

Britain, Ireland to toughen security measures

BELFAST Aug 18: Britain and Ireland agreed a package of taut security measures Monday to round up all members of the group blamed for Northern Ireland's deadliest bomb attack, reports AFP.

Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam and Irish Justice Minister John O'Donoghue said they were considering lowering the standard of evidence needed to prove the imprisonment of offence of membership of illegal paramilitary groups.

Also possible was the use of detention without trial — so-called "internment" — recently repealed by London, and no longer used by Dublin.

The pair, backed by police chiefs from Belfast and Dublin, added that security cooperation on the border of Ireland and Northern Ireland would be stepped up to hinder cross-border traffic in arms and explosives.

Some measures, agreed after proposals from Northern Ireland's head of police Ronnie Flanagan and Ireland's police chief Pat Byrne, would be implemented immediately they

said. The announcement came after police arrested five men in and around Omagh, west of Belfast.

An AP report from Belfast adds: Supporters of the Irish National Liberation Army, a maverick rival of the truce-observing IRA, said Monday that INLA commanders should formally stop their own campaign to destabilise Northern Ireland.

The statement by the Irish Republican Socialist Party, legal representatives of the outlawed INLA, came as the British and Irish governments considered how to crack down on a third anti-British paramilitary faction blamed for Saturday's car bomb in the town of Omagh.

The so-called "Real IRA," a group of Irish Republican Army defectors founded last year in response to the IRA command's July 1997 truce, insists its leaders are the true heirs to the fight to break Northern Ireland's links with Britain. Most of Northern Ireland's majority Protestants consider themselves British.

Will Clinton's confession erode his credibility?

WASHINGTON, Aug 18: By changing his story, President Bill Clinton imprinted his presidency with a mark of deception and betrayal of trust, reports AP.

Almost certainly, his confession will erode his credibility. In his unprecedented testimony, advisers said the president admitted to an inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky — admission that puts him in uncharted territory. Presidents don't tell the nation that they lied. They say mistakes were made and pass the blame. Clinton, at the risk of political and legal peril, decided to change his story even though he had maintained a stance of innocence for seven months.

Most Americans already felt he was lying. It was a wrenching ordeal that they simply want to forget. It remains to be seen whether they will forgive.

The about-face could weaken his hand with Congress, too. But political analysts expect he will survive. "I think he cannot emerge

from this with anything but injury," said Boston University historian Robert Dallek. "We had a lame duck president. We'll have an even lamer duck presidency. The penalty he pays is embarrassment, diminished stature, people don't trust him. They don't find him in many ways worthy of the office. But times are good. We're stuck with him."

Other presidential scholars are uncertain about the outcome.

"I honestly don't have any confidence in forecasting what the public's attitude will be two months from now," said Thomas Mann, director of governmental studies at the Brookings Institution think tank. "I could see him getting beyond it because of his extraordinary political skills. And I could see the public souring and supporters deserting him if they think he's been too clever by half."

"We just haven't had anything like this before. Everything is new and most of it for the worst," Mann said.

Pollster Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Centre recalled that public opinion defied conventional wisdom in January when the scandal broke, as Clinton's approval rating rose instead of falling.

"Polls overwhelmingly show the public would accept an apology," Kohut said. "But I don't think anyone can say that people's intentions are absolutely certain to be matched by their reactions if the president says he told them a lie."

Republicans say Clinton's admission will make it harder for him to challenge them on tax cuts and Social Security or try to blame them for a possible government shutdown this fall. His words "won't have the sting they previously had," predicted Republican strategist Frank Luntz. "Everything he says, a Republican member of Congress can respond: 'And we should trust you?'"

Back in January, Clinton was unequivocal about asserting he did not have a sexual relationship with Lewinsky.



President Clinton meets with National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, right, and White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles in the White House Monday, prior to taking questions from a grand jury about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. — AP/UNB photo

BRIFFLY

Chinese dissident dies: Pan Mingdong, a veteran dissident who was repeatedly jailed and detained for his activism, has died of cancer after police delayed giving him a passport that could have enabled him to seek treatment in the United States, human rights groups said yesterday. AP says from Beijing.

14 killed in Rwanda: Fourteen people were killed in a weekend attack in the central Rwandan province of Gitarama, sources close to the victims said Monday. AFP says from Kigali.

King Fahd leaves hospital: King Fahd of Saudi Arabia left the hospital Monday evening to convalesce after having undergone an operation to remove his gall bladder, the royal family said, AFP reports from Riyadh.

