidence vote with only 175 out of 425 state assembly seats.

The Hindu newspapers said the next few days "would have a definite bearing" on the date for the next general elections in India.

It said the failure of the BJP — India's largest party but whose radical pro-Hindu policies have been condemned by other political groups — to set up a successful regional coalition had damaged its credibility as a national force.

India's next general elections are due in 2001.

The current United Front coalition government in New Delhi, however, an alliance of more than a dozen parties from the centre and left, has been plagued by infighting during its six months in power and is not expected to last long.

The BJP's setback in Uttar Pradesh, termed a "third rate political force" by the Asian Age daily, could lead to the Congress (I) Party, India's second largest political group, trying to woo the BSP as well as other groups.

The Congress keeps the United Front in power with its parliamentary support but has clear designs on replacing it with its own coalition.

Uttar Pradesh has been regarded as the political heart of the country and has produced most of India's prime ministers.

Confrontations building over Commonwealth agenda

Sanjay Suri writes from London

Confrontations are building over the controversial Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group ahead of the Commonwealth summit meeting in Edinburgh later this week.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) will present its report to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) on its findings so far. The heads of government meeting is taking place from October 24 to 27.

The brief of CMAG is to report on violations of the Harare principles on observance of good government and human rights which were set out at the CHOGM in Harare in 1991 and then followed up with the setting up of the ministerial action group in Auckland two years ago.

The report by CMAG this year will be an indicator of how far Commonwealth countries are willing to accept the role of CMAG in internal affairs. One senior official has said that clear differences have developed already on the role of CMAG.

The eight member countries of CMAG at present are Britain, Canada, Ghana, Jamaica, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The group has investigated "serious or persistent violations of the principles contained in the Harare declaration."

The Harare declaration binds Commonwealth members to support democracy and fundamental human rights. Any transgression of these values can therefore invite a response by the Commonwealth which can lead to suspension of a member state. At present Nigeria has been suspended from the Commonwealth.

The follow-up declaration in New Zealand says: "Where a

member country is perceived to be clearly in violation of the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, and particularly in the event of an unconstitutional overthrow of a democratically elected government, appropriate steps should be taken to express the collective concern of the Commonwealth countries and to encourage the restoration of democracy within a reasonable time frame."

That agreement stresses instances of overthrow of a legitimate government, but does not confine itself to such instances only. The Harare declaration

and its follow-up arm the Commonwealth with powers to intervene in any member state where human rights are seen to be violated.

The Commonwealth has often been divided with what are called the "ABC" countries on one side and the rest on the other. The "ABC" countries are Australia and New Zealand, Britain and Canada, the four developed countries of the grouping. The Commonwealth itself is now a group of 54 countries that were once a part of the British empire.

— India Abroad News Service

Looting continues in Brazzaville

BRAZZAVILLE, Oct 20: Angolan troops held Congo's main airport near here Sunday after they helped Congolese rebels seize it and win a four month civil war which the rebel leader said left around 10,000 people dead, reports AFP.

It was the first confirmation of an Angolan troop presence near the Congolese capital and indicated deeper involvement by Luanda then previously known.

An AFP journalist said the few soldiers at the Maya Maya International Airport were Angolan who told him they had been there a weekend were scheduled to stay two months.

Informed sources in Luanda said Angolan soldiers helped militia loyal to Denis Sassou-Nguesso to take the airport from President Pascal Lissouba's forces after a failed bid earlier in the month.

The airport fell Wednesday when troops from Angola's northern Cabinda province were sent as reinforcements, said an Angolan source.

It was reported last week that Angolan troops helped rebel forces take Congo's oil port of point, Noire.

Elsewhere in Brazzaville, the looting carried out by the 2,000 strong Cobra militia since their victory continued unabated.

Hundreds of cars stolen by the gun-toting fighters drove through the city with goods plundered from the central and southern suburbs that had been under the control of Lissouba's forces.

There were indications, however, that moves were being made to rein in the lawlessness ahead of Wednesday, when Sassou-Nguesso is expected to arrive in the city.

Money in Swiss bank accounts legally earned, says Benazir

LAHORE, Oct 20: Benazir Bhutto on Sunday slammed Swiss authorities for freezing 17 bank accounts belonging to her family and denied charges the money was earned illegally while she was prime minister of Pakistan, reports AP.

"My family has some bank accounts abroad," she said in the Punjab capital Lahore. "But we earned all this money legally."

Pakistan's anti-corruption commission is pursuing allegations Benazir Bhutto siphoned off millions of dollars before she was dismissed as prime minister last November on charges of misrule and corruption.

Switzerland has barred withdrawals from the accounts until any legal proceedings in Swiss courts are completed. Pakistan's Accountability Commissioner Saif-ur Rehman said Saturday.

Spice Girls back on track

LONDON, Oct 20: The Spice Girls topped Elton John's tribute to Princess Diana from the top of the British singles chart after six weeks, reports AP.

But the reworked version of "Candle in the Wind," recorded immediately after Elton sang it at Diana's funeral on September 6, has become Britain's biggest-selling single ever.

And it may soon become the world's top-selling single.

In Britain, it topped the 3.6 million record sales achieved by Band Aid's "Do They Know It's Christmas" by at least 200,000 copies, raising an estimated 10 million pounds (dhs 16 million) for Diana's Memorial Fund.

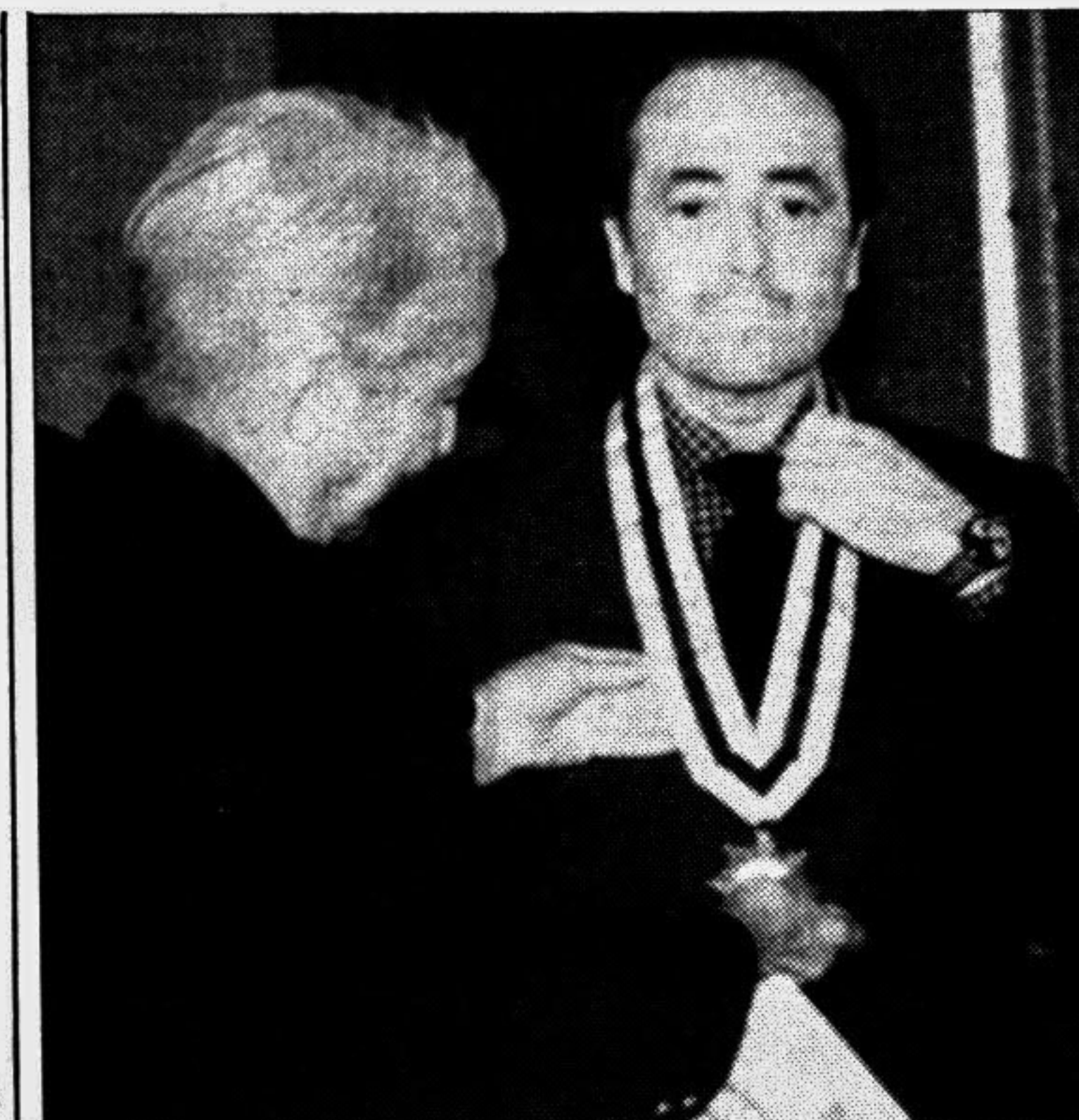
More than 30 million copies of "Candle in the Wind" have been sold worldwide and it is closing on Bing Crosby's all-time best-seller "White Christmas," which has sold around 35 million copies over more than four decades.

Stress management reduces risks of heart-attack

CHICAGO, Oct 20: A stress-management programme helped heart patients reduce their risk of heart attacks or the need for surgery by 74 per cent, according to a new study, reports AP.

"In addition to diet quitting smoking and controlling blood pressure, you need to think about managing stress," to avert potentially fatal heart problems, said the lead researcher, James A. Blumenthal, a professor of medical psychology at Duke University Medical Centre.

All of 107 patients studied suffered from impaired blood flow to the heart in mental stress tests or during normal daily activities when they wore heart monitors, researchers said.



Spanish tenor Jose Carreras (right), is presented with the "Cultural Award" by Together for Peace Foundation's president Maria Pia Fanfani of Italy, during a ceremony in Rome Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Fergie for forgiveness

LONDON: The Duchess of York, whose sexual indiscretions and brash behaviour helped undermine respect for the royal family, has written asking their forgiveness, according to a news report Monday, says AP.

The London tabloid The Sun quoted an unidentified family friend as saying that the former Sarah Ferguson, ex-wife of prince Andrew, has sent handwritten letters to Andrew's mother Queen Elizabeth II, to Prince Charles and the Queen's daughter Princess Anne.

The Sun quoted the friend as saying: "They (the letters) are all basically asking for forgiveness. She acknowledges that she has behaved badly in the past. She makes it very clear she wants to put the past behind her. She says it is time to forgive and forget."

The Sun quoted the friend as saying that the letters sent the week after the funeral of Princess Diana, Charles' ex-wife were "long and rambling and very emotional" and had shocked the recipients.

The Sun quoted the friend as saying the letters were being interpreted as a bid by the 38-year-old duchess to worm her way back into the royal family and smooth the path for a possible reconciliation with Andrew.

The paper quoted an unidentified royal aide as saying: "It can only be seen as a terrible step backwards after everything that has happened. We have to be seen to move on and the public still believe that Fergie has badly damaged the royal family."

Sarah married Andrew in 1986. They divorced in May last year but news reports have said they remain on good terms.

In 1992 before her separation later that year from Andrew, sneak pictures published in British newspapers showed the topless duchess snuggling with her former financial adviser John Bryan and having her toes kissed by him.

Last year, British news reports said that the bin-spending, fun-loving duchess, at the time of the reports, owed her bank 3 million pounds (dhs 4.8 million).

Man wins restraining order against wife

HARARE: A Zimbabwean man won a restraining order against his wife after telling a court she frequently beat him up and poured cold water over him while he was sleeping, a newspaper reported yesterday, says AFP.

Describing his wife as 'huge in size' he said she also "pulled by private parts" and frog-marched him around in front of his friends.

The man, who was not named by the newspaper, fled their home but was followed by his wife who took away the small bus with which he earned his living.

The court ordered the wife to keep the peace and return her husband's bus.

US set to give non-proliferation certificate to China

WASHINGTON, Oct 20: Despite growing evidence of clandestine Chinese nuclear weapons technology transfers to Pakistan, the U.S. administration is set to certify that this is not happening, reports from India Abroad News Service.

Observers here say the administration hopes to make the certification the centrepiece of the summit between President Bill Clinton and visiting Chinese President Jiang Zemin. This will clear the way for U.S. companies to sell nuclear power reactors to China.

Although its own intelligence agencies and leading nuclear nonproliferation experts deny this, Washington insists that China is no longer violating the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) it signed in 1992 and has stopped exports of nuclear weapon-related knowhow to nations like Pakistan and Iran.

Independent nonproliferation experts here say the government must give such a certificate on the condition that Beijing joins the Nuclear Suppliers Group. This would require full-scope safeguards on its exports "and thereby cut off

all nuclear transfers to Pakistan unless Pakistan accepts full-scope safeguards," says Paul Leventhal, president of the Nuclear Control Institute.

Leventhal has also criticised China for supplying, since 1995, "low-enriched uranium to India's U.S.-supplied Tarapur nuclear power station without requiring full-scope safeguards — an arrangement in which the United States quietly acquiesces."

But State Department spokesman James Rubin denied that the administration was trying to push through the certification to Beijing in time for the Clinton-Jiang summit.

Rubin declared, "We are not going to let artificial deadlines interfere with our determination to protect the United States from the threat of nuclear proliferation."

"We are not going to — when it comes to nonproliferation, that is the highest priority of the Secretary in protecting our citizens from threats abroad," he added.

Every time intelligence reports or experts like Leventhal whose institute is a nonproliferation research and advocacy centre, have exposed fresh violations by Beijing, the administration has rejected them as being without merit.

Testifying before the House International Relations Committee, which examined the implementation of the U.S.-China Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation Agreement that has been in limbo since 1985 because of Beijing's failure to meet the requirements of U.S. and international nonproliferation laws, Leventhal cautioned the government.

He told Congress that President Clinton "should not certify China's nonproliferation credentials and thereby authorise nuclear trade with China until China agrees to require full-scope safeguards as a condition of its supplying nuclear-related items to non-nuclear weapon states."

He noted that the "significance of China as the only major nuclear supplier that today does not require full-scope safeguards on all nuclear exports can be seen in Pakistan." Leventhal said that "Even if China lives up to its May 1996 com-

mitment not to supply unsafeguarded nuclear facilities, there remains the possibility of diversion of Chinese exports from safeguarded to unsafeguarded facilities in Pakistan."

China was the supplier of the Khushab military reactor to Pakistan and had been asked by the U.S. not to supply the heavy water Pakistan needs to begin operating the reactor.

He said it would "be a major blow to US nonproliferation leadership if the U.S.-China agreement were activated and subsequently a Pakistani weapons-production reactor were started up through the use of Chinese-supplied heavy water."

"Even if the President certifies China's nonproliferation commitments at the present time," Leventhal added, "He might well find it impossible to re-certify China in the future under such circumstances," he said.

Leventhal acknowledged that the President is "not explicitly required by law to obtain full-scope safeguards commitment from China," but said "One cannot but wonder how he could certify China's

nonproliferation credentials without one."

"If China gets the green light to receive U.S. nuclear goods before its illicit nuclear commerce with countries such as Pakistan and Iran has ended and before its internal and external nuclear controls are put in place and shown to be effective, U.S. nuclear technology and materials could wind up in the nuclear-weapons programmes of countries hostile to the United States," he warned.

He also predicted that sending reactors and fuel to China before outstanding nonproliferation questions have been resolved "could have another undesirable effect — signalling to other nations that the United States is prepared to bend its own law and policy to accommodate recalcitrant nuclear trading partners."

Leventhal called on the Congress to enact a requirement for a waiting period of at least one year from the date of certification "Before China can receive nuclear goods pursuant to this agreement, and a requirement for Presidential re-certification of China each time

there is an application for a major export or retransfer to China under the agreement."

However, State Department spokesman Rubin dismissed Leventhal's testimony and asserted that China had lived up to its commitment to the United States not to provide assistance to unsafeguarded reactors.

"I do note that there are often allegations made, and those of us who have specific information, through a variety of means, have to rebut such allegations," he added. "There are people who, when they look at these problems, want a level of compliance that is unrealistic," the spokesman said taking a swipe at Leventhal.

"And there are those of us who need to examine what really would contribute to a programme, as opposed to a generalised policy of general assistance that doesn't contribute to a programme," he said.

"So our measurement," Rubin noted, "is whether they are providing assistance to an unsafeguarded programme. (And) it is my understanding that we still believe they are living up to that commitment."