

UN rejects Iran's call to close case

REUTERS, Vienna

The head of the UN atomic watchdog yesterday voiced "serious concern" at omissions in Iran's declarations about its nuclear activities and rejected a call from Tehran to drop investigations.

Mohamed ElBaradei singled out Tehran's failure last October to mention that it had designs for advanced centrifuges capable of producing highly enriched uranium for use in a nuclear reactor or, potentially, in an atomic weapon.

"I am seriously concerned that Iran's October declaration did not include any reference to its possession of P2 centrifuge designs and related R&D (research and development), which in my view was a setback to Iran's stated policy of transparency," ElBaradei said

yesterday.

He was addressing the board of governors of the UN watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as they opened a closed-door meeting which will consider how to proceed with Iran.

Iranian ambassador Pirooz Hosseini told reporters that Tehran was the victim of a "war of propaganda" and Iranian officials had been misquoted by the press last year as saying the October dossier was complete.

"At the time...we were not obliged to announce everything," he said, in remarks which contrasted with Iranian comments at the time.

Iran insists it is building a nuclear programme purely to generate electricity. The United

States accuses Tehran of systematic deception and says it is bent on acquiring nuclear weapons.

ElBaradei urged Tehran to ensure full transparency and help restore international confidence by "taking the initiative to provide all relevant information in full detail and in a prompt manner".

A senior Iranian official said on Sunday that the IAEA should remove Iran from its agenda and confirm its innocence.

"The case concerning Iran's peaceful nuclear activities should be completely closed at the IAEA Board of Governors and removed from its agenda," Supreme National Security Council Secretary Hassan Rohani said on state television.

But ElBaradei said the board

would remove the issue from its agenda only when all its unresolved questions were answered.

"I think the issue will be removed from the agenda when we are done with all the issues that are outstanding," he said. The main issue is the nature of Tehran's enrichment programme and the origin of highly enriched uranium found by U.N. inspectors last year.

Revelations in recent weeks that a top Pakistani atomic scientist sold nuclear secrets to Iran, North Korea and Libya have intensified international concern that "rogue states" or terrorists could get their hands on weapons of mass destruction.

ElBaradei himself has spoken of an extensive international network of black-market proliferators.

Gujarat riot is a blot on NDA tenure: Advani

PTI, Ghaziabad

The NDA Government's tenure has been remarkable in ensuring security and development in the country, except for the "unfortunate" events of Gujarat in 2002, Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani said in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad district yesterday.

Advani described the communal riots of Gujarat that year as a "blot" and an "aberration".

He said the Vajpayee Government had got mandate in 1998 on the plank of good governance and it had fulfilled its promise as the country had "seen so much of development recently that there is a feel-good feeling everywhere and India is shining."

Addressing officers and jawans of CISF on the occasion of the force's 35th Raising Day, Advani said the government had made "sincere efforts" towards improvement of relations with Pakistan and end to proxy-war which had led to creation of a "new atmosphere" not only in bilateral ties but also within the country.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian women walk holding banners and placards as they participate in a silent march organised by Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) to mark International Women's Day in New Delhi yesterday. Domestic violence was the focus of International Women's Day in Asia while the United Nations took the occasion to warn that HIV rates were soaring among the continent's female population.



PHOTO: AFP

People who were participating in an anti-Aristide march near the Presidential Palace sit or lie on the pavement as US Marines point their weapons in the direction where shots are being fired Sunday in Port-au-Prince. At least six persons were shot dead and 13 were wounded when supporters of Haiti's former president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, opened fire on protesters marching to the presidential palace, according to witnesses and local radio reports.

Aristide supporters open fire: 6 killed

REUTERS, Port-au-Prince

Suspected supporters of exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide sprayed gunfire into a crowd of thousands of jubilant revelers outside the National Palace Sunday, killing at least six people, including a Spanish journalist, and wounding 18.

Eyewitnesses said gunmen linked to Aristide's Lavalas movement fired from rooftops and burst into the capital's main square in a pickup truck, a jeep and on foot, shooting with automatic weapons into a festive crowd celebrating the fall of the president. "A whole group from Lavalas came down the Champs de Mars firing in every direction," said Ingrid Arnesen, a CNN producer who witnessed the attack. "Heavy machine gun fire."

It was the boldest attack since Aristide, facing a bloody revolt and international pressure, fled the impoverished Caribbean nation of 8 million last Sunday. His supporters had accused rebel troops of conducting reprisal raids in the

capital's slums, home to thousands of Aristide supporters.

Hospital officials said the dead included Spaniard Ricardo Ortega, a correspondent for the Antena 3 Spanish television station. The wounded included two Haiti police officers and American journalist Michael Laughlin of the South Florida Sun-Sentinel newspaper, who was shot in face and shoulder.

