

It's up to N Korea to improve ties: US

AFP, Nairobi

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday it was up to North Korea to end "provocations" and improve ties with the United States after it freed two reporters in a mission led by her husband.

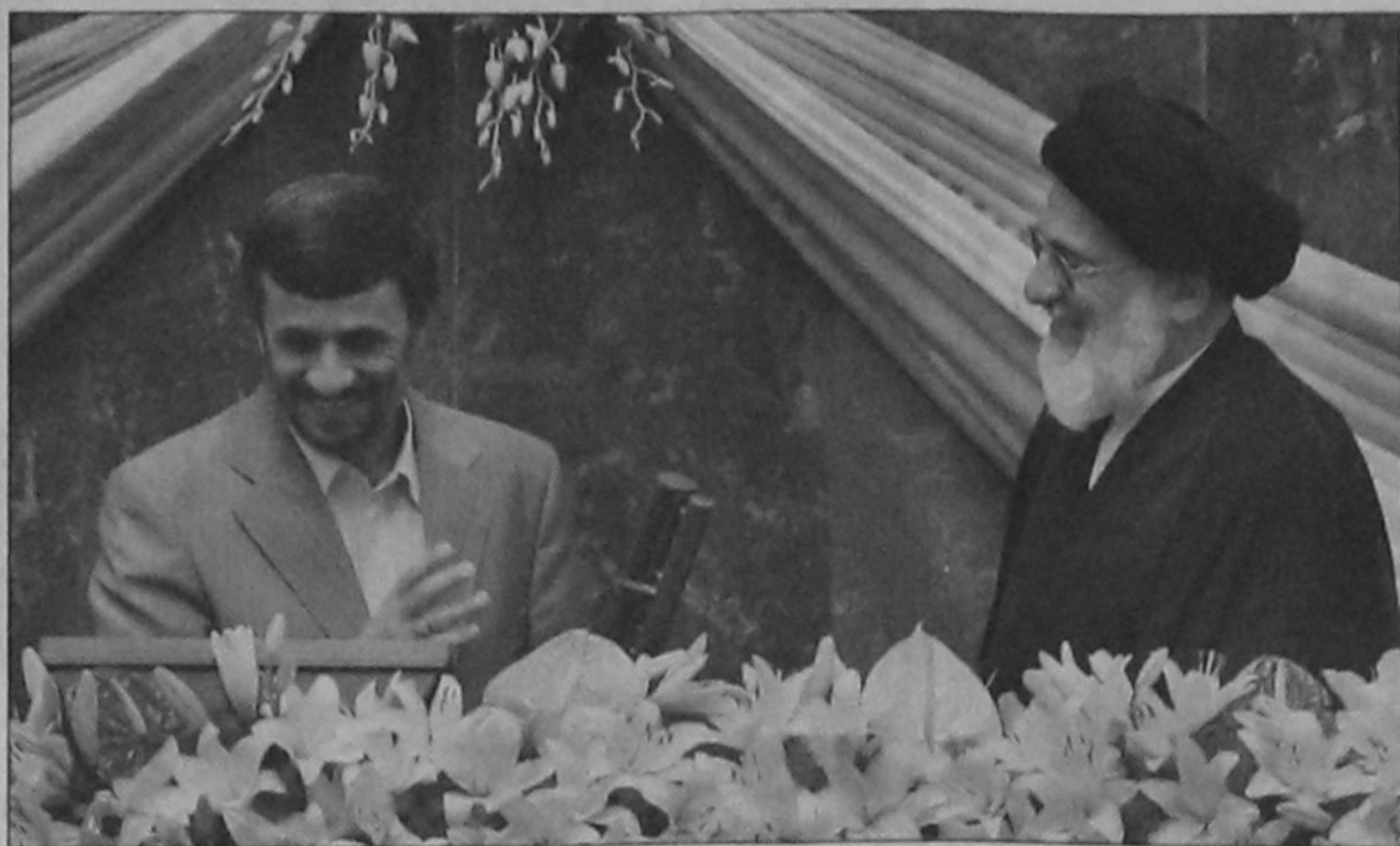
Visiting Nairobi at the start of a tour of Africa, Clinton said that she considered the release of the two reporters separate from an ongoing row with North Korea over its nuclear programme.

"The future of our relationships with the North Koreans are really up to them," Hillary told reporters.

"They have a choice if they continue to follow the path that is filled with provocative action, which further isolates them from the international community... or they can decide to renew their discussions with the partners in the six-party talks," she said.

Hillary said she spoke only briefly over the telephone with former president Bill Clinton on his way back to the United States with the two reporters, Laura Ling and Euna Lee.

She said she voiced relief over their release but was not able to discuss his meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in more depth.



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (L) shares a laugh with Iran's judiciary chief Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi before taking the oath of office during a swearing-in ceremony in parliament in Tehran yesterday. Ahmadinejad was sworn in as Iranian president as riot police broke up opposition protests over an election that triggered the worst turmoil in the Islamic republic's history.

9 more die in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Nine people were killed, including a woman and six policemen, by violence across Iraq yesterday, Iraqi police said.

In the deadliest attack, a roadside bomb exploded as policemen were travelling by car through a market in the southern Baghdad neighbourhood of Dora, killing five of them, police said.

A further eight people were wounded, including three policemen, in the midnight blast in the predominantly Sunni district, a police official told AFP, requesting anonymity because he is not authorised to speak to the media.

In the restive city of Mosul, 370 kilometres (230 miles) north of Baghdad, one policeman was killed when three gunmen in a car opened fire on a police checkpoint in the north of the city and then fled the scene.

The shooters then moved on to a second checkpoint in the area, which had been informed of the violence nearby, and entered a gun battle with police there.



People queue outside an STA travel agency in London yesterday in a bid to obtain a GBP 10 (11.7 euros/16.9 USD) airline ticket to Australia. 150 one-way tickets were available on a first-come-first-served basis, as the travel agent celebrated its 30th anniversary by seeking to re-enact the £10 assisted-package scheme in which thousands of Britons emigrated to Australia following the second world war.

Defiant Ahmedinejad takes oath for 2nd term

AFP, BBC ONLINE, Tehran

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been sworn in for a second term as Iran's president yesterday after weeks of post-election unrest.

In an address after the ceremony, he criticised foreign powers who have cast doubt on the validity of the election, saying Iran would resist them.

Opposition supporters protesting outside parliament were met by hundreds of riot police.

Germany, France, Britain and the US all said they would not be sending letters of congratulation to Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad now has two weeks to form a government that must then be approved by parliament.

Taking his oath of office,

broadcast live on state TV, Ahmadinejad promised to "protect the official faith, the system of the Islamic revolution and the constitution".

The 52-year-old hardliner took the oath of office for another four years at a ceremony in parliament after his landslide election victory in June that triggered the worst turmoil in the Islamic republic's history. At least 30 people died during the street protests which followed the June 12 poll.

In a speech outlining his plans for the future, Ahmadinejad said he would continue to resist "oppressive powers," dismissing the US stance towards Iran and hailing his election as a sign of major change in Iran.

But prominent opposition leaders were absent from the

ceremony, and outside a force of about 1,000 riot police and Basij volunteer Islamic militiamen used pepper gas on demonstrators who claim his election was rigged, witnesses said.

"The protesters were chanting anti-Ahmadinejad slogans. The police and the Basijis dispersed them. All the nearby shops are closed," a witness said.

Another group tried to demonstrate nearby but were also dispersed as protesters chanted "God is Great" and booed the security forces.

Yesterday's ceremony was attended by about 240 of Iran's 290 MPs, but prominent opposition leaders including Ahmadinejad's main defeated challenger Mir Hossein Mousavi were absent, as was powerful cleric and former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

But despite the international outcry over the election and its brutal aftermath, a number of foreign diplomats were present, including envoys from Britain, France and Sweden, which currently holds the EU presidency.

Ahmadinejad now has a two-week deadline to form a new government that is likely to remain on a collision course with the West, particularly over Iran's controversial nuclear drive.

News Analysis Iran pushes ahead

BBC ONLINE

The formalities have been observed. Iran's authorities will be pleased that the show of unity was maintained as Ahmadinejad was sworn in for his second four-year term.

For the moment the fractured Iranian establishment has come together to agree on the one thing that unites them - decrying foreign interference in their domestic affairs.

Nevertheless, there was a substantial boycott by reformist members of parliament, and by leading opponents of Mr Ahmadinejad, including former President Rafsanjani.

Already the conservative press is speculating about the

new cabinet. The conservative Hamshahri newspaper called for the new ministers to be "efficient, religious and prudent" - a strong hint that conservatives have not been happy with the calibre of past ministers.

The opposition has kept up its pressure on the streets. The appearance of calm and normality in Iran's affairs of state may not last very long.

In the address that followed, he called for "a national will, a national resolve", and told his audience: "We need to join forces."

"I do not have any incentive other than serving the people and the country and I do not think of anything but the progress and development of the nation," Mr Ahmadinejad said.

