

China asks officials to avoid contact with HK

HONG KONG, Dec 12: Chinese officials have been told to avoid any contacts with Hong Kong officials until Gov. Chris Patten withdraws his proposals to increase democracy in the territory, a prominent pro-Beijing legislator said Saturday, reports AP.

"I've heard that the local officials from China have instructions from Beijing not to be in the same forum or same dinner party even with Hong Kong officials," said Allen Lee, convenor of the Cooperative Resources Center political group.

The relationship between the two places has deteriorated to the extent that they can't even talk to each other. Without China's cooperation, Hong Kong will have no future, Lee said.

Earlier Saturday, local media reported that Chinese officials

cancelled a visit to Beijing later this month by Hong Kong Attorney-General Jeremy Mathews because of the escalating dispute.

Chinese officials were not immediately available for comment on the reports.

China and Britain have been engaged in an escalating war of words over how to handle this British colony's transfer to Communist Chinese control in 1997.

The two sides concluded three days of talks in Hong Kong Thursday having failed to make any progress. The sour mood was punctuated by the fact that no joint communiqué was issued and that separate news conferences were held.

China doesn't want to see more democracy here because it fears more freedom will spark dissent at home.



A group of US marines take a break under the burning sun after they unloaded their gear at Mogadishu airport on Friday to take part in 'Operation Restore Hope' in this poverty and war-stricken country at the horn of Africa.

Yeltsin starts fresh talks with hardliners

MOSCOW, Dec 12: Boris Yeltsin has begun new talks with hard-line lawmakers to end Russia's worst political turmoil since the Soviet collapse, reports AP.

Yeltsin is demanding that his reformist prime minister stay at work at least until April. The president was expected to open talks Saturday with the parliament speaker and faction leaders. The 1,041-member Congress of People's Deputies is dominated by Communists elected in partially free balloting in 1990.

Yeltsin met for about an hour Friday evening with speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov, who has orchestrated the attacks on Yeltsin's powers and on Acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, the architect of market reforms.

The Congress stalemate turned to turmoil when lawmakers rejected Gaidar as prime minister on Wednesday, despite Yeltsin's offer in earlier talks to let them control some Cabinet posts in return for approving the nomination.

A burned Yeltsin shot back Thursday with a call for a nationwide vote of confidence in the Congress, a step that could lead to new parliamentary elections and possibly the removal of many hard-line lawmakers.

The Congress on Friday undercut Yeltsin's call by changing Russian law to bar such referendums. That deepened the deadlock, and the sides agreed to start negotiations away from the glare of parliamentary lights and microphones. Reuter adds: President

Yeltsin said on Friday that he would offer no candidate for head of government other than acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar. Yeltsin's spokesman said.

Spokesman Vyacheslav Kostikov said in a statement that the President, in talks with representatives of the Congress of People's Deputies, had "repeated that he is not prepared to nominate any other candidate for the post of Prime Minister."

Kostikov said Yeltsin had suggested, as an alternative, that Congress accept Gaidar continuing in his present post of acting Premier until April.

Yeltsin was reported by Itar-Tass as saying the talks focused on procedural and technical questions.

BRIEFLY

Prabhakaran's aide killed: Major David, described as a close confidant of Prabhakaran who is the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), was killed by security forces in eastern Batticaloa Friday, reports Xinhua from Colombo.

David was the LTTE's political chief for Batticaloa and its chief agricultural instructor, reports reaching Colombo said Saturday.

The reports said that he was killed by the security forces while he was riding his motorcycle with a companion to attend a propaganda meeting.

David had been given military training abroad and played a key role in rebel activities of the LTTE fighting to set up a separate state of minority Tamils in the north and east of the island country.

Caputo Ghali's special envoy: Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali Friday named former Argentine Foreign Minister Dante Caputo as his special envoy to Haiti, the United Nations announced yesterday, reports AFP from UN.

