

BRIEFLY

Jiang to visit Canada, Mexico: Chinese President Jiang Zemin will make state visits to Canada and Mexico later this month, the government announced Tuesday. AP reports from Beijing.

Jiang's Nov. 26-29 visit to Canada will begin after he attends the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Vancouver. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Shen Guofang said. Jiang will visit Mexico from Nov. 30 to Dec. 3, Shen said.

Smoke haze delays food drops to PNG: The heavy smoke haze blanketing drought-ravaged Papua New Guinea are delaying emergency food drops because of dangerous flying conditions. Australian defence officials said Tuesday. AP reports from Port Moresby.

Australian commanding officer Lt. Col. Norm Cognet said the hazy conditions have stopped C-130 Hercules flights into Kiunga, the hard-hit Western province's central drop-off area, and delayed helicopter flights from there to villages inaccessible by road. There is a problem with the smoke haze, Cognet said Tuesday. "It's not stopped us altogether, but it's stopped us achieving the delivery rates we wanted."

Indonesian workers go on strike: Thousands of workers, most of them women, at one of Indonesia's largest cigarette manufacturers have gone on strike for higher salaries, a company official said Tuesday. AP reports from Jakarta.

Jamal, a spokesman for PT Gudang Garam, said the workers walked off the job Monday. He said about 3,000 workers staged a peaceful protest Monday outside one of the company's factories at Kediri, 690 kilometres (431 miles) east of the capital, Jakarta.

9 die in Pak bldg collapse: A house collapsed in the old city of the northwest frontier provincial capital of Peshawar early Tuesday killing nine people, including four children, police officials said. AP reports from Peshawar.

Another four people were critically injured when the building collapsed as they slept, officials said. The brick home was in the middle of the congested old city of Peshawar and according to the authorities the owner was adding a second story, which may have caused the building to collapse.

Pentagon may sale choppers to Greece: The Pentagon announced Monday a possible sale to Greece of seven CH-47D Chinook helicopters with M-60 and M-2 machine guns. AP reports from Washington.

The estimated cost of the proposed deal was 376 million dollars the Pentagon said in a notification to Congress. This proposed sale will not adversely affect either the military balance in the region or US efforts to encourage a negotiated settlement of the Cyprus question, the Pentagon said.

ICAO meet held in Canada: Some 130 civil aviation chiefs from around the world gathered in Montreal Monday for an unprecedented discussion on how to beef up security on all commercial flights. AP reports from Montreal.

The equation was simple, said President Assad Kotaitie in an address to the International Civil Aviation Organisation. "The anticipated growth of air traffic will lead to more accidents," he said. Addressing these concerns effectively will require a new level of cooperation among countries, he said.

Cohen cancels Asia trip: Faced with a potential military confrontation with Iraq, US Defence Secretary William Cohen and President Clinton's top military adviser canceled plans Monday to travel to Asia. AP reports from Washington.

Cohen had been scheduled to depart Wednesday for Seoul, South Korea, on the first leg of a six-nation Asia tour that would have kept him out of Washington for 12 days. Army Gen. Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had planned to leave Tuesday for stops in Japan and South Korea. He was to have returned to Washington on Saturday.

Russian border guards kill 1: Russian border guards patrolling the volatile Tajik frontier killed one man when they fired on a group trying to enter the Central Asian republic from Afghanistan, officials said Tuesday. AP reports from Dushanbe.

Border guards first fired warning shots, which failed to stop the infiltrators on the river Pyandzh, and then shot to kill, the border guards command said. The guards also detained two other Afghan gunmen in the incident late Monday. Border guard officials wouldn't say why the Afghans tried to cross the border.



Rene Liu, left, acknowledges spectators' cheers as Tseng Jing Looks on during awarding ceremonies in the 10th Tokyo International Film Festival in Tokyo Monday. The Taiwanese actress starring in "Murmur of Youth" shared the Best Actress Award, competing with 13 films selected from 317 entries submitted from 50 countries. — AP/UNB photo

Combination of drug shows treatment of hepatitis C

CHICAGO, Nov 11: An experimental combination of drugs shows promise in treating patients suffering a relapse of hepatitis C, a liver infection that kills tens of thousands of people worldwide, reports AP.

