

Clinton target of CIA assassination plot?

WASHINGTON, Apr 1: Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi has offered to send protection for US President Bill Clinton, who he believes could be the target of a CIA assassination plot, reports AFP.

In an interview published Thursday in the Los Angeles Times, Gaddafi said Clinton was not responsible for a recent report to Congress charging that Libya was a threat to the United States.

"Clinton is victim just like us," he said. "He is a victim of the CIA and imperialism and we're concerned about him, that he might face the same destiny as John F. Kennedy who was assassinated in 1963."

The Libyan leader, who offered to send an armoured car to Washington, has previously expressed admiration for Clinton, who succeeds two republican administrations which consistently condemned Tri-

poli. Gaddafi also confirmed that two Libyans suspected of blowing up a Pan Am jet over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 would remain in Libya despite demands from London and Washington for their extradition.

An embargo was imposed against Libya in 1992 in an attempt to get Tripoli to turn over the two men accused of the bombing which killed 270 people.

Asked about the prospects for peace in the Middle East, Gaddafi said that no lasting agreement could be reached solely with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.

PLO Chief Yasser Arafat "does not represent all the Palestinians," he said.

"The armed groups and organisations are not part of this (peace) process, and so peace is in danger."

PLO orders closure of Fatah offices in occupied areas

GAZA CITY, Apr 1: The PLO ordered the offices of its mainstream Fatah organisation in the occupied territories closed in protest over Israeli actions against its members, reports AP.

But sources indicated Friday the closure was triggered by infighting.

Palestine Liberation Organisation chief Yasser Arafat issued the orders to close nine Fatah offices in the occupied West Bank and six in the Gaza Strip late Thursday, said Sufian Abu Zaid, head of the PLO liaison office in Gaza.

The main Fatah office in east Jerusalem as well as the central office in Gaza City would remain open, he added.

The head of the Fatah office in the West Bank town of Tulkarum, Thabet Thabet, said

the order was to protest the army's crackdown against Fatah activists and specifically Monday's slayings in Gaza of six members of the Fatah Hawks, the organisation's armed wing.

Thabet said he understood the closures to be a temporary.

But sources inside Fatah, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Arafat's orders were part of the power struggle that has played the PLO since it started negotiating the long-delayed accord with Israel.

The struggle is between the "inside" — local Palestinians who have paid a heavy price in jail time and blood during the six-year uprising — and the "outside" — the PLO bureaucrats in Tunis — over who will

be in charge when Palestinians gain autonomy.

Those here complain that Faisal Hussein and Zakariya al-Aqha, Arafat's handpicked Fatah leaders in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, intended to appoint Arafat's men over them to positions in the occupied lands.

They said they had replaced local leaders such as Sami Abu Samhadan, who had years of experience in running the street battles against the occupation. This has caused clashes between the armed underground Fatah Hawks and the Fatah offices.

In the past few months, for example, Fatah Hawks in Khan Yunis have opened fired at the local Fatah office. And the six people killed in the Jabaliya refugee camp Monday were in

the process of mediating a dispute between the Fatah Hawks and the local Fatah office when soldiers ambushed them.

"Arafat wants to control the Palestinians and to put all the strings in his hand," said one Fatah leader from Ramallah.

Last December, three key Fatah leaders in the Gaza Strip resigned in protest, contending they and other local activists were being ignored by Arafat and passed over for top jobs in autonomy.

According to an agreement signed Thursday by the PLO and Israel in Cairo, Egypt, Palestinian police officers from outside the occupied lands will begin moving gradually into Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho starting next week to prepare for autonomy.

Off the Record



US First Lady Hillary Clinton laughs as she greets a woman wearing a cut-out Bill Clinton her at the Zamorano Fine Arts Academy in San Diego on Thursday. Clinton signed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. — AFP photo

Abdel-Rahman to take third wife if...

NEW YORK: Sheikh Oman Abdel-Rahman, charged with plotting to blow up the United Nations, told a judge Thursday that if the government did not bring his wife and son to the United States he would have to take another wife, reports Reuters.

The joking remark came during a pre-trial hearing when Abdel-Rahman stood up before US district judge Michael Mukasey and raised a number of issues regarding his conspiracy case.

"It is important that my wife and family should visit me at the expense of the American government," Abdel-Rahman said.

If his family wasn't brought over, he will be forced to take another wife, he said with a smile on his face.

The remark caused laughter in the court room. Last summer, the blind preacher was about to be deported because he had failed to mention immigration documents that he had two wives, which is permitted under Islamic law.

