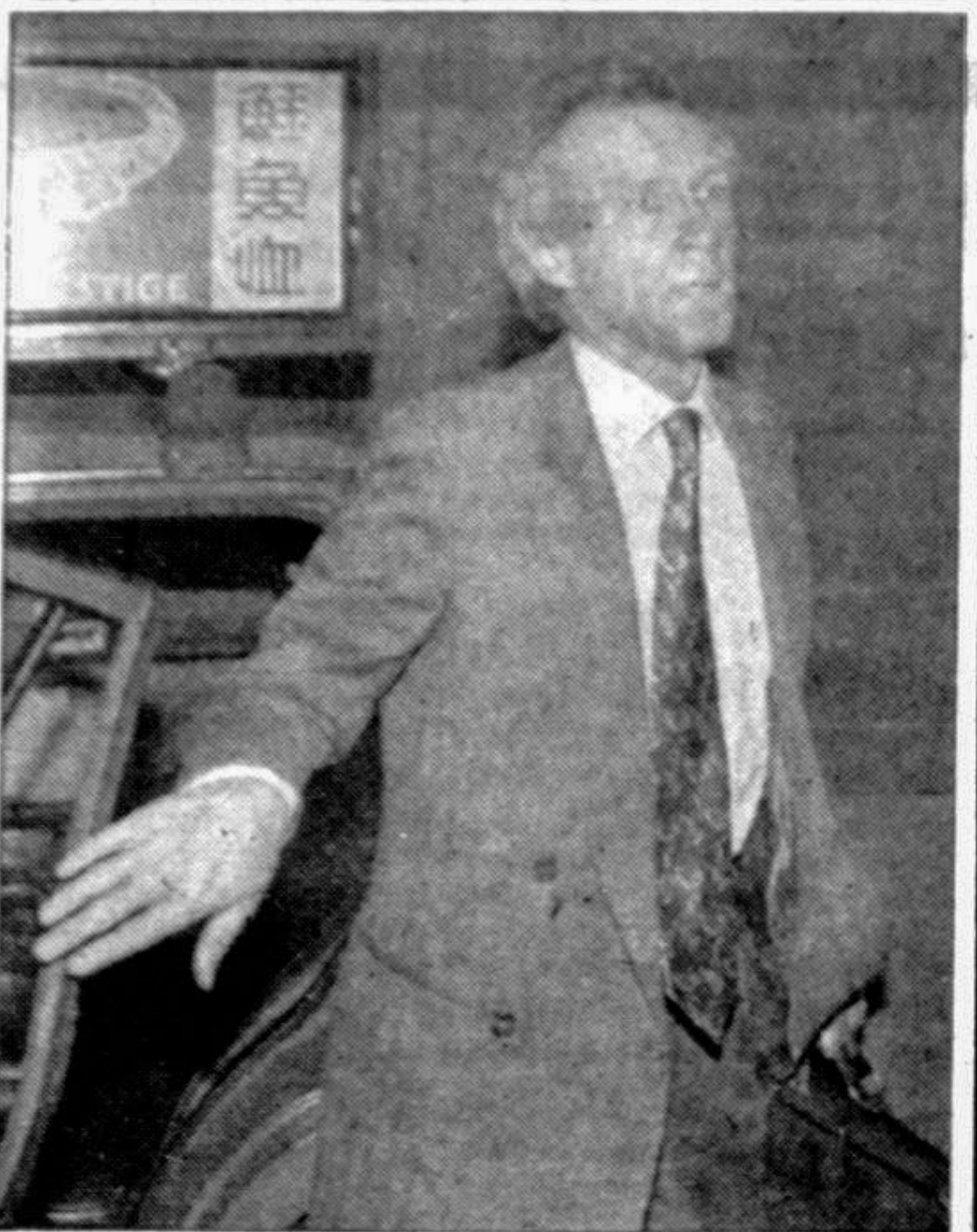


BRIEFLY



International Herald Tribune (IHT) Asia editor Michael Richardson arrives at the High Court on Monday. Richardson is among the four parties charged with scandalising the Singapore judiciary. — AFP photo

5 killed in Afghan fighting: Afghan government forces battled those of General Abdul-Rashid Dostum in northern Afghanistan for the third day running on Monday and official Kabul Radio said five of Dostum's fighters had been killed. Reuter reports from Islamabad.

Belarus president in China: Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko arrived here Tuesday for a three-day state visit at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart, Jiang Zemin, the official Xinhua news agency announced. AFP reports from Beijing.

Zhirinovskiy to run for presidency: Russia's eccentric ultra-nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has announced he will run for president in the 1996 elections. ITAR-Tass news agency said yesterday. Reuter reports from Moscow.

90 leaders to attend UN summit: More than 90 world leaders have confirmed they will attend the UN world social summit in Copenhagen in March. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said on Monday. Reuter reports from Copenhagen.

Russian army officer killed: A Russian army officer was killed by a shot through the back of the neck in a suburb of Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, the chief of staff for Russian border troops in Tajikistan said, quoted by ITAR-Tass. AFP reports from Moscow.

Avalanche claims 16 in Iceland: Sixteen people, more than half of them children, were feared to have died in their beds on Monday when an avalanche smashed into a remote Icelandic fishing village. Reuter reports from Reykjavik.

Top Chinese official executed: A top official in the southwest province of Guizhou has been executed for embezzlement and taking bribes in a case that official media said demonstrates China's commitment to fighting rampant corruption. AP reports from Beijing.

Al-Azhar's restoration begins: Restoration work began Monday on the 10th-century Al-Azhar mosque in the centre of Cairo, its Grand Sheikh Gad Al-Haq Ali Gad Al-Haq said. AFP reports from Cairo.

12 more executed in China: Authorities in a southeast Chinese city on Tuesday executed 12 people charged with murder, wounding and robbery, a China-run news agency said. AP reports from Hong Kong.

Kuwait considers Iraq still a threat
KUWAIT, Jan 17: Four years after Operation Desert Storm, Iraq is still a threat to Kuwait and relations will not be resumed while Saddam Hussein is in power, despite his recognition of the emirate's sovereignty. Kuwait's Crown Prince says reports AP.

Rivals back Mubarak's stance on Israel's refusal to sign NPT
CAIRO, Jan 17: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has for the first time in a long while succeeded in rallying political opponents behind him in a campaign against Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), reports AFP.

Rao plans to oust Arjun for revolt against leadership

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: A leadership feud in India's ruling Congress (I) party is nearing a flashpoint after Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's public warning to his arch rival, party sources said today, reports AFP.

Rao, the 73-year-old Congress President, is planning to oust former minister Arjun Singh from the 109-year-old party for leading a near-revolt against his leadership, a newspaper reported.

The expulsion of Arjun Singh... appears to be imminent, the usually well-informed Hindustan Times said in a front-page report.

Congress leaders declined to comment on any possible moves by Rao, but the times said the decision-making

Congress Working Committee was likely to meet here in the next three or four days and take a decision in this regard.

Congress spokesman Vithal Gadgil confirmed a meeting of the CWC, of which Arjun Singh is a member, was due, but gave no further details.

Other Congress sources, however, said the crisis in the ruling party was coming to a head, and that Rao would move against Arjun Singh ahead of crucial legislative elections in six Indian states in February and March.

"Arjun Singh's strategy is to wait for a poor Congress performance in the polls so that he can launch his final assault against the PM," one source said. "The PM would like to pre-empt that."

The developments followed Rao's first public warning Monday to his critics in the ruling party who he said had crossed the limits of tolerance and needed to be disciplined.

"Leave it to me," Rao told members of the Congress youth chapter. "It is my responsibility to maintain discipline in the party and I will fulfil my duty as the party president."

Rao, under attack within the Congress following its election rout in two key states last month, said he had not responded to the increasing vocal attacks on him so far because he believed in democracy.

"But the limit (of tolerance) has been breached," Rao thundered in a rare display of public annoyance with Arjun Singh, his key rival in the Congress who quit the cabinet on December 24.

"The current (dissent) activity in the top level of the organisation will be effectively curbed," he added. "Indiscipline will not be tolerated anymore."

Congress sources said Arjun Singh's supporters were also preparing for a showdown in the event of his expulsion from the party.