Dr Gary L. Davis said Monday that a new study showed that a drug called ribavirin, when combined over six months with interferon, the standard treatment, boosted the effectiveness of interferon tenfold.

The combination produced long-term improvement in 49 per cent of patients, compared with less than 5 per cent in patients treated with interferon alone, the University of Florida professor of medicine said at a meeting of the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease.

Liver disease from hepatitis C is a most common reason for liver transplants. The virus infects millions of people, but most don't know it because the virus initially causes flu-like symptoms that are often mild.

When acute infections go untreated, up to 90 per cent progress into long-term disease, such as cirrhosis, cancer or liver failure. Even with treatment, only 40 per cent of patients respond favorably. Of those patients, half to four-fifths of them have a relapse.

The only approved treatment for hepatitis C is interferon, a synthetic version of a protein that the body produces to fight viruses.

Davis' study, carried out by more than 50 investigators in 11 countries, involved 173 adult relapse patients who were assigned to get the combination regimen for six months and 172 assigned to take interferon and a placebo. The patients were followed for six months after treatment ended.

The only major side effect from adding ribavirin was anemia, Davis said. Twelve per cent of patients had their doses reduced because of that, and in general, the anemia went away when the treatment ended, he said.

An expert not involved in the research called it a significant advance.

"This is the first time we've shown undoubtedly that a combination of drugs in the relapse patients in superior to just a single therapy," said the expert, Dr Norman Gitlin, chief of hepatology at Emory University Medical Centre in Atlanta.

People most likely to be infected by the virus are drug abusers, people who had gotten tattoos or had their bodies pierced, and patients who received transfusions before 1990 or have undergone kidney dialysis.

US presses other powers to slap travel ban on Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 11: The United States pressed other powers Monday to slap a travel ban on Iraq as Baghdad dug in its heels, refusing to allow UN experts to take a part in enforcing UN sanctions, reports APF.

But diplomats at UN headquarters in New York emphasized that all sides were working toward a peaceful solution to the crisis over Iraq's refusal to allow UN nationals to carry out weapons inspections.

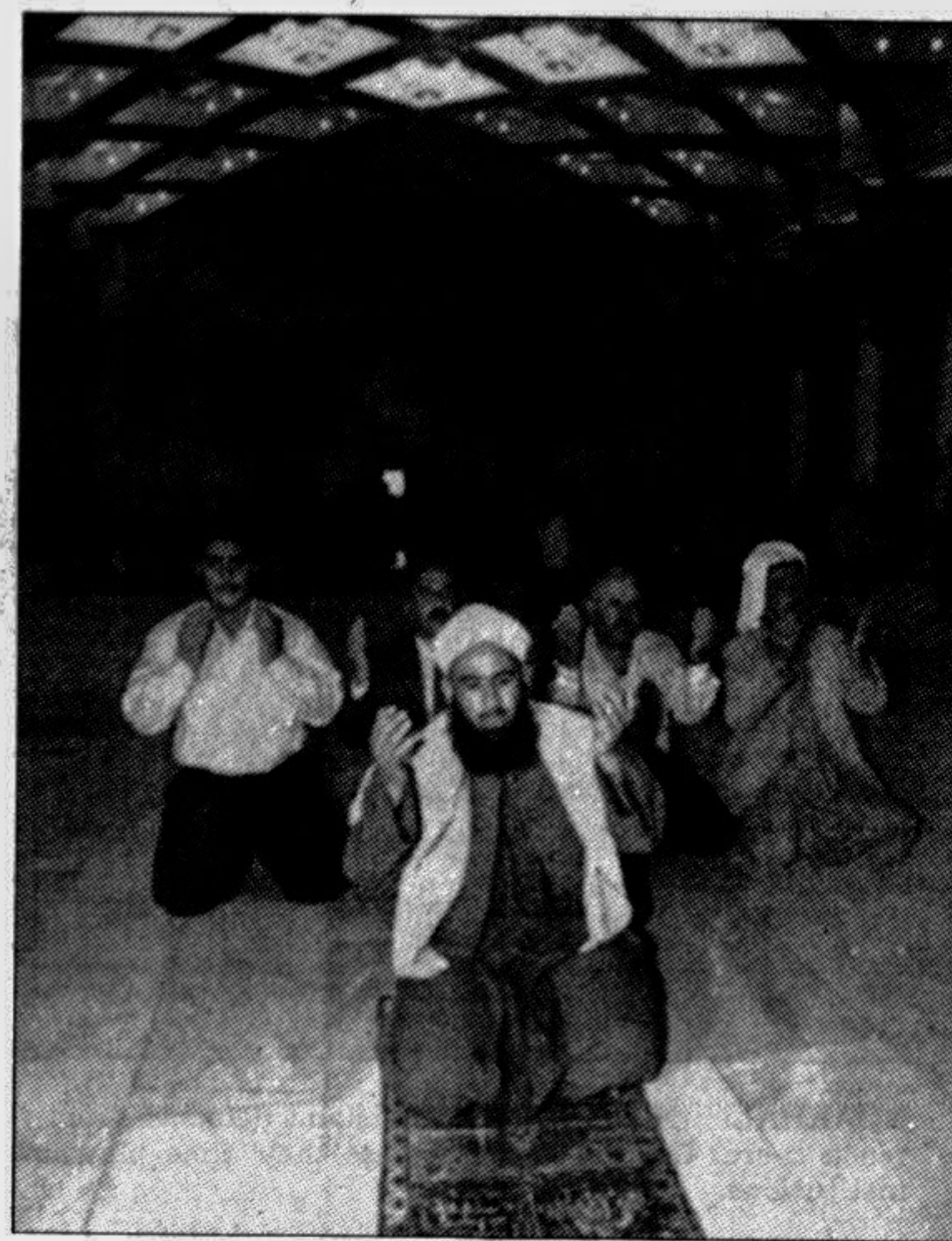
"There is still time yet for them to consider their next move," UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said of Iraq after briefing Security Council members.

