

Iran-Contra scandal Bush hires ex-Attorney Gen to represent him in investigation

WASHINGTON, Dec 31: President Bush has hired former Attorney General Griffin Bell to represent him in the ongoing investigation of the Iran-Contra affair, the White House announced Wednesday, reports AP.

tion, would "assume full responsibility for advising the president should the independent counsel fail to complete his investigation during the president's term in office."

Iran-Contra prosecutor Lawrence Walsh said earlier this week that Bush was a "subject" in the inquiry because the president failed to turn over notes to prosecutors. A "subject" is someone whose activities are under scrutiny in a criminal investigation.

It is unlikely that Walsh's investigation would be complete before Bush leaves office on Jan 20. Thus the president would need a private lawyer to advise him.

The White House said that Bush asked Walsh for a copy of the 1988 deposition on Dec 14 but was told by Walsh's office on Tuesday that the president could not have a copy of the document.

Walsh has said that the record of the 1988 interview is grand jury material and therefore subject to secrecy restrictions that bar him from providing it to anyone.

"The president hopes that Judge Bell's efforts will further his goal of putting his sworn testimony about the Iran-Contra matter before the American people," the announcement said.

"I'm glad the president will have the advice of an able lawyer who understands both litigation and the rule of law," Walsh said today in a statement.



GENEVA: Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) chief Yasser Arafat (L) and UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Ghali smiles for the photographers prior to their meeting in Geneva December 30. —AFP/UNB photo

Kim hopes to hold summit with DPRK

SEOUL, Dec 31: President-elect Kim Young-sam told a New Year's press conference he hopes to hold summit talks with rival North Korea which will lead to unification of the divided Korean peninsula, reports AP.

"I believe a South-North (Korea) summit is possible within my term and unification of our country will be realised within this century," Kim told Korean reporters Wednesday in remarks embargoed until Thursday.

Kim said his administration would focus on national security, minimising trade frictions and uniting the hostile Korean nations, divided since 1945.

Ghali's call to delay decision on use of force Western action will lead to allout war: Y'slav leaders

BELGRADE, (Yugoslavia), Dec 31: Yugoslav leaders have warned that Western military intervention in Bosnia will lead to all-out war. But even Britain's foreign secretary, a staunch opponent of military action, was becoming hawkish, reports AP.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali on Wednesday appealed for any decision on military force to wait until a meeting Saturday in Geneva between the three warring factions: ethnic Serbs, Croats and Muslims.

Lt Gen Satish Nambiar of India, commander of 23,000 UN peacekeepers across Yugoslavia and its former republics, also argued for further negotiations. But he acknowledged international patience was growing thin.

"There is a tolerance level which will break, and it is quite close to the breaking point," he told The Associated Press.

The failure of peace efforts has caused even staunch opponents of foreign intervention to rethink their options.

Britain's foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, told The Daily Telegraph newspaper he could envision armed action against the Serbs. He still dismissed bombing of Serb targets.

Temperatures remained below freezing in the city, which has been without electricity and water for three weeks. Residents have resorted to chopping down trees for firewood.

In Belgrade, the Yugoslav army chief of staff, Gen Zivota Panic predicted Western military intervention would only "spread the war." He said his army was preparing to repel

any foreign military intervention.

A Paris reports adds: A majority of French favour military intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, especially for humanitarian assistance, according to a poll published Wednesday.

Seventy-six per cent of those surveyed said there should be soldiers sent to the war-torn republic formerly in Yugoslavia to assure that humanitarian aid reaches the beleaguered population, said the study, conducted by the polling firm IFOF and the newspaper Le Parisien.

Seventy per cent said there should be military intervention to enforce a cease-fire, and 61 per cent said soldiers should forcibly end the fighting between Serbs and Croats.

BRIEFLY

LDP to open office in Washington: Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will soon open an office in Washington to establish contacts with the Bill Clinton administration and Congress, a Japanese newspaper said Thursday, reports Reuter from Tokyo.

The daily Asahi Shimbun said the LDP would start preparations next month for the office, which would arrange meetings with key US politicians and hire lobbyists to collect information.

Asahi said Hiroshi Mitsuzuka, head of the LDP policy research council, told a party meeting this month that such an office was needed in view of the tough trade policies Clinton was expected to take towards Japan.

Economists say Japan's trade surplus with the United States is likely to hit a record of about 45 billion dollar in 1992.