Caputo, now a congressman, will arrive in New York next week to meet with Boutros-Ghali ahead of his first mission, UN spokesman Joe Sills said.

Caputo, who served as foreign minister between 1983-89 and as president of the UN General Assembly in 1988, said in Argentina he was "personally honoured" by the appointment and that he would act as a mediator in Haiti.

3 beheaded in Saudi Arabia: A Saudi woman, her daughter and a Saudi man were beheaded on Friday in two separate cases of murder and drug smuggling in the conservative kingdom, Gulf news agencies said, reports Reuter from Dubai.

They quoted a Saudi Interior Ministry statement as saying Muttal Al-Amrani was beheaded for smuggling drugs into the kingdom.

Aisha Al-Zuebi and her mother Noura were beheaded in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia for shooting dead Aisha's father while he was sleeping.

Under the strict sharia Islamic law in force in Saudi Arabia, rapists, murderers and drug traffickers are beheaded in public, while convicted thieves usually have their hands, amputated.

Algerian policeman shot dead: Gunmen shot dead a police officer shopping at a market Friday, the first killing of a member of the security forces since a curfew took effect a week ago, reports AP from Algiers.

The policeman was killed during daylight hours in Ben Zerga, east of the capital, one of the regions under a 10 pm to 5:30 am (2100 to 0430 GMT) nightly curfew authorities said.

The gunmen were not identified, but suspicion fell on armed Islamic fundamentalists whose attacks have killed more than 250 police officers and soldiers over the past year.

The killing indicated that the fundamentalists retain the capability to carry out terror acts despite the curfew, aimed at breaking the armed Islamic opposition to the government.

French writer dead: Jacques Perret, a writer who twisted the tongues of generations of students learning French, has died at the age of 91, his family announced Friday, reports AP from Paris.

The author reportedly died Thursday at a hospital in the Paris region. Cause of death and funeral arrangements were not disclosed.

Perret fought in the French army against Moroccan tribesmen in the 1920s and spent World War II as a prisoner of war, inspiring his best-known work, "Le Caporal Epingle," or "The Nabbed Corporal."

The novel nearly won France's prestigious Prix Goncourt in 1947, and was awarded the Grand Prix de la Ville de Paris in 1979. A film version was made in 1962.

10 killed in Bangkok road incidents: Over ten people were killed in road incidents in Bangkok during the past two weeks, forcing the city's traffic police to tighten traffic law, reports Xinhua from Bangkok.

A chartered bus, carrying no passenger, went out of control and slammed into a bus top near the city's northern bus terminal Friday afternoon, killing five pedestrians.

The incident came only one week after a fatal road incident occurred on December 3 in Bangkok, in which four young school children and a school van driver were killed. Those two major road incidents have forced the traffic police to enforce tighter laws in the city, which has about a 6 million population and about 2 million vehicles.

Lankan opposition protests police attack on MPs

COLOMBO, Dec 12: The Sri Lankan opposition launched a protest campaign here Friday evening in retaliation for the police attacks on several opposition MPs, journalists and others in Colombo Thursday, reports Xinhua.

The island, reported today that armed police here Thursday fired into the air, tear-gassed and baton-charged a demonstration at the slave island area in Colombo organised to mark the United Nations Human Rights Day.

Over a dozen of demonstrators including some journalists covering Thursday's protest were injured and hospitalised. A crowd gathering Friday evening shouted slogans along with the opposition.

US marines won't leave Somalia before Clinton takes over

BRUSSELS, Dec 12: US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney said on Friday, he hoped most American troops would leave Somalia within three months, reports Reuter.

He added however that a force of marines could stay off the coast to back up UN peacekeepers. Cheney, addressing a new conference after a NATO meeting defended the killing of two Somalis by French troops after a vehicle tried to ram a barricade in Mogadishu. He said US troops would do the same if they felt threatened. US troops are spearheading a 35,000-strong force drawn from about 17 countries, to safeguard food supplies and alleviate one of the worst famines this century.

