

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.

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 Haluakhuwa, 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 Mikhail 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 a beating."

US, Europe hope to find compromise on Iran

AFP, Vienna

A headline 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.

An IAEA meeting in Vienna was adjourned on Friday until Wednesday

after the United States and Europe's big three --- Britain, France and Germany --- had failed in two days of closed-door talks to agree on a resolution on Iran.

The United States, which has labeled Iran part of an "axis of evil" of countries trying to make nuclear weapons, along with North Korea and pre-Saddam Iraq, has sought to get the IAEA to declare Iran in "non-compliance" with the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

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

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.

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 antiwar 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."

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 protestors 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 have 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 in his leadership.

As Mikhail Gorbachev's foreign

minister, Shevardnadze had been one of the architects of perestroika and a key player in negotiations with the United States over arms reductions.

But when he took over at the helm of his home country, Shevardnadze fell hostage to vested interests. He turned a blind eye to corruption and, in recent years, has appeared increasingly helpless to prevent Georgia sinking into poverty and chaos.

Eduard Ambrosiyevich Shevardnadze was born on May 28, 1928, in the town of Mamati, near Georgia's Black Sea coast. At age 20, he joined the Communist Party and began a rapid climb through the ranks.

He made his name working in the interior ministry in charge of "public order", a euphemism for the sometimes brutal repression of his fellow Georgians under the Soviet regime.

Shevardnadze was rewarded in 1972 with his appointment as first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, and in 1988 he was promoted again, this time to the Politburo in Moscow.

He arrived just as Gorbachev was starting to implement his perestroika reforms in the face of resistance from hardliners.

Shevardnadze sided with the reformist camp. As foreign minister, he was at Gorbachev's side for a series of historic US-Soviet summits on nuclear disarmament.

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.

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.