

International

Albania, Bulgaria signal cooperation with possible NATO airstrikes in Kosovo

# US envoy ends latest round of talks with Milosevic in failure

BELGRADE, Oct 11: US envoy Richard Holbrooke on Sunday said that his latest lengthy round of talks with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic failed to come up with a solution to end the Kosovo crisis despite earlier claims by Belgrade of a possible political solution, reports Reuters.

A weary Holbrooke told reporters after a seven-hour meeting with Milosevic that NATO would meet on Monday to authorise military action in the troubled Serb province.

"Nothing has changed. The situation is very serious," Holbrooke said, adding that his efforts to bring about a peaceful solution to the crisis would continue.

"We will continue to meet with president Milosevic and we will work continuously in the hope that we will find in the next two days a viable, peaceful alternative," he said.

As Holbrooke spoke, Washington announced the departure of six B-52 bombers, a reconnaissance aircraft and 13 tanker planes to Britain for

possible punitive air strikes against Belgrade over its brutal crackdown on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

The negotiator, who also met with Kosovo Albanian political leaders on Saturday, has been seeking an 11th-hour diplomatic resolution of the crisis which the West would prefer to risky NATO intervention.

Earlier, Belgrade had raised a glimmer of hope of a political solution to the crisis when it said after the talks: "It was agreed that all necessary conditions exist for the resolution of open questions through a political process."

The terse statement issued by the official news agency Tanjug said it was agreed that Serbia met conditions set by the United Nations for ending the threat of NATO air strikes against Serbian military targets.

The demands contained in the UN Security Council resolution have been realised in practice, which is evidenced by the accelerated normalisation of

the situation in the field," the statement said without further elaboration.

The Council resolution demanded that Serbia withdraw police units from its southern-most province — where ethnic Albanians are a 90 per cent majority and guerrillas began fighting for independence last March — as well as adopt an immediate ceasefire and stop atrocities against Albanian civilians.

AFP adds from Tirana: Albania and Bulgaria on Saturday signalled cooperation with NATO over possible airstrikes against Serbian targets in the Kosovo crisis.

Albanian Defence Minister Luan Hajdaraga said Tirana gave the green light for NATO aircraft to fly over its territory and use its ports until December 31, 1998 if a military intervention was carried out inside Yugoslavia.

Hajdaraga said on state television that the Albanian government made the decision after a NATO request about "un-

limited access" to Albanian airspace in the case of airstrikes.

"We are open to all options that would lead to a just settlement to the crisis in Kosovo, and are therefore ready to grant NATO all airport facilities," said Hajdaraga.

"For Albania, even military options must serve a political solution of the crisis," the minister said.

The minister said international observers must go to Kosovo to monitor the situation in Serbia's ethnic Albanian province and make sure that demands by the United Nations and the six-nation Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia are met.

In Sofia, Bulgaria's National Security Council and President Petar Stoyanov agreed to open the country's airspace to NATO aircraft if airstrikes are given the go-ahead.

"Bulgaria is ready to give access to its airspace in response to a note" by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a communication adopted at a special security council meeting said.

## Troops kill 18 Tigers in Lanka

COLOMBO, Oct 11: Troops have killed 18 Tamil Tiger guerrillas and three soldiers died in scattered skirmishes in northeastern Sri Lanka, the military said today, reports AFP.

Security officials said the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) also killed four members of a rival Tamil group near Kathankudy in the eastern district of Batticaloa early today.

They said seven other members of the Tamil Eelam Liberation organisation which supports troops in the war against the LTTE were wounded when the Tigers set off a claymore mine.

A military communique said three police commandos were killed and seven injured when a truck in which they were travelling was hit by a claymore mine blast in the northern district of Vavuniya on Friday.

It said at least ten rebels were killed when troops fired artillery at a group in Kilinochchi.

## Thousands attend rally for peace in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Oct 11: Thousands of people attended a rally to pray for peace on Sunday, urging Indonesians to avoid violence as the country struggles through its economic crisis and moves toward a system of more democracy, reports AP.