Asked when the US marines would leave Somalia, Cheney said they would not be out by January 20 when President elect Bill Clinton assumes power.

"If you are asking me will every single American be out of Somalia within two months? No. Will the bulk of the forces we are putting in there be gone within three months? We hope so," Cheney said.

But he said the withdrawal might begin "by the latter part of January" if everything went well.

Announcing the decision to send over 28,000 troops to Somalia last week, outgoing President George Bush said the intention was for them to hand over the job to a UN peace-keeping force possibly before Clinton takes over.

Cheney said the United States was prepared to deploy off the Somali coast an amphibious readiness group of about 1,500 marines backed by helicopter gunships.

It could come to the aid of UN peacekeepers if they run into problems after US forces pull out he said.

"We are prepared to leave behind a residue of specialists and some combat capability off the coast should that be warranted in order to support a sustained UN effort to maintain peace and security."

Specialists would include logistics and combat support units many other nations did not possess, Cheney said.

In Washington, a senior official said on Thursday the US role in Somalia was already expanding beyond its original humanitarian limits and Washington was under pressure to take on more and more tasks in the east African Nation.

The State Department official, who spoke to Reuters on condition he not be identified, said getting US troops out of Somalia was likely to become a big problem for Clinton.

Asking about the shooting incident, Cheney dismissed calls for the French legionaries

to be held responsible for Thursday's incident.

"Certainly these situations are always regrettable but any suggestion that the troops in any way have conducted themselves in an irresponsible manner or used excessive force would be inaccurate," he said, "I simply don't share that view."

"If... a couple of Somalis charged through a road bloc and refused to stop then certainly I would think that our people would justify it in defending themselves against what they thought was perhaps a potentially hostile act."

He said weapons were in the hands of irresponsible people who had interfered with relief supplies or were high on drugs. "It is a potentially dangerous situation in our people... will take whatever measures to defend themselves."

Benazir exploiting Babri mosque issue : Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Dec 12: Pakistani Opposition Leader Benazir Bhutto on Friday demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, while Sharif accused her of exploiting the destruction of a mosque in India for her political ends, reports Reuter.

The two political foes held rival all-party conferences in Islamabad and Lahore to discuss the demolition by Hindu revivalists of a 16th century mosque in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya on Sunday, which prompted an explosion of sectarian violence.

Sharif condemned what he called the martyrdom of the mosque, accused India of failing to keep its word to protect it and demanded it be rebuilt.

In a televised address to the nation on Friday evening,

Sharif issued a second invitation to the opposition to evolve a joint strategy.

"People must judge as to which politicians give priority to personal ends over national interests, as to who was a true servant of Islam as against those who were using Islam only as a political slogan, Sharif said.

He said the destruction of the mosque had persuaded him to put aside a political confrontation with Bhutto, who last month launched a long march aimed at ousting him, and he called for the opposition to show wisdom and hold talks.

