

Taliban pressing UN to recognise its govt

ISLAMABAD, Oct 5: The hard-line Taliban Islamic militia pressed the United Nations to recognise the Taliban government, according to a statement issued on Sunday by the movement's reclusive leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, reports AP.

Omar assailed the UN for recognising the ousted government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, whose alliance controls barely 10 per cent of the country.

The Taliban militia controls the remaining 90 per cent. Omar also warned the UN against using the killing in August of eight Iranian diplomats and one Iranian journalist as an excuse to deny the Taliban recognition.

"It is highly regrettable that the United Nations still accord recognition to the ousted and rejected Rabbani regime in sheer violation of its own principles," said Omar in a statement given to the privately run News Network International, a Pakistani news agency.

The UN's special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi is currently in Iran and plans to come to Pakistan in an attempt to find a route toward the establishment of a broad-based government in Afghanistan.

As well Brahimi is trying to broker an end to a standoff between Iran and the Taliban militia. Iran is conducting massive military exercises on its eastern border with Afghanistan.

Tehran sent 270,000 soldiers to the border after its diplomats were killed by Taliban soldiers during the takeover of the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif.

Iran is demanding an apology from the Taliban, as well as the release of about 50 Iranians being held captive in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar.

The opposition northern alliance — which comprise religious and ethnic minorities including Shiites, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras — has lost a number of key towns and districts in recent weeks to the Taliban.

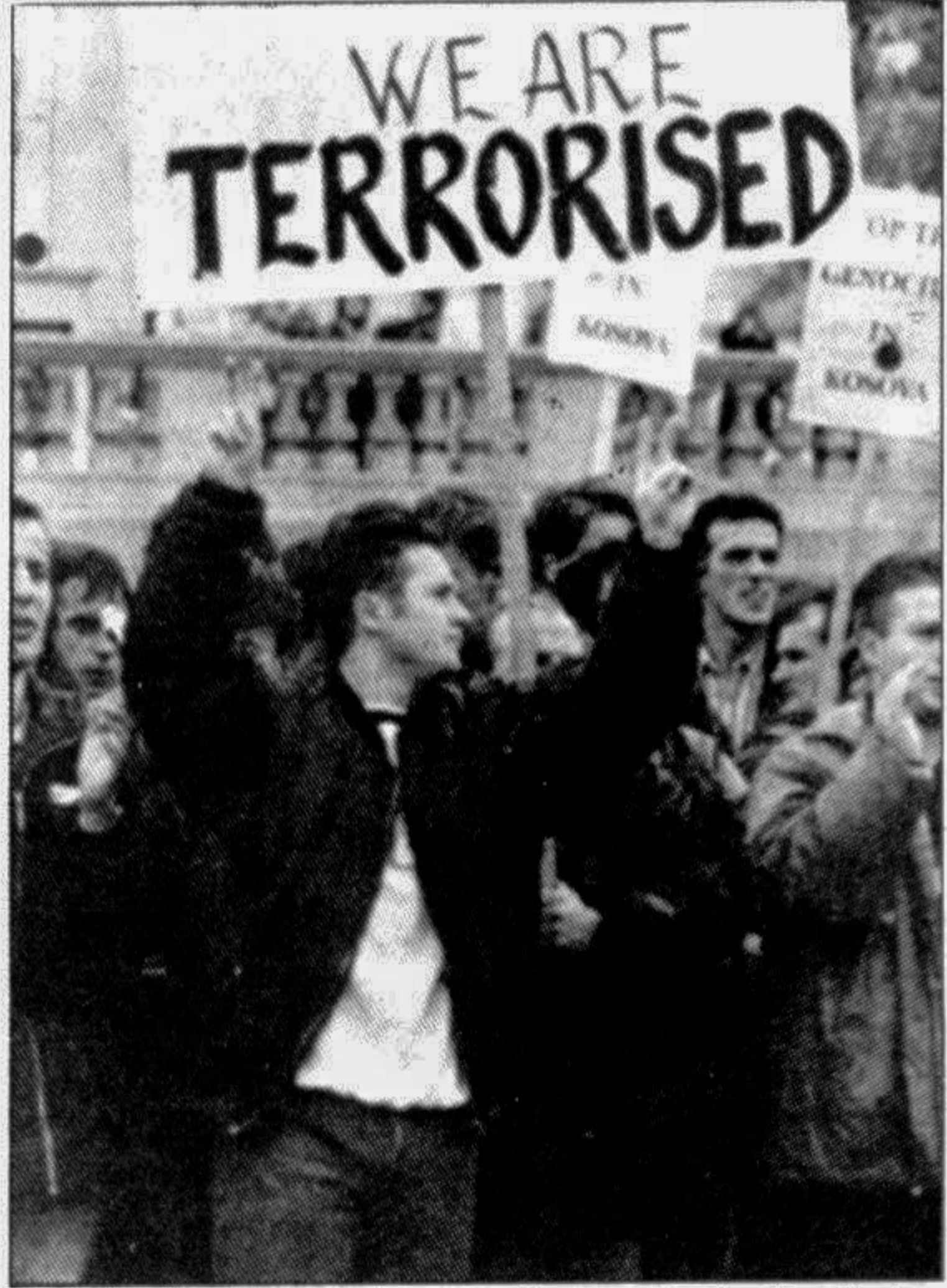
The Taliban, or students of Islam, are mostly Sunni Muslim Pashtuns and follows a strict version of Islam which bars most women from work and education, forbids arts and music and forces men to wear beards.

