

Pakistan protests Sharma's remark

ISLAMABAD, Feb 5: Pakistan has strongly protested what it called a personal attack against its Prime Minister by the Indian President, officials said Saturday, reports AFP.

Indian High Commissioner S K Lamba was summoned to the Foreign Office here late Friday to receive a note of complaint to be conveyed to his government, they said.

Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma on Thursday accused Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of "losing touch with reality" and ignoring the plight of her own people.

"Mrs Bhutto has lost her roots as well as touch with reality and the culture of the subcontinent," Sharma said during a speech in the northern Indian city of Jaipur.

The Pakistani Foreign Office said in a statement that the

"personal attack is not only unwarranted, but it is also a violation of the norms related to civilised conduct between sovereign states."

Sharma's remarks were meant to "deflect attention from India's massive violations of human rights in Indian-held Kashmir," the statement said.

The campaign would "not serve to deflect world opinion" from Kashmir, the statement said, adding that "Indian atrocities have shocked the civilised world and deserve to be condemned by the international community."

Bhutto told the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) in Geneva on Tuesday that Indian troops had killed more than 40,000 people since 1989 in a bid to stamp out a Kashmiri uprising against Indian rule.

15000 Indians march to the border

WAGHA BORDER (India), Feb 5: About 15,000 people marched up to the border with Pakistan Saturday for a two-hour demonstration to protest against Islamabad's support for Muslim separatists in Kashmir, reports AP.

The protest coincided with a day-long nation-wide general strike in Pakistan called by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to show solidarity with the separatists who have been fighting Indian security forces in Kashmir since the past three years. About 8,000 people have been killed.

The issue is at the core of India-Pakistan enmity, the South Asian neighbours who have fought three wars, including two over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, during the last four decades.

"Death to Benazir" and "Kashmir for Indians" shouted as they marched on a highway that cuts through wheat fields toward the heavily-guarded border in the northern state of Punjab.

About 3,000 policemen formed a wall with bamboo shields and stopped the howling men and women about 50 meters (yards) from the frontier marked by barbed wire. Hundreds of tourists and visitors from the two countries use the road every day, passing through metal gates on both sides of the border.

On Saturday, the gate was shut and no-cross-border traffic was allowed during the protest organised by the youth wing of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's Congress Party.

"It seems Pakistan has not forgotten the 1971 lesson," said Maninderjit Singh Bitta, president of the Indian Youth Congress, referring to the 1971 India-Pakistan war over Bangladesh, then known as East Pakistan. Pakistan lost the war.

The earlier conflicts in 1948 and 1965 over Kashmir left roughly one-third of the state with Pakistan and the rest with India.

Kashmir is the only Muslim-dominated region in the predominantly Hindu India. Once a princely state ruled by a Hindu King, it merged with India when the sub-continent won independence from Britain in 1947 and was divided on religious lines into India and Muslim Pakistan.

But the simmering Muslim discontent with Indian rule exploded into a guerrilla war in late 1989, and India accuses Pakistan of training and arming the Kashmiri rebels. Pakistan denies the charge, but Benazir Bhutto says her country supports the Kashmiris' right to self-determination.

"We appeal to you as a fellow human being, belonging to this subcontinent, to stop this madness and work sincerely for peace," Bitta said in a speech delivered from atop a bus.

The protesters, who burned a cloth effigy of Benazir Bhutto after beating it with shoes, later dispersed peacefully to return to Amritsar, a Sikh holy city 30 kilometers (20 miles) to the east.



Today, February 6, is the 42nd anniversary of the accession of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to the Throne of the United Kingdom. In this file photo the Queen is seen making her annual inspection of the Yeomen of the Guard at the Buckingham Palace. —LPS photo

BRIEFLY

64 West African migrants dead: A total of 64 West African migrants were found dead in a police cell in the Gabon capital Libreville, a Defence Ministry spokesman said on Friday, Reuters reports from Libreville.

A government statement earlier reported deaths from what it described as fighting among inmates at the detention camp but gave no figures of casualties.

