

UN, world leaders prepare for new showdown with Iraq

BAGHDAD, Nov 1: World leaders and UN officials faced a new crisis with Iraq Sunday after the government announced that it would no longer allow UN weapons inspectors to work in the country, reports AP.

The UN Security Council late Saturday unanimously condemned Iraq's decision and demanded that Baghdad rescind the decision immediately and unconditionally.

The council called Saturday's announcement from Baghdad "a flagrant violation" of council resolutions and a memorandum of understanding between Iraq and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan that averted military action against Iraq in February after another crisis over weapons inspections.

It reiterated the council's offer to review Iraq's compliance with UN resolutions if it resumes cooperation with UN weapons inspectors.

The decision by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his top advisers exempted only a handful of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency, who monitor suspected nuclear sites.

On Sunday, a four-man team from the IAEA left their headquarters on the edge of Baghdad for a monitoring assignment, refusing to speak to reporters. A

UN official said other weapons monitors would not be working. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

Iraq's move Saturday was seen as a response to the Security Council's decision Friday to review Iraq's progress on eliminating prohibited weapons.

Although it pledged a "comprehensive review," the council did not accede to Iraq's demand that the review lead directly to the removal of the sweeping trade sanctions imposed in 1990 after Baghdad's forces invaded Kuwait.

The sanctions cannot be lifted until the Special Commission certifies that Iraq has eliminated its weapons of mass destruction. Iraq insists it has done so, but the commission says Baghdad continues to hide information on weapons, especially those with biological and chemical agents.

Iraq's statement issued Saturday said the ban would continue "until the United Nations looks at the issue in an honest and positive way, leading to Iraq's right to the lifting of the unjust sanctions."

Iraq also insisted that the Security Council fire Richard Butler, chief of the UN Special Commission that oversees weapons inspections. Iraq has

long accused Butler of working on behalf of the United States to prolong sanctions.

It remained unclear if Saturday's decision would provoke the United States and Britain to threaten military action against Baghdad, as they did earlier this year after the Iraqi regime prevented UN inspectors from entering Saddam's presidential palaces. Both US and British officials condemned the move.

In Washington, US President Bill Clinton's national security advisers were reviewing the situation and consulting with allies and UN officials, said David Leavy, a spokesman for the US National Security Council. "We view this as a serious matter," Leavy said.

US Defence Secretary William Cohen cancelled a week-long Asian tour to return to Washington and participate in US administration discussions over the new standoff with Iraq.

Saddam Hussein's decision caused jitters in Baghdad. Currency traders said the already depressed Iraqi dinar fell from 1660 to the dollar to 1760 within minutes of the announcement.

Iraqi Trade Minister Mohammed Mehdi Saleh told reporters Saturday that the country would stand firm.

"This is the decision of the people of Iraq and the leadership of Iraq to save the sovereignty of Iraq and the right of the people to live," Saleh said.

The sanctions have severely damaged the Iraqi economy by limiting the sale of oil, banning air travel and prohibiting most other financial dealings with Iraq.

Saturday's decision deepens a dispute that began Aug 5, when Iraq announced that teams from the Special Commission and the atomic agency could no longer carry out spot inspections. But Iraq allowed both groups to continue long-term monitoring, often done with cameras and sensors, at previously identified weapons sites.

The Iraqi Information Ministry issued a statement late Saturday saying the government was not asking the roughly 120 UN monitors and support staff to leave Iraq. It added that the monitoring cameras and sensors installed at weapons sites could continue to operate.

"Iraq was disappointed because lifting of the sanctions didn't go in a normal fashion," the statement said. It added that the Security Council decision Friday had been made under "clear pressure from America."

3 lakh Israelis gather to remember slain Rabin

TEL AVIV, Nov 1: Over 300,000 Israelis gathered on Saturday in the plaza where Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated three years ago, to remember the slain prime minister and express support for the Mideast peace process he began, reports AP.

Israeli entertainers sang peace songs and politicians praised his efforts to make peace with the Palestinians.

"Rabin stood before a nation filled with doubt and didn't hesitate for a minute," said former prime minister Shimon Peres, who served as Rabin's foreign minister and later as Israel's premier.

