

International

Egyptian Militants urge Muslims to 'besiege US embassies'

CAIRO, Feb 14: A violent Muslim group on Thursday urged Muslims to "besiege American embassies" to win freedom for two Islamic leaders jailed in the United States, reports AP.

The statement from al-Gamaa al-Islamiya, or the Islamic Group, called for support of Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, an Egyptian cleric jailed in the United States, and Mousa Abu Marzook, a leader of the fundamentalist Hamas facing extradition to Israel from America.

"The American and Zionist terrorism will only be stopped with similar or stronger terrorism," it said.

The group did not say what action it planned but urged Muslims to "besiege American embassies in their countries and demand from their leaders to shut them down."

In also warned that jailing Abu Marzook "in either American or Israeli jails must not pass without a punishment the size of the crime itself."

The statement was published Thursday in the Arabic language Al-Hayat newspaper. A copy was made available to The Associated Press.

There was no way to independently verify the authenticity of the communiqué, but it appeared similar to earlier statements from the group.

The Islamic Group has led a five-year campaign to overthrow Egypt's secular government and replace it with strict Islamic rule. More than 1,050 people have died, many of them police and militants.

The Islamic Group led a campaign in 1994 and 1995 to try to scare foreigners from Egypt by attacking four groups and planting small bombs at banks that maintained accounts for foreigners.

The statement followed reports from Jerusalem that Israel, Jordan and the United States are working on a deal to send Abu Marzook to Jordan rather than extradite him to Israel.

The Muslim fundamentalist group Hamas, active in the territories, opposes Arab efforts to make peace with Israel.

France offers to help forge Syria-Lebanon-Israeli deal
Clinton calls for new ME peace moves

WASHINGTON, Feb 14: President Clinton said Thursday the recent Israeli-Palestinian agreement had created "a renewed sense of promise in the Middle East" but said comprehensive peace rests on Syria resuming negotiations with Israel, reports AP.

Clinton, after meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said the two leaders engaged in "extensive discussions" about Syria and the peace process. But Clinton declined to reveal any details when asked if the two leaders had discussed any new Israeli proposals for land concessions in the Golan Heights.

Clinton said discussing specifics of any new Israeli proposals would set back negotiations but added, "I do feel encouraged by the discussions we have had that there are things worth working on."

Netanyahu, at a joint news conference with Clinton, said Syria could show its good faith by exerting its influence in Lebanon to reduce the military

capacity of Hezbollah terrorists.

Until then, he said, Israel would not withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon because "if we simply walked away... Hezbollah and other terrorists would simply come to the (border) and attack our towns and villages."

It was Clinton's first meeting with Netanyahu since the Israeli leader and Palestinian chief Yasser Arafat ended a dangerous impasse last month by agreeing to, then implementing, Israel's long-delayed pull-out from Hebron and parts of the West Bank.

Referring to the Hebron agreement, Clinton said: "There is a renewed sense of promise in the Middle East."

Netanyahu said Israel already has acted boldly and the next move should come from others.

"I think we've taken bold steps for peace," the Israeli leader said.

"It's time that we see such steps from our partners as

well," the prime minister said. "And if we have this mutuality, we will have, I think, a great future, a different future and hope for our children and our grandchildren."

Netanyahu was the first of four Middle East leaders scheduled to meet Clinton in coming weeks. The president also will see Arafat, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Hussein.

In talks with Netanyahu, Clinton explored possible steps to resume peace talks with Syria. Israeli-Syrian discussions were broken off a year ago after Islamic militants carried out suicide bombings in Israel.

Syria is insisting that Israel surrender the Golan Heights, a strategic plateau along its border, as its price for peace. Israel captured the Golan in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Netanyahu was said to have brought to Washington a territorial compromise on the Golan. The United States believes Syrian President Hafez Assad will not sign a peace

agreement without getting back all of the plateau.