There was widespread scepticism in Libreville about the accuracy of the official version. Over-crowded cells often lead to suffocation in African prisons.

Deng to celebrate Lunar Year: Chinese senior leader Deng Xiaoping is expected to arrive in southern China's Zhuhai special economic zone next week where he will celebrate the Lunar New Year, a report said yesterday, according to AFP from Hong Kong.

Deng, 89, will arrive in Zhuhai at the border with the Portuguese enclave of Macau, which reverts to Chinese sovereignty in 1999, before the Lunar New Year Thursday, the Taiwan-funded United Daily news quoted sources as saying.

Chinese Premier Li Peng ended his five-day visit to Zhuhai on Friday and is currently in Shenzhen to attend the official opening of Daya bay nuclear power plant on Sunday.

Referendum in Moldova Mar 6: Moldovan President Mircea Snegur on Friday ordered to hold a referendum on the country's independence next month, apparently seeking to quell nationalists who want to reunite with neighbouring Romania, AP reports from Moscow.

In accordance with Snegur's decree, the referendum will be held on March 6, the Interfax news agency reported.

Moldova's citizens will be asked a single question — whether they support an independent, unified and neutral Moldova "within the borders recognised by the United Nations."

US welcomes Ukraine: The White House on Friday welcomed a vote by Ukraine's parliament that moves the former Soviet republic closer to eliminating its nuclear weapons, calling it "a major non-proliferation achievement," AP reports from Washington.

The Clinton administration issued a congratulatory statement, playing down the fact that Ukrainian lawmakers also rejected a move to make the nation completely free of nuclear weapons.

The parliament voted 260-3 on Thursday to remove conditions it had imposed for approving the START 1 treaty requiring Ukraine to surrender its nuclear warheads. Lawmakers also passed the related Lisbon protocol on handing over the weapons.

Search for Colombian drug gang: An elite police team like the one used to kill drug lord Pablo Escobar is in Cali, poised to hunt the bosses of the world's largest cocaine trafficking gang, a law enforcement official said Friday, AP reports from Bogota.

More than 150 agents are expected to begin Monday pursuing the Cali cartel bosses: brothers Gilberto and Miguel Rodriguez, Jose Santacruz and Francisco Herrera, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Agents of the US Drug Enforcement Administration are training the Colombian police team, which will use radio-tracking equipment, phone bugs and a secret base in Cali, El Tiempo newspaper reported Friday, citing unidentified police sources.

11 Buddhist nuns jailed: Eleven Tibetan Buddhist nuns have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to seven years apparently for attempting a protest, Amnesty International reported Friday, AP says from Beijing.

The sentences came to light the same day China announced the early releases of three political prisoners in an apparent response to stepped-up pressure from Washington to relax repression of dissent.

The international human rights group Amnesty International said the nuns from Garu Nunery, north of the capital city of Lhasa, were arrested on June 14. The report was not clear on the reason for the arrests, but said unofficial sources in Lhasa speculated the nuns were arrested before they managed to begin a protest.

12 shot dead in Sudan: Three masked men with machine guns sprayed bullets on worshippers in a mosque Friday, killing 10 men and two children, police said, AP reports from Khartoum.

Seventeen people were also reported injured in the attack in this northeast African country, which has been under Muslim fundamentalist military rule for almost five years.

The assailants escaped in a pickup truck from the mosque at Um-Bada in Omdurman, 15 miles (26 km) north of Khartoum, the official Sudan News Agency said. No group claimed responsibility.

Discovery's cosmonaut almost stranded

CAPE CANAVERAL, Feb 5: The shuttle Discovery's Russian cosmonaut, Sergei Krikalev, was almost stranded in space a second time, as far as ham radio operators were concerned, reports AP.

After months of trying, the State Department finally got permission Friday from Russia's Ministry of Post and Telecommunications for Krikalev to use Discovery's ham radio to talk to people in his homeland. The federal Communications Commission quickly gave the final approval.

The Russian approval came not a moment too soon — Discovery's crew was already pulling out the shuttle's amateur radio for the first of five school contacts.

