

## India rules out any change over CTBT

NEW DELHI, Oct 14: India on Thursday ruled out any change in its position of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) following its rejection by the US Senate and a military coup in Pakistan, reports AFP.

External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, retained in the new Hindu nationalist-led alliance government, said neither issue would change New Delhi's thinking that the treaty was biased in favour of the five recognised nuclear powers -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

"There is no need to consider any change on account of the developments in Pakistan," Singh said, referring to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's ouster in a military coup on Tuesday.

And India's stand remained unchanged despite Wednesday's rejection of the treaty by the US Senate.

"India will not stand in the way of entry of force of CTBT," he added. "It is our expectation that other nations will also act accordingly."

The CTBT was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1996, but before it can enter into force it must be ratified by a list of 44 countries judged to have nuclear facilities. India is one of the countries.

Analysts say India, which has come under pressure to sign the CTBT following its nuclear tests last year, is pleased over the US Senate vote as it gives it more time to formulate a domestic consensus.

## Anti-Habibie demonstration in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Oct 14: Thousands of Indonesian students began to converge on parliament Thursday demanding that President B.J. Habibie quit the presidential race, hours before he was due to defend his 17-month rule to the assembly, reports AFP.

Some 2,000 students from at least five student groups arrived on foot and in buses from the east but were blocked under a flyover tightly guarded by a multi-layered cordon of hundreds of anti riot police.

As the students stayed put, the troops erected wooden barriers covered with barbed wire in front of them. Dozens of other anti-riot soldiers stood on guard on the flyover.

The protesters held dozens of anti-Habibie and anti-Suharto banners as well as one of which read "Stop militarism, bring Suharto and his cronies to court."

Hundreds of other students, from the Joint Forum, later arrived on foot, and reports said some 1,000 supporters of opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri were heading towards parliament to join them.

"Reject Habibie and Wiranto" read one poster carried by the Joint Forum group, referring to the president and armed forces chief General Wiranto who he has picked as his candidate for the vice presidency.

Another poster said "Crush remnants of (Suharto's) New Order."

The student protesters called on the MPR to reject Habibie's bid for another term in office, and demanded that the military leave the country's political scene altogether.

The students are also demanding constitutional amendments and the reopening of a corruption probe into former president Suharto.

The government on Monday halted its probe into Suharto, saying there was insufficient evidence to support accusations of corruption.

## WTC bombers resented to life terms

NEW YORK, Oct 14: Four Islamic militants convicted of bombing the World Trade Center were each sentenced to more than 108 years in prison, a reduction from the original terms of 240 years, reports AP.

A federal appeals court had ruled that the original sentences were calculated incorrectly.

One of the defendants, Mohammed Salameh, 32, who allegedly played key roles in building the bomb used in the attack, was sentenced Wednesday to 116 years, 11 months in prison.

He also got a lecture from US District Judge Kevin Duffy when he criticized the United States and said it might someday splinter like the Soviet Union.

"If you had been convicted of this crime under those foreign governments, there would be no resentencing," Duffy said. "You don't resent a dead person."

Duffy guaranteed a lifetime behind bars for the four convicted of playing a role in the Feb 26, 1993, bombing, which killed six people and injured more than 1,000 others.

He also ordered the defendants to pay a \$250,000 fine and \$125,000 in restitution should they ever sell book or movie rights to their stories.

Nidal Ayyad, 32, a chemist who ordered materials for the Trade Center bomb, was sentenced to 117 years and a month in prison. Mahmud Abouhalima, 39, got 108 years and four months.

The fourth, Ahmad Ajaj, 34, told Duffy he was innocent and in frail health after his left lung was removed during a cancer operation in prison. Duffy said Ajaj's guilt was clear and gave him 114 years and 10 months.

Ramzi Yousef, the alleged mastermind of the bombing, who was captured in Pakistan in 1995 and convicted in the United States, is also serving a life sentence, as is a sixth Trade Center defendant, Eyad Ismail.

# Benazir trying to contact army rulers to return home

LONDON, Oct 14: Pakistan's former prime minister Benazir Bhutto was trying to contact military leaders Thursday to secure a safe return home following the ousting of her successor Nawaz Sharif in an army coup, her spokesman said, reports AFP.

But Benazir, who has been staying in London since fleeing Pakistan amid corruption charges, has been unable to reach General Pervez Musharraf, her former military operations commander who orchestrated Tuesday's coup.

"She has been attempting to speak to him so that she can get back home safely. She wants to try to help Pakistan and is confident he will want to do the same," spokesman Bashir Riaz said.

