

China to appoint 44 Hong Kong liberals as advisers

HONG KONG, Feb 29: China will next month appoint 44 Hong Kong people, accused by pro-democracy liberals of being likely Beijing 'yes-men', as advisers on the British colony, a pro-China newspaper said today, reports Reuter.

The Hong Kong daily Wen Wei Po said the appointments on March 11 in Beijing would soon be followed by others from a wider spectrum of Hong Kong society.

Hong Kong liberals say they fear the advisers will tell Beijing only what it wants to hear and could become a parallel government undermining the British colonial administration in the run up to the territory's 1997 handover to China.

Governor Lord Wilson has said the advisers, chosen by Beijing's Hong Kong and Macau affairs office and the local branch of Xinhua news agency, should come from as wide a spectrum as possible.

Wen Wei Po, often a channel for official Chinese comment, said: "the Hong Kong and Macau affairs office and the Hong Kong branch of the Xinhua news agency will soon be appointing a second and third batch of advisers from an even wider social spectrum."

Many of the first batch are professionals and businessmen already known for their pro-Beijing sympathies. Leading liberals, who are pushing for as much democracy as possible before the handover, are conspicuous by their absence.

Repeating as assurance already given by the foreign affairs ministry, Wen Wei Po quoted a Hong Kong and

Macau affairs office official as saying: "there is absolutely no intention of creating a shadow government or a second power base."

Liberals, led by united democrats leader Martin Lee, say China should use directly-elected members of the legislative council as a conduit for Hong Kong public opinion.

Under a system of limited democracy, only 18 of the colonial legislature's 60 members are directly elected by the people.

Almost all 18 are liberals, but they are outnumbered by a large conservative bloc among the other members who are either elected by small professional and business groups or appointed by the government.

Venezuela takes over UN Council presidency

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 29: Venezuela's UN Ambassador, Dr Diego Arria, assumes the Security Council presidency on Sunday for the month of March, reports Reuter.

He takes over from US Ambassador Thomas R Pickering, who recently was nominated by President George Bush as his new envoy to India.

Pickering, who served as Washington's permanent representative to the United Nations since 1989, will be succeeded in his post by Edward Perkins, also a career diplomat.

The council presidency rotates monthly according to the English alphabet.

UN withdraws experts from Iraq

BAGHDAD, Feb 29: The United Nations withdraws a team of eight missile destruction experts at the center of a row between Iraq and the World Organisation, UN sources said, reports Reuter.

The sources said Christopher Holland and his team left Baghdad early today for Bahrain, field headquarters for UN experts scrapping Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

The Security Council condemned Iraq on Friday over its refusal to allow the team to destroy missile-related equipment. It also ordered Baghdad to send a delegation to UN Headquarters in New York to explain its stand.

Meanwhile AP reports, Security Council President Thomas R Pickering said Friday Iraq has apparently refused United Nations demands that it permit destruction of its ballistic missile production

facilities.

"By its terms it seems to be totally unacceptable. We have to examine it," Pickering, the US ambassador, said before the Security Council met in closed consultations. "Based on the information I have it is seven pages of no."

But he added that Iraq wants to send a delegation to discuss the issue, and Baghdad says the delegation will arrive soon.

The Iraqi letter, obtained by the Association Press, is not a flat rejection of demands for destruction, but a proposal that one missile plant be converted to nonmilitary, civilian use.

The letter was sent to Rolf Ekeus, head of the special UN commission charged with destroying Iraq's terror weapons, by Mohammad Said al-Sahaf, minister of state for foreign affairs.

The letter proposed that

Baghdad be permitted to modify the Badr-2000 Project for civilian use to produce liquid fuel tanks, rubber separators for the oil industry, explosives for road construction, cement and the 100-kilometer range Ababil missile.

It said destruction of longer-range missiles clearly is required under the cease-fire resolution. "It is neither clear nor justifiable, however, that destruction should indiscriminately include machines and equipment which can be modified and changed in such a way as will turn them totally incapable of being used in production of any weapon or prohibited material."

The Security Council's Gulf War cease-fire resolution requires destruction of missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometers and the equipment needed to manufacture such missiles. It says nothing about conversion of prohibited mili-

tary equipment or plants for legitimate civilian use.

On Thursday night Pickering protested Iraq's lack of cooperation in a meeting with Iraq's acting ambassador, Samir al-Nime.

Pickering said the Security Council is "determined that their resolutions be implemented."

The council has said Iraq would face "serious consequences" for noncompliance, but these never have been spelled out.

