

US renews sanctions on Myanmar

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush renewed economic sanctions on Myanmar Tuesday saying the military government represses human rights. "The crisis between the United States and Burma arising from the actions and policies of the government of Burma that led to the declaration of a national emergency on May 20, 1997, has not been resolved," a White House statement read. "These actions and policies, including its policies of committing large-scale repression of the democratic opposition in Burma, are hostile to US interests and pose a continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.

Advani to visit Pakistan from May 30

PTI, Islamabad

Indian Leader of Opposition and BJP President LK Advani would pay a week-long visit to Pakistan from May 30. During the visit, he would meet President Pervez Musharraf and other leaders. Advani, who had visited Pakistan last in the late 70s as Information and Broadcasting Minister, would be visiting Lahore, Karachi, his native place Hyderabad in Sindh province, and Islamabad. The BJP chief is expected to meet Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and leaders of various Opposition parties during his visit at the invitation of the Pakistan Government.

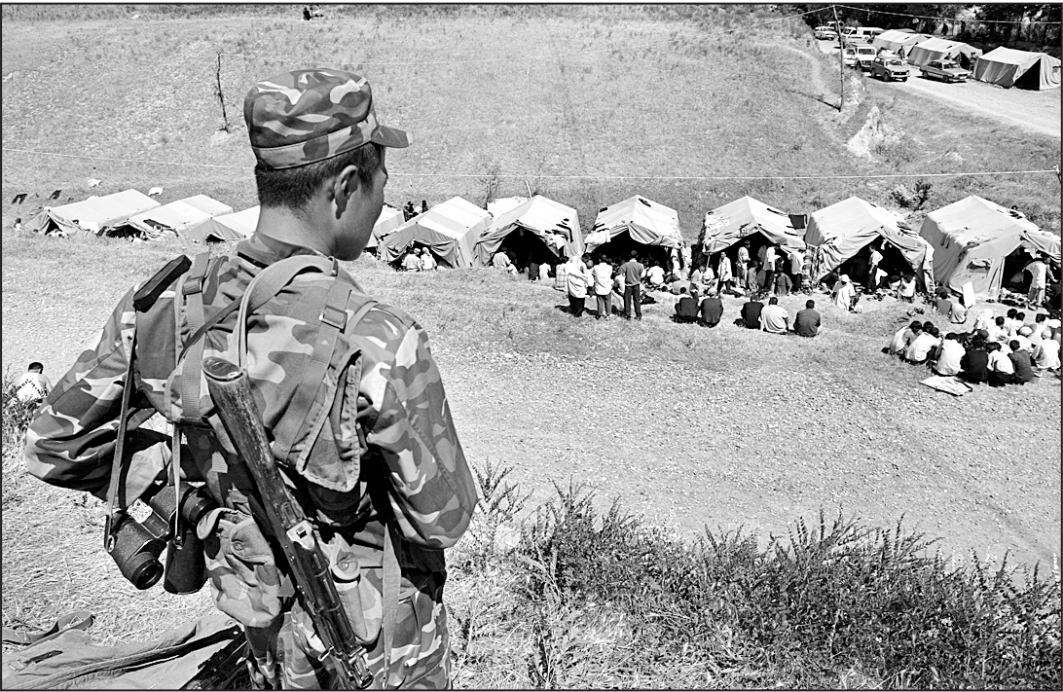


PHOTO: AFP

A Kyrgyz border guard wtches a refugee camp just outside the Kyrgyz village Barash, some 40 kms from Andijan, at the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. More gunfire was heard in the eastern Uzbek town of Andijan, days after Uzbek security forces reportedly killed hundreds of demonstrators. Uzbekistan's autocratic leader Islam Karimov faced increasing international pressure as the reported toll from a military crackdown in the eastern town of Andijan rose to 745.

'Musharraf's push for another term a blow to democracy'

AFP, Islamabad

A decision by military ruler Pervez Musharraf to seek another term after his current five-year tenure as president ends in 2007 was widely criticised Wednesday by analysts and his political opponents as a blow for Pakistan's fledgling democracy. Analysts said that Musharraf had made clear he would follow the similar paths of previous dictators and cling to power for as long as possible. They said the decision, announced by his Minister of

Information Sheikh Rashid on Tuesday, was a forewarning that the General would manipulate the political chessboard to fulfill his ambitions of power. Amid scathing criticism by mainstream opposition parties, political analyst Hasan Askari said no military leader had ever surrendered power voluntarily in Pakistan and Musharraf would be no exception. The retired professor said the announcement would further undermine the development of democratic institutions. "It is a negation of the spirit of democracy."

"In a non democratic set up you do not allow political alternatives to emerge and thus create a situation where leadership is perceived to be indispensable," Askari said. Former PM Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League party described Musharraf's intentions as a blow to democracy. "It is a blow to democracy. It clearly shows that General Musharraf is ready to rig the next elections, come what may," party leader Raja Zafarul Haq said. "This is very sad that he is hell bent to continue."

Political analyst Najam Sethi said the announcement was "ominous." "The assurance with which the Information Minister has spoken about Musharraf re-election beyond 2007, it seems to suggest that all decisions have already been taken. "It shows the next elections will be managed to secure the right results which will then make it possible for him to be president for another five years," Sethi said.

Sonia says not gunning for PM

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Sonia Gandhi, heading India's ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA), has ruled out reconsidering her decision not to become the Prime Minister, at least during the remaining four year term of current Parliament. "Why should I reconsider my decision? The question does not arise. There is a Prime Minister. He is a man of integrity. He has a five-year term. Why should I want to be the Prime Minister?" said Italy-born Gandhi who is the President of Congress leading the UPA 23-party coalition. She was responding to a question from reporters yesterday evening about the possibility of her having a rethink on renouncing the post of Prime Minister on this day a year ago after Congress and its allies came to power in parliamentary polls. Asked if she would stick to her decision not to become the Prime Minister even if Congress secures majority on its own in future elections, Gandhi sidestepped the question.

