

Palestinians prefer neutral site for talks

NICOSIA, Apr 1: The Palestinian team to Arab-Israeli peace talks Tuesday said it was opposed to moving bilateral negotiations from Washington to the Middle East but would settle for a neutral site, reports AFP.

'UN Council sanctions against Libya unjust'

LONDON, Apr 1: Libyan television described the UN Security Council resolution on Tuesday imposing sanctions against Libya as unjust and unfair, reports Reuter.

AFP adds from United Nations: Main points of the resolution imposing sanctions on Libya voted by the UN Security Council here Tuesday.

It reaffirmed that "every state has the duty to refrain from organizing, investigating, assisting or participating in terrorist acts in another state."

It decided that all states shall "deny permission to any aircraft to take off from, land in or overfly their territory if it is destined to land in or has taken off from the territory of Libya, unless the particular flight has been approved on grounds of humanitarian need."

It prohibited member states or their nationals from providing Libya or their nationals any arms and related materials, including the sale or transfer of weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary police equipment or spare parts.

It decided that to deny entry or expel Libyan nationals who have been expelled from other states because of their involvement in terrorist activities, it requested members to report to the Secretary General by May 15, 1992 on the measures they have taken to meet obligations set out in the Resolution passed Tuesday.

Peres appears to win in Israel's first primary

JERUSALEM, Apr 1: Former Labour Party leader Shimon Peres on Wednesday appeared to win the No. 2 slot on the party's list for Parliament in a slow announcement of results because of a computer failure, reports AP.

BRRIEFLY

Bust of Tito disappears: A marble bust of former Yugoslav leader Marshal Josip Tito has disappeared from the main hall of the federal parliament building here, the Borba newspaper reported Wednesday, AFP says from Belgrade.

Borba said parliamentary employees were unable to explain its disappearance, while the parliament's speaker and secretary general declined to comment.

A Serbian member of parliament said the bust may have been placed under protection for its "reservation as a historical monument."

Tito was President of the Yugoslav Federation from the end of World War II until his death in 1980.

Pindi may send food to Kabul: Pakistan is considering sending food aid to hungry civilians in Kabul but wants guarantees that none will fall into the hands of its government foes, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Tuesday, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

This request on humanitarian grounds is being considered favourably and sympathetically by the government of Pakistan, particularly as it came from the United Nations, the spokesman told a news briefing.

The Afghan government of President Najibullah has appealed through the UN for 100,000 tonnes of wheat to alleviate severe shortages in Kabul and other central and western areas.

Giving aid to the Afghan capital could pose problems for Pakistan, which has been the main conduit for weapons and cash aid to Afghan guerrilla groups during 14 years of war.

Brown defeats Clinton: Jerry Brown defeated front-runner Bill Clinton in Vermont's Democratic caucuses Tuesday night, while President Bush coasted unchallenged through the state's Republican caucuses, AP reports from Montpelier.

Brown, a former California governor campaigning as an outsider, called it a strong showing against "what has been the front-runner," Clinton lamented that he had been cast in the unpopular role of insider because of his earlier victories.

Clinton's Vermont vote was running behind that of Democrats who preferred to remain uncommitted.

With 83 per cent of Vermont's 245 cities and towns reporting, Brown had 45 per cent of the vote, Clinton 16 per cent. Uncommitted Democrats accounted for 25 per cent. Paul Taongas, who has dropped from the campaign, had 9 per cent.

IMF lauds Russia: The International Monetary Fund praised Russia for its tough economic reforms Wednesday and took a major step towards making Moscow eligible to borrow billions of dollars in IMF loans, Reuter reports from Washington.

The IMF's board agreed to give Russia a three per cent stake in the fund when it joins the organisation, probably late next month. That would make Russia eligible to borrow about US dollars 4 billion annually from the IMF to support its reforms.

Floods claim 53 in China: Spring flood caused by rainfalls in the central Chinese province of Jiangxi have killed at least 53 people and injured 513, the People's Daily said Wednesday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The floods have left 100,000 people stranded, submerged about 186,000 hectares (440,000 rpt 440,000 acres) of land and destroyed 45,000 houses, the newspaper said.

"This is the most rain that Jiangxi has received during this period since 1904," it said.

Provincial party and government authorities have mobilised more than 900,000 people to fight the floods, it added.

Jamaica's new cabinet sworn in: Jamaica's new Prime Minister PJ Patterson swore in his 15-member cabinet on Tuesday, keeping the same line-up as his predecessor Michael Manley, reports Reuter from Kingston.

He announced that he would switch their portfolios later this week but government spokesmen later clarified his position, telling reporters he was keeping ministers in their posts but was switching some departments from one ministry to another.

Patterson made some minor changes, making himself Minister of Development and Information and bringing former Attorney General Carl Rattray, dropped in a January shuffle, back into the cabinet.

