

US senator calls for Annan's resignation

AFP, Washington

A US senator heading a panel investigating the UN's scandal-plagued Iraq oil-for-food program called for UN chief Kofi Annan's resignation in a Wall Street Journal opinion piece released Tuesday.

"It's time for UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to resign," Republican Senator Norm Coleman, chairman of the Senate investigations subcommittee, wrote in the article to be published Wednesday.

"I have arrived at this conclusion because the most extensive fraud in the history of the UN occurred on his watch," the Minnesota senator wrote.

He added that "as long as Mr. Annan remains in charge, the world will never be able to learn the full extent of the bribes, kickbacks and under-the-table payments that took place under the UN's collective nose."

The oil-for-food program, launched in December 1996 and terminated in November 2003, was intended to allow Iraq to sell oil under UN supervision to buy food and humanitarian supplies, and eventually developed into the largest aid scheme in UN history.

But US congressional investigators say Saddam's regime may have skimmed billions of dollars from the program, and allegations have surfaced of pay-offs to officials and private individuals from around the globe.

Defence ties with India crucial: Russia

PTI, Moscow

Terming military cooperation with India as a crucial aspect of bilateral relations, Russia has said that Moscow's defence association with New Delhi helps in maintaining stability in the region.

"Military-technical cooperation between Russia and India helps in maintaining stability on the Indian subcontinent and is a crucial component of the entire range of bilateral relations," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said on Tuesday.

Ahead of President Vladimir Putin's visit to India, Yakovenko said big energy projects like Sakhalin-1 and construction of \$2.6 billion Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu are evidence of Russian assistance are examples of mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries.

US Homeland Security chief resigns

AP, Washington

Tom Ridge's successor as chief of the US Homeland Security Department will have to unify a sprawling bureaucracy, a deadly serious job where failure could put the United States at risk of another terror attack.

Ridge, who announced his resignation Tuesday, acknowledged the frustrations of working out the kinks in the broadest government reorganisation in half a century, a job critics say remains largely incomplete. "I like going to work every day," Ridge said, before adding, "There are certain days I've enjoyed it even more."

Ridge said he will remain in the job until Feb. 1, unless the Senate confirms his successor earlier.

"He was dealt an impossible hand," said Richard Clarke, the former top counter terrorism adviser to President Bush who resigned last year. "He was not allowed to make some of the key decisions about the beginning of the department. I think anyone would have failed under those circumstances."

Vajpayee, Advani court arrests in protest against inflation

AFP, New Delhi

India's former premier Atal Behari Vajpayee and deputy premier Lal Krishna Advani along with other opposition leaders and supporters were detained briefly Wednesday after staging a protest against high prices.

They were held for a short while in a downtown stadium after marching near Parliament House where tight security was in effect.

The BJP staged the rally after walking out on the first day of the winter session of parliament in protest at high inflation.

"This government has no economic policy and is unable to take any decision. It does not know what shape is to be given to the country's future," Vajpayee told a rally.

The wholesale price index, India's most closely watched inflation monitor, is at over seven percent, up from just 4.32 percent in late April.

While it is down from an August peak of 8.74 percent, analysts warn inflation is not yet under control. The price increase has been driven by high global oil prices and a patchy monsoon in the agriculture-dependent country.



PHOTO: AFP

A Filipino boy sits on debris of tree trunks, branches and mud littered on a road while other children look around in Infanta after a flash flood spawned by a tropical storm hit the area. Philippine President Gloria Arroyo ordered yesterday a renewed crackdown on illegal logging after a series of flash floods and landslides left almost 500 dead missing mostly in the nearby town of Real. Arroyo blamed illegal logging for the massive floodings and damage that hit the eastern Philippines.

Demands for Suu Kyi's release continue

AFP, Bangkok

UN secretary-general Kofi Annan led international demands for the swift release of Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose house arrest has been extended for another year by the military regime.

