

# China's 'help' in Myanmar's naval build-up worries India

YANGON, Dec 2: Myanmar is building a new naval base in the Irrawaddy Delta and upgrading other facilities at both ends of its coast, developments that have worried India because of possible Chinese involvement, diplomats said, reports Reuters.

China has already become a major arms supplier to the Yangon military government as it embarks on an expansion of its armed forces.

A new naval base is being constructed at Hanggyi island at the mouth of the Bassac River, diplomats said.

It is also believed that existing facilities at Sittwe, near the Bangladesh border, and Mergui on the southern isthmus near the Thai border, are being improved.

A base on great Coco Island, just north of India's and Aman islands, is also being upgraded, diplomats believe.

No one is really sure what they are doing, said an Asian diplomat.

"India is worried and ASEAN should be worried too," he added.

ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, groups Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

Senior Foreign Ministry official A Aye, while giving no details of any programme, said a naval build-up was necessary because of increased poaching by Thai fishing boats in Myanmar waters.

The government sporadically battles Karen ethnic rebels in the Irrawaddy Delta and wanted to block any attempts by the Karen, whose main forces are along the Thai border from linking up with Muslim rebels in Arakan state in the West, he said.

They can certainly justify

having more patrol boats but there would be no justification for a blue-water fleet, said another diplomat.

He said it was believed that China had made a generous offer to assist in building the marine base but it seemed to have been turned down.

A Aye flatly denied that China was in any way involved in the programme.

Indian concern centres on whether Beijing's vessels would be allowed to use the facilities.

"The Chinese have helped them a lot in arms purchases and shielding them at the United Nations, the second diplomat said.

"The Myanmar know they owe Beijing a lot and the debt will be called in, he said. But he added that it was unlikely Myanmar would give China access.

But a third diplomat said a small group of Chinese techni-

cal advisers had visited Hanggyi.

China has recently built three roads over the border from its southern Yunnan province to towns in northern Myanmar.

Myanmar's latest military acquisitions from China are two Y-8 transport planes, similar to the West's C-130, diplomats say.

They were delivered four months ago as part of a 1.2 billion US dollar arms deal that includes tanks and patrol boats.

Defence experts say some of the equipment is of poor quality.

The army is also in the process of almost doubling its size to about 300,000 men, diplomats say.

Government officials say the build-up is necessary because of the several ethnic insurgencies it is fighting.

# Carlos rules out another coup

CARACAS (Venezuela), Dec 2: President Carlos Andres Perez said Tuesday the loyalty of the military rules out the possibility of a third coup attempt against his administration, reports AP.

"There will be no new coup in Venezuela," he told a news conference.

Perez, who vowed to continue the tough, unpopular economic measures, said that the bulk of the armed forces gave "absolute proof of loyalty" during two coup attempts this year.

Friday's coup attempt, which along with a related prison riot claimed at least 232 lives, lasted longer than a similar attempt in February.

Perez's economic measures have included eliminating subsidies and the sale of many government-owned businesses. When they were announced in 1989, Perez's first year of his second term, riots claimed an estimated 300 lives.

Perez said several times he would not resign or permit the date for presidential elections, scheduled for December.

# Charles bans Diana from US tour

LONDON, Dec 2: The Sun reported Wednesday that Prince Charles has banned Princess Diana from going with him to the United States next February because he cannot face putting their marriage in the spotlight again, reports AP.

The London tabloid in what it tagged an exclusive said Diana had been telling friends how much she looked forward to the planned trip in February to the United States, "where she gets a superstar welcome," and to Mexico.

But quoting unnamed "well-placed" sources, the Sun said that Charles subsequently decided to go alone on the tour.

The report follows months of speculation in London's tabloid press that the 11-year-old marriage of Charles, 44, the eldest son and heir to Queen Elizabeth II, and Diana, 31, is on the rocks.

The Sun said the move over the tour is further evidence of deep divisions between the couple.

It reported that two weeks ago friends close to the couple said they would be touring together in a show of unity.

"Since then, Charles has taken the dramatic decision to snub his wife, it reported.

"Well-placed sources say he told Diana that he was not prepared to endure another

starting November 2 at the invitation of President Roh Tae-woo, combining a state visit with promotion of British trade.

London tabloids covering that trip concentrated almost entirely on the couple's alleged marriage problems, publishing pictures of them looking unsmilingly away from each other.