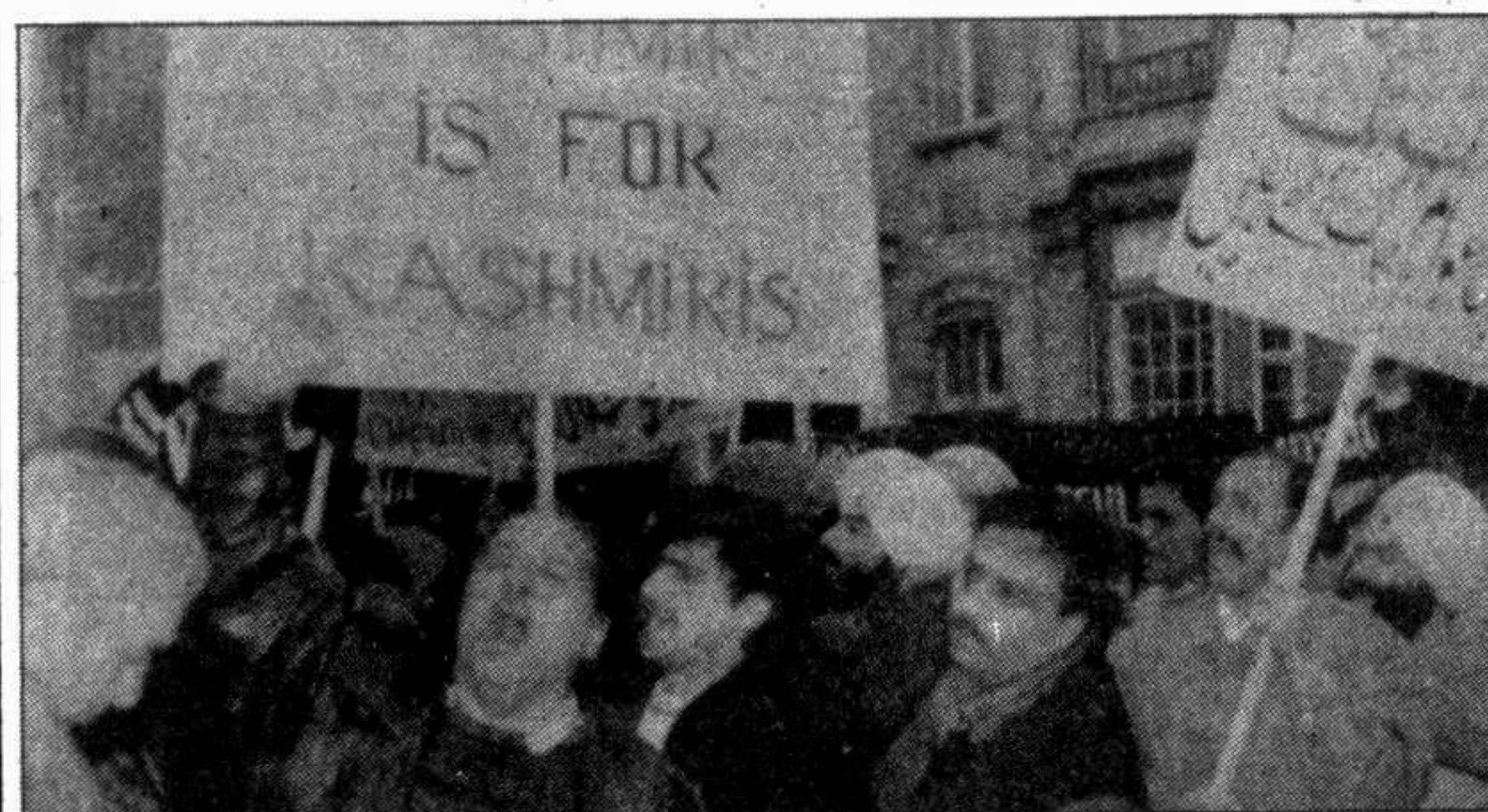
But Bhutto and other opposition leaders in Lahore demanded his government step down.

Sharif said his government

would rebuild Hindu temples wrecked by angry Pakistani Muslims in revenge for the razing of the mosque in India, and condemned the violence. He said compensation would be paid for deaths and damage.

At least 24 people died this week when crowds attacked more than 100 Hindu temples and two churches in the southern province of Sind, where most of Pakistan's minority Hindus live. Dozens, more temples were damaged in other parts of the country.

Bhutto called a news conference at which she snubbed Sharif's invitation to the opposition and accused him of failing to take preventive measures to protect the mosque. She demanded his immediate resignation and fresh elections.



Indian Muslims shout in front of the Indian embassy in Belgium on Friday while holding banners reading: "Kashmir is for Kashmiris." The demonstrators were demanding autonomy of Kashmir.

Yeltsin's top aide fired

MOSCOW, Dec 12: President Boris Yeltsin fired a top aide Saturday in an apparent concession to hard-liners amid negotiations to try to resolve Moscow's worst political turmoil since the Soviet collapse, reports AP.