Jodie Foster fractures toe

BRYSON CITY, NC: Academy Award winning actress Jodie Foster, in western North Carolina to make a movie, made a brief appearance at a hospital. It wasn't for pre-production or film in, reports AP.

She fractured her toe on a piece of furniture Tuesday and was treated Wednesday at Swain County Hospital. Foster, co-producer of "Nell," left the hospital after an hour.

Foster stars in the movie as a woman raised by her mother in isolation.

Madonna a difficult guest



US singer Madonna smokes a cigar as she is interviewed on Thursday by David Letterman on the "Late Show". — AFP photo

NEW YORK: Censors had their work cut out for them after Madonna's taped appearance with US talk show host David Letterman, reports AP.

The singer who loves to shock used a forbidden four-letter word 13 times in Thursday's taping of "The Late Show with David Letterman." She also threw in a couple of other expressions not allowed on American television, including two "god damns."

The show was scheduled to air at 11:30 pm on the CBS network — minus the offensive language, show spokeswoman Rosemary Keenan said.

Madonna was a difficult guest from the outset, pouting and refusing to talk about her career.

"Why are you so obsessed with my sex life?" she demanded moments after sitting down.

She handed Letterman a pair of her panties and ordered him to smell them. He refused, stuffing them in a desk drawer and turning the conversation to her interest in basketball.

After she left, Letterman said: "I tried to be nice to her. I'm exhausted now."

BRIEFLY

US naval academy to fire 29: The US Naval Academy's biggest cheating scandal involved 71 midshipmen, but only 29 should be dismissed for violating the school's code, the Pentagon concluded, AP reports from Annapolis.

Although the 42 others implicated for cheating on a 1992 electrical engineering exam will be allowed to graduate, they will face disciplinary actions that could include delayed graduation and taking the course again, said Lt. Cate Mueller, an academy spokeswoman.

Thirty-five other midshipmen were cleared Thursday by the three-member Pentagon panel headed by Vice Adm Richard C. Allen. The number of midshipmen implicated at some point in the investigation reached 134. Twenty-eight were cleared, kicked out of the academy for other reasons or graduated before Allen's panel began its work.

Newsman jailed in China: Hong Kong government radio yesterday quoted sources as saying Hong Kong-based reporter Xi Yang has been sentenced to 12 years in jail by Beijing, Reuters reports from Hong Kong.

No further details were provided and executives at Xi's paper, the Chinese language Ming Pao, were not immediately available for comment.

Xi was detained on September 27, the second Hong Kong-based reporter to be held in less than a year. He was formally arrested 10 days later and faced a secret trial on charges of stealing state financial secrets.

Sihanouk appears in public: Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, virtually bald from chemotherapy, has appeared in public for the first time since beginning cancer treatment in a Beijing Military Hospital last year, Reuters reports from Beijing.

Sihanouk, appearing otherwise healthy and in good spirits, was shown on Chinese state television on Thursday visiting Communist Party Politburo standing committee member Li Ruihuan.

Sihanouk was quoted as thanking Li for the excellent medical treatment he had received in China.

Ba'ath Party team in Russia: Iraq's ruling Ba'ath Party sent a delegation of officials to Moscow on Thursday to attend a congress of Russia ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, the official INA news agency said, Reuters reports from Baghdad.

The delegation's leader, Abdul Ghani Ghafour, said his group would hold talks with an unspecified number of political parties in Russia with the aim of "fostering ties between the Ba'ath Party and these parties and forces," INA reported.

Ghafour said the delegation would also explain Iraq's stance on UN sanctions imposed after it invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

The Security Council reviews the sanctions every 60 days.

12 die in Sahara copter crash: A helicopter crashed Thursday in the Sahara desert, killing eight Algerians and four German journalists reporting on tourism, AP says from Algiers.

Details were sketchy, and it was unclear if there were any survivors. The identities of the dead were not disclosed. They included three Algerian children.

Authorities reported that the Germans were writing for an unidentified German travel agency. The representative of state-run Air Algerie for Berlin and Frankfurt was among the dead.

Hungary to seek EU membership: Hungary became the first member of the former Soviet bloc to apply for full membership of the European Union (EU) yesterday, AFP reports from Athens.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Geza Jenzsensky made the application to Greek Foreign Minister Theodore Pangalos. Greece currently holds the presidency of the EU council of ministers.

"The most important aspect for my country is that the way towards the European Union is now definitive and there can be no turning back. The security and integrity of Hungary are guaranteed," Jenzsensky said.

Australian FM in Beijing: Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans arrived in Beijing yesterday for a two-day visit that is to focus on the North Korean nuclear issue, human rights and bilateral trade ties, an embassy spokeswoman said, AFP reports from Beijing.

Gareth, who arrived nearly 17 hours behind scheduled from the southwestern city of Guilin, is to hold talks Friday with his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen as well as with Cambodian king Norodom Sihanouk, the spokeswoman said.

French students go on rampage

PARIS, Apr 1: A student march to celebrate victory over Prime Minister Edouard Balladur's Youth Wage law on Thursday degenerated into a rampage by rioters who stoned police, burned cars, beat journalists and smashed windows, reports Reuters.

Forty-eight policemen were injured, including seven who were sent to hospital, in an outbreak of violence that lasted five hours and spread through a large patch of the capital, the police department said in a statement.

Some 15 cars were set on fire and more than 200 were damaged, it said. Rioters shattered the windows of some 60 shops and about a dozen were pillaged.

UN Council urges North Korea to allow full N-inspection

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 1: The Security Council unanimously urged North Korea on Thursday to allow full nuclear inspections, adopting a statement that lacked the strong sanctions threat sought by Washington, reports AP.

Under a compromise worked out with China — North Korea's main ally and the main opponent to such a threat — the council instead gave only a hint of further action if Pyongyang continues to refuse to cooperate.

North Korea quickly repudiated the statement, called for negotiations with the United States and said the Pyongyang government would not permit further inspections. "We are strongly against this" statement, North Korean

Ambassador Pak Gil Yon told reporters. The issuing even of a statement will not help the solution of the problems.

"We have nothing more to show the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors at this time," he added.

Earlier, the North's official news agency quoted an unnamed Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying that his country might be willing to return to negotiations under some conditions, including a restart to US-North Korean talks.

North Korea denies that it is developing nuclear weapons but has warned of war if it is pushed too far, and its refusal to allow nuclear inspections of some sites has raised suspicions.

North Korea agreed in February to allow UN inspections of seven nuclear sites. But during the UN inspections, North Korea blocked access to a key facility suspected of reprocessing plutonium, which can be used to make nuclear weapons.

To raise pressure on Pyongyang, the United States had sought a legally binding Security Council resolution, hinting at sanctions and further council action if the north does not cooperate.

China opposed a resolution and sought a weaker non-binding statement that made no threats. Under their compromise, the statement said that the council will actively study the situation and decide "that fur-

ther Security Council consideration will take place if necessary in order to achieve full implementation" of nuclear accords between North Korea and the IAEA.

A White House official said the administration was "very pleased" with the statement, because it provided a way for China to join the UN action. He spoke on condition of anonymity from southern California, where President Clinton is vacationing.

The Council president, Jean-Bernard Merimee, said: "We think the statement is a good basis for the renewing of inspections and the resuming of talks between the two Koreas."

A Western diplomat at the United Nations, speaking on

condition of anonymity, said that the council statement adopted Thursday was put forward by China and modified in negotiation with the United States.

The diplomat said the United States was prepared to accept the statement because the substance was very similar to its ideas and council unanimity was vital.

US diplomats said it was important that all 15 council members be united in urging North Korea to accept inspections. China, a permanent member with veto power, had been expected to abstain from the resolution.

Chinese Ambassador Chen Jian, Beijing's deputy envoy at the world body, told reporters after the meeting that China

hopes the statement will help the crisis.

When asked about sanctions as a next step if the North continued to refuse to cooperate, he appeared to reject the idea. "We do not favour resorting to threats, pressure or sanctions as a means to solve problems," he said.

Before the statement was adopted, the Korean Central News Agency quoted an unidentified Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying the North "would not oppose a negotiated solution" if the United States halts international pressure on it and resumes talks aimed at improving relations.

Unlike resolutions, council statements are not legally binding and do not carry the same weight.

Global treaty on N-test ban next yr likely

GENEVA, Apr 1: A global treaty banning nuclear tests, including underground explosions, could be agreed as quickly as early next year, the head of UN sponsored negotiations said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Mexico's Ambassador Miguel Marin-Bosch, who chairs the conference on disarmament's special committee, also said there were signs that China would detonate an underground blast soon.

Experts from 39 nations, who began the first negotiations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) at the winter session that started in January, are due to end the round on Thursday.