Afghan warfare destined to drag on inconclusively

KABUL, Feb 5: The fierce fighters of Afghanistan drove out the British colonialists in the 19th century, the Soviet army in the 1980s and all other would-be conquerors passing through central Asia, reports AP.

With the foreign forces now gone, the quarrelsome Afghans have turned their guns against each other, waging a brutal civil war that has devastated the capital and shows no sign of ending.

The latest battle erupted January 1, and five weeks of heavy fighting have settled nothing, proving only that an outright battlefield victory is beyond the grasp of all the Islamic factions.

President Burhanuddin Rabbani's forces, commanded by Ahmad Shah Masood, have held their ground in the capital, clinging to the presidential

palace, the Defence Ministry and the radio and television stations.

But Rabbani and Masood have little prospect of dislodging their main rivals, who are able to terrorise the city with rockets and artillery from hills and neighbourhoods on the southern and eastern outskirts of Kabul.

The warfare appears destined to drag on inconclusively, eventually ending in yet another stalemate.

This has become the painfully familiar pattern since April 1992, when the loosely allied Islamic factions ousted a Soviet-installed Communist government in place since 1979.

The Islamic groups had widespread civilian support when they fought the Communists. But many Afghans

have grown disgusted with the non-stop feuding among factional leaders, who have few ideological differences but harbour intense hatred of one another.

"Why don't these people

come to terms with each other and do something for the people instead of fighting each other, killing innocent people and destroying our homes?" asked Kabul resident Mohammed Sharief, whose son was killed by a rocket that also destroyed the family home.

Some 100,000 Kabul residents have fled the city during the latest fighting, while around 10,000 have been wounded and an estimated 1,000 killed.

The United Nations last month pulled out its small international staff and the few embassies operating in Kabul evacuated their diplomats.

Peace efforts have dissolved into a bitter exchange of insults between the rival Islamic groups and negotiations are unlikely to succeed any time soon.

The country was relatively calm and making modest steps toward rebuilding when war broke out New Year's Day. The

marketplace in Kabul was bustling, full of food and other goods. Nine political parties formed a coalition government headed by Rabbani and Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

The government had little authority and barely functioned, but at least representatives of the rival parties were meeting on a regular basis without drawing guns.

It all fell apart when Hekmatyar and an unlikely ally, warlord Rashid Dostum, teamed up for an assault aimed at ousting President Rabbani. These three men — Rabbani, Hekmatyar and Dostum — now head the most powerful factions.

Dostum was a leading general in the Communist army. His defection to rebel forces in early 1992 was crucial to the

downfall of the Communists. He then built a powerful militia among his fellow Uzbeks in northern Afghanistan.

Islamic factional leaders often depict Dostum as an un-reformed Communist — until they need a battlefield ally. President Rabbani wooed Dostum last year. But by January 1, Dostum had turned on the president and joined forces with Hekmatyar.

The New Year's attack by Hekmatyar and Dostum never came close to ousting Rabbani. Now the war is fought mostly with a predictable, though terrifying, exchange of rockets and artillery from long range.

Even if Hekmatyar and Dostum triumph, few believe their battlefield marriage would last. Most observers think they would then turn on each other.

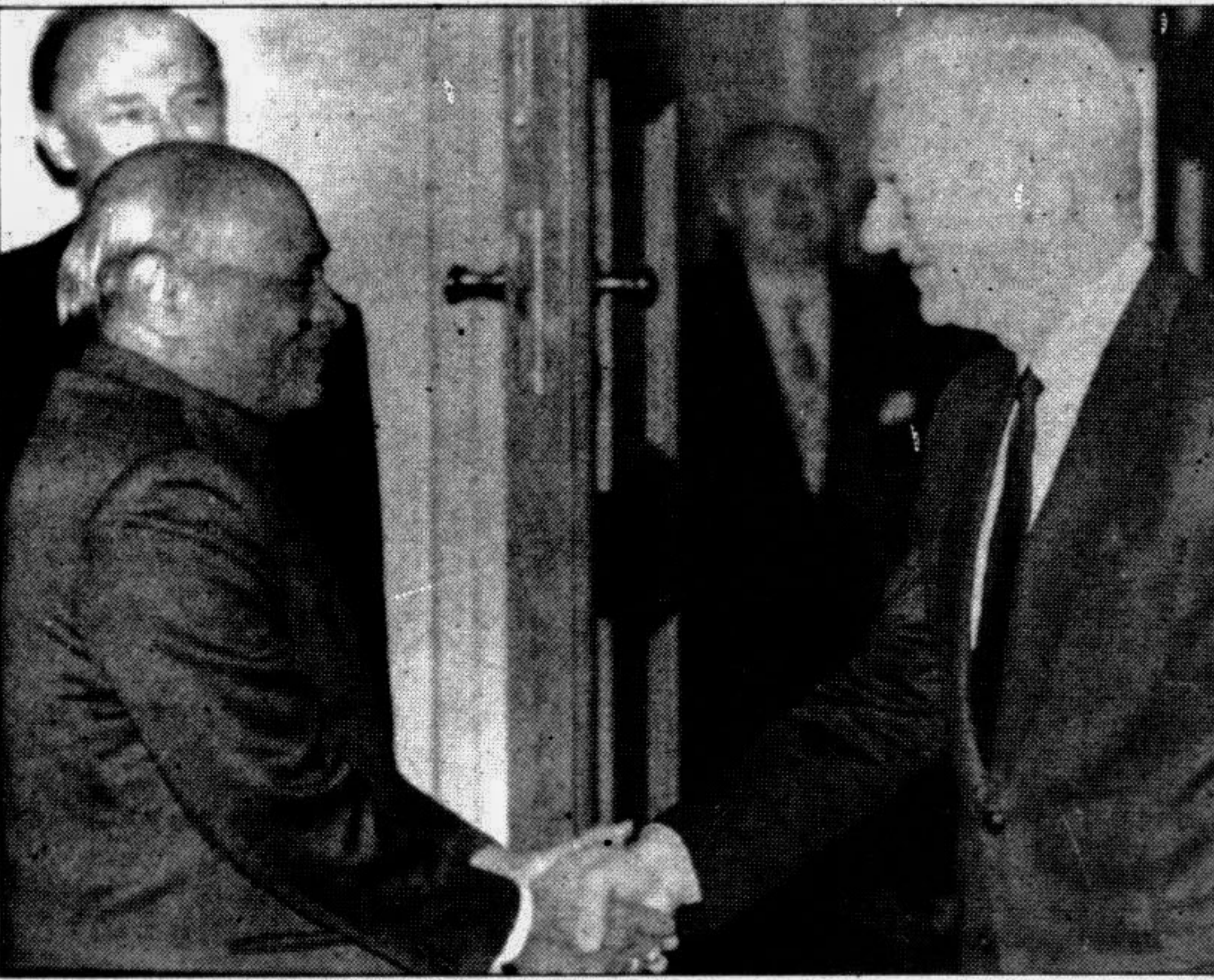
Aspin returns to private life

ARINGTON, Feb 5: Former Defence Secretary Les Aspin returned to private life Friday, praising his successor and US military leaders, reports AP.

"I know that as I leave this job, America's security is in great hands," the former congressman said at a ceremony in his honour at Fort Myer.

Aspin chaired the Armed Services Committee in the House of Representatives before President Clinton nominated him as Defence Secretary. He was forced out of that job two months ago. William Perry, who had held the No. 2 job at the Pentagon, was confirmed by the Senate and sworn in Thursday to replace Aspin.

Clinton's first choice to succeed Aspin, Adm Bobby Inman, dropped out of the running last month.



Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao is welcomed by German President Richard von Weizsaecker (R) at Berlin's castle Bellevue on Friday on the third day of Rao's visit to Germany. The Premier's visit is centered on economic issues. — AFP photo

US continues efforts for sanctions on DPRK

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 5: The United States on Friday began trying to build support for possible UN sanctions against North Korea if the Pyongyang government does not permit full international inspections of its nuclear facilities, reports AP.

Western diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said US Ambassador Madeleine K. Albright met with envoys of the other four permanent Security Council members — Britain, China, France and Russia.

The diplomats said Britain and France agreed the ques-

tion of sanctions should be placed before the Security Council if North Korea continues to refuse full inspections. Russia appeared supportive, they said, but China, an ally of North Korea, reserved its opinion.

China, which holds a veto on the council, has opposed taking the issue to the Security Council and has called for more negotiations. South Korea and Japan also had been wary of action which would isolate North Korea and could provoke it.

North Korea, one of the most closed societies in the

world, insists its nuclear programme is only for peaceful purposes. But its rejection of full inspections has heightened suspicions that it is developing a nuclear arsenal.

Last spring, North Korea objected to planned inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency and announced it would withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It suspended its withdrawal last June, and in December agreed in talks with U.S. officials to permit full inspections at seven nuclear sites.

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S Africa's army opened up to blacks

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 5: South Africa's army was opened up to blacks for the first time Friday with some Soweto recruits given a welcome kiss by Miss South Africa, Jacqui Mofakeng, reports AP.

Around 500 young men, mostly black, were recruited to the force at the Soweto ceremony. Police intervened to remove disappointed candidates from the recruiting station.

"Things have changed so much in South Africa, I want to serve my country and make a career in the army," said smiling 22-year-old Russel Muzundile, from Soweto.

Sergeant Kobus Wessels, a member of the all-whites, recruiting team, said "I don't know whether it is a good or bad thing to have a multi-racial army."

UN installs spy camera in Iraq

MANAMA, Feb 5: UN monitoring plans to ensure Iraq does not revive its secret nuclear programmes accelerate next week with the installation of spy cameras, a top inspector said Friday, reports AP.

Iraq, eager to get oil and trade sanctions lifted, is cooperating satisfactorily, said Maurizio Zifferero, the Italian deputy director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"Elements of the monitoring plan are up and running, others are being phased in," Zifferero said.

He said a 17-member team of nuclear experts led by Garry Dillon, a Briton, headed early Friday to Iraq to install three cameras at mechanical workshops to make sure no tools are produced for use in enrichment of uranium. In all, the agency plans cameras at about two dozen workshops.

Zhirinovsky gives 'secret' weapon to Serbs

BELGRADE, Feb 5: Russian ultra-nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky has given a 'secret' electronic weapon to the Serbs that is now in Bosnia to be used in case of attack on a Serb-controlled area, a Zhirinovsky aide said Friday, reports AP.

The weapon, made by "a fusion of protons and neutrons at high temperatures," was given to former Serb paramilitary commander and leader of the party of Serbian Unity (SSJ), Zeljko Raznatovic Arkan.

Aleksj Vidjenkin, one of Zhirinovsky's deputies, told a press conference that "the weapon can kill a man without him realising he is disintegrating," adding it would be used if towns under Serb control in Bosnia or Serbia were attacked.

Danish marine rescues 36 Tamils from sea

COPENHAGEN, Feb 5: Danish marine authorities said Friday they had rescued 36 Sri Lankan asylum seeker dumped at high sea from a Russian container ship in three small motorised rubber dinghies, reports AP.

The ethnic Tamils, mainly men and children, had spent 12 hours at sea in the Oeresund channel between Denmark and Sweden before being spotted, a spokesman for the Danish marine command center said.

They told their rescuers they had eaten nothing for five days and that the Russian sailors had taken most of their belongings away from them, including their money and their clothes, officials said.

According to the refugees the container ship left Sri Lanka January 5, and had

dropped them in to smaller boats Thursday night. They said there had been several other dinghies.

Some of the refugees said they had paid a large sum of money to travel on the Russian vessel.

They were eventually recovered drifting in the bay of Koge, to the south east of the Danish capital, many of them with few clothes and plastic bags around their feet.

Officials took them for medical attention at Koge Hospital, and from there to a center for asylum seekers in Sandholm-Le Jren, North of Copenhagen.

Authorities and they had launched an investigation to identify the vessels which abandoned them, but that the serial numbers on three rubber dinghies had been erased.

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News Analysis

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