

Expulsion of US arms inspectors: Situation reaches crisis point

Iraq prepares for war

BAGHDAD, Nov 15: Unfettered by UN arms inspectors' scrutiny for the first time in years, Iraq has begun preparations for war, fearing an imminent military strike by the United States, reports AP.

Iraq pushed the crisis to the brink Friday by expelling six American experts from the international UN weapons inspection team. The Americans arrived in the Gulf state of Bahrain on Saturday.

Hours earlier, Iraq announced nationwide gasoline rationing, even as thousands of people moved onto the grounds of presidential palaces and factories to act as human shields in case of American strikes.

Anti-aircraft batteries also have been put on alert, and men have been urged to join the elite military unit Fiddayeen Saddam, or Saddam's Commandos.

Iraq is approaching "a bright new chapter in the great and eternal mother of battles," an Iraqi television announcer said, referring to the term used by President Saddam Hussein to describe the 1991 Gulf War with a US-led multinational force.

Angered by the Americans' expulsion, the United Nations withdrew 68 other non-American experts also to Bahrain, leaving behind a skeleton crew of 19, mostly non-experts.

The UN inspectors had been working in Iraq since the end of the Gulf War — precipitated by Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait — to monitor the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles.

Until the inspectors declare their job finished, the UN will not lift the severe economic



President Clinton passes by White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles after meeting reporters in the White House briefing room Friday where he announced that he has ordered the aircraft carrier USS George Washington to the Persian Gulf to prepare American forces for any contingency. — AP/UNB photo

sanctions over Iraq. Baghdad says it is willing to live with that rather than lose its sovereignty.

With the inspectors gone, Iraq is free for the first time in seven years to do what it wants at the several suspected weapons sites across the country. But Iraq says its hands are clean.

"There is nothing in Iraq that can produce a prohibited weapon," Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf told a

news conference Friday.

He said a military strike from the United States could come any moment.

Yeltsin opposed to military action

Meanwhile, with an eye toward future oil deals with Iraq, President Boris Yeltsin's government has been a leading opponent of military strikes in the latest United Nations standoff with Saddam Hussein's regime.

US President Bill Clinton has left open the possibility of renewed military raids on Iraq. But Russia is virtually certain to remain opposed to force for two main reasons.

Still nostalgic about the loss of their superpower status, the Russians insist on making their voice heard in a post-Cold War world.

Russian political and military leaders feel overwhelmingly that the United States has too much clout on international issues, and Moscow seeks to counterbalance, or at least moderate, that power.

PA warns US

AFP from Gaza reports: The Palestinian cabinet warned the United States Friday not to use force against Iraq as it could endanger the whole Middle East.

"The Palestinian leadership is worried about the crisis between the United Nations and Iraq and calls for a peaceful resolution, read a statement from the cabinet after it met in Gaza." The use of force in this difficult situation will negatively effect security and peace in the whole Middle East," the statement, carried by the Palestinian news agency Wafa, said.

The cabinet also called on the United Nations to lift sanctions against Iraq.

Hundreds of Palestinians protested Monday against US policy towards Iraq, some of them calling on Baghdad to fire missiles at Israel.

Iraq has blamed the United States for the prolonged embargo it has been under since it invaded Kuwait in 1990.

Ranariddh to give up leadership if Hun Sen drops criminal charges

PHNOM PENH, Nov 15: Deposed First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh say she will give up his claim to office and Cambodia's political leadership if coup leader Hun Sen drops criminal charges against him, reports AP.

"I am prepared to act against the will of the Cambodian people, against the law, in order to accept a compromise," Ranariddh said during an interview broadcast Saturday by Voice of American radio.

"I will not claim back my position as the first prime minister, however, all charges against me must be dropped," Ranariddh said, adding "Hun Sen must think twice about this."

Lebanon says no to land mine ban treaty

BEIRUT, Nov 15: Lebanon rebuffed Canada's invitation to join an international treaty to ban land mines, saying Friday it will sign only if rival Israel does, reports AP.

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, on a tour of the Middle East, has been encouraging countries in the region to participate in the Convention to Ban Anti-Personnel Mines. The treaty will be signed at a conference in Ottawa in December.