"Rabin's way won't be abandoned," Peres said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also praised his one-time political nemesis.

"I share the deep sorrow and horror of every Israeli citizen at Rabin's murder," Netanyahu said in Jerusalem.

Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing Jewish extremist during a peace rally on November 4, 1995 at the same Tel Aviv plaza, where Saturday's rally was held. Yigal Amir, then a 25-year-old religious law student, fired three bullets into Rabin. Amir, who is serving life in prison, confessed to the attack and said he did it to put an end to Rabin's land-for-peace policies with the Palestinians.



Israelis hold up signs reading "the way of Rabin has won" and a photo of Rabin during a memorial rally for slain Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in Tel Aviv on Saturday. Over 300,000 Israelis gathered in the plaza where Rabin was assassinated three years ago, to remember Rabin and express support for the Mideast peace process he began. — AP/UNB photo

'Pinochet in UK as head of state delegation'

LONDON, Nov 1: Former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet arrived in Britain as the head of an official military delegation, the Sunday Telegraph reported citing the head of Britain's arms industry, reports AP.

But the Ministry of Defence denied that Pinochet, who was arrested on October 16 on a warrant from Spain as he recovered after back surgery, had any connection with the mission.

The paper cited Major General Alan Sharmar, Director General of Britain's Defence Manufacturers Association, as saying Pinochet was titular head of a delegation seeking to buy military equipment.

The Ministry of Defence paid their air fares, arranged their itinerary and provided a liaison officer, it added.

A spokesman for the MOD confirmed to AFP that the delegation had come over and visited several defence companies, but said it was "totally unconnected" to Pinochet.

He said it was "just a coincidence" that the former dictator was in London at the same time.

Pinochet arrived in Britain on September 22, while the delegation made its visits to the defence companies on October 7 and 8.

US, Israel sign accord on missiles

JERUSALEM, Nov 1: In back-to-back signings in Jerusalem and Washington on Saturday, Israel and the United States agreed to fight proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and work together on strategic matters, reports AP.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the United States was committed to strengthening Israel's defensive and deterrent capabilities.

"This is additional proof of the tight alliance on all matters concerning our vital interests," Netanyahu said at the signing ceremony in his office with US Ambassador Edward Walker.

A similar signing was held at the White House between US President Bill Clinton and Israeli Ambassador Zalman Shoval.

Under the agreement, Israel and the United States will establish a joint strategic committee to oversee enhanced technological, strategic, and military cooperation. The United States will consider the regional deployment of ballistic missiles of intermediate or greater range in the event of a threat to Israel's security.

US embassy spokesman Larry Schwartz said the pact was not a guarantee of US military assistance.

Fresh charges of sexual misconduct against Anwar

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 1: The attorney general said new charges of sexual misconduct would be levelled against Malaysia's former deputy prime minister after his trial on 10 criminal counts, news reports said on Sunday, reports AP.

Anwar Ibrahim faces 10 counts of corruption and sodomy, charges he denies and says were politically motivated. His trial, likely to be the most sensational in Malaysian history, begins Monday and is expected to last through June.

Attorney General Mohtar Abdullah said new evidence had surfaced against Anwar and a former tennis partner, S Nalakaruppan, on sex-related charges, the Star newspaper reported.

They "will be charged after the conclusion of the existing charges against them," the attorney general said. No further details were given.

Anwar's trial begins with four counts of corruption expected to be heard through November.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad fired Anwar as his deputy on September 2, saying his onetime heir apparent was unfit to lead.

