

International

West warns Milosevic not to use force to cling to power

BELGRADE, Sept 26 : Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, with apparent electoral defeat staring him in the face, was warned by the West Tuesday not to try to use force to hang on to power, reports AFP.

Britain led Western insistence that Milosevic should not use strong arm tactics to cling to the presidency. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook reminded him that western powers still have "a continuing and significant military presence" in the Balkans.

Unofficial results from more than half the polling stations in Serbia showed Milosevic had been soundly defeated by opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica, he said in Brighton where he was attending a British Labour Party conference.

"He (Milosevic) cannot go on in power with any credibility or with

any authority other than use of naked power," Cook told Sky News television.

He hinted that western troops carrying out peacekeeping operations in Kosovo could be mobilised against Serbia if Milosevic launched any military action.

"He has already dragged the poor people of Serbia into four separate wars and lost every one of them. He now should recognise that he should go, and should go with the minimum violence and the maximum opportunity to get out as quickly as he can."

Cook's comments came after a Brussels-based thinktank, the International Crisis Group (ICG), warned that Milosevic would at least seek a run-off vote against opposition candidate Kostunica and might even try to engineer a crisis to cling on to power.

"He would give himself a two-

week lifeline to engineer at least something, either to give himself a better chance to steal the ballot or -- perhaps more likely -- to do something that will enable him to create a crisis, a state of emergency, and call off the whole process," said ICG president Gareth Evans.

Despite the lack of official results, Kostunica supporters felt confident enough of victory to begin celebrating late Monday.

More than 40,000 of his supporters packed Belgrade's central Square of the Republic, waving party and Serbian flags shouting "He is Finished" and "Victory" to the rhythms of drum troupes which have become a trademark of anti-Milosevic rallies.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also moved into line with Western leaders in accepting that Milosevic was facing defeat, the Russian press said Tuesday.

"Those who had announced widespread fraud, like (EU foreign policy and security chief Javier Solana, have been proved

wrong," he said.

"What is certain is that the (ruling) Socialists have suffered a heavy defeat in (Serbian) municipal elections," he said, adding that the presidential contest was heading "without doubt for a second round."

With both the Milosevic regime and the opposition claiming victory in Sunday's elections, western governments say they have evidence of widespread ballot-rigging by Milosevic's officials.

But former Greek foreign minister Carlos Papoulias, who went to Yugoslavia as a private observer, said the vote had been carried out in "an impeccable manner".

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A villager walks past a submerged portion of a railway track in the flood-affected area of Katwa, some 150 km north of Calcutta on Tuesday. Over five hundred people have died and around a million people rendered homeless in the floods caused by incessant rains in West Bengal.

--AFP photo

UN divided over response to flights to Iraq

Jordan prepares to send plane to Baghdad: FM

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 26 : The UN committee overseeing sanctions against Iraq on Monday was unable to agree about an appropriate response to flights to Baghdad, the committee president, Dutch ambassador Peter van Walsum, said, reports AFP.

"There was no agreement," van Walsum said, noting the 15 committee members discussed for more than two hours the recent French and Russian landings in Baghdad, and those expected in the near future.

Van Walsum said, "My view was that there was no consensus for a change of practice, so I felt that I should continue the existing practice" of requiring committee authorization for all flights to Iraq.

The committee members, who represent the permanent seats of the UN Security Council, are

profoundly divided over the legality of the flights to Baghdad.

Britain and the United States maintain that committee authorisation is necessary, while France believed that since the United Nations resolutions do not impose an aerial embargo, a simple notification is sufficient.

France on Monday submitted a proposal to change the committee's practice, in place since the 1990 Gulf War, when the UN imposed a severe course of sanctions against Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Jordan is preparing to send a plane to Baghdad with Cabinet ministers and parliamentarians on board, Foreign Minister Abdellah al-Khatib told AFP today.

"Jordan is making the necessary preparations to send a Jordanian plane to Baghdad," Khatib

Jordan's queen gives birth to baby girl

AMMAN, Sept 26 : Jordan's Queen Rania gave birth early today to a baby girl called Salma, the third child of the world's youngest queen and her husband King Abdullah II, palace sources told AFP.

Both mother and child are doing well, the sources said, adding that the baby was born at 2:22 a.m. (5:22 BST Monday), the sources said rather than 2:30 a.m. as initially reported.

Salma weighed 3.3 kilograms (seven pounds) when she was born at the Hussein Medical City in Amman.

