

UN sanctions on Libya won't resolve dispute with West: Velayati

BEIJING, Apr 17: Visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said here Thursday that the imposition of UN sanctions against Libya would not resolve its dispute with the West, reports AFP.

"From the very beginning we have said that they have to negotiate with the government of Libya," Velayati told a press conference. "The process of consultation should continue. Imposition of sanctions will not solve the problem."

"As a member of the UN, we will observe what has been decided in the UN, in the Security Council, that is our obligation," he said.

But if Iran had been a member of the Security Council, he added, "we would have voted against it."

Asked about Iran's reaction to the reduction in Libyan diplomats prescribed by the

Security Council, Velayati said it was Iran's obligation to abide by the Security Council resolution.

He said implementation of the air embargo ordered against Libya by the Security Council, which took effect Wednesday, varied according to different members of the council.

"What was decided in the Security Council was based on the interpretation of a mutual agreement, or treaty, which is related to civil aviation," he said.

"We can have different interpretations of this treaty. What Libya has done has been compatible with mutual agreements. They were very cooperative."

Velayati is on a two-day visit here for a meeting of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Yeltsin bans biological weapons Russia, Ukraine agree to destroy N-arms

MOSCOW, Apr 17: Russian President Boris N Yeltsin has signed a decree saying his country will adhere to a 1972 international treaty banning germ warfare, his press secretary said Thursday, reports AP.

But Yeltsin did not say publicly whether the former Soviet republic has any biological weapons or whether it will destroy any.

Meanwhile, Yeltsin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk signed an agreement on the transfer of tactical nuclear weapons, as well as their use, Alexei Novikov told the Associated Press.

The United States destroyed all its germ warfare stocks two decades ago. U.S. intelligence officials say they have discovered more than 20 germ warfare research, manufacturing and storage sites on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Ukraine earlier this week had said it would soon resume transferring the arms after getting assurances it could monitor their destruction.

The United States had long claimed the Soviet Union maintained a secret programme for the production of offensive germ weapons and was pressing Russia to meet an April 15 deadline to fully reveal its scope and history.

The Soviets had insisted they were only developing

vaccines against biological weapons and conducting other research under a defensive programme, which is allowed under the accord.

Before the signing, Yeltsin repeatedly had promised publicly and privately that he would adhere to the international treaty.

The decree states that Russia, as successor to the Soviet Union, will abide by the accord banning the production and deployment of biological weapons, as well as their use, Alexei Novikov told the Associated Press.

The United States destroyed all its germ warfare stocks two decades ago. U.S. intelligence officials say they have discovered more than 20 germ warfare research, manufacturing and storage sites on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Titled "on ensuring the fulfillment of international commitments in the sphere of biological weapons," the decree was signed on April 11 but made public only this week, Novikov said.

The agreement on the transfer of nuclear weapons removed another sore point in Russian-Ukrainian relations. Kravchuk abruptly halted the transfer in February, demanding stronger verification of their destruction.

Several Western countries, including the United States, expressed alarm at the step and pressed the states to resolve their differences. The agreement calls for all battlefield-range weapons to be transferred by July 1 and includes a protocol regulating their destruction.

Also Thursday, the government daily Rossiyskaya Gazeta reported that Yeltsin signed a decree creating a commission to control weapons exports. The Commission will be headed by Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, the architect of Yeltsin's economic reform programme.

The Commission will involve deputy heads of the ministries of defense, economics, security and science, foreign affairs and others. It is also to cooperate with other former Soviet republics.

12 killed in India train mishap

NEW DELHI, Apr 17: At least a dozen people were killed and as many injured when a train smashed in a tractor at an unmanned level crossing in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the Press Trust of India said today, reports AFP.

The accident occurred Thursday near the Hindu holy town of Benares. Seven persons were killed on the spot, and the five others died in hospital, the agency reported.

Cracks develop in floor of Tipu Sultan Mosque

CALCUTTA, Apr 17: Calcutta's historic, 300 year old Tipu Sultan Mosque is endangered with several cracks appearing in the floor of the main prayer hall and the five west facing domes while the adjacent residence of the Imam is to be demolished after being declared unsafe, reports PTI.

The reason for this is only ten feet away where fifty feet under ground construction of the Esplanade-Shyambazar stretch of the metro railway is in progress.

Situated in the hue of busy Chowringhee, the mosque began developing cracks from the first week of March when the metro railway authority began work in full swing to complete work in the sections but the appearance of cracks forced them to halt work near the mosque and repair the damage.

The Tipu Sultan Mosque protection and welfare committee also took immediate steps to repair the crack and strengthen the foundation.

The Committee's secretary Sera Mubarakki feels that the metro authorities should have taken preventive steps before beginning work so that the mosque did not suffer.

Iraq, Iran to resume exchange of POWs

GENEVA, Apr 17: Iraq and Iran agreed on Thursday to resume the repatriation of thousands of Prisoners-of-War by May 1, the International Committee of the Red Cross said, reports Reuter.

The ICRC says there are around 20,000 Iraqi soldiers in Iran and at least 1,000 Iranians in Iraq.

Iran says most of the Iraqis want to stay. It also says Iraq is holding 5,000 Iranians.

The agreement means that the ICRC will be allowed back into Iran, at least temporarily, to supervise the operation.

'Nepal foreign policy to remain unchanged'

KATHMANDU, Apr 17: Nepalese Prime Minister Gijra Prasad Koirala said that the fundamental tenets of Nepal's foreign policy will remain constant, reports Xinhua.

He stressed that the policy is guided by the country's national interest and vision and based on non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

He made these remarks while speaking at a function to mark the 45th anniversary of the Nepal Council of World Affairs here yesterday.

International situation has changed so rapidly since last year that the world today looks very different from what it was less than a year ago, the Prime Minister said. The fast change demands an ability to adopt a foreign policy that can keep

pace with the rapid evolution in international relations, he added.

Koirala said that the element of continuity while adapting to changes in the world is 'nowhere more evident than in the relations with our immediate neighbours.'

'Indeed, the reality of our existence demands a stable relationship of trust and mutual benefit with both India and China,' he said.

'My recent visit to China has reinforced the steady progress in our bilateral relations, 'he noted'. We shall continue to make every effort to strengthen and broaden our

neighbourly relations based on mutual understanding of each other's aspirations and interests,' he stressed.

Dry spell affects normal life in Assam

GUWAHATI, Apr 17: The month-long dry spell, accompanied by dust storm, has affected the normal life of the people in lower Assam districts, according to official reports reaching here today, says PTI.

The water sources, including the wells, were drying up causing scarcity of drinking water.

Many cases of measles and chicken pox were also reported in Guwahati city.

Guwahati city was the worst affected areas as most of the private water sources were drying up and the Guwahati Municipal Corporation could meet only thirty per cent of the demand of the water requirement.

Clinton accuses Bush of stealing his ideas

PHILADELPHIA, Apr 17: Democratic front-runner Bill Clinton lashed out at president George Bush here Thursday accusing him of stealing his ideas and of being interested only in winning re-election, reports AFP.

For 11 years we have had no economic leadership, no economic vision, no economic strategy, Clinton said of Bush's 11-year tenure in the White House, eight of them as Vice-President to Ronald Reagan.

George Bush's presidency, he said, has produced slower economic growth, slower job growth and slower income growth than any administration since the great depression and the

biggest deficits of any administration in history, he added.

In a speech outlining his own economic programme, Clinton said that Bush was a do-nothing president until the polls told him he had to act to stay in the White House.

He said that Bush had caved in to pressure from within his own Republican Party after disappointing results in the early presidential election primaries and that he stolen Clinton's ideas recently on such issues as aid to Russia, and job training programmes.

They say I'm slick Clinton said in reference to the derogatory nickname of 'slick Willie' used against him during the campaign.

A campaign confession is not the same as a lifetime of conviction and commitment to change, he told a campaign rally in a local school.

Clinton returned to the campaign trail after a week long rest imposed by his doctors who said he risked permanent damage to his vocal chords if he did not take a break after his key win in the New York primary last week.

India planned to rescue Najibullah!

NEW DELHI, Apr 17: India planned to rescue deposed Afghan President Najibullah and fly him here, but botched the attempt, a newspaper reported today, says AFP.

The Indian Express newspaper said the plan was to "smuggle out" Najibullah, whose ouster was announced Thursday, in a UN chartered plane the previous night.

The attempt was foiled when news of the plan leaked to the Afghan armed forces, who prevented Najibullah's departure on the plane parked at Kabul airport, the daily said in a front-page report.

A battery of intelligence officers, and Home and Foreign Ministry officials waited eight hours Wednesday night at a military airfield here to receive Najibullah before realising "something was seriously a miss," the Express said.

It quoted intelligence sources as saying some Indian officials had "botched up the

entire planning" of the rescue attempt, resulting in its failure.

Indian officials had no immediate comment on the report, which followed widespread speculation that New Delhi would be his most probable destination where he to step down and leave his country.

India has been sympathetic to the Soviet-installed Najibullah regime and hosted the Afghan leader on state visits in the past.

A senior Foreign Ministry official, however, ruled out Thursday the possibility of India granting political asylum to Najibullah saying he could come here only as a refugee.

The official said it was not New Delhi's policy to give political asylum, noting that "such facilities" had not been granted even to Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, who escaped to India after a failed 1959 uprising against Chinese rule.



TOKYO: Chinese dissident leader Shen Tong answers questions during a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents Club on Thursday. Shen is here to promote his book 'Almost A Revolution.' Shen's application for a Japanese visa was delayed, which he believes is a result of his dissident status. — AFP/UNB photo

IRAQ TO LOSE STRATEGIC PORT

In a move that is certain to anger Baghdad, a UN commission has decided that Iraq will lose part of a strategic port under a new boundary agreement, AP reports from United Nations.

A report by the five-member Iraq-Kuwait Boundary Demarcation Commission would redraw the border so some of Iraq's southern port of Umm Qasr would fall under Kuwaiti control.

Umm Qasr became Iraq's only outlet to the sea and sole naval base after the port of Basra became unusable when sunken ships clogged the Shatt-al-Arab waterway during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

The Thursday decision is certain to anger Iraq, which cited its long-standing border dispute with Kuwait to justify its Aug 1990 invasion of the Emirate. A US-led coalition drove Iraq from Kuwait in February 1991 before a UN-mediated cease-fire.

Train mishap claims 15 in Tanzania:

At least 15 people were killed when a train plunged into a river in eastern Tanzania early on Thursday and a government official said that up to 50 may be dead in a submerged carriage, Radio Tanzania reported, Reuter says from London.

The accident happened near the town of Kilosa when the train tried to cross a bridge which had earlier been swept away by flood waters, said the radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

A government spokesman said between 40 and 50 people were feared dead in one carriage which was completely submerged, it added.

Police and railway workers were continuing rescue operations and troops had been sent to the scene, west of the capital Dar Es Salaam, to help recover the bodies, it added.

Major to help Shamir for ME peace:

British Prime Minister John Major offered Thursday to work together with his Israeli counterpart Yitzhak Shamir for peace in the Middle East, the Israeli premier's office said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Major also said in a message to Shamir that he hoped for stronger ties between their countries and wanted to meet the Israeli premier soon.

The message was in response to a telegram from Shamir congratulating Major on his victory in last week's British general election.

27 Palestinians injured:

At least 27 Palestinians were injured Thursday in clashes with Israeli soldiers as strikes were held throughout the occupied territories to protest UN sanctions against Libya, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The army said six soldiers and 11 Palestinians were injured in the Gaza Strip's Jabalia refugee camp, a hot-bed of anti-Israeli violence and the birthplace of the 52-month-long revolt against Israeli rule.

At least 27 Arabs were wounded by army gunfire in clashes throughout the occupied Gaza Strip, Israel radio reported.

Pro-FLO Palestinian leaders had called for a general strike on Thursday to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the assassination of Khalil Wazir, the military commander of the Palestine Liberation Organization. He was killed in his home in Tunis and Israeli commandos are widely believed to have carried out the assassination.

IPI urges Malawi to free newsman:

The International Press Institute on Thursday urged the Malawi government to release a Reuter news agency correspondent arrested in December, AP reports from London.

"We understand that our colleague's condition in prison is deteriorating," institute director Peter Galliner said in his letter to Malawi's president, Hastings Banda. "We urgently appeal for his immediate release."

Galliner said the institute had learned that Reuter correspondent Simon Mhone was detained following a Reuter report on Banda's opening of parliament.

The institute, which represents leading journalists, editors and publishers in many countries, has offices in Zurich and London.

Two Libyans may go to West to stand trial

TRIPOLI, Apr 17: The two Libyans suspected of involvement in the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am jet over Lockerbie would be prepared to stand trial in Scotland or the United States, their lawyer said.

But first they want guarantees that the trials would be fair, Libyan lawyer Ibrahim Lagwell told Reuter on Thursday night.

Asked when his clients told him they would be prepared to stand trial in a foreign country and whether that would include Scotland or the United States, Lagwell replied: "Yes — recently — at any place they can have a fair trial, even in the US or Scotland. Any place we are ready, but we must have the guarantees for that."

Libya has been virtually isolated from the outside world since Wednesday when UN sanctions came into force because Tripoli had refused to hand over the men — Abdel

Baset Ali Mohamed Al-Megrahi and Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah.

Lagwell said he believed that the Libyan authorities would not object to such a voluntary surrender.

"My clients feel that they are innocent and they (would) accept a fair trial in any place where they have a guarantee," he said in an interview conducted in English.

Asked what guarantees he was seeking from the US and Britain, Lagwell said: "First of all, they (the suspects) must be dealt with by the judicial departments (authorities) ... not by the foreign intelligence services which have used their influence in the indictment."

He also wanted guarantees that the Libyans' lawyers be present with them. The voluntary surrender formula would overcome legal obstacles to the extradition of the men in the absence of related treaties, Lagwell said.

