

BRIEFLY

Colombia to extend emergency: Emergency measures adopted in November to combat rebel violence will be extended for another 90 days, the Interior Minister announced on Wednesday, reports AP from Bogota.

"We haven't been able to develop our projects fully in the first 90 days," Interior Minister Fabio Ramirez told the RCN radio network.

The measures, initially set to expire Feb 6, will be extended for another 90 days to allow time to be converted into permanent legislation, Ramirez said.

President Cesar Gaviria declared the state of emergency November 9 allowing him to take action against public enemies without consulting first with Congress or the courts.

Floods kill 19 in Kenya: At least 19 people have been killed in floods around the Kenyan town of Narok, Kenyan radio said on Wednesday, says Reuter from Nicosia.

The floods swept away passengers and vehicles at the bus station in the town, 110 km (70 miles) west of Nairobi, said the radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Other vehicles were swept away while crossing a river, it added.

Quake hits Sumatra: An intense earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale was recorded Wednesday in Sumatra, Indonesia, the Hong Kong Observatory reported, says AP from Hong Kong.

An observatory statement said initial reading of the quake, recorded here at 10.36 am (0236 GMT Wednesday), determined the epicentre to be about 118 kilometers (74 miles) west-southwest of Medan Sumatra.

The observatory has no further details.

The Richter scale is a gauge of the energy released by an earthquake as measured by ground motion recorded on a seismograph.

Every increase of one number means that the ground motion is 10 times greater. A quake of magnitude 6 can cause severe damage on land.

Palestinian team will go to US: The Palestinian team in peace talks with Israel wants to send a delegation to Washington to discuss the peace process with the new administration, the delegation leader said on Wednesday, reports Reuter from Amman.

Faisal Al-Husseini, overall leader of the Palestinian team, said contacts with the United States were underway but he did not say when the delegation might leave.

Husseini blamed Israel for the deadlock in the talks, citing its refusal to comply with a UN Security Council resolution demanding it take back more than 400 Palestinians deported to South Lebanon last month.

The Palestinians will ask the new Clinton administration to speed up the peace process, which began in October 1992, he added.

Five Tibetans sentenced: Five Tibetan farmers were given prison sentences ranging from 13 to 15 years for staging a pro-independence protest in a rural county, a Western human rights group said Thursday, AP reports from Beijing.

The London-based Tibet International Network said the sentences were unusually heavy, reflecting China's concern about increasing involvement in pro-independence activities of lay Tibetans in the countryside, where 88 per cent of Tibetans live.

The five were sentenced on November 1 by a Lhasa court, but the sentences were never publicly announced, the network said in a news release. Chinese authorities generally do not make public trials and sentences of people accused of political crimes.

Oil tanker on fire in Andaman Sea: A Supertanker fully laden with crude oil is on fire and has been abandoned north of Sumatra island in the Andaman Sea after colliding with another tanker, the Supertanker's management firm said yesterday, reports Reuter from Singapore.

"She is fully loaded (with oil), she is on fire, she is abandoned," said a spokesman for Danish shipping company AP Moller in Singapore.

Sudan to launch military offensive against rebels

CAIRO, Jan 21: Sudan's opposition charged Wednesday that the government plans to launch a military offensive against rebels in southern Sudan with weapons obtained from Iran and Ethiopia, reports AP.

Lt Gen Abdel-Rahman Saeed, a member of the disbanded Democratic Unionist Party, said during a news conference that the Sudanese army had prepared 19 battalions with as many as 9,000 troops for the offensive.

The government troops will start in the next few days, he said.

or may already have started, a new offensive in the south to destroy the Garang faction and force them to sign a peace treaty," Saeed was quoted as saying by Egypt's state-run Middle East News Agency.

They have already obtained weapons and provisions for this offensive, they got thanks, small weapons, ammunition, military clothes and other supplies from Iran," Saeed said.

He said the military traded agricultural products with Ethiopia for tanks and armoured personnel carriers.

Sudanese officials were not available Wednesday to comment on the charges.

Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Army launched its rebellion in early 1983, demanding greater autonomy and economic reforms in the three southern provinces of Bahr el-Ghazal, Upper Nile and Equatoria.

Last February, the Sudanese government launched a successful military offensive against the 10-year-old rebellion in the south. The rebels, already weakened by internal splits and loss of support from Ethiopia, took a beating after the army took over a dozen rebel-held towns.

A military coup led by Lt Gen Omar Hassan al-Bashir toppled a civilian government in Sudan in June 1989 and disbanded the political parties. Scores of Sudanese opposition figures took refuge in Egypt.

Japan welcomes reelection of Nakajima as WHO chief

TOKYO, Jan 21: Japan welcomed today the re-election of Hiroshi Nakajima as head of the World Health Organization (WHO) following an intense campaign by Western nations to replace the Japanese pharmacologist, reports AP.

"We highly appreciate the support from countries concerned," Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe said in a statement today.

Nakajima received 18 of the 31 votes for a second five-year term against 31 votes for Algeria's Mohamed Abdel Moutemmed. Nakajima's former deputy who had the backing of the United States.

UK withdrawing troops from ROK

LONDON: Britain said yesterday it was withdrawing its remaining troops from the United Nations contingent in Korea, ending a more than four-decade commitment, reports Reuter.

A Defence Ministry spokesman said the 36 soldiers and one officer would leave Korea by the middle of March as part of Britain's gradual winding down of its garrison in Hong Kong.

The spokesman said the decision, taken earlier this week, was also in line with Britain's changing global commitments.

Idealism tinged with hard reality in Clinton's speech



WASHINGTON: Clinton (R) hugs his wife Hillary (L) and daughter Chelsea after being sworn-in Wednesday as the 42nd President of the US. — AFP/UNB photo

WASHINGTON, Jan 21: President Clinton's message to the world Wednesday was a mixture of idealism embracing a new world order and a warning that he will use US military might "when necessary," reports AP.

He offered no overtures to Iraq, Iran, Cuba and other nations with which the United States has had bitter disagreements. He presented no new plans to end the conflict in the former Yugoslavia or to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute.

But he promised, "When our vital interests are challenged, or the will and conscience of the international community is defied, we will act — with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary."

He registered concern that the world is more unstable after the disintegration of the Soviet Union than it was during the Cold War.

"The new world is more free but less stable," Clinton said. "Communism's collapse has called forth old animosities and new dangers. Clearly, America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make."

Although Clinton said little about foreign policy issues during the campaign, close aides have stressed he has an agenda he hopes to carry out if crises carrying high priority do not get in the way.

His two most prominent goals are to slow the proliferation of dangerous weapons and to improve the environment. On Tuesday, Clinton created a new, senior post at the State Department to work on the environment, refugees and human rights, and named Tim Wirth, a former liberal Democratic senator from Colorado, to the job.

Actually, events may give Clinton some breathing room at the outset.

Iraq, hoping to avert further US bombing attacks, has declared a unilateral ceasefire and invited UN weapons inspectors to resume their search for illicit arms.

It was a bid to Clinton for a new deal, and could spare him from having to grapple right away with President Saddam Hussein.

Also, Bosnian Serbs accepted a truce plan while Israel's legislature reversed a prohibition on dealing with the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

These steps in the direction of conciliation could spare Clinton tough decisions for a while.

The one-time antiwar protester and longtime admirer of Thomas Jefferson spoke idealistically of America's role in the world.

Use of force in Iraq will do no good: China

BEIJING, Jan 21: China on Thursday criticised the allied use of military power against Iraq, saying the use of force "will do no good", reports AP.

On Wednesday, France had criticised a US cruise missile attack on a nuclear weapons programme plant in a Baghdad suburb as an excessive use of force. Numerous Arab states have labelled similar criticisms against the allied air raids on Iraq over the last eight days.

"We have taken note of the attitude France has taken toward the matter. We also have taken note of the attitude of the Arab states," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin said at a weekly briefing.

"We always stand for peaceful settlements of international disputes," he added. "The use of force will do no good on the resolution of this question."