US Marines leading an international peace mission roared to the scene in machine gun-mounted Humvees as panicked demonstrators ran for cover and military helicopters hovered over the palace.

"It was a massacre," said Haitian National Police chief Leonce Charles, who was appointed to the job last week.

Prime Minister Yvon Neptune urged police to pursue the "assassins" no matter what side of Haiti's political divide they came from and said police and foreign troops should start disarming people with illegal weapons.

US turns to software to find Laden

PTI, New York

US military and intelligence officials are using powerful software called Analyst's Notebook and have engaged the services of Task Force 121, which also helped in Saddam Hussein's capture, to arrive at a clear picture of Osama bin Laden's whereabouts.

Key to the search is "accumulated humint," or human intelligence, a media report said, adding the software used in the search helps piece together data on criminal and terror networks.

Quoting officials, Newsweek magazine said an increasing number of "data points" reports of sightings have created an ever-clearer picture of bin Laden's area of operation as he appears to shuttle between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Now they've focused that to the point where they have been able to send in Predator unmanned aerial vehicles to search for him.

Women's Day observed

Asia puts focus on domestic violence

AFP, Hong Kong

Domestic violence was the focus of International Women's Day in Asia yesterday, while the United Nations took the occasion to warn that HIV rates were soaring among the continent's female population.

In the Philippines, President Gloria Arroyo signed a new law increasing penalties for men who abuse their wives and children, while similar legislation was reportedly on the cards in Indonesia.

A Philippines group campaigning against domestic violence hailed the law as the culmination of more than 10 years' work. Nine percent of Filipino women suffer domestic abuse, campaigning group Kalakasan (Strength) Foundation said.

Men who abuse their female partners will face up to 16 years in jail under the law, which also provides special protection measures for abused women and gives them legal recourse, officials said.

In Indonesia, the Jakarta Post said

in an editorial that parliament had passed a bill to curb domestic violence but that its signing by the president had been delayed for unexplained reasons.

Rita Serena Kolibonso, head of a group working to stamp out violence against women in Indonesia, described domestic violence as "a hidden crime as our system does not allow the emergence of such cases in court."

In Taiwan, President Chen Shui-bian raised the prospect of appointing the island's first woman prime minister if he wins his re-election battle on March 20, according to local media reports.

Chen told supporters he also wanted more women to serve in the cabinet.

Contenders for premier include the head of the body charged with formulating the island's China policy, Tsai Ing-wen, and industrialist Nita Yin, now heading the project to build a high-speed railway the length of the island.

HRW decries abuse of Afghans by US forces

AFP, New York

US military forces in Afghanistan have mistreated detainees, arbitrarily detained civilians and used excessive force in arrests of non-combatants, Human Rights Watch said in a new report released yesterday.

The rights watchdog said it concluded "the US-administered system of arrest and detention in Afghanistan exists outside of the rule of law." The United States has detention facilities at Bagram, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Asadabad military bases.

"The United States is setting a terrible example in Afghanistan on detention practices," said Brad Adams, executive director of the Asia division of Human Rights Watch.

"Civilians are being held in a legal black hole -- with no tribunals, no legal counsel, no family visits and no basic legal protections."

And Washington has not responded adequately to questions about arrest and detention practices, the group charged.

It gave the example of three detainees it said were known to have died while in US custody, two at the Bagram airbase north of Kabul in December 2002 and one at Asadabad in June 2003. The first two deaths were ruled homicides by US military pathologists who performed autopsies on the two men, but US officials have yet to explain what happened to any of the three men, the group said.

The 59-page report is based on research conducted by Human Rights Watch in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2003 and early 2004. "Human Rights Watch documented cases of US forces using military tactics, including unprovoked deadly force, during operations to apprehend civilians in uncontested residential areas situations where law enforcement standards and tactics should have been used," the group said.

Kerry continues to press Bush on security

AP, Hollywood

John Kerry is pressing President Bush on national security issues, raising questions about the handling of probes into terrorist attacks as well as intelligence suggesting weapons of mass destruction were in Iraq.

"The American people deserve an answer now as to why we had intelligence failures and what the security needs of our nation are," Kerry, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee said Sunday. He accused Bush of stonewalling separate probes into those issues.

The Massachusetts senator is putting the finishing touches on a four-day swing through the South, a trip he argued was aimed at showing that his populist economic message and focus on jobs can sell well in what is arguably his toughest region to win.

Florida, the key to Bush's 2000 victory, was Kerry's focus Monday, with appearances set in Hollywood, West Palm Beach and Tampa.

Zimbabwe 'seizes US cargo plane'

AGENCIES, Harare

A US-registered cargo plane with 64 suspected mercenaries on board was impounded in Harare, Zimbabwe's Home Affairs Minister Kembo Mohadi has said yesterday.