Benazir said in an interview with a London-based Arabic daily published Tuesday that she planned to return home within the next 10 days and did not expect the military leaders to pursue legal action against her.

"I want to give them time to receive me upon my victorious return," she told the Asharq-al-Awsat paper.

"I will return to Pakistan and if there are free and honest elections, I will win."

She told the paper she would seek to hold "free and honest elections within the next three months."

Benazir still heads the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the main force in a 19-party umbrella opposition group called the Grand Democratic Alliance.

She faces arrest in Pakistan over corruption allegations relating to her time in power.

Benazir also told Lebanon's al-Mustaqbal paper that the coup was a result of Sharif treating the army "as if they were employees at one of his private companies."

She said she expected the new military leadership to "take important decisions leading the army back to its barracks."

Another report from Islamabad adds: Pakistan's former

president Farooq Leghari today called for a caretaker government that should "cleanse" the country of corruption and hold elections, reports Reuters.

That (caretaker) may have, as its priority agenda, accountability, and the return of the plundered wealth from Pakistan. That may have on its agenda moves towards restoration of democracy in the real sense," Leghari said from Lahore.

Leghari, who now leads his own political party, resigned in 1997 after months of power struggle with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who was ousted in a military coup on Tuesday.

Leghari said Sharif's administration had destroyed all national institutions in his 2 year in power and had lastly tried to create "dissension and subversion" in the armed forces which prompted the army chief Pervez Musharraf to take over.

Leghari said although there was no provision for a coup in the constitution it was done for a higher good.

## Pak media turn against Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Oct 14: Pakistan's media quickly turned against ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif today, saying his dictatorial actions forced the army to step in and dismiss his government, reports Reuters.

The independent newspapers, which had spoken out against Sharif's government in the run up to Tuesday's bloodless coup, said the overthrow by the army was justified because Sharif had become too powerful and undemocratic.

"The army has had to step in to dislodge the increasingly authoritarian, wayward and personalised government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif," The News said in an editorial.

The undemocratic ways of Pakistan's elected civilian government created conditions which left the army -- the most powerful and professional institution in the country -- with no other option but to intervene," it said.

The News is part of the Jang Group of newspapers which had a high-profile fight with the government earlier this year over tax-evasion charges and accusations of press censorship.

In an editorial called "A new beginning?" The News said the performance of Sharif's government since coming to power with a strong mandate in February 1997 was "abysmal."

"So personalised and autocratic was Mr Sharif's rule that all institutions of the state were made to work according to his whims."

The constitution was manipulated and disregarded and democracy itself undermined by his obsessive compulsion to concentrate power," it said.

The Nation criticised Sharif for being power hungry and for his attacks on the judiciary and for forcing a chief justice to resign last year.

## Southeast Asian nations to strengthen N-free zone

BANGKOK, Oct 14: Southeast Asian nations have decided to strengthen their nuclear-weapons-free zone, coinciding with rejection by the US Senate of a landmark treaty to ban nuclear testing, reports AP.

In a meeting Tuesday, representatives of the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed to strengthen the treaty that committed them to a zone free of nuclear weapons four years ago.

The gathering came on the eve of the US Senate's refusal to ratify the test-ban treaty, dealing President Bill Clinton a foreign policy defeat despite appeals from other nuclear powers to endorse the pact.

A statement on the regional meeting issued Thursday by the Thai Foreign Ministry, which chaired the meeting, made no reference to the US vote.

But the statement noted that the US and the four traditional nuclear powers -- Russia, China, France and Britain -- are being consulted about joining the pact to keep nuclear weapons out of the region.

Thailand will to launch moves toward a dialogue between the treaty signatories and the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, which monitors the development of nuclear energy and arsenals.

The presumed presence of nuclear weapons aboard US warships has frequently been a target of protest in the region.

## Gusmao to return to E Timor next week

CANBERRA, Australia, Oct 14: East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao said Thursday he planned to return to his homeland next week for the first time in seven years as the UN said its top man in the territory would go to Australia for consultations with the former guerrilla commander, reports AFP.

Gusmao, widely tipped to be the first president of an independent East Timor, has been out of the former Portuguese colony since he was captured in 1992 by Indonesian authorities.

But emerging from a meeting with Australian Prime Minister John Howard on Thursday, he said he was eager to set foot in East Timor despite concerns in some camps his life could be in danger if he returned.

"I'm planning to go next week," he told reporters.

The announcement came after he and Nobel Peace Prize winner Jose Ramos Horta met in Canberra with Howard, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and opposition Leader Kim Beazley.

