

International

Khatami at UNGA

Iran denounces idea of a world dominated by the US



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, left, claps hands with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami during a meeting Monday at the United Nations. Khatami, in the first General Assembly speech by an Iranian leader in 12 years, said his country wanted good relations with the outside world. — AP/UNB photo

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 22: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Iran's deputy foreign minister and other diplomats Monday in the highest level US-Iranian diplomatic contact in two decades but there were no one-on-one direct talks between the two countries, reports AP.

The meeting followed a speech by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami to the UN General Assembly in which he called for a dialogue on terrorism, said there could be no military solution in Afghanistan and chided US global influence.

Khatami, in the first General Assembly speech by an Iranian leader in 12 years, said his country wanted good relations with the outside world, but denounced the idea of a world dominated by the United States.

"The fantasy of a unipolar world ruled by a single super-

power is but an illusion," he said. But he appeared to soften long-standing Iranian criticism of the United States.

"I am confident that powerful nations, such as the American people, will not accept that their good name, potentials and national prestige be exploited for the advancement of the dream of a uni-polar world by the short-sighted material and factional interests of a few," he said.

Albright met with Iran's deputy foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, as part of an eight-nation meeting convened by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to discuss the civil war in Afghanistan and the potential for a war between Afghanistan and Iran.

"I think we as an international community ought to do

whatever we can to bring the situation under control, not only internally but to ensure that tensions in the region do not increase," Annan said as he entered the meeting.

Inside, he told the group, "As the war in Afghanistan itself has escalated, so have risks of its becoming a fullscale regional conflict."

Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi had been scheduled to attend the eight-nation conference and there was no immediate explanation why Zarif was sent instead.

State Department spokesman James P. Rubin said that because of the urgency of the issue, Albright was happy to participate in the meeting despite the lower-level representation by Iran.

Several members of Congress last week urged the

Clinton administration to refrain from any goodwill gestures toward Khatami or his government and majority in the House of Representatives signed a statement urging continued toughness towards Iran.

On Afghanistan, Khatami called for all-party talks to avoid conflict. "There is no military solution," he said.

Iran has no diplomatic relations with the United States but Khatami has sought to tone down nearly two decades of hostility with the country sometimes known in Iran as "the Great Satan."

Not included in the UN talks were diplomats from the Taliban or the nearly overrun government of Burhanuddin Rabbani, which is still recognised as the official representative of Afghanistan at the United Nations.

Bid to reduce tensions between Iran, Taliban

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 22: The neighbours of Afghanistan along with the United States and Russia agreed Monday to send a UN envoy to the region in a bid to reduce tensions between Iran and the Taliban, reports AFP.

UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi told journalists he could go to the area in early October along with the secretary general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

The decision came out of a meeting of representatives from Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, along with the United States and Russia met on the side lines of the United Nations General Assembly.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the so-called "six plus two" session in a bid to defuse tensions between Iran and the Taliban militia after the killing of nine Iranian diplomats in northern Afghanistan.

It also called on the United Nations to investigate Iranian reports of "mass killings and mass graves in Afghanistan."

Police threatens to arrest Anwar Ibrahim's wife
Kuala Lumpur appears calm

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 22: Army trucks filled with field troops carrying assault rifles surrounded the home of ousted deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim on Tuesday, reports AP.

Another 30 riot police with tear gas canisters lurked outside the house as supporters gathered inside.

Though the mood was tense at Anwar's house, the rest of the capital was calm, following violent clashes between police and Anwar supporters Monday.

Anwar, who was sacked earlier this month, was expected to face charges of sexual misconduct and disturbing the public order. His arrest at his home Sunday has added a volatile element to Malaysia's political and economic troubles.

The unrest also comes during the state visit of Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, Prince Philip. Demonstrators at the courthouse where supporters expected Anwar to be charged Monday lunged at the queen's convoy as it drove by, prompting riot police to move in.

The police have now turned their sights on Anwar's wife, threatening to arrest her for comments she made suggesting her husband had been injected with the HIV virus while in po-

lice detention.

Anwar, arrested under the country's Internal Security Act, has not been seen since police dragged him and his wife, Azizah Ismail, from their home Sunday night.

Anwar had said his wife would take over his political reform movement in the event of his arrest. Any move to arrest her would be seen as another step by the government to crush the growing movement calling for an end to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's 17-year leadership.

The police intimidation appeared to be working.

Azizah told reporters Tuesday that she would no longer hold nightly reform rallies at their house. She called on Anwar's supporters to remain peaceful, saying the police would use their disorder as an excuse to arrest them.

"I want things to be stable," she said. "They'll use that excuse to kill us all."

