

UN postpones ruling on Libya's air violations

UNITED NATIONS, May 16: The UN Sanctions Committee on Thursday postponed a ruling on whether Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi violated an international air embargo by flying to two African countries last week, reports AFP.

Western diplomats said after a sanctions committee meeting, prolonged by procedural wrangling, that the 15-member committee needed more information on the flights to Niger and Nigeria on May 8 and 9. Gaddafi returned to Libya on Saturday.

The committee is to meet again next week on the issue.

In a letter to UN Security Council President Park Soo Gil, Libyan Ambassador Abuzed Omar Dorda said that he had not received information from Tripoli on "the means of transportation" used by Gaddafi.

But Dorda insisted that even if aircraft had flown from Libya, the flights were religious and consequently not covered by the flight ban.

Western diplomats said however that even under the religious exemption, Libya should have sought prior approval from the sanctions committee.

"The visit was a response to an invitation to the leader from the African Islamic leaders and members of the World People's Islamic Leadership, and which

is led by Moamer Gaddafi. This means that the visit is a religious 100 per cent," said the letter obtained by AFP.

The committee, which groups all 15 council members, requires consensus for its decisions.

Ex-FBI agent jailed for 23 yrs

MANASSAS, Virginia, May 16: A former FBI agent was sentenced on Thursday to 23 years in prison for trying to kill his ex-wife in revenge for her lesbian affair with mystery writer Patricia Cornwell, reports Reuters.

Eugene Bennett was convicted in February of nine felony counts in an elaborate plot to kill his estranged wife, Marguerite, prosecutor Paul Ebert said.

The jury recommended Bennett receive a 61-year sentence, but circuit Judge Richard Potter suspended all but 23 years of it. Bennett could be free in just under 20 years.

Marguerite Bennett said during the trial in Manassas, Virginia, near Washington DC, that she had a brief lesbian affair with Cornwell in 1991 and 1992. Cornwell confirmed this in an interview earlier this year with Vanity Fair magazine.

Israel, PA begin 1st meet in two months

US sees glimmer of hope

JERUSALEM, May 16: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called it a "good start," but Palestinians were grim on Thursday following the first meeting between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in two months, reports AP.

An American official called the meeting constructive, but said the two sides were "very far apart on the basic issues that divide them."

Yasser Arafat said the Wednesday night meeting arranged by US mediator Dennis Ross "did not achieve the needed results," and top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said it "revealed to me the depths of the crisis we're in."

"I never felt so far away from being these people's partners as I did last night," Erekat told The Associated Press.

Erekat described the meeting as "very, very frank ... and very, very bitter, angry at points."

Netanyahu, however, said "I think we had a good start. ... Both sides presented their concerns."

Netanyahu, who was briefed Thursday on the meeting by Ross, said "it can be a basis for further meetings."

"We are trying to find a bridge between the two sides to

allow a renewal of joint security cooperation ... and to renew the peace process," he said.

Ross met twice with Netanyahu on Thursday and was to meet Thursday night with Arafat in the West Bank city Ramallah.

However, Arafat's office announced at 2000 GMT that the Palestinian leader was too busy to meet with Ross Thursday. The cancellation signaled the Palestinians' growing impatience with the impasse in negotiations.

The United States has been pushing to revive Israel-Palestinian peace talks, which have been on hold since Israel broke ground in Jerusalem in March for a new Jewish neighbourhood on land captured from Arabs in the 1967 Middle East War. The groundbreaking was followed by weeks of clashes in the West Bank between Palestinian youths and Israeli troops.

The Palestinians say the talks cannot resume until Israel stops construction of the neighbourhood, known as Har Homa in Hebrew and Abu Ghneim in Arabic, and expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

"What was needed from the Israeli side was a freeze of set-

tlements, an end to land confiscations, and an end to construction at Abu Ghneim," Erekat said Thursday. "We did not hear it. On the contrary, we heard that settlements will continue."

"Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, who traveled Thursday to the United States, insisted Wednesday that Israel's settlement activity did not violate the Israel-Palestinian accords."

"It may be against some people's desires and expectations, but it does not go against the agreements," he said.

The Haaretz newspaper said Levy, in his meeting with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, would express Israel's desire to reach an understanding with the United States on issues to be raised in negotiations on a final peace settlement with the Palestinians.

Negotiations have not yet started on a final settlement, which is supposed to be reached by 1999 and address unresolved issues such as the status of Jerusalem, the future of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the final borders of the Palestinian entity and the question of statehood.