Diana to visit Nepal in March: Britain's Princess Diana, estranged wife of heir-to-throne Prince Charles, will visit Nepal in March to see how British aid is helping local people, a spokeswoman for the royal family said on Wednesday, reports Reuter from London.

"She will focus on the work of the leprosy mission, a cause close to the Princess's heart, and the British Red Cross," the Buckingham Palace spokeswoman said.

Britain gave the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal 7.5 million pounds (11.25 million dollar) in aid in 1991.

Diana and her two sons William, 10 and Harry, eight, flew to the Caribbean on Wednesday for a sunshine holiday break, leaving behind her husband from whom she separated earlier this month.

US donation to Latvia: The United States will donate 200,000 tonnes of corn to Latvia under a programme that encourages agricultural reform, the Agriculture Department said on Wednesday, reports Reuter from Washington.

Under terms of the food for progress agreement, Latvia will carry out measures to expand the role of the private sector and to improve food supplies.

Latvia, which will pay for shipping costs, would sell the corn to help develop private institutions and free markets.

The corn would be worth about 19 million dollar. 75 per cent of the corn will be shipped on US flag vessels.

Avalanches kill six in Turkey: Avalanches of snow and ice killed at least six people and injured 15 in northern and southeastern Anatolia, Turkish television said on Wednesday, reports Reuter from Istanbul.

It said heavy snow had cut village roads and some parts of eastern Turkey were covered with two metres (yards) of snow.

Three people died in northern Kastamonu province Wednesday when an avalanche hit Sihoglu village. Another avalanche struck Turkeli town of the Black Sea coast but there was no word on casualties, the television said.

Three more people were killed and 15 were injured by an avalanche at Semdinli in southeast Turkey on Tuesday, it added.

Prague, Bratislava set up ties: The Foreign Minister of the Czech lands and Slovakia established diplomatic ties between their two countries on Wednesday, on the eve of the breakup of the 74-year-old Czechoslovak federation, reports AFP from Prague.

Josef Zeleniec for the Czech republic and Milan Knazko for Slovakia exchanged diplomatic notes here to swap ambassadors from January 1, the news agency CTK reported.

Neither side has yet named their envoy to Prague and to Bratislava, the former coronation site of the kings of Hungary and which will become capital of Slovakia from midnight Thursday (eds 2300 GMT).

Zeleniec told a press conference on Tuesday he planned to make his first foreign trip as the Czech Foreign Minister early in January and would go to Slovakia.

'92 was a better year: Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 31: More than 1,000 soldiers were killed in the government's war against Tamil guerrillas this year and a drought slowed Shri Lanka's economic growth. Still, 1992 was a better year, authorities said Thursday, reports AP.

The military worst setbacks this year occurred when two top commanders were assassinated by suspected rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In August, a landmine killed the northern military commander, Lt Gen. Denzil Kobbekaduwa, and eight other officers, in northern Shri Lanka. And in November, a suicide bomber killed navy chief Vice Admiral Clancy Fernando in Colombo.

jured in the fighting. Government forces killed 2,876 rebels this year, he said, but the figure has not been independently confirmed.

Last year 968 soldiers were killed and the military estimated rebel deaths at 4,274.

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Tamils form 18 per cent of Shri Lanka's 17 million people. The rebels claim their people are discriminated against in jobs and education by the majority Sinhalese who account for 75 per cent of the population and control the government and military.

Ministers who reviewed the economy at a Cabinet meeting Wednesday recorded increases in exports, tourism and improvement in the banking sector. Cabinet spokesman Ranil Wickremasinghe said.

"Despite the drought adversely affecting agriculture and industries, the overall economic situation was satisfactory," Wickremasinghe told reporters.

Israel to withdraw troops from part of Golan

JERUSALEM, Dec 31: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said today Israel would withdraw its forces from part of the occupied Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Syria, reports Reuters.

Rabin referred to United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for Israel's withdrawal from occupied lands in exchange for peace in a speech to youth members of his Labour Party. His comments were broadcast by Israel radio.

"For peace with Syria I am ready to accept resolutions 242 and 338, which means withdrawal of Israeli forces, I stress, Israeli forces," Rabin said.

"But I will not discuss the extent of withdrawal until I get an answer from Syria what does peace mean for it. I want a peace that stands on its own feet and is not dependent on

what happens with Lebanon, Jordan or the Palestinians."

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Middle East War. It captured the West Bank and Gaza Strip from Jordan and Egypt respectively.

