

International

Immediate military action against Iraq unlikely

WASHINGTON, Nov 2: Defence Secretary William Cohen said on Sunday that the United States prefers to act with its allies to resolve the United Nations' latest standoff with Iraq but holds out the option of unilateral military action, reports AP.

Cohen, breaking off a planned tour of Asia, met for two hours at the White House with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and other top US national security officials to work out a response to Iraq's latest defiance of UN-mandated inspections for weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq banned UN inspection teams from working in the country on Saturday after the UN Security Council renewed its refusal to lift economic sanctions against Iraq. The Security Council then demanded unilaterally that Iraq reverse the ban.

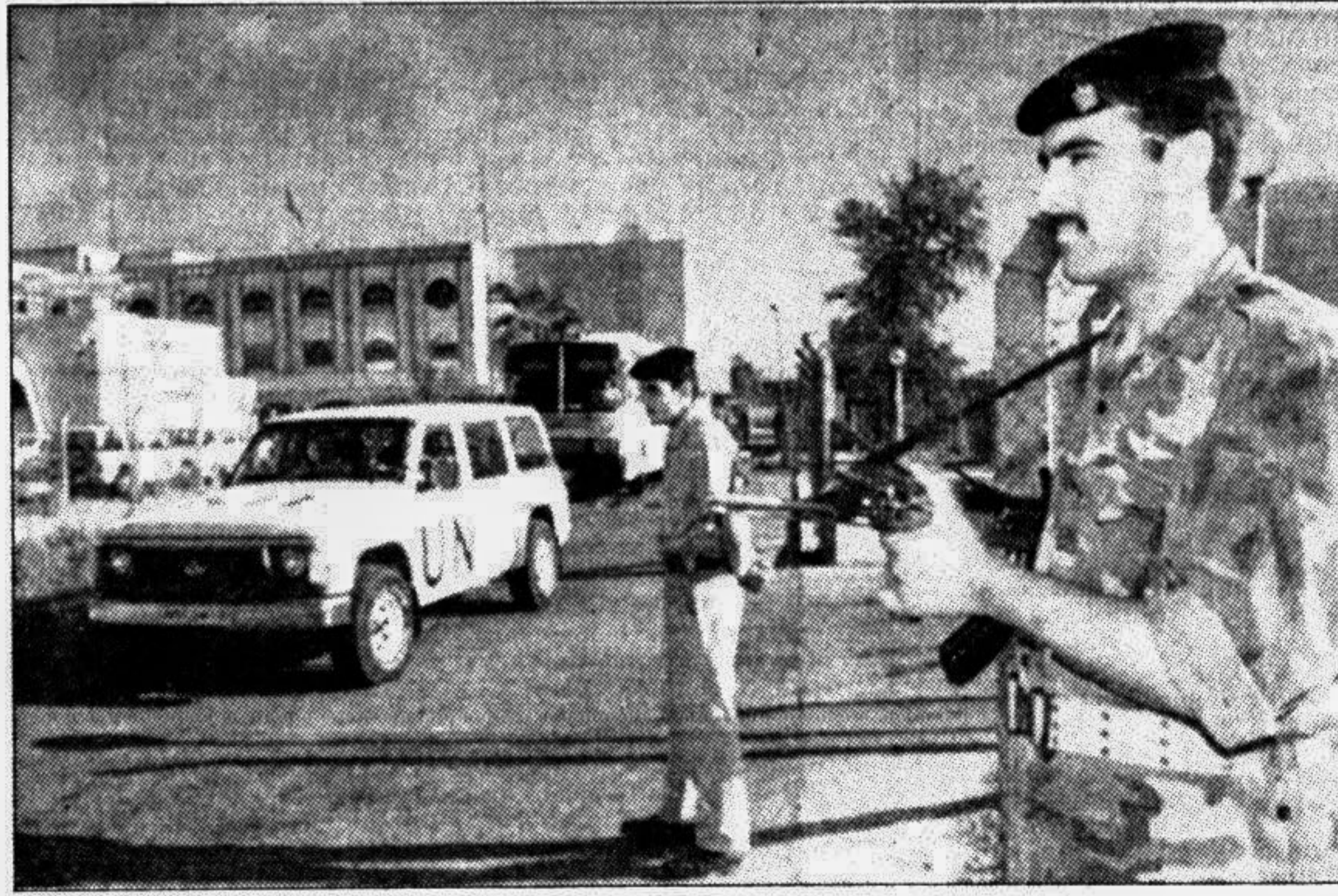
The Clinton administration appeared ready to let the Security Council take the lead, and there seemed little chance of an immediate military response. France and Russia, council members that have taken more lenient positions on relaxing the sanctions in the past, firmly rebuked Iraq and called for compliance with the UN Special Commission, known as UNSCOM.

