

Spy row : Republicans blast Clinton's policies on Russia

WASHINGTON, Feb 28: Prominent Republicans Sunday attacked President Clinton's policies on Russia as naive after the arrest last week of a CIA officer accused of being a double agent, reports Reuter.

Former Defence Secretary Dick Cheney, expected to seek the 1996 Republican nomination for the White House, accused Clinton of being soft in response to the case of Aldrich Ames, a CIA officer accused last week of being a double agent since 1985.

"I think a traditional kind of response, that we've had in the

past when we've caught them involved in espionage, would have been appropriate — to send a lot of them home, said on the NBC news programme "meet the press."

On Friday, the Clinton administration expelled Aleksandr Lysenko, described by the State Department as Moscow's chief intelligence officer in the United States, after Moscow refused to withdraw him voluntarily. The administration had pressed for action after the arrest Monday of Ames, former head of the Soviet counter intelligence branch.

Ever since Russian reformers were routed in parliamentary elections in December, the West had faced a more assertive foreign policy in the Kremlin and a slowdown in Russian economic reforms.

Relations have also been tested over President Boris Yeltsin's veto of NATO membership for members of the former Soviet bloc and his assertion of Russian interests in war-torn Bosnia.

Yeltsin failed on Saturday to block the release of some of his most bitter foes, including hardliners who sparked an uprising last October that ended with Yeltsin's order to blast the old parliament building.

Senator Richard Lugar, an Indiana Republican who is a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, advocated making tough-minded business and political deals with Russia that are in US interests, including nuclear non-proliferation.

PLO sending special envoy to US

JERUSALEM, Feb 28: The PLO is sending a special envoy to Washington for talks with US officials on terms for resuming peace talks with Israel following the massacre of 53 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, a PLO official said today, reports Reuter.

"We are sending a special envoy to Washington within 24 hours to discuss with the American administration, the requirement for resuming successful talks. In principle we have accepted to resume the talks," the official told Reuter.

"But it doesn't mean we will start next week. We need certain requirements to ensure the success of the talks to be met by both Israel and the United States," he said.

PLO rejects measures against settlers

Israel begins arresting Jewish extremists

JERUSALEM, Feb 28: Israel began arresting a small core of radical Jewish settlers in response to the Hebron mosque massacre and said it wanted to resume peace talks with the PLO this week, reports Reuter.

But the Palestine Liberation Organisation, which demanded the disarming of all settlers in the occupied territories, said Israel must do more before the negotiations on limited Palestinian self-rule could convene.

The United States, praising the Israeli cabinet's decision on Sunday to crackdown on radical settlers, called on Israel and the Palestinians to resume talks as soon as possible.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, asked by reporters if Israel was ready for talks this week, said: "from our viewpoint, yes. The ball is now in the PLO's court."

His government announced measures "on an individual basis against radical elements among the Israeli residents" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where about 120,000 Jews, armed and defended by the government, live among two million Arabs.

Rabin later explained that detention without trial, weapons confiscations and entry bans to the territories would affect only a "small minority" of settlers who constitute "the focal point of friction" in the Hebron area.

A Nicosia report says: The PLO Executive Committee, meeting in Tunis, has rejected measures taken by Israel against militant settlers following the Hebron mosque massacre, Tunis Radio reported today.

The meeting adjourned its

the Israeli measures taken against settlers and hoped the UN Security Council would adopt a decisive resolution to protect Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Witnesses said at the start of the meeting on Sunday night that it apparently lacked

core of radical Jewish settlers.

Israel said it wanted to resume peace talks with the PLO this week but the Palestine Liberation Organisation, which has demanded the disarming of all settlers in the occupied territories, said Israel must do more before the negotiations on limited Palestinian self-rule could convene.

Meanwhile, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon have cut short peace talks with Israel following the Hebron massacre of 43 Palestinians, US officials said Sunday.

A Clinton administration official told Reuters the three Arab delegations had decided to return home following Friday's murder of 43 Palestinians by a Jewish settler in the occupied West Bank town of Hebron.

"We understand they are calling off the last three days of talks, basically on the grounds that the atmosphere is not right. They wanted things to cool down a bit," said the official, who asked "not to be named."

But he said there was no suggestion the talks were being permanently broken off. "It's clearly not permanent," the official said.