Kohl reshuffles cabinet

BONN, Apr 1: German Chancellor Helmut Kohl has nervously reshuffled his cabinet and risked accusations of anti-Semitism to try to end off political embarrassment in two state elections on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Kohl replaced Gerhard Stoltenberg as Defence Minister on Tuesday over an arms export scandal that threatened to worsen the already weak chances his Christian Democrats (CDU) have in the Northern state of Schleswig-Holstein.

Last Friday, he said straight into dispute with the Jewish community over shunned Australian President Kurt Waldheim in a move several German and foreign critics said was clearly aimed at winning support among anti-Semitic right-wing voters.

Stoltenberg said CDU state campaigns were suffering because of his ministry's failure to block a shipment of 15 tanks to Turkey after parliament banned it in protest against Ankara's crackdown

on rebellious Kurds. "I have told the Chancellor today that I wish to resign as Defence Minister. I want to avoid damage to the CDU and the government," Stoltenberg told journalists.

His parliamentary State Secretary Otfried Henning automatically left the Defence Ministry with his departing boss.

In a surprise move, Kohl lunched with Waldheim in Munich last Friday and angrily attacked Jewish leaders when, as widely expected, they criticised him for it.

It is upto me as Chancellor to decide who I meet here in Munich with my friend [Bavarian state Prime Minister] Max Streibl, he said when asked about Jewish protests against the meeting.



MOSCOW: Russian President Boris Yeltsin (C) puts his signature to the federation treaty March 31 in the Kremlin, Moscow. Leaders from 18 out of the 20 autonomous republics of the Russian federation signed a new treaty today, the only exceptions were Chechnya and Tatarstan who have declared independence. — AFP/UNB photo.

Russia signs treaty with ethnic regions

MOSCOW, Apr 1: Russia has signed a treaty with most of its main ethnic regions to prevent the country splitting up, but celebrations were marred by accusations of involvement in a bloody rebellion in the north Caucasus, reports Reuter.

As fireworks lit up the Moscow night sky on Tuesday, several people were reported killed in the breakaway republic of Chechnya as forces loyal to President Dzhokhar Dudayev stormed the local radio and television centre, briefly occupied by armed rebels.

A state of emergency was declared in the republic, which proclaimed its independence from Russia last November after resisting an attempt by Moscow to deploy more troops there.

Iar-Tass news agency said about a dozen people were killed in the latest violence. It quoted a senior Chechen parliamentary official, Zelikhan Yandarbiyev, as blaming Russia for supporting the rebels.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin shrugged off the refusal of Chechnya and powerful Tatarstan to join 18 other republics in signing a federative treaty, developing more political and economic power.

"Russia was, is and will be united," he told delegations from the republics, regions and districts that make up his sprawling country at a ceremony in the Kremlin's ornate St George's Hall.

Azerbaijan's deputy defence minister, I. Kasimov, looked hesitant, but Maj. Gen. Roustam Akhmedov, the defence minister for Uzbekistan, smiled as he was escorted through the main entrance by NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner, a former German defence minister.

Before the meeting opened, US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney shook hands and chatted briefly with Col. Gen. Pavel Grachev, aide to Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The two officials met privately on Tuesday.

The meeting was designed to set out a programme for closer military contacts.

The allies were expected to offer to set up seminars, workshops and other meetings so the newly independent nations could learn basic lessons in how to manage the military in a democracy.

Even so, their talks were likely to be overshadowed by Western concerns about the fate of some 27,000 nuclear weapons on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

The NATO allies were expected to seek assurances that thousands of short-range nuclear weapons would be moved to Russia and a large number destroyed.

On Tuesday, Cheney received fresh promises by three republics — Russia, Ukraine and Belarus — that they would abide by an agreement to ship their tactical nuclear arms to Russia by July 1.

Ukraine's defence minister, Col. Gen. Konstantin Morozov, whose country suspended arms shipments in mid-March, said the transfers would be resumed, according to a senior US defence official. Morozov did not say when.

Cheney also met with Grachev and Pyotr Chaus, acting defence minister for Belarus.

The defence meeting is the latest in a series of efforts by the Western alliance to bring its one-time enemies in the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact closer — but without letting them in as members.

All but two of the former Soviet republics — Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan — were represented.

Big 3 fail to win broad support

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 1: The United States, Britain and France, mainstays of the successful anti-Iraq coalition, failed Tuesday to win ringing endorsement of sanctions against Libya for refusing to surrender suspects in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103, reports AP.

The sanctions resolution squeaked by with only one vote more than required on the 15-nation council — a disappointment for the US, British and French sponsors who sought more affirmative votes to enhance the sanctions' moral weight.

Despite their vigorous lobbying, the vote to impose sanctions was 10-0, with five abstentions on the 15-nation council which represents 175 members of the United Nations.

The sanctions — aviation and arms embargoes and expulsion of Libyan diplomats — to go into effect April 15. They are legally binding and enforceable through military action, if necessary.

Resistance came from the Third World: China, Cape Verde, India, Morocco and Zimbabwe, which all abstained. The Arab League, Islamic Conference and Arab Maghreb Union, all urged the council to hold off on sanctions.