"Lebanon is interested in this treaty but there is absolutely no way that Lebanon is going to be drawn into signing this treaty as long as Israel does not acquiesce too," Lebanese Foreign Minister Faris Bweiz said after a 70-minute meeting with Axworthy.



A model displays a purple cocktail dress with a shawl around a neck designed by Jun Ashida during the Spring-Summer Tokyo Collection '98 Friday. — AP/UNB photo

Duma passes anti-corruption law

MOSCOW, Nov 15: Russia's State Duma (lower house of parliament) Friday passed unanimously an anti-corruption law, according to the Interfax news service, reports Xinhua.

Initiated by security committee chairman Viktor Ilyukhin, the bill provides a detailed description of corruption as a government official's acceptance of remuneration in the form of money, services or other activities that provide a benefit or profit.

The remuneration sources were listed by the bill as government bodies as well as individuals.

Other kinds of corruption mentioned by the law include travel in Russia and abroad, the use of premises, means of transportation, computer equipment, monetary funds or government property by officials in cases "when this is not provided for by the law in the receipt of credits, loans, purchase of securities, real estate and other forms of property by officials."

Kashmir will be on Albright's agenda in India, Pakistan

Aziz Haniffa writes from Washington

Kashmir would be on the agenda of the talks that U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will have in Pakistan and India next week, a senior Clinton administration official acknowledged.

The official, who is the administration's point person for South Asia, briefing correspondents here on Albright's visit, said, "In Pakistan and India, she will discuss their mutual tensions and proliferation issues, and encourage their bilateral dialogue. She will also be advancing the visit of President (Bill) Clinton to the region next year."

The Secretary, he said, was hoping to underscore that the most important objective of her trip is a "reengagement of the United States with the South Asian region" since former Secretary of State George Shultz visited India in 1983.

Asked if the "mutual tensions" between New Delhi and Islamabad that Albright would discuss include the Kashmir issue, the official, though evasive in his response, conceded that they would, albeit not necessarily as the central issue.

The central purpose of this visit, the official explained, "will be to encourage the dialogue that is taking place between India and Pakistan and to support the efforts of the two prime ministers to move that dialogue to more productive discussions of the areas that have been of concern to the two countries. And clearly in that context, Kashmir is an issue."

The official said, "We know that both sides recognise that. It is on the agenda of the two countries in the joint state-

ments that was agreed to. We also know that there have been difficulties in terms of agreeing to how that issue would be addressed by the two sides. We encourage that to go forward."

The official said, "We hope that both countries will be able to move as soon as possible beyond the procedural to the substantive and perhaps the issues of such long standing can be, if not resolved, perhaps ameliorated and we strongly support them."

He said that this was what "the Secretary will be attempting to encourage" during her visit and meeting with Prime Ministers I.K. Gujral and Nawaz Sharif and senior officials of both countries.

Earlier in the briefing, the official acknowledged that Albright had indeed expressed "a desire" to visit Kashmir, particularly since her late father, Josef Korbel, a Czech diplomat, had written one of the highly acclaimed books on Kashmir (Danger in Kashmir), but that she would not do so on this trip. However, he emphasised that "she has expressed a desire to go there in the future, when it would be appropriate."

He said that Albright was "only, I guess, 10 or 11 years old when he (Korbel) was involved in that work, (and) she did get very interested in that, and in just India and Pakistan more broadly."

The official said he was "fully hoping" for Albright to "make another trip to the region during her tenure. We'll have to see if there may be more time available then."

Asked if New Delhi's allegations about Pakistan's role in

fomenting the insurgency in Kashmir and supporting cross-border terrorism in general would also figure on the agenda, the official said, "We are, as you all know, and as you read our annual reports on human rights and the statements that we have made, remain concerned about cross-border terrorism as well as any human rights violations."

"(So) Certainly those subjects will be addressed along the way, with this trip," he said.

The official said that Albright was also delighted that by sheer coincidence she would be in India "on the same date that half way around the world, at Cape Canaveral (in Florida), the space shuttle Columbia will be launched, which, as part of its crew, will include the first Indian American to be sent to space on the shuttle."

He said that Indian American astronaut Kalpana Chawla "has a remarkable background and we are hoping to be able to work with the assistance of NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) to link up with this event."

The official said this event "is not only a statement that can underscore our message of closer ties, but it's another vivid demonstration of the importance of Indian Americans in American society today, the contributions they are making, and this is just the most recent and vivid example."

The official said that this also shows the importance of science and technology cooperation between the U.S. and India.

India Abroad News Service

US court sentences Kasi to death

Over 100 Americans leave Pakistan for fear of life

KARACHI, Nov 15: Criminal mafias and extortion groups thrive in the troubled port city of Karachi, where four US executives were gunned down this week, police officials and residents said, reports AP.

More than 100 American tourists, businessmen and their families have already left Pakistan fearing for their lives since the murder of the oil executives on Wednesday, immigration officials said.

The shooting came just hours after a US court found a Pakistani, Aimal Kasi, guilty of the 1993 murder of two CIA employees.

Kasi was Friday sentenced to death even though a group called the Aimal Secret Action Committee, which claimed killing the Americans in Karachi, threatened other attacks on US interests if the death penalty was imposed.

But even before the killings, Karachi had a reputation for serious sectarian strife and organised crime.

"There are all sorts of criminals who operate in mafias. We are trying our best to control them with our limited resources," a senior police official said.

Groups of armed youths often fight for control of extortion rackets in poor neighbourhoods, according to residents.

Around 5,000 cars and more than 6,000 motorcycles have so far been stolen or snatched at gunpoint in the city this year, compared to last year's figure of 3,700 cars and 4,000 motorcycles.

"Car-snatching has been on the rise as stolen vehicles are used in crimes and later abandoned, as was the car used in the killing of the Americans," Citizens — Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) official Sharfuddin Memon said.

The killings of the US executives came after three leading Sunni Muslim scholars were killed earlier this month by unidentified assailants.

More than 60 incidents of terrorism blamed on sectarian and ethnic friction have been reported so far this year, but the cases remain unsolved.

Those responsible for the murder of two US diplomats in the city in 1995 are also still at large.

Karachi has seen more than 2,000 killings over the past three years, including around 500 people during the current year.

Police say much of the violence stems from political and ethnic groups operating from the labyrinthine eastern districts of Malir and Korangi and Western Orangi district.

"They eliminate anyone suspected of being a police informer or abetting a rival group to keep people terrorised," a resident in Korangi said, adding that group members lived in abandoned houses and used children as paid lookouts, he said.

"The gangsters take meals and tea from US citizens. We have been paying them 200 rupees (about nine dollars) every month for the last four years and whenever we refuse they torture our children," a housewife said.

Last week, the Malir district was paralysed as militants of two ethnic groups fought fierce

gunbattles over what police described as the "extortion business."

Four people died and several were injured before a semblance of order was restored by heavy contingents of police using armoured vehicles.

A woman, who identified herself as Aisha Bibi, said her son was shot dead before her eyes because he would not pay.

"Mostly they demand money from businessmen by telephone, ranging between 10,000 rupees (250 dollars) and 50,000 rupees (1,200 dollars), we have received several complaints," he said.



Rich Becker, centre, whose son-in-law was killed in the 1993 CIA shootings, talks to reporters Friday, after the jury decided that Mir Aimal Kasi should receive the death penalty for the shooting. Standing with Becker is Judy Becker Darling, left, wife of Frank Darling, one of the two CIA employees killed, and Rosie Becker, right, Judy's mother. In the back row centre is Nicholas Starr, who was wounded in the attack by Kasi. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Int'l film festival opens in India:

The Tenth International Film Festival for children and young people got off to a glittering start Friday at Lalitha Kala Toranam in Hyderabad with children depicting the country's rich culture and heritage in the form of exquisite folklore, dramas, dances and songs, PTV reports from Hyderabad.

The Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Jaipal Reddy, the guest of honour at the inaugural function, stressed the need to produce "distinct and specific films" and other audiovisual programmes for children and young people.

Nigerian killed in Indonesia:

Police shot dead one Nigerian man and arrested about 45 others in drug raid, police said Saturday, AP reports from Jakarta.

Friday's raid on a central Jakarta hotel followed a wave of arrests of suspected narcotic smugglers during recent weeks. On Wednesday police arrested a Myanmar citizen, Shwe Maung, who was allegedly carrying six kilograms (13 pounds) of heroin on arrival at Jakarta airport, the newspaper Media Indonesia reported.

Stone Age caves found in Pakistan:

Pre-historic caves and paintings dating back to the Stone Age have been discovered in Musakhail area of Balochistan province, Pakistan Television (PTV) reported Friday, Xinhua says from Islamabad.

The paintings, which are of the Stone Age and date from 2000 BC to 12,000 BC, have been found in caves and rock-shelters in Musakhail in Loralai district, northeastern Balochistan in the Suleman mountainous range, PTV said. The discovery was made by archaeologist Fazal Dad Kakar during an archaeological survey in Balochistan province, it said.

UN to press for women's equal right in Afghanistan

KABUL, Nov 15: The United Nations said on Friday it will press for women to be treated as equals in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan — which it sees as the second-worst region in the world behind Sierra Leone for observance of women's rights, reports Reuters.

The Taliban deny women full access to health facilities and have closed girls' schools in the two-thirds of the country they control.

But UN gender adviser Angela King made clear to reporters the world body was not expecting immediate results.

"I think the UN has to wait and see exactly what is going to happen, but at the same time push towards the goal of the UN," she said.

King, Assistant Secretary-General and special adviser on gender issues to UN Chief Kofi Annan, is on a two-week tour of Afghanistan to try to reconcile the United Nations' commitment to gender equality with the traditional interpretation of the role of women in the country.

She told reporters the UN was in a difficult position and

unable to implement a policy advocated by Annan that puts principles such as gender equality at the centre of the organisation's planning.

We are at the moment in a bit of a stalemate because we have not been able to carry out the principle-centred approach due to the fact that women still do not have complete and satisfactory access to health, education and other facilities that

Fresh fighting erupts in Lanka

COLOMBO, Nov 15: Government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels traded mortar and artillery fire in fresh fighting in Sri Lanka's north, the Defence Ministry said today, reports Reuters.

It said in a statement that Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas fired mortars at troops manning defences near Mankulam town in the northern Wanni region, wounding two soldiers.

are absolutely key," she said in Kabul.

As part of their crusade to create the world's purest Islamic state, the Taliban have closed girls' schools and banned women from working except in the medical sector.

They say women should not meet, or be seen by men who are not relatives.

They have decreed that women are only allowed to leave their homes wearing the burqa, a traditional Afghan veil that covers women from head to toe, with a small patch of gauze over the eyes.

King said she was very disappointed the Taliban had not taken up an offer made six months ago to provide resources for the rehabilitation of schools in Kabul, provided there were equal numbers of places for both boys and girls.

"The initial response was that there would be an agreement. But I was very disappointed that nothing has happened — we are still hopeful," she said.

King said Afghanistan ranked second from bottom in an index of gender equality.



Former teacher Mary LeTourneau, 35, who had pleaded guilty to two counts of second-degree child rape in August for having sex with a sixth-grade boy, becomes emotional at her sentencing hearing Friday, in a Kent, Wash. LeTourneau received 100 days already served, and community-based treatment. — AP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Humphrey gets tired of political life

LONDON: Britain's political life is to lose one of its most familiar features: Humphrey, the cat who hangs out at the prime minister's Downing Street residence, is retiring, reports AP.

A vet advised that Humphrey, thought to be 11 years old, was suffering from a kidney complaint, had gone off his food, and needed a quieter home in the suburbs, a spokesman for Prime Minister Tony Blair said Thursday.

"We are very sorry that Humphrey is retiring and we wish him all the very best," said the spokesman, speaking on terms of customary anonymity.

"We have all grown very fond of him but realise that he will be better off being cared for in a quiet environment away from the hustle and bustle of central London."

Humphrey, originally a stray, had a basket and litter tray on the ground floor of the neighbouring Cabinet Office building on the busy Whitehall, but he spent much of his time in and around 10 Downing Street.

Monkeys face extinction because...

DAR ES SALAAM: Monkeys in Tanzania's southern highlands face extinction because locals are eating them, the state news agency Shihata reported Friday, says AP.

Quoting Mbinga game officer Patrick Ndumu, the agency said that almost 60 per cent of the area's 200,000 residents had now resorted to eating monkey meat, and that the monkey population was dwindling very fast.

Shihata said only a few monkeys could be spotted in Huli forest and along the banks of lake Nyasa, which borders Tanzania and Malawi.