Gusmao and Ramos Horta also received a rousing welcome in Australia's parliament where they attended question time.

The pair are expected to return to Darwin on Friday before Gusmao flies home next week. Ramos Horta is expected to return to East Timor later this year.

In the East Timorese capital of Dili, United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) spokesman David Wilmhurst said last March that the special representative of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in the territory was leaving for Darwin later Thursday to meet with Gusmao.

Wilmhurst said Martin would spend the weekend in talks with Gusmao and return to Dili on Monday.



Pakistan army soldiers patrol inside the premises of Parliament house in Islamabad yesterday, the third day of the dismissal of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The Army sealed off Parliament offices and asked the staff to leave the building. — AFP photo

# US foresaw possibility of coup in Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Oct 14: The White House had sensed the potential for an overthrow of Pakistan's civilian rulers, but did not see it coming this week, officials said, reports AP.

President Bill Clinton, meanwhile, urged "a prompt return to civilian rule" in Pakistan and sent the US ambassador back to Islamabad "to underscore my view directly to the military authorities and to hear their intentions."

"I will also be consulting closely with all concerned nations about maintaining peace and stability in South Asia," Clinton said Wednesday.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the coup created a "new level of uncertainty" in the tense region.

"What we hope very much is there is a return to a constitutional system in Pakistan and that we are able to continue the work that we have been doing to deflect the conflict, to get India and Pakistan to talk again about solving the Kashmir problem peacefully," Albright

said at the University of Maine.

A senior government official, discussing the Pakistan matter on condition of anonymity, said US intelligence had warned for several months of the possibility of a military takeover. "It was not a surprise at all that it happened," although the timing of Tuesday's takeover was not known, the official said.

Seeing a potential for military attempt to subvert the democratic process, the administration three weeks ago quietly called on Pakistani military leaders to remain in their barracks, officials said.

Just hours after the coup, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon told reporters that although there had been many media reports that there might be a coup, "I know we had no premonition that it was going to happen" when it did.

Another administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Wednesday there was little immediate concern about a Pakistani military

move on Kashmir, the divided Himalayan territory. Nor does India appear to be overly alarmed by the coup, despite putting its armed forces on heightened alert, the official said.

While the United States wants to see a return to civilian government and elections, it is not pushing for deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's return, said yet another administration official speaking on condition of anonymity.

The official said the US view of Sharif was that he was unpopular among his own people and a target of corruption charges. Sharif's management of Pakistan's economy, his crackdowns on the press and his intimidation of opposition leaders also were concerns to US officials.

On Capitol Hill, Sen Sam Brownback announced that the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs will hold a hearing on Pakistan on Thursday.

## Taiwan renews calls for talks with China

TAIPEI, Oct 14: Taiwan Thursday renewed its invitation to China's top envoy to visit for talks, saying disputes with the mainland could only be resolved through negotiation, reports AFP.

"I express again my utmost welcome for Mr. Wang Daohan's visit at a time convenient for both sides," said Koo Chen-fu on the first anniversary of his historic trip to China.

"We will do our best to arrange for the delegation a safe, comfortable, sincere and constructive trip."

Koo, chairman of the quasi-official Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), also urged Beijing "to show more humanitarian concern and less political interference" when offering help to Taiwan's earthquake victims.

"Let's transform goodwill and mutual trust into the driving force of normalisation of bilateral relations in the 21st century," he said.

China has considered Taiwan part of its territory since the nationalists broke from the communist mainland in 1949. Taiwan accepted donations

from China's Red Cross following the devastating September 21 quake which left at least 2,333 people dead and some 100,000 homeless.

But any hopes the disaster might prompt a rapprochement between the two sides evaporated when Taiwan declined other offers of help from China after hearing that Beijing, in line with its claims of sovereignty, had insisted it approve all aid donations.

Koo travelled to China a year ago in what was hailed as the beginning of improved ties between the two rivals.

Koo's counterpart Wang from the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) had planned to make a return visit to the island this autumn.

But the trip was indefinitely postponed by Beijing in protest at Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's remarks in July that cross-strait ties should be redefined as a "special state to state relationship."

China attacked Lee for trying to stir up separatist sentiment.

## US military ship gets green signal from China

HONG KONG, Oct 14: China will let a US Navy destroyer and two cargo aircraft visit Hong Kong but denied permission for a spy plane to land amid continuing but lessening tensions over the embassy bombing in Yugoslavia, officials said Thursday, reports AP.

The USS O'Brien will stop in Hong Kong from October 31 to November 5, becoming the first US Navy destroyer allowed a port of call since NATO's bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in May, said US consulate spokeswoman Barbara Zigli.