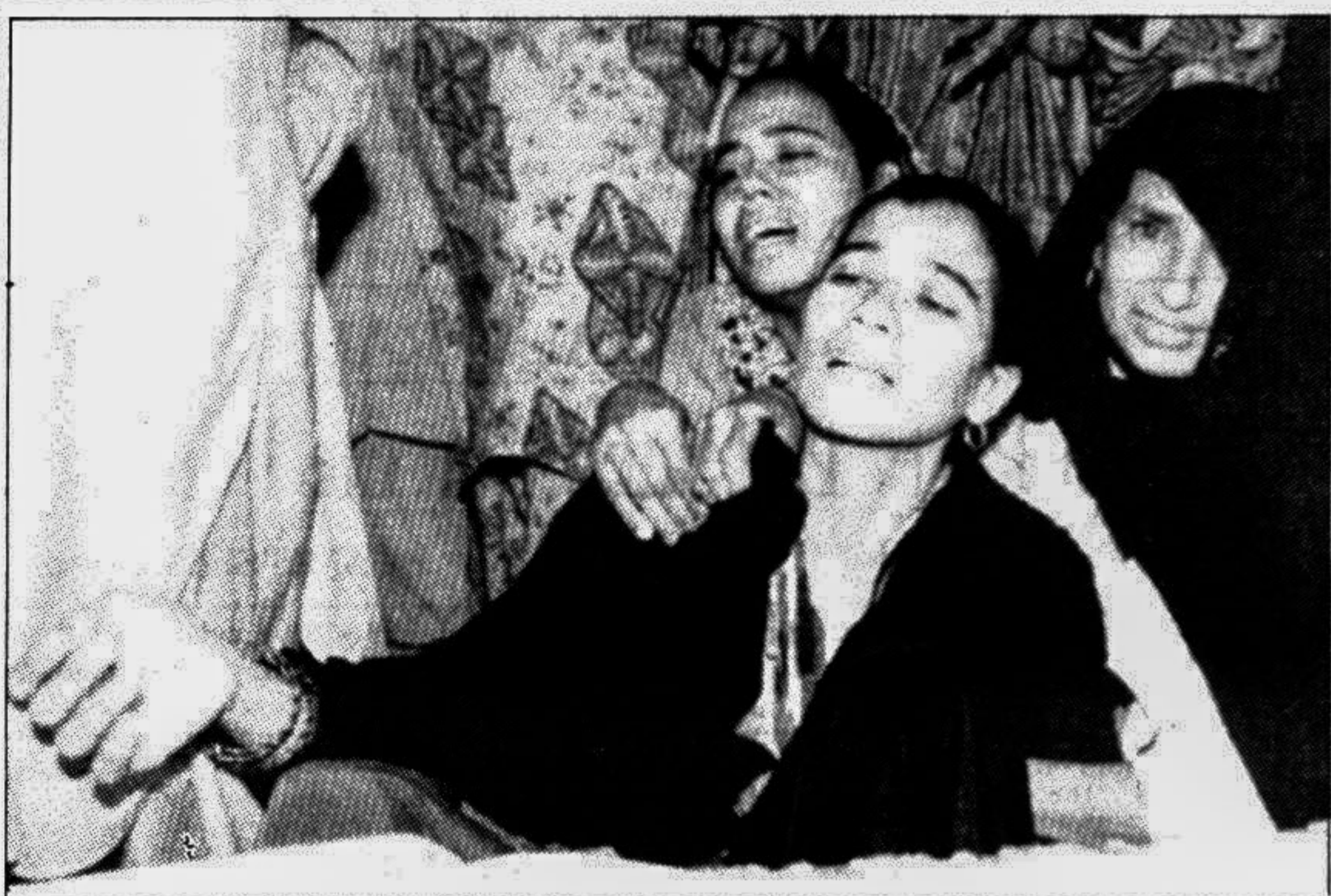
Mohtar said the prosecution would allow the case professionally, without taking political sides.

"Our responsibility is to enforce the country's laws by conducting prosecution without fear or favour, based on clear evidence," the attorney general said.

Mohtar said that trial dates for Anwar's remaining corruption count and five sex counts had been fixed for dates in December, February, March, April, May and June.

Raja Aziz Addruse, Anwar's head lawyer, said the defence counsel had not yet been informed of those dates, the Star reported.

Anwar's case has become an international spectacle and is expected to draw many foreign journalists, human rights activists, diplomats and justice-system observers.



Women weep over the body of a political activist, Chodri Najam, killed in police firing in Karachi on Saturday. The government has imposed federal rule in troubled Sindh province. — AP/UNB photo

HR group for probe into Taliban 'atrocities'

ISLAMABAD, Nov 1: Calling the slaughter of Afghan civilians in northern Afghanistan by invading Taliban soldiers "one of the worst atrocities of Afghanistan's long civil war," Human Rights Watch called Sunday for a speedy investigation by the United Nations, reports AP.