Azizah said the police had visited her three times since Anwar's arrest. They asked her to pacify the crowds that gather at her home nightly, shouting anti-government slogans and demanding Mahathir's resignation.

One of the organizers of the Anwar rallies, who spoke on

condition of anonymity, said the public gatherings would continue in many states in the next few days.

"Although lots of the original leaders are under great danger, there are still many more leaders who are being mobilized," he said.

The organiser said the close Anwar aides who had not been arrested were in hiding and that police were now targeting Anwar's financial backers.

"The net has been cast very wide," he said.

Anwar was fired by Mahathir Sept. 2 as his deputy and finance minister on charges of sexual misconduct.

The sacked deputy has vehemently denied the charges and says they are part of a government conspiracy to thwart his growing challenge to Mahathir.

Police said Azizah told CNBC news Monday that her husband's life had been threatened by police.

Amnesty International called for Anwar and his colleagues to be charged promptly or released.

The group said it was concerned that Anwar "and the other detainees are being held solely because of their critical political views and are possible prisoners of conscience."

Peace is possible in Kosovo: Russian Minister
Blair calls for adoption of resolution for ceasefire

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 22: British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Monday urged the adoption of a resolution for a ceasefire in Kosovo, where Serbian authorities are leading a bloody crackdown on separatists, reports AP.

"We propose a new Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and demanding an urgent end to the trampling on the rights of the inhabitants of Kosovo," Blair told the UN General Assembly.

"It should be passed this week. Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic would ignore such a resolution at his peril," Blair said.

Continuation of military repression will inevitably lead to a new kind of response," Blair added in an allusion to possible NATO intervention.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he deplored the negative image the international community has gained during the seven-month long offensive against ethnic Albanian separatists in the Serbian province.

"In Kosovo, the interna-

tional community seems to be watching with concern while the kind of brutal and indiscriminate abuses we saw in Bosnia are repeated, something we all swore must never happen again," Annan said.

Britain and France have proposed a draft Security Council resolution that would allow

NATO to use force in the region to stop the fighting.

However, Russia and the United States have expressed serious reservations about the resolution, according to diplomats in the respective delegations.

Another report from Belgrade adds: Peace is possible in Serbia's southern province of Kosovo, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Afanassievsky said in an interview published today by the Daily Blic.

Speaking after talks with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, Afanassievsky said: "The situation gives reason to hope for an agreement, but it is not easy."

Backing a "step by step" settlement, he called on Serbian forces and the ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighting for the independence of the province to end their hostilities.

He stressed the importance of resolving the problem of the thousands of Albanian refugees who have fled into the forests and countryside before winter.

Off the Record

Fat cabinet, idle ministers

LUCKNOW: India's most populous state has so many Cabinet ministers they don't know what to do, reports AP.

"As many as 23 of us, including myself, have little or no work to do," said program implementation minister Bhaguraj Prasad Singh, one of 93 Uttar Pradesh Cabinet members. Speaking Tuesday, the first anniversary of his government, Singh said he had not signed off on a single project during his tenure.

"We are ministers in name only," added dairy development minister Sunder Singh Baghel.

Politics are so fractious in Uttar Pradesh that the state's top politician, Chief Minister Kalyan Singh, had to offer Cabinet posts — which come with perks — to secure the loyalty of allies in his 11-member governing coalition. The 93 ministers in the largest Cabinet ever in Uttar Pradesh, are nearly half the 222 legislators who supported his government in a recent confidence vote.

Several Uttar Pradesh ministers admitted to idleness Tuesday, but none said they were considering leaving the Cabinet. Officials estimate that salaries, allowances and privileges such as homes, cars and special bodyguards for Cabinet members cost the state just over 1 billion (about 24 million dollars) for the year.

Ail for love!

BANGKOK: Thai police arrested a man who robbed a Bangkok doughnut shop because he needed money to throw a birthday party for his pregnant wife, Thai newspapers said Tuesday, reports AP.

Somai Srinualae, 19, and three friends, robbed a Mister Donut shop last Sunday in Siam Square, one of Bangkok's busiest shopping areas. He was a former employee of the store.

He was quoted in Thai Rath newspaper as saying he needed money to throw a birthday party for his wife who often complained he doesn't show her enough love and affection.

Police said all four have confessed to their crime.