"I personally am very pleased that the UN Security Council, including some people I thought had been a little tolerant with him in the past, strongly condemned what he did," President Clinton said in an interview with American Urban Radio Network.

Clinton, out campaigning for Tuesday's midterm elections, was briefed about the situation but did not plan to convene his foreign policy advisers on the issue until Monday, a National Security Council spokesman said.

No additional US forces were being moved to the Persian Gulf region, and US forces had not been placed on alert, said Pentagon spokesman Lt Cdr Anthony Cooper.

Cohen said unilateral US



An Iraqi guard watches on Sunday as a UN nuclear inspection team leaves the UN headquarters on the edge of Baghdad. Two nuclear teams went into the field, but Iraq has barred work by biological, chemical and missile teams. — AP/UNB photo

military action against Iraq has "always been an option we could pursue... but we prefer to act through our allies and with our allies if we have to take any action at all."

"The preference is to keep it exactly where it is today, a contest between Iraq and the United Nations," Cohen told reporters at Andrews Air Force Base just outside Washington after he returned from the aborted Asia trip. "The best thing is for Saddam (Hussein, the Iraqi president) to comply with these agreements."

Cohen, Albright, George Tenet, director of the CIA, and the president's national security adviser, Sandy Berger, were meeting late Sunday at the White House "to review the situation and appropriate action," spokesman David Leavy said. The United States was con-

sulting with its allies through the United Nations, he said.

"The Security Council made clear last night that the latest actions by Baghdad are an affront to the Security Council and the international community," Leavy said. "That kind of behaviour cannot be tolerated. UNSCOM must have (unblocked) access to the sites."

Under an agreement reached with Iraq at the end of the 1991 Gulf War, the UNSCOM teams must certify that Baghdad has destroyed all its weapons of mass destruction before the Security Council can lift economic sanctions imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

The Iraqi deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, repeated his accusations Sunday that UNSCOM is working for the CIA and the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, and said the Council was manipulated by

Washington.

Another report from Baghdad says, unless the UN Security Council begins to lift devastating trade sanctions, Iraq will not renew cooperation with weapons inspectors, even if threatened with military action, officials said.

Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said Sunday that "there will be no cooperation before Iraq's demands are met."

The statements were the first Iraqi response to the UN Security Council's condemnation of Baghdad's decision Saturday to ban UN weapons inspectors from working in the country.

In Washington, National Security Council spokesman David Leavy said President Bill Clinton's national security advisers were reviewing the situation and "all options remain on the table."

Poll on US congressional races Neither Republicans nor Democrats have clear lead

WASHINGTON, Nov 2: Weekend polls suggest that neither political party has a clear national advantage in congressional races and that the last-minute decisions of undecided voters could be key in many of Tuesday's congressional elections, reports AP.

Rolls released by the Pew Research Center and CNN/USA Today/Gallup indicated that voter preference for Democratic or Republican congressional candidates was at a statistical tie among likely voters in the weekend before election day. But nearly one out of five registered voters now only leans to a candidate or is flatly undecided, the Pew poll found.

Rep. John Linder of Georgia, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, discounted the significance of national polls about voter preference for congressional elections, suggesting Republicans would gain the advantage through better turnout in midterm elections that traditionally draw fewer voters.