Annan held out the possibility that Iraq Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, sent here to urge a lifting of sanctions, could address the Security Council and make the case for ending the embargo if Baghdad reversed its position.

The United States, backed by Britain, crafted a resolution that called for a travel ban on Iraqi leaders who block arms inspections and threatened "serious consequences" in response to further defiance, US and British diplomats said.

"It is our view that this is a strong resolution with teeth that would send an unmistakable message," US Ambassador Bill Richardson said.

The resolution was to be formally presented today as diplomats expressed confidence that France and Russia, which had in the past abstained from tougher measures against Iraq, would come on board.



Iraqis who came to protest inside the presidential palaces in Baghdad Monday praying to God to protect their country from a possible American attack and to lift the sanctions from Iraq. — AP/UNB photo

Iraqis shout anti-US slogans

Meanwhile, shouting anti-US slogans and carrying mattresses, hundreds of Iraqi families flocked to one of President Saddam Hussein's palaces on Monday to act as human shields against any US military strike.

"With our lives and with our blood, we will sacrifice ourselves for you, Saddam," demonstrators chanted as they entered the palace to defy a potential US attack following an overnight of Iraq by a US spy plane.

"Clinton, hear this, we all love Saddam Hussein," they said.

US President Bill Clinton, backed by Britain, has not ruled out the use of military force in retaliation for Saddam's decision on October 29 to ban US weapons inspectors working for the United Nations.

Men, women and children carrying portraits of the Iraqi leader made space for themselves to sleep on the marble floors, moving the furniture about in Saddam's palace on the river Tigris in Baghdad as the UN Security Council prepared to discuss the showdown over arms inspections and sanctions.

Iraq's official news agency INA said hundreds of families had volunteered to sleep in Saddam's palaces to "defy an US aggression against these symbols of the nation."

In another sign of tension amid street demonstrations, motorists filling their fuel tanks formed long queues at petrol stations, clogging up traffic.

Elsewhere in Baghdad, hundreds of Iraqis signed up for the "Fedayeen (fighters) of Saddam," a paramilitary force. One of the volunteers made his pledge with his own blood after cutting his arm.

The United States sent a U-2 spy plane over Iraq for the United Nations on Monday but Baghdad kept its guns silent, saying it flew too high for Iraqi

anti-aircraft defences to shoot it down.

