

International

Bin Laden said to be indicted for soliciting murder

US contacts Taliban to discuss fate of 'Saudi extremist'

WASHINGTON, Aug 26: The United States has contacted Taliban officials following last week's missile strikes on Afghanistan to discuss several issues including the fate of Saudi extremist Osama bin Laden, a State Department official confirmed Tuesday, reports AP.

Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar was quoted by the Afghan Islamic Press as saying that he had turned down an offer for dialogue from Washington after the attack on Thursday.

"We have been in touch with Taliban officials since the strike as we have been in touch with representatives of other Afghan factions," said the State Department official, who asked not to be named.

The administration was seeking to discuss "a lot of issues" with the Taliban but the fate of Bin Laden, whom the United States blames for the August 7 bombing of US em-

bassies in East Africa, "would be a very prominent one," he added.

The Taliban official said he had told the Americans the attack had ended prospects for dialogue. "There is nothing left to talk about after the missile raid," the Pakistan-based agency quoted him as saying.

The official did not give details on the Taliban response, but noted, "I can't say that there is anything specific on a schedule."

"We keep in touch," he added. AP adds from New York: A federal grand jury heard the case against Osama bin Laden for more than a year before indicting him just weeks before he was suspected in the deadly US embassy bombings in Africa, a source familiar with the grand jury investigation says.

The sealed indictment charged the Saudi millionaire with soliciting murder. The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told The Associ-

ated Press on Monday that the grand jury in US District Court in Manhattan indicted Bin Laden before the Aug. 7 bombings in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

The grand jury was convened after 19 US service personnel were killed when a bomb exploded in June 1996 at a military apartment complex in Saudi Arabia. There were suspicions that Bin Laden was linked with the attack.

It was not clear what specific incident resulted in the indictment, which came after evidence was presented that Bin Laden had called publicly for acts of violence, including murder, against US citizens, the source said.

The charge of solicitation to murder brought against someone who may have incited others to commit violence or murder.

The felony is punishable by life in prison.

Arafat on Israeli proposal

Withdrawal must be in line with US initiative

JERUSALEM, Aug 26: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Tuesday he had reservations about Israeli proposals on withdrawing from a further 13 per cent of the West Bank although gaps have narrowed between the two sides, reports AP.

"We have reservations (and) the agreement must be implemented on the ground in accordance with the US initiative," he told reporters when he returned from Oslo.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said publicly for the first time Monday that he was ready to accept conditionally a US package proposal centred on Israel transferring in stages over three months an additional 13 per cent of the West Bank to full or partial Palestinian control.

The deal would expand Palestinian autonomy from 27 per cent of the West Bank to 40 per cent. There is also self-rule in 60 per cent of the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli offer would designate three per cent of the land

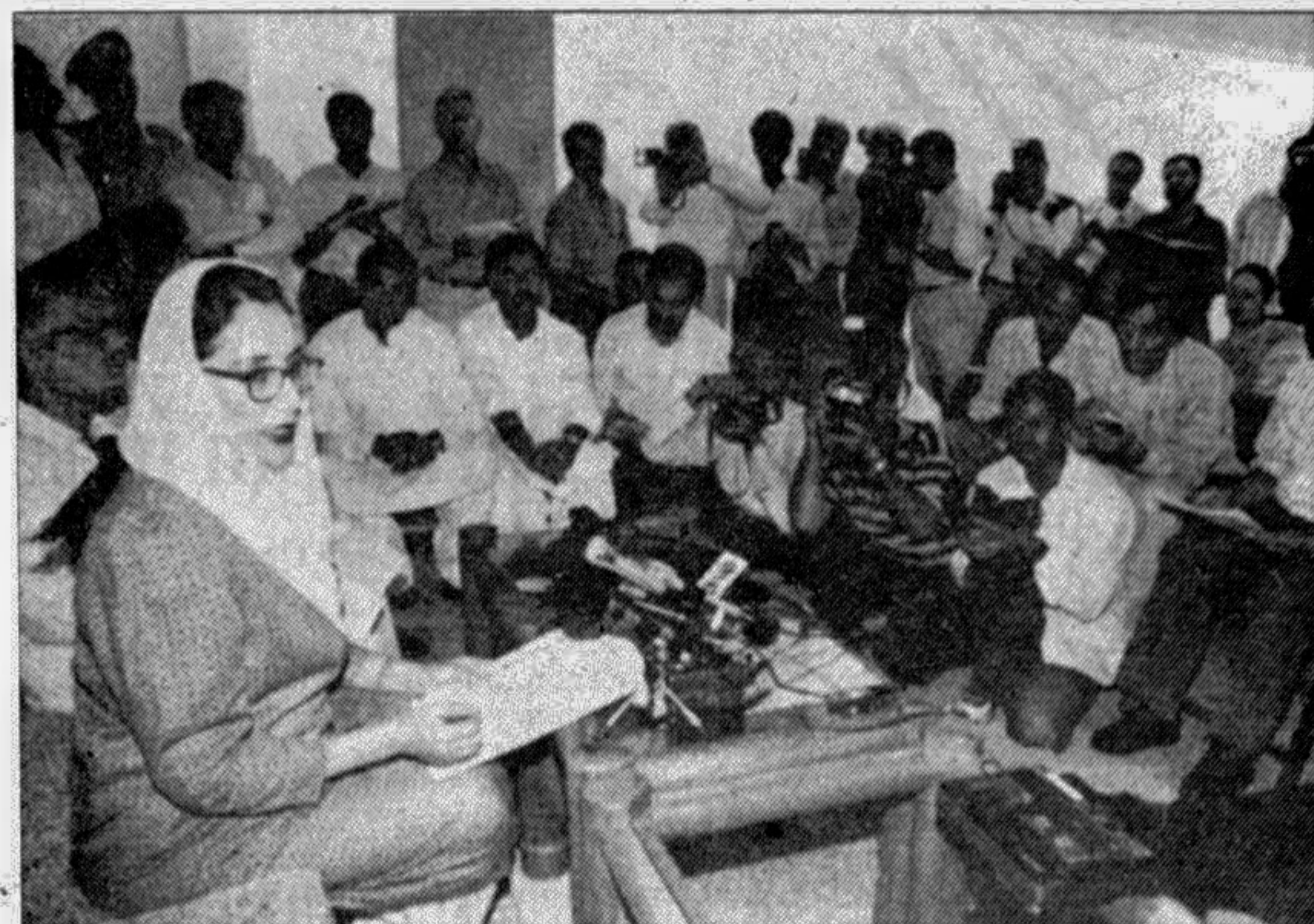
to be ceded as "nature reserves" where Israel would retain full security powers and the right to restrict Palestinian construction.

Hours after the announcement, Arafat, speaking in Oslo at a ceremony marking the fifth anniversary of the first Israeli-Palestinian peace accord, called the Israeli proposal "a beginning."

He also agreed in principle that some of the land to be transferred could be nature reserves, implying at least temporary restrictions on Palestinian powers in the zones.

But officials on both sides stressed that key questions remained to be worked out over the pullback, including the location of the land to be transferred and the exact powers to be granted to Arafat's Palestinian Authority in each area.

The Israeli proposals are only a beginning and there are still substantive differences between the two sides' positions," said Ahmad Tibi, an Israeli Arab adviser to Arafat.



Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto speaks to the press in Islamabad, Pakistan Tuesday. Benazir said it was her government's policy, and the policy of current Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, not to intervene in Afghanistan, but that individual Pakistanis may have gone to help the Taliban by their own initiative. — AP/UNB photo

Blair promises 'draconian' anti-terrorism laws

OMAGH, Northern Ireland, Aug 26: British Prime Minister Tony Blair has promised new "draconian and fundamental" anti-terrorism laws, saying they are necessary to ensure such tragedies as the Omagh bombing never happen again, reports AP.

Blair announced the proposed new measures during a visit Tuesday to the boarded-up, gutted downtown where a car bomb set off by Irish Republican Army dissidents killed 28 people and wounded 330 others on Aug 15.

He said Parliament would be recalled Sept. 2 to approve legislation that would make it easier to secure convictions against suspected members of violent paramilitary groups accused of organising attacks in defiance of April's peace accord.