Omar said every government has a right to introduce the laws of its choice and the UN should not object to its stern interpretation of Islam.

"If the United Nations does not respect the aspirations of Afghan majority and turns a blind eye to the ground realities... then we will be left with no other option, but to make decision on our own," he said.

He said the slain Iranians were not diplomats, but military personnel and accused Iran for repeatedly interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

"If foreign interference continues... it would force the Taliban to take action," he said.



Ethnic Albanians take part in London's Trafalgar Square Sunday, where thousands of people gathered to demonstrate against atrocities allegedly committed against ethnic Albanians by Serb forces. Human rights activists Bianca Jagger and actress Vanessa Redgrave were amongst those who addressed the rally. — AP/UNB photo

Russia warns Milosevic of serious consequences

Call to change policies on Kosovo

MOSCOW, Oct 5: Russia warned Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic of serious consequences if he did not change his policies in Serbia's ethnic Albanian province of Kosovo, Russian news agencies reported today, says AFP.

If decisive steps to amend the situation (in Kosovo) are not taken immediately, armed intervention blueprints prepared by NATO can be put into action," the agencies cited Russian government ministers as telling Milosevic in Belgrade.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Defence Minister Sergei Sergeev held unscheduled talks with Milosevic on Sunday, according to the Russian Embassy in Belgrade.

Serbian state television RTS-1 said Ivanov handed over a personal message from Russian President Boris Yeltsin to Milosevic.

Moscow earlier warned the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation against carrying out airstrikes over Kosovo without approval by the UN Security Council. Such strikes would be "a gross violation of the United Nations' Charter" and would "torpedo the system of contemporary international relations," Russia said.

Kosovo problem," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Rasmannin said. The Russian government maintained its opposition to military intervention Sunday, expressing "its profound concern on reading NATO's plans to conduct airstrikes against targets on the pretext of giving impetus to resolving the Kosovo problem," the statement said.

Moscow has intervened on previous occasions in defence of Serbia, a traditional ally, when international fury over bloodshed in Kosovo has looked likely to translate into action against Belgrade.

Around 1,000 Albanians have been killed since Serbia, the dominant republic in Federal Yugoslavia, launched a crackdown in February.

Reports of recent massacres have provoked fresh threats of action by the international community, which is concerned about a humanitarian disaster this winter with an estimated 300,000 ethnic Albanians living outdoors after being driven from their villages.

Russia and China dispute Western claims that resolutions that the Security Council has already passed authorise the use of force by NATO without the need for a further vote.

Moscow has intervened before to help Yugoslavia escape threats of punitive action by the West, most recently last June when President Boris Yeltsin won promises from Milosevic to end the Kosovo conflict.

Since then, Serbian security forces have waged an offensive across western Kosovo, ostensibly against guerrillas of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which razed scores of Albanian villages and driven 300,000 people from their homes.