Yeltsin dismissed Gennady Burbulis, who had been head of his advisers, shortly before the closed-door talks got under way in the Kremlin, deputy presidential spokesman Dmitry Ardamatsky said.

Valery Zorkin, chief judge of Russia's Constitutional Court, was acting as a mediator in Saturday's talks. Before the talks began, Zorkin told the Congress that the political situation was "rather dangerous" and urged the lawmakers not to take any steps to worsen it.

Hard-liners had demanded the removal of Burbulis, widely regarded as Yeltsin's chief political strategist and closest aide since 1989.

Delhi press report unfounded: China

BEIJING, Dec 12: A Chinese official spokesman Saturday described as "totally unfounded" a report in a New Delhi daily that had said China was to train militants in Pakistan for operations inside Punjab, reports PTI.

The report which appeared on Wednesday had said three top militants had visited China in mid-October and met Chinese officials and that currently Chinese personnel were in Pakistan to train some 40 militants.

"This report is totally unfounded" a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said when asked to comment.

Off the Record

Never mind that he is an ex-leader

MEXICO CITY: It could have been a rock concert: 10,000 wild student fans chanting "Gorby! Gorby!" as the black limousine pulled up outside an open-air stadium. The crowd roared its delight, reports AP.

Last month Elton John and rock group U2 tore down the rafters. This week it was Mikhail Gorbachev and wife Raisa sweeping through Latin America to cheers and applause — cashing in on Gorby Fever.

Never mind that he is the ex-leader of an ex-empire. Gorbachev was still packing the crowds he did as leader of the Soviet Union — wooing audiences on a tour of Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico.

And as raised funds for his private Gorbachev Foundation on his first Latin American tour, he did it in style.

"The totalitarian monster is nearly finished," said Gorbachev in a rousing speech to 10,000 students Friday on the campus of Mexico City's Anahuac University.

"But the fight is not yet over," he said to loud applause as he defended his reforms and blamed the failed Soviet coup of August 1991 for unraveling efforts to transform the Soviet Union into a modern superpower.

He appealed for "new leadership" in Russia and the will to surmount political crises gripping the country. Students attended free Friday, but some Gorbachev appearances cost — 500 dollar a head for one gala reception in Mexico's northern industrial city of Monterrey.

Maternal jealousy

ORLANDO, Florida: Police were searching on Friday for a woman who allegedly tried to infect her 2-year-old daughter with the AIDS virus by repeatedly biting the toddler in a bizarre case of maternal jealousy, reports Reuter.

Police photographs show dozens of bite marks covering the child's arms and shoulders, neck and back. Investigators believe the woman tried to give her daughter AIDS last October because she didn't want the child's grandmother caring for the little girl.

The 21-year-old woman is wanted on attempted murder and child abuse charges. Her whereabouts are unknown.

The girl is now in custody of Florida state child welfare officials and has been tested for AIDS, but the results are not yet known.

Shopkeepers strike to protest his hunting

QUETTA: Shopkeepers in a small town in Pakistan closed their stores to protest against a hunting trip by the governor of a Saudi Arabian region local officials said on Friday, reports Reuter.

They said tribesmen at Dalbandin in Baluchistan province had also formed an action committee to protest against the hunting of Houbara Bustards while Pakistan was mourning the destruction of a 16th century mosque in Northern India by Hindu revivalists.

The Saudi governor was due to arrive Saturday for a month's hunting trip. His hunting party of more than 150 people was already camped near the desert town.

A government official said the protest was aimed at winning Arab aid for the backward area. He said a meeting had been arranged with the governor during his visit to sort out the issue.

Jogging is most top secret!

WASHINGTON: Clinton, take it from someone who knows. You can shake the ever-present news media, reports AP.

Jimmy Carter says he did it. Regularly. "I jogged every day and that was one of the most top secrets that I had when I was in the White House," he said Thursday on CNN's "Larry King Live."

"We couldn't use radio communications among the Secret Service to determine when I was going to jog. We had to use a medium that the White House press reporters couldn't monitor."