9 die in Vietnam bus crash: Nine people were killed and five others seriously injured when a bus crashed through a barrier and collided with a train in the central province of Phu Yen, local police said yesterday. AP reports from Hanoi.

Stolen paintings recovered in Spain: A painting attributed to Adolf Hitler which was stolen in this eastern Spanish city 16 months ago was found Monday, Spanish police said, AFP reports from Valencia, Spain.

Mubarak, Arafat meet in Egypt: President Hosni Mubarak met Tuesday with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to discuss the stalled Middle East peace process, AP reports from Mersa Matruh, Egypt.

1st triple transplant patient dead: The world's first triple transplant patient has died 12 years after the operation that gave her a new heart, lungs and liver. AP says from London.

7th day of stand-off: Davina Thompson died Thursday at Papworth Hospital in Cambridge from lung disease, hospital spokeswoman Kate Lancaster said Monday. She was 47. Thompson's operation in 1986, to fight a progressive illness, was generally considered a success, and led the way for other triple transplants. Lancaster said.

7th day of stand-off: The government ended that standoff by seizing Suu Kyi's car, forcibly restraining her and driving her back to Yangon against her will.

A government spokesman said this week Suu Kyi could not be allowed to travel to Bassein because of threats against her life.

Suu Kyi is popular with the people of Myanmar, but the regime does not allow her to make public appearances. The only physical attack on Suu Kyi took place in Nov 1996 by mob whose members said they were paid by the government.

US diplomats, Serbs try to restart Kosovo talks

— PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Aug 18: American diplomats and Serb officials conferred behind closed doors on ways to set up talks between the Yugoslav government and Kosovo rebels on the future of separatist Kosovo province, reports AP.

The US diplomatic initiative headed by envoy Christopher Hill, may be successful but the talks, once they resume after they broke down in May, may not.

Such negotiations are boycotted by ethnic Albanian opposition parties and the Kosovo Liberation Army fighting for independence of the Serbian province, where Albanians account for 90 per cent of the population of 2 million. Kosovo is in Serbia, the dominant Yugoslav republic.

Iraqi envoy to UN says No cooperation with UN arms inspectors until demands met

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 18: Iraq signalled on Monday that there would be no change in a decision to suspend cooperation with UN weapons inspectors until Iraq demands are met, reports AP.

"We still stand by our position that was announced by the leadership," Iraqi Ambassador Nizar Hamdoun told reporters here.

A senior UN official meanwhile reported to the UN Security Council that Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz had informed UN Special Envoy Prakash Shah that continued cooperation with the arms inspectors was "futile."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan dispatched Shah to Baghdad last week in a bid to persuade the Iraqi leadership to reverse an August 5 decision suspending cooperation with the UN weapons inspectors.

US Ambassador Bill Richardson said Washington

"feels very strongly that Iraq has not been in compliance, (and) that Prakash Shah's discussions have not been successful."

"It is up to the Secretary General and the Security Council to respond adequately to Iraq's totally unacceptable action," he added.

Iraq is notably demanding the restructuring of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) the replacement of UNSCOM chairman, Richard Butler, and the transfer of UNSCOM headquarters outside New York to dilute perceived US influence.

Security Council members have rejected the demands.

But Hamdoun said that "unless those concerns are addressed, it's difficult for Iraq to alter its position."

"The problem is still that UNSCOM is still in charge of this process, and UNSCOM has been unfair to Iraq," he said.

Hamdoun spoke as the UN Security Council met to discuss response to letters from Butler and Intentional Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei who said they could no longer perform their mandates because of the Iraqi decision.

The Iraqi envoy noted that Shah was continuing discussions with Iraqi officials in Baghdad. The Indian diplomat is expected to return to New York on Thursday.

An aide to Annan, Rold Knutsson, informed the Council that at two meetings with Aziz, Shah insisted on the need for Iraq to fully comply with UN resolutions providing for full and immediate access for the arms inspectors.

Aziz responded by explaining that the Iraqi decision was taken because there was no prospect of UNSCOM completing its disarmament mandate, according to western diplomats at the closed-door Council session.

Bribery in Vajpayee's inner circle alleged BJP-led coalition in crisis

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: India's splintered opposition parties closed ranks Tuesday to press Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for an investigation into allegations from within his own coalition that people close to him were bribed to transfer a senior bureaucrat, according to an AP report.