The Sun quoted in unnamed Buckingham Palace spokesperson as saying there is nothing unusual in Charles traveling without his wife since "both have a full individual programme."

The Sun said the Mexican Embassy in London had confirmed that Charles and Diana were originally invited by President Carlos Salinas to visit Mexico together.

The Mexican Foreign Ministry said Monday that Charles would pay an official visit to Mexico next February. But no details of dates or itinerary has been issued for Charles' visit there or to the United States.

Charles visited the United States without Diana in February 1990. She visited the United States without Charles in February 1989. Their most recent trip to the United States together was in November 1985.



Diana: Signing off after the disastrous trip to South Korea, their marriage problems would be exposed again. Charles and Diana made a four-day visit to South Korea

# BRIEFLY

**Blasts claim 3 in Kashmir:** Three powerful bombs exploded in rapid succession in a crowded market in a Kashmir town, killing three people and injuring 23, police said Wednesday, reports AP from Jammu.

A truck and a fruit shop were destroyed in Tuesday's blasts at Bishnah, 22 kilometers (13 miles) southeast of Jammu, winter capital of Jammu-Kashmir state, said police chief Surinder Singh Wazir.

Eighteen people were hospitalized, three of them in critical condition, he said. The explosions were triggered by timing devices, Wazir said.

No one claimed responsibility for the blasts, but Wazir said the attack could have been carried out by either Muslim militants or Sikh guerrillas from neighboring Punjab state.

**80 seek asylum in Canada:** Eighty citizens of various former Soviet republics requested political asylum in Canada Tuesday during a stopover on a flight from Russia to Cuba, Canadian immigration authorities said, reports AFP from Gander.

The asylum seekers, who arrived on an Acroflot flight, refused to reboard the plane after it stopped to refuel.

They brought to 2,180 the number of people who this year in Gander sought political asylum, compared to the record of 2,894 set in 1989, according to immigration spokesman Paul Green.

The new arrivals were put up in Gander hotels until their cases can be brought before Canadian immigration officials.

**8 die in Peruvian plane mishap:** The two Peruvian air force bombers collided over this coastal city Tuesday, sending one of the aircraft spiralling into a city street below, killing at least eight people and injuring some 250 others, police said, reports AFP from Peru.

Hospital sources said the dead included the Canberra bomber's crew of two air force majors, as well as five children and a police sergeant killed while they were crossing the street in a densely-populated business area.

Pisco is on the Pacific, 240 kilometers (150 miles) south of Lima. Authorities said about 20 of the injured were transferred to Lima for emergency treatment.

The bomber that crashed was on a routine flight mission, travelling with three identical aircraft, officials said.

**18 Sikhs shot dead:** Government troops shot and killed 18 suspected Sikh militants Wednesday in the northwestern state of Punjab during a search for the separatist rebels, a news agency reported, says AP from Delhi.

The militants were hiding in sugar cane fields in Fategarh Samrah village near the Pakistan border when troops gunned them down, United News of India news agency reported.

Details of Operation "Chase and Neutralize" were not immediately available.

The Congress Party state government, which came to power in February, has cracked down on the decade-old Sikh militancy, which has claimed more than 15,000 lives so far.

**2 Malaysian ships sink:** Two Malaysian ships sank Tuesday in the South China Sea because of rough weather, maritime officials said, reports AP from Kuala Lumpur.

Harbor master Hamzah Mohamed Noor said the Malaysian-registered 587-ton Luconia sank at 6:30 pm (1030 GMT) Tuesday about 27 nautical miles off the coast of Desaru in Malaysia's southern Johore state. The ship was en route to Brunei from Malaysia's Port Klang.

Its 11 Malaysian and three Indonesian crew were rescued by the Russian trawler NV Lensk and were taken to Singapore.

The Luconia's mishap following the sinking earlier Tuesday of the 1,596-ton Malaysian-registered Seng Heng also in the South China Sea.

The ship was about 83 nautical miles from Tanjung Penyusup off the Johore coast while carrying timber from Kuching in Malaysian Sarawak state on Borneo island to Singapore.

# Tamils kill 12 Lankan soldiers

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Dec 2: Tamil Tiger rebels fired mortars and grenades at army bunkers in north-central Sri Lanka, killing at least 12 soldiers and wounding five, military officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Many buildings were damaged in the attack at Katupotha, 180 kilometers (112 miles) north of Colombo, said officials at the Joint Operations Command.