The proposals — which Blair announced after shaking hands and saying "I'm so sorry" to hundreds of appreciative resi-

dents in drizzling rain — closely mirror proposed laws that the Irish government intends to enact at its own emergency parliamentary session before US President Bill Clinton arrives Sept 3 to tour Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern said the recall of both Parliaments on the same dates "symbolizes effectively the shared determination of the two governments to deal decisively with any groups who persist in violence in defiance of the clear will of the people of the island."

The two premiers planned to meet Wednesday to discuss their governments' security plans and the Northern Ireland peace process in general.

Blair's proposals include a provision allowing judges to infer guilt from a defendant's refusal to cooperate with any relevant inquiry, which could effectively abolish the right to si-

lence for suspected members of violent splinter groups.

Members of paramilitary groups often maintain disciplined silence when questioned.

Blair said the new British law would allow testimony of senior detectives to be used to convict people of belonging to outlawed paramilitary groups, something that has normally been difficult to do.

Admitting these plans were "of a very draconian and fundamental nature," Blair said he considered them "right and justified in these circumstances."

He said IRA dissidents and other armed opponents of the peace agreement that set out how Northern Ireland should be governed were "outcasts from the community." And people rightly expect that we will take whatever measures we can, properly and legitimately, to bring those responsible to justice.

'Energy for life on Mars much less than earth'

WASHINGTON, Aug 26: While scientists speculate about the possibility of life on Mars, a team of researchers has calculated that the Red Planet probably had enough energy for life to begin but not to create an Earth-like abundance, reports AP.

Even over billions of years, the energy available from volcanic activity and geothermal vents would support much less life than on Earth, the scientists report in the Aug. 25 edition of the Journal of Geophysical Research.

There probably "was sufficient energy available to support the origin of life on Mars but not sufficient energy to create a ubiquitous and lush biosphere," Bruce M. Jakosky of the University of Colorado, Boulder, and Everett L. Shock of Washington University in St. Louis speculate in their paper.

Two years ago, NASA scientists made the startling announcement that they had found a rock in Antarctica that had originally formed on Mars

and showed evidence of tiny, bacteria-like life. Their interpretation remains subject to controversy, however.

Interest in the possibility of life on Mars has increased in recent years with the discovery that life can exist under the harshest, most extreme conditions deep inside the Earth — conditions similar to those on Mars and Jupiter's moon Europa.

In those cases, microbes managed to extract the energy to live from chemical reactions, rather than from the sun as most life forms do on Earth.

But when the researchers studied conditions on Mars, they concluded that the amount of volcanic rock that has erupted on Mars over its lifetime is several hundred times less than that on early Earth. Therefore, the energy accessible through hydrothermal vents would probably have been proportionately less on Mars as well.

Kabila calls for people's war in eastern Congo

KINSHASA, Aug 26: President Laurent Kabila has called for a people's war in the east of the democratic republic of the Congo, urging villagers to resort to bows and arrows or spears if they have no other weapons to hand, reports Reuters.

With his government proclaiming major successes against Rwandan-backed rebels on the western front, Kabila said the population needed to do more in the east to eject Rwandan and Ugandan forces from Africa's third largest country.

"It is not enough the Congolese must mobilise to apply the principle of a people's war," he told state television on a rival back in the capital Kinshasa after just over a week in his southern home province of Katanga.

"They must encircle the enemy and fight them from the front and from behind. It's important that they crush the enemy."

Kabila who ousted veteran dictator Mobutu Sese Seko with the help of Rwanda's Tutsi-dominated army and Uganda in May 1997, accuses his former allies of invading to fight alongside rebels who took up arms against him on August 2.

Information Minister Didier Mumentgi told the television that forces loyal to Kabila recaptured the port town of Matadi on Tuesday, bringing the western tip of the former Zaire back under government control.

"Today we can state with joy that the far west of our country has come back into the republic," Mumentgi said. "Matadi, Kitona, Muanda, Boma and Banana have been re-taken," he added.

