

# Flights into Iraq suspended

AFP, AP, Baghdad

Civilian flights into Baghdad were suspended yesterday after a missile slammed into a DHL cargo jet in the first successful strike on a civilian plane of the seven-month-old insurgency.

The crew emerged miraculously unscathed from the hit by the SA-7 ground-to-air missile after an emergency landing at Baghdad airport on Saturday.

But the attack prompted the now German-owned express courier to halt its service for at least 48 hours for a security review.

Jordanian carrier Royal Wings, which runs the only civilian passenger service into the Iraqi capital, swiftly announced that it too was suspending its flights until at least Wednesday following the attack, which coincided with twin suicide bombings north of Baghdad that killed at least 18 people.

The threat from surface-to-air missiles, thousands of which fell into insurgents' hands after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's armed forces, has prevented the restoration of normal air links to Iraq ever since the US-led spring invasion, despite the presence of thousands of US troops at the airport, now a major military base.

Aircraft using the airport are obliged to corkscrew down onto the runway from high altitude for fear of being hit by the elusive insurgents who have dogged the US-led occupation.

"DHL has made the decision to suspend all flight operations to Iraq for at least the next 48 hours," company spokeswoman Patricia Thomson said in Brussels.

She said the company was reviewing the strike in coordination with the US military and the US-installed Iraqi authorities.

"Pending the findings of these investigations, as well as a full assessment of the security situation, DHL will then be in a better position to conduct a further review on how to continue any operations in Iraq," said Thomson.

Royal Jordanian, the parent company of Royal Wings, said it was halting its flights between Baghdad and Amman until at least Wednesday.

"After November 25, the company will decide if it will restart its flights to Baghdad or not," an official said.

The three-month-old service, which became daily this month, was open only to journalists, businessmen, aid workers, coalition officials and members of the interim Governing Council but provided an important link to the outside world as the coalition tries to rebuild the war-ravaged country.

The only alternative is the 10-12 hour road journey to the Jordanian or Syrian capitals, along a highway that is regularly targeted by robbers and is the scene of frequent roadside bombings on US troops.

## 4 more settlers killed in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Separatist rebels killed four more Hindi-speaking settlers in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam, bringing the death toll from a week of ethnic clashes to 46, police said yesterday.

Assamese militants torched at least 50 houses of Hindi-speakers early Sunday in the Tinsukia district, 550km east of the state capital Guwahati, charring one man to death, a police spokesman said.

Eleven Hindi-speaking labourers were killed in the same district Saturday when suspected rebels sprayed automatic gunfire at two brick kilns.

Another Hindi-speaker died Sunday in a hospital in Tinsukia of injuries sustained last week in a mob attack, police said.

Elsewhere in eastern Assam, militants late Saturday opened fire on settlers in Halukhluwa, killing two people and injuring a third, and torched five homes as they fled, provincial police chief Khagen Sharma told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP  
A Georgian opposition supporter holding his infant daughter attends a rally of thousands in front of parliament on Saturday night. Georgia's opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili warned his supporters that it was "too early" to celebrate victory after they stormed parliament, forcing the former Soviet republic's embattled president to flee.



PHOTO: AFP  
Indian Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani (2nd,L) waves to the crowd along with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief ministerial candidate for Delhi state Madan Lal Khurana (R) and BJP candidate from Sarojini Nagar constituency Ram Bhaj (L) during an election rally in New Delhi yesterday. Polls in four Indian states Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and the capital New Delhi will be held on December 1.

## BJP may put up poor show in state polls

AFP, New Delhi

India's ruling Hindu nationalists face a bruising political challenge next week when four major states hold assembly elections expected to set the tone and perhaps timing for next year's parliamentary vote.

Leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are travelling on helicopters, cars and boats deep into constituencies in India's Hindi-speaking heartland where the main opposition Congress party is fighting to keep its grip on power.

The polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh and New Delhi, involving millions of voters, are seen as a referendum on the political ability of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP, which came to power in 1999 on the coalition crutches of 23 regional parties.

Vajpayee's see-saw four years have seen the Congress wresting power in 15 of India's 28 states despite the fact that

its leader, Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, is widely rejected by Indians as the country's next potential prime minister.

The BJP on the other hand has lost six state polls, winning only in the communally sensitive Gujarat state and in the sea-resort state of Goa.

Pollsters forecast a poor show by the BJP next week and are predicting that barring Madhya Pradesh, the party will be outgunned by the Congress in the four electoral battles.

"If anything, a defeat in these elections, where it's (solely) a BJP versus Congress fight, will have an adverse moral impact on Vajpayee's performance at the federal level," said psephologist Mahesh Rangarajan.

"It is not a referendum as such on Vajpayee's performance in New Delhi," Rangarajan said. "The issues involved here are too local. But yes, if he loses badly, morally it will be a beating."

## US, Russia move to up their stake in Georgia

Powell considers trip to Tbilisi

AFP, Tbilisi

Opposing political groups were fighting for power in Georgia yesterday but behind the scenes two much bigger forces -- the United States and Russia -- are also slugging it out for influence in this tiny but strategic state in the Caucasus Mountains.