The current round of negotiations was due to last until March 2. An Israeli official said Israel was disappointed at the Arab decision.



PLO leader Yasser Arafat poses for photographers prior to the meeting of the executive committee of the organisation with Palestinian negotiators to the peace process in Tunis Feb 27, after the Hebron massacre.

overnight session after four hours and made no statement, the radio said, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

But Tunis Radio quoted committee members as saying the committee had rejected

the quorum of 10 needed to take any major decision.

Tunis Radio said they would meet again on Monday evening in response to Friday's massacre, in which 43 Palestinians were shot dead at prayer, Israel began arresting a small

BRIEFLY

Pope condemns church blast : Pope John Paul, who is due to visit Lebanon this spring, Sunday condemned the blast that killed at least 9 worshippers in a church near Beirut as a crime against the country, Reuter reports from Vatican City.

Speaking in St Peter's Square, the Pope also condemned the Hebron Mosque massacre.

ROK to sell ammunition to Egypt: South Korea plans to sell Egypt ammunition and other military materials for the first time, Defence Ministry officials said Monday, AP reports from Seoul.

In a letter in January, Egypt said it intended to buy artillery and other weapons as well but South Korea would sell only ammunition and other "non-combatant" materials, they said.

The officials declined to disclose other details, including the amount of sales.

Fire burns forest in Thailand : A raging fire has burnt over 3,200 hectares of forest in northeastern Thailand since it broke out on February 21 in spite of the all-out efforts to put it under control from the government and the army, Xinhua reports from Bangkok.

Various kinds of fire-fighting vehicles, airplanes and helicopters have been used in putting out the blaze, and four out of the six burning points have so far been extinguished in the Houkhakhen Wildlife Sanctuary in Uthai Thani province with a total area of 1.12 million hectares.

Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai inspected the affected area with other government officials on Saturday and ordered to take measures to put out the fire as soon as possible.

WAM becomes independent : The United Arab Emirates (UAE) news agency (WAM) has become independent from the government, media reports monitored here said yesterday, reports Xinhua from Kuwait City.

An official information source said in Dubai, UAE, that the legislative ministerial committee of the UAE approved Saturday night a federal draft bill regarding the WAM, stipulating its independence and appointing its general manager and his aids.

According to the 20-article bill, WAM, as a legal person, will enjoy full qualifications to perform necessary legal acts to achieve its goals.

Policeman shot dead in Egypt : Suspected Muslim extremists shot dead a policeman outside a southern Egypt station house Sunday night and stole his machine gun, AP reports from Cairo.

Security officials said the number of assailants who attacked Abdel-Fatah Abu Heib at his guard post outside a traffic police station was not known. They escaped.

The attack was at Edfu, a tourist centre with one of the most important ancient Egyptian temples, just north of Aswan in extreme southern Egypt.

Tigers kill 2 Lankan soldiers: Tamil rebels attacked a military outpost in northern Sri Lanka with mortars Monday, killing two soldiers and injuring a civilian, military officials said, AP reports from Colombo. The attempt by guerrillas to overrun the military base in Nikawena village was however repulsed, officials said. They did not disclose any rebel casualties.

South Korea offers to reopen talks with North on N-issue

SEOUL, Feb 28: South Korea offered Monday to reopen talks with rival North Korea to resolve a nuclear dispute and other issues that divide the two - and Seoul officials said the Communist North would probably accept, reports AP.

The offer was South Korea's follow-through on a previous deal struck by the United States and North Korea on nuclear inspections. In that deal, North Korea agreed to reopen dialogue with the South as early as Tuesday, Seoul officials said.

The South Korean offer of talks came as seven experts from the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency was on its way to the northern capital of Pyongyang for inspections at the even nuclear sites North Korea has decided to let them see.

The US-North Korea deal, reached in New York Friday, calls for Pyongyang to accept nuclear inspections and resume dialogue with rival South

Korea on a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

Vice Unification Minister Song Young-dae said a telephone message was sent to North Korea Monday, proposing that inter-Korea working-level talks be opened at the border village of Panmunjom on Tuesday.

The Communist North was expected to accept the offer.

Rabuka sworn in for second term

SUVA, Fiji, Feb 28: Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka was sworn in for a second term today and said he hoped Indian politicians he ousted in a 1987 coup would join his government within its five-year term of office, reports Reuter.

