

British author alleges

CIA, MI 6 responsible for Lockerbie incident

LONDON, Feb 25: The British intelligence agency MI 6 and the US CIA are "directly responsible" for the deaths of the 270 people who died when a jet exploded over the Scottish border town of Lockerbie in 1988, a British author alleged Wednesday, reports AFP.

David Yallop claimed in his book "to the ends of the earth" - published Wednesday - that he had warned British intelligence only days before Pan Am flight 103 exploded that a major terrorist attack was imminent.

Yallop, a freelance journalist, alleged that the intelligence services would, with the additional information that was available from other sources, have been able to predict the attack on the flight.

He said in the book that his information was gained during an interview with Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal in Libya nine days before the explosion in December.

Yallop said he returned to Britain after the interview and arranged a meeting with an MI 6 agent, but the agent

Heavy gunbattles in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU, Feb 25: Heavy gunbattles erupted in the Somali capital today, just a day after thousands of protesters fought running battles with US led forces in the country, reports Reuter.

Bullets rained down across the streets near the so-called KM-4 and KM-5 areas in central Mogadishu, confining residents and foreign correspondents in their offices and hotels.

Rapid gunfire, accompanied by frequent heavy booms of what appeared to be fire from rocket-propelled grenades and rockets, constantly echoed across the Indian Ocean port.

US Cobra helicopters swooped over the shootout scene often troubled by snipers in the past two months.

No details of who was shooting at whom could be obtained from the US forces, who command a 33,000-strong multinational force sent to Somalia in December to end gunlaw and looting of food aid

Christopher ends ME tour

JERUSALEM, Feb 25: US Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher wound up his Mideast tour Thursday, putting the onus on the Palestinians to make the next move in the Arab-Israeli peace process, reports AP.

Christopher's two days of talks with Palestinian and Israeli leaders failed to achieve a date for the resumption of Mideast peace talks. But the Israeli media was full of reports of possible compromises to restart the negotiations.

Christopher, who departed for Geneva to make preparations for a US-Russian summit, gave the Palestinians undisclosed US proposals for overcoming the dispute.

Hanan Ashrawi, spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation to US-backed peace talks, said Wednesday night that the delegates found some of the proposals worth considering and discussing with PLO leaders in Tunis.

The respected daily Haaretz reported that the United States and Israel had reached a compromise agreement involving a "calming message" about Israel avoiding further deportations in the future.



LOS ANGELES: Pop superstar Michael Jackson (R) kisses his sister Janet Jackson after she presented him with the Grammy Legend Award at the 35th annual Grammy Awards Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Kim calls for building a 'new Korea'

SEOUL, Feb 25: Vowing to build a "freer and more mature democratic society," former opposition leader Kim Young-Sam today became South Korea's first civilian president in more than three decades, reports AFP.

"We gather here to open a new era of democracy under civilian government," the 65-year-old Kim said in his acceptance speech before 30,000 guests in front of the National Assembly. We have had to wait for this moment for 30 long years.

Kim called for building a "new Korea" that "will be a freer and more mature democratic society... where justice will flow like a river."

Kim, a longtime opposition leader who joined the ruling party three years ago, replaces Roh Tae-woo, a former army general who led the transitional from military rule to democracy during his five-year term.

He became the first civilian



SEOUL: President-elect Kim Young Sam takes the oath of office at the National Assembly Thursday. — AFP photo

CASTRO FOR BETTER TIES WITH US

Cuba is ready to improve relations with the United States on the basis of "mutual respect and national sovereignty," President Fidel Castro said, AFP reports from Havana.

"We have never been an obstacle for improved relations," Castro said Wednesday after voting in municipal and legislative elections in which he is a candidate for deputy from the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba.

"The blockade is blocking our development, but we will not stop fighting and working to the limit to improve the living conditions of our people," he said, referring to the three-decade-old US embargo.

"Continuing this hostile policy is not up to Cuba, but the United States," he said in comments carried by the official Cuban news agency Prensa Latina.

Riot at Algeria's detention camp

Muslim fundamentalists at a Sahara Desert camp rioted last week, injuring a dozen guards and doing some \$ 8 million dollars (dlsr 370,000) in damage, the official APS news agency reported Wednesday, AP says from Algiers.

More than 90 detainees appeared before a military court Monday for their involvement in the melee in which detainees attacked guards with various objects, set fires and tried to force open the quarters where arms are kept, the agency said.

Special army forces quelled the uprising, which occurred February 18 after a 48-hour hunger strike by detainees at the camp in Ouargla, 800 kilometers (500 miles) south of Algiers. The agency did not say whether there were deaths or injuries in the efforts to restore order.

The camp is one of seven opened in February 1992 to take in thousands of fundamentalists rounded up in a crackdown after the cancellation of parliamentary elections to thwart a fundamentalist victory.

Gen Nambiar to be replaced soon

The commander of the UN peace-keeping force in former Yugoslavia said on Wednesday that he would step down next week, Reuter reports from Zagreb.

Lieutenant-General Satish Nambiar of India confirmed reports by UN sources in New York that he would step down when his one-year tour of duty expires on March 2.

He will be replaced as commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) by Swedish Lieutenant-General Lars-eric Wahlgren.

In a statement issued from UNPROFOR headquarters in the Croatian capital Zagreb, Nambiar did not say why he was departing but spokeswoman Shannon Boyd told Reuters he was going essentially for family reasons.

Kabul urged to protect Shi'ites

Iran urged the Afghan government on Wednesday to protect Shi'ite Muslims in Kabul against attacks blamed on Afghan Defence Ministry forces and their allies, Reuter reports from Nicosia.

Iranian television said Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati told reporters in Tehran that the Afghan government was responsible for what happened in Kabul and urged it to punish perpetrators of the "recent crimes against Shi'ites" there.

It did not say if Velayati named any people or groups as organisers of the attacks in which many people were killed, women were raped and houses were looted, according to previous Iranian reports.

Iran's official Irna News Agency said on Monday forces of Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Masoud and Saudi-backed guerrilla Chief Abdurrab Rasul Sayyaf "on February 11... besieged a Shi'ite-populated area in Kabul, massacring many people and raping women."

Battle honours for UK soldiers

Members of the British army, navy and air force who took part in the Gulf War will receive battle honours, the government announced on Wednesday, reports Reuter from London.

Queen Elizabeth has approved the award of the battle honour "Kuwait 1991" to 15 royal navy ships and 10 vessels of the royal fleet auxiliary that were engaged in the campaign against Iraqi forces between January 17 and February 28, 1991.

The battle honours "Wadi Al Batin" and "Western Iraq" have been approved for the army, Malcolm Rifkind, Secretary of State for Defence, said in a written parliamentary answer.

The battle honour "Gulf 1991" has been approved for the royal air force. The army regiments and air force squadrons that will receive these honours have yet to be decided, Rifkind said.

Diouf leading in Senegal's elections

DAKAR, Feb 25: Incumbent President Abdou Diouf was far ahead Wednesday in Senegal's election with 25 per cent of the vote counted, election officials said, reports AFP.

Diouf had 60 per cent, while his closest rival, Abdoulaye Wade of the Democratic Party of Senegal, had 27 per cent, the National electoral Commission said.

None of the six other candidates had received more than five per cent of the vote, according to the tally.

The results were the first to be released since Sundays voting and represent 10 of Senegal's 31 departments.

Poverty compels Indians to sell parts of their bodies

NEW DELHI, Feb 25: Villavakkam on the outskirts of Madras, India's bustling metropolis in the South, is the centre of the country's multi-million-dollar trade in human organs, reports IPS.

Every day, agents from the city's many private clinics invade the poor suburb in search of kidney and other organ "donors". Villavakkam is now derisively called "Kidneyvakkam."

Poverty is compelling more and more Indians to sell parts of their bodies, making the country one of the world's biggest markets of human kidneys, eyes, skin and bone.

The daily-wage earners are easily tempted. Few people think twice when offered the unimaginable chance of earning the rupee equivalent of 980 US dollar for one healthy organ. As soon as the deal is struck, the donor is rushed off for blood and urine tests at clinics where recipients await the transplant.

A worried government is now trying to rein the flourishing business. But health activists say legislation is being huddled through under pressure from the World Health Organisation (WHO), ignoring the complexities of the human organs trade.

They say the proposed law targets only agents and not health professionals who are deeply involved in the trans-

Israel still intransigent over deportee issue: Arafat

CAIRO, Feb 25: PLO chief Yasser Arafat on Wednesday said the resumption of Arab-Israeli peace talks hinged on the return of Palestinian deportees and accused Israel of "intransigence," reports AFP.

Arafat said he was "in favour of a resumption of peace talks but on condition that all obstacles, preventing the participation of the Palestinian negotiators, be eliminated."

"None of the parties involved in the peace process has the right to take measures that hamper the initiative," added the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

"Israel remains intransigent and is still refusing to put an end to this problem (deportees) even after the visit to Israel of the American Secretary of State, Arafat said during a stopover in Cairo, on his way from Khartoum to Amman."

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher meanwhile wrapped up his Middle East peace mission admitting that "obstacles" remain in the way of a resumption of negotiations.

"But I think we made progress in explaining the situation with respect to the deportees."

"A process is underway that will resolve that issue," Christopher said.

Palestinian negotiators, who receive their instructions from the PLO, have refused to return to the negotiating table until a solution is found to

Clinton, Major pay tribute to Mulrooney

WASHINGTON, Feb 25: President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister John Major on Wednesday paid tribute to Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulrooney after Mulrooney announced he will step down, reports Reuter.

Clinton said he spoke to Mulrooney by telephone after his Ottawa news conference and "he seemed to be a person who had worked through this and was very much at peace with himself."

"I thanked him for his kindness to me and he assured me that his country would continue to work with me, and that he would personally until his tenure in office was over. And I wished him well," said the president, who met Mulrooney in Washington two weeks ago.

Major, speaking at a joint news conference, with Clinton after an hour of talks between the two leaders, called Mulrooney "and old friend and a good friend."

"I shall miss him" he told reporters.

"He's been a very good friend to the United Kingdom and a very good friend to the Commonwealth. So I'm sad to hear of his decision today," Major said.

Mulrooney's departure inevitably raised questions about prospects for the pending North American Free Trade Agreement, but White House spokesman George Stephanopoulos said it was unlikely to have any impact.

'Unmarried people must remain chaste'

ISLAMABAD, Feb 25: Pakistan's top Islamic court said on Wednesday that overpowering lust was no excuse for rape and that unmarried people must remain "chaste," reports Reuter.

A two-judge bench of the Federal Sharia Court turned down an appeal from a convicted rapist, sentenced to a total of 50 years in jail and 50 lashes by a lower court for raping a five-year-old girl.

It rejected Mohammad Sher's plea that the sentence be reduced because he was "over-powered by sexual urge" when he kidnapped the girl on her way to school and molested her last year in Rawalpindi, near Islamabad.

"According to the teachings of Islam, in case any person has become a major, he should get married and if he is unable to do so, he should remain chaste and resort to fasting," the court said in its judgement.

It quoted an injunction from the Koran as saying: "Let those who find not the wherewithal for marriage, keep themselves chaste until God gives them means."

The Prophet Mohammad (S) had advised young people unable to marry to fast, "as fasting diminishes... sexual power", the court said.

Pakistan's Islamic laws enforced by late military ruler General Mohammad Zia-Ul-laq in 1979 prescribe a maximum penalty of stoning to death for adultery and rape. This punishment, awarded by several courts, has yet to be carried out.

Rape is a common offence in Pakistan, but victims are usually reluctant to bring charges because of the social stigma.

GCC states plan to spend \$ 50b on advanced arms

ABU DHABI, Feb 25: Gulf Arab states are racing to buy advanced weapons to offset a shortage in armed force personnel that underscored their vulnerability during the war for Kuwait, reports AFP.

The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states plan to spend more than 50 billion dollars by the year 2000 on aircraft, tanks, armoured vehicles, missiles and frigates, military experts said.

But they said the 12-year-old Gulf alliance would not follow Iran's example in buying submarines, although some countries showed interest in submarines displayed at an international arms show in Abu Dhabi last week.

I don't think GCC states will want to appear in an arms race with Iran, one expert said, besides, for the military point of view, the shallow Gulf waters are not suitable for submarine warfare.

Russian experts at the Abu Dhabi exhibition said some Gulf military delegates had shown interest in the Kilo class submarines, one of which was delivered to Iran in November as part of a three-unit package.

According to defence sources, the number of GCC troops could now be much lower than it was before the 1991 Gulf War as most states have demobilised foreign soldiers in their armies.

But except in tanks, the GCC has more weapons than its giant neighbours.

Their jets are estimated at 992, compared with 540 in Iran and 700 in Iraq before the invasion of Kuwait. The GCC also has 240 navy units while Iran has 148 and Iraq had 49.

GCC nations also have an estimated 1,160 tanks and 3,230 armoured vehicles.

Pornography show in House of Commons

LONDON: A pornographic show of racy magazines and sex films, some depicting children, opened Wednesday in the House of Commons to convince Deputies that a new obscenity law is needed, reports AFP.

The 48-hour show will demonstrate to deputies how certain films and magazines have become violent and sometimes employ children, said a spokesman of the anti-pornographic police unit that organized the show.

Labour Party Deputy Ann Winterton said she was "profoundly shocked that such magazines and films are available on the market, mostly because there is no political will to fight the inefficiency of the obscene publications law."

Passengers were asked to push the plane

WELLINGTON: Passengers in a four-engine jet were asked to give the plane a push when it was blocked in at a New Zealand airport, the airline said today, reports Reuter.

Ansett New Zealand Public Relations Manager John Cordery said pushing the jet was the best way to move it clear of other aircraft so that it could take off from the city of Palmerston North, 100 km (60 miles) north of Wellington.

"I understand it was all done in very good humour," he said.

Baby was delivered after mother's death

KILLEEN, Texas: A pregnant soldier was killed by a shot to the head but her baby was successfully delivered by Caesarian section, Her husband, also a soldier, was taken into custody, reports AP.

Police officers called to an apartment complex Tuesday night found Annette Horne, 23, wounded on the floor, a police statement said.

Mrs Horne was taken to a nearby hospital where she was pronounced dead.

Doctors then performed the Caesarian section to deliver the girl, police said. The newborn was in stable condition Wednesday.

Charges of voluntary manslaughter were being prepared against William Horne, 24, police said. Both Horne and his wife were in the Army, stationed at Fort Hood.

Floods destroy 130,000 houses in Iran

NICOSIA, Feb 25: Recent floods in southern Iran have destroyed more than 130,000 houses and caused at least 300 million dollar of damage, Tehran radio said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Red Crescent official Ali Ghayuri said the damage from the floods which swept six provinces was on a par with Iran's biggest earthquake which devastated a region near the Caspian coast in 1990, the radio said.

Iran gave no overall figure for the damage from the flood which killed 35,000 people.

Floods destroy 130,000 houses in Iran

performed within 72 hours of removal from the donor. Kidney transplants too need almost simultaneous operations on both donor and recipient.

But with more and more transplants every day, many by small private clinics, procedural norms are often a casualty.

A major reason for the world health body stepping up pressure on Third World governments to ban the trade is that several kidney recipients in the west have acquired the AIDS virus from improperly screened donors in poor countries, say activists.

The number of private Indian hospitals transplanting human organs has mushroomed in recent years.

performed within 72 hours of removal from the donor. Kidney transplants too need almost simultaneous operations on both donor and recipient.

But these figures are based on reported cases and the real size of the trade is much larger.

A federation of over 3,000 non-governmental health bodies, VHAI, has circulated a paper, "Trading in Organs: Need for a Comprehensive Policy" among legislators and health professionals to lobby for modifying the bill. "Passed as it is, the bill will be a quite ineffective piece of legislation," says VHAI's Rama Bana.

Every year, 80,000 people in India suffer from renal failure, necessitating a kidney transplant, and there are two million Indians who could regain their sight with corneal transplants.

But supply is far short of demand. Only a thousand voluntary kidney donors are found every year. And according to the New Delhi based Times Eye Research Foundation, the 154 Indian eye banks, up from 45 a decade ago, can provide a total of just 7,106 corneas.

Even legalising cadaver donations will not bridge the shortfall, especially as removal of the consent of relatives. Most Indians would consider it sacrilegious.

But a far bigger problem is the absence of a proper judicial infrastructure to ensure that basic norms are followed in removing, storing and transplanting organs.

Eye transplants must be