Mumentgi, speaking after a cabinet meeting, said hundreds of rebels had been killed or wounded and thousands taken prisoner in the battle for control of the western front.

The recapture of the garrison town of Kitona, the oil town of Muanda, the smaller port of Boma and the naval base of Banana after the massive intervention of Angolan troops on the side of the government had already been reported.

Zimbabwe has also sent troops to fight for Kabila. An army communique, meanwhile, warned the population at large that the rebels had changed tactics, dressing in civilian clothes and carrying their guns in bags.

The communique, read on state television, urged people to report anyone in groups of two or three, carrying bags and acting suspiciously.

Mumentgi said that on Tuesday government forces had begun harassing rebel forces in the east, where the revolt began. "Since this morning the enemy is harried, disperse and on the way to being wiped out in the east," he added.

BRIEFLY

EG Marshall dies at 84: EG Marshall, the Emmy Award-winning character actor who played so many politicians, lawyers and judges that he was sometimes confused with the real thing, has died. He was 84. AP reports from New York.

Marshall, who had been sick for a short time, died Monday night at his home in suburban Mount Kisco, said his agent, Clifford Stevens.

King Fahd leaves hospital: Saudi King Fahd was discharged from hospital Tuesday after undergoing medical check-ups, the official Saudi press agency reported. AP says from Riyadh.

King Fahd, who is in his mid-70s, was admitted to King Faisal Specialist Hospital on Sunday. It was the fourth time this year that the Saudi monarch has been admitted to the hospital.

Herzog to visit ROK in Sept: German President Roman Herzog will make an official five-day visit to South Korea next month at the invitation of President Kim Dae-jung, Kim's office said yesterday. AP says from Seoul.

During the Sept. 15-19 visit, the two presidents will review the latest situation on the Korean peninsula and discuss ways to expand economic cooperation, the office said in a statement.

Missing Myanmar plane lands safely: A Myanmar Airways Fokker F-27 turboprop aircraft reported missing on Monday with 39 passengers on board has landed safely in Laos, an official of Myanmar Airways said on Tuesday. Reuters says from Bangkok.

"The passengers and plane are OK. They landed at a Laos airport — that's what we can say," said the official, contacted in Yangon, the Myanmar capital, by telephone from Bangkok.

Lightning claims 5 in Hanoi: Five people were killed by lightning in southern province of Dong Nai, an official of the provincial floods and storm control committee said yesterday. AP says from Hanoi.

Three people working on the grading of the local stadium and two employees of the Vedan MSG plant were killed in the incident last week. Three others were injured.

Irish president to visit Australia: Irish President Mary McAleese will be in Australia next week on her first state visit since her election last November. AP reports from Canberra.

Prime Minister John Howard said he was honoured she had chosen Australia as her destination. McAleese will visit Perth, Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane between Aug. 31 and Sept. 10.

UN cuts down on staff in Tajikistan: The United Nations has begun withdrawing some of its personnel from Tajikistan, where four members of a UN observer mission were murdered in July, a UN spokesman said on Tuesday. Reuters says from UN.

He said non-essential personnel, including 33 military observers, were being relocated temporarily to Tashkent, in neighbouring Uzbekistan, as a precautionary measure.

2 Japanese F-1 fighters missing: Two Japanese air self-defence Force F-1 fighters are missing off northern Japan and are believed to have crashed, possibly after a mid-air collision. Japan's defence agency said yesterday. Reuters says from Tokyo.

The planes, based at Misawa air base at the northern end of Japan's main island of Honshu, disappeared from radar screens over the Pacific at around 7 pm on Tuesday night, shortly after taking off to conduct night flying practice, a defence agency spokesman said.

Bus-van collision kills 11 in Karachi: The collision of a bus and a van in the southern port city of Karachi killed 11 people, Associated Press of Pakistan reported yesterday. AP says from Karachi.

The state news agency added another 15 people were hurt in the accident late Tuesday. No other details were reported.

3 held in Japan for smuggling: In an apparent bungled smuggling attempt, three Japanese men have been arrested on suspicion of trying to bring hundreds of kilograms of illegal stimulant drugs into the country, police said yesterday. AP reports from Tokyo.

Koji Kawakami, a spokesman for the Mie prefectural, or state, police in southwestern Japan, identified the three as fishing boat captain Tami Sumi, 52, Shoichi Iwasaki, 33, and Tadato Miyazaki, 42. Iwasaki and Miyazaki are both unemployed, Kawakami said.

Koirala inducts communists into cabinet

KATHMANDU, Aug 26: With an eye on next year's elections and with coalition government a near certainty, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on Wednesday inducted a communist group into his minority government, giving him a comfortable lead in parliament, reports AP.

Koirala's centrist Nepali Congress has 87 members in the 205-seat House of Representatives, the lower house of parliament. With the additional 40 members from Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), Koirala has a comfortable majority required to pass bills.

The move had been expected after the budget was approved by parliament Tuesday with the support of the communists.

Iraq only has commercial ties with Sudan's factory

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 26: Iraq only has commercial ties with Sudan's El Shifa Pharmaceutical Factory and nothing is beyond, Nizar Hamdoon, Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations, stressed here on Tuesday, reports Xinhua.

Speaking to reporters, Hamdoon said Iraq has had pharmaceutical contacts with the government of Sudan with regard to this factory.

Hamdoon said Iraq's pharmaceutical contacts with Sudan were approved by the UN sanctions committee on Iraq.

He said Sudan has asked United Nations Security Council to send a fact-finding mission to the country and the facts will speak for themselves.



Activists of Revolutionary Youth Association (RYA), are burning the effigy of US President Bill Clinton near US Consulate in Calcutta, Tuesday, in protest against recent missile attack on Sudan and Afghanistan. — AP/UNB photo

US, UK draft resolution to suspend sanctions

Libya likely to extradite two Lockerbie bombing suspects

CAIRO, Aug 26: Libya is studying a US-British proposal to try two Libyan suspects in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in the Netherlands and will announce Wednesday whether it accepts the deal, Libyan television reported, says AP.

The head of the Arab League, Esmat Abdel Meguid, said Tuesday he expects Libya to accept the agreement.

"The American-British proposal is compatible with the previous Arab suggestions, which Libya has accepted," Abdel Meguid said after meeting with British Ambassador David Blatherwick.

The United States and Britain have said they would accept a trial by a panel of three Scottish judges under Scottish law in the Hague.

The deal also says that the suspects, Abdel Basset al-Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah, cannot be extradited from The Netherlands and that if found guilty, they would serve their sentences in the United Kingdom.

Libya's government-run television said experts and officials were meeting to discuss the proposals and "a detailed statement about this will be issued... Wednesday."

Libya had long demanded that if a trial were held it should be in a neutral country. Washington and London had insisted on a trial on their territory.

Reuters says from UN: The United States and Britain on

Tuesday introduced a Security Council resolution that would suspend sanctions against Tripoli once two Libyans accused of the 1988 Lockerbie airliner bombing arrive in the Netherlands for trial under Scottish law.

Both countries moved quickly to make official their Monday offer for a change of trial venue, presumably in an effort to force Tripoli to respond and ward off further violations of the faltering sanctions. US officials hope the Security Council acts this week.

Washington and London, which had insisted on a trial in their respective countries, on Monday announced that the two accused Libyans could be tried in the Netherlands for their role in blowing a Pan

India bans CD of Encyclopedia Britannica

NEW DELHI, Aug 26: Indian customs officials have banned the import of the CD version of Encyclopedia Britannica, saying it shows a wrong map of the Himalayan state of Kashmir, newspapers reported Wednesday, reports AP.

Indian officials routinely stamp a warning on maps in newspapers and books that show portions of Kashmir as belonging to Pakistan, India's neighbour with which it has fought three wars in 50 years.

American airliner out of the skies over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988. A total of 270 people were killed in the air and on the ground in Scotland.

In 1992 the Security Council imposed an air and diplomatic embargo against Libya for refusing to surrender the two suspects to Britain or the United States. The sanctions were tightened in 1993 with the addition of a freeze on some Libyan assets abroad and a ban on some types of equipment used in oil terminals and refineries.

The new resolution would suspend these measures "immediately" once both suspects arrived in the Netherlands.