Israel has been negotiating peace with the Arab states and Palestinians for over one year. Rabin, who defeated rightist Yitzhak Shamir's government

Ghali welcomes START-2 Treaty

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 31: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali late on Wednesday welcomed the sweeping nuclear weapons treaty between the United States and Russia, calling it an important stimulus towards disarmament around the world, reports Reuter.

In a June election, has offered to discuss a land for peace deal.

AFP adds: The Israeli army imposed a curfew on all of the occupied Gaza Strip on Wednesday ahead of the anniversary of the first armed action by Fatah against Israel on January 1, 1965.

The army spokesman refused to give the reason for the curfew or how long it will last, but Palestinian sources said it was to try and prevent trouble over the period of the 28th anniversary.

Fatah, the mainstream group of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, both led by Yasser Arafat, claimed responsibility Wednesday for the murder of an alleged collaborator at Rafah, in the south of the strip, the sources said.

Masked men burst into the home of Attalah Al Hissi, 26, and riddled him with bullets.

Pindi to mobilise world opinion against India's N-proliferation

ISLAMABAD, Dec 31: Pakistan has decided to mobilise international opposition to India's development of weapons of mass destruction, Defence Minister Ghous Ali Shah said Wednesday as he singled out New Delhi's Agni missile, reports AFP.

The Agni can carry a one-tonne warhead, carrying either a nuclear or conventional payload, and can hit China and Gulf States.

"India will have to think a hundred times prior to embarking upon its usage" the Minister told the national assembly.

BJP leader shot dead

BEGUSARAI, Dec 31: The Begusarai district President of the Kisan cell of BJP, Sarangdhar Singh, was shot dead here Wednesday night by unidentified gunmen, police sources said, reports PTI.

The sources said that Singh was hit in the chest and by the time he was taken to the Sadar Hospital he died.

No arrest has been made so far, they added.

Another report from Calcutta adds: The deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Pranab Mukherjee, Wednesday called for a relentless fight against the communal forces and said that it would be dangerous for the country if the BJP was able to increase its number of seats from the present 119 in the next Lok Sabha election.

Talking to newsmen at the PCC (I) office here, Mukherjee said there was no basic difference between the communal and fascist forces.

Mahathir wants to cut privileges of sultans

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 31: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad stepped up a campaign to curb privileges of Malaysia's hereditary rulers on Wednesday by announcing fresh proposals to remove their rights enshrined in the constitution, reports Reuter.

Mahathir told reporters that as well as an earlier plan to strip the nine sultans of their immunity from the law, the government wanted to remove their power to pardon themselves and other members of royalty of criminal charges.

A third amendment to the constitution would be made to allow Malaysians to lodge reports against the rulers, he said.

"We have to amend the Sedition Act and to restrict their powers to pardon to make the whole exercise effective," Mahathir said after meeting over 1,000 grassroots leaders of his United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party.

"They (the sultans) will not be allowed to pardon themselves or those close to them," Mahathir said.

UMNO, which has had an uneasy relationship with the sultans, recently launched a concerted campaign to curb their rights after a school hockey coach alleged Sultan Mahmood Iskandar Mahmood of Johor State, a former king, slapped him.

The issue has been widely debated in Malaysia and given unusual prominence in pro-government media.

Sultan Mahmood was sentenced to six months' jail in 1978 for manslaughter but was pardoned by his father, the then-sultan, and did not serve the sentence for shooting an alleged smuggler from his helicopter.

Sultan Mahmood, 60, made a public call to his "loyal subjects" to meet him at his palace grounds on January 8 for a gathering which he said would not be for political purposes.

Off the Record



STUTTGART, Germany: A polar bear at Stuttgart's Wilhelm Zoo enjoys the Sunny but cold weather with temperatures below zero as he plays with the fish a warden threw to him for breakfast on Tuesday.

—AFP/UNB photo

Twins commit suicide

SEOUL: Eighty-year-old twins took more than 100 aspirin each and killed themselves in a suicide pact, police said Thursday, reports AP.

The pair were found unconscious by a neighbour Tuesday, police said. Kwon Kyong-sook died on arrival at the hospital and her sister, Kyong-ok, died Thursday, police said.

A hand-written note signed by both said death was their route out of loneliness, despair and poverty, police said.

Neighbours said the women had lived on relief goods from the government and a nearby church. Kyong-ok's husband died in 1984 and her only child, a daughter, never contacted her, police said.