Pickering, asked Friday about a military strike, repeated his earlier statements: "No option has been ruled in or ruled out."

Iraq has argued that compliance with UN resolutions on destroying its weapons should be linked to the relaxation of UN economic sanctions imposed after Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990.



JERUSALEM: Muslim Palestinians attend Friday noon prayers in front of the dome of the rock in Jerusalem's old city. After day's heavy snowfall life returns to normal. — AFP/UNB Photo.

Second mutiny in Niger in 24 hours

NIAMEY, Feb 29: Niger's return to democracy was in jeopardy today after a second mutiny abroad troops in 24 hours, reports Reuter.

Soldiers retook the national radio and television buildings on Friday evening, hours after their earlier mutiny had apparently ended peacefully.

They said on television their "movement" would continue until further notice and told Prime Minister Amadou Cheffou to start negotiations on their grievances in an infantry barracks.

Niger's 4,500 soldiers are suffering like the rest of the West African country's eight million people from the disastrous state of the economy.

But they are also in the front line in the desert north against well-armed guerrillas of the nomadic Tuareg Tribe.

In their first takeover from Thursday evening to midday on Friday, the mutineers detained the head of Niger's interim parliament, Andre Salifou, and interior minister Mohamed Musa.

The two men were freed unharmed after the soldiers said they had been assured that their January and February

wages would be paid immediately.

Salifou, Cheffou and President Ali Saibou said in a joint statement that all the troops' legitimate grievances over money and living conditions would be addressed.

But Salifou, appointed by Niger's pro-democracy national conference last November, said such episodes were inevitable because of the country's empty coffers.

Students abroad complaining about unpaid grants have occupied Niger's embassies in Lagos and Abidjan in recent weeks. Others staged food riots at home and workers have gone on sporadic strikes.

Niger's government is so broke that it has banned the use of air conditioners in public buildings in Niamey, where the midday temperature hits 40 degrees centigrade.

Ministries now have only two telephone lines — one for the minister and another for everybody else.

Almost all France's former African colonies are undergoing acute problems changing from dictatorial military or one-man rule to multi-party democracy.

BRIEFLY

Libya, China sign accord: Libya and China on Friday signed a protocol agreement for economic, cultural and scientific cooperation the state-run Libyan news agency JANA reported in a dispatch received Nicosia, reports AFP.

The accord calls for cooperation between the two countries in trade, banking, electricity and shipping.

It also stipulates the "creation of a commission to pursue the implementation of accords reached during the 4th session of the Libyan-Chinese committee," which met recently in Tripoli.

JANA said the protocol was signed by strategic industry minister Jadallah Azouz Al-Talhi for Libya and chemical industry minister Ou Xulian for China.

Fire on Algerian radicals: Security forces fired in the air to disperse hundreds of Muslim fundamentalist demonstrators after Friday prayers in Constantine, the main city in Eastern Algeria, state radio reported, AFP says from Algiers.

It was not known if there were casualties in the clashes between the security forces and supporters of the Islamic Salvation Front. Four policemen and two demonstrators were hurt in Constantine after last week's Friday prayers.

The situation was reported calm elsewhere in the country.

Russia, S Africa set up ties: Russia and South Africa established full diplomatic relations on Friday, ending more than three decades of hostility, reports Reuter from Pretoria.

Foreign Ministers Pik Botha of South Africa and Andrei Kozyrev of Russia signed the agreement to exchange ambassadors.

This just about concludes our establishing relations with all the important powers in the world. This is a momentous occasion for all of us in South Africa," Botha said.

The two ministers said they noted the similar democratic reforms in their two countries and believed there were vast areas in which they could cooperate.

Pilot convicted of stealing: An Israeli air force pilot has been convicted of stealing a fighter plane from Sweden, according to the Itim news agency on Friday, Xinhua reports from Jerusalem.

The Tel Aviv district court decided Thursday that it would hand down a sentence on March 8 to reserve major Israel Yitzhaki, 51, who managed to restore a nintage mustang fighter plane for exhibit in the early 1980s and flew it to Sweden in 1986.

He took the World War II plane under the pretext it needed repainting and registered the plane in his name during the restoration.

Zaire bans Christians' march: Zaire has banned a mass march of Christians planned in Kinshasa on Sunday to demand the resumption of the country's national pro-democracy conference, Zaire's official Azap news agency said on Friday, reports Reuter from Brussels.

Kinshasa's governor issued the ban on the grounds that government orders prohibited public demonstrations, said Azap, monitored by Belgian news agency Belga.