"Our voters are more religious about voting," he said. But Democrats countered that Republicans did them a huge favour by attacking President Clinton over the Monica

Lewinsky affair in recent political ads that could turn out to energise the president's supporters.

"There's no question the Republicans have lost altitude," said Steve Grossman, general chairman of the Democratic National Committee. In the Pew poll released Sunday, Democrats were preferred by 46 per cent of likely voters and Republicans by 44 per cent, a statistical tie. Two weeks ago, the Pew poll gave Republicans a 48-43 advantage among likely voters. The most recent poll of 743 likely voters was taken from Wednesday to Saturday and had a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

"There's more uncertainty about the final outcome of the election when there's a last-minute reversal of trend," said Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center. "The key message out of this poll is that the conviction we had about modest Republican gains a few weeks ago falls from certain to questionable."

The Gallup poll of 563 likely voters showed Democrats with 48 per cent support among likely voters while the GOP had 45 per cent.

BRIEFLY

China sets up ties with Tonga: Confirming earlier reports, China announced yesterday that it had established formal ties with the South Pacific kingdom of Tonga, wooing yet another diplomatic ally away from rival Taiwan, AP says from Beijing.

China and Tonga signed a joint communique on October 26 that set official relations as of yesterday the state-run Xinhua news agency said. The announcement was expected following Taiwan's decision Saturday to sever ties with Tonga, the fourth country to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing so far this year, following the lead of South Africa, the Central African Republic and Guinea-Bissau.

Ceasefire in Guinea-Bissau: The warring parties in Guinea-Bissau have agreed an end to their five-month conflict. The West African country's acting Foreign Minister Joao Cardoso said yesterday, AFP reports from Abuja. The two sides signed an agreement late Sunday in Abuja, promising a ceasefire, the withdrawal of all foreign troops, the simultaneous sending of a regional buffer force along the Senegal-Guinea-Bissau border and the holding of elections before the end of the year, he said.

6 die in chopper crash in Bolivia: One Canadian and five US nationals, all employees of oil companies operating in Bolivia, have died in a helicopter crash some 900 km east of La Paz, officials said Sunday, AFP reports from La Paz.

Authorities said the helicopter crashed into a field of sunflowers between the villages of Pailon and Cautro Canadas after experiencing mechanical problems some 30 minutes after taking off from an airport in Santa Cruz.

Ruling party loses in Macedonian polls: Macedonia's Prime Minister Branko Cervenkovski conceded the defeat of his Social Democrat Party in Sunday's general elections in a speech to the nation broadcast early yesterday, AFP says from Skopje.

Earlier the right-wing opposition coalition of the VMRO-DPMNE and Democratic Alternative (DA) had claimed victory, saying it had maintained the lead it took in the first-round ballot on October 18 in the former Yugoslav republic.

Flood death toll 56 in Vietnam: The death toll from floods which ravaged central Vietnam last month has reached 56, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

Floods hit the provinces of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan and Phu Yen due to torrential rainfall between October 18 and 23, officials from the provincial and central anti-flood and storm committees said.

Chinese plane makes emergency landing: A China Eastern Airlines plane with 102 people on board made an emergency landing at Shanghai airport yesterday after turning back on a flight to Japan due to landing gear problems, airport and company officials said, Reuters reports from Shanghai.

No one on the Airbus A300, which was carrying 87 passengers and 15 crew, was injured, the official Xinhua news agency said. The flight left Shanghai for Osaka around 9.35 am (0135 GMT) but the pilot later asked to return for an emergency landing because of problems with the plane's front landing gear, officials said.



A woman holds a picture of her missing son during an anti-Pinochet protest at a monument for missing persons at the General Cemetery of Santiago, Chile, on Sunday. Pinochet was recovering from back surgery. He was arrested on October 16 on a Spanish warrant seeking his extradition on charges of genocide during his 17-year rule. — AP/UNB photo

Tomb collapse claims 4 in Haiti: Four people died and another 40 were injured when a tomb collapsed during an All Saints' Day ceremony at a central Port-au-Prince cemetery at noon on Sunday, eye witnesses and hospital officials said, Reuters reports from Port-au-Prince.