Wu said the problems in the Gulf region "should be resolved on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions."

A debate has been brewing in the United Nations over the Security Council resolution that the United States, Britain and France are citing as justification for enforcing the "no-fly" zones in northern and southern Iraq.

Resolution 688 demands that Baghdad immediately halt the repression of Iraqi citizens, specifically the Kurds. However, the resolution does not cite Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which allows the use of military force. Without that citation, the resolution is unenforceable, UN legal experts say.

China blocked the other members of the Security Council from citing Chapter 7 in the resolution, threatening to use its veto power.

Algeria to set up ties with Bosnia

ALGIERS, Jan 21: Algeria will establish diplomatic relations with Bosnia-Herzegovina, a spokesman for the Algerian government announced here yesterday, reports Xinhua.

The spokesman added that the government made this decision as a token of its solidarity with the Bosnian Muslims in their fight for liberty and their fight to self-determination.

Last October, Algeria established diplomatic relations with Slovenia and Croatia, two other countries born out of the former Yugoslavia.

UN arms inspectors off to Baghdad

MANAMA, Jan 21: About 52 UN weapons inspectors and staff left Thursday for Baghdad and expressed hopes their work would be eased by Iraq's expressed wish for good relations with President Clinton, reports AP.

The arms inspectors had been stranded in Bahrain for two weeks because of Saddam Hussein's refusal to let them fly to Baghdad in UN planes, or guarantee their safety if they did.

"From the news reports it appears that Saddam and the government are making an open pitch... to appeal to the new administration," said Kevin St. Louis, an American who heads the inspectors' operation in Baghdad.

"So I guess we are going in hopeful that they are cooperative, more cooperative."

The inspectors and staff have been waiting in Bahrain since January 3.

First, bad weather and plane breakdowns disrupted their travel plans and then Baghdad said January 8 that they could no longer use UN planes and would have to take Iraqi craft. Iraq backed down on that issues Tuesday, following a week of allied air and missile strikes on southern and northern Iraq and a manufacturing facility near Baghdad. Also, a stray cruise missile hit the downtown Al-Rashid Hotel in the capital.

Baghdad's reversal along with a unilateral cease-fire over the northern and southern "no-fly" zones was announced as a "good will" gesture toward Bill Clinton, inaugurated as the 42nd US President on Wednesday.

The UN flights issue was one of several that triggered US-led military action against Iraq.

As the UN team was flying

in, Iraqi Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan was quoted by state-run Iraqi radio as affirming Baghdad now wants "security and peace." The radio was monitored by the British Broadcasting Corp.

But Iraq has not yet declared that it will comply with the commission's demands to come clean on the secret nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes and long-range missiles that have to be dismantled under the terms of the Gulf War ceasefire.

"We won't know until we start working," said St. Louis, who has seen several of the 47 UN weapons teams that have gone into Baghdad obstructed and sometimes harassed by hostile Iraqi demonstrations and threats.

But the authorities have pledged to guarantee the inspectors' safety. In addition, the experts are taking extra security precautions such as parking cars in secure areas and not going out on their own, St. Louis said.

Paul Brough, the American who leads a 25-member chemical destruction team that was part of the group going into Baghdad, said he was "not worried, because the Iraqis said they are guaranteeing our safety."

"I expect we will be able to get on with our work," he said, noting that this team's work in particular has "always been well received by the Iraqis."

Brough will be based in Baghdad for the better part of this year.

His job is to destroy an arsenal of thousands of rockets, shells and bombs filled with poison gas and badly leaking since bombardment by the coalition forces in the Gulf War.

Off the Record



WASHINGTON: Bush (L) watches as Clinton pets his (Bush's) dog Millie and Barbara Bush greets Mrs Clinton and Chelsea at the White House Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Iran, Pakistan urge Afghan groups to end war

NICOSIA, Jan 21: Iranian and Pakistani Ministers meeting in Tehran voiced concern about renewed fighting in Kabul and urged Afghan groups to end the clashes, Iran's IRNA news agency reported on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Alaeddin Borujerdi called for negotiations to halt the fighting between government forces and Muslim Mujahideen groups opposed to Burhanuddin Rabbani's Presidency, it said.