Diana, sons begin post X-mas vacation

ST JOHN'S, Antigua: Princess Diana and her two children began a post-Christmas vacation Wednesday in the Caribbean, but authorities weren't saying exactly where, reports AP.

The princess, who separated from Prince Charles earlier this month, arrived in Antigua at mid-afternoon with Princes William, 10, and Harry, 8, aboard a British Airways plane.

After a quick exchange of greetings with local functionaries, a smiling Diana, her children and an entourage including guards boarded a small two-propeller Islander aircraft operated by an island-hopping service, Carib Aviation of Antigua.

Officials refused to say where the flight was headed. But according to British press reports, the destination was expected to be island of St. Kitts or the adjacent, smaller and more exclusive St. Nevis.

Only after her departure did other passengers on the British Airways plane allowed to disembark in Antigua.

The princess' personal detective, Inspector Ken Wharfe, arrived in Antigua with another policeman on Tuesday and then took a 60-minute flight to St. Kitts, according to London's Daily Mail.

Press Association, the British news agency, said Diana's mother, Frances Shand-Kydd, is reported to be accompanying her.

Thumb replaced by toe

LONDON: A British furniture maker who lost his thumb in an accident with a circular saw has had it replaced with his big toe, reports Reuter.

Peter Morris, 38, who is to go back to work with his new thumb next month, said he had been wary of the transplant idea at first. "It just didn't sound right, my big toe taken off and put on my hand."

Clinton accepts Oxford college fellowship

LONDON, Dec 31: US President-elect Bill Clinton has accepted an honorary fellowship at University College, one of Oxford University's most prestigious colleges where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar in the late 1960s, reports AP.

"We are absolutely delighted — no doubt about that," Prof. Wyndham John Albery, master of University College, said Tuesday.

UN to evacuate peacekeepers under Khmer Rouge attack

PHNOM PENH, Dec 31: A group of United Nations peacekeepers will be evacuated from their post in north-western Cambodia following deliberate Khmer Rouge shelling of the area, UN officers said Thursday, reports AP.

"This shelling appears to be a direct attack on a UN position," said the UN military spokesman, Lt Col Dick Palk.

He said the peacekeepers in Svay leu village, 50 kilometres (30 miles) northeast of Siem Reap city, had come under intermittent shelling in

the past week and mortar fire became heavier morning. Rounds damaged buildings and crashed near bunkers.

Some UN personnel previously have been forced from their posts because of fighting between Khmer Rouge guerrillas and government forces, but this was the first time the United Nations has suggested the Khmer Rouge was directly attacking UN personnel.

Palk said Khmer Rouge representatives in Phnom Penh were not cooperative when UN officials discussed the shelling

with them Thursday. Talks will continue.

The 45 UN personnel to be evacuated include 26 Bangladeshi troops, an Australian communications expert, seven Cambodians helping with voter registration and others.

The radical Communist Khmer Rouge, which slaughtered Cambodians during its rule in the 1970s, fought the Vietnamese-installed government for 13 years until signing a peace accord in October 1991.

But it has denied UN peace-

keepers access to areas under its control, briefly detained groups of peacekeepers, and refused to disarm.

AUN oil embargo against the Khmer Rouge and a ban on long exports from Cambodia go into effect at midnight (1700 GMT) Thursday, but enforcing them will be a major problem.

The UN Security Council imposed the oil embargo to pressure the group to cooperate with the peace process. Cambodia's Supreme National Council, a reconciliation body

comprising all factions, banned long exports to save the forests.

The restrictions require controlling Thailand's vast trade along the 680-kilometer (425-mile) border with Cambodia — a highly difficult undertaking.

UN peacekeeping forces are denied access to Khmer Rouge-controlled areas where UN checkpoints to enforce the embargo were to be set up. A UN official in Bangkok, who spoke on condition of anonymity,

said the United Nations wanted to set up checkpoints at nine locations on the Cambodian side of the border with Thailand.

News reports in Bangkok said the Thai government planned to set up 17 checkpoints on Thai territory opposite the UN checkpoints.

The UN official said that authorities were working toward fulfilling their obligations under the Nov.30 Security Council resolution that imposed the sanctions.

Former Soviet troops leave Mongolia

HONG KONG, Dec 31: Mongolia announced Wednesday that all former Soviet troops had evacuated its territory, China's official Xinhua news agency reported, says AFP.

Xinhua, in a three-paragraph dispatch dated from Ulan Bator, quoted the Defence Ministry of China's northern neighbour as making the announcement.