Governments, including the US, former colonial ruler Britain and Germany have condemned the extension.

The news broke during a summit of Southeast Asian nations in Laos as the leaders welcomed Myanmar's release of more than 9,000 inmates from jail.

Annan said her detention "is not in the interest of the process of national reconciliation and democratisation in Myanmar" and called for her to be freed as soon as possible, the UN chief's spokesman Fred Eckhard said in a statement on Tuesday.

The UN chief said the junta

should "seize the momentum" created by the release of the 9,248 detainees by freeing Aung San Suu Kyi and other political detainees as soon as possible.

The United States warned Tuesday it might boycott meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) when Myanmar takes over the chairmanship of the 10-nation grouping in 2006, unless the regime improves its human rights record.

"The US has made clear that the situation in Burma has complicated our dealings with ASEAN," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said, using Myanmar's previous name.

The United States has repeatedly criticised the junta's human rights record and imposed trade and investment sanctions against the impoverished nation.

"At the Vientiane summit, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

and Indonesia's foreign ministry expressed concern at the latest developments.

Britain, which governed Myanmar until its independence in 1948, said it was "deeply disturbed" at the news of the detention extension.

"Her continued detention is completely unjustified and unacceptable, both to the people of Burma and to the international community," said junior Foreign Office minister Douglas Alexander.

"Aung San Suu Kyi and the democratic movement have a key role to play in national reconciliation in Burma."

Germany called for her release along with all other political prisoners.

"The involvement of all political and social players in Myanmar is an indispensable condition for a successful process of democratisation," said junior foreign minister Kerstin Mueller in a statement.

Terrified Filipinos flee new typhoon

Flood death toll over 400

AFP, REAL, Philippines

Terrified survivors were yesterday fleeing the northeast Philippines as a new typhoon bore down on the stricken area where flooding and landslides have left over 400 people dead and 150 missing.

Typhoon Nanmadol was early Friday expected to slam into the east coast of the main island of Luzon. Entire villages were washed away by a storm earlier this week and three large towns were cut off and suffered heavy damage.

The new typhoon is packing winds of 175 kilometers per hour over the Pacific Ocean and is already bringing driving rain and strong winds to the devastated region, the government weather center said.

The worst-hit coastal towns of Real, Infanta and General Nakar suffered 364 dead and 139 missing, said the civil defense office in

Manila. At least 39 people were killed and 17 were missing, elsewhere on Luzon.

In Real, the streets were strewn with logs and boulders. Some survivors queued up to board military trucks to carry them to safety while others fled on foot in small groups through the winding paths of the Sierra Madre mountains.

Many men were wearing only shorts and hauling heavy rucksacks. One man had a washing machine on his back, while another man begged for a place on a truck for him and his two-year-old son.

"You and I must leave now. The rains are coming again and I am afraid," said mud-caked grandmother Olympia Romantico, who had waded for 10 hours through mud to flee Real, her naked seven-year-old granddaughter in tow.

Freddie Lanza, a 34-year-old resident of the nearby village of

Maragondon, said he and his family had a miracle escape when a landslide struck two days ago.

"There was a loud rumbling, like a clap of thunder up in the mountains. In less than seconds our house was gone."

"We waited for help for two days but none came. We had to leave otherwise we would starve to death," he added.

Many of the dead and missing in Real were in a three-storey building at a beach resort that was being used as a makeshift evacuation center when it collapsed at the height of the storm, civil defense officials said.

"I passed by there earlier and I saw people buried. One of my friend's wife is also there," town resident Leopoldo Pusanga told AFP.

President Gloria Arroyo, who just returned home from a regional summit in Laos, called off plans to fly to the storm-hit areas after warnings that it was not safe for helicopters to fly.

Pakistan, India peace talks delayed till Christmas

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan on Wednesday accepted an Indian request to delay the foreign secretary-level talks between the nuclear rivals on the Kashmir dispute until after Christmas, the foreign office here said.