"Let's try hard to stop insulting each other and to prevent all kinds of violence," said Muhammad Iqbal Assagaf, a student leader within Nahdlatul Ulama, the nation's largest Muslim group.

He also urged groups struggling for independence in East Timor and Irian Jaya not to risk splitting Indonesia apart, and for rivalrous political parties to avoid resorting to violence.

Between 5,000 and 10,000 Indonesians turned out, far less than the group had predicted, but many people still regarded it as a welcome sight in Jakarta, where President BJ Habibie has been facing a growing number of anti-government protests.

Iqbal had invited people from Indonesia's many newly founded political parties, as well as Habibie and former President Suharto, who resigned in the face of widespread rioting in May.

Afghan team in Islamabad to persuade UN envoy to visit Kabul

# Taliban jets stage air-raids across territory held by Masood

KABUL, Oct 11: Taliban militia warplanes have staged air-raids across territory held by rival Ahmad Shah Masood, independent sources confirmed today, reports AFP.

The Taliban bombings began on Saturday and could signal the start of the much anticipated autumn offensive by the Taliban against Masood's forces who control 10 per cent of Afghanistan.

"I can confirm the bombings, and the time is right for an offensive," one independent source said.

On Saturday, a spokesman for Masood said at least 10 civilians from the same family were killed after the Taliban militia launched a major offensive against Masood.

He said civilian areas had been pounded by cluster bombs dropped by Taliban warplanes, however, forces loyal to former Afghan defence minister Masood, had stayed off the attack.

A two-pronged attack was staged and at least 10 people from one family were killed while further casualties were reported after the Taliban dropped cluster bombs, the op-

position spokesman said. He said they first targeted Ghorband on Masood's north-west flank to put pressure on the strategic town of Jabalsiraj, about 77 km north of Kabul.

A second Taliban strike was launched to the north of the Salang tunnel which passes through the Hindu Kush Mountain range and links Kabul with northern Afghanistan, he said.

However, he said the Taliban had "suffered serious casualties in the attack for which they have been taking preparations for weeks."

Reuters adds from Islamabad: A delegation of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia arrived in Islamabad on Saturday, saying it would try to persuade a UN peace envoy to visit Afghanistan to ease border tensions with Iran.

Delegation leader Abdul Wakil, quoted by the Pakistan based Afghan News Service, said he had brought a message from Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar for UN special envoy for Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi, who is visiting Islamabad.

He told the Afghan Islamic Press that Omar had urged Brahimi in his message to meet him in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar, the headquarters of the Taliban Islamic movement.

Brahimi, a former Algerian foreign minister who arrived in Islamabad on Thursday after four days of talks in Tehran, has ruled out visiting Afghanistan until the Taliban give security guarantees to UN staff.

The United Nations barred its international staff from travelling to Afghanistan after an Italian UN military observer was shot and killed in Kabul in August in an apparent reaction to US missile strikes against suspected guerrilla bases of Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden in eastern Afghanistan.

Taliban says there is no security risk for Brahimi's visit. Wakil said Omar's message had assured Brahimi that the Taliban, which controls about 95 per cent of Afghanistan, would give maximum cooperation to his mission to end the tension with Tehran.

## BRIEFLY

**Hillary in Bulgaria:** US First Lady Hillary Clinton, arrived in Sofia yesterday for a two-day visit to Bulgaria where she will be special guest at a conference of women from Balkan states, Bulgarian radio reported, AFP says from Sofia.

Thursday morning, the wife of US President Bill Clinton, is due to address the conference organised by the UN Security Council President Petar Sovanov, Antona. The wives of seven presidents, prime ministers and parliament speakers from the region are taking part in the conference. Hillary Clinton is to meet with members of non-governmental organisations and will visit a social centre for abandoned children in Sofia.

**New bodyguards for Thai army chief:** Thailand's new army commander in chief has recruited a special squad of soldier bodyguards while he wages a war on military men involved in criminal activities, newspapers reported on Sunday, AP reports from Bangkok.