Pressure among Western governments to restore the NATO threats has grown hugely over the last week after allegations that Serb troops and police massacred several dozen villagers.

Reuters adds: Yugoslavia vowed to defend itself... the eve of the release of a crucial report by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan which could give the green light for NATO airstrikes over the crisis in Kosovo.

Yugoslavia's statement of defiance after a meeting of the country's Supreme Defence Council followed a strong warning from Russia that Western military intervention in the Kosovo conflict would cause a crisis in East-West relations.

"If we are attacked, we shall defend the country by all available means. This is the unanimous stand by the (Council) members," a statement said.

Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic called the session of his Supreme Defence Council after emergency talks in Belgrade with Russian government envoys including Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Defence Minister Igor Sergeev.

Annan's report — expected to say that fighting in the province was continuing — was requested by the UN Security Council to determine if Belgrade had complied with demands for a ceasefire and stopped repressive actions against civilians.

European Union foreign ministers and NATO's policy-making North Atlantic Council planned to use the situation in Kosovo, where the ethnic Albanian majority is seeking autonomy, in meetings today while awaiting Annan's pivotal report.

US Defence Secretary William Cohen said on Friday that airstrikes could occur within two weeks if Milosevic did not remove forces responsible for devastating ethnic Albanian communities and driving 300,000 people from their homes.

Britain Defence Secretary George Robertson said on Sunday that Serbian security forces had been withdrawing from battle zones in Kosovo in an apparent attempt to avert the threat of NATO air attacks.

14 killed in clashes with LTTE 29 bodies of crashed Lankan airliner recovered from sea

COLOMBO, Oct 5: Fishermen have recovered 29 bodies of the 55 people who were on board an airliner that disappeared over the Indian Ocean north of Sri Lanka last week, officials said Monday, reports AP.

Government officials believe the Lionair passenger aircraft, an Antonov AN-24, may have strayed too close to a Tamil Tiger guerrilla coastal base and been shot down by rebels who may have mistaken it for an Air Force troops transport plane.

Twenty bodies were found Sunday floating in the village of Poonakary, about 260 kilometres north of Colombo, said Mariyadas Croos, the government's chief administrator in the northwestern Mannar district.

Six more were found Saturday at Ariyal Point, and three others on Friday off the village of Nachchikudah, all in the same district. All the bodies were highly decomposed, and were buried or buried by the fishermen, said Croos in a telephone interview.

The guerrillas, who control the large parts of the coastline, have offered no comments on the plane crash.

The guerrillas have shot down several military planes with missiles in recent years, but have not attacked civilian aircraft since they blew up a plane of the state-owned airline Air Lanka on the ground at Colombo airport in 1983, killing 14 people.

In another report AFP says: Sri Lankan troops and Tamil Tiger rebels exchanged mortar fire near a town newly captured by the army in northern Sri Lanka as 14 people were killed in clashes elsewhere in the region, the military said Sunday.

A military statement said 12 guerrillas of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). One soldier and a civilian were killed in the clashes Saturday.

It said the rebels also fired mortars at troops advancing northwards from Mankulam town, which troops captured in fierce fighting Wednesday.

Troops ordered to shoot rioters on sight in Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI, Oct 5: Indian authorities ordered the police to shoot rioters on sight in the southern state of Tamil Nadu today, as the death toll in caste clashes over the weekend rose to eight, reports AFP.

Hundreds of armed police patrolled the riot-hit coastal district of Ramanathapuram after pitched street clashes between two Hindu communities triggered police firings on rioting mobs.

Eight people died in the violence, including two who succumbed to bullet wounds in hospital today, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. Three others were in a critical condition in hospital.

The violence broke out between low-caste Hindus and another Hindu sect known as Thevars during the weekend.

Indian troops kill 9 militants in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Oct 5: At least 15 people including nine Muslim guerrillas were killed in renewed violence in the troubled Indian state of Kashmir, officials said on Sunday, reports AFP.

A state government spokesman said Indian soldiers shot dead five Muslim rebels in the frontier district of Poonch late Saturday night.

Four others were killed overnight in a gunbattle with Indian soldiers in the northern district of Kupwara, he added.