Thousands of people gathered at the grand cemetery to celebrate the holiday and pay respects to their dead. But while a crowd gathered for a spiritual ceremony with drumming and dancing around the raised tombs, some 8-10 feet tall, one tomb collapsed, crushing people beneath it, eyewitnesses said.

US-ROK talks cancelled: A top level US-South Korea security meeting was cancelled yesterday after US Defence Secretary William Cohen aborted his Asian tour to deal with the latest crisis in Iraq, officials said, AFP reports from Seoul.

The 30th security consultative meeting was due to get under way yesterday with Cohen and South Korea Defence Minister Chung Yong-Taek leading their respective delegations.

Kuwait, Egypt sign MOU: Kuwait and Egypt signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) Sunday on bilateral cultural cooperation for the coming three years, Kuwait News Agency reported. Xinhua says from Kuwait City.

The memo was signed by Yusef Al-Sumaiti, Kuwaiti Information Minister and Chairman of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, and Egyptian Cultural Minister Farouk Hosni.

Belgian-Chinese PMs hold talks: Belgian Prime Minister Jean Luc Dehaene met yesterday with Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji after a welcoming ceremony in the Great Hall of the People, AFP reports from Beijing. Dehaene, the fifth European Union leader to visit China since September, arrived late Saturday for the first visit to China by a Belgian prime minister for 30 years.

Hurricane Mitch death toll in Nicaragua rises to 1071

MANAGUA, Nov 2: The official death toll in Nicaragua from former Hurricane Mitch has risen to 1,071. Vice President Enrique Bolanos said here late Sunday, reports AFP.

Of that total, 471 died in Nicaragua's northeast region, while the other 600 victims of the storm died in other areas of the country, Bolanos said.

AP adds: Rescue workers recovered hundreds of bodies from Nicaraguan communities buried when a crater lake overflowed and sent mud and rock hurtling down a volcano on to villages below. However, Vice President Enrique Bolanos said Sunday that in just two of the four Nicaraguan villages buried, 1,000 to 1,500 people were presumed dead. The flow of mud down the Casitas volcano late Friday or early Saturday had covered 80 square kilometres in mud and rocks, he said. There were reports of perhaps as many as 10 villages being affected.

"We perhaps will never know how many people died," Bolanos said. Mitch was one of the most violent hurricanes to hit the Caribbean, causing heavy rain and floods as it cut a fatal path along the coasts of Honduras, Nicaragua and other Central American countries.

Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman declared three days of national mourning in what he said was the country's worst natural disaster since a magnitude 6.2 earthquake killed 5,000 people in 1972.

The turmoil caused by the storm took more lives Sunday when the mayor of the Honduran capital and three others died in a helicopter crash while out surveying flood damage. Tejuicigalpa Mayor Cesar Castellanos, 49, had been seen as a likely presidential candidate in 2001 elections. The first army rescue helicopters to reach the Casitas volcano on Sunday found

widespread destruction, army spokesman Capt Milton Sandoval said. Rescue workers recovered 360 bodies in four villages near Posoltega, about 80 kilometres northwest of Managua.

Rescuers aboard the first army helicopters to reach the communities found hundreds of decomposing bodies, he said. One hundred soldiers working at the scene were burying the rotting bodies where they lay because of public health concerns, Sandoval said.

It was unclear how many residents of the villages of El Porvenir, Versalles, Rolando Rodriguez and Santa Narcisca may have fled in time to avoid the mudslide. Dr Marcos Espinosa said in a telephone interview that 126 survivors from the four villages had been treated at a hospital in Chinandega for "fractures and serious wounds" that had become infected after the victims spent nearly two days in the mud.