In interviews with survivors, who reached neighbouring Pakistan, officials of the US-based Human Rights Watch heard horrific stories of marauding Taliban soldiers shooting at "anything that moves."

Survivors said soldiers went house to house dragging out ethnic Hazaras, who are Shiite Muslims, and shooting them, rounding up hundreds, perhaps thousands of young men, and packing them into rail cars for transportation to jail.

"In a very brutal war, this is a particularly brutal episode," said Patricia Gossman, senior researcher of Human Rights Watch's Asia Division. "We are talking about the systematic execution of perhaps 2,000 civilians, in large part because

of their ethnic and religious identity."

The Taliban religious army, which rules roughly 90 per cent of Afghanistan, took control of the northern opposition stronghold of Mazar-e-Sharif in August.

During the bloody takeover eight Iranian diplomats and an Iranian journalist were also killed.

The Taliban leadership blamed renegade Taliban troops for the killings, which caused Tehran to deploy more than 200,000 soldiers to its border with Afghanistan, where the troops still remain.

Iran accuses the Taliban of targeting Afghanistan's minority Shiite Muslims and conducting a campaign of "ethnic cleansing," a charge denied by the Taliban, who are mostly Sunni Muslims.

The Taliban accuses Iran of fomenting violence among Afghanistan's Shiite Muslims, who are often referred to as Hazaras, named for the region they come from.

BRIEFLY

4 US soldiers killed in ROK: Four US soldiers and one South Korean soldier were killed when their armoured vehicle fell off a bridge into a river in darkness, the US military command said on Sunday, AP reports from Seoul.

Two other American soldiers were also injured in the accident which occurred on a bridge over the Injeon River 40 km north of Seoul, Saturday night, it said. The seven, all assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery, 2nd Infantry Division at Camp Hovey, were returning from a training support mission when their M981 Fire Support Vehicle plunged into the river, the command said.

Queen likely to honour Graham: Britain's Queen Elizabeth is expected to honour US evangelist Billy Graham to mark his 80th birthday next week, according to the Sunday Times, AFP reports from London.

It said the monarch, who has met Graham on each of his 10 visits to this country, may knight him after being "enchanted" by his preaching ever since their first meeting in 1955. Another option would be the Order of Merit, 4 which is awarded at her sole discretion, or making him a Knight Commander of the British Empire (KBE).

ECOWAS summit ends: West African leaders late Saturday ended their summit meeting in Abuja after failing to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Guinea Bissau, officials said, AFP reports from Abuja.

The two-day leaders' summit of the 16-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had been dominated by the crisis in Guinea Bissau which broke out in June, pitting President Joao Bernardo Vieira against rebel leader General Ansumane Mane. In a final communique, the ECOWAS leaders said that Vieira and Mane had agreed to try to consolidate and August 26 ceasefire, and to the deployment of a ceasefire observer team but had not concluded a final agreement.

Mudslides kill 58 in Nicaragua Hurricane death toll rises to 450

MANAGUA, Nov 1: The death toll from one of the strongest hurricanes to hit the Caribbean soared to at least 450 as massive mudslides buried several communities near Nicaragua's border with Honduras, killing at least 58 people, a town official said, reports AP.

Of the 2,500 people living in the 10 communities at the foot of the Caistas Volcano, only 57 had been accounted for by Saturday evening, Mayor Felicitia Zeledon of Posoltega told the Government's Radio Nicaragua in a live interview.

She said rescue workers had pulled 58 bodies from the mud.

"It is like a desert littered with buried bodies," Zeledon said, citing reports from rescue workers.

There was no immediate independent confirmation of Zeledon's report.

It was the first official confirmation of any deaths from mudslides in the northwestern province of Chinandega, where unconfirmed radio reports said as many as 4,000 people at the foot of the volcano may have been killed when mudslides came crashing down.

Maj Ezenor Carcamo, head of the National Civil Defence System in the region, said earlier Saturday that authorities were unable to fly to Posoltega during the day to check out the reports because of bad weather. About 14,000 people live in the town.