President Clinton addresses the 53rd General Assembly Monday at the United Nations. Listening are left to right UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, President of the General Assembly Didier Operti and Under Secretary General for General Assembly Affairs Jin Young Jiam. Looking to assert himself on the world stage, President Clinton is calling anew for a united international front to combat terrorists and their new high-tech ability to kill and maim. The White House hoped the image of the president in an international leadership role would counter that of Clinton as grand jury witness concerning his relationship with White-House intern Monica Lewinsky in video footage also broadcast Monday. — AP/UNB photo

Release of Clinton's testimony
World reacts with sympathy

TOKYO, Sept 22: As Bill Clinton's grand jury testimony was aired around the world, many people expressed sympathy for the president and revulsion at the spectacle of America dragging its leader through a ritual of humiliation, reports AP.

From Europe to Asia to the Middle East, men and women in the street decried what they saw as an erosion of standards protecting privacy and keeping explicit sexuality out of the mainstream media.

"They didn't have to do this," Kensuke Sunato, a 27-year-old company worker, said in Tokyo. "I can't help but feel, so what?"

In London, the media likened the release of the testimony to past ages of witch-hunts and inquisitions, and said the latest development in the Lewinsky affair was as much a blow to America as to the president.

"This was medieval. It was cruel. This was like bear-baiting, witch-ducking... The questions were more offensive than the answers," said a front-page column in the Times. "It was humiliating even to the viewer."

Another British paper, The Independent, echoed that view.

"Sordid hounding of the president demeans America," read the headline of its editorial.

In Canada, one person reserved the harshest criticism

for the media, accusing it of broadcasting Clinton's deposition to boost ratings.

"No matter what they say, it's about sex, it's about ratings and there's no denying that," said Gail MacLennan, a freelance consultant and writer. "This has just upped the ante in terms of what is acceptable to expose."

Japanese newspapers gave prominent coverage to Clinton's deposition, carrying front-page photographs of the videotaped testimony that showed the president lost in thought or displaying irritation.

The mass-circulation Yomiuri and Mainichi newspapers focused on how damaging the release of the tape would be to Clinton politically.

"How will the people judge (Clinton's) real face and natural voice?" read a headline in the Yomiuri.

In South Korea, one television station speculated on whether the videotape would be enough to sink Clinton's presidency.

"The Americans saw in their own eyes a new president who lied before the grand jury. He is at a crossroads," MBC-TV said.

In Hong Kong, where passers-by watched Clinton on a television screen at a shopping mall, Lisa Wong said she supposed most people would lie to keep such an affair secret.

And in Australia, the Sydney Morning Herald led with this headline: "Humiliation of a president... in your living room."

As Clinton's grilling by prosecutors played on TV in a London pub, one man said he already knew more than he wanted to know about the US president's sex life.

"I don't need to be seeing this," said Tony Charlesworth, a 31-year-old London businessman. "They should only show it to people who need to see it. They're just humiliating him."

But in Kuwait, former oil minister Ali al-Baghi called it a historic day.

The head of the most important country is accounting for breaking the law, just like any ordinary person. I hope this will be a lesson to us in the Third World," said al-Baghi.

Maher bin Najl, a 39-year-old Kuwaiti banker, agreed that airing the testimony was "democracy at its peak," but said "The poor guy did not do anything. It's his private life and he should not resign."

In Germany, Chancellor Helmut Kohl expressed outrage.

"I find the whole business extremely upsetting," Kohl told reporters Monday. "I can only repeat, in my blunt way of saying it, that it makes me throw up."

Rebels in DRC continuing to claim successes

GOMA, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sept 22: Rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are continuing to claim successes, including in the west of the country where they had previously suffered defeats, reports AP.

The military commander of the ethnic Tutsi-led rebellion, Jean Pierre Ondekane, said they were giving the forces of DRC President Laurent Kabila problems between Kinshasa and Matabi, west of the capital.

It was in this area that the rebels suffered defeats last month at the hands of Angolan and Zimbabwean troops who rushed to help Kabila.

"Our soldiers are not sleeping, they are working," Ondekane said.

"We are avoiding combat with the Angolans and Zimbabweans and they with us, because they have lost many men."

On the other side of the country, Ondekane said the Town of Isiro in the northeast had fallen with little resistance.

"We will continue in that direction up to the border with Sudan," he added. "We will clear up the area of the Garamba national park where Kabila's soldiers are hiding."

Ondekane also confirmed the capture of the strategically important eastern town of Kamituga, on a major road between Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province, and Kindu, where Kabila has established his operational headquarters.

"Kamituga fell after fierce fighting like Shabunda (also on the road to Kindu) last week, when we captured 10 Sudanese prisoners," Ondekane said.

The Sudanese government has denied sending troops to aid Kabila.

On the other hand, Ondekane said, the capture of Lubumbashi, the country's second largest city in Kabila's home province of Katanga, would take time "because we are advancing on foot."