"We will continue our efforts to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan," IRNA quoted Borujerdi's Pakistani counterpart, Shahryar Muhammad Khan, as saying.

Government units attacked forces of the Hezb-I-Islami party of hardline Mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar outside Kabul on Tuesday.

Kabul said 15 Hekmatyar fighters were killed in the clashes and three people died in rebel rocket attacks on the city.

A Tehran radio commentary said the two sides' force were evenly balanced, raising fears of a drawn-out struggle.

Iran and Pakistan, both Afghanistan's neighbours, between them received five million refugees and backed Mujahideen forces during a 13-year civil war before the rebels toppled the Soviet-installed government last April.

Air strikes on Iraq justified: Major

LONDON, Jan 21: Rejecting French criticism of a cruise missile attack by the United States against Iraq, Prime Minister John Major said Wednesday the bombardment was wholly justified and France was consulted beforehand, reports AP.

"I don't share that (French) concern at all," Major told reporters outside his 10 Downing Street office. "This was a raid made by the United States, rather than the allies because they had the equipment in site to do it."

But there was discussion between the allies, including the French," Major added. "This was within international law and I think the United States was wholly justified. I have no reservations about it."

However, a senior aide,

speaking on condition of anonymity, said Major in a telephone call with President Bush had urged caution over a raid planned for last Friday and this had delayed the attack.

"It was a political and diplomatic question of timing," said the aide. "I think at the end of the day all we did was delay it for a day."

The official said Major had been concerned that the UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali should endorse the raid — which he did — and UN weapons inspectors should agree that Iraq was hampering their work.

Britain, using Tornado bombers, and France had joined the United States in two attacks on Iraqi missile and radar sites in the past week.

The United States alone, the only one of the three allies with cruise missiles, conducted Sunday's attack on a Baghdad factory. Iraq said at least 21 people were killed.

In Paris, Foreign Minister Roland Dumas told a Cabinet meeting that the cruise missile attack overstepped the UN mandate.

Later, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd used a dinner meeting with Dumas in London to try to ensure the French maintain their support for the allied air attacks.

The Foreign Office said the two men discussed a range of issues in general terms.

New cabinet members under Clinton

WASHINGTON, Jan 21: Following is a list of the members of the new US-cabinet under President Bill Clinton subject to confirmation by the Senate:

Secretary of State: Warren Christopher, Secretary of Defense: Les Aspin, Secretary of the Treasury: Lloyd Bensten, Attorney General: Zoe Baird, Secretary of Education: Richard Riley, Secretary of Health: Donna Shalala, Secretary of Labour: Robert Reich, Secretary of Housing: Henry Cisneros, Secretary of Transportation: Federico Pena, Secretary of Interior: Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of Commerce: Ron Brown, Trade Representative: Mickey Kantor, Secretary of Agriculture: Mike Espy, Secretary of Energy: Hazel O'Leary, Secretary for Veterans' Affairs: Jesse Brown, Ambassador to the United Nations: Madeleine Albright.

Kuwait deports 184 Iraqis

NICOSIA, Jan 21: Kuwait deported 184 Iraqis and one Jordanian into Iraq on Tuesday night, the official Iraqi news agency INA said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Eighteen of the deportees had spent between one and two years in detention, added the agency, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

UK withdrawing troops from ROK

LONDON: Britain said yesterday it was withdrawing its remaining troops from the United Nations contingent in Korea, ending a more than four-decade commitment, reports Reuter.

A Defence Ministry spokesman said the 36 soldiers and one officer would leave Korea by the middle of March as part of Britain's gradual winding down of its garrison in Hong Kong.

The spokesman said the decision, taken earlier this week, was also in line with Britain's changing global commitments.

'Reunion on Mall' celebrates America's cultural diversity

WASHINGTON, Jan 21: From all across the United States from Puerto Rico to Alaska, from the rural heartland to the big cities — crafts people, musicians, and cultural artists joined in a gigantic two-day inaugural festival in the nation's capital to celebrate America's cultural and ethnic diversity, reports AP.