The accusation of bribery in Vajpayee's inner circle brought the 5-month-old government to yet another crisis. It has come close to collapsing several times over erratic behaviour of Jayaram Jayalitha, a powerful regional politician from the south who is part of the 19-party coalition.

On Sunday, Jayalitha accused Vajpayee in an open letter of transferring the head of the Enforcement Directorate — which investigates financial crimes — because the owners of a "well-known group of publications" had "paid hefty bribes

to persons very close to the prime minister." She did not name the media baron.

Vajpayee's office replied with a cut letter asking Jayalitha to prove her charges.

The exchange was part of weeks-old sparring between Vajpayee Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and Jayalitha, who faces several charges of financial wrongdoing during an earlier tenure as the top elected official of the southern Tamil Nadu state.

The Directorate, which comes under the Finance Ministry, also is investigating alleged foreign currency violations by an owner of the Times of India, the country's largest English daily. The publisher has denied impropriety.

Vajpayee's political rivals immediately sought a parliamentary inquiry into the charges of bribery in his office. Even a junior partner in the

governing alliance suggested he seek a vote of confidence in Parliament.

The charges cannot be dismissed lightly "since they come from within Vajpayee's own coalition," said Laloo Prasad Yadav, leader of an influential opposition party from the north.

Jayalitha said MK Bezbarruah should be transferred back as chief of the Enforcement Directorate, apparently to counter reports that his transfer had been at her behest.

Some of her close business associates and family friends have been charged by Bezbarruah with violating complex foreign exchange laws.

Jayalitha has repeatedly threatened to pull out of the government over several local issues. She has not carried out her threat so far.

Landslide kills 60 pilgrims in India

LUCKNOW, Aug 18: A landslide killed 60 Hindu devotees returning Tuesday from a pilgrimage to a religious shrine in Tibet, a government official said, reports AP.

The mud slide, triggered by overnight torrential rains, buried the pilgrims camped in a Himalayan village near Pithoragarh, 325 kilometres east of New Delhi, said Ashok Kumar, the relief commissioner of Uttar Pradesh state.

Another 25 local residents were missing and feared dead, Kumar told The Associated Press in Lucknow, the state capital.

The road to Pithoragarh was washed away, hampering efforts by rescue crews to reach the site. Telephone lines also were down, and further details were not available.

Every year, groups of Hindu devotees trek to the Chinese province of Tibet to pray at Kailash Mansarovar temple, in trips organised by the Indian government.

This was the second disaster to hit the mountainous region of Uttar Pradesh in one week. Last Wednesday, a landslide killed at least 42 people and hundreds of animals.

Floods threaten major cities in China

BEIJING, Aug 18: Flood waters two stories high covered tourist sites on Sun Island as the northeastern Chinese city of Harbin struggled Tuesday against what is feared will be its worst flood in 50 years, reports AP.

Soldiers worked 24 hours straight piling sandbags along a 26-kilometre (16-mile) embankment protecting Harbin, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported. More than 260,000 people were trying to protect the city of 9 million, Xinhua said.

Medical teams around the country have been treating soldiers and civilians exhausted from a summer of fighting the worst floods in decades. The floods have killed more than

2,000 people and made millions more homeless.

More rain was expected Tuesday on the Songhua and Nen Rivers in the northeast and on the lower and middle reaches of the Yangtze. China's mightiest river further south that is suffering its heaviest

floods in 44 years, the Workers Daily reported.

Soldiers have evacuated more than 700 families and 52 businesses from Sun Island in the Songhua River outside Harbin, where a park in the bitter northern winter draws tourists with snow sculptures and winter sports. Also moved were 52 Siberian tigers from a breeding center on the island.

A photo in the official China Daily showed workers piling up sandbags between the swollen Songhua River and a highway linking Harbin and China's largest oil field, Daqing.

The flooded Nen River on Monday punched a 50-metre-wide (50-yard-wide) hole in an embankment protecting Daqing.

Soldiers worked to repair it and build up another dike that would be the final defence of the oil field and the 2.3 million people of the city of Daqing.

Floods have inundated 1,391 wells, and production also has been halted at an additional 280 wells, the official China Daily reported.

200 Americans in Pakistan leave for home

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: About 200 Americans prepared to leave Pakistan Tuesday after their government deemed the country unsafe, but US Ambassador Thomas Simons vowed they would be back, reports AP.

Simons is among the diplomats who remained behind as their families, non-essential staff and their relatives departed under State Department orders following the Aug. 7 bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es-Salaam, Tanzania. The nearly simultaneous bombings killed 257 people and injured thousands.

"The Americans always come back. We have very important business to conduct in this country," Simons told reporters after arriving at the airport with the evacuees in a convoy of four buses, the ambassador's car and a few police motorcycle outriders, their sirens blaring.

Though ordinary Americans have been strongly advised to

leave as well, few took up their government's offer of a ride on the charter plane booked to fly diplomatic staff and relatives to Brussels Tuesday.

"People are thinking about leaving, but there is no general rush for the exits," Simons said. "They're going to continue to watch the situation. But they're calm, as we are calm."

Americans not connected with the embassy were briefed by Simons Monday, hours after learning of the evacuation order. Many said that despite the seriousness of the warning and the sudden departure of much of the embassy staff, they were inclined to stay for the time being because there had been no specific threat against Americans in Pakistan.

"It is a general pattern of threat that we're responding to," Simons said Tuesday.

Similar measures have been taken at US Embassies in Asmara, Eritrea; Tirana, Albania; and Ulan Bator, Mongolia.

7th day of stand-off Doctors allowed to visit Suu Kyi

YANGON, Aug 18: Myanmar's military government allowed doctors to visit opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi at the site of their roadside stand-off on Tuesday, reports AP.

But Suu Kyi also came under attack from ruling generals who urged a crowd of workers to "amhlate" her, and reports emerged that two members of her political party have been sentenced to jail.

Suu Kyi and three colleagues have been holed up in a van for seven days, 32 kilometers west of Yangon. They were stopped there by the authorities last Wednesday while attempting to travel to the city of Bassein to meet members of her political party.

During the standoff, Suu Kyi became ill with severe dehydration and a 40 degrees Celsius fever.

Suu Kyi's political party, the National League for Democracy, said her two personal physicians would visit her Tuesday afternoon.

The 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner has failed to travel outside Yangon four times during the past two months and been stopped by the government at the same checkpoint each time.

Her doctors were initially allowed to visit her, but one was barred after the authorities found she was bringing food to Suu Kyi.

While a government spokesman insisted the military was providing Suu Kyi with food and water during that six-day standoff, she and her party later said the government had attempted to starve her into submission.

The government ended that standoff by seizing Suu Kyi's car, forcibly restraining her and driving her back to Yangon against her will.

A government spokesman said this week Suu Kyi could not be allowed to travel to Bassein because of threats against her life.

Suu Kyi is popular with the people of Myanmar, but the regime does not allow her to make public appearances. The only physical attack on Suu Kyi took place in Nov 1996 by mob whose members said they were paid by the government.

US diplomats, Serbs try to restart Kosovo talks

— PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Aug 18: American diplomats and Serb officials conferred behind closed doors on ways to set up talks between the Yugoslav government and Kosovo rebels on the future of separatist Kosovo province, reports AP.

The US diplomatic initiative headed by envoy Christopher Hill, may be successful but the talks, once they resume after they broke down in May, may not.

Such negotiations are boycotted by ethnic Albanian opposition parties and the Kosovo Liberation Army fighting for independence of the Serbian province, where Albanians account for 90 per cent of the population of 2 million. Kosovo is in Serbia, the dominant Yugoslav republic.

Mixed world reaction over Clinton's testimony

TOKYO, Aug 18: President Bill Clinton's long-awaited testimony about his relationship with a White House intern drew strong reactions around the world Tuesday, with some people rooting for him and other saying he should be punished, reports AP.

In Japan, as in many other countries, Clinton's testimony before a federal grand jury in Washington on Monday was the top story on television news broadcasts.

For instance, many Japanese awoke Tuesday to see the news and the lead story on public broadcaster NHK, and it quickly became the talk of the town in some areas.

"It doesn't matter. It has nothing to do with the president's job," said Seiko Fujii, a 33-year-old teacher, after Clinton testified under oath that he had engaged in an improper relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

"But having the president testify like a regular person is amazing," she said in downtown Tokyo's morning rush hour.

Fit housewife Miyoko Nishida, 61, Clinton's testimony left her comparing him to a Japanese premier who fell from power.

"You couldn't do that in Japan," she said of Clinton's relations with another woman.

"Remember Prime Minister Uno," she said, referring to late premier Sosuke Uno, who was forced to step down after 89 days in office in 1989, when his popularity plunged amid reports that he had kept a geisha as his mistress.

In South Korea, some people felt deep sympathy, not for Clinton, but for his wife, Hillary.