The 13 new bodyguards for Gen Surayudh Julianont come from the Special Warfare Command Centre in central Thailand, which the general used to run, the Bangkok Post reported. Surayudh was appointed to the Thai army's top post last week and has vowed to professionalise the military. His appointment has been praised by foreign diplomats and defence analysts in Bangkok.

**Malaysian trade team in Chechnya:** A Malaysian trade and economic delegation met with the president of breakaway Chechnya on Saturday, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, AP says from Moscow.

The 10-member delegation is headed by Tansali Usman, the chief adviser to Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. It travelled to Chechnya to discuss several economic projects with President Aslan Maskhadov and other officials, ITAR-Tass said. Such official visits are rare in Chechnya, which has been plagued by kidnappings and other crime since the end of its 1994-96 war of independence against Russia.

**Azeri presidential polls begin:** Presidential elections began Sunday in Azerbaijan where President Heydar Aliyev, 75, the republic's erstwhile Communist Party chief, is firm favourite to win a new term, AFP reports from Baku.

Voting started at 07:00 am (0200 GMT) at more than 4,200 polling stations and will go on until 10:00 pm (1700 GMT). Aliyev's main challenger is the former dissident and opposition leader Etibar Mammedov. The four remaining contenders for the nation's top post are Nizami Suleymanov, Ashraf Mekhtiyev, Khangusein Kazymli and Firidun Gasanov.

**Stones hurled at Israeli troops:** Palestinian youths hurled stones on Saturday at Israeli soldiers in Hebron, who fired back with rubber bullets, witnesses said, adding that no one was wounded, AFP reports from Hebron.

Palestinian police intervened to move back and disperse the approximately 100 Palestinian youths, the witnesses said. Meanwhile, an army spokesman said an Israeli Army position in Hebron was fired upon Friday evening but that no one had been wounded in the attack.

**5 forest guards killed in Kokrajhar:** Five forest protection force personnel were killed and two others injured in an attack by Adivasi miscreants who also looted the arms in lower Assam's Kokrajhar district on Saturday evening, according to official sources, PIT reports from Kokrajhar.

A group of more than 40 miscreants attacked the remote Borobandha forest beat office in Gossaigaon sub-division and killed five forest protection personnel on the spot before fleeing with the arms and ammunition. They looted arms including 16 303 rifles and 397 ammunition. The injured were admitted to hospital, the sources said, adding that the district deputy commissioner and superintendent of police, accompanied by army personnel, had rushed to the site.

**Indian journalist Pankaj dead:** Senior journalist of the Press Trust of India (PTI) Pankaj Sarkar died in New Delhi yesterday following a prolonged illness. He was 50, PTI reports from New Delhi.

Sarkar is survived by his wife, son and daughter. Sarkar joined PTI in 1975 and served the organisation in various capacities including as New Editor at the central desks in New Delhi and correspondent in Kathmandu. He was the president of the Federation of PTI Employees Union.

## Crisis between Turkey, Syria Riyadh backs Cairo's bid to defuse tension

RIYADH, Oct 11: Riyadh fully backs Cairo's efforts to defuse mounting tension between Ankara and Damascus but has no intention of undertaking a mediation bid of its own, a Saudi official insisted on Saturday.

"Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries back the efforts of President (Hosni) Mubarak to defuse the tension and resolve the problem through dialogue free from (Turkish) pressure," the official told AFP asking not to be named.

"Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have no intention of conducting their own mediation and are in permanent contact with the parties concerned, including Egypt, to help crown the Egyptian efforts with success," the official said.

Meanwhile, Saudi Defence Minister Mustapha Tlass met on Saturday with Saudi Mi-

itary officials, including Army Chief General Ali Aslane, to discuss "ways of developing co-operation" between the armies of Syria and Saudi Arabia, the official news agency Sana reported.

The Arabic daily Al-Hayat reported on Friday that Crown Prince Abdullah is to visit Damascus and Ankara in the next few days to try to help defuse the crisis between Syria and Turkey.