Gen. Joaquin Cuadra, head of the Nicaraguan army, added that the Posoltega region near the Honduran border "is one of the places most affected, and we do not have access by air or land."

Officially, Nicaragua reported 121 dead from heavy rain and flash flooding there. Another 151 people are listed as missing in Nicaragua, the National Civil Defence reported.

Defense Minister Pedro J Chamorro Barrios announced Saturday evening that Nicaragua had asked the United States to loan several large helicopters to help assess casualties and damage in remote areas and take aid to affected communities.

Queen-Charles relations hit new low

LONDON, Nov 1: Relations between Queen Elizabeth and her son Prince Charles have hit a new low because he is refusing to bow to her demands and ditch long-term companion Camilla Parker Bowles, the Express on Sunday newspaper said, reports Reuters.

On Thursday Charles made his first public appearance with Parker Bowles since the death of his former wife Princess Diana in a Paris car crash last year.

The newspaper said the Queen and her senior aides were concerned by what they saw as Charles's plans to ease Parker Bowles more and more into the public eye.

"His determination to continue the friendship has meant that his relations with the Queen have slumped to their lowest ebb in years," the newspaper said.

Relations are so strained that Charles last met the Queen face to face at the end of August in Balmoral. It is understood they never spoke last week despite the furor generated by the Junor book," the newspaper said.

Glenn plunges into least glamorous part of his job

SPACE CENTER, Houston, Nov 1: The world's oldest space traveller took time out from his round-the-clock geriatric tests to answer questions from middle and high school students, reports AP.

Students at John Glenn High School in New Concord, Ohio, his hometown, and at two museums, one in Columbus, Ohio, and the other in Arlington, Virginia. Commander Curtis Brown Jr joined in the 30-minute discussion.

The 77-year-old senator laughed when asked if he feels younger in space.

"I guess I feel young all the time. That's the reason I volunteered to come up here," he said.

After two days in orbit, Glenn had his first blood samples taken by Discoverer's chief doctor, Scott Parazynski. He also gulped down an amino acid pill before being injected with another amino acid. Researchers want to see how well alanine and histidine are absorbed by Glenn's weightless muscles, and how fast protein in his muscles builds up and breaks down.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration said the findings may provide a bet-

ter understanding of the aging process on earth and assist doctors in treating bedridden patients whose muscles become shrivelled.

Fortunately for Glenn, the needles used for the blood draws and histidine infusions were short and slender — about the size of sewing needles.

"Everybody complains about being stuck like a pin cushion, but that's the only way you can get this data," said John Charles, a NASA life sciences researcher. "Until somebody invents a tricorder like on 'Star Trek,' that's how we get the data."

Glenn also began collecting urine samples as part of the muscle-protein experiment and got ready for the most complicated test of all: A sleep study requiring that he be wired up with 23 sensors for four nights starting late Sunday. The sensors will measure his breathing, snoring, eye and chin-muscle movements, and brain waves.

Glenn, blissfully back in orbit after 36 years, said before the flight that he found it no more demeaning than "taking part in some research in a hospital someplace."

Japanese PM for steps against missile threat

TOKYO, Nov 1: Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi on Sunday urged heightened preparedness against missile attacks following North Korea's launch of a rocket over Japan earlier this year, a news report said, says AP.