In Seoul, the South Korean capital, Park Jong-Il, 28, an office worker, said Americans

should now drop the matter.

"As president, Clinton did a lot of good things too, like creating jobs. I think Americans should let him go," he said.

But Park also said that the president had left Mrs. Clinton — "no ordinary housewife" — in a difficult position.

Later, when Clinton gave a nationally televised speech in the United States apologising to Americans and his family for his inappropriate relations with Ms Lewinsky, Australian gathered around office TVs with a mixture of fascination and mirth.

"It's high drama — the fact that the leader of the last remaining superpower on Earth has to discuss his sexual alliances in public," said John Porter, the managing director of the Ausstar satellite TV company, after watching Clinton's address with many other office staffers.

Porter, an American who has lived in Australia for four years, said overseas viewers sometimes find it ironic that a country as free-wheeling as the United States is holding Clinton to such "a ridiculously high moral standard."

In Europe, Clinton's closed-door testimony before the grand jury in Washington DC, was the top story on Austrian Television Monday night, taking up about half of its three 30-minute reports.

"It is very hard to imagine that the president of the United States would be removed from office for a sexual affair," said correspondent Raimund Low, who once reported for the network from Washington. "However, for the remainder of his term, Bill Clinton will be severely handicapped, perhaps also in the international arena." Low said during one of the broadcasts.

Other countries seemed to take the news in stride.

In Sweden, known for its liberal view of sexual matters, the testimony wasn't even mentioned on the evening TV news.

And in the Romanian capital of Bucharest, the embattled US president received strong support from Romanian teenagers traveling the length of the country to praise Clinton.

"Mr Clinton, don't forget: the Oasul county stands by your side," chanted a group of 15 teenagers who arrived at the US Embassy from Satu Mare, a city some 450 kilometre northwest of Bucharest.

A bar patron watches videotaped footage of President Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky, Monday afternoon, in Philadelphia. With the future course of his presidency at stake, President Clinton underwent questioning under oath Monday before a grand jury regarding his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. — AP/UNB photo



Miss Uzbekistan-98, Elnara Mamedova, 15, a schoolgirl from Tashkent, during the awards ceremony in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

New drug against brain cancer being tested

WASHINGTON, Aug 18: A new kind of drug, made by fusing poison to an immune system cell, homes in on and destroys brain cancer cells, researchers reported on Monday, says Reuter.

Although the drug has only been tested in mice, they said the approach was so promising that they were rushing to human trials of the drug.

"It kills brain cancer cells very nicely," said Dr Stephen Marcus, a vice-president at Neurocrine Biosciences, which has licensed the technology from the National Institute of Health (NIH).

"I must say it's a different approach than most other things," said Raj Puri of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), who led the team that developed the approach.

The drug, known as IL-4 fusion toxin, is being tested against glioblastoma, the most deadly form of brain cancer. Most patients die within a year and few survive past two years.

The new drug makes a unique attack on tumours. It attaches a poison, taken from the very common pseudomonas bacterium, to an immune chemical known as interleukin-4.

Interleukin-4 (IL-4) is a cytokine, used by immune cells to signal one another. A few years ago, Puri and his colleagues found that brain cancer cells carry receptors for IL-4. Normal brain cells do not.

"We don't understand why," Puri said. "We are trying to understand why nature has provided so many receptors for the IL-4 cytokine to the tumour cells."

But while they try to understand the why, the scientists can exploit the how. Since the

tumour cells have the receptor — a kind of chemical docking port — it can be used to deliver poison.

"We are basically fooling the cell into taking the toxin inside," said Puri, whose work is reported in the journal Cancer Research.

Normally, when a cytokine such as IL-4 docks on a cell receptor, the cell pulls it inside.

"The cell doesn't recognise that a toxin is attached. Basically, the cell becomes intoxicated and it dies," Puri said.

The researchers tested this in specially bred mice that had been infected with human glioblastoma tumours. They injected IL-4 fusion toxin into the tumours, killing them off apparently without hurting the mice or their brains.

Supporters of Benazir attack govt attorney

KARACHI, Aug 18: Dozens of supporters of former premier Benazir Bhutto attacked a government attorney with eggs and tomatoes outside a court room today as she appeared before a judge, witnesses said, reports AFP.

Police detained several people for "hooliganism" against Attorney General Chaudhry Mohammad Farooq, police said.

The incident came a day after a clash between police and pro-Bhutto men on Monday in another city, Lahore, when the former premier appeared in a court there to answer corruption charges, several were injured.