Britain pledges to keep troops in Iraq until 'job is done'

AFP, London

Britain will not pull its troops out of Iraq "before the job is done", the government said on Tuesday following a speech outlining its latest set of policy objectives. "The UK will continue to provide troops for as long as the Iraqi government wants us to remain," the Foreign Office in London said in a statement. "We have no desire to stay longer than is necessary, but nor will we leave before the job is done." The pledge followed the Queen's Speech, the ceremonial event when parliament opens for a new session at which Queen Elizabeth II outlines the government's proposed new laws in an address written for her by ministers. Britain, which was Washington's closest ally in the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, still has around 8,000 troops in the country, mainly based around the southern city of Basra.

IMPROVING IRAQ'S SECURITY

Baghdad, Tehran pledge cooperation

AFP, Baghdad

Baghdad and Tehran pledged to improve security in Iraq, turning the page on years of war and rivalry, as another Iraqi general on Wednesday became the latest victim of a wave of insurgent attacks. An Australian negotiator, meanwhile, raised hopes that hostage Douglas Wood, 63, may soon be freed, saying he has received a phone call from an unidentified man claiming to represent Wood's captors. The Australian contractor could be freed within 24 hours, Sheikh Taj Eldin Al-Hilali, who flew to Iraq to try to negotiate the contractor's release, told Australian radio. The sheikh also handed over vital medication for Wood, a spokesman for Sydney's Muslim community said. "The strongest bit of news that we

have at the moment is that the medication has changed hands, the mufti (Al-Hilali) has given this medication to be taken to Mr Wood and this is a very good sign," Keysar Trad said. Assaultants in Baghdad gunned down Ibrahim Hamas, a brigadier general at the interior ministry, as he left his home around 9:00 am (0500 GMT), an interior ministry official said. His wife was also injured in the attack in Zafraniya in southern Baghdad. Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi was to meet Wednesday with Hajem Hassani, Iraq's Sunni parliamentary speaker, on the second day of his visit, the first since the downfall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebani said Tuesday he had no doubt that Kharazi's visit "will open up significant new horizons for cooperation between the two coun-

tries. "Post-Saddam Iraq is a new Iraq, at peace with its neighbours, far removed from its bellicose predecessor," he said. Kharazi assured his counterpart that the clerical Shiite regime in Iran would not interfere in its neighbour's affairs. "It is in Iran's interest to support by all possible means the Iraqi government. It is not in the interest of any of Iraq's neighbours to see the current situation continue because it would have negative consequences on the entire region," he said. Kharazi's visit, just two days after that of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, highlights the warning of ties between the two neighbours who were at war from 1980-1988.



PHOTO: AFP

Prime Minister Tony Blair (L) walks beside Conservative Party Leader Michael Howard (R) as they lead Members of Parliament through the Central Lobby to listen to the Queen's speech during the State Opening of Parliament in London Tuesday evening. Labour defeated Conservative Party in the general election held early May with a very narrow majority in the parliament.

US soldier guilty of Iraq abuse

AFP, Washington

A US military policewoman behind some of the most ghastly photographs from Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison scandal was sentenced to six months in jail for her role in the abuse by a military jury late Tuesday. Specialist Sabrina Harman, 27, will also be reduced in rank to private and receive a bad conduct discharge, the military jury ruled. Harman was convicted Monday of four charges of maltreatment of detainees, one charge of conspiracy to maltreat detainees and dereliction of duty. She had faced a maximum sentence of five and a half years in jail, but prosecutors asked the jury to sentence her to three years in jail. "I think she was extremely relieved," said defense attorney Frank Spinner, adding that Harman will likely serve just over 100 days in jail. A former pizza restaurant manager, Harman is credited with setting up one of the most infamous pictures from Abu Ghraib, that of a hooded inmate in rags standing on a box with electrical wires attached to



A file photo of Sabrina Harman

his hands. International publication of those photographs led to widespread condemnation of US practices in Iraq at a time when US forces were trying to bring the country under control after the 2003 invasion. She also posed grinning behind a pyramid of naked Iraqi prisoners, giving a thumbs-up in front of a corpse wrapped in plastic, and wrote the misspelled word "rapeist" on the leg on one of the inmates. In an effort to reduce her sentence, Harman's defense team tried to paint Harman as a kind woman unable to properly react to a situation that had gotten out of control.

British MP turns on US accusers over Iraqi kickbacks

AFP, Washington

British parliament member George Galloway on Tuesday turned the tables on US lawmakers alleging he pocketed Iraqi oil kickbacks, and accused the United States of unparalleled corruption and waste in Iraq. The fiery left-wing politician came to Congress to defend his name against allegations he pocketed hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegal funds from the UN Oil for Food program during Saddam Hussein's regime. But Galloway said it was his American accusers who must answer for the "disaster" caused by the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the deaths that have been seen since. "I gave my heart and soul to stop you committing the disaster that you did commit in invading Iraq, and I told the world that your case for the war was a pack of lies," Galloway told a Senate panel.

"Everything I said about Iraq turned out to be right, and you turned out to be wrong, and 100,000 people have paid with their lives," he told the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs subcommittee. He said US military action against Iraq was based on "a pack of lies". Galloway vehemently denied ever receiving oil kickbacks from Saddam's regime. He dismissed the hearing as "the mother of all smokescreens," saying the relentless focus on alleged UN wrongdoing by some US politicians deflected attention from the far bigger transgression of the US-led invasion. "I am not now, nor have I ever been an oil trader," Galloway told the panel, calling the charges against him "utterly unsubstantiated and false".