

Arabs call for restraint

UNSC weighs next step in face of Iraqi defiance

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 31: Iraq is warning it is ready for "military confrontation" over its move to expel US arms inspectors. Meanwhile, Washington and its partners are weighing options, including new sanctions, to force Baghdad to back down, reports AP.

Iraq escalated its confrontation with the United Nations on Thursday, barring two American members of the UN weapons inspection team, who arrived aboard a UN plane from Bahrain.

The Iraqis have given the 10 Baghdad-based Americans on the 40-member inspection team one week to leave the country. The Security Council has warned of unspecified "serious consequences" if Iraq does not back down.

The 15-member Security Council was to meet again today to try to figure out how to respond to the Iraqi challenge.

US officials believe President Saddam Hussein's move to get rid of the American inspectors was spurred by divisions that emerged in the council last week.

Five members — France, Russia, Egypt, China and Kenya — had refused to support a US-British resolution to slap a travel ban on Iraqi officials for failing to cooperate with the weapons inspectors.

"We certainly think that any time that the council's unanimity is questioned, that Iraq has made a habit of trying to exploit this type of development," State Department spokesman James Rubin said.

On Thursday, however, Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov summoned the Iraqi ambassador and warned that Moscow did not support the "Inadmissible restrictions" imposed on the weapons inspectors.

Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who has close ties with Saddam, assured Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in a telephone conversation that "Iraq cannot pick and choose who the inspectors are," Rubin said.

Despite the international pressure, Iraq remained defiant.

Meanwhile, six years after the Gulf War, few if any Arab countries would back yet another attack on a fellow Arab nation. While Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is not well-liked in the Arab world, the UN sanctions and the hardships they have caused are even less popular.

The White House has warned that it will "carry out the will of the international community," but many Arab officials have urged restraint.

Israeli-Palestinian talks to resume Monday

WASHINGTON, Oct 31: The United States said on Thursday Israeli-Palestinian peace talks will resume in the Washington area next Monday after a delay for consultations within the Israeli government, reports Reuter.

The US State Department, which early this week showed growing impatience with the delays, said on Thursday Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat had agreed to the new schedule for peace talks.

The meetings are scheduled to take place next Monday and we hope that all the parties are prepared to negotiate seriously," State Department spokesman James Rubin said.

Foreign Minister David Levy will represent Israel at the talks, facing senior PLO negotiator Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, for the Palestinians, he added.

The Washington talks were originally meant to start early this week but the Israeli government took days to agree on

how broad a mandate Levy should have.

AP adds from Ramallah: Yasser Arafat's Cabinet agreed Thursday to attend peace talks with Israel in Washington next week, despite doubts about Israel's intention to hand over more West Bank land, officials said.

Palestinian Cabinet ministers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said they decided after a six-hour debate to attend the talks.

US pressing Israel to hand over 10pc of West Bank

Meanwhile, the United States is pressing Israel to give the Palestinians another 10 per cent of the West Bank and commit to a starting date for a troop pullback during US-hosted peace talks next week, Israeli newspapers said Friday.

The United States appears to be siding with the Palestinians who say the scope of the Israeli redeployment in the West Bank must be the key issue in the talks.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin, left, receives a bowl from Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Thursday. Jiang's trip to Philadelphia included stops at Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

2 sentenced to death in Egypt: An Egyptian military court Thursday sentenced to death two brothers for a bus attack in which nine German tourists and an Egyptian driver were killed, Reuter reports from Cairo.

Saber Farahat Abu El-Ela and his brother Mahmoud had pleaded guilty to the charges of premeditated murder, attacking tourists and damaging the economy through violence and terrorism.

At the start of the trial that began on Oct 14, Saber El-Ela said his only regret was that the victims of the Sept 18 attack in central Cairo had not been Jews.

Hillary begins Ireland visit: Hillary Rodham Clinton urged all sides in Northern Ireland to take risks for peace and promised Ireland's government on Thursday that the United States would remain deeply involved in the effort, AP reports from Dublin.

The wife of President Bill Clinton arrived Thursday night for a short visit and will be in Northern Ireland on Friday.

"I'd like to highlight two themes on this short visit here and tomorrow in Belfast: compromise and reconciliation," Mrs. Clinton told Prime Minister Bertie Aherne and a crowd of dignitaries at Dublin Castle.

30 drown as boat sinks in China: Thirty villagers hired to dig a grave drowned when their overloaded wooden boat sank in a reservoir in southern Guangdong province, AP reports from Beijing.

The group had just set out early Wednesday for the opposite side of the lake, near Chaoyang city east of Hong Kong, when the boat sank about 20 metres offshore, the local newspaper Yangcheng Evening News said in a report. A nearby boat managed to rescue only 11 people from the 14-meter-deep water, the report said.

32 buried in Chinese mine blast: A powerful gas explosion inside a coal mine in central China has left 32 people buried and presumed dead, AP reports from Beijing.

The blast at Pingdingshan, a major coal mining area in Henan province, occurred just after midnight on Saturday, the newspaper Yangcheng Evening News said in a report. The mine was operating illegally and most of the miners were untrained migrants from nearby provinces, the report said.

Afghan bandits kill 8 in Iran: Eight Iranian villagers were killed this week in a cross-border attack by an armed group of Afghans supported by the Taliban, an Iranian newspaper reported Thursday, says AFP from Tehran.

The daily Kayhan said the attack took place in the eastern Iranian village of Chahak, near Rotbat-Jam, some 15 km from the Iran-Afghan border.

According to the state-run paper, the intruders were "armed Afghan bandits supported by the Taliban." It gave no reasons for the attack.

11 soldiers killed in Senegal: Eleven Senegalese soldiers and 80 separatist rebels were killed in Casamance in the last two days during fierce fighting between the two sides that was ongoing Thursday, authorities said, AFP reports from Dakar.

The fighting was taking place southeast of Ziguinchor, the main city in southern Casamance and a stronghold of the rebels. The region was over run by the army last week.

5 foreigners kidnapped in Yemen: Yemeni tribesmen kidnapped an American and released a Briton on Thursday while four Russian captives spent the ninth day in a tribe's custody, officials said, AP reports from Sana'a.

Each case involved a different Yemeni tribe. At least 30 tourists have been kidnapped in Yemen this year, but all have been released unharmed.

French scientist jailed for spying: A Paris court jailed a French nuclear physicist for nine years on Thursday for delivering top secret documents on France's nuclear tests to Soviet spies, Reuters reports from Paris.

Francis Temperville, 40, admitted passing on documents but said he did not realize he was working for the Soviet Union.

He was convicted of photocopying and delivering about 100 documents to Soviet agents in 1989-90 while working at France's atomic energy commission.

China, Vietnam to open road traffic: Vietnamese and Chinese officials are expected to formally open more than a dozen land border crossings to passenger and cargo traffic, official media reported Friday, AP reports from Hanoi.

The two countries have been working to improve relations along their once-tense border — the site of a brief war in 1979. Although there are 22 crossing points, only six had been officially cleared in the past for border trade and passenger traffic.



A worker holds new Kalashnikov submachine guns before they are checked at the machine-building works producing the famous AK assault rifles in the Ural Mountains city of Izhevsk on Wednesday. The works is going to celebrate the 50th anniversary since the first of 70 million AK-47s went into production and the 78th birthday of Mikhail Kalashnikov on Nov 10. — AP/UNB photo

Gunmen attack Shi'ite mosque in Karachi: 1 dead

KARACHI, Oct 31: Gunmen sprayed bullets at a Shi'ite Muslim mosque killing one elderly cleric and injuring his companion, police officials said Friday, reports AP.

The attack late on Thursday occurred outside the Shi'ite mosque, Imam Bargah Kauser in Karachi's troubled Orangi district.

The 75-year-old cleric, Syed Shammir Hasan Kazi, died immediately, according to police.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack, the first assault on a mosque in one year. Police officials, who wouldn't be identified, suspected rival Sunni Muslims.

"It was religiously motivated," said Hasan Turabi, a Shi'ite Muslim leader. He blamed the militant Sunni group known as the Guardians of the Friends of the Prophet.

"We have told the police who the culprits are, but they won't do anything," said Turabi.

13th death anniversary India pays homage to Indira

NEW DELHI, Oct 31: President KR Narayanan, Vice-President Krishan Kant and Prime Minister I K Gujral, led the nation in paying homage to late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at Shakti Sthal here on her 13th death anniversary today, reports PTI.

While devotional music of Pandit Jasraj mingled with the morning stillness, a stream of people, including former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka, former ministers and Congress workers offered flowers at the Samadhi.

The Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust organised a function at No 1, Safdarjung Road, the official residence of the late leader. It was attended by the president, the vice-president, the prime minister, former president Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma, Congress president Sitaram Kesri and a host of other senior leaders.

Pinochet's successor selected

SANTIAGO, Chile, Oct 31: Chile's president chose a widely respected career officer Thursday to succeed former military dictator Gen Augusto Pinochet as army commander in chief, reports AP.

Gen Ricardo Izurieta, 54, was chosen for a list of five finalists presented by Pinochet, who must step down as army chief in March after almost 25 years in power. The appointment of Izurieta, who is considered non-political, was hailed by foes of Pinochet.

Defence Minister Edmundo Perez made the announcement as a clearly moved Pinochet, 81, stood behind him. The change will take place on March 10, one day before the deadline for Pinochet's retirement set in the constitution written by his 1973-90 military regime.

Izurieta, a former military attache to the United States and Israel, among other military posts, is currently the army chief of staff.

Mars Pathfinder mission to end next week

PASADENA, California, Oct 31: The Mars Pathfinder mission, described as the most successful planetary project ever, will officially end next week, space officials said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Communications with the Pathfinder lander and the Mars rover Sojourner ceased on Sept 27 and all attempts to reestablish contact since then had failed, project manager Brian Muirhead said.

Signals would continue to be sent to the craft in order to try to get them to "call home" until Nov 4 — exactly four months since the landing on the red planet — after which the mission would be declared officially ended, he said.

'Opposition must not be ruled out of plot' More people involved in coup attempt: Chiluba

LUSAKA, Oct 31: Zambian President Frederick Chiluba said on Thursday more people were involved in a coup attempt against his government earlier this week, and a top official said the opposition must not be ruled out of the plot, reports Reuter.

State radio and television said the Zambian leader had told supporters who marched to his official state house that the government was still investigating the attempt by some junior army officers to overthrow him on Tuesday.

"The information we are getting is that more people were involved," he said, "just hours after the United States and Zambian opposition leaders called on him not to use the force to crack down on his opponents."

Chiluba declared a state of emergency on Wednesday, and the government has arrested at least 17 people suspected to have planned the coup. He gave no indication of any new arrests on Thursday.

The president has said he does not suspect the opposition, but the chairman of his ruling Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), Sikota Win a thought otherwise.

Citing a statement made just

days before the coup attempt by Chiluba's arch-rival, former president Kenneth Kaunda, that Zambia's political situation was "explosive" Wina told the president on Thursday their involvement could not be ruled out.

State radio said Wina, addressing party cadres at State House after a march to denounce the coup, had "warned that the opposition must not be let free."

The United States condemned the attempted coup in a statement on Thursday but urged the Zambian government not to use it to get at its opponents or to whittle down human rights.

"We urge the Zambian government to respect the rule of law, and to guarantee the protection of universally recognised rights of those involved," it said.

State radio also quoted retired General Malimba Masheke, chairman of Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP), as saying the state of emergency — which gives the state sweeping powers of detention and to regulate political activity — was aimed at undermining the opposition.

"They are trying to get us," he said.



President Clinton listens to Starbright Chairman, director Steven Spielberg, at the Children's Hospital National Medical Centre in Washington Thursday during a demonstration of Starlight World, an online computer network that links seriously ill children in hospitals across the country. Vice-President Gore is at left. — AP/UNB photo

Lankan army reshuffle top generals for major battle

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Oct 31: The Sri Lankan Army has reshuffled top field commanders to prepare for what it expects will be a decisive battle in the war against Tamil guerrillas, a newspaper said Friday, reports AP.

It has assigned battle-tested generals to replace the commander in charge of the 5-month-old campaign to capture the main road in the rebel-held north, and the officers leading the three divisions spearheading the campaign. The island newspaper said.

Maj Gen Srilal Weerasooriya has succeeded Maj Gen. Asoka

Jayawardhana as the commander in charge.

On Thursday, Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte said a decisive offensive would be launched soon to finally defeat the Tamil Tiger guerrillas after 14 years of warfare. He didn't give details.

"We have completed 90 per cent of our work," said Ratwatte, the government official in charge of the war. He was speaking to the Foreign Correspondents' Association.

"The government is working toward making the LTTE (Tamil rebels) a phenomenon of the past," he said.

Jiang promises to broaden democracy in China

WASHINGTON, Oct 31: Chinese President Jiang Zemin promised Thursday to broaden democracy in China and run the country according to the rule of law, reports AP.

"We will further enlarge democracy, run the state according to law, and turn China into a Socialist country ruled by law," he said in a speech.

"We believe that without democracy there can be no modernisation. We will ensure that our people hold democratic elections, make policy decisions democratically, carry out democratic management and supervision and enjoy extensive rights and freedoms."

China's idea of democracy is sharply divergent from Western ideas and Chinese leaders often assert that their country is already under democratic rule.

Jiang, beaming broadly, was addressing about 200 VIPs gathered by the Asia Society at the downtown Ana Hotel after a luncheon of filet mignon and red pepper.

He said his White House summit with US President Bill Clinton Wednesday had "yielded important achievements" and marked a new beginning in US-China ties.

"Yesterday President Clinton and I held talks where we had an in-depth exchange of views

on how to establish a constructive and strategic partnership between China and the United States oriented towards the 21st century," he said.

"The meeting yielded important achievements. This marks a good beginning in the establishment and development of such a partnership," the 71-year-old Chinese leader said.

Reuter adds: President Jiang Zemin flatly rejected US criticism of China's human rights on Thursday, saying jailed religious figures were law-breakers and the people of Tibet lived in "happiness and contentment."

In a spirited debate with members of Congress and a speech to Asian experts, Jiang, on a nine-day US tour including a summit with President Bill Clinton, said China would expand economic and political openness within its Communist system.

While charge and denial over human rights abuses dominated the day's events, there were signs that economic and political relations were being fostered on the first state visit since relations were chilled by the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown.

Clinton's national security adviser Sandy Berger said: "We have widespread interests in common with China, whether

that's preventing war in Korea, trying to deal with the environment, trying to stop the spread of nuclear weapons."

House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich, who castigated Jiang on the rights issue at a breakfast for him in Congress, later said: "The framework of a peaceful evolution of this relationship is there."

In a deal timed to coincide with the summit, Chinese officials signed a 3 billion dollar order for 50 jets made by Boeing Co, the biggest ever Chinese planes order. And the US nuclear industry was glowing with optimism after an agreement whereby Clinton will allow exports of US nuclear energy equipment to China in return for assurances that Beijing will have no more nuclear cooperation with Iran.

Reflecting suspicions over Chinese promises, however, State Department spokesman James Rubin said: "We're in trust-but-verify mode" and said the agreement would be put at risk if Beijing failed to meet its pledge.

At the breakfast meeting Jiang heard a catalog of complaints about abuse of jailed dissidents, religious persecution, forced abortion and nuclear proliferation.

Off the Record

White House haunted?

WASHINGTON: Do ghosts haunt the White House? Some people think so, especially at Halloween, reports Reuter.

"There are, from time to time, reports that the White House is haunted," White House spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters Thursday, a day before the annual holiday.

He said the hauntings are said to include "mysterious appearances of figures from history," and that there are "tales and legends of a former White House usher, now dead, who appears from time to time."

Stories about White House ghosts are legendary.

Many of them revolve around President Abraham Lincoln, the melancholy man who lost a son while living there and was assassinated.

Legend has it that British leader Winston Churchill would not sleep in the Lincoln bedroom because it was haunted. Lincoln used the room as his office. It is now a popular guest room.

"A high percentage of people who work here won't go in the Lincoln bedroom," said the White House social secretary, Capricia Marshall.

She said that in the last few years, there was an usher who went into the room to turn out the lights.

"When he went down the hallway, he turned around again and the light was back on again," she said.

Some people have sworn they have seen the ghost of Abigail Adams, wife of the country's second president James Adams, trying to hang laundry in the White House East Room like she did when she was alive.

Life emulates Mithun's celluloid role!

CALCUTTA: Bollywood superstar Mithun Chakraborty, who played saviour in many of his films, might soon emulate his celluloid roles in real life by adopting an abandoned girl child, reports PTI.

Mithun was expected to fly into the city yesterday along with actress wife Yogeeta Bali to complete legal formalities for adopting the baby, who was found lying uncared for in a garbage vat at a bus stop on VIP Road in the eastern fringes of the city last Friday.

If all goes according to plan, she would undertake a flight of fancy to the film star's residence at Ooty today, according to officials of the Sreebhumi Sporting Club, who are now bearing all the expenses of the child admitted in a deluxe cabin in a local nursing home.

"She is fair and healthy, and very lovable," said the manager of the Daffodil Nursing Home, A B Chakraborty.

The baby was found wrapped in a plastic bag by a local youth who was attracted by the sound of her cries. She was brought to the nursing home by the club members.

India, Fiji to reestablish ties

SUVA, Fiji, Oct 31: India will reestablish diplomatic ties with Fiji as soon as repairs to India House in Suva are completed, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said Friday, reports AP.

Rabuka said Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral reassured him of the move at the Edinburgh meeting of Commonwealth leaders.



Miss Australia, Laura Coortan, during a news conference Thursday at London's Hilton Hotel where all the Miss World contestants gathered before the finals, scheduled to be held in the Seychelles on Nov 22. — AP/UNB photo

India enters an era of coalition govts: Analysts

NEW DELHI, Oct 31: India's major parties are finally accepting that India has entered an era of coalition governments, analysts say, reports AP.

They say the Congress (I) Party and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), India's two largest parties, will only be able to return to power as part of alliances.

Political commentator Mahesh Rangarajan, speaking after India's fragile minority coalition emerged from its latest political crisis, around that multi-party government would be good for India.

He said Congress, the party of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, had dominated Indian politics almost uninterrupted since 1947 but added: "Coalitions will be good for India, as single party rule did not benefit is for long."

"Coalitions are the only way out, as the Congress base in the country is eroded."

"They will not, in the near future, be able to put together a single-party government. The BJP's case is the same. Both of them need other parties to survive."

India is currently ruled by the United Front, a coalition of more than a dozen desperate left-wing and centre parties. It has survived for six months with the parliamentary backing of the Congress.

A previous United Front coalition collapsed after 11 months when the Congress withdrew its support in an abortive attempt to launch its own coalition.

The current Front, led by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, has struggled through a series of crises.

The latest came last week when it successfully fought off demands from within its own ranks and from the Congress to sack a BJP state government following bribery allegations.

Rangarajan said: "The coalition experiment is continuing and it is a positive sign that about 14 parties can work together democratically."

"They have not blundered in major policy decisions, even though there have been a lot of different opinions on all the issues. This is learning curve for the coalition and it is good for the country."

Kalim Bahadur, head of Central Asian Studies, at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Univer-

sity, said the weakness of the current coalition had not shaken his faith in alliances.

"May faith in the coalition remains," he said. "If the present government falls, it will be mainly because there are too many parties in it — 14 parties are too many for any coalition to handle."

"In the future, there will be new alignments and things will stabilise for the country."

He predicted that, "over time," the Congress, which has seen its share of the popular vote fall steadily since the early 1980s and the BJP would find common ground with newly-emerging regional parties, thus paving the way for stronger coalition governments.

Indian politics in recent years has seen the proliferation of regional parties and groups

representing specific interest groups, like the underprivileged castes at the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy.

Their growth has eaten away at Congress' traditional dominance. While hampering the BJP's hopes of extending its support from the northern "Hindi belt."

SD Muni, a political commentator and academic, said, Congress and the BJP, a right-wing party accused by most other political groups of a divisive religious agenda, would have to "adapt to coalitions."

He added: "They are new to earn this technique but will have to learn, there is no choice left."

"The social polity is so fragmented that one cannot have a political structure which is coherent."