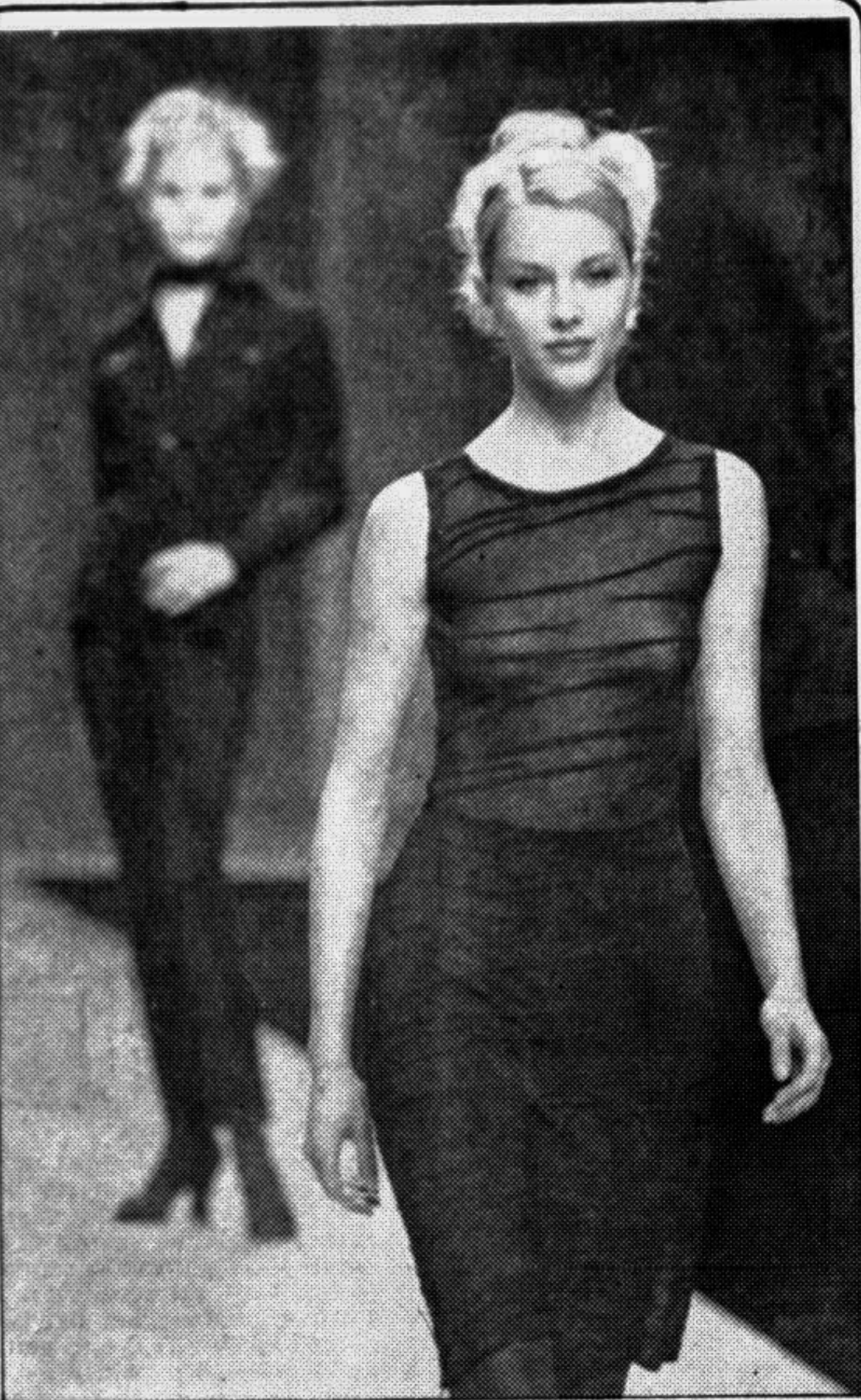
Meanwhile France on Thursday offered to help Israel forge a peace agreement with Syria and Lebanon.

France maintains close ties with both Syria and Lebanon. On Wednesday, Millon and Mordechai discussed the possibility of expanding France's military presence in southern Lebanon as part of a Middle East peace agreement.

Mordechai said that he believed France "has the necessary connections with Arab countries, especially Lebanon and Syria," to aid in peace talks.