It also says Libya has to satisfy French authorities investigating the mid-flight bombing of France's UTA flight 772 over Niger in 1989 in which 171 people died. But diplomats said they did not believe Paris would hold up the sanctions suspension if Libya complied on the Lockerbie demands.

The document would also decide that the suspects would be detained by the Dutch government on arrival in the Netherlands.

Call on the Dutch and British governments to adopt legal measures in connection with the proposed trial — ask UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to assist Libya "with the physical arrangements for the transfer of the two accused from Libya direct to the Netherlands."

Pharmaceutical factory in Sudan

Soil sample showed clear evidence of chemical precursor for deadly gas: US

WASHINGTON, Aug 26: A soil sample collected in "recent months" from around a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan showed an ingredient for making deadly VX gas and was a key factor behind the US cruise missile strikes, a US State Department official said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

"We have been aware for at least two years that there was a serious potential problem at this plant that was struck," under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering said.

"We had related important physical evidence which was acquired by the United States in recent months. The physical evidence is a soil sample, analysis of it shows the presence of a chemical whose simple name is 'empta,' a known precursor for the nerve agent VX," Pickering told reporters at a briefing at the US Information Agency Foreign Press Centre.

The United States fired on the El Shifa factory in Khartoum last Thursday and at sites in Afghanistan that it said were training camps related to Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden.

Pickering would not be more specific on when and where the soil sample had been taken but said the chemical empta, or ethylmethylphosphonothioic acid, "is not used in commercial applications. It doesn't occur naturally in the environment. It is not a by-product of another chemical process."

He said "we think that it was this evidence, and evidence like it, which made our decision to carry out this strike on this particular target the correct and proper decision under the circumstances."

There was also "clear" evidence of contacts between executives of the factory in Sudan and Iraqis close to Iraq's chemical weapons programme, Pick-

ering said. "El Shifa officials, early in this company's history, we believe were in touch with Iraqi individuals associated with Iraq's VX programme," he said.

But Iraq's UN ambassador, Nizar Hamdoon, said his country "strongly denied" any contact with the Sudan on chemicals beyond pharmaceuticals supplied ordered from the destroyed factory and approved by the UN Security Council's Sanctions Committee which monitors goods imported to Iraq.

"I think it is part of the (US) effort to try to muddle the whole situation in order to cover up the problem that they have had with the bombing of Sudan," he told reporters.

Sudanese officials dismissed the soil sample. "They (the Americans) still have not produced any concrete evidence..."

Information Minister Ghazi Salahuddin told a news conference in Khartoum.

"They cannot prove it by claiming to have contaminated soil," he said, adding that the best solution was Sudan's proposal for a comprehensive UN supervised investigation.

Pickering dismissed the need for an international investigation. "I don't believe that an international investigative committee needs to have an additional role. The evidence in our view is clear and persuasive," Pickering said.

US officials including Defence Secretary William Cohen have said that Bin Laden helped finance the El Shifa factory, which is privately owned.

Off the Record

'Molestus' the new breed mosquitoes

LONDON: London's underground train network, 'the tube', is reported to be the breeding ground for a new type of mosquito, perfectly adapted to subterranean life, reports Reuters.

The latest issue of the British Broadcasting Corporation's Wildlife magazine on Tuesday said the new species of mosquito, dubbed "molestus" by British scientists, has developed a taste for rats and mice.

The network's warm, damp conditions are ideal for the blood-sucking bugs.

Scientists also say that the underground variety differs so much from the above-ground species that the two groups appear unable to mate!

Low-cost commercial pet cloning service?

COLLEGE STATION (Texas): A Texas scientist said on Tuesday he was working on a project to clone a mixed-breed dog for its anonymous, wealthy owners, says Reuters.

Mark Westhusin, associate professor of veterinary physiology at Texas A M University, said his team had been given a 2.2 million US dollars research grant to work on the 2-year project. Missy, the pet at the centre of the high-tech project, has her own website at www.missyclon.com, featuring several photos and a wagging-tail animated graphic. But one thing not found there is any clue to the identity of her dotting owners.