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Iraqi citizens fear results of a possible standoff with U.N.

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — Signs of nervousness peak through the calm in Iraq's capital, where some residents worry that a standoff with the United Nations will worsen food shortages or lead to a military confrontation.

Iraq's currency, the dinar, is jittery, and its leadership shows no signs of backing down from a threat to expel American arms inspectors trying to determine whether Iraq has followed U.N. orders to destroy its weapons of mass destruction.

Fakhria Aboud, a 58-year-old mother of eight, said she fears a missile strike on Baghdad like strikes of the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

"I am trying to build up a stock for my family in case something happens," she said, pushing a cart full of vegetables and groceries down a street. "We have filled all the containers at the house with heating oil, and it is time to stock up on food."

Delshad Ahmad, a Kurdish store owner, also was worried the crisis would escalate.

"I have just gotten myself together and made some money to buy a car," said Ahmad, 36. "I really hate to see things deteriorating be-

cause such a situation will affect my life savings the way it did in 1991."

Sanctions imposed by the United Nations after Iraq's 1990 invasion of neighboring Kuwait, which led to the Gulf War, prevent Iraq from exporting oil — its major source of income. The sanctions have devastated the economy, and will not be

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DICK GEPHARDT
HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER

lifted until U.N. inspectors certify Iraq has destroyed its major weapons systems.

The government makes food available at below-market prices through a U.N. oil-for-food program, which permits Iraq limited oil sales to buy food and medicine. Some items were scaled back last week, but Eric Falt, a spokesman

for the U.N. program, expressed hope Sunday that distribution would continue.

U.N. officials object to Iraq's demand that all Americans on the U.N. weapons inspection team in Iraq leave the country by Wednesday. The outraged chief inspector last week suspended field work.

The United States has not ruled out military action to try to end the crisis, and the top four congressional leaders, appearing before Americans Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press," seemed to endorse that option.

"The only thing that he (Saddam Hussein) seems to understand is action, and that's what's going to have to happen," House Democratic Leader Dick Gephardt said. He, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle and House Speaker Newt Gingrich, said they agree the Iraqi president must be made to back down.

Baghdad, however, does not appear ready to do so.

The U.N. teams were to resume inspections Monday, though three of 10 American inspectors have left Baghdad and two arriving inspectors were refused entry Sunday.

Loyalties of Irish president questioned

President-elect Mary McAleese's Catholic background raises concern

ROSTREAVOR, Northern Ireland (AP) — Ireland's president-elect returned to her hometown in this troubled province Sunday, greeted warmly by Catholics but with suspicion by some Protestants who question her loyalties.

Mary McAleese offered handshakes and hugs on the crowded main street of this mostly Catholic seaside village, 40 miles south of Belfast. She was applauded at Mass and welcomed at The Old Killowen Inn, where her father tends bar.

"This is a special place with special people. I hope to get back as often as possible," said McAleese, a Roman Catholic.

The 46-year-old lawyer and university vice-chancellor won a record 58 percent of the vote across the Irish Republic on Thursday to become the first person

from the British-ruled province elected to the largely symbolic post.

However, elsewhere in this predominantly Protestant province, her election as the neighboring state's president provoked concern, even anger.

"She ought to make her move to Dublin permanent," fisherman John McAfee of Kilkeel, a mostly Protestant village near Rostrevor, said.

The province is torn between the many Catholics who want Northern Ireland to unite with the Republic of Ireland and the many Protestants who seek continued ties with Britain.

Though not a resident of the Irish Republic, McAleese was eligible to seek office because the republic's constitution claims the province as part of the country.

It's that territorial

claim that causes many Protestant leaders to look with suspicion on Irish leaders.

In fact, in ongoing peace talks aimed at deciding the future of Northern Ireland, Protestants have made an end to the territorial claim their central demand.

McAleese's predecessor, Mary Robinson, proved adept at striking a neutral tone during her frequent visits north.

McAleese, by contrast, comes into her post closely identified with Catholic ambitions, despite promises that she'll be sensitive toward Protestant interests.

Her detractors say she's too close to the IRA-allied Sinn Fein party, a claim that she has denied.

The Irish Republican Army recently declared a truce in its decades-long fight to drive the British

from the province, a move that allowed the Sinn Fein to join the peace talks.

Even John Alderdice, moderate Protestant leader who has shown a willingness to compromise, says McAleese was a poor choice for president.

"Mary McAleese has devoted her efforts to building bridges within the Catholic nationalist community, not across the community to Protestants," he said.

McAleese, who's married with three teen-age children, will move to Dublin when she's inaugurated Nov. 11. And at least in Rostrevor, she will be missed.

"I'm probably the biggest loser from this election," said Liam Farrell, the next-door neighbor since 1989. "She's been the best neighbor you could have."

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