"It is something that we will not be able to avoid in the interest of the nation. It is just a matter of timing," Rabuka said at a news conference after being sworn in by Fiji's President in the capital, Suva.

Fire kills 9 in US

BALTIMORE, Feb 28: A fire that engulfed a row house, killing seven children and two adults, was caused by candles they were burning for light because their electricity had been cut off, fire officials said Sunday, reports AP.

One survivor dropped her 2-year-old son to safety from a second-floor window and then leaped herself, suffering a broken ankle, fire officials said.

Power was shut off in early November after the residents failed to make installment payments on an overdue bill of more than 1,000 dollars, said Baltimore Gas and Electric spokesman Kevin Thornton.

The house was heated by gas. Thornton did not know whether the family had paid the gas bill, but said the company has a policy of not cutting off both gas and electric service to any customer.

Investigators believe the fire late Saturday was started in the downstairs living room by candles left burning on a table beside a sofa bed where a 14-year-old boy slept, said fire department Capt. Paul Geoghegan.



Muslim Sarajevans take advantage of the upcoming spring weather to stroll in the streets of the city Feb 27. Sarajevo remains calm despite unconfirmed UN accusations that Bosnian Serb and Muslim-led forces breached a ban on heavy weapons.

Koirala calls emergency meeting of NCP

KATHMANDU, Feb 28: Nepal's embattled Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala called an emergency meeting of his ruling Nepali Congress Party today ahead of a crucial no-confidence vote, state radio said, reports Reuter.

Political sources said Koirala, facing a strong challenge from within his own party, summoned all 113 Congress members of parliament to find out how many would support him as leader in Wednesday's vote.

"Should he fail to obtain the support of at least 58 Congress members this evening, Koirala must not lose time to step down," said Narahari Acharya, a Congress member of Nepal's upper house who is considered close to the Prime Minister.

Although sponsored by the opposition, the no-confidence motion gives anti-Koirala elements in Congress the chance to damage him.

Move to convince main rival Mandela meets Zulu chief Buthelezi today

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 28: ANC President Nelson Mandela meets Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi tomorrow hoping to convince his main black political rival to contest South Africa's first all-race election and help bring peace to the country, reports AFP.

Mandela was optimistic about Tuesday's meeting despite the failure of the government to persuade Buthelezi and Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini to take part in the poll in talks Saturday in Ulundi.

The private radio 702 on Sunday reported Mandela as saying Saturday night in East London that there was still time for Buthelezi "to join the process."

The meeting between the two leaders comes amid rising tensions between Mandela's African National Congress and Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which has its power base in the violence-torn southern province of

Natal.

The ANC was preparing Sunday to hold a mass funeral in Natal for 15 of its election workers, 12 of them teenagers, who were massacred in their sleep on February 19 in a pre-dawn attack in Creighton.

One day after the killing blamed on the IFP, six people, including a four-year-old boy, were murdered on their way to an IFP rally at Taylor's Halt, near the Natal capital of Pietermaritzburg.

Almost 2,000 people were killed in political violence in Natal last year, most of it blamed on the power struggle between IFP and ANC.

Buthelezi has pledged to boycott the April polls because he says the new constitution gives neither sovereignty to the Zulu king, nor enough regional powers to his Kwazulu black homeland, which is surrounded by Natal province.

US, Vietnam start talks after 20 years

HANOI, Feb 28: US and Vietnamese negotiators began financial and political talks here Monday that could lead to the first diplomatic relations between the two since their war began nearly 20 years ago, reports AP.

Thirteen American and 18 Vietnamese negotiators met across a long rectangular table in Hanoi's Government Guest House.

These are the first major political negotiations since the Paris Peace Agreement of 1973 that ended US military involvement in Vietnam.

The negotiations were initially aimed at resolving US financial claims against Vietnam dating back to the end of the war in 1975.

and the functions of each.

Nguyen Xuan Phong, acting director of the Americas Department and head of the Vietnamese delegation, said the talks would last two days. Other observers said additional talks would have to be scheduled later on.

The talks follow the lifting of a 19-year US economic embargo against Vietnam by President Clinton on February 3.