Iraq protested to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan over the flights and warned that "we will respond to this flagrant violation of our sovereignty and our airspace in a way which preserves our sovereignty and security," he said.

Later Monday Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz met Annan and other UN officials in New York to call on the international community to hear Baghdad's case before considering measures to force Iraq to allow weapons inspections.

"Give us a chance. Give us a chance before stampeding an other unjust resolution against Iraq, Aziz told a news conference.

But US State Department spokesman James Rubin said Washington was seeking a "strong resolution" to condemn Saddam's actions.

"If Iraq refuses to back down after the vote on a resolution, our options remain open," Rubin said.

bin said, referring to potential military action against Baghdad.

Amid the tension, experts of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) in charge of disarmament Iraq decided to take a "day off" from inspections, following seven straight days of being turned back from sites, a UN official said.

A crippling oil embargo in force since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 cannot be lifted until UNSCOM confirms the elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

Tariq Aziz calls Albright a liar

Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz fired the latest salvo in Baghdad's war of words with Washington in United Nations late Monday, calling US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright a liar.

Asked, shortly before a Security Council meeting on Iraq about Albright's weekend description of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as a "congenital liar," Aziz retorted that "the persons who accuse the others, those are the liars."

To a reporter asking whether he meant that Albright were a liar, the Iraqi envoy replied "I hope she wouldn't be [a liar], but unfortunately she is."

Mubarak urges Saddam to resolve crisis with UN

AP adds: President Hosni Mubarak appealed Monday to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to put an end to the dispute with the United Nations over weapons inspections.

He also warned that the whole region could be affected and urged that the current dispute be resolved diplomatically, not militarily.

Mubarak's statements, issued on his return to Egypt from a trip to Saudi Arabia, were reported by Egypt's Middle East News Agency.

The Egyptian leader said he had sent an appeal to Saddam via the Iraqi representative to the Arab League, Nabil Najim.

Saddam's reply was that Iraq was complying with UN resolutions and was "not hiding anything," MENA quoted Mubarak as saying.

During his two-hour stop in Saudi Arabia, Mubarak met with King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah to discuss the Middle East peace process and the Iraq-UN crisis.

Japanese team leaves for DPRK to improve ties

TOKYO, Nov 11: A delegation led by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's ruling party left for Pyongyang on Tuesday on a mission to pave the way for normalising diplomatic ties with North Korea, reports AP.

During their three-day visit, 10 members of the delegation will meet with top aides of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, officials said.

They are expected to meet with Kim Young Sun, a secretary of the ruling Workers Party of Korea, Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Kim Yong Nam, to discuss ways to restart official normalisation talks, the Kyodo News agency reported.

The delegation, led by Yoshiro Mori, chairman of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's general council, is the first in two and a half years to be sent by the ruling party.

Four other LDP members, four politicians the coalition Social Democratic and Sakigake parties, and a Foreign Ministry official, are also in the delegation.

Chief Cabinet spokesman Kanezo Muraoka expressed hopes for "straightforward and fruitful talks."

Earlier Tuesday, North Korea's official Korean Central Broadcasting, monitored in Tokyo by Japan's Radio Press, quoted a spokesman for the (North) Korea-Japan Friendship Association as saying the group welcomed the delegation.

The planned visit by the delegation reflects the desire of the peoples of North Korea and Japan, and meets the demand of the time," the unidentified spokesman was quoted as saying. "North Korean-Japanese relations should be improved at an early date and should not be delayed any longer."

Hillary leaves for Russia finally

ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE, Maryland, Nov 11: The four presidents who considered the Boeing 707 their flying White House probably never thought anyone would cross the former Soviet border in it to share American secrets for success, reports AP.

But six years after the Cold War thawed, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton left Monday to do just that.

She had left once already — on Sunday night — only to return quickly after a sensor light indicated a fire in an engine on the left side. Members of her entourage dubbed the redo "Groundhog Day." After the movie that featured comedian Bill Murray living the same day again and again.

On Monday, the 25-year-old plane took off again with Hillary Clinton and about 40 advisers, Secret Service agents and journalists on an eight-day tour of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Russia.