A police officer and four civilians fell to the bullets of Muslim guerrillas overnight Saturday in Kashmir, where 13 rebels have died in stepped-up Indian operations in the week ending on Saturday.

SEOUL, Oct 5: North Korea reiterated its position on Monday that it will continue to test-fire multi-stage rockets despite protests by the United States, Japan and other neighbouring countries, reports AP.

North Korea took the stand, claiming that its August 31 firing of a rocket was an attempt to put an artificial satellite into orbit and didn't pose any threat to other countries.

Anwar denied bail, ordered to face trial on Nov 2

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5: Fired deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, wearing a neck brace for injuries he said were inflicted by police, was denied bail Monday and ordered to face trial on four corruption charges beginning Nov 2, reports AP.

The trial will be suspended Nov. 14, during an 18-nation summit of Asia-Pacific leaders, then resume Nov. 23 to take up five charges of illegal homosexual acts.

High Court Judge Augustine Paul issued a gag order against all public statements about Anwar's guilt or innocence and said the trial would be conducted in English. "So that justice can be seen to be done."

Paul ordered police to let Anwar's lawyers visit him to discuss the case, and denied bail, saying the prosecution had convinced him that doctors were attending to the jailed politician regularly and that Anwar might interfere with witnesses.

"I've been treated worse than any other criminal," said Anwar, who until he was fired Sept. 2 as deputy prime minister and finance minister, had been designated as Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's successor.

"The judge isn't only me but millions of others," said Paul, noting the international press attention that has brought expressions of concern from the presidents of the Philippines and Indonesia, the US State Department and heads of the World Bank, the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund.

Anwar had been kept from seeing his family or lawyers except during two arraignments last week in lower court. Anwar appeared with a black eye, bruised neck and arms, saying police had beat him until he was unconscious on the night he was arrested, Sept. 20.

While Anwar has been held incommunicado and his wife banned from addressing the public, the government embarked on an information campaign, sending cabinet ministers and ruling party leaders around the country to explain why Mahathir fired him.

In a clear reference to Mahathir, who described in detail the sexual allegations against Anwar at a news conference and said he is sure to be convicted, Anwar's chief lawyer, Raja Aziz Addruse asked the judge to act.

"A number of persons of high office have seen fit to express publicly and in no uncertain terms their views that my client is already guilty of the offenses," Raja Aziz said. "Because of the authoritative position these persons hold or have held, their views are bound to influence the trial of the accused and to adversely affect him."

The prosecution asked the judge to keep secret a report by four government doctors who examined Anwar during a weekend hospital stay until police complete their investigation of how Anwar was injured.

Anwar, clearly thinner than before his arrest, looked at reporters and tugged at his trousers to indicate his weight loss. He stood and sat down stiffly in the neck brace. At the end of the hearing, he kissed one of his daughters and held his wife's hand.

India takes its war against Kashmir rebels on Internet

NEW DELHI, Oct 5: The Indian Army has taken its war against Kashmir separatists into cyberspace, launching an Internet Website to counter allegations of human rights abuses, reports AFP.

As of today the Website at <http://www.army.inkashmir.com> had recorded 535 hits since it was set up late last month as the army's response to more than 100 Electronic-mail services and websites created by supporters of the Muslim secessionist movement in the northern state of Kashmir.

"Initially, the response was not very good, with very few hits," said Lieutenant Colonel M K Bawa.

"But now, dozens are visiting the site, and it has already recorded hits from the US, Canada, Pakistan, UK and India," Bawa was quoted as saying by the Indian Express newspaper.

Bawa said the army viewed the Website as a counter-propaganda tool to put across New Delhi's position on alleged human rights abuses by its troops in Kashmir, as well as details of Muslim militant 'atrocities' and weekly updates on counter

insurgency operations. The Website focuses on the role of foreign mercenaries in the Kashmiri conflict, and repeatedly points the finger of blame at rival neighbour Pakistan.

"Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir," and "Narcotics terrorism in Kashmir: Pakistan's role" are just two of the special chapter headings on offer.

Both India and Pakistan claim Kashmir, which is divided between the two countries by a UN-monitored Line of Control.