"There is a lot of a activity going on," one dissident said. "Let us see what Rao can do." Arjun Singh declined to comment on Rao's warning, saying: "He (Rao) has every right to speak..."

Benazir to visit US in April

ISLAMABAD, Jan 17: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will visit the United States this April in a bid to attract investors to her Asian nation, a newspaper reported Tuesday, says AP.

Benazir Bhutto is expected to hold talks with US President Bill Clinton and also likely to meet with potential investors in New York and Los Angeles, said The News, an English-Language daily.

The Pakistani premier is expected to arrive on or about April 10 and will spend a week in the United States, the newspaper added.

A high-ranking official at Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said he could neither confirm nor deny the report. He said an official announcement was expected later in the week.

Benazir Bhutto, who was educated at Harvard, says that repairing strained relations with the United States is central to her foreign policy.



Tamil Tiger guerrillas are pictured on Monday in the frontline of the northern Jaffna peninsula where the rebel soldiers have been battling Sri Lankan government troops for a separate state for more than a decade. — AFP photo

Directive not in retaliation, says India

NEW DELHI, Jan 17: India on Monday insisted that its request to withdraw 15 officials from the Pakistani mission in New Delhi merely aimed at balancing numbers between the two countries, and was not retaliation for the closure of the Indian consulate in Karachi, reports AFP.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Friday's directive ordering 15 non-diplomats out of India, was to restore parity in the number of staff posted in both countries' missions in Islamabad and New Delhi.

"We would have expected Pakistan to take this step (on its own). But that was not happening," he said, adding that India hoped that the two countries would abide by "mutually agreed rules."

Washington challenges China's sovereignty: Zemin

BEIJING, Jan 17: Chinese President Jiang Zemin launched a scathing attack yesterday on the United States, accusing Washington of challenging China's sovereignty and blatantly violating bilateral accords, reports AFP.

During a meeting here with former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Jiang said the United States had been responsible for the stormy nature of Sino-US ties in the past few years, with "one wave rising to succeed the other and troubles constantly appearing."

In an unusual outburst by such a senior leader, the president said the fundamental reason for the repeated disputes between the two countries was Washington's violation of the three Sino-US joint communiqués governing bilateral ties.

"Some Americans have always tried to tamper with matters related to China's sovereignty, most notably on the issues of Taiwan and Tibet," Jiang was quoted as saying by the Xinhua news agency.

China was incensed by the US announcement in September that it was reviewing — for the first time in 15 years — its policy of informal contacts with Taiwan, which Beijing has viewed as a renegade province since nationalist forces fled to the island in 1949 after losing a civil war to the communists.

The US move reflected the growing economic importance of Taiwan, and Washington has stressed that it remains fully committed to its "one China policy" — recognising Beijing as the sole legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

Although he did not directly accuse the United States of trying to split China, Jiang told Kissinger that in relation to China's sovereignty and the reunification of the motherland "the stand of the Chinese government and Chinese people is unswerving and will not falter."

Jiang also urged Washington to look beyond the immediate benefits to be gleaned from bilateral ties towards developing a long-term relationship.

"We should be farsighted and view things from a commanding height to seek common interests so as to promote bilateral relations in the new world order."

As well as spats over sovereignty, Sino-US ties have foundered on commercial issues, including China's re-entry to the World Trade Organisation and a bitter dispute over Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) protection that is threatening to blow up into a full scale trade war.

Christopher, Kozyrev to hold talks today

GENEVA, Jan 17: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived here today for talks with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev that are expected to focus on international security and the war in Chechnya, reports AFP.

Christopher was to meet with Kozyrev at a private dinner later Tuesday and at a series of official talks on Wednesday.

They war in Chechnya, which Christopher said could threaten Russian democracy, is certain to come up, although Kozyrev played down the issue on arrival here Monday.

The two are to discuss the Start-2 nuclear disarmament treaty, which neither Russia nor the United States have ratified, cooperation in solving the war in the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East peace process, and plans to expand NATO.

S Arabia blames Yemen for crisis Syrian-brokered accord being implemented

DUBAI, Jan 17: Saudi Arabia blamed Yemen on Monday for the latest crisis on their joint border, but said that a Syrian-brokered accord to defuse tension had been implemented, reports Reuter.

A statement issued by the weekly Saudi cabinet meeting said that while the leaders of Yemen and Saudi Arabia were in contact last week to resolve a long-standing border dispute, Sanaa had violated the kingdom's territory.

"The kingdom was surprised at dawn on Tuesday with Yemeni violations on the land of Saudi Arabia," said the cabinet statement carried by the Saudi press agency.

"After that, urgent contacts were conducted during which the kingdom demanded the Yemeni brothers return immediately to their positions before the latest Yemeni violations," it added.

This week's cabinet session was chaired by Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Prince Sultan, a younger brother to King Fahd, who is also prime minister.

On Sunday Riyadh and Sanaa agreed to defuse tension along their border, including withdrawing troops rushed to the area, following mediation efforts by Syria.

A Saudi Yemeni statement said: "In the spirit of Muslim and Arab brotherliness, it has been agreed to contain the tension witnessed recently on the borders by returning the situation to its earlier position and not using force."

Off the Record

Tip in dilemma
DUBAI: An Egyptian man who bought a small bottle of mineral water at Dubai Airport tipped the waiter 5.200US dollar and spurned suggestions he take it back, reports Reuter.

"Don't bother me... Its over... I have a lot of money," local newspapers quoted him as, having told the airport restaurant manager who urged him to take the money back.

The same man returned and paid three dollars for a coffee before boarding his flight from the United Arab Emirates to Cairo.

Airport security confirmed the dollars were genuine and officials said they would try to trace the man and return the money before deciding whether to give it to restaurant staff.

For smokers trying to kick the habit
LONDON: Smokers trying to kick the habit who have tried everything from nicotine patches to herbal cigarettes could try smoking black peppers, a British health magazine suggested on Monday, reports Reuter.

Healthy eating, referring to a study reported in the Drug and Alcohol Dependence Journal, said smoking black pepper is the latest way to curb cigarette craving.

During the study, 48 smokers who had been deprived of cigarettes overnight puffed on a device delivering either mint/menthol vapour, essential oil of black pepper vapour or no vapour at all for three hours.

"The black pepper smokers reported a significantly reduced cigarette craving compared with the two other groups," the magazine said.

Frantic bid to get into Guinness
NEW DELHI: An Indian youth on Monday made his 85th attempt to secure a mention in the Guinness book of world records by chomping down two Rose bushes, the Press Trust of India said, reports AFP.

Parthasarthy took about an hour-and-a-half to devour the two four-foot (120 centimetre) plants — right from the roots to the topmost flower — in the southern city of Coimbatore, it said.

The young man, known as the "snake emperor" after having lived, and survived, a "sojourn" with caged, poisonous snakes a few years ago, also plans to eat 625 chillies in yet another record-setting attempt, the agency said.

Parthasarthy's former unsuccessful tries at Guinness fame include swallowing 36 raw eggs in one go and pushing a mustard seed backwards with his nose for a half kilometre (about a quarter mile) stretch.