American Airlines flight crash in Dec 95

Colombian investigators clear air traffic controllers of any wrongdoing

BOGOTA, Nov 11: Colombian investigators cleared air traffic controllers on Monday of any wrongdoing in the December 1995 crash of an American Airlines flight in the southwest of the country, in which 159 passengers and crew died, reports Reuters.

The chief prosecutor's office laid the blame for the disaster squarely on the crew of the Boeing 757, which plowed into a tree-covered mountain minutes before it was due to land at Cali airport en route from Miami. Just four people survived.

In a civil court ruling Florida in September, a US federal judge said the American airline pilots, who died in the disaster, had been negligent and engaged to "willful misconduct" — opening the way for hefty compensation claims from victims' families.

The chief prosecutors' office determined that the actions of the air traffic controllers at Cali's Alfonso Bonilla Aragon airport were within the legal parameters established for these cases and therefore no type of legal responsibility can be derived from those actions," a statement from the prosecutor's office said.

American's flight 965 crashed into the Andes mountains on Dec 20, 1995, after veering wildly off course.

Assumptions about cholesterol challenged

ORLANDO, Florida, Nov 11: Cholesterol is bad, right? But there's a good kind of cholesterol although it can be bad, doctors told an American heart association conference on Monday, reports Reuters.

Several studies presented at the conference challenged prevailing assumptions about cholesterol, which can clog arteries and cause heart disease.

Bristol-Myers Squibb, Co researchers presented two studies they said showed it was not necessary to lower cholesterol as much as doctors thought they should.

Tests involving Bristol's drug pravachol (pravastatin) showed the drug, which is less powerful than rival drugs, prevented deaths, heart attack and surgical procedures just as well.

Pravachol only lowers low-density lipoprotein (LDL) — the so-called "bad" cholesterol that sticks to artery walls) by about 25 per cent, compared to between 45 and 50 per cent for Merck and Co's Zocor (simvastatin) and up to 60 per cent for Warner-Lambert Co's Lipitor.

"The conventional wisdom has been that you need to push LDL levels as low as possible — that bigger is better. But these studies call that theory into question. They turn things upside down," said Dr Cryer.

In a second contradictory study, Alan Fogelman of the University of California San Diego and colleagues said so-called "good" cholesterol, the kind that doctors like because it helps prevent the build-up of fat in the arteries, has a bad side.

They said HDL could cause heart attacks in patients who have just undergone surgery and in those with severe infections.

It may even spell trouble for people with chronic inflammations, such as rheumatoid arthritis, they said.

"We've learned that two or three days after surgery, HDL changed from an anti-inflammatory into a pro-inflammatory," Fogelman told a news conference.

"The risk of heart attack goes up, even though the levels of HDL remain the same."

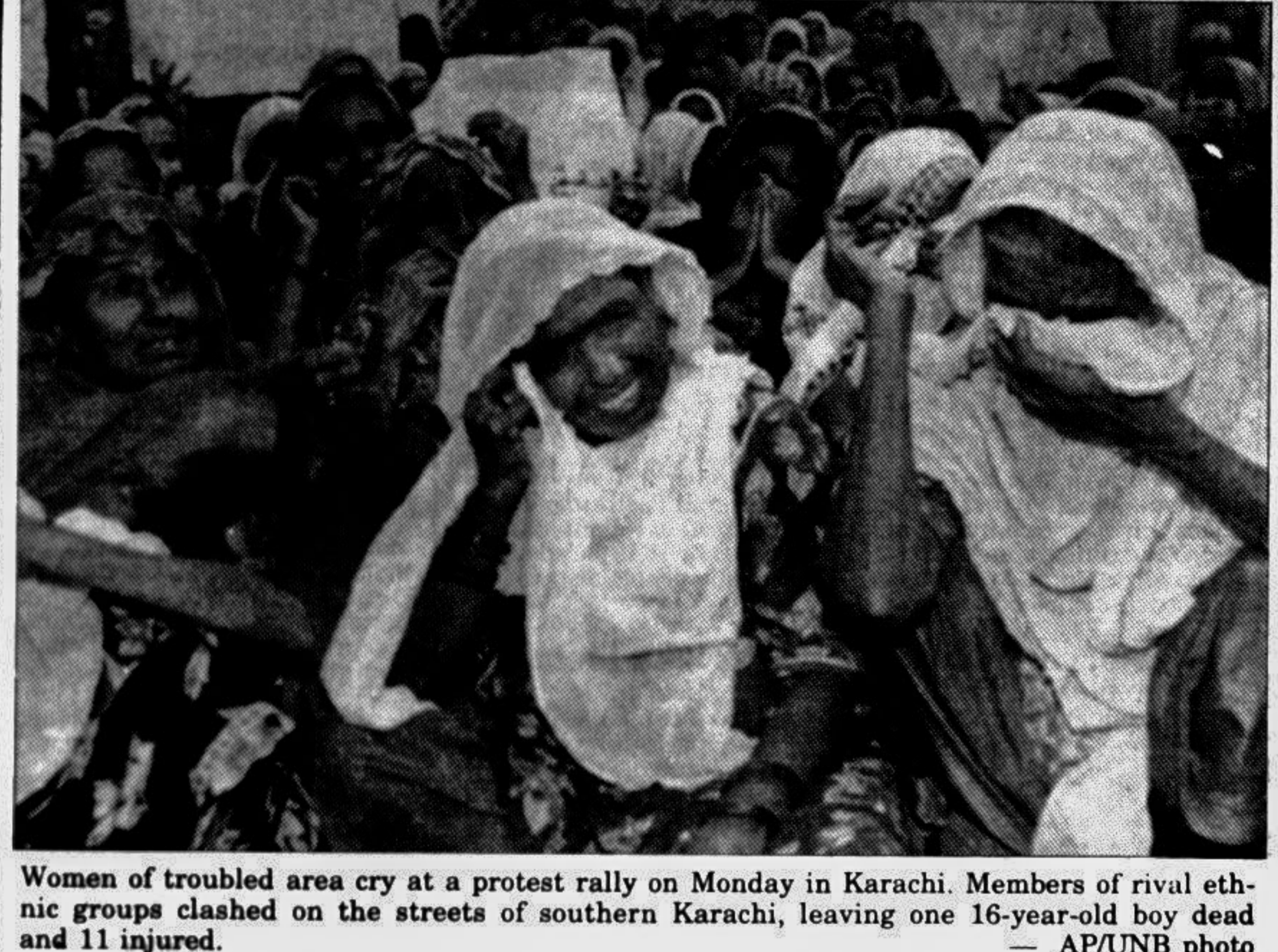
In experiments on mice and monkeys, the researchers found the same thing was true when infection was present, because inflammation seems to trigger the effect. LDL conversion could possibly pose a risk to people with chronic inflammations, though there has been no research to prove this.

"We do know there is a high incidence of people with chronic inflammation having heart disease," Fogelman said.

But they said the effect was not strong enough to justify stopping attempts to raise levels of HDL.

Earlier on Monday, researchers at the University of Rochester said doctors were failing to get their patients' blood cholesterol down low enough.

They told the conference more than 60 per cent of the 5,000 patients being treated for high cholesterol they studied failed to get their cholesterol levels down to recommended levels and recommenced more aggressive treatment.



Women of troubled area cry at a protest rally on Monday in Karachi. Members of rival ethnic groups clashed on the streets of southern Karachi, leaving one 16-year-old boy dead and 11 injured. — AP/UNB photo

Political repression in Vietnam on the rise, says HR group

HANOI, Nov 11: Economic freedoms aside, political repression in Vietnam remains rampant with the Communist Party tightening its hold on power and institutionalising its means of control, a new study finds, reports AP.

Producing the first expansive study of Vietnam's human rights record in several years, New York-based Human Rights Watch-Asia released a report Tuesday saying political repression in Vietnam is on the rise and being legitimized through legal reform.

In its 8-page report, the group alleged the widespread use of "administrative detention" to hold dissidents and pro-democracy activists without formally charging them.

"This is yet another case in Asia of economic development not producing any political liberty or reform whatsoever and maybe even the reverse," said Human Rights Watch-Asia executive Sidney Jones.