New Delhi accuses Islamabad of arming and training the militants fighting in India controlled Kashmir, where more than 20,000 have died in separatist violence since 1989.

While Bawa was happy with the increasing number of visitors to the Website, a quick look at the site's 'guest book' revealed that half were less than happy with its content.

"The page you have designed looks good, but with all the fake news and views about Pakistan's involvement (in) Kashmir makes the age irrelevant and biased," said one comment signed as coming from Britain.

Clinton-Lewinsky scandal Republicans set to pass broad impeachment resolution

WASHINGTON, Oct 5: After lawmakers explain their constitutional duty and staff lawyers review the evidence, the House Judiciary Committee plans to set lofty pronouncements aside and pass a Republican resolution to start an impeachment investigation of President Bill Clinton, reports AP.

The hearing that begins on Monday in the glow of television lights ends the review of evidence submitted by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. It opens a path to an impeachment inquiry that will enter the history books, along with Watergate that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon and the impeachment case against post-Civil War President Andrew Johnson.

The committee's formal mission at this hearing, which could last two days, was described in simple terms on Sunday by Chairman Henry Hyde, an Illinois Republican: "Is there enough to go forward, or should we shut it down?"

That question was effectively answered before the hearing. Republicans, with their 21-16 committee majority, said they were primed to approve a Watergate-style resolution that includes neither a timetable nor subject limits — even though Starr's evidence was solely related to Clinton's relationship with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The Republican resolution asks the committee to investigate "whatever sufficient grounds exist for the House of Representatives to exercise its constitutional power to impeach William Jefferson Clinton, president of the United States of America."

Democrats countered with a proposal that is doomed to lose in committee but designed to win points among voters. It would first set the standards for impeachment, determine whether Starr's evidence met that criteria and — if the answer was affirmative — begin an inquiry that would end the day before the November 26.

Thanksgiving holiday. It also would provide the option for a censure of Clinton.

Starr, action under the independent counsel law, referred what he considered substantial and credible information on potentially impeachable offenses committed by Clinton. Hyde said the committee was reviewing allegations of perjury, obstruction of justice, subornation of perjury and tampering with witnesses.

A key part of the hearing is the analysis of evidence by the chief committee investigators, David Schippers for the Republicans and Abbe Lowell for the Democrats.

Schippers told his staff that "we are not here as advocates for any position," said a Republican committee source, speaking on condition of anonymity. And, in a typical tactic for a former prosecutor, Schippers considered Starr's referral in a light most favourable to the president," the source said. That strategy is used to spot weaknesses in causes.



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, left, met with Syrian President Hafez Al Assad in the People's Palace in Damascus Sunday in an attempt to defuse the growing tension between Syria and Turkey. — AP/UNB photo

Clinton-Lewinsky scandal Republicans set to pass broad impeachment resolution

WASHINGTON, Oct 5: The global explosion of knowledge now underway may create a widening gap between the rich and poor countries, according to a report released Sunday by the World Bank, reports Xinhua.

The rapid growth in global knowledge may lift hundreds of millions of the world's poor out of poverty, or throw them further and further behind the wealthy ones, the report said.

New communications technology and plummeting computing costs would enable the poor to tap into a rapidly expanding global store of knowledge, which is crucial to improving their health and living standards, but the rapid growth of knowledge would also make it possible that the poor would fall behind more rapidly than ever before, noted the report entitled "Knowledge for Development."

Developing countries "need not reinvent the wheel, or the computer or treatment for malaria. Rather than re-create existing knowledge, poorer countries have the option of acquiring and adapting knowledge already available in richer countries," the report said.

DPRK to continue test-firing of rockets

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New era of information tech may widen gap between rich and poor

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"In our enthusiasm for the information super highway we must not forget the villages and slums without telephones, electricity or safe water, the primary schools without pencils, paper or books," World Bank President James Wolfensohn writes in the foreword to the report.

Low national incomes are not the only reason why poor countries are less prosperous than richer ones, the report said. Many developing countries lack the capacity to acquire and adapt the economic, technical, and social knowledge that has spurred many of the world's development success stories.

The bank's chief economist, Joseph Stiglitz, said: "Knowledge is one area where government policies can make a difference when resources are scarce."