BRIEFLY

Tajik opposition leader killed: Tajik opposition leader Otakhon Latifi was killed in his apartment early yesterday, police said, adding that the motive for the murder was as yet unclear. AFP reports from Dushanbe.

Latifi freed the legal arm of the nationalist movement in Tajikistan.

ELN freed last of its hostages: Colombia's second-largest rebel group on Monday freed the last of eight mayors it had kidnapped to focus attention on escalating right-wing paramilitary activity in the north, AFP reports from Bogota.

The National Liberation Army (ELN) freed Nestor Gallego, mayor of the town of Vagachi, fulfilling a promise made on the weekend to release the last of the municipal officials taken as political hostages.

Philippine storms leave 52 dead: Storms that battered the main Philippine island of Luzon over the past week left at least 52 people dead and destroyed crops and livestock worth 34.2 million pesos (dhs 780,000), officials said yesterday. AP reports from Manila.

The deaths did not include at least 40 people who drowned after an inter-island ferry with 454 people aboard sank Friday night south of Manila after being pounded by large waves whipped by the storms.

CPC team ends Vietnam visit: A high-level delegation of the Communist Party of China (CPC) ended a six-day official visit to Vietnam yesterday. Xinhua says from Ho Chi Minh City.

During his stay, Wei Jianxing, a politburo standing committee member who headed the delegation, held talks with Vietnamese leaders.

India's ruling alliance breathes easy

NEW DELHI, Sept 22: India's ruling alliance is breathing easy for the first time after completing six months in office with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee likely to expand his cabinet later this month, reports IANS.

According to party officials, the long-due expansion of the Vajpayee ministry would take place when the Prime Minister returns from addressing the U.N. General Assembly in New York. The cabinet expansion was said to have been held up because of the political uncertainty till now over the 17-party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government.

Media commentators who had written much of Vajpayee's "grim" and "tired" appearance since he took office on March 19, now noted how the Prime Minister looked pleased after addressing the first joint rally by his coalition which was held last week in the southern city of Chennai and attended by hundreds of thousands of people.

A day earlier, the master-organizer, who is also known for literary inclinations, was at his usual best during the release of a book of his poems in New Delhi.

"We have always maintained that we are confident of completing five years (in office), and our assessment has not changed," said BJP spokesman Krishan Lal Sharma. Added M. Venkiah Naidu, another party leader: "Our government will complete its term. We don't expect any early elections."

Till recently, not many party officials had exhibited such confidence.

According to political analysts, the chief reason for Vajpayee's increasing confidence is the main opposition parties which are keen to see the BJP-led coalition but would provide a new government if the former fell on its own. This has disappointed most of the smaller opposition parties which are keen to see the BJP government go.

The Prime Minister also executed a coup of sorts when he managed to isolate a sulking ally, the Tamil regional All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalalitha, by weaning away its junior Tamil partners to the Chennai rally. The AIADMK boycotted the event but found itself sailing alone.

It was a big success for Vajpayee's BJP, a political pygmy compared to the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu state. The BJP's tie-up with the AIADMK before the national election, which brought Vajpayee to office, was widely seen as a masterstroke of electoral strategy and ensured the BJP three Parliament seats from the state where the BJP had virtually no presence till then.

Adding to the good news is the reported decision of two parties — the Trinamool Congress, which is part of the ruling alliance and Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which is supporting the government from the outside — to join the Vajpayee cabinet. Both had stayed out, their reluctance being ascribed to the perception that the government would not last long.

The confidence has led the ruling alliance to tone down its bitter attacks on the Congress, although they will take on each other in Assembly elections in four states in November.

Meanwhile, the government is also going ahead with apparently secret negotiations with the United States in a move which is expected to result in New Delhi signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Vajpayee, as before the surprise nuclear tests in May, has refused to take the opposition into confidence over the talks.

However, analysts warn that the BJP's balance sheet is uneven. Most commentators, and even party officials, are expecting BJP governments to lose to the Congress in local elections in the northern state of Rajasthan and in Delhi. The BJP could, however, wrest the central state of Madhya Pradesh from the Congress. The BJP has a minor presence in northeastern Mizoram, the other state to go to polls.

A sharp rise in food prices in recent months is said to have badly dented the BJP's popularity in its traditional strongholds.

The BJP is also seen as hamstrung by a relatively lacklustre chief with party president Kushabhau Thakre unable to keep up with his high-profile predecessor, Home (Interior) Minister Lal Krishna Advani.

Weltklasse für Deutschland

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on general election campaign tour in Bonn Monday. The sentence on the Kohl poster reads: "World class for Germany." The German general election will take place on September 27. — AP/UNB photo