Some Israeli politicians have been searching for ways to get Israeli troops out of Lebanon without endangering Israel's northern towns and villages.

The debate over a possible unilateral Israeli withdrawal was sparked by last week's collision of two military transport helicopters en route to Lebanon. Seventy-three soldiers died in the accident.



Models present evening gowns of Charco Azcona during the winter fashion show of Pasarela Cibeles in Madrid Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Berlin film festival opens: The 47th annual Berlin Film Festival opened Thursday, unleashing competition among 25 films from all over the world, Xinhua reports from Berlin.

Contenders for the prestigious Golden Bear Award, the highest prize of the event, include films produced by Germans, Americans, Poles, Brazilians and Chinese.

Fire claims 39 in China: Thirty-nine people, including three children, died when a bus engine caught fire and flames raced through the vehicle as it travelled along a southern Chinese highway, the Hong Kong-based Ming Pao newspaper said yesterday. Reuters reports from Hong Kong.

The paper said there was no emergency escape door on the bus which was carrying 71 passengers between Shenzhen, near the Hong Kong border, and the provincial capital of Guangzhou. Eighteen people were injured. Chinese transport officials were not immediately available for comment.

6,000 Zairians flee towards Zambia: About 6,000 Zairians loaded into 14 boats were trying to cross Lake Tanganyika to get to Zambia on Thursday, a UN spokesman said, AP reports from Nairobi.

Peter Kessler, East African spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said aid workers in the Zambian port of Mpulungu were preparing to receive the refugees, although their direction wasn't completely clear. Since Zairian rebels launched their campaign to drive government forces from the eastern part of the country in September, several thousand Zairians have found refuge in neighbouring Zambia and Tanzania — which together with Zaire, border the world's second-deepest freshwater lake.

ROK FM arrives in China: South Korean Foreign Minister Yoo Chong Ha arrived Friday for talks with his Chinese counterpart to discuss the defection of a senior North Korean official at Seoul's consulate in Beijing, AP reports from Singapore.

Yoo made no statement or comment upon his arrival at Changi International Airport.

He was to meet Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen at a posh Singapore hotel for 30 minutes starting at 9 am (0100 GMT), south Korean officials said. The two are in Singapore attending a previously scheduled Asia-Europe foreign ministers meeting on Saturday.

24 Sudanese rescued from desert: Twenty-four Sudanese returning home from Libya in a bus have been rescued after spending at least two weeks lost in the vast desert stretching across the two Afro-Arab nations, the official Sudan News Agency said Thursday, AP reports from Khartoum.

Assassination attempt on Colombian president

BOGOTA, Feb 14: Colombian president Ernesto Samper said on Thursday that he had survived a possible assassination attempt involving an attack on his presidential jet, reports Reuters.

Speaking in a Reuters interview, Samper said the attempt involved a bomb that exploded near the runway of the airport in Colombia's Steamy Caribbean port of Barranquilla, minutes before the presidential aircraft was due to land there Wednesday afternoon.

Initial reports said the bomb exploded up to 2.5 miles (4 km) from the airport runway and represented no real threat to Samper's Dutch-made Fokker aircraft.

Bosnian president threatens to step down

SARAJEVO, Feb 14: Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic has threatened to resign if international arbitrators award control of the disputed northern town of Brcko to separatist Serbs, the official press reported Thursday, says AP.

Izetbegovic's threat was contained in a January 14 letter to the contact group for the former Yugoslavia — comprising Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States — press said.

The Muslim leader was elected Chairman of Bosnia's three-person collective presidency, which includes representatives of the country's rival Muslim, Croat and Serb communities.

Brcko is the only territorial issue not resolved in the 1995 Dayton peace accords, and is claimed by both of Bosnia's two entities — the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Republika Srpska.



US President Bill Clinton receives credentials from Bangladesh Ambassador, K H Shehabuddin, February 11 in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP/UNB photo

34 killed as boat capsizes in Kenya

NAIROBI, Feb 14: A boat overloaded with passengers capsized in Kenyan waters off Africa's largest lake, killing at least 34 people, the Kenya News Agency said Friday, reports AP.