Troops forced back the rebels in the three-hour battle, which began Tuesday night, said the officials, who cannot be identified under briefing rules.

# Germans launching defence hotlines for foreigners

BONN, Germany, Dec 2: Fed up with neo-Nazi attacks and the government's seeming inability to deal with them, average citizens throughout Germany are launching neighbourhood watch groups and defence hotlines for foreigners, reports AP.

"This can be a real alternative to what's reportedly going on now with people arming themselves," said Brigitte Erler, chairman of a newly founded group called SOS Racism. "If we say we'll protect you, or we'll do this together, then it's not necessary for people to arm themselves."

Scared and angry Turks are arming themselves in self-defense. A prominent author of Jewish descent, Ralph Giordano, has even suggested it's time for Jews in Germany to defend themselves, prompting Chancellor Helmut Kohl last week to warn that only the state can use force to fight crime.

Taking matters into their own hands instead of taking up arms, representatives of Germany's Jewish, Turkish and business communities joined with others Tuesday to launch

a nationwide programme called "Action Courage."

Like the Danes who wore yellow stars in solidarity with their Jewish neighbours in World War II, the campaign is calling on all Germans to wear either its buttons, emblazoned with the world "courage," or large safety pins as signs of help to foreigners and warning to neo-Nazis.

In addition, "Action Courage" proposes nationwide use of a neighbourhood telephone network to alert a large number of people in a short time to respond to an attack on foreigners. The first person to learn of an attack calls whoever's nearest the scene, then the police, then, one other person who passes along the warning, while the original caller heads to the site. The process is repeated among a prepared list of "defenders" until as many people as possible are notified and at the scene, Ms Erler explained.

Such a telephone network is already being used in dozens of areas where refugee homes are located, she said, "and it's working great in some places."

Many recent firebombings of asylum centres have caused no injuries and little damage, usually because of quick response by someone at the home or in the area, police have said.

Another proposal is for communities to set up a 24-hour "foreigner phone" that people can call either when they've been threatened or need help battling discrimination.

"Practically every foreigner and now also the Jews here live in fear and justifiably so," Ms Erler said. "We hope these actions, the buttons and the telephone network, can alleviate the fear."

Twenty organizations — from youth and church groups to Germany's largest union, IG Metall — have joined in "Action Courage." And Ms Erler said her group is in contact with over 2,000 initiatives that have sprung up since the threatening upswing of neo-Nazi attacks began last summer.

"We Jews have learned from the past how effective it can be when people come together to reject violence," said Michael Lawton of the

# Palestinians urge Arabs to boycott talks with Israel

JEDDAH, Dec 2: Palestinian delegates have urged their frontline Arab partners to boycott peace talks with Israel next week but a decision is not expected before Friday, Arab diplomats said.

"We are for postponing the next round because there is no benefit because of Israel's position, PLO executive committee member Yasser Abed-Rabbo told Reuters.

He was speaking after foreign ministers of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria and a Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) representative met on Tuesday on the margins of an Islamic conference to coordinate positions ahead for the eighth round of negotiations launched more than a year ago.

Sources at the talks in Jeddah said the Arab delegations agreed to meet again in Beirut on Friday after Jordan, Lebanon and Syria said they were willing to attend the December 7 meeting in Washington despite the lack of real progress.

The Palestinians charge Israel has offered no real concessions at the talks so far, refusing to accept the Palestinians' right to self-

termination and setting up a state of their own Israel has only offered them self-rule for an interim period.

Abed-Rabbo said the Palestinians were waiting to receive written answers from the American sponsors of the Arab-Israeli talks about their concerns. He did not specify what they were.

He said they feared the next round of talks would again be devoid of substance and complained that Washington was not putting enough pressure on Israel to comply with the ground rules of the peace process, based on the UN Security Council's land for peace resolutions.

Delegates said Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the only Arab state to have signed a treaty with Israel, were urging Palestinians not to boycott the next round.

They have to attend even if not much is achieved. The Palestinians have the most to lose, an Arab diplomat close to the peace talks said.

Acting US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger was reported on Monday to have sent a harsh note to both Israel and the Palestinians, telling them they shared in the

blame for the slow pace of Middle East peace talks.

The Israeli Daily Maariv newspaper said Eagleburger had urged both sides not to wait for President-elect Bill Clinton to take over late in January because he intended to maintain the same Middle East policies as the outgoing Bush administration.



An Israeli soldier guarding the Allenby Bridge in West Bank on Tuesday connecting Israel and Jordan, stands next to a sign saying 'May Peace Prevail on Earth' as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin dedicates a new bridge terminal. —AFP/UNB photo

# Fresh fighting in Angola

LUANDA, Angola, Dec 2: Jonas Savimbi's UNITA rebels have captured two strategic towns and military bases in fierce battles, gaining a foothold in mineral-rich northeastern Angola, reports AP.

The rebels captured Negage on Tuesday after a three-day battle with government troops, government radio said.

The city, 240 kilometers (150 miles) north of Luanda, is the headquarters of the government's northern air command. On Monday the rebels took nearby Uige, the provincial capital, and its military base, the radio said.

The fighting further dampens hope for peace after more than a decade of civil war. Clashes broke out after Savimbi refused to accept his group's loss to the government party in September elections.

A government military source said Tuesday that losses were heavy on both sides in the fighting. He termed the battle for Negage fiercest since a three-day battle a month ago left 2,500 dead in the capital, Luanda.

Control of Negage's air base and Uige's military base gives

Savimbi's Union for the Total Independence of Angola a powerful hold on the northeast, gateway to the country's diamonds and oil.

Fighting continued Tuesday around Negage, located 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of Uige.

UNITA and government representatives were scheduled to meet again this week to arrange direct talks between Savimbi and President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and arrange terms for the rebels to join a government of national unity.

But a government official said negotiations were not possible when the other side was making war.

UNITA information officer Jorge Valentim said Tuesday that the attacks were the work of regional commanders, who he said had been ordered to stop fighting.

Valentim said Savimbi was still in control of UNITA forces and blamed poor communication with troops in the field for the fighting.

The government rejected the explanation. In Washington, the United States, which once strongly supported UNITA, accused the rebel group of systematically using military operations over the past two months to seize territory and to destabilize Angola.

# Khmer Rouge kidnaps six peacekeepers

PHNOM PENH (Cambodia), Dec 2: The Khmer Rouge kidnapped six UN peacekeepers in central Cambodia after accusing the men of spying for the government, a UN spokesman said Wednesday, reports AP.

The men — three from Britain, two from the Philippines and one from New Zealand — were being held near Kompong Thom, 140 kilometers (85 miles) north of Phnom Penh, at noon Wednesday, said spokesman Eric Falt. He said UN officials in Phnom Penh had been in constant radio contact with the observers and they said they were unharmed.

Meanwhile, five UN peacekeepers were injured Wednesday morning when their vehicles ran over freshly laid anti-tank mines on a well-travelled road near Siem Reap, 225 kilometers (140 miles) northwest of Phnom Penh, Falt said.

UN peacekeepers, here to guide the country through democratic elections by May, have come under attack in recent weeks as tensions have risen throughout Cambodia.