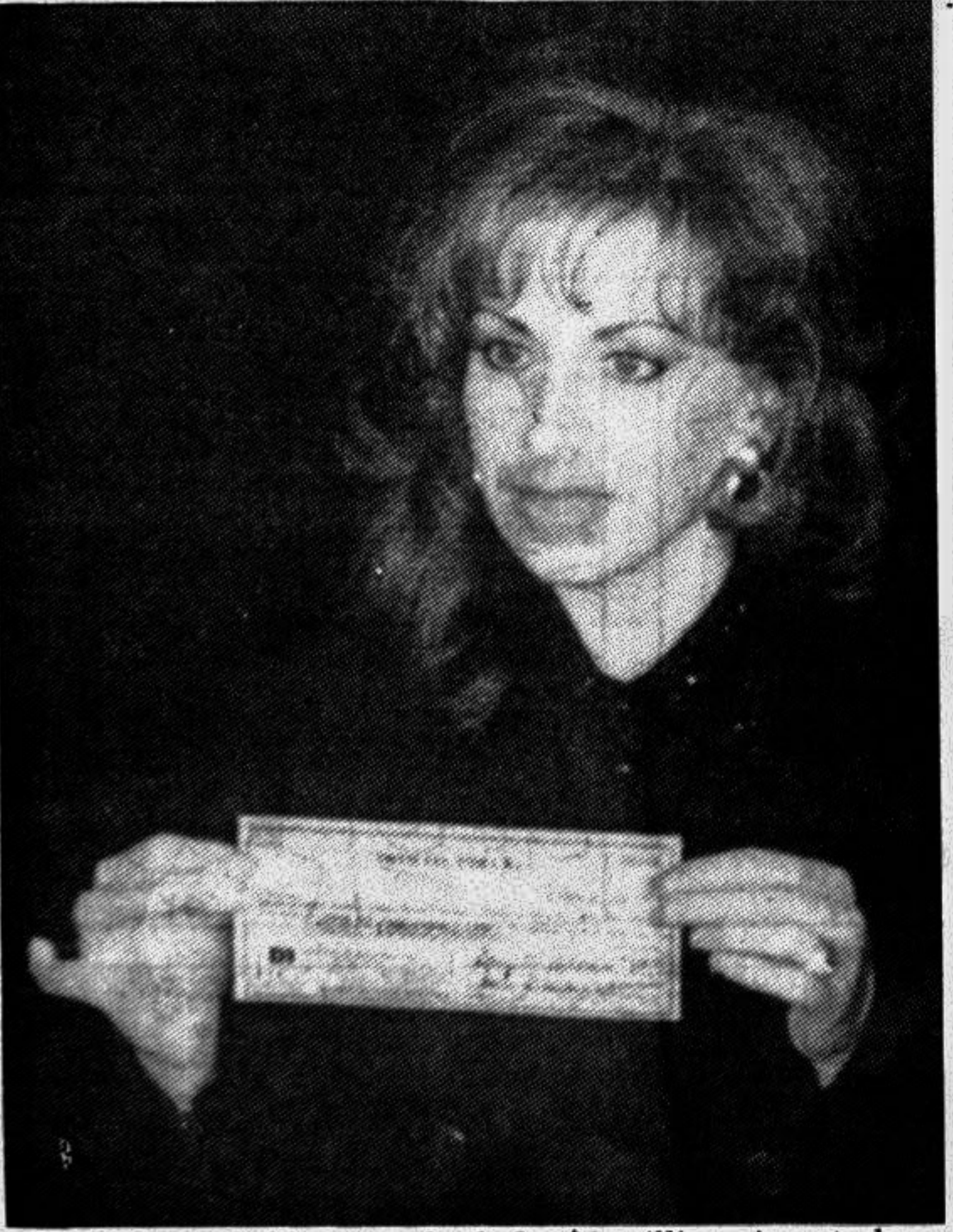
Speaking to Japan Self-Defence Forces in Saitama, north of Tokyo, Obuchi called for the creation of new Japanese defence systems, saying the North's launch of a multi-stage projectile endangered the region, Kyodo News reported.

"We need to put in place the necessary systems so that we can deal properly with a variety of situations," Obuchi was quoted as saying.

Obuchi said Japan will "continue to seriously study a joint US-Japan defence system that would intercept missiles before they hit their targets, Kyodo reported.

Many legislators in Japan have also been calling on the government to build a multi-purpose spy satellite following the North's launch.

North Korea insists its rocket-firing on August 31 put a satellite into orbit, but Japan refutes that claim, saying that the launch probably aimed to test the range of ballistic missiles.



Paula Jones holds up a check for \$1 million given to her by New York real estate tycoon Abe Hirschfeld during a news conference at a Washington hotel on Saturday. The money would become part of an overall settlement of Jones's sexual harassment suit against President Clinton, though a spokeswoman for the former Arkansas state worker said there was no deal yet. — AP/UNB photo

Anger, bloodshed cast doubt over implementation of ME peace accord

JERUSALEM, Nov 1: In Israel and the Palestinian lands, a prelude to peace can look a lot like an outbreak of war, reports AP.