Hong Kong long has been a top destination for US military ships and aircraft on duty in the region, but Beijing temporarily slammed the door shut following the embassy bombing that Washington insists was an accident.

US military visits have been gradually increasing, however, as China grants permission to some but not others.

Beijing has also approved landings by two US military C-141 transport airplanes into Hong Kong, but banned a proposed stop by the sensitive P3 Orion plane, a high-flying model used for surveillance.

The first C-141 will visit Hong Kong on October 23-26 carrying a group of senior military officers from the National Defense University in Washington, DC, on a tour of Asia, Zigli said.

The other C-141 scheduled to visit on November 5 is a regional embassy support aircraft set to deliver cargo, Zigli said.

All together, five US military aircraft have been allowed to land Hong Kong, while five other have been denied since the embassy bombing.

## West Bengal flood death toll rises to 95

CALCUTTA, Oct 14: The toll in the recent floods in West Bengal stood at 95, with 1.28 crore people affected in 15 districts, state finance minister Asim Dasgupta said yesterday, reports PTI.

Of the deaths, 29 were caused by diarrhoea and 19 in snake bites. He said, adding that 12,015 people had been affected by diarrhoea in the flood affected districts.

Dasgupta, who reviewed relief and rehabilitation measures along with relief Minister Satya Ranjan Mahato, said damage due to the flood had been estimated at 2,068 Crore, the state government had spent Rs 60.52 crore for relief from the state calamity relief fund against its allocation of Rs 59.03 crore.

Expressing dismay that the centre had not yet responded to the State's demand for Rs 721 crore from the national calamity relief fund, he said the Centre should immediately send a team to assess the damages as demanded by the state government.

# Vajpayee criticised for jumbo government

NEW DELHI, Oct 14: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee came under media criticism Thursday for inducting a jumbo-sized 70-member ministry dominated by Hindu nationalists, reports AFP.

"This is clearly not in keeping with the commitment to downsizing government," The Economic Times said, adding the ministry's size betrayed the prime minister's compulsions of coalition.

The Business Standard echoed the criticism: "Good beginnings are important, and Atal Behari Vajpayee has begun badly by appointing a jumbo cabinet that does him no credit."

"By taking the easy way out in the face of pressure for ministerial berths, the prime minister has quickly dampened the hopes that had been raised, of a purposeful government coming into office."

It said Vajpayee should have instead tried "reducing the size of the government, getting government out of business, and (boosting) privatisation."

Vajpayee, 72, whose Hindu

nationalist-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) emerged victors in elections last week, on Wednesday took the oath at the head of the 70-member, two-tier ministry.

He retained most veterans of his 1998-99 coalition, including Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha, Defence Minister George Fernandes and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh.

But Vajpayee dropped Sikander Bakht, the most high-profile Muslim supporter of the Hindu nationalists, leaving the cabinet without a single Muslim or Sikh -- India's two influential minority groups.

The new coalition included members of 10 political parties, including Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP, which cornered nearly 60 percent of all ministerial berths.

For the first time, Kashmir's Muslim-dominated pro-India National Conference party, which rules the Himalayan state, joined a government in New Delhi.

Vajpayee had come under a lot of pressure from his numerous allies ahead of the swearing-in over plum cabinet posts. Newspapers said some of the allies were disgruntled over the portfolio allocation.

Not all the allies in the NDA have joined the government. Some partners have said they would prop up the government from the outside and offer it "issue-based" support.

The NDA, which is dominated by Vajpayee's BJP, won around 300 seats in the 545-member parliament routing the main opposition Congress party.

The government's birth pangs, however, led to rumblings with an influential ally, Ramakrishna Hegde, hitting out at Vajpayee for dropping him from the cabinet. Hegde was earlier the commerce minister.

Hegde, a former chief minister of the southern state of Karnataka announced that he was snapping links with NDA. Two leaders of another key ally also moaned their non-inclusion.

# Russian bombing leaves 2000 dead: Grozny

GROZNY, Russia, Oct 14: The Russian bombardment in Chechnya has killed 2,108 civilians in just over one month, the Chechen general staff announced Thursday in Grozny, reports AP.

Another 8,000 civilians suffered injuries since Russia opened an air and artillery campaign against the rebel republic on September 5, Chechen officials told AFP.

The Chechen leadership painted a picture of utter disaster across the republic, while also reporting important victories against the invading Russians on the battlefield.

Some 20 per cent of all housing and 80 per cent of Chechnya's industry -- primarily oil storage facilities and refineries -- have been destroyed, the Chechen officials said.