"I went out and jogged outside the White House often — and within the White House grounds."

And, said Carter, he also ducked reporters and cameramen on weekends when he was supposedly at Camp David, the presidential retreat in the Maryland mountains.

Will Clinton be another Kennedy or Jimmy Carter?

WASHINGTON, Dec 12: Will Bill Clinton be another John F. Kennedy, who at 43 was the youngest man ever to win election to the US presidency, was the symbol of a new generation that initiated a wave of civil rights and poverty reforms, and who brought an assertiveness to US power worldwide? reports IPS.

Or will he be another Jimmy Carter, the last Democratic president, whose constant efforts to reconcile different parts of his political coalition amid rapid global changes ultimately crashed against galloping inflation and a rightwing tide led by Ronald Reagan?

The two questions dominate political talk in Washington now that the Arkansas governor has ended

the Democrats' 12-year exile from the White House.

But the 46-year-old president-elect is not saying much from his state's capital of Little Rock, where he is closeted away with his family and his closest advisers.

Hungry for even the smallest hints on who might be in or out in the coming administration, reporters and analysts are contenting themselves with rumours and speculation.

The problem is that Clinton, like any good politician, was able throughout his campaign to assure every faction in the traditionally fractious democratic party that he is on its side.

He was thus able to hole together a winning coalition that included middle- and working-class Whites and Blacks, the

oldest and youngest voters, foreign policy hawks and doves, pro-government liberals, Wall Street bankers, blue-collar protectionists and white-collar free traders.

All of these groups now believe Bill Clinton is on their side — or at least more on their side than the hapless outgoing president George Bush — and they expect him to prove it soon. So along with the speculation, expectations are also rising. Both Kennedy and Carter were also brought to office with similarly nebulous mandates. Kennedy was elected on the rather vague promise of getting "the country moving again" after eight years of bland Republican leadership.

Carter came in as "the final chapter of Watergate," as one

pundit put it — an outsider whose quiet Christian faith and unpretentious morality seemed fitted perfectly to redeem Washington from the scandal and real politics of Richard Nixon.

But they governed very differently in very different times. Kennedy, the brash young scion of the nation's leading Irish-American family, was a decisive leader. After hearing a range of views, he usually met with his closest aides, made a decision and stuck to it. He did not tolerate leaks or backbiting within the top ranks of his administration.

Carter, the Georgia engineer and peanut farmer, was known for welcoming input from all sources — and then anguishing over what to do.

Surrounded by strong per-

sonalities, he was perceived as being pushed and pulled in different directions as he tried to master every question. Disappointed policy-makers leaked infighting to the press which furthered the impression of disarray.

Kennedy also took power at a time of great generational change that has tended to manifest itself in major form movements in the United States about every 30 years.

Just as the progressive movement reached its height early this century in response to the excesses of the robber barons of the big banks and industry, and Franklin Roosevelt began the new deal after the Republican roaring 1920s, so Kennedy was poised to shake the country from its post-war lethargy.

Clinton now find himself compared with both presidents. Those who see him as a new Kennedy point not only to his youth, intelligence and gestures (which uncannily evoke the assassinated president), but also to the likelihood that Clinton could be the beneficiary of the 30-year cycle, particularly now that it is clear the Reagan (counter-) revolution has run its course.

Those who see Carter in Clinton note the southern roots, his tendency as governor to always seek the middle ground in policy disputes, the wide differences among those seen as his principal advisers on key issues of foreign policy and the economy, and the unhealed wounds of party battles fought long ago.

World Commission on Culture, Development

PARIS, Dec 12: The World Commission on Culture and Development was established Friday by UNESCO in cooperation with the United Nations, says a press release.

A number of international personalities were named as members by the Director-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, in collaboration with the Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and the President of the Commission, Javier Perez de Cuellar.

During a joint press conference with Perez de Cuellar on Friday the Director-General underlined that the objective of the commission is to strengthen the links between culture and development.