The boat, was sailing from Homa Bay, a port on Lake Victoria about 300 kilometres (187 miles) west of Nairobi, when it capsized on Wednesday afternoon near Sukuru Island, the report said.

The cause of the accident was not immediately clear, though The Daily Nation newspaper said Friday the boat was caught in a storm and sank.

Police said only four bodies had been retrieved from the lake by Thursday.

Six men survived by clinging to pieces of wood and other debris, a local official, William Kerario, was quoted as saying in The Daily Nation.

PML (N) opens talks with MQM

KARACHI, Feb 14: The Pakistan Muslim League PML led by premier-designate Nawaz Sharif opened talks Thursday with ethnic based Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) in a bid to forge a coalition to rule the southern province of Sindh, reports AP.

Deposed premier Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is also vying to form the government in Sindh, her home province, by mustering support from other groups in the Provincial Assembly.

Sharif's party secured 12 seats in the 109-member Sindh Assembly with Bhutto's party getting 35 and MQM 28. The remaining seats were won by other groups and independents.

MQM, whose support is considered crucial, is likely to prefer an alliance with Sharif, since the ethnic group was at loggerheads with Bhutto during her three-year rule.

Good bye to habit of marriage!

NEW YORK, Feb 14: At age 65, Elizabeth Taylor says she has finally broken the habit of a lifetime — marriage, reports Reuters.

Eight marriages, including two to the same man, Richard Burton, are enough, Taylor told ABC's Barbara Walters in an interview to shown today on "20/20".

"I've been in love so many times, I think I've had it," she told Walters, who then asked, "what about marriage?"

Oh God, no... if you hear of me getting married... slap me," Taylor said.

Taylor said she was devoting herself to her children and friends, including Michael Jackson, saying she planned to be godmother to his just-born baby son.

In the interview with Walters, taped earlier this week, Taylor said she planned to be



in the delivery room when Jackson's second wife, Debbie Rowe Jackson, gave birth.

But hospital spokesman refused to give any details about the birth, including when the baby was born this week and who was with Mrs. Jackson.

Mr and Mrs Jackson have requested that there be no further information other than that the baby was a boy and mother and son are doing fine," a hospital spokesman said.

Food aid to go to DPRK's civilians, assures UN

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 14: The UN food agency said Thursday that countries donating emergency food aid to North Korea can be assured the contributions will feed North Korean civilians, not the country's soldiers, reports AP.

"We monitor at each stage along the way," said Douglas Coutts, director of the New York office of the World Food Programme. "I can assure you there is no food in any of these programs going to the military."

The military has its own food rationing system, he said. The Rome-based agency appealed Wednesday for 41.6 million dollars in emergency food aid to help North Koreans suffering the effects of two successive years of floods.

The contributions would pay for roughly 100,000 metric tons of food for about 1.73 million adults and children considered the most at risk, the agency said. Agency staff monitor the

disbursement of aid, he said. Without aid, the secretive communist country is expected to exhaust its food supply by May or June, Coutts said.

The United States has said it intends to contribute, but would first consult with allies South Korea and Japan.

Coutts said he hoped the food agency's newest plea would not be affected by the defection of a high-ranking North Korean official on Wednesday. Hwang Jang Yop, the most senior official ever to defect from the North, sought refuge in the South Korean consulate in Beijing. He wants to go to South Korea.

The World Food Program estimates that daily rations distributed by the government have been reduced over the past two years from 700 grams per person to between 100 and 150 grams today. That's equivalent to about half a bowl of rice, the agency said.

'DPRK's N-waste deal with Taiwan will jeopardise reactor accord'

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 14: Members of South Korea's National Assembly said Thursday that North Korea's plan to store nuclear waste from Taiwan poses a severe environmental threat and jeopardises a 1994 nuclear reactor accord, reports AP.

Five National Assembly delegates visiting the United Nations said South Korea might withdraw support from a deal to build replacement nuclear reactors in North Korea if the nuclear waste plan goes through.

