

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 Husseini 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 Samhadana, who had years of experience in running the street battles against the occupation. This 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 fire at the local Fatah office. And the six people killed in the Jabalya 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.

Order to close 11 factories to protect Taj Mahal

NEW DELHI, Apr 1: India's Supreme Court on Thursday ordered the closure of 11 factories threatening the white marble Taj Mahal monument in the northern city of Agra, reports AFP.

A two-judge bench ordered the shutdown of the units for failing to install pollution control devices to check effluents ordered by the High Court earlier.

It also asked the Petroleum Ministry, the Oil and Natural Gas Commission, and the public Indian Oil Corp to control emissions from a giant oil refinery in Mathura, some 50 kilometres (31 miles) from Agra.

The Mathura Refinery has also been threatened with closure after 200 factories were ordered shut following an October court ruling.

The Moghul-built mausoleum has developed yellowish stains and cracks on its inlaid walls.

Britain expels Russian diplomat

LONDON, Apr 1: Britain said today it had expelled a Russian diplomat after Moscow ordered one of its diplomats to leave Russia.

"We were asked the Russians to withdraw a diplomat," a Foreign Office spokesman told Reuters. "In response, we asked the Russians to withdraw a diplomat from London."

On the Russian decision to throw the British diplomat out, the Foreign Office spokesman said: "We regret the demand, which is at odds with the bilateral relationship we are trying to build."

He added: "Neither diplomat has been declared persona non grata. We hope this is an end to the affair."

The Foreign Office refused to give the names of the diplomats involved or any further details of the tit-for-tat expulsion.

Prosecution of Noriega challenged

MIAMI, Apr 1: Manuel Noriega was illegally whisked out of Panama to face US drug charges and should have been immune from prosecution because he was a head of state, his lawyer said in an appeal.

The former Panamanian military leader's newly declassified appeal, released Thursday, also claims his conviction should be overturned because the United States committed shocking war crimes when it invaded Panama.

Noriega was overthrown in the December 1989 invasion and brought to Miami, where he was convicted on drug and racketeering charges. He is serving a 40-year sentence.

The 90-page appeal also challenges the government's evidence about coup attempts against Noriega.

Off the Record



US First Lady Hillary Clinton laughs as she greets a woman wearing a cut-out Bill Clinton hat 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 Reuter.

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 on 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 damn."

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 that 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."

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 Reuter.

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.

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, Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

No further details were provided and executives at Xi's paper, the Chinese language Ming Paq, 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, Reuter 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 Ruluan.

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 Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party, the official INA news agency said, Reuter 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 block to apply for full membership of the European Union (EU) yesterday, AFP reports from Athens.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Geza Janszensky 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," Janszensky 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 schedule from the southwestern city of Gulin, 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 Reuter.

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

"We are strongly against this" statement, North Korean

poli.

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