The newspaper, quoting "well-informed" Saudi sources, said the Saudi Crown prince would try to arrange negotiations between the two countries and convince Ankara to "ease its demands."

Turkey has threatened to carry out a military attack against Syria over its alleged support for Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat meets with Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, front left, Saturday with unidentified members of their delegations. Arafat had a short stop-over at Oslo International Airport in Gardermoen on his way from Helsinki to next week's Middle East summit in Washington. — AP/UNB photo

## 'Improving conditions for black workers can help end killings in S Africa'

JOHANNESBURG, Oct 11: President Nelson Mandela on Saturday assured white farmers, frightened by hundreds of killings of whites in rural areas, that there is no political campaign to chase them from their farms, reports AP.

Some of the attacks were motivated by revenge for the exploitation of farmhands who still toil under apartheid-era conditions, Mandela said at a summit on the violence.

Improving conditions for the black workers could help end the killings, he said. "Elimination of poverty and inequality are the surest long-

term guarantee to eliminating crime, instability and intra-communal tensions," he said.

About 80 white farmers have been killed so far this year, fueling charges by the mainly white opposition parties that Mandela's government is not concerned enough about the victims because of their colour.

In the most recent attack, an elderly farm couple died Friday near Bloemfontein, about 250 miles south of Johannesburg. They had as wounds in their heads.

Since 1994, nearly 600 farmers have died in similar at-

## Public backlash shown vital reason Plans for memorial garden after Diana dropped

LONDON, Oct 11: Plans for a controversial memorial garden outside Kensington Palace, the former London home of Diana, Princess of Wales, are to be scrapped because of overwhelming public opposition, it was reported today, says AFP.

The Express Today said that Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, head of the government-sponsored Princess Diana Memorial Committee, is preparing to drop the idea after a survey indicated a public backlash.

"If people don't want it, we won't have it," senior Treasury source told the newspaper.

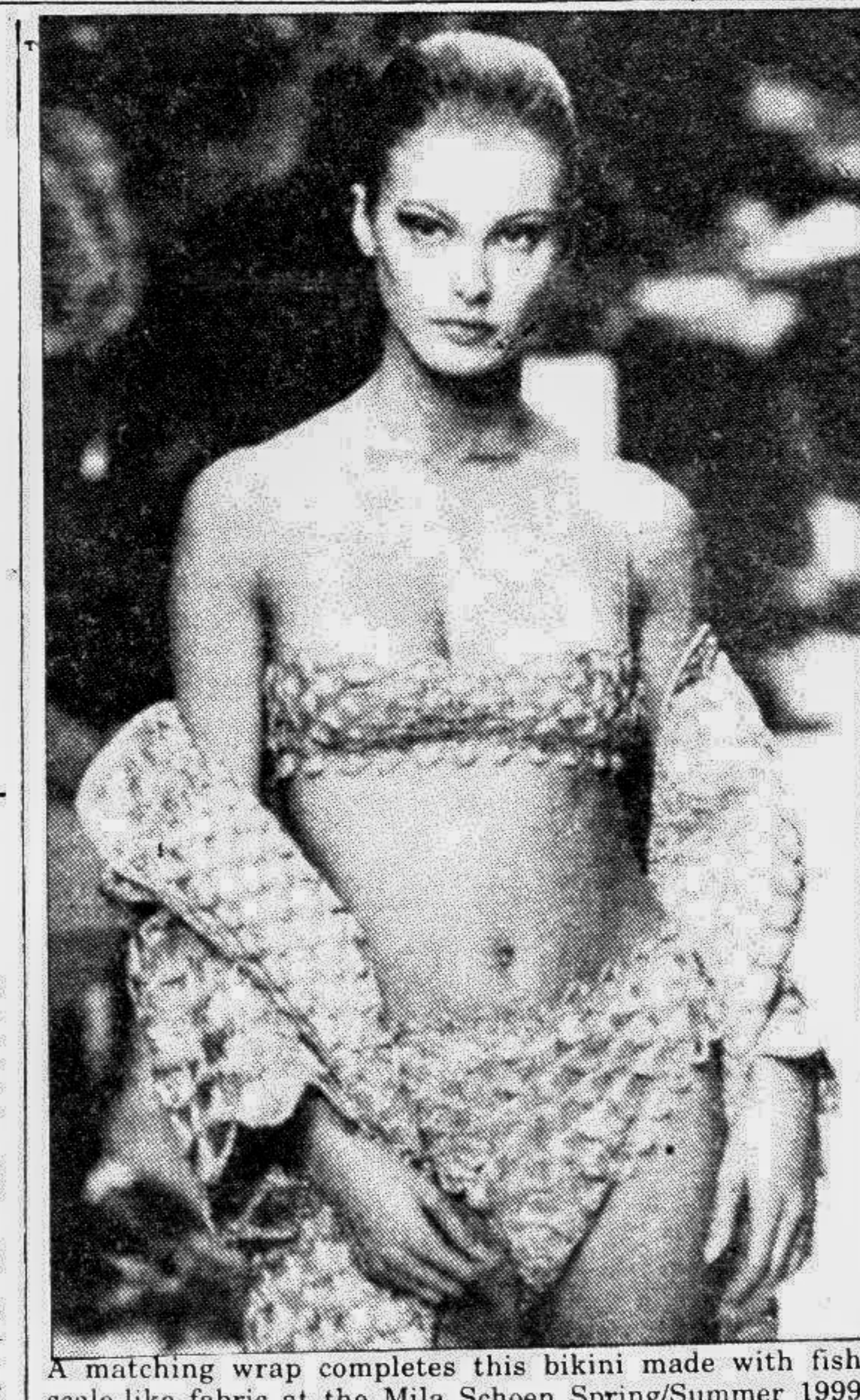
"We are not trying to force a garden on anybody. We have to take account of public opinion. If they don't want it, fair enough."