"It is in the interest of my clients that they have a trial ... really, my clients are in a very embarrassing situation and now they feel that they are making all the matter embarrassing for the whole country," he added.

"What they are feeling now is very bad because they have caused all the problems for the others. Everybody will tell them all this problems was caused by you ... why haven't you accepted to go and have a trial?"

The UN resolution ordering the sanctions also calls on Libya to cooperate with an investigation into the 1989 bombing of a French Airliner over Niger.

A total of 441 people were killed in the Lockerbie and Niger bombings.

Lagwell said the surrender offer had been conveyed to Britain and the United States through UN Secretary-General

Boutros Boutros-Ghali before sanctions were imposed.

The Libyan lawyer said he feared that the men's surrender to the US or Britain had become more difficult because of sanctions and the publicity given the issue.

Lagwell said he would prefer his clients were surrendered to a country having a judicial system where the judge ruled without the need for a jury.

Asked if France could be a possibility, Lagwell said: "Yes, why not. If I have the guarantees from the judicial department we will be ready and I will do it (the surrender) voluntarily. But this must be pre-arranged."

On the question of possible trial in the United States, he said: "My clients have vital rights to be protected by the US constitution and to have a fair trial. Now we have prejudicial pre-trial publicity."

Off the Record



BANGKOK: Lupita Jones, Miss Universe 1991, is surrounded by Thai children Thursday during a visit to grand palace in Bangkok. The Mexican beauty is in the Thai capital for the final days of her reign. She will crown a new Miss Universe on May 9. — AFP/UNB photo

Publishing company penalized for on-the-job sexual harassment

TOKYO: A court on Thursday ordered a publishing company and a male employee to pay 1.65 million yen (dhs 13,000) in damages in a landmark case that penalized on-the-job sexual harassment, a relatively new concept in male-dominated Japan, reports AP.

Until recently, most Japanese women have remained silent about sexual harassment. But awareness of the issue has heightened, partly because of reports about American Professor Anita Hill's allegations against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

In a suit filed in a district court in Fukuoka, southern Japan a 34-year-old woman said editor Hidenori Hirotsu, 40, her boss at Kyu Kikaku, a publishing firm, spread rumours that she was having illicit affairs.

The woman, whose name has been withheld upon her request, said in the suit that Hirotsu's actions deprived her of dignity and drove her to quit her editing job in 1988. She demanded that the company and her boss pay 3.7 million yen (dhs 28,000).

The company and Hirotsu denied any sexual harassment. In Thursdays ruling, the court said Hirotsu had behaved unlawfully and that Kyu Kikaku was also legally responsible for not providing sexual equality in the workplace.

Prostitute — largest taxpayer

ANKARA: The largest taxpayer in Turkey's largest city is the city's number one prostitute, officials announced Thursday, reports AFP.

Mattild Manukyan, owner of virtually all the brothels in Istanbul, a city of eight million inhabitants, paid the equivalent of 600,000 dollars in income taxes for 1991.

It was the second year that she took the honour. The runner-up for 1991 was newspaper publisher Aydin Dogan, who paid taxes of 550,000 dollars.

Rabin foresees Palestinian autonomy, if elected

LONDON, Apr 17: Yitzak Rabin, leader of Israel's opposition Labour Party, told the Independent newspaper today that he envisaged Palestinian autonomy within six to twelve months if elected Prime Minister on June 23, reports AFP.

The limited self-rule would run for a transitional period of five years, during which time the Palestinians would run all their affairs with the exception of security and foreign relations, he told the British paper.

The Palestinian uprising or Intifada "gave self-respect to the Palestinians in the territories," he said, refusing to rule out a fully independent Palestinian state in the long

term. In common with all mainstream Israeli political leaders, Rabin, whose party has a strong lead in the opinion polls, had always previously rejected the setting up of an independent Palestinian state.

Pressed on the issue, he said he would rule out a Palestinian state for the present but would not rule it out for the future. "I am not saying the Palestinians have no rights to aspire to," he said.

However, Rabin said he would not put a complete freeze on settlements if elected in June. He would maintain the right to build in strategic locations such as the Golan Heights, the Jordan valley and east Jerusalem, he said.

Suicide rate jumps in Russian army

MOSCOW, Apr 17: Russian military personnel are committing suicide today at a rate equal to that during the great purges of 1937, Itar-Tass news agency reported Thursday, says AFP.

It quoted military specialist Colonel Alexandre Zhuskevich as saying stress was to blame.

In 1989 suicides accounted for 1.9 per cent of deaths in the army, the agency said. In 1991 the figure was up to 21.9 per cent, during the first three months of 1992, suicides in the Russian army represented 38 percent of all deaths.

Three-quarters of today's suicides are suffering no known physical or psychological ailments, and thus must be explained by social causes, said the news agency.