The meeting between Pakistani foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar and his Indian counterpart Shyam Saran to discuss the issues of peace and security and Jammu and Kashmir will now be held on December 27-28, a foreign ministry statement said.

"The re-scheduling of the dates has been done at the request of the government of India," it said.

The statement came two days after foreign ministry spokesman Masood Khan announced here that the top foreign ministry officials of Pakistan and India had agreed to meet in Islamabad on December 23-24 to review progress on the peace process.



PHOTO: AFP

Indonesian police stand next to the wreckage of Lion Air plane at the accident site, near Solo International airport, Central Java yesterday. At least 32 people were killed and 61 injured when a passenger plane by budget airline Lion Air skidded off runway after landing in bad weather in Indonesia's Central Java province Solo on Tuesday.

Iran hails UN nuke 'victory'

BBC NEWS ONLINE

A top Iranian official has claimed a "great victory" over the US after the UN said it would not punish Iran's nuclear activities with sanctions. Hassan Rohani said Iran would never give up its right to nuclear power.

He stressed during talks with European countries Iran's freeze on uranium enrichment was only temporary. The UN atomic agency IAEA welcomed Iran's offer to freeze enrichment in a statement on Monday that did not mention any threat of future sanctions.

US President George W Bush has acknowledged Iran's latest move, but says the US wants the enrichment programme terminated, not just suspended.

At a press conference in Canada where he is on an official visit, Mr Bush described the freeze as "a positive step, but it is certainly not the final step."

Washington has accused Iran of going back on numerous promises

over its nuclear activities, and had been pushing for UN sanctions.

For his part, Mr Rohani said the "whole world had turned down America's calls". "We have proved that, in an international institution, we are capable of isolating the US. And that is a great victory," said Mr Rohani, who heads Iran's top security body.

He added that the UN representative at the IAEA meeting in Vienna "was enraged and in tears, and everybody said that the Americans had failed and we had won".

It was Iran's first direct comment on the nuclear controversy since the IAEA resolution on Monday. According to Mr Rohani, Iran's offer to suspend uranium enrichment would only apply for the duration of talks with the EU.

"We are talking months, not years," the cleric said.

Officials from the UK, Germany and France are trying to get Iran to renounce its nuclear fuel enrichment programme for good.

READ THE WORLD Novelists fight AIDS

AFP, Johannesburg

Nobel prize-winning novelist Nadine Gordimer launched Tuesday a literary-style Live Aid, with a short-story collection by some of world's most distinguished writers to benefit HIV/AIDS treatment.

At a press conference, where she was introduced by Salman Rushdie as "the Bob Geldof of the literary world," Gordimer said she had taken her cue from musicians who had performed benefit concerts for causes like AIDS and famine relief.

"I asked myself, what had we writers done?" the South African novelist said. "The answer was nothing. No group effort."

Geldof organized musicians behind the 1985 Live Aid concerts, which raised funds for Ethiopian famine victims.

Gordimer wrote to 20 novelists, including four fellow Nobel prize winners -- Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gunter Grass, Jose Saramago and Kenzaburo Oe -- asking each to contribute one short story and to waive all royalties.

"And I got wonderful responses from everyone of them," she said.

The result was a 21-story collection, "Telling Tales," which has so far found 13 publishers around the world -- all of whom agreed to distribute the

book without taking any profit.

"It's a great book. Some of the stories are real classics," said Rushdie, who was also among the invited contributors, along with the likes of John Updike, Margaret Atwood, Woody Allen, Michel Tournier and Arthur Miller.

Specifically, the money generated from the worldwide sales of "Telling Tales" will finance the work of the Treatment Action Campaign, a South African HIV/AIDS treatment non-governmental organisation.

"Musicians have contributed their talents to jazz, pop and classical concerts for the benefit of the 40 million men, women and children worldwide infected with HIV/AIDS, two-thirds of whom are in Africa," Gordimer, who edited the collection, said in the introduction to the book.

