

## British officials to sit with IRA allies

BELFAST, Northern Ireland, Dec 1: British officials will meet leaders of the IRA's allies in Sinn Fein next week, in the first official face-to-face contact between the two sides since the IRA cease-fire, the government announced Thursday, reports AP.

The time and location of the talks has not been set, said a spokesman at Prime Minister John Major's office.

Britain will be represented by Quentin Thomas, a junior minister in the Northern Ireland Office. Sinn Fein has indicated that Martin McGuinness, the party's second-ranking leader, will head its delegation.

Major's spokesman, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Britain had not changed its mind about excluding Sinn Fein from an investment conference in Belfast, despite pressure from American politicians to the contrary.

The first talks are expected to concentrate on conditions for Sinn Fein entering into all-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

## BRIEFLY

**Quake jolts Bali:** An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.0 rocked the tourist island of Bali on Thursday, an official said, AP reports from Jakarta.

There were no immediate reports of casualties. Jumadi, a spokesman of the Meteorology Agency of Bali, said the quake jolted the provincial capital of Denpasar and the neighbouring islands of West Nusa Tenggara at 11:59 am (0359 GMT).

**Murderer hanged in Japan:** A 44-year-old man convicted of stabbing three women to death in 1977 was hanged on Thursday, news reports said. It was the first execution reported in one year in Japan, AP reports from Tokyo.

The mass-circulation newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun and Kyodo News Service reported that Yukio Ajima was hanged at the Tokyo Detention House, nine years after the Supreme Court rejected his final appeal.

**Italian unions call off strike:** Unions on Thursday called off a general strike after the government agreed during all night talks to scale down cuts in Italy's generous pension system, AP reports from Rome.

Premier Silvio Berlusconi's spokesman Jas Gavronski said the government and union leaders reached an accord on pension reforms, which are part of the 1995 deficit-fighting budget now being debated in the Senate. The strike, scheduled for today, would have been the second general strike in six weeks.

**8 Tajik rebels killed:** Russian border guards killed eight Tajik rebels who tried to cross a river separating Tajikistan from Afghanistan, a news agency reported on Wednesday, AP says from Dushanbe.

After firing warning shots, the guards shot several times at rebels carrying about 20 rebels, destroying one raft and forcing survivors to retreat to the other side, ITAR-Tass said.

**Canada plans to ban handguns:** The Canadian government plans to ban a wide range of handguns and require that all firearms be registered with police, Justice Minister Allan Rock said on Wednesday, AP reports from Ottawa.

The sweeping package of long-awaited reforms would also impose tough sentences on criminals who use guns and make it illegal to possess smuggled weapons.

**196 hostages freed in Peru:** Soldiers fought with leftist guerrillas and rescued 196 settlers who were being held by the rebels in Peru's eastern jungle region, the Defence Ministry said on Wednesday, AP reports from Lima.

One soldier was killed and another wounded in a battle with Shining Path guerrillas on Sunday in the village of Alto Chiquiri in the province of Satipo, 180 miles (300 kilometers) east of Lima, the ministry said. Twenty settlers, including seven children, were rescued from guerrilla control in that battle, and another 176, including 86 children, were freed later in the village of Alto Somaviri in the same province, a ministry release said.

**Adams to meet US Official:** Gerry Adams, leader of the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, is expected to meet President Bill Clinton's National Security Adviser Tony Lake at the White House next week. US officials said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Washington.

**Botulism claims 5 in Georgia:** A botulism outbreak, caused by poorly prepared fish, has killed five people in the past ten days in the Georgian capital, officials said on Thursday, AP reports from Tbilisi.

An additional 60 people have been hospitalised, including several in critical condition, said Nikolai Shavdia, chief sanitary doctor at Tbilisi's Republic Hospital. All five people who died had eaten home-smoked fish bought at a local market, Shavdia said. Others fell ill after eating home-canned meat, also from city markets.

**Brazil's Congress chief punished:** The president of Brazil's Congress has failed to overturn a verdict that he misused public funds and has been banned from politics for three years, a spokesman for Brazil's highest court said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Rio De Janeiro.

"He lost his appeal so he's out," the spokesman said. Humberto Lucena, who was re-elected as a senator in October's general elections had been found guilty of misusing a parliamentary print room to produce campaign propaganda, the spokesman for the Supreme Federal Tribunal said.

**Floods, typhoons kill 400 in Vietnam:** More than 400 people were killed and property and crops worth nearly 3,000 billion dong (300 million dollars) destroyed in floods and typhoons this year, the official Vietnam news agency (VNA) said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Hanoi.

The toll, higher on both counts than previously reported, included destruction by floods in October in the Mekong river Delta and three typhoons that struck the north and centre. VNA quoted a senior official as saying.

**Major victory for Israeli gays:** The Supreme Court handed Israel's gay community a major victory on Wednesday in a landmark ruling recognising gay couples. AP reports from Tel Aviv.

The 50-page decision forces the national airline El Al to grant the boyfriend of flight attendant Jonathan Danilevitz the annual free tickets and other benefits due heterosexual partners of its workers.

**UN troops to stay in Rwanda for another 6 months**

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 1: The United Nations on Wednesday extended its peacekeeping mission in Rwanda for another six months, but was not prepared to send troops to neighbouring Zaire to restore security in refugee camps, reports AP.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali last week recommended sending as many as 5,000 peacekeepers to bring order to the squalid camps which shelter more than 1 million refugees of the carnage in Rwanda.

