

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 indi-

cated 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.

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.

Journalists in the north Ossetian city of Vladikavkaz, which is close to Chechnya, said by telephone they had seen dozens of Russian military planes unloading servicemen and equipment late into the night.

Unidentified planes, defying Yeltsin's ultimatum, bombed the outskirts of Grozny on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Russia denied its planes were involved but a senior opposition official in Chechnya told Reuters "They were not our planes. Obviously they were Russia's. The Russians are going to bring the troops in. Basically it is already decided."

AP adds: Nervous civilians fled the Chechen capital for the countryside on Thursday in fear of an attack by Russian troops.

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



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. — AP 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," Asif 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.

Pakistan won't allow outside inspection of its N-facilities

LONDON, Dec 1: Pakistan has no plans to dismantle its nuclear programme despite US pressure and will not allow outside inspection of its facilities, Pakistan Premier Benazir Bhutto told Thursday's Independent, reports AFP.

The United States recently offered to ease the Pressler Amendment, which since 1990 has denied aid to Pakistan because it is presumed to possess nuclear weapons, in exchange for the removal of certain technology and a "one-time" inspection.

Bhutto said talks with Washington were continuing but stressed that Pakistan would not allow "physical verification" of its claim to possess no such weapons.

Lanka to resume talks with LTTE before Xmas

COLOMBO, Dec 1: The Sri Lankan government will resume the suspended peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) before Christmas, according to Media, Tourism and Aviation Minister Dhamasari Senanayake.

Addressing the weekly cabinet press briefing Wednesday, Senanayake said the government is "vigorously" pursuing the peace process.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga is taking active and positive steps to resume talks. She seems to be hopeful on certain issues tackled," the minister said.

The minister assured the press that certain meaningful steps will be taken soon.

UN asks Afghan factions to halt war

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 1: The Security Council expressed grave concern on Wednesday at the continuation of fighting among warring factions in Afghanistan and called for an immediate halt to these pointless and destructive attacks, reports Reuters.

In a statement read at a brief public meeting, the council said it fully supported broad based consultations by a UN special mission headed by former Tunisian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Mestiri, which has been trying to end the conflict.

become productive members of society. Those accused of crimes should be judged by a court of law, he said.

During the three-year regime of Lt. Gen. Raoul Cedras, an estimated 4,000 civilians — many of them Aristide supporters — were murdered, human rights groups say. Cedras is now in exile in Panama.

"You lived through a nightmare," Aristide told the assembly some of whose members had come out of hiding for the first time in years. Many shouted their wish that the army be abolished.



Israeli female soldiers, very close friends of Liat Gabai, 19, mourn on Wednesday as they leave the hospital in Haifa, Israel where Liat died after being transferred from Afula where she was struck in the head by an axe swung by a West Bank Palestinian. — AFP photo

Aristide plans to reform army

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Dec 1: President Jean-Bertrand Aristide declared on Wednesday that Haiti's army is "a cancer," but said he plans to reform, not abolish, the military, reports AP.

Aristide spoke to the cheers of labour unionists, many of them persecuted after army leaders overthrew Aristide in 1991. The military coup leaders fled into exile before Aristide's US military-backed return on October 15.

"Of course, I don't agree with the army. The army is a cancer," Aristide said from the National Palace.

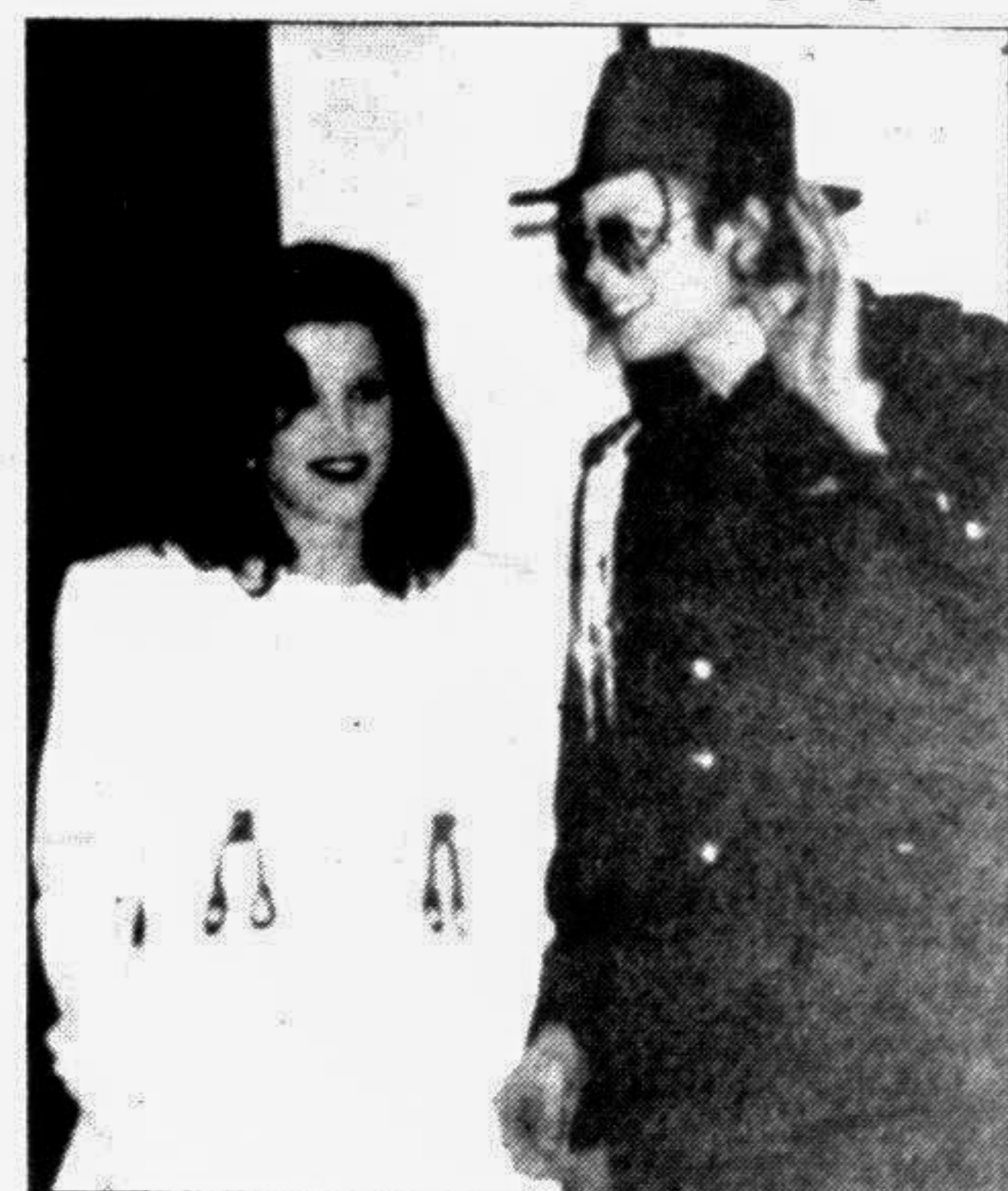
"I will take whatever legal steps I can to cure the patient of its cancer," he said, pointing out that he had sworn fidelity to the 1987 Constitution that provides for the existence of both an army and police force.