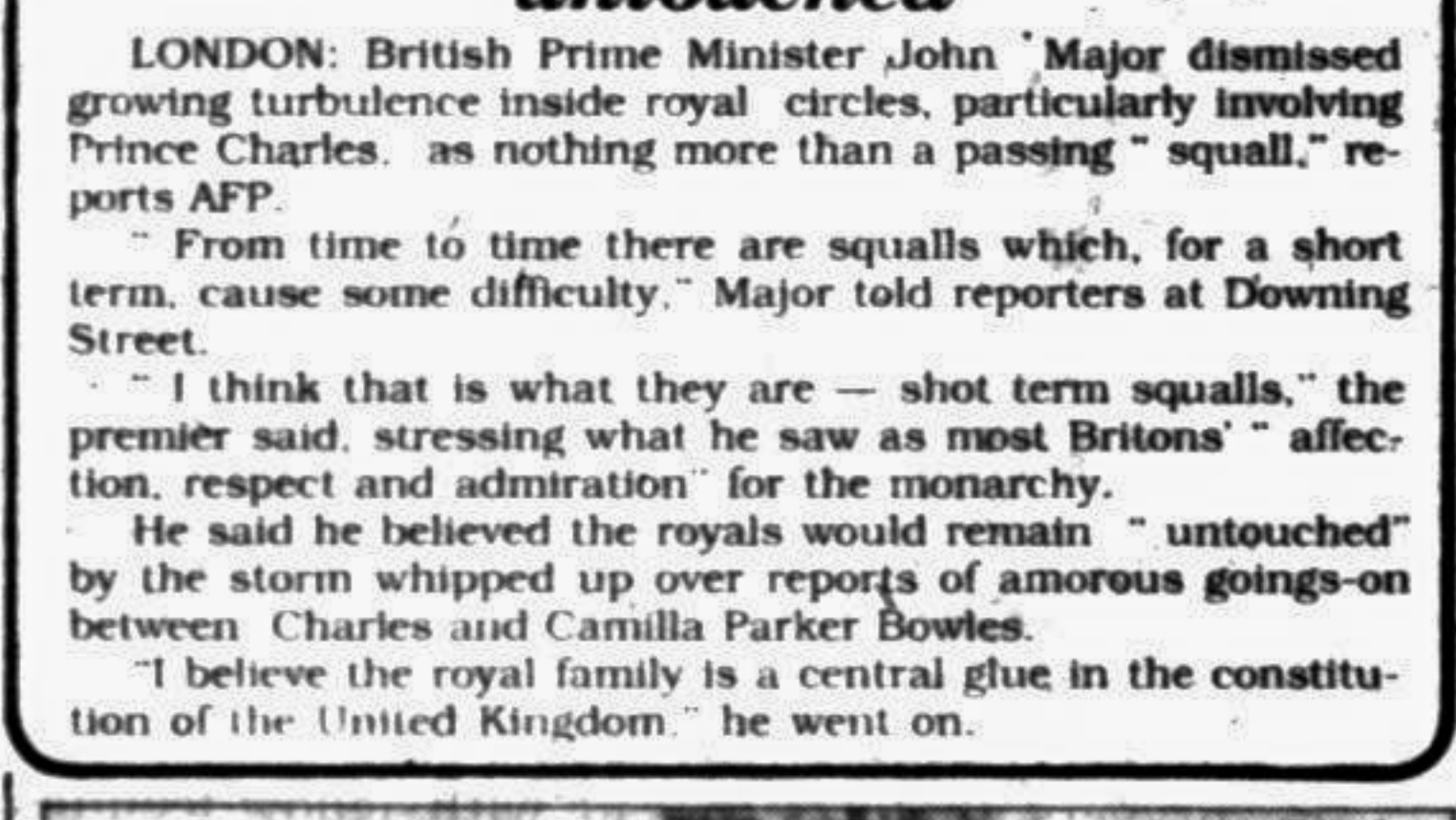
Royals would remain 'untouched'
LONDON: British Prime Minister John Major dismissed growing turbulence inside royal circles, particularly involving Prince Charles, as nothing more than a passing "squall," reports AFP.

"From time to time there are squalls which, for a short term, cause some difficulty," Major told reporters at Downing Street.

"I think that is what they are — shot term squalls," the premier said, stressing what he saw as most Britons' "affection, respect and admiration" for the monarchy.

He said he believed the royals would remain "untouched" by the storm whipped up over reports of amorous goings-on between Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles.

"I believe the royal family is a central glue in the constitution of the United Kingdom," he went on.



A group of US soldiers from Fort Campbell, Kentucky arrive Monday at a US base in Panama. Approximately 1,200 US soldiers are expected in Panama to help with transfer of 8,000 Cuban refugees from Panama back to Guantanamo Base, Cuba. — AFP photo

Germany to expand Islamic edn
BONN, Jan 17: Germany's most populous regional state said on Monday it would expand Islamic religious instruction for Muslim pupils in state schools who want to learn more about their faith, reports Reuter.

Taking into account the growing number of Muslim children in German schools, north-Rhine Westphalia's Education Ministry said it would gradually expand voluntary Islamic education to children aged 10 to 12.

Until now, only children aged six to nine were able to learn more about Islam under Germany's system that divides children by faith for religion instruction in school.

One in eight to the state's 75,000 Muslim children in grades one through four now takes part in voluntary religious classes.

Martin Luther honoured
DENVER, Colorado, Jan 17: President Bill Clinton and other Americans honoured Martin Luther King Monday amid a dispute between the king family and authorities over how to preserve the slain US civil rights leader's legacy, reports AFP.

"What he lived and died for was for everyone of you to have the right to do good and be good and make the most of your life," Clinton said in an address at a commemorative ceremony for king held here.

Clinton linked the famed dream speech of king, who would have been 66 years old Monday to his own efforts to improve the lives of average Americans and bring the American dream within their reach.

Kuwait considers Iraq still a threat
KUWAIT, Jan 17: Four years after Operation Desert Storm, Iraq is still a threat to Kuwait and relations will not be resumed while Saddam Hussein is in power, despite his recognition of the emirate's sovereignty. Kuwait's Crown Prince says reports AP.

"Iraq's recognition of the State of Kuwait does not end anything. The ruling regime in Iraq still harbors aggressive intentions," Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah, who is also prime minister was quoted as saying by the Al-Watan daily Tuesday.

"Iraq invaded Kuwait Aug. 2, 1990."

Rivals back Mubarak's stance on Israel's refusal to sign NPT
CAIRO, Jan 17: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has for the first time in a long while succeeded in rallying political opponents behind him in a campaign against Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), reports AFP.

All the opposition parties whether rightwing, leftwing or pro-Islamic have paid tribute to the Egyptian president for his stance over the issue, putting aside their usual jibes and criticisms.

"He knows that the main Egyptian opposition parties support his position on national issues including the elimination of the Israeli nuclear strength," the mouthpiece of the Labour Party, Al-Shaab wrote, despite criticism of the continued detention of the party's Secretary, General Adel Hussein.

Mustafa Bakri, the Editor-in-Chief of the Liberal Party's Al-Ahram newspaper who has been in trouble with the state prosecutor since October for his articles, went even further.

"The attitude of President Mubarak confirms that Egypt which plays a pivotal role in the region will never accept the (Israeli) humiliation which the Arab nation has been a victim of," he wrote Friday.

Even the banned Muslim Brotherhood which has seen several members arrested in the past few months backed Mubarak's stance.

"We are encouraged by this decision and call on the president to go further in working for the elimination of Israeli arms of mass destruction," Brotherhood spokesman Maamun Al-Hodeiby told AFP.

Mubarak announced that will refuse to re-sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which is due for renewal in April if Israel does not join.

But Israel, which has never confirmed or denied western estimates that it has around 100 nuclear warheads, has said signing the treaty will not lead to stability in the region or an efficient control of nuclear programmes.

US Defence Secretary William Perry urged Israel to back an extension of the treaty in talks with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on January 8 in Tel Aviv, after first raising the issue with Mubarak in Cairo.

"Whatever differences we have with the ruling power we salute this position which serves the interests of the country," Hodeiby added.

A member of the Nasserist party polburo Hossam Eissa also welcomed the stance as "A very good initiative and we hope to see it continue." The party is vehemently opposed to any Arab-Israeli reconciliation.

But Eissa also urged Egypt to "arm itself with nuclear weapons unless Israel's nuclear strength is eliminated."

Mubarak also won the backing of the main rightwing opposition new Wafd, but one of its leaders Yassin Serag Eddin urged Egypt to match Israel's nuclear strength.

Israel has always stuck to an official line since 1965 that it would not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons to the region.

Another report from Jerusalem adds: President Ezer Weizman of Israel telephoned his Egyptian counterpart Hosni Mubarak on Monday night in a bid to ease tensions over the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, officials said today.

"The conversation was designed to ease tensions," a spokesman for Weizman said amid reports in the Israeli press that Mubarak will now meet Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin soon.

The spokesman said Weizman, who visited Cairo in December, had pointed out that extremists on both sides were trying to block the peace process.

"The time has come to restore normal, good working relations," he quoted Weizman as saying.

In Cairo, the official Mena news agency said bilateral relations and developments in the peace process had dominated the telephone discussion.

Deputy Foreign Minister Yoasi Beilin goes to Egypt on Sunday to defuse the growing dispute over Israel's refusal to sign the non-Proliferation Treaty.

Beilin said he would be seeking "proper clarification." Talk of a war was "very far from any reality," he added.