But both US and Vietnamese officials said the two sides appeared to be moving in that direction. The liaison offices are seen as a transitional step.

The US team is headed by James Hall, the director of the State Department's Office of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Affairs, and Ronald Bettauer, Director of international claims and investment disputes.

Malaysia won't send students to UK this year

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28: Malaysia, angered over corruption charges in the British press, today broadened the economic punishment it has decided to mete out to its former colonial master, reports Reuter.

A government-backed agency said it would not send 1,000 students to Britain this year and it would terminate a contract with a British consortium that places Malaysian students in British universities.

"We are not sending our students to Britain for fear of their safety in case of retaliatory action from the British public," Nazri Abdul Aziz, Chairman of the Malaysian Trust Council said.

US comments become focus of bitter Indo-Pak dispute over Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Feb 28: Casual comments by the US administration have become the focus of a bitter dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, reports AP.

If American diplomats remain embroiled in the conflict, it could set back recent improvements in Indo-US relations and American efforts to prevent an Indo-Pakistani nuclear arms race.

An off-the-record remark by a senior official and some ill-considered wording by a junior White House letter-writer are being blamed for the damage.

Some Indian officials suggest that Robin Raphel, the State Department's top diplomat on South Asia, be told that a visit here next month would be unwelcome, or that a black carpet should be rolled out if

she does come.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since gaining independence from Britain in 1947, and are believed to have been close to nuclear wars in 1986 and 1990.

India has long been sensitive to outside criticism, and its newspapers often print exaggerated pro-government reactions.

But headlines and editorials about US President "Bill Clinton's verbal bombshells" and his administration's "tilt toward Pakistan" have been severe. The acting US ambassador responded with an op-ed piece in a large newspaper about recent improvements in Indo-US trade and military relations.

proves ties with the United States, the other will lose out. And their fears have been amplified by gaffes at the State Department and the White House," said Sumit Ganguly, a South Asia expert at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.

Strains began appearing in Indo-US relations and growing in Indo-Pakistani relations about five months ago.

Ms. Raphel, a friend of Clinton's, was promoted to US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia. Benazir Bhutto, a Harvard-educated politician, was re-elected as Pakistan's prime minister.

India, whose forces are trying to crush rebels fighting for independence there.

Many Indians believe Ms. Raphel changed US policy on Kashmir by siding with Islamic Pakistan, which supports the rebels in Jammu-Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in Hindu-dominated India. US diplomats insist there has been no policy change.

When India was partitioned by Britain in 1947, Kashmir's Maharajah signed a treaty joining India after Pakistan invaded. But India has never held the plebiscite it promised to allow Kashmiris to choose between India or Pakistan.

In the last four years, more than 8,000 people have died in Jammu-Kashmir in skirmishes between guerrillas and Indian forces. International human

rights groups have criticised India for torturing rebel suspects and Pakistan for financing and training guerrillas, who also violate human rights.

On October 28, Ms. Raphel told South Asian reporters in Washington: "We view Kashmir as a disputed territory. We do not recognise that instrument of accession as meaning that Kashmir is forever an integral part of India."

Breaking the rules of her background briefing, the reporters named her, and their papers portrayed her as pro-Pakistani. Many Muslims in Kashmir Valley now regard Ms. Raphel as a hero.

"I look forward to working with you and other to help bring peace to Kashmir."

US officials issued a clarification saying the note had been written by a White House letter-writer who was unfamiliar with South Asian politics.

Ms Bhutto has travelled the world condemning Indian human rights abuses in Kashmir. Her government also pressing the UN Human Rights Commission to send a fact-finding mission to Jammu-Kashmir to investigate human rights violations.

India has responded by creating its own human rights commission and will soon allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the state. But it has vowed that it will never surrender control of Kashmir.

Qazi Hussain reelected Pak Jamaat chief

LAHORE, Pakistan, Feb 28: Pakistan's Jamaat-I-Islami Party (JI) re-elected Qazi Hussain Ahmad as its head here Sunday, about a month after he resigned amid a split in the organisation, reports AP.

Ahmad secured 76 per cent of the votes from an electoral college, made up of around 9,000 party members, a JI announcement said, after polling by secret ballot throughout the country.

It is Ahmad's third five-year term as chief of JI since assuming the post in 1987. His last tenure was cut short by the internal row.