King Hussein, Mubarak talk ME peace process

AMMAN, Dec 31: King Hussein and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak discussed the latest development in the Arab-Israeli peace talks after a stopover here by PLO leader Yasser Arafat, the official news agency Petra reported today, reports AFP.

The two leaders "reviewed a host of current Arab issues, the peace process and its latest developments" and ways of working towards a United Arab stance when they spoke by phone on Thursday night, the agency said.

The call followed a two hour meeting at Amman Airport between the Jordanian Monarch and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, who made a brief stopover here on his way back from Cairo to his headquarters in Tunis.

In their unscheduled talks, Arafat and King Hussein stressed the need for "starting a new phase of clear cut, long term mutual coordination with a view to safeguarding the Palestinian people's rights in their homeland" and ending their "longstanding ordeal," Petra said.

Cairo has hosted intensive Israeli-PLO negotiations which have so far failed to find agreement on implementing the Palestinian autonomy accord.

PLO executive committee member Yasser Abed Rabbo, a key figure in the Cairo talks, stressed in Amman that the "Israeli position was still remote from the declaration of principles," notably over control of international border crossings, the size of Jericho and Jewish settlements.

Rabbodenied reports about reaching a draft accord with Israel.

US, DPRK agree on 'package deal' to resolve N-dispute

SEOUL, Dec 31: The United States and North Korea have virtually agreed on a "package deal" to resolve their long-standing dispute over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons capability, a news report said Friday, reports AP.

Under the deal, North Korea would be expected to reopen its nuclear facilities to international inspections by January, the national Yonhap news agency quoted a senior Foreign Ministry official as saying.

"The two sides could not reach full agreement because of a couple of problems but those remaining problems are insignificant and are not expected to be obstacles," Yonhap quoted the official as saying.

The agency said the United States and North Korea would hold another meeting early next week to seal the "package deal" that also calls for Washington to improve political ties with Pyongyang. Inter-Korea dialogue, suspended over the nuclear dispute, would also reopen as part of the deal.

The United States, closely allied with pro-Western South Korea, has no formal ties with the Communist North. Improve ties with Washington is one of North Korea's top policy goals.

North Korea, a hard-line Marxist state, says its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes only but has refuse outside inspections, heightening suspicion that it is developing nuclear weapons.

Officials of the United States and North Korea met in New York Wednesday for the fifth time in December to try to resolve their dispute over Pyongyang's nuclear inspection problem.

After the New York meeting, the two sides reported progress an expressed optimism that the dispute could be resolved peacefully soon.

US State Department press officer David Johnson reported that Washington has "move closer" to meeting its objectives of getting North Korea to receive International Atomic Energy Agency inspections.

North Korea also said a "breakthrough" was made at the latest New York meeting.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency, monitored in Tokyo, said the United States indicated a willingness to meet a longstanding Pyongyang demand for an end to joint US-South Korean military exercises, usually held each year in March.

"We agreed to allow inspection needed entirely for guaranteeing the continuity of (nuclear) safeguards, not routine and ad hoc inspection," the KCNA quoted an unidentified Foreign Ministry official as saying.

The routine inspections remained to be negotiated, he said.

BRIEFLY

Rao meets Dr Sharma : The Prime Minister P.V Narashimha Rao met the President Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma, at the Rastrapati Bhawan in New Delhi yesterday morning, PTI reports from New Delhi.

The 45-minute meeting came a day after parliament had discussed the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) report on the securities scam.

A Rastrapati Bhawan spokesman described the meeting as a routine one.

Jiang, Kim to visit Japan: Chinese President Jiang Zemin and South Korean President Kim Young-Sam will both visit Japan in 1994, the Kyodo news service said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

No appropriate date for Jiang's visit has been set but Kim is expected in March or April, the news agency said, adding that Chinese Vice Premier Zhu Rongji would also come to Japan. Jiang, who visited Japan in April 1992, will be making his first official visit here since assuming the presidential post in October 1992.

Cyclone hits Papua New Guinea: Nine people have gone missing after tropical cyclone Rewa hit southwest Papua New Guinea (PNG) Thursday night, Xinhua reports from Canberra.

The nine people went out in a banana dinghy on Wednesday and have not returned by that morning, the Australian Associated Press reported on Friday.

Fears have been aroused that they came across cyclone Rewa which battered several small islands off the southwestern tip of PNG Thursday night.

Douglas Hurd to visit Mideast: British foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd will visit nations on the front line of the Middle East peace process next week, the Foreign Office said on Thursday, Reuter reports from London.

Hurd leaves on Monday for Lebanon, Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan. He will also visit Malta.

Aides said the tour would reinforce British backing for the peace process agreed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation for limited autonomy in Jericho and the Gaza Strip.

France expels two Iranians : France has expelled two Iranians suspected of a role in the 1990 killing in Switzerland of an opposition figure, spurning a Swiss extradition request "in the national interest," the premier's office said Thursday, AP reports from Paris.

The two suspects, Mohsen Sharif Esfahani, 37, and Ahmad Taheri, 32, were expelled Wednesday night to Tehran, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Switzerland has been seeking the pair's extradition for prosecution in the April 24, 1990 killing of Kazem Rajavi, the brother of Massoud Rajavi, leader of the Mujahedeen Khalq, the top Iranian opposition group.

IRA kills British soldier: Irish Republican Army guerrillas shot dead a British soldier in Northern Ireland on Thursday, the first person killed since an Anglo-Irish peace plan was launched two weeks ago, Reuter reports from Belfast.

He was also the first person killed after an IRA ceasefire for Christmas.

An IRA statement said the soldier, shot in the town of Crossmaglen, was targeted by its "2nd battalion".

A police spokesman said the soldier appeared to have been hit by a single shot and was taken to hospital where he died shortly afterwards.

2 killed in Malaysian chopper crash: A Royal Malaysian Air Force super puma helicopter crashed yesterday in a mangrove swamp in the northern state of Kedah killing at least two people, the national news agency BERNAMA said, Reuter reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Rescue workers were trying to extricate two bodies from the wreckage at the crash site in Sungai Petani, BERNAMA said.

Air force officials told BERNAMA that there were four crew members in the aircraft when it crashed.

Leader of the extremist Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia Vladimir Zhirinovsky gestures while talking to journalists after his return from Bulgaria in the headquarters of his party, Moscow, on Dec 30. Zhirinovsky was expelled from Bulgaria recently after he stated that Bulgarian President Zheleve should be sacked. — AFP photo

Former Prime Minister of Pakistan and leader of the opposition in his country Nawaz Sharif (R), shakes hands with Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic Dec 30 in Sarajevo. Sharif is on a two-day visit to the Bosnian capital. — AFP photo

Sharif calls for lifting arms embargo against Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Dec 31: Pakistan's former Prime Minister called on Thursday for the Bosnia arms embargo to be lifted and said the international community was guilty of a double standard against the war-torn country's Muslim-led government, reports Reuter.

"An immediate lifting of the arms embargo is a must," Nawaz Sharif, unseated as premier of the Islamic country by Benazir Bhutto earlier this year, told reporters in Sarajevo.

"The double standard of the world have to come to an end."

The ex-premier said the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), of which Pakistan is a leading member, would have to play a more prominent role in resolving Bosnia's 21-month civil war.

UN fails to achieve peace in Bosnia, says mission chief

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzogovina, Dec 31 : Troop shortages, Bureaucratic hassles and political posturing have bogged down the UN mission in Bosnia, the head of the peacekeeping forces there says, reports AP.

Showing the same frustration that plagued his two predecessors, Lt. Gen. Francis Briquemont said the Bosnia operation raises questions about the future of such missions.

"There are a lot of lessons to learn," he said in an interview recently in his small office in the UN compound near Sarajevo's main hospital. As he spoke, a shell landed nearby, rattling the window.

Briquemont has been on the job since July 12, moving up from commander of Belgian troops. The United Nations rotates its command here among the chiefs of its multinational contingents.

Briquemont expects to be replaced in six to eight months, citing the strains of acting as military commander and diplomat.

He questioned whether the leaders of Bosnia's three warring parties have the interests of their populations at heart.

"The leaders never speak about their own populations," Briquemont said. "They speak of their war goals and their objectives. I think they like the power very much."

But he also blamed the United Nations for its failure to achieve peace here, saying the Security Council has been too lofty in its goals and too sparing with resources.

"There is a fantastic gap between all these Security Council resolutions and the means available to execute them," he said. All these resolutions can not be executed in the field."

The general said he needs at least 10,000 fresh troops to carry out the resolutions, including one passed in April to establish "safe areas" around Muslim enclaves threatened by Bosnian Serb forces.

But instead of more troops, France and Britain have talked of pulling out in the spring if there is no peace agreement. Briquemont said the Spanish contingent is under similar pressure at home.

"You have a sort of paralysis of the operation because of the lack of troops", he said. "It's very frustrating when you see what we are trying to do with our few units."

Briquemont said his primary mandate is to make sure aid reaches the needy, "and for the rest, I am doing what I can. For the next three or four months, we must save the whole population of this country."

The mission also has been hampered by the UN effort in Somalia, where casualties among American troops seem to have sapped international will for stronger action in Bosnia, he said.

"I have the impression that all the countries thought it was possible to have these operations without any casualties," he said. "Now you have very difficult operations with casualties. Public opinion is reluctant to accept that."

But Briquemont suggested the Bosnia mission may have been doomed from the start.

"The United Nations decided to come to Bosnia in a 'peacekeeping' operation where there was no peace and no agreement," he said.

Russia to sell 4 rocket boosters to India

MOSCOW, Dec 31: Russia has decided to sell four rocket boosters to India — two more than initially planned — to compensate for its cancellation earlier this year of a contract, Interfax reported today, reports AFP.

The news agency quoted the Director of the Russian Space Agency, Yuri Koptev, as saying that the additional rocket boosters would compensate India for Russia's decision not to provide equipment and expertise in training specialists in space technology.

Russia was forced in June to cancel provisions of the contract that dealt with Technical aid after Washington charged that it was in violation of an international treaty prevents the spread of technology that could be used to develop nuclear arms.

The United States warned it was prepared to impose economic sanctions if Russia did not comply with the Missile Technology Control Regime (MCTR) even though Moscow argued that it was not in violation of the treaty.

Koptev said the first booster would be delivered in 1995, as part of a 220-million-dollar contract.

Wijetunga calls for peace in '94

COLOMBO, Dec 31: President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga called today for unity and peace in 1994 but at the same time repeated his earlier hawkish promise to wipe out "terrorism" and end Shri Lanka's long-standing ethnic conflict, reports AFP.

"Our theme for the new year should be singular dedication to the creation of a united Shri Lanka. Let the year 1994 be the year of justice, peace and stability," Wijetunga said in a message for the new year.

"The need for all Shri Lankan to stand united, forgetting all differences of race, religion or caste, and shedding petty political differences for the good of all, is felt today more than ever before," Wijetunga said.

But Wijetunga said he wanted to eliminate "terrorism" in the northeast.

Thousands sign petition

Aideed's supporters want UN to quit Somalia

MOGADISHU, Dec 31: Thousands of Somalis gathered in warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed's South Mogadishu stronghold Thursday to sign a petition urging United Nations forces to quit Somalia, reports AFP.

General Aideed himself stayed in Nairobi on Thursday after holding talks with Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi on Wednesday. Members of Aideed's Somali National Alliance (SNA) faction said he would probably visit neighbouring Uganda and Tanzania before returning to Mogadishu, possibly next week.

The petition signed by Aideed's supporters in Mogadishau accuses the UN of human rights abuses including the detention of Osman Hassan Ali, known as Ato, Aideed's chief financier who was arrested on September 21.

Two other senior Aideed aides, Omar Salad Elmi and Mohamed Hassan Awale, have been held since October 3.

The petition reiterates Aideed's assertion that the ON wants to colonize Somalia and accuses the world body of "creating a hostile atmosphere" by attacks against Aideed's faction, causing "the death and injury of an estimated 11,000 Somali civilians."

An Aideed supporter, Abdi Abshir Kahiye, said the SNA hoped to hand the petition to UN special envoy to Somalia, Jonathan Howe, with more than 50,000 signatures.

Kuwait to sign defence pact with China

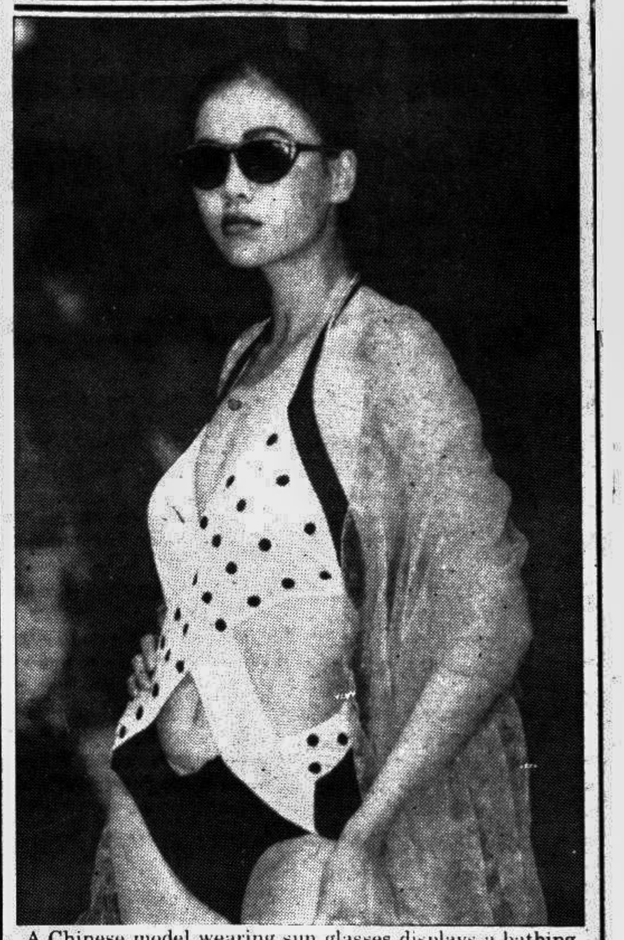
KUWAIT, Dec 31: Kuwait is close to reaching a defence accord with China, a Kuwaiti newspaper said today, reports Reuter.

The newspaper Al Anbaa quoted Defence Minister Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as saying: "Communications with China regarding the accord are being conducted through the Foreign Ministry, they have reached their final stages."

Sheikh Ali did not elaborate on the terms of the agreement.

It would be the fifth defence agreement between Kuwait and a permanent member of the UN Security Council since the United States and its allies drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in 1991.

Off the Record



A Chinese model wearing sun glasses displays a bathing suit at Ching Huan night club in Changsha Dec 24. Some women in the Changsha modelling business earn a respectable living of more than 4,000 Yuan (US dollar 500) per month, ten times the average income. — AFP photo

Smoking helps body burn fat but....

SAN FRANCISCO, California: Moderate smoking helps the body burn fat, but cannot be recommended as a slimming aid, a new study says, reports AFP.

"Smoking, from a health point of view, is much more risky than weighing those few extra pounds," said Marc Hellerstein, a University of California at Berkeley professor and the study's lead author.

While it had been shown that smoking increases metabolism — the rate at which food calories are turned into energy — the new research is the first to show that smoking directly stimulates a process called lipolysis, a process that frees lipids, or fats, from cells and carries them into the bloodstream.

Consequently, people trying to quit smoking can gain an average of 3.6 to 4.5 kilos (eight to 10 pounds) even if they improve bad eating habits they had before going smoke-free.

Some lipids that enter the bloodstream are burned by the higher metabolism. But many of them are converted by the liver into fatty substances called triglycerides, which contribute to artery clogging.

Cat fulfils master's last request

NEWPORT BEACH, California: Fulfilling his master's last request, a cat named Rudi sat in the front row at the man's funeral, reports AFP.

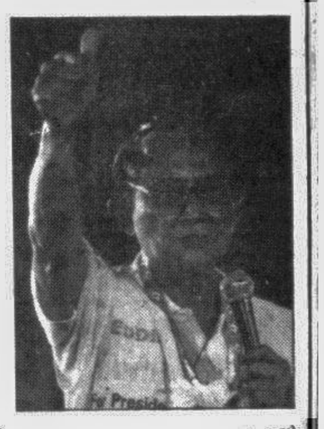
Dick Denio, a retired fisherman, made the wish shortly before dying on Christmas eve at the age of 78.

His roommate, Jeni Greenman, said she was left with little choice about the funeral Wednesday.

"I didn't want to take Rudi to the service, but its was Dick's last wish and I didn't want to break my promise," Greenman said. "Rudi keeps looking for Dick. I say, daddy's not coming home."

Denio died of a stroke after undergoing lung surgery.

"President of the Manila zoo"



MANILA: A 40-year-old woman was wrestled to the ground and jailed overnight after pushing her way to President Fidel Ramos and addressing him as "president of the Manila Zoo," police said Friday, reports AP.

Bodyguards thought the incident, which took place during a wreath-laying ceremony Thursday, could have been an assassination attempt.

But investigators later concluded the woman was "demented," police said.

As the woman was dragged away, reporters asked what had prompted the outburst.

"Ask the moon," she replied.

Campaign to save sex for marriage

NEW YORK: With the mantra "True love waits," US churches are teaming up in a campaign to persuade teenagers to save sex for marriage, reports AFP.

Designed to help prevent disease and teenage pregnancy — and win chastity pledges from half-a-million youths — the drive is the brainchild of the Conservative Southern Baptist Sunday School board.

But other denominations have jumped on the bandwagon, including the 59-million-member Roman Catholic church, prompting church officials to boast that they may be on the verge of a sexual revolution among teens.

"I hope it is a clear signal to society that.... sexual purity prior to marriage is a viable option for teenagers, and one they are willing to stand behind," said Jimmy Hester, the southern Baptist coordinator of the programme.

Floods in southern England

LONDON, Dec 31: Torrential rain and strong winds battered southern England on Thursday, causing floods which inundated hundreds of home and closed many roads.

Seven feet (two metres) of water ripped through the fishing village of Polperro in the southwest country of Cornwall when the normally tranquil river Pol was turned into a raging torrent.

Cars were picked up and carried away by the force of the flooding. A number of houses and two bridges were damaged.

One of the last symbols of Cold War fades from air on New Year's Day

BERLIN, Dec 31: One of the last symbols of the Cold War will disappear at the stroke of midnight today when as the bells ring out the new year the US radio station RIAS will pass into history, reports AFP.

RIAS was founded by the US forces in February 1946 to boost the morale of the Berliners at the end of World War II, and broadcast the message of the victorious US forces to the defeated, war-weary population.

All news bulletins were sent by telex direct from Washington and had to be translated exactly word for word.

But with the collapse of communism, the thawing of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany, RIAS — radio in the American Sector, or Rundunk Im Amerikanischen Sektor — is to fade from the airwaves.

From January 1, 1994 it will be merged with the former national West German radio station Deutschlandfunk and the old East German cultural station DS-Kultur, to be reborn as a new national broadcaster Deutschlandradio.

RIAS Director Helmut Drueck said the newxomer on the wavelengths will aim "to bring the two halves of our country closer together. Officially we are reunified, but socially we are still wide apart."

Out of the 900 staff only 350 are being taken on by the new station, and Drueck too will start 1994 out of a job.

It will be a sad parting of the ways for many Berliners who tracked the momentous events which shook their city in the last 50 years by switching the dial to RIAS.

The station was dubbed "the voice of the free world for a free world," and was there at every twist and turn in the city's fate.

Occupied by French, British, American forces following the end of the war, West Berlin soon found itself isolated and surrounded by a Soviet-occupied zone, which became East Germany.

It was in 1948-49 during the Red Army's blockade of Wester Berlin when RIAS really came into its own. As the Soviet forces tried to squeeze the allied forces out of West Berlin, the city was deprived of everything including electricity.

While the allies fed the population via huge airlift, RIAS boosted morale taking to the streets and broadcasting the news by loudspeaker.

RIAS played its part in the bloody June 17, 1953 uprising in East Berlin and several East German towns telling participants how widely their protest had spread.

And when the Berlin Wall — the cruellest symbol of all of the city's divided status — was thrown up overnight in August 1961 by East German, RIAS was on the scene, giving numerous East Berliners time to dash the few hundred metres (yards) to the West.

During the long years of the Cold War, East Germans who defied the government and tuned into RIAS were mercilessly tracked down by the East German secret police.

So it is perhaps the ultimate irony that as the wall finally came tumbling down in November 1989, RIAS was on hand to report the historic occasion, thus recording its own death knell.

A spokesman for Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Anton Pfeifer, paid tribute Thursday to RIAS' role in the history of Berlin.

RIAS made an enormous contribution to the reunification of our country," he said.

4 Thais to die for killing prostitute

BANGKOK, Dec 31: Four Thai men, including two policemen, were sentenced to death for murdering a young prostitute who was trying to escape a brothel in southern Songkhla province, court officials said, reports Reuter.

The sentence by Songkhla provincial court on Thursday was welcomed by local residents who packed the court room, newspapers said today.

"They deserved what they got," one told the Nation newspaper.