India claims to have pushed back Pak attacks on Siachen Glacier

SRINAGAR, India, Nov 2: India claimed Monday to have killed two enemy soldiers as its troops pushed back Pakistani attacks on the Siachen Glacier, reports AP.

There was no immediate comment from Pakistan. Spokesman Maj. P. P. Purohit said the Pakistani troops tried to capture an Indian post on the glacier on Sunday night, and another Siachen post early Monday morning. He said India suffered no casualties in the fighting.

India twice last week made similar accusations of Pakistani attempts to capture Siachen territory.

For the last month, firing across Siachen has occurred almost daily, but casualties have been few. The glacier, 1,000-km above sea level. Both India and Pakistan claim Siachen, and skirmishes are common despite severe cold and high winds.

Lankan troops kill 10 Tigers

COLOMBO, Nov 2: At least 10 Tamil Tiger guerrillas and a Sri Lankan soldier were killed in fresh fighting in the island's north-east over the weekend, the Defence Ministry said today, reports AP.

Five members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were shot dead by soldiers near the northern towns of Paranthan and Mankulam on Sunday, the ministry said.

It said a soldier was killed in Paranthan on Saturday during an exchange of fire that also left up to 28 rebels wounded.

Five more Tiger rebels were shot dead by soldiers in the north-eastern district of Trincomalee on Saturday, the ministry said.

Implementation of accord to be delayed: Netanyahu

JERUSALEM, Nov 2: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that the land-for-security agreement with the Palestinians will get off to a late start because Israel's Cabinet and parliament have not yet approved it, reports AP.

The agreement was to take effect today, but the Cabinet will only discuss it on Tuesday, with no date set for a vote.

Parliament will not vote on the agreement until next week. US officials said that despite the delays, the timetable should not be disrupted. Under the plan, Israel is to withdraw from 13 per cent of the West Bank over 12 weeks, with each phase accompanied by Palestinian security measures such as the confiscation of illegal weapons.

In the first week, no major Israeli steps are required. The Palestinians are to outline their plan for fighting Islamic militants to the United States, and several Israeli-Palestinian committees are to begin meeting.

"It is the US position that the schedule would be unaffected," said the US Embassy spokesman, Larry Schwartz.

Netanyahu played down the importance of the delay. "There conceivably could be a delay, but I think we can limit it to a technical delay of a few days. So I don't think there will be a problem," Netanyahu told reporters.

The prime minister also said he was confident parliament would ratify the agreement, but appeared less certain about the backing of his Cabinet ministers. "I am sure the Knesset will approve it, assuming it passes the government," he said.

Netanyahu said he was acting on the recommendations of the attorney general, Elyakim Rubinstein. Earlier today, legislator Hanan Porat, an avowed opponent of the agreement, had asked Rubinstein to make a ruling on the issue.

Netanyahu denied media reports that Israel had agreed to slow the expansion of Jewish

settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of the agreement with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu said Israel would keep building to accommodate the natural population growth in the settlements, but would not establish new communities.

On Monday, construction continued on the expansion of Kiryat Arba, a settlement of 6,000 residents just outside the tense, divided West Bank town of Hebron. Workers were paving roads and working on the utilities for a 200-apartment neighbourhood, said the Mayor of Kiryat Arba, Zvi Katzover.

In other developments Monday, Palestinian police identified a 19-year-old Hamas activist as the suicide bomber in last week's attack on an Israeli convoy in the Gaza Strip.

Also Monday, lifted a 50-day blockade on Palestinian areas in a move described as a goodwill gesture. Some 60,000 labourers will be permitted to return to their jobs in Israel.

Prosecutors likely to appeal HC decision on Pinochet

LONDON, Nov 2: Using testimony from some prominent Chileans to bolster their case, British prosecutors planned on Monday to formally appeal a High Court decision to throw out the arrest of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, reports AP.

The prosecutors, acting on behalf of a Spanish magistrate seeking the former Chilean dictator's extradition on allegations of murder, kidnapping and torture during his 17-year regime, are expected to argue that the High Court erred in ruling that Pinochet is immune from prosecution as a previous head of state.