Separatist violence claims 22 more lives in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 26 : Separatist-linked violence in Indian Kashmir has killed 22 people, including 13 Muslim militants, a police spokesman said today, reports AFP.

In one incident three members of the police counter-insurgency Special Operation Group were killed, along with a police informer, overnight Monday when militants ambushed them in Kupwara district, 100 km north of the Kashmiri summer capital, Srinagar.

The spokesman said four more militants and an Indian soldier were killed in a shootout in Chitl village in Bandipore district, 60

km north of Srinagar.

Six residential houses were destroyed in a fire that broke out in the village during the fighting.

Another four Muslim militants and an Indian border guard were killed Tuesday morning in a fierce encounter at Wangurd, in the southern Kashmir district of Anantnag, the spokesman said, adding that the shooting was "still on."

A policeman, three militants and two civilians were killed in other isolated incidents across the Kashmir valley.

India should not worry about China's arms sale to Pakistan

GODAVRI (Nepal), Sept 26 : Sino-India relations are improving fast and New Delhi should not be worried about Beijing's limited arms sales to Islamabad, former Chinese ambassador to India Cheng Ruiseng has said, reports PTI.

India need not worry about limited arms sales to Pakistan by China in view of India's huge military procurement, Cheng told an international seminar on defence here in the Lalitpur district of Nepal.

The present Chinese help to Pakistan is much less and "limited" compared to the earlier one, he told the seminar on defence, technology and cooperative security in South Asia, organised by the Colombo based regional centre for strategic studies.

India and China have matured enough to handle the bilateral issues and relations between the two neighbours are improving fast in recent years through friendly exchanges at all levels, said Cheng, currently Deputy Director of Chinese centre for international studies, Beijing.

On the boundary question, he said the signing of the agreement

Palestinians to accept delay in peace deal if Israel gives more land

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Sept 26 : The Palestinians would be willing to accept a delay of "months" in reaching a peace deal if Israel carries out a further withdrawal from the West Bank and releases more prisoners, an official said today, reports AFP.

These two agreements created favourable conditions for the final settlement of the boundary question and offered a new model of cooperative security in Asia, Cheng said.

The former Chinese ambassador to India said both India and China could be natural allies in world affairs as both have identical views on many international issues, like intervention in Kosovo by western forces or expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

On the Kashmir issue, Cheng said Beijing could do much except telling Pakistan and India to bilaterally solve their problems.

Confrontation between India and Pakistan was exploited by the major outside powers for their own interests, seriously threatening peace and security in the region, he said.

The official was referring to the so-called third phase redeployment from the West Bank called for under the 1993 Oslo peace

accords.

He said Israel should hand over full control to the Palestinians of areas where they currently have administrative powers but Israel retains security control, in particular Arab neighbourhoods around Jerusalem.

The Palestinians currently have full or partial control over some 40 percent of the West Bank and 65 percent of the Gaza Strip.

Israel has released some 400 Palestinians since September last year but still holds 1,650 what it terms "security prisoners."

Meanwhile, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators left for Washington today where the United States is to lead a further round of talks to push forward peacemaking, Israeli radio reported.

The latest US push follows a summit between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, which one senior Israeli official told the radio was "the best they had ever had."

However, no breakthrough was reported by either side as a result of the meeting, which was their first encounter since the US-hosted Camp David summit broke down without agreement two months ago.

India retests surface-to-air missile

NEW DELHI, Sept 26 : India today successfully retested the surface-to-air Trishul (Trident) missile from a ship off the country's southern coast, the Press Trust of India reported, says AFP.

The test was carried out at a firing range in the eastern state of Orissa.

Officials said it was fired from a mobile launcher and was supposed to hit a dummy object attached to a Pindost Target Aircraft.

The multi-role Trishul has a range of up to nine kilometres (5.5 miles) with a payload capacity of 15 kilograms (33 pounds).

The Trishul has been flight-tested more than 10 times since 1983. A version is being developed for the army.

India has an ambitious programme to build a full rack of guided missiles including the ballistic missile series Agni (Fire), which can carry nuclear warheads.

India to set up body to probe corruption

GUWAHATI, India, Sept 26 : India is setting up a high-level commission to probe corruption allegations against politicians and bureaucrats in the country's northeastern states, official sources said today, reports AFP.

A top federal Home Ministry official said a retired Supreme Court judge would head the commission investigating charges that political leaders and senior civil servants have been siphoning off government funds.