A few snapshots from the days since the October 23 signing of the Wye river accord: Schoolchildren sobbing after a brush with death at the hands of a suicide bomber. Forensics experts picking through the charred and mangled remnants of an Israeli Army jeep. A slain Jewish settler's bloody corpse dumped in a West Bank street. Angry protesters reviling the prime minister as a traitor.

It has been a tumultuous run-up to implementation of the agreement, which is set to begin on Monday. But so far both sides say they are under-terred by the violence.

Even so, the past week's events were a drawing of battle lines, throwing into sharp relief the obstacles that will be faced by the agreement's architects in coming weeks and months.

Extremists on both sides quickly made felt the ferocity of their opposition to the pact, which calls for security steps by the Palestinians in exchange for an Israeli pullback from another 13 per cent of the West Bank.

Hard-line Jewish settlers staged disruptive sit-down demonstrations on West Bank highways, and a few vocal anti-government threats deemed credible enough that security surrounding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was increased considerably.

On the Palestinian side, the radical Islamic group Hamas returned after a 14-month hiatus to what had long been its hallmark: The suicide bomb.

A militant tried to ram an explosives-rigged car into a schoolbus carrying Jewish settler children in the Gaza Strip, but an Israeli Army jeep managed to cut off the attacker and take the blast's brunt instead, killing a teen-aged soldier.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat responded with his most resolute actions yet against Hamas. In addition to rounding up hundreds of Hamas activists, he dared to move directly against the group's revered spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, putting him under house arrest hours after the foiled suicide bombing.

But it was difficult to tell how long — and how tough — the crackdown would be. Two senior militants detained earlier, Ismail Hanieh of Hamas and Hafez Azam of Islamic Jihad, were already free as of Saturday.

Arafat, always closely attuned to street sentiment, is well aware that moving too harshly against Yassin could backfire by inflaming the ailing, wheelchair-bound Islamic preacher's edgily devout followers.

They've gone overboard — to disrespect the Sheikh this way past the line," said Osama

Afif, a hot-eyed 20-year-old who lives in Yassin's slum neighbourhood in Gaza City. "If they're smart, they won't keep him under house arrest for long."

On the Israeli side, Netanyahu has dealt with the anger of hard-line settlers by alternately making emotional reassurances — "We love you!" he told them on his return from Washington — and being bluntly dismissive of their attempts to topple him.

The 150,000 Jewish settlers are far from a monolithic political bloc.

Only a relatively small number are ideologues who fervently believe in a biblical claim to all the West Bank. Many settlers instead have a purely pragmatic goal: A comfortable suburban lifestyle at far less expense than inside Israel proper.

Of necessity, Netanyahu reacts vehemently and publicly to any attack on settlers — including the slaying of a Hebron-area settler on Monday, three days after the signing of the peace agreement. But ordinary Israelis tend to take a somewhat more nuanced view.

While Thursday's attack aimed at schoolchildren was universally denounced as despicable, many in the Israeli mainstream quietly question the logic of maintaining isolated Jewish settlements in the heart of Palestinian-run Gaza.



A model sports a chocolate corset designed by Chantal Thomas at the 4th Chocolate Fair on Saturday in Paris. — AP/UNB photo

3 soldiers killed near Dili Australian FM praises Jakarta's efforts in E Timor

SYDNEY, Nov 1: Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has praised the efforts of Indonesia's government in East Timor over the past six months despite reports that as many as 18,000 troops remain in the troubled area, reports AP.

Downer also rejected suggestions that Australia's intelligence agencies had failed to keep tabs on the extent of Indonesia's troop deployment in East Timor.

"They may or may not have done what they said they would do in terms of troop numbers," Downer told Australian television Sunday.

"But in broader terms I think the Indonesian government has done more over the last six months than they've done over the previous 23 years on this question of taking forward the East Timor peace process."

Meanwhile, assailants killed three soldiers and a civilian in the disputed territory of East Timor, the official Antara news agency reported Sunday. A fourth soldier was missing and believed killed.

The military blamed pro-independence activists in the stabbing deaths Friday night of two soldiers and a civilian in Webelek, 40 km southeast of Dili, the capital of East Timore.