## European nations reach 60pc target of disarmament deal

BRUSSELS, Dec 1: NATO and its former Warsaw Pact foes have destroyed more than 35,000 tanks, armoured combat vehicles and artillery pieces under a landmark disarmament accord, officials said on Wednesday, reports AP.

The nations have a year to get rid of another 15,000 tanks and other non-nuclear weapons to comply with the terms of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe treaty.

In all, the 30 countries party to the pact must scrap about 50,400 main battle tanks, artillery pieces, armoured combat vehicles, attack helicopters and combat aircraft over three years.

The agreement was originally negotiated to prevent the Soviet bloc from launching a lightning strike on Western Europe.

Each and every nation has reached the 60 per cent target required under the treaty, said an alliance official, who demanded anonymity. "As far as implementation of the treaty we are on track."

Germany, which is also a member of the alliance, has a hefty supply of armaments. The former Warsaw Pact nations, united with communist East Germany, has surpassed the goal. It has scrapped 86 per cent of its quota of 7,236 tanks and other arms, according to the alliance.

In all, NATO nations have destroyed 4,650 tanks and the East Europeans, 8,500. Nearly 5,000 armoured combat vehicles have been scrapped by the West and 8,900 by the East.

The allies have gotten rid of 2,100 artillery pieces, and the former Soviet bloc, 4,520. NATO has scrapped 140 combat aircraft and 110 attack helicopters, and the East, 1,400

aircraft and 60 helicopters.

Each side — NATO and the former Warsaw Pact nations — must reduce to an equal ceiling of 20,000 tanks in an area stretching from the Atlantic coast to the Ural Mountains, deep in former Soviet territory.

Russia has been slow to meet an additional requirement to destroy 19,000 tanks and other arms beyond the Ural Mountains. So far, officials said Moscow has scrapped only about 2,000 targeted weapons.

Officials said about 2,000 tanks, armoured combat vehicles and artillery pieces destined for treaty cuts remain

unaccounted for in the former republics of the Soviet Union. They said it was still unclear what has happened to the equipment, missing from the inventories of Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova.

The disparity, disclosed a year ago, occurred after the former republics divided up weapons cuts negotiated with the former Soviet Union.

The treaty was first signed in November 1990 by the 16 NATO nations and the Soviet Union and the other five members of the Warsaw Pact, the now defunct Eastern military alliance.

Also party to the accord are Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

**Donors announce \$125m aid for Palestinians**

BRUSSELS, Dec 1: A group of donor countries and world bodies yesterday announced 125 million US dollars in emergency aid for the Palestinian authority to help its finances until March 1995, reports Xinhua.

The ad hoc liaison committee on aid to the Palestinians reached the decision after two days of meetings in Brussels with delegations from Palestine and Israel. Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation Yasser Arafat attended the meetings.

## International

Residents flee capital for countryside

## Grozny bracing itself for possible Russian invasion

GROZNY, Dec 1: The capital of the breakaway region of Chechnya, which has defied Moscow for three years, was bracing itself today for what authorities say is an imminent Russian invasion, reports Reuters.

It was not clear whether President Boris Yeltsin would keep his word and introduce as state of emergency in Chechnya after his ultimatum demanding that the warring sides stop fighting and disarm, expired at 6 am (0300 GMT).

He has not spelled out how Russia would enforce a state of emergency but both Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev and

the Moscow-backed opposition Provisional Council, which has so far failed to oust him, expected the Kremlin to send in troops.

"We expect an invasion from Moscow, the groundwork is being laid for it," Movladi Udugov, Dudayev's information minister, told Reuters.

A single military jet roared over Grozny as a Russian ultimatum expired.

A trick of cars, packed tightly with family and a few belongings, left the city, along with a few trucks piled high with furniture and rugs.

Central Grozny was virtually empty following another nerve-jangling night of intermittent small arms fire from jumpy fighters around the city.

On Tuesday, a Russian plane reportedly came from Russia and landed at Grozny airport.

An armed Chechen volunteer passes by a burning aircraft after an attack on three military airplanes at Grozny airport on Tuesday. The raid reportedly came from Russian territory.

— AFP photo

## Continued conflict in Bosnia threatens Europe's security

LONDON, Dec 1: Pakistan's foreign minister said on Wednesday Serb aggression in Bosnia was comparable to Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia and the international community should learn that appeasement does not work, reports Reuters.

"I often compare the Bosnian situation to the situation when Hitler's armies moved into Czechoslovakia. Then, too, there was appeasement of the aggressor. Then, too, appeasement failed," Assef Ahmad Ali said.

He called on Europe, NATO and the United Nations to stand up to the Bosnian Serbs and their backers in Serbia, or else conflict would spread to the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia and beyond.

"This will be the biggest threat to the security of the whole of Europe if Europe does not take a strong and principled stand now," Ali said.

He made the comments in response to questions after giving a lecture during an official visit to Britain with Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

Ali also appealed to the international community to do more to rebuild Afghanistan, saying that it was the only way to stem the flow of illegal drugs from the country.

The major powers had poured billions of dollars into Afghanistan to further their own ends during the Cold War but now they were skimping on aid, he said.

As a result, the Afghan people felt they had been "sidelined by history," Ali said.

"If one nation is left out in the cold, the world should not blame them if they grow poppies to produce heroin," he said.

On the disputed Indian state of Kashmir, Ali said that it was Pakistan's policy to support a plebiscite in the territory.

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