British ambassador David Hannay dismissed reporters' questions about a serious division on the council, saying: "International terrorism is difficult to grapple with" and saying some nations had "some measures of disagreement about the speed and the measures taken."

Libya is to be punished with sanctions if it does not turn over two suspects in the Pan Am bombing, cooperate in the French investigation in which four Libyans have been charged, promise to pay compensation and prove that it no longer supports terrorism.

Paris, Apr 1: President Francois Mitterrand met early Wednesday with Prime Minister Edith Cresson, the unpopular leader of a faltering government that was expected to undergo a major shake-up later in the day, reports AP.

There was strong speculation that Cresson had offered her resignation Tuesday afternoon during an unscheduled visit to the presidential palace. She made no statement to the press.

Her meeting with Mitterrand, which began at 9:30 am (0730 GMT), was widely expected to be her last as Prime Minister.

CIS talks closer military contacts with NATO

BRUSSELS, Apr 1: Defence ministers from former Soviet republics on Wednesday strode through the doors of the NATO military alliance to meet for the first time with their Western counterparts, reports AP.

"It's historic," said Dutch Defence Minister Relus ter Beek as ministers from Eastern Europe gathered at the headquarters of the 16-nation North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

"For the first time, ministers of what were once the adversaries are now meeting not in an atmosphere of confrontation as always has been in the past but in an atmosphere of cooperation," said ter Beek.

The gathering drew together defence chiefs from more than 30 nations, ranging from the United States and Canada in North America to the far reaches of the former Soviet territory.

For most it was the first time they had set foot in the Western alliance.

Azerbaijan's deputy defence minister, I. Kasimov, looked hesitant, but Maj. Gen. Roustam Akhmedov, the defence minister for Uzbekistan, smiled as he was escorted through the main entrance by NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner, a former German defence minister.

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Off the Record



HOLLYWOOD: British actor Anthony Hopkins holds up his Oscar shortly after winning the Academy Award for best actor on March 30 at the 64th Annual Academy Awards ceremony. Hopkins won for his performance in 'Silence of the Lambs'. — AFP/UNB photo.

Bonus day in space

SPACE CENTER, Houston: Atlantis' astronauts used a bonus day Wednesday to gather more data on the atmosphere, photographing Earth's lustrous halo and measuring the fragile ozone layer, reports AP.

The shuttle originally was scheduled to land Wednesday. But NASA on Sunday extended the mission to Thursday to allow more experiments.

"It looks like it's going to be a great extra day. It's going to be a wonderful finish for the mission," mission manager Marsha Torr told the crew of seven.

The nine-day mission is the first shuttle flight devoted to studying the atmosphere.

On Wednesday, the astronauts took measurements of the ozone layer, the shield against harmful ultraviolet rays that is being destroyed by manmade chemicals.



HOLLYWOOD: US actress Mercedes Ruehl poses with her Oscar on March 30 shortly after being awarded the Academy Award for best supporting actress. Ruehl won for her performance in 'The Fisher King'. — AFP/UNB photo.

My wife is qualified to do anything : Clinton

NEW YORK, Apr 1: Democratic presidential front-runner Bill Clinton says if he is elected president he would want his wife, Hillary, to hold a high-level position in his administration, reports AFP.

The Arkansas governor was asked Monday at a campaign stop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, how he would use the talents of his wife, one of the nation's most powerful lawyers, if he were elected president.

"First of all, I would very much like her to work in the administration, somehow, have a real area of responsibility," Clinton said at Milwaukee area technical college, adding, "I think she's qualified to do anything."

Clinton's democratic rival Jerry Brown has questioned whether the governor funnelled state money to his wife's firm. The couple has denied the charge.

Clinton, who last week was trying to limit public debate

level of the administration, he said, reminding his audience, "you've got to get me in before I can get her in."

Clinton said if he were elected, the couple would decide what her role should be, then they would tell the American people and give them time to get adjusted to it.

Hillary Clinton is a partner in the prestigious rose law firm based in Arkansas' capital, Little Rock.

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Rival clan factions battle in N Somalia

NAIROBI, Kenya, Apr 1: Rival clan factions in northern Somalia's nominally independent Somaliland Republic battled for three hours with guns and mortars, aid sources said Wednesday, reports AP.

The clash on Saturday, in the northern port of Berbera between subgroups of the region's majority Isaaq clan ended by early evening and there have been no reports of major fighting in the Somaliland Republic since, according to the sources.

The sources, representatives of aid groups in radio contact with staff in the Somaliland Republic, spoke on condition they not be identified further.

In a New York Times-CBS poll released Tuesday, Clinton's support among Democratic primary voters jumped from 28 per cent to 51 per cent in the last month, but reservations about his character persist.

Sixty-seven per cent said they would like to see some one else enter the race. And Clinton still had a 28 per cent negative rating among Democrats and a 41 per cent negative rating among all voters.