The government is Hanoi did not respond to requests for reaction to the report, but has repeatedly said it respects individual freedoms and has accused human rights groups of meddling in its internal affairs.

The study was released just days before leaders from the

French-speaking world converge on Hanoi for the 7th Francophonie Summit. Among top dignitaries attending will be French President Jacques Chirac and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

"Vietnam's foreign partners should urge the government to increase transparency and accountability within its process of legal reform," the human rights organisation said.

The report said "administrative detention" was a familiar means of social and political control in Vietnam.

During the 1930s, Colonial French authorities in Vietnam arrested and held without charge suspected communists. Later, the Communist Party employed similar tactics against its opponents after the fall of Saigon in 1975.

A political directive — Communist Party Directive 31 — signed earlier this year by former Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet legalised administrative detention despite constitutional protections against the practice.

Citing numerous cases, Human Rights Watch-Asia said Vietnam was holding prisoner political and religious dissidents simply for expressing

their desire for greater democracy or spiritual freedom.

The Foreign Ministry has recently said Vietnam wasn't holding any political prisoners and insisted that all inmates were criminals under Vietnamese law.

The Communist Party's religious affairs commission, however, admitted that top Buddhist leaders were being held prisoner, but said they had committed crimes against the state.

Buddhist monks Thich Quang Do and Thich Huyen Quang are currently being detained for supporting a church rivaling the church of Vietnam, said Le Quang Vinh, the director of the Government Commission on Religious Affairs.

Human Rights Watch-Asia listed the two monks among nine dissidents and religious leaders currently imprisoned in Vietnam, but said many others shared the same fate.

"The international community should urge the Vietnamese government to release immediately and unconditionally all persons detained for the peaceful expression of their political or religious views," the report said.

Other human rights groups

have claimed anywhere between 50 and several hundred government opponents, pro-democracy advocates and religious leaders are imprisoned in Vietnam.

Vietnam maintains a system of political reeducation camps in several remote locations throughout the country.

Human Rights Watch-Asia also said freedom of expression and of the press was systematically repressed by the Communist Party.

The editor in chief of a business newspaper was recently arrested and charged with revealing state secrets after his reporting exposed and alleged corruption scam involving the country's customs department.

New regulations have also limited the activities of foreign journalists working in Vietnam and increased censorship. Domestic journalists are barred from working for foreign media and must obtain government approval before passing on information to foreign reporters.

In a similar report, the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights urged French President Chirac to lobby Hanoi for greater adherence to international treaties on political and individual rights.

Robotic mission orbiting Mars to be delayed by 1 yr to map out entire red planet

PASADENA, California, Nov 11: A mechanical problem on board the tiny robotic spacecraft orbiting Mars will force a one-year delay in its main mission — to map the entire red planet, US space officials said on Monday, reports Reuters.

Scientists had hoped to begin charting the Martian surface next March. But they said a small fracture in a hinge or "yoke" between the Mars global Surveyor and a solar panel had required a slower flight path.

"Essentially, we will begin mapping the surface of Mars in mid-March 1999, during summer in the northern Hemisphere," project manager Glenn Cunningham told reporters at the jet propulsion laboratory. "Originally, we had planned to begin mapping on March 15, 1998."

Cunningham said the delay might add several million dollars to the final cost of the mission but that the technical difficulties came with a silver lining — the opportunity for scientists to study Mars' surface from new angles while waiting for repairs.

"The bottom line message is that this is actually a far better mission than our original mission," he said.

Cunningham and other project scientists used a news conference to make that point on Monday, showing new pictures of the Martian landscape taken by Surveyor.

The pictures showed canyons, escarpments and large, flat areas that resemble dry lakebeds on earth.

Surveyor, launched late last year, was designed to circle Mars for two years, making a detailed map of the surface and beaming back data about the planet's climate and weather patterns.

Eventually, the 148 million dollars craft will produce a topographic map of the entire planet, a tool scientists intend to use in choosing landing sites or research prospects for future missions.

Surveyor will also examine the terrain for evidence of water and conditions that could have supported life in the past.

Cunningham said the craft should be able to achieve those objectives despite the year-long delay, though scientists are considering shortening the total length of the mapping mission from one year to nine months.