Russia's Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov had arrived and US Secretary of State Colin Powell was reportedly considering a trip to Tbilisi, capital of this former Soviet republic of fewer than five million people, to press their countries' interests.

Since the fall of communism, Moscow and Washington have tried to keep on friendly terms, but in Georgia, their competing interests have left them in a Cold War style head-to-head confrontation.

Both sides have a major stake in the outcome of the drama being played out

in Tbilisi, where President Eduard Shevardnadze is hanging onto power by his fingertips after the opposition stormed parliament and declared one of its leaders acting head of state.

The reason little Georgia is getting such high-level attention is its location, wedged between Russia and Turkey.

"Georgia is strategically important because that is where NATO, in the shape of Turkey, meets Russia," said Zeyno Baran, Director for International Security and Energy at the Nixon Centre in Washington and a specialist on Georgian affairs.

Another factor is oil. Georgia has none itself but it is on a transit route for the export of crude from the nearby Caspian Sea, where Western oil companies are hungry developing new fields.

Control the export route for the oil, say analysts, and you control the oil itself. Some observers compare it to the so-called "Great Game" of the 19th century, when Britain, then the world's superpower, was jostling with Russia for control of routes to India.

Moscow has powerful levers of influence in Georgia. It has two army bases in the south and west of the country, a hangover from the Soviet era that the Kremlin is in no hurry to give up.

Russia provides most of Georgia's energy needs through a gas pipeline, and it is in de facto control of two chunks of the country, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where Moscow-backed separatists have seceded from Tbilisi.

Washington, too, has its influence. It is Georgia's biggest bilateral aid donor, propping up a government that is nearly bankrupt. It provides military aid. US Marine Corps instructors are working with the Georgian army, and Washington has given Tbilisi six Huey helicopters. Turkey contributed another two.

## FBI collecting data on anti-war groups: NYT

REUTERS, New York

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has been collecting information on the tactics, training and organisation of anti-war demonstrators, The New York Times reported in its yesterday editions.

In a report sourced to several interviews as well as a confidential bureau memorandum, the Times said that the law enforcement agency has also advised local officials that they should report to counterterrorism squads any suspicious activity at protests.

The memorandum, which was circulated to local law enforcement officials on Oct.

15 ahead of antiwar demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco, detailed how protesters have sometimes used "training camps" to rehearse, the Internet to raise funds and gas masks to defend against police use of tear gas, the newspaper reported.

The memo analyzed legal activities such as recruiting demonstrators, as well as illegal ones such as using false documentation to gain access to secured sites, it said.

FBI officials told the newspaper that the intelligence gathering effort was aimed at identifying anarchists and "extremist elements" plotting violence, not at monitoring the political speech of law-abiding protesters.

Asked to comment on the paper's account, an FBI spokesman emphasized that the agency's interest was in potential criminal, and possibly terrorist, activity.

"The FBI is not interested in individuals who are exercising their constitutional rights of protest," FBI spokesman Bill Carter said. "It's only the groups who would be involved in violent or criminal activity where there would be an interest."

## US, Europe hope to find compromise on Iran

AFP, Vienna

A hardline United States and a Europe stressing "constructive engagement" hope to find a compromise this week at the UN nuclear watchdog to keep up pressure on an Iran suspected of hiding an atomic weapons programme, diplomats said over the weekend.

"There's movement on all sides as we fashion the appropriate response," US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told PBS television in Washington.

Armitage said the transatlantic allies were not at loggerheads.

"I would prefer to use a term that

we haven't yet reached agreement, rather than do not agree," he said, commenting on talks that began in Vienna last week at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) but were adjourned until Wednesday due to the deadlock.

The United States has now dropped demands to take Iran before the UN Security Council as US and European diplomats held weekend talks in their capitals on how to crack down on Tehran for hiding sensitive atomic activities, diplomats said.

This move could bring the issue before the UN Security Council, which could then slap sanctions on Iran.

An IAEA meeting in Vienna was adjourned on Friday until Wednesday

"I would prefer to use a term that

## Sharon considers dismantling isolated settlements

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is considering dismantling isolated Jewish settlements in the occupied territories as part of a series of unilateral gestures towards the Palestinians, reports said yesterday.

The settlements which face dismantling are on the Palestinian side of a controversial separation barrier being built by Israel across the West Bank or in areas which are considered difficult to defend.

The "plan is meant simply to make things easier for Israel," Sharon was quoted as saying by the Maariv daily.

"These are steps that can be taken without undermining security and their purpose is to make things easier for us and not for others."

The plan comes amid preparations by the Israelis and Palestinians for the resumption of peace talks which have been suspended for more than three months.

Both Sharon and his new Palestinian counterpart Ahmed Qorei have expressed a willingness to meet, but a summit is not expected until at least after the unveiling of the unofficial Geneva Initiative peace plan at the beginning of December.

Thousands recall JFK's death in Dallas

AP, Dallas

Thousands of mourners, conspiracy theorists and the just plain curious gathered Saturday along the downtown street where President John F. Kennedy was assassinated 40 years earlier, with many of them recalling where they had been at the very moment they heard the news.

Some looked up to the sixth floor of the former Texas School Book Depository, the building from which officials say Lee Harvey Oswald fired the deadly shots at 12:30 p.m. on Nov. 22, 1963. Others gravitated toward an "X" painted on the pavement to mark the spot where Kennedy's convertible was passing when he was hit.

A makeshift memorial with dozens of bouquets, signs and flags of the US and other countries was assembled nearby one of several memorials around the country for the fallen president.

"John F. Kennedy has been gone nearly as long as he lived, yet the memory of him still brings pride to our nation and a feeling of loss that defies the passing of years," President Bush said in a written statement.

Near Washington, Kennedy family members gathered at Arlington National Cemetery early in the day to pray beside the eternal flame that marks the president's grave.

Kennedy's daughter, Caroline Kennedy, her husband and children, and Kennedy's brother, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., were joined by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, archbishop of Washington.

## Shevardnadze's fall from grace

AFP, Tbilisi

Ten years ago, Eduard Shevardnadze was basking in the glory of having helped end the Cold War. But his fall from grace Saturday, after a disastrous decade as president of Georgia, could hardly have been more undignified.

Shevardnadze was forced out of parliament by opposition protesters who overran the chamber demanding his resignation.

Bodyguards hurried the 75 year-old leader out of parliament mid-sentence as he was addressing the assembly's first session since the November 2 general earlier, which the opposition and foreign governments say was rigged.

Shevardnadze, an former Soviet foreign minister who used to be the darling of the West, remained defiant in the face of demands for him to step down.

"I will only resign by constitutional means," he said. "Civil disobedience in Georgia is not acceptable."

The opposition invasion of parliament marked the culmination of three weeks of near daily street protests over the election that has mobilised tens of thousands of Georgians.

The United States, a long-standing Shevardnadze supporter, delivered a particularly stinging blow earlier this week when it voiced disappointment from his leadership.

As Mikhail Gorbachev's foreign

## US toughens immigration rules for Pakistanis

ANI, Washington

Apparently under directions from the US, the Pakistan Embassy in Washington has asked its citizens to strictly follow the US immigration rules.

The Pakistani nationals have been asked to get them registered with the concerned authorities within a month of their arrival, and ten days before their annual registration expires.

The Pakistani citizens entering the US should get themselves registered with US immigration authorities within one month of their landing in the country," the Online News quoted Mission Deputy Chief Muhammad Sadeeq as saying in Washington on Saturday.

According to the paper, snaps and fingerprints of all the immigrants would be taken at all the international airports on their entry within and exit from the US.

A recent Washington Post news report had suggested that the Department of Homeland Security is likely to cease registration of foreign immigrants entering US, and mostly Muslims would be affected through the new orders from the next year.

The report had further stated that the immigration department is initiating a programme labeled "US Visit" from January.

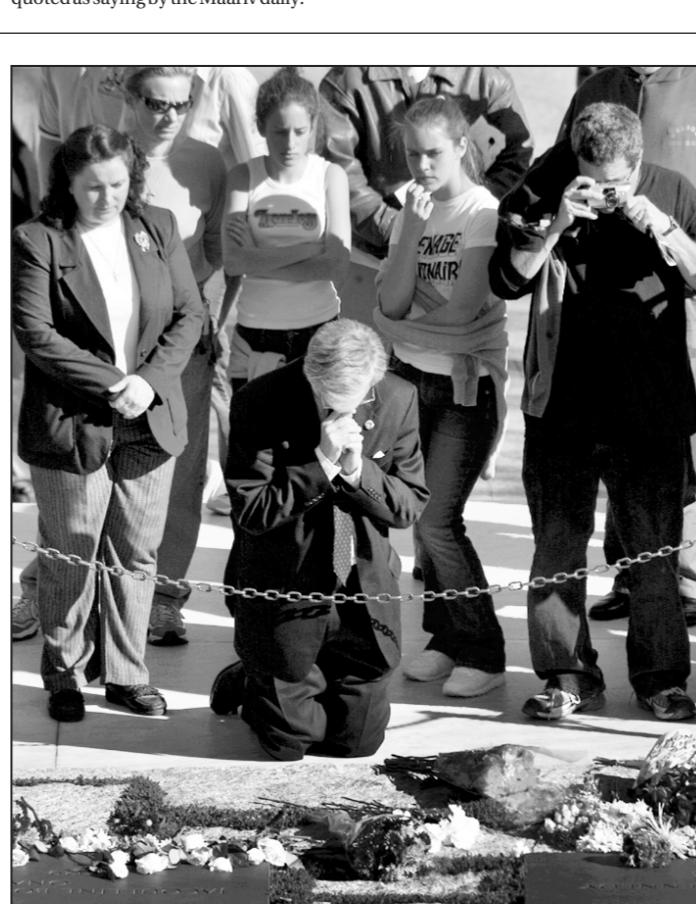


PHOTO: AFP  
Joe Noonan (C), of Bridgewater, New Jersey, kneels before the Eternal Flame before other visitors at the grave of assassinated US president John F. Kennedy on Saturday at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, to mark the 40th anniversary of JFK's assassination in 1963.