The commission will come into effect very soon and it is expected to unravel a very big corruption racket in the northeastern states," the official said on condition of anonymity.

The commission is also expected to look at other charges that some government funds have found their way into the pockets of separatist militant groups operating in the region.

India's northeast consists of seven states -- known as the "Seven Sisters" -- joined to the rest of the country by a thin strip of land and bordered by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar.

Double agent testifies in Lockerbie trial

CAMP ZEIST, Netherlands, Sept 26 : The trial of two Libyans charged with the Lockerbie bombing continued today with keenly awaited testimony from a Libyan agent turned CIA informer, reports AFP.

Abdul Majid Giaka, 40, is said to be able to directly link the accused to the bomb that blew Pan American Flight 103 out of the sky over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988, killing 270 people.

Giaka, appearing behind a curtain that concealed his face from the public gallery, began his testimony -- due to last several days -- by answering questions about his identity and education.

He spoke in Arabic, with simultaneous translation into English.

Iran sought secret talks with Israel

JERUSALEM, Sept 26 : High-ranking Iranian officials tried last year to launch secret talks with Israel, Tehran's arch-enemy, but were rebuffed by the Jewish state, former Israeli foreign minister David Levy was quoted as saying today, reports AFP.

"Sources close to the Iranian government tried several times last year to engage in a secret dialogue with Israel," Levy told the daily Yediot Aharonot, adding that he had "categorically rejected the idea because nothing good would come out of it."

It would have put Israel in an undesirable and difficult situation with regard to the United States, which accuses Iran of supporting terrorism and operates a unilateral economic embargo against it.

Lankan troops mount fresh offensive

COLOMBO, Sept 26 : Sri Lankan troops mounted a fresh land and air offensive against Tamil Tiger rebels today, resulting in at least 30 people dead on both sides, the defence ministry said, reports AFP.

Security forces backed by artillery guns and air craft captured an area of about 10 square km in the northern peninsula of Jaffna after Tuesday's brief offensive, the ministry said in a statement.

It said 13 government soldiers were killed and 4 others wounded and placed rebel casualties at 17 fighters killed and many more wounded.

BRIEFLY

Lightning kills 7 in China: Lightning struck a group of villagers gathering herbs in central China, killing seven of them and injuring four, a local government spokesman said Tuesday. AFP reports from Shanghai.

The accident occurred Sunday afternoon on the outskirts of Ezhou, a city in Hubei province, said the Ezhou city spokesman, who gave only his surname, Zhou.

5 more killed in Maluku: At least five people were killed and eight others injured in an attack by Muslims Tuesday on a Christian village in Ambon, capital of Indonesia's restive Maluku Islands, a church worker said. AFP reports from Jakarta.

The Muslim attackers were aided by soldiers during the attack on the village of Hatice Besar, said Sammy Weileruni of the Christian coordinating post at the Maranatha church in Ambon. Weileruni said all the dead were Christians.

MILF kills 7 in Philippines: Muslim separatist guerrillas killed seven people including five children in an attack on a home in the southern Philippines, the local military spokesman said Tuesday. AFP reports from Zamboanga.

Ten guerrillas of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) barged into the house of Fermín Inoc on Monday near the town of Tangkal, shooting him, four of his children, and a visiting relative and their child, Colonel Hilario Atendido said.

BRIEFLY

Putin's envoy holds talks with Pakistani FM

ISLAMABAD, Sept 26 : A special envoy of Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived here Tuesday for talks with Pakistani leaders on bilateral relations and the situation in Afghanistan, officials said, reports AFP.

Sergei Yastrzhembsky met with Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar and held wide ranging talks focussing on "bilateral relations and regional and global issues of common concern," officials said.

The envoy is also expected to meet with Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider before calling on military ruler General Pervez Musharraf to deliver a message from Putin, they said.

The contents of the message were not revealed but press reports said it related to the situation in war-torn Afghanistan.

The visit of Yastrzhembsky, described here as "an important

contribution to Russian foreign policy making," is the first by a senior official since Musharraf took power after ousting prime minister Nawaz Sharif's government in a military coup in October last year.

It also follows Putin's meeting with Musharraf on the sidelines of the UN Millennium Summit in New York earlier this month.

Sattar told reporters on Monday the Russian envoy's visit would "give opportunity to the two sides to have exchange of views on matters of bilateral concern," officials said.

The foreign minister said Pakistan, keen to iron out differences with Russia, would try to allay Moscow's concern on Afghanistan.

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