The prosecutors have until the end of the business day Monday to file the appeal. Hearings before a House of Lords

panel of five senior judges are tentatively scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday.

If last Wednesday's High Court ruling "is not overturned by the House of Lords then any self-styled head of state or dictator... will consider themselves to be immune from any prosecution over abuse of human rights in Britain," said Labour Party lawmaker Jeremy Corbyn at a vigil Sunday.

Anti-Pinochet campaigners such as Isabel Allende, daughter of the late Chilean President Salvador Allende, whose government was toppled by Pinochet in 1973, and Juan Pablo Letelier, whose father was killed in 1976, are among those expected to give testimony to the House of Lords.

Pak scientist denies having N-bomb making Chinese help in

BEIJING, Nov 2: Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, chief architect of Pakistan's nuclear programme, has denied allegations that Beijing helped Islamabad make its nuclear bombs but acknowledged that some bomb parts were imported from Europe, reports PTI.

"I can tell you with full authority and honesty that we have had no access to any Chinese data," he was quoted as saying by a leading defence magazine.

If we produce a Hamburger, you in the West will say that it has been copied from McDonald's. Dr Khan told Jane's Defence Weekly in an interview to be published today.

'Indonesian military involved in riots'

JAKARTA, Nov 2: Members of the Indonesian military were involved in deadly riots that swept Jakarta in May and helped oust former President Suharto, a chief investigator said on Monday, reports AP.

The disclosure is likely to further embarrass the military, which is struggling to revamp its image amid evidence of widespread abuses while the authoritarian Suharto was in power.

A report on riots in six cities compiled by a government-backed team of investigators alleges that members of the military instigated some of the violence, team member Bambang Widjojanto said. The report was

expected to be released this week.

"We found that security forces were involved in several areas where riots occurred," Bambang said in a telephone interview. "However, we still don't know if it was the involvement of individuals or the institution."

The conclusion was based on extensive interviews with witnesses, said Bambang, a human rights lawyer and chairman of the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute.

Some witnesses have said they saw men with short, military-style haircuts roaming Jakarta and other cities in trucks and urging crowds to riot.

US official hears ethnic Albanians' fears firsthand

STREOC, Yugoslavia, Nov 2: US diplomat Julia Taft recently got some ethnic Albanian hospitality — walnuts and pudding — and a taste of the fear permeating daily life for Kosovo villagers, reports AP.

The assistant US Secretary of State, on a one-day visit Sunday to the embattled Serbian province, protested mildly when the dish of white, creamy rice pudding came out.

Then came a helping of perspective, Kosovo-style. Family members gave their names but asked journalists not to publish them, for fear of retribution by Serb police.

"Yes I feel threatened," the hostess told Taft. "I sleep with my clothes on because that's how we think. We may have to flee."

Others complained that police and soldiers who withdrew from some areas a week ago returned to harass and arrest people. When Taft said that such incidents, she sensed things were getting better in Kosovo, the head of the family replied: "We don't sense that."

He said only international troops, not an unarmed foreign verification force being created, could solve their problem.

"The Westerners are not going to solve the problem," Taft responded. "The people who live here must come to an agreement to solve their problem."

But the man shook his head, saying: "I don't think that it will be possible."

Taft later told a news conference that fear of Serb police and Yugoslav soldiers continues to prevent people from reclaiming their normal lives.

She said the situation in the Yugoslav province was much better than during her previous visit two months ago, but thousands of refugees still were staying away from their homes.

"It's difficult to say that everybody is able to go back home or is willing to back home," she said. "There is fear among the population."

Taft noted Serb police had decreased their visibility, with only three checkpoints seen during her travels Sunday.



A police officer carries a young girl to safety in the town of San Nicolas Lempa 80 kms east of the capital of San Salvador after she was rescued by helicopter from the flooded land near the Rio Lempa on Sunday. Sixty-three people have died and 200 more were missing in flash floods caused by Hurricane Mitch. — AP/UNB photo