# Off the Record

## Condom dispenser in Israeli parliament

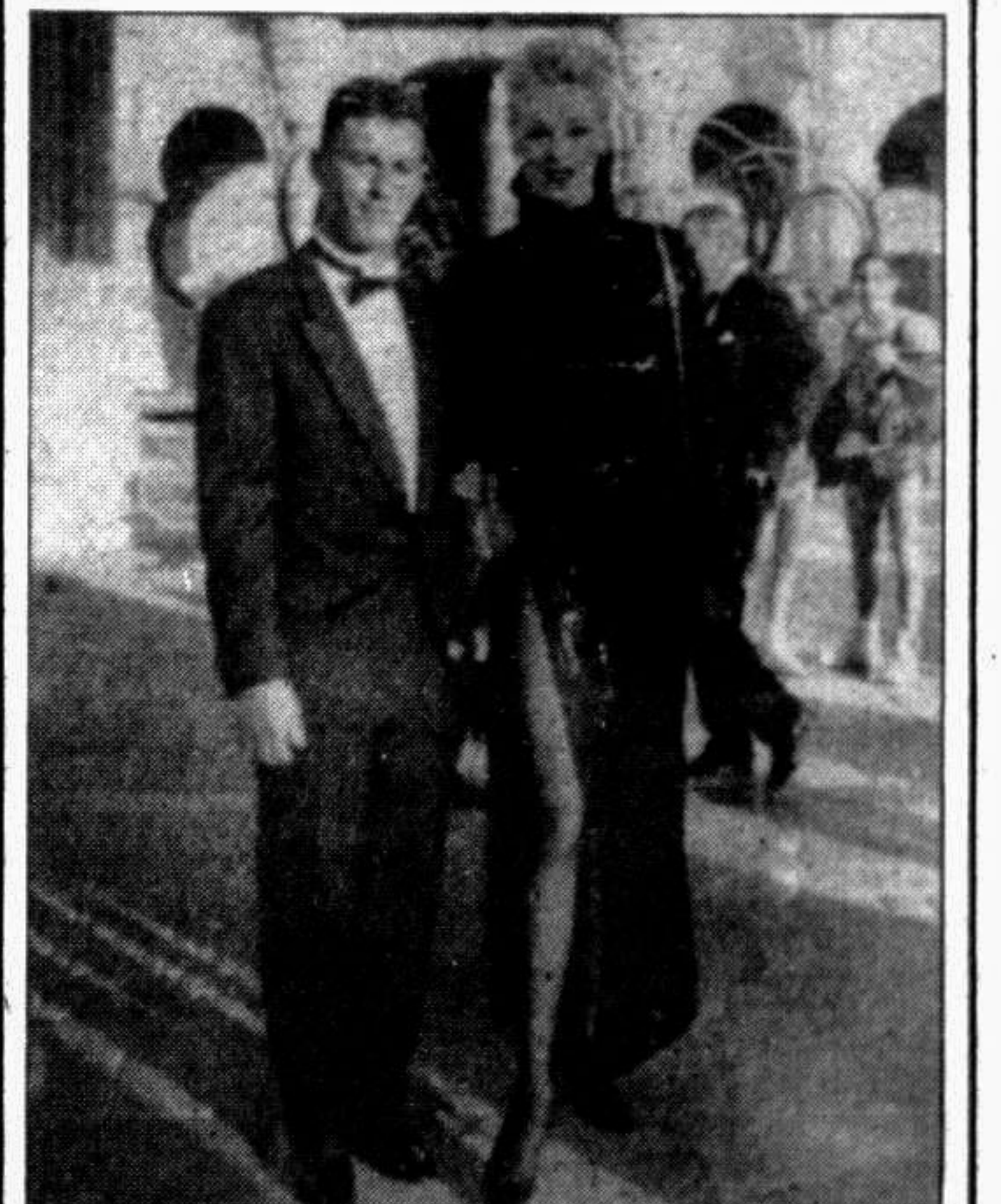
JERUSALEM: Members of the parliamentary committee on education learned Tuesday that AIDS awareness begins at home when they discovered a condom dispenser in the committee room, reports AP.

Committee chairman Avraham Burg installed the dispenser to mark World AIDS awareness day. One religious lawmaker walked out in protest while others protested Burg's "vulgarity."

"I am ashamed even to pronounce this word, 'Condom,'" legislator Rabbi Yosef Ba-Gad thundered on Israel radio, justifying his walkout.

A decision by the Labour-led government to allow condom dispensers in secular high schools has raised religious ire, although the machines will not be installed in religious schools.

"Promiscuity reigns, and it should not be allowed to overflow into the school grounds as well," a National Religious Party statement declared.



SUN CITY, South Africa: Bright Nielsen (R), ex-wife of US movie star Sylvester Stallone, poses with her new friend Raoul Mayer on Monday before the start of French composer Jean Michel Jarre's concert, which will open "The Lost City," a new touristic resort. —AFP/UNB photo

# Panic to run for presidency

BELGRADE, Dec 2: Moderate Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Panic declared on Tuesday he would run against hardline nationalist Slobodan Milosevic for the Serbian presidency — and pledged to "save Serbia" if elected, reports Reuters.

"It's time for a change. That is why I am running for president," Panic, 62, told reporters in Belgrade.

"A vote for Milan Panic is a vote to restore the rightful place and reputation of Serbia among the nations of the world. A vote for Milan Panic is a vote to save Serbia."

Milosevic, President since 1989, is widely seen abroad as the man to blame for the break-up of Yugoslavia and the bloodshed that has ravaged Croatia and Bosnia.