A similar march 10 days ago turned into a bloodbath when troops opened fire on the crowd, killing at least 17 people.

The national conference, which opposition parties hope will oust President Mobutu Sese Seko and pave the way for democracy, has been halted for more than a month.

Kazakhstan to help Pakistan in field of N-technology

ISLAMABAD, Feb 29: Kazakhstan, a new central Asian state of the former Soviet Union, is ready to cooperate with Pakistan in the field of nuclear technology as it is convinced that Islamabad's nuclear programme is peaceful and aimed at overcoming the energy crisis, reports Xinhua.

The local English daily 4th Frontier Post today quoted Mian Abdul Wahid, member of the National Assembly, who recently visited Kazakhstan as saying Kazakhstan is prepared to extend all possible cooperation to Pakistan in the field of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Bush's reelection campaign has moved into high gear

HOUSTON, Texas, Feb 29: President George Bush's reelection campaign has moved into high gear as the key southern state primaries approach and the threat from republican rival Pat Buchanan looms larger, reports AFP.

"I am going to be nice," the president assured reporters Friday while jogging in Houston, Texas, where he was taking a brief respite from two weeks of vigorous campaigning.

In fact, while addressing a group of Rodeo organizers, Bush refrained from making any direct attacks on his rival and settled for listing his own Conservative credentials.

Buchanan, a right-wing political commentator, has accused Bush of betraying the Republican Party and selling

No US loan unless Israel stops settlement

WASHINGTON, Feb 29: The dispute over Israel's request for 10 billion dollar in US housing loan guarantees overshadowed bilateral Israeli-Arab peace talks here Friday as the negotiations grew more contentious, reports AFP.

As this fourth round of bilateral talks opened Monday, US Secretary of State James Baker told a congressional panel that Israel would not be granted the loan guarantees unless it halted all settlement construction on the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Washington, he added, would consider guaranteeing smaller loans if Israel did not begin any new construction. Construction underway could

be finished, but the cost would be deducted from the loan guarantees Israel seeks to finance housing for Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

The Arab delegations immediately welcomed Baker's firm stand. But Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir Thursday accused Washington of siding with the Arabs and "exploiting" the immigration problem.

Two pro-Israeli US senators meanwhile proposed a compromise under which the guarantees would get tentative approval, with President George Bush given latitude to decide whether the money would be disbursed or sus-

pending if Israel violates its pledge.

The guarantees would enable Israel to borrow 10 billion dollar from commercial banks at favourable interest rates as Washington would assume responsibility for repayment should the Israelis default on the loans.

Guaranteeing the loans would force congress to set aside 200 million to 300 million dollar in US taxpayer money in case of Israeli default.

Neither the White House nor the house subcommittee considering the loan guarantee has weighed in on the compromise proposal.

Several delegates at the talks acknowledged they had paid close attention to the congressional discussions. When they turned their focus on the talks, the mood soured considerably.

"The atmosphere is worse than last time and the last sessions were very tense," Palestinian spokesman Iman Ashrawi said Friday.

An Israeli spokesman agreed, saying Thursday the talks "ended on a very tense note."

Israel for the first time outlined a detailed proposal on the future on the occupied territories, which the Palestinians immediately rejected as "preposterous."

CIS troops ordered to pull out of Nagorno-Karabakh

MOSCOW, Feb 29: Armenian and Azeri fighters, oblivious to peace initiatives, slugged it out in the villages of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenians appeared to be getting the upper hand, reports Reuter.

Former Soviet troops, now under the command of the Commonwealth of Independent States, were ordered to pull out of the disputed enclave after they came under fire in the latest outbreak of fighting.

In Azerbaijan, President Ayaz Mutalibov declared three days of mourning from today to

mark large Azeri losses in the fighting, particularly in the Armenian capture this week of the town of Khojaly.

But Mutalibov was likely to come under attack himself at a vast demonstration planned in Baku by the opposition popular front, which accuses him of failing to provide sufficient support for Azeri combatants.

Commonwealth television showed bombed-out buildings in Armenian-dominated Stepanakert, capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, including parts of the army base reduced

to rubble by Azeri rockets fired from the hills above.

It also showed carnage in the Azeri town of Shusha, where residents said Armenians attacked them from helicopters.

"What will be the further fate of soldiers of the 366th regiment? How will the withdrawal be completed?" A commentator asked as a heavily bandaged soldier was shown shown wandering through the camp.

"So the war in Karabakh continues under its own momentum,

Most Israelis opposed to freezing settlement

CAROL, Feb 29: Most Israelis are opposed to freezing settlement building in the occupied territories as a precondition for acquiring US loan guarantees, according to a poll published in Tel Aviv yesterday, reports Xinhua.

Forty-two per cent of the 505 Israelis questioned by telephone favoured halt of settlement building, according to the poll conducted by the Tel Aviv-based Dahaf Institute and published in the Hebrew daily Yedioth Ahronoth.

Off the Record

'It's for the child in me'

ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA: Actress Elizabeth Taylor celebrated her 60th birthday by fulfilling a child's dream — a private party at Disneyland with hundreds of celebrity guests, reports AFP.



"It's to bring out the kid in me... It's for the child in me," she said when asked about the party late Thursday inside Fantasyland.

Dressed in black jeans and boots and a black jacket studded with rhinestones, the actress was accompanied by her husband and the party's co-host, Larry Fortensky.

Among the friends who showed up were celebrities from the 1940s and '50s, such as Esther Williams, Jackie Cooper and Robert Stack. Other guests included Richard Gere, Cindy Crawford, Jon Voight, David Bowie, Gregory Peck, Dionne Warwick and Stevie Wonder.

"This is the best birthday party I've ever had," said Taylor, who married for the eighth time in October in a private ceremony on Michael Jackson's secluded ranch in California.

Human blood in mice

TORONTO: A Canadian scientist has developed a technique to replicate the human blood system in mice, achieving a major breakthrough in the study and treatment of blood disorders, reports Reuter.

Dr John Dick, Senior Research scientist at Toronto's hospital for sick children, said on Friday his technique transplants human bone marrow into mice, reproducing for the first time an almost complete human blood system.

"The animal model provides a way... to study blood and genetic diseases, and understand them more rapidly," Dick, who is also an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto, said in an interview.

The technique works by injecting special mice, which are born without an immune system, with bone marrow that contains stem cells — the cells that produce white and red cells and other elements that make up blood.

Better have children

ATLANTA: A study of women at risk for AIDS finds as many as half never use contraceptives and many want to have children, reports AP.

Researchers from local health departments and the national Centers for Disease Control studied 736 sexually active women at risk of AIDS because they or their sex partners have used intravenous drugs. The study looked at drug clinics in New York City, Philadelphia and the Newark, NJ area, and at drug centers and prisons in Miami.

Most of the women — from 54 to 60 per cent at the various sites — said they did not want to become pregnant within the next three years. But only 26 to 38 per cent reported regular contraceptive use, and 37 to 49 per cent said they never used contraceptives, the CDC said.

AIDS outreach efforts could help prevent the women and their children from infection, but drug users are difficult to reach, said Dr. Christine Galavotti, a psychologist with the CDC's division of sexually-transmitted-disease prevention.

Merely surviving may really be the priority for them — not pregnancy planning or attending counseling sessions, Galavotti said.

Between 41 and 64 percent of the women surveyed said they want to have children sometime in the future. If they were infected with HIV, their children would run the risk of being infected.

Chocolate gal at the palace corner

TOKYO: Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito may have failed to meet his own deadline for finding a bride, but he has his secret admirers, reports Reuter.

Palace guards found a young Japanese woman on Valentine's day ringing at the door of Naruhito's residence in the palace compound. She was carrying a box of chocolates.

An imperial guard spokesman said Friday the woman had been admitted to the grounds by mistake. He declined to name her, saying only she was in her late 20s and lived near the capital. "We didn't even check the chocolates," he said.

Media reports said the woman was an imperial family fan who had brought letters and gifts in the past but who had never before made it beyond the palace gates.



RIO-DE-JANEIRO: Members of the Samba School, Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel, work on a mask that will adorn the float representing the schools in the annual Brazilian carnival, 14 Samba schools will parade on March 1 and 2 for an estimated 70,000 fans. — AFP/UNB Photo.

Pretoria bans carrying of firearms

PRETORIA, Feb 29: South Africa's government Friday banned the carrying of dangerous weapons and firearms in public places and at political rallies in a move long demanded by the African National Congress (ANC), reports AFP.

The ANC has for months been negotiating with the government and the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) on the carrying of Zulus of "traditional weapons", generally spears and heavy wooden clubs.

The ANC demanded that these arms be outlawed, a move rejected by Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who said such a ban would insult Zulu manhood.

Conservatives in recent years

"Garbage? Typical Pat Buchanan — carnival — like



conservatives in recent years. "Garbage? Typical Pat Buchanan — carnival — like