Many of the estimated two million children around the world who die from diarrhoea could be saved if their parents knew how to prepare a simple solution of water, sugar and salt, Stiglitz noted.

Carl Dahman, main author of the report, believes that governments that adopt policies to

make the most of knowledge will have major advantage in improving the lives of their citizens.

According to the report, developing countries are badly in need of how-to knowledge such as nutrition, birth control, engineering and accounting, and knowledge about attributes or characteristics such as product standards, accounting systems or creditworthiness of a firm.

The report argues that lacking knowledge is "information problems" which in turn could lead to market failures such as lenders' refusal to offer loans to poor people, because of the difficulty in assessing their ability to repay.

It believes that knowledge gaps could be narrowed through education, better phone systems and openness to exchanges with foreign countries, including trade.

Founded 54 years ago, the World Bank is striving to become a clearing house for all the developing knowledge. It expects to have its knowledge management system on line by 2000 so that clients, partners and member governments around the world can benefit from it.

BRIEFLY

4 shot dead in Baghdad synagogue: A Palestinian burst into a Baghdad synagogue and killed four people Sunday hours before the start of a Jewish holiday, the Iraqi News Agency reported. AP says from Baghdad. Mahdy Mohammed Al-Sharkawi, a Kuwaiti-born Palestinian, shot two Jews and two Muslims, the agency reported. Iraq's cabinet, in a meeting chaired by President Saddam Hussein, condemned the shootings and said that al-Sharkawi "acted in a very strange and surprising way." Iraqi police apprehended al-Sharkawi.

Int'l film festival opens in Alma Ata: The first European-Asian International Film Festival opened in Alma Ata on Sunday, with the aim of strengthening cooperation among countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and other regions in the film industry. Xinhua says from Alma Ata. Some 120 artistes from the CIS, the Baltic, the United States, Britain and Japan were invited to the opening ceremony, at which congratulatory letters from Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Russian President Boris Yeltsin were read.

Call to stop murder spree in Java: The head of Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation has demanded that the military move fast to halt a mysterious murder spree in east Java in which about 100 Islamic clerics and others accused of black magic have been killed, a newspaper reported yesterday. AP says from Jakarta. Police have said that knife-wielding killers, wearing ninja-like black dress and masks, have attacked victims at night during the past two months in the regency of Banyuwangi, about 830 km east of Jakarta.



Israeli soldiers in the West Bank town of Hebron lead six Palestinians who were caught out during curfew, Sunday. Stone-throwing clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinians continued Sunday as the Israeli-controlled part of Hebron remained under curfew, imposed Wednesday, Sept 30 after two hand grenades were thrown at Israeli soldiers. — AP/UNB photo

Chinese dissidents call on Blair: British Prime Minister Tony Blair should press Chinese leaders to protect human rights and the environment, dissidents said in an open letter yesterday, the eve of Blair's visit, AP reports from Beijing.

Before Blair lands in Beijing today morning to start his five-day visit, China was expected to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in New York. The timing suggested Beijing was anxious to smooth the way for Blair, who is making the first visit by a British prime minister in seven years.

Van Gogh paintings on display in US: Hundreds of thousands of American art lovers will have a chance to view the brilliant colour paintings of Dutch Vincent van Gogh as 72 of his masterpieces are on show in US capital Washington, Xinhua says from Washington.

The art exhibition, at the National Gallery of Art, started Sunday and will run to January 3, 1999. It was the first largest Van Gogh exhibit outside the Netherlands and in the United States in 25 years. The paintings from 1882 to 1890 include some of Van Gogh's best known works, such as the "Yellow House" where he lived in the southern French town of Arles, "The Harvest" and "The Bedroom."

French defence team to visit India: A French defence team is expected to visit India in December this year to help it upgrade its Mirage-2000 aircraft with night fighting capabilities and modern avionics, Business Standard reported here today, reports Xinhua.

The move follows Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Paris last week. India needs to spend 1 billion US dollars to upgrade its fighter aircraft fleet, including MIG-21s, MIG-23s, MIG-27s and MIG-29s, Mirage-2000s, Jaguars and Sea Harriers.