They came for the "Reunion on the Mall" — the grassy area between the Capitol and the Washington Monument — in a joyous celebration of national unity. According to National Park Service estimates, almost

400,000 people were on hand January 17-18 in sunny, but chilly weather.

"It's exciting to be part of it," said Karen Audia Shannon, whose booth was cooking up food specialties of her native Calabria, Italy.

"I'm honoured to be here," said Indian-born Raji Jaljeppali of Memphis, Tennessee, as she prepared highly spiced Indian food. Across in tent, Marcia Haughton, had the same opinion as she prepared Trinidadian specialties.

Outside the food tent, children were drawing their own

visions of unity and harmony in chalk on a specially prepared blacktop area. Organized by a Connecticut arts group, any child at the festival could participate. Others, clad in McDonald t-shirts and shorts, were involved in a jump rope competition.

In a nearby tent, the Popovich Brothers from Colorado, were singing Serbian songs passed down from their ancestors.

Still further down the Mall, in a huge crafts tent, Mousa Yang from Laos, and her 81 year old mother, were displaying their quality techniques.

Halimeh Abdel Fattah, from Palestine, who now lives in Michigan, was showing her intricate embroidery, and New Mexico's Felipe Ortega, of Apache and Spanish ancestry, was showing his pottery making techniques.

Meanwhile, a rap music group from the heart of Los Angeles was peering into an entertainment tent, watching Broadway stars Carol Channing and Lauren Bacall perform — while waiting to begin their own performance.

"We're so excited to be here," said Rosalee Velasco of

the group "Colors United," whose goal is to eliminate racism and sexism. The group includes Hispanics, African, American and Asians from the Los Angeles area — some of whom used to be gang members.

The idea for the reunion on the mall came from Hillary Clinton, according to Ed Emerson, the Presidential Inaugural Committee's (PIC) executive producer. Emerson explained that the three times Clinton was elected governor of Arkansas, the Clinton's invited entertainers, artists and

Thieves steal city trash trucks

NEW YORK: Thieves are stealing city garbage trucks in an epidemic that's baffling sanitation Department brass, according to a published report, says AP.

The New York Post reported Thursday that 11 garbage trucks, each weighing 18 tons, have vanished in the last five months. Each truck costs \$110,000.

In the past, the Sanitation Department has lost two or three trucks a year, Sanitation-spokeswoman Anne Carty told the Post.

"We don't know where they are or how they are being disposed of," Carty said, referring to the latest thefts.

The latest theft occurred Monday in the Bronx.

The city has 2,000 Sanitation trucks in its fleet.

She takes revenge by opening beauty parlour

TIRANA, Albania: Drita Haxhinasto came of age while lipstick, perfume and rings were banned by the Communists as examples of bourgeois degeneracy, reports AP.

She is getting her revenge. Mrs Haxhinasto owns the first beauty parlour in Tirana, the capital of Albania.

Customers can enjoy cakes and soft drinks with their haircuts, manicures, pedicures and massages. An eclectic mix of music — European rock, the Beatles, rap groups, Michael Jackson, Julio Iglesias — plays in the 30-by-18-foot (9-by-5.5 meter) salon, whose white walls and ceiling are trimmed in pink.

A sign on the big street window proclaims "Beauty Salon Artemis" in Albanian and English. Artemis may be the goddess of the hunt in Greece, but she is the goddess of beauty in Albania.

"I worked hard to convince my husband, and later the banks, of the value of this initiative, which has been my dream," said Mrs Haxhinasto, 40, who also is a mechanical engineer and deputy head of the Women's Forum, a support group for women.

Troops won't leave Somalia hastily: Powell

WASHINGTON, Jan 21: The United States wants to "do it right" in its famine relief work in Somalia and will not withdraw troops hastily, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

"We'll take our time. We'll do it right" General Colin Powell said in an interview with Cable News Network as President Clinton's inaugural parade passed the White House.