A consultation exercise carried out by Culture Secretary Chris Smith produced an overwhelmingly negative response among the 15,000 people surveyed, said The Express today.

A proposal to remodel one tenth of Hyde Park and make a modest 27-acre (11.25 hectare) garden of remembrance has been accepted by Diana's Memorial Committee as one of five proposals for commemorating her life and work.

But the project has been challenged by the rich and famous residents of Kensington and Chelsea.

Mandela said black workers should be included, but doubted their willingness to defend farms where they suffer low pay, squalid living conditions and abuse.



A matching wrap completes this bikini made with fish scale-like fabric at the Mila Schoen Spring/Summer 1999 collection unveiled in Milan on Saturday — AP/UNB photo

## Yeltsin leaves for central Asia

MOSCOW, Oct 11: President Boris Yeltsin left for central Asia on Sunday to discuss improving ties with ex-Soviet republics on his first trip abroad since Russia was hit by a major economic crisis, reports AP.

On his first stop, Yeltsin was to meet Uzbek President Islam Karimov on Sunday and sign agreements aimed at boosting bilateral trade, cooperation in the oil industry, and expanding economic ties, Uzbek officials said.

He will then go to Kazakhstan on Monday, where he and Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev are expected to sign agreements on economic, science and technical cooperation and on combating drug trafficking.

Meeting with reporters last week, Yeltsin said he also planned to discuss the situation in Afghanistan with his Uzbek and Kazak counterparts in Moscow. His last trip abroad was to Britain in May, when he attended a summit of the Group of Seven leading industrial nations.

# Pak Upper House set to reject Islamisation bill

ISLAMABAD, Oct 11 - The Islamisation Bill passed by the lower house of the Pakistani Parliament is unlikely to become a law with opposition parties determined to defeat it in the upper house where the ruling party lacks the needed majority, according to IANS.

The 15th Constitution Amendment Bill, which seeks to make the Quran and the Sunnah (sayings of the Prophet) the supreme law of Pakistan, can become law only if it is also cleared by a two-thirds majority in the Senate, the upper house, and then signed by President Mohammad Rafiq Tarar.