"We decided that we too should ... give something of our ability, as imaginative writers, to contribute in our way to the fight against this disease from which no country and no individual is safely isolated," she said.

None of the stories take HIV/AIDS as their direct subject, but many deal with themes of death, illness and isolation.

Updike, who attended Tuesday's launch, said he had jumped at the chance to join the project.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Local Government Engineering Department

Office of the Executive Engineer

62, West Agargaon, Dhaka-1207

Memo No. LGED/XEN/(Dhaka)/Tender-06/04/8393

Date: 24/11/04

Rural Transport Improvement Project (RTIP)

Invitation for Bids (IFB)

IFB No-51/2004-2005

The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received for a credit from the International Development Association (hereinafter referred to as the IDA) towards the cost of the Rural Transport Improvement Project (RTIP) and intends to apply part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the contract(s) as mentioned in para-2. Bidding is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the Guidelines: Procurement under IBRD Loans and IDA Credits."

2. The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, represented by the Executive Engineer, LGED, Dhaka invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the construction and completion of the following works:

Name of the work	Contract		Bid security (Tk)	Time for completion (Days)	Price of bidding document (Tk)
	Package No	Slice No			
Improvement of Dhaka-Mawa RHD at Tegharia-Bibir Bazar Road-Shaper Bazar-Taltalahat GC-Betka Road (Dhaka portion) and construction of 65m bridge at Ch: 6720 and construction of Appurtenant Structures	Dha/UZR-309	UZR-309	5,64,000.00	550	5,000.00

3. The bidders may inspect the bidding documents, obtain further information and clarification at the office of the Executive Engineer, LGED, Dhaka, Tel: 8155655/8155657 or the office of the Project Director, RDP-26, LGED Bhaban (Level-5), Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207, Tel: 9122435, 9122432. The bidder must be eligible in post qualification as specified in bidding documents.

4. A pre-bid conference will be held on 27/12/2004 at 12.00 Noon in the office of the undersigned and all bidders are requested to attend the conference on time.

5. A complete set of bidding documents may be purchased by any eligible bidder from (1) Office of the Project Director, LGED Bhaban (Level-5), Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207, or (2) Office of the Divisional Commissioner, Dhaka, or (3) Office of the Upazila Engineer, Upazila: Keraniganj, Dhaka, or (4) Office of the undersigned on submission of a written application upon payment of a non-refundable price as mentioned in para-2 for each set in the form of Pay Order/Bank Draft from any scheduled Bank in Bangladesh drawn in favour of the Executive Engineer, LGED, Dhaka. Additional sets of bidding documents may be purchased at the same price. The bidding documents will be available during regular office hours from 12/12/2004 to 08/01/2005.

6. All bids must be accompanied with a bid security of amount as mentioned in table in para-2, in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order/Demand Draft/Unconditional Bank Guarantee drawn in favour of the Executive Engineer, LGED, Dhaka.

7. All bids must be delivered to (1) Office of the Project Director, RTIP-RDP-26, LGED Bhaban (Level-5), Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207, or (2) Office of the Divisional Commissioner, Dhaka, or (3) Office of the undersigned on or before 1:00 PM of 09/01/2005.

8. Bids will be opened at 2:00 PM on 09/01/2005 at the office of the undersigned in presence of the bidders or their authorised representatives who choose to attend.

9. Bidders may deliver/submit bids personally or by registered mail or by courier services etc. and bids must reach to the office(s) mentioned at para-7 on or before 1:00 PM of 09/01/2005.

10. A general information regarding the bidding will be available at the LGED Web Site: <http://www.lged.org> & Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU), IMED Web Site: <http://www.cptu.org.bd>.

11. The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids without assigning any reason.

DFF-28363-28/11/04

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Executive Engineer

LGED, Dhaka