Aristide asked the unionists whether any of them would be willing to join a reformed army. The assembly resoundingly shouted no. Many raised their hands, however, when Aristide asked whether any would like to be members of the new civilian police force.

Aristide said he favoured giving new job training to former soldiers so they could

Off the Record

Michael, Lisa splitting up?



NEW YORK: Michael Jackson is trying to end his 5-month-old marriage to Lisa Marie Presley, tabloids in New York and London reported on Thursday, reports AP.

The pop superstar's manager called the reports "an outrageous, 100 per cent, total lie!"

The New York Daily News blamed the alleged breakup on the strain of a bi-coastal relationship, saying Jackson was angered by Presley's refusal to leave California and live with him in New York.

"Michael told me they're splitting," the Daily News quoted an unidentified close associate of Jackson as saying. "He doesn't want to live in California. He said it's bad vibes, bad luck for him there."

That contradicted a report in London's Daily Mirror, which claimed Jackson wanted more space and didn't want his wife tagging along with him to New York, where he keeps an apartment in the luxurious Trump Tower.

Jackson spokesman Lee Solters denied the couple were going separate ways, but acknowledged that he hadn't spoken with Jackson recently, the News said. Solters did not return a call to the Associated Press early Thursday.

Jackson's manager, Bob Jones, heatedly denied talk of a split.

"This is an outrageous, 100 per cent, total lie! People just don't want to give these kids a chance. You have my word that this is simply somebody's sick fantasy," Jones said in Thursday's New York Newsday.

"Michael is here in Chicago, recording with R Kelly. Lisa Marie is in Los Angeles. She cannot be with him when he works. All his energy has to go into his recording. When he finishes this album, they will be together," Jones said.

'Sexy bandit' tricks sixty men

MINEOLA, New York: At least 60 men have fallen for the sexy bandit, a woman dressed like a nurse who tells them she needs a ride because she's caring for an elderly woman and her car broke down, police say, reports AP.

Once in the car, she fondles the men — while artfully picking their pockets.

The woman has stolen an average of 500 dollars from the pockets of each unsuspecting motorist since 1988. All her victims were driving luxury cars. Many were senior citizens.

"It's quite a scam," Detective Tony Leterel of the Nassau County police said on Tuesday.

"She gets in and after she tells him where to take her she starts talking sexy to him," Leterel said. "She touches his leg and grabs his crotch."

The men get distracted, Leterel said, and don't notice their wallets are missing until after she gets out of the car.

Overweight mice help to identify gene for obesity

LONDON: Overweight mice have helped scientists at the Rockefeller University in New York to identify a gene responsible for obesity, the British press reported yesterday quoting the scientific journal Nature, reports AFP.

The discovery may ultimately enable doctors to target individuals in need of weight control and help pharmaceutical companies develop drugs to treat those with a hereditary risk of obesity.

Six scientists from the university's Howard Hughes Medical Institute report the discovery of the gene, called 'ob', in yesterday's edition of Nature.

Although they report the molecular identification of the obese gene in the mouse, they have also discovered a similar human gene, said the press reports.

The link with obesity has to be confirmed by more research, although previous studies show that genes found in mice and in men usually have similar roles.

ROK regains control over its armed forces from US

SEOUL, Dec 1: After nearly half a century, South Korea on Thursday regained peacetime control over its armed forces from the United States, reports AP.

The turnover was part of an effort to lower the profile of the US military and push South Korea toward self-reliance in defending itself.

"I am here to express my happiness that we have earned back the right to control our own forces today," Gen. Lee Yang-ho, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, said at an elaborate ceremony marking the change.

Earlier Thursday, Lee received the "baton of command" from President Kim Young-sam, the head of the armed forces, at the presidential palace.

Shortly after the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, South Korea turned over the command of its military to UN forces, headed by the United States.

Thursday's transfer also has symbolic significance in South Korea's continuing standoff against North Korea.

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 Zaïre 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, at-

tack 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.

In the first year of the accord, the nations pared their hardware by a quarter, and in the just completed second year, by an additional 35 per cent.

"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 has a hefty supply of armoured units, 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.

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.