Forty villages have been completely demolished while another 130 suffered serious damage from the bombings, the general staff said.

It reported that 37 Chechen

soldiers have been killed and 45 wounded since September 23.

Meanwhile, Chechnya reported killing some 920 Russian soldiers over the past three weeks, downing six Russian warplanes and destroying 65 armoured vehicles.

It said another 52 Russian soldiers and officers have been taken prisoner.

Russian defence officials refused to comment on the Chechen report.

Moscow insists it only is targeting suspected rebel bases in the separatist republic, which Moscow holds responsible for a deadly wave of Russian apartment block explosions and incursions in neighbouring Dagestan.

Officials in Grozny on Thursday said that Russian planes bombed the Chechen capital after a night of air raids over the republic that killed 36 people.

Two Russian Sukhoi-25 jets bombed Grozny, hitting oil installations, an AFP correspon-

dent reported.

A thick pall of smoke could be seen above a district of the city where several small oil refineries are located.

Another missile hit the outskirts of Grozny airport, already targeted by the Russian air force on September 23.

Overnight Russian air and artillery bombardments targeted the eastern regions of Chechnya around the villages of Nozhai-Yurt and Gudermes, Goragorsky in the west, Dolinsk (a few kilometers west of Grozny) and Bamut in the southwest.

In Moscow, President Boris Yeltsin on Thursday consulted Magomed Magomedov, leader of Chechnya's neighbor Dagestan, over the crisis.

Yeltsin has made no public comments over the conflict since Russian troops rolled into Chechnya for the first time since a 1994-1996 civil war that killed some 80,000 people and left the republic with de facto independence.

## BRIEFLY

### Arafat in Japan:

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived in Tokyo on Thursday to attend a two-day international meeting of donor nations and meet with Japanese leaders, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Arafat arrived in a Gulfstream G-A jet at Tokyo's Haneda airport, said an airport official. Arafat was here for a two-day meeting of donor nations and international bodies in Tokyo, which he is due to address on Friday, the final day of deliberations. Japan and other nations agreed last year to provide Palestinians with 3.3 billion dollars in financial aid for a period of five years. Tokyo has been the largest aid donor to the Palestinian Authority.

### China launches satellite:

China successfully placed in orbit Thursday a satellite developed with Brazil to help study natural resources and the environment on Earth. Chinese state media reported, AP reports from Beijing.

A Long March 4B rocket carried the satellite into space after blasting off from the Taiyuan Launching Centre in central China around 11:15 am (0915 BST), the reports said. China and Brazil originally planned to launch the satellite Friday but weather conditions allowed the launching to be moved up a day. The satellite, known as CBERS-1, carries three high-resolution cameras to study environmental and agricultural conditions.

### 7 killed in prison violence:

Seven prisoners were killed and nine injured Wednesday in further violence at El Rodeo prison, some 100 kilometres south-west of Caracas, the prison's director Luis Calderon said, AFP reports from Caracas, Venezuela.

Calderon said the violence began in the morning, when a group of prisoners attempted to take control of parts of the prison. On Sunday, Calderon said two inmates were killed. Some 40 prisoners were killed on Saturday had tried to force prison kitchen staff to hand over supplies.

### 31 drug traffickers arrested:

An international drug cartel has been dealt a crippling blow by the arrest of 31 of its suspected members in a joint crackdown by Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador and the United States baptised "Operation Millennium," AFP reports from Washington.

"We believe that today's actions have disrupted this consortium," US Attorney General Janet Reno told a press conference in Washington on Wednesday. In Bogota, Colombia's top police official, General Rosso Serrano, told reporters that 30 suspects had been arrested in Colombia and one in Mexico in a massive international sting operation.

## Lanka fighting claims 11 lives a day: President

COLOMBO, Oct 14: Sri Lanka's Tamil separatist conflict claims an average of 11 lives every day, the government said Thursday in an attack on the opposition, which it accuses of not cooperating with efforts to end the bloodshed, reports AFP.

The death toll, which includes both government troops and Tiger guerrillas, was highlighted in an eight-page letter from President Chandrika Kumaratunga to the country's opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"Let it be remembered by all our people that for everyday you procrastinate, another 11 precious Sri Lankan lives are lost," the President wrote.

Kumaratunga was lambasting Wickremesinghe and his opposition United National Party (UNP) for not co-operating with her efforts to resolve the conflict.

The UNP rejected Kumaratunga's charges and said it was the government which had failed to deliver on promises that helped them win 1994 elections.