The Boeing 727-100 was held on Sunday after its owners "made a false declaration of its cargo and crew".

Mohadi said the plane was carrying mercenaries of differing nationalities and "military material".

A spokeswoman from the US embassy in the Zimbabwean capital could not confirm or

deny the reports.

"A United States of America-registered Boeing 727-100 cargo plane was detained last night at about 1930 (1730 GMT) at Harare International Airport after its owners had made a false declaration of its cargo and crew," Mohadi told reporters at a news conference.

"The plane was actually carrying 64 suspected mercenaries of various nationalities," he was quoted as saying.

"Further investigations also revealed that on board the plane was military material."

The minister said an investi-

gation was under way to establish the men's identities and their "ultimate mission".

The plane is believed to have been moved to a military base, but it is not immediately clear what has happened to those on board the plane.

US Embassy officials said they had not been informed of the incident and were trying to obtain details from Zimbabwe authorities.

President Robert Mugabe repeatedly has accused the United States and Britain of plotting to overthrow his autocratic regime.

Breakaway Tamil rebels want to avoid bloodshed

Strikes in Lankan town in support of renegade leader

AFP, Colombo

The leader of a breakaway faction of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday played down fears of armed conflict within the movement and said he would meet Norwegian peace envoys to discuss a new truce.

Meanwhile Sri Lankan government troops, who have remained neutral in the stand-off between the Tiger factions, have been placed on alert amid fears a factional war could erupt in the east of the island.

Eastern regional leader V. Muralitharan, known as Karuna, who broke away from the Tamil Tiger leadership based in the island's northern Wanni region, said he was keen to avoid fresh bloodshed.

"We will try every possibility to avoid internal clashes," a spokesman for Karuna told AFP when contacted by telephone. "We don't want to see any more bloodshed on our soil, but it depends on the Wanni leadership."

He said prominent citizens in the eastern district of Batticaloa had rallied around Karuna and

were on their way Monday to meet the northern leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to try to end the crisis.

Thousands of people took to the streets in the district controlled by Karuna Sunday and burnt an effigy of Tiger Supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran in the first ever open defiance of the Tiger leader.

Karuna, 37, was formally dismissed from the Tiger movement by Prabhakaran, 49, on Saturday. A replacement named has not been able to take charge as Karuna has refused to step down.

The split comes as a serious blow to the faltering Norwegian-led peace process aimed at ending three decades of ethnic bloodshed between the Tigers and government forces that have left at least 60,000 dead.

It also comes ahead of snap general elections on April 2. The polls were called by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who has accused political rival Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe of ceding too much in negotiations to end the conflict.

"We love peace for the betterment of our people and we have no

idea of starting a war," spokesman Varadan, who uses only one name, quoted Karuna as saying. "But, we will act in self defence."

He said Karuna had asked peace broker Norway to help arrange a separate truce between his faction and government forces. The Sri Lankan defence ministry rejected the request on Friday.

"On our part we have spoken to Norwegian embassy," Varadan said. "Now it is up to them. If they like to meet us, we are ready to discuss."

Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim was due to arrive here later Monday on a visit to review the truce between the government and the LTTE that has been in place since February 2002.

It was not immediately clear if Solheim was planning to meet Karuna.

Meanwhile, ethnic Tamil residents in eastern Sri Lanka staged a work stoppage Monday expressing solidarity with a renegade rebel leader amid fears of factional fighting, residents and military officials said.



PHOTO: AFP

Mourners attend the funeral of Palestinians killed early Sunday by the Israeli army in the Nusselirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. At least 14 Palestinians were killed and some 81 wounded on Sunday as scores of Israeli troops targeted two refugee camps in central Gaza.

Conservatives oust socialists in Greek polls

AFP, Athens

Greece's conservatives scored a resounding victory in elections, ending two decades of almost uninterrupted Socialist rule as the country prepared to host the Olympic Games and chart a course for a historic reunification of Cyprus, results showed yesterday. "It is a new start for all Greeks," said Costas Karamanlis, leader of the conservative New Democracy party in his first televised speech as prime minister-elect late Sunday after the vote.

With some 96 percent of ballots counted, New Democracy won 45.51 percent of the vote compared to 40.58 percent for the Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) which has ruled Greece for 19 of the past 22 years, the interior ministry said early Monday.

PASOK leader George Papandreou, whose party has won three consecutive mandates since 1993, conceded defeat shortly after the exit polls were released.

"The party of New Democracy has won the election. I wish ND leader Costas Karamanlis good luck in his work," said Papandreou, a former foreign minister.

New Democracy was on track to command a solid majority in the 300-strong parliament with 165 seats, with PASOK holding 117 seats.