Several states which have criticised the elections said they would not be sending customary letters of congratulations to Ahmadinejad to mark his reappointment as president, including the US, Germany, France and the UK.

"Nobody in Iran is waiting for anyone's congratulations," said Ahmadinejad, to the laughter of listening deputies.

Outside, hundreds of demonstrators gathered. There were reports of clashes with riot police and at least one arrest.

Iran's parliament was dotted with empty seats for Wednesday's swearing-in. Ahmadinejad's predecessors as president - Mohammad Khatami and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani - were missing, as they were from a formal ceremony to endorse his presidency on Monday.

Also missing were two defeated opposition candidates - Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi - who continue to contest the results.

But envoys from the European Union and the UK reportedly attended the inauguration.

Nonetheless, Ahmadinejad has received the backing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has supported him throughout the unrest.

Khamenei said Ahmadinejad was the rightful winner and that Iranians had "voted in favour of a fight against arrogance, to confront destitution and spread justice".

Meanwhile, more than 100 people, including some members of the opposition movement, went on trial in Iran on Saturday for their alleged involvement in the post-election violence.

Foreign media, including the BBC, have been restricted in their coverage of Iran since the election protests turned into confrontations with the authorities in which at least 30 people were killed.

Rows erupt again at Fatah Congress

AFP, Bethlehem

The second day of Fatah's first congress in 20 years was marked by acrimonious rows as delegates demanded accountability from the leadership of Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas's party.

Hundreds of delegates at the gathering in the West Bank city of Bethlehem protested the lack of administrative and financial accountability by the Fatah leadership since the last congress in 1989.

They rejected the explanations of the party's governing bodies that Abbas's opening speech on Monday amounted to a report on Fatah's management over the past 20 years.

Delegates interrupted a speech by central committee member two Ahmed Ghneim, who angrily left the podium.

Abbas, who did not take part in the debates, was called into the hall to help calm things down.

"I admit we have committed errors, even sins, but the rendering of accounts must be done during committee meetings and not through chaotic interventions," he said.

But Abbas himself was interrupted. Security forces briefly intervened as a delegate ordered out by Abbas refused to leave the room.

"We are here to put Fatah back on track, not to settle scores," Abbas said.

Fatah, which is at the helm of the Palestinian Authority, exercised undivided power among Palestinians before it was trounced by the rival Islamist Hamas movement in a 2006 parliamentary election.

Longstanding Hamas-Fatah tensions boiled over in June 2007 when the Islamists seized control of Gaza after a week of deadly street clashes, confining Abbas's power base to the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Infighting and corruption allegations have helped weaken the dominant position in Palestinian political life that Fatah enjoyed before the 2004 death of its founder and iconic leader Yasser Arafat.

Russia accuses US of rearming Georgia

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday accused the United States of quietly rearming Georgia a year after Russian forces crushed the ex-Soviet state's US-backed military, and warned Moscow would respond accordingly.

"Delivery of weapons from the United States is continuing," Deputy Foreign Minister Grigori Karasin told jour-

lists at a briefing ahead of the first anniversary of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

"This is worrisome and will force us to take corresponding measures," Karasin said. He did not elaborate on what types of weapons were involved or on how Russia would respond.

His comments however marked one of the most pointed official accusations

that the United States, which recently reaffirmed a strategic commitment to Georgia, was stoking tensions in the volatile Caucasus region.

On a visit to Tbilisi on July 23, US Vice President Joe Biden admitted that Washington, which equipped and trained Georgian forces prior to the war last August, was today working on "maintaining" the Georgian military.

He said then however that the effort was confined to "planning, training, organisation" -- not supply of weapons.

Karasin said the same day that Russian would prevent the rearming of Georgia. The following day, Russia's ambassador to NATO said Moscow would impose sanctions on US or any other foreign firms that sold arms to Georgia.

"No one can give us any guarantee there will be no new aggression from Georgia," Karasin said at the press conference Wednesday.

A top Russian general separately said Russia could "clearly see" that Georgia was today rearming and trying to rebuild its armed forces "to previous levels and higher" than what it had prior to last year's war.

The general, Anatoly Nogovitsin, said this effort was "for the purpose of aggression."



This file photo taken on August 4, 2009 and released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-il (R) posing with former US president Bill Clinton (L) in Pyongyang. Former president Bill Clinton flew out of North Korea on August 5, 2009 with two US journalists sentenced to long jail terms after securing a pardon for them from leader Kim Jong-il, Clinton's spokesman said.

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