Unlike in the National Assembly, the lower house, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) will find it difficult to muster the needed numbers in the Senate. The government requires the support of 66 lawmakers in the 87-member house. The present strength of the PML and its allied parties in the Senate is 39.

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan said that his Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and its allies would not let the government "bulldoze" the bill through the upper house. He said the government was not sincere in enforcing Islamic laws. The bill has nothing to do with Islam and its sole aim was to impose one-person rule in the country,

he alleged. "The bill would empower Nawaz Sharif to issue directives that could not be challenged in courts," he told IANS.

Pakistan's leading human rights activist Asma Jahangir agreed with Ahsan and said she feared the enactment of the legislation might have a backlash in India.

In the National Assembly, the bill was backed by more than a two-thirds majority. In the 217-member house, 151 voted for it and only 16 against it. The main opposition PPP, the Awami National Party and the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam voted against the bill. Christian lawmakers abstained.

The government tabled the bill after withdrawing two provisions, which sought to empower the government to issue directives for enforcing the Islamic way of life and amend the Constitution by a simple majority on Shariah-related matters. The opposition and some religious parties strongly objected to these provisions alleging these would pave the way for authoritarian rule in the country and deny provinces a say in Parliament.

Ahsan said the bill would alter the basis of the Constitution and deprive women and minorities of their rights, he said, charging that the PML government had shown its disregard for the democratic pro-

tection and ensure that they get their due place in society.

The proposed law makes it obligatory for the government "to take steps to enforce the Shariah, to establish Zakat (prayer), to administer Zakat, to prescribe what is right and to forbid what is wrong, to eradicate corruption at all levels, and to provide substantial socio-economic justice, in accordance with the principles of Islam, as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah."

Activist Asma Jahangir said that the passage of the Islamisation bill in the National Assembly is bound to have a negative impact on the Muslim minority in India. "Already in power and eager to implement its communal agenda, the Bharatiya Janata Party and its associates find ample justification to try and speed Hinduisation of their own society," Jahangir told IANS over the phone from her Lahore office.

Jahangir, who is a lawyer by profession, said, "It is a pity that the conscientious objectors within the ruling party, who had received such admiration for their courage, proved to be people of frail conscience."

She said Sharif and his guiding spirits had made the bill amendment a tool for their power hungry purpose. "The country can choose be-

between staying a democratic republic and becoming an autocratic theocracy. The choice now rests with the Senators," added Jahangir. She said the claim the Shariah had been purged of all objections was a deception. The objections remained substantially and effectively intact, she said.

Claiming the bill's purpose was not to impose Shariah in the country, Jahangir said the amendment bestowed on the federal government unlimited powers in the name of Shariah, prescribing what is right and forbidding what is wrong. She said virtually all bills will be able to do in the name of Shariah.

"For instance fundamental rights will no longer remain fundamental. They will be liable, like the other parts of the constitution, to be overridden in the name of Shariah — the supreme law."

"The courts' jurisdiction will be liable to be abridged on the orders of the executive that will have the power to decide which matter concerns Shariah," she said. She said an anarchy-like situation will emerge in the legal system when different courts may differ in opinion on Shariah's definition. Different interpretations of laws, pertaining to different

## Labour govt to set up commission to examine Upper Chamber

LONDON, Oct 11: Britain's Labour government is to set up a commission to examine the new-style Upper Chamber of Parliament that will replace the House of Lords, it said today, reports AFP.

Baroness Jay, leader of the Lords, told The Observer newspaper that the body would look at membership of the new chamber, how its members would be elected and it functions.

"I hope now there will be sensible and responsible discussion about the nature of the second chamber pretty quickly," Baroness Jay told The Observer.

The commission will examine whether seats should be reserved for unelected professionals such as lawyers, doctors and leaders from other religions, as well as the Church of England.

But it will not report back until the summer of the year 2000 at the earliest — in time to go into the manifesto for the next general election.

The government is committed to introducing legislation, probably in the autumn, which would strip hereditary peers, overwhelmingly Tory, of their voting rights.