South Korea is the main financier of a \$1.5 billion contract to build two reactors in North Korea under a 1994 accord by which the communist country has frozen its nuclear programme.

If North Korea begins storing the low-level nuclear waste from Taiwan "it will be very difficult for politicians like us to say to the Korean people that we

have to put up that kind of money" for the reactors, National Assemblyman Suh Sang-Mok told reporters.

"If this kind of deal goes through it will create very bad public opinion in Korea," he said.

The legislators also said that North Korea is not capable of properly storing the nuclear waste and the plan violates an international convention prohibiting the import and export of nuclear waste.

"We think that North Korea does not have the technology and expertise to handle this kind of nuclear waste safely," Suh said. North Korea reportedly plans to store the waste in abandoned mine shafts about 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the border with South Korea.

The deal announced January 20 permits initial shipment of 60,000 barrels within two years, with an option to ship

another 140,000. Anti-nuclear groups in Taiwan and South Korea estimate that cash-strapped North Korea could reap at least 227 million dollars from the deal.

Cho Soon-Sung, another National Assembly delegate, said the lawmakers were seeking to resolve the situation first through "quiet diplomacy," but might try to lobby the UN Security Council to take action.

South Korea is among the 10 non-permanent council members.

North Korea badly needs hard currency to import food and other basics. But Suh said South Korea does not intend to link the nuclear waste issue with UN appeals for food aid for North Korea, where people are reported starving.

"This is a different issue," he said. "We do not have the intention of linking this with the food aid."

Kofi Annan moves ahead with reform programme

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 14: "We are proceeding with reform," Secretary General Kofi Annan said February 13 as he opened his first press conference since becoming Secretary General, reports AP.

Annan also said that he expects "constructive" work between the United Nations and the US Congress in the coming year to work out the payment of more than \$1,300 million owed the world organisation by the United States.

"I can't tell you when I am going to get the check, but I am hopeful in the end, the right thing will be done by all the members of Congress," he said.

A major portion of the Secretary General's one-hour press conference was devoted to questions about the UN reform process. A two-page hand-out sketched "UN Reform: The first

six weeks."

Reform "is a process, not an event. Change has to be managed," Annan said. "I am going to lead this process as chief (administrative officer) and I will undertake measures within my authority in streamlining the secretariat and improving the managerial processes without waiting for government's approval."

The Secretary General has said that his goal is to consult with governments during his first six months in office to determine how they see the restructuring of the organisation and its programme and then present his reform proposals to the General Assembly in July.

In the meantime, he has eliminated three senior posts, has instituted a "cabinet-style" administration requiring senior staff to meet on a regular basis

to streamline co-ordination, and plans to reduce paperwork by 25 per cent.

The Secretary General said his definition of reform is creating an efficient, leaner, relevant United Nations better able to take on the tasks member states set for it. While that may mean consolidating some services, he said, it may also mean making investments in other areas, spending money to train staff or buy new equipment.

"Reform cannot be taken on a shoestring budget," he said.

The Secretary General also said that he plans to use current UN staff, recruit "new talent" from outside the UN system, and promote competent UN officials to put his managerial team together.

"Obviously I am not going to reform the whole system in one go," he said. "We have to take

the problem in manageable chunks: so in the first phase I will focus on the secretariat and the funds and the programmes that are directly dependent on the UN. In the next phase, I will see how we can get the system to work together as a system on the economic area."

Answering press criticism that he has paid too much attention to Washington during his first days in office, the Secretary General said that "I think the member states have understood that it was necessary for me to visit Washington and try to clarify the misunderstanding... I do not believe any of them feels I should visit 184 member states."

Annan, under pressure from the US Congress to make substantial reforms before receiving more than \$1,000 million in US back dues, joked that he

apologised to members of the Security Council for not being able to revamp the cumbersome bureaucracy in the five weeks he has been in office.

Annan became the UN's seventh Secretary General on January 1, 1997. His first official visit was to Washington January 22-23 where he met with President Clinton; Secretary of State Madeleine Albright; Senator Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and other members of Congress.

In its FY-1998 budget proposal, the Clinton administration is proposing that the US pay its assessed contributions for this year as well as appropriate \$100 million to pay on the arrears in 1998 and \$921 million for an arrears payment in 1999.



An Iraqi woman grieves over pictures of friends and relatives during a memorial service held in the Amiriya shelter in Baghdad Thursday. Iraqis held a memorial service for the hundreds of people who were killed when US warplanes bombed this concrete shelter in 1991 Gulf War. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Three-eyed man!

HONG KONG: China has discovered its first case of a three-eyed man in the southeastern province of Fujian, it was reported Friday, reports AP.

The 23-year-old man, identified only as Deng, was found by a hospital in Futian to have three eyes, the Hong Kong branch of China News Service said in a report.

Two of the eyes were sightless, while two thirds of the third of the third eye was covered by skin. The agency said the case was the first in China and only the third in the world.

Twin births climb 42 pc in US!

ATLANTA: Twin births have climbed 42 per cent since 1980 in the United States, largely because of fertility drugs, the US government said, reports AP.

There were 68,339 live twin babies born in 1980, compared to 97,064 in 1994, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. The rate at which twins were born increased 30 per cent during that period, from 18.9 babies per 1,000 births to 24.6.

"A birth is more likely to result in twins than it was in the early 1980s," CDC statistician Joyce Martin said. "Mothers are more likely to seek fertility therapies. They are also more widely available."

The likelihood that a woman will give birth to twins increases until about age 40, she said, and as women grow older, their fertility decreases, and they are more likely to use fertility drugs.

Twins make up 2 per cent of all births.

The study did not look at the rates of triplet or quadruplet births.

Twin rates were highest in the Northern and Eastern states. Connecticut and Massachusetts topped the list with a rate of 27.7 twin births per 1,000 births between 1992 and 1994.

The population of mothers giving birth there was a little older," Ms Martin said.

The rates were the lowest in the South and West. Idaho and New Mexico were at the bottom, with twins in 19.8 out of every 1,000 births.

In 1994, the twin birth rate among white mothers was 24.3 per 1,000. It was 28.3 per 1,000 for black moms and 18.6 for Hispanic mothers.

Twins are seven times more likely to be born smaller than single infants, Ms Martin said. More than half of all twins weigh less than five and a half pounds (2.5 kilograms), compared with 6 per cent of single babies. Four out of every 100 twins die.

Tomb dating back 1,057 yrs discovered

HANGZHOU: A tomb dating back 1,057 years has been discovered near the city of Lin'an in east China's Zhejiang province, reports Xinhua.

Archaeologists with the State Bureau of Cultural Relics have confirmed that the well-preserved tomb was built for an empress during the Five Dynasties (907-960) period.

The tomb, 11.8 metres long and 2.2 metres wide, has three rooms with coloured wall paintings, sculptures of human figures, and charts of the constellations in each room.

Archaeologists have unearthed 26 valuable celadon items, more than 100 pieces of jade and copper mirrors, and some other silver, copper and iron works.

Womaniser bishop!

LONDON: Roderick Wright, the Scottish Roman Catholic bishop who eloped with a divorcee earlier this week, then was revealed to be the father of a 15-year-old boy by another woman, was an inveterate womaniser, press reports said Saturday, report AP.

The Daily Mirror quoted a "highly-placed church source" as saying: "Everyone is panicking now because there is a belief there are at least another two woman Roddy has been involved with."

The Sun said the church had made inquiries when two women complained about Wright's "improper conduct" when he was a priest 20 or 30 years ago.

The archbishop of Edinburgh and Saint Andrews, Keith O'Brien, also said that three years ago a woman in Wright's diocese had given the names of several women who had had relations with the bishop.

O'Brien said Wright, who resigned from the church this week after his elopement with 40-year-old mother-of-three Kathleen McPhee, had vigorously denied the allegations.

"We really took him at his word," O'Brien added. "That is why we have been particularly shattered by events. In all honesty, when one opens a can of worms, one just doesn't realise what's at the bottom of it."

"This Roddy Wright has had a weakness with regard to sexuality and there's always the possibility of other revelations."