Kim's son admits receiving money from businessmen

SEOUL, May 16: South Korean President Kim Young-Sam's son admitted that he had received money from businessmen but denied graft charges, a senior prosecutor said today, reports AFP.

"Hyun-Chul admitted that he had taken money from businessmen ... but he is persistent in denying that he had received the money in return for favours," senior prosecutor Shim Jae-Ryun told journalists.

"We'll continue grilling him through cross questioning of him with those businessmen," Shim said.

Prosecutors planned to take out an arrest warrant on Hyun-Chul on Saturday on graft charges, Shim hinted.

Investigators earlier called in for cross questioning three businessmen who had allegedly bribed the son to buy influence or helped him launder slush money, prosecution officials said.

They include Choi Sung-Jin, a former vice chairman of the collapsed Woosung Construction Co., who allegedly handed Hyun-Chul some 336,000 dollars in return for pressuring Korea First Bank not to press for bankruptcy of the firm in 1995.



This undated file picture shows a self-portrait of Raffaello Sanzio that will be reproduced upon the new Italian half million lire note. — AFP/UNB photo

UNSC concerned at killing of Zairean refugees

UNITED NATIONS, May 16: Security Council members on Thursday expressed "grave concern" at killing of refugees in eastern Zaire and attacks on UN staff, particularly the recent assault against two staff members by rebel soldiers, reports AFP.

Council president Park Soo Gil of South Korea said council members shared a "sense of aversion" about the attacks on humanitarian workers in general and the UN children's fund or UNICEF in particular in rebel territory.

Two UNICEF staff on Monday were assaulted and physically beaten in Goma, close to rebel leader Laurent Kabila's headquarters. The attackers were in uniform. UN sources said they spoke Kinyarwanda, the language of neighbouring Rwanda whose rulers are backing the Tutsi-dominated rebels in Zaire.

UN officials on Wednesday called together senior diplomats close to the Zaire crisis to use their influence with Kabila.

China, France to promote partnership in 21st century

BEIJING, May 16: China and France signed a joint communique today on promoting a partnership into the 21st century, opposing attempts at world domination and urging a ban on fissile material for nuclear weapons, reports Reuters.

"At the dawn of the 21st century, the time has come for France and China to prolong this partnership with a long-term global partnership aimed at improving French-Chinese relations into a new phase of development," said the communique, signed by French President Jacques Chirac and China's President Jiang Zemin.

"The two parties have decided to engage in reinforced cooperation, to foster the march toward multipolarity and to oppose any attempt at domination in world affairs," it said, adding that areas of tension remained in the international situation.

The world's last two powers to engage in nuclear testing voiced support for the global test ban treaty and urged a speedy start to talks on banning production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices.

Tigers fight pitched battle with Lankan troops

COLOMBO, May 16: Tamil Tiger guerrillas fought pitched battles with Sri Lankan troops today as a major military offensive continued for the fourth day, the rebel radio said, reports AFP.

The Voice of Tigers radio, monitored in the northern town of Vavuniya, said heavy fighting was raging in Omani and Nedunkeni, causing large scale destruction and rendering thousands homeless.

It said the military was raining long-range artillery while the air force was bombing rebel areas.

"A large number of people have been displaced because of the shelling and bombing," it said.

"People have fled their homes and taken shelter in (Hindu) temples and school buildings," the radio said. "The heavy rains are adding to people's misery."

The radio said the LTTE had lost only six guerrillas, including a woman, in fighting since thousands of soldiers launched a massive offensive Tuesday to capture a strategic highway in the island's north.

Quit by Monday, Kabila's ultimatum to Mobutu

CAPE TOWN, May 16: Rebel leader Laurent Kabila agreed Thursday to wait until Monday to know if Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko will give up power, but refused to say if he would halt the rebel advance on the Zairean capital, reports AFP.

Kabila held more than two hours of urgent talks with South African President Nelson Mandela, in another bid to avoid a bloody takeover of Kinshasa.

"Matters are going according to plan," Mandela told reporters after the meeting, held at his Tuynhuys office here. "We are sure that a solution will be found. It is in the interests of both parties."

The South African leader, who persuaded Kabila to fly to Cape Town after the collapse of a key peace summit Wednesday in the Congolese port of Pointe Noire, said the Zairean president, Mobutu, had agreed to respond by Monday to a peace plan drafted by mediators.

Under the plan, leaked to the South African media Thursday, Mobutu would hand power im-

mediately to an all-party transitional authority, which would govern, Zaire until democratic elections are held.

In return, Mobutu and his family's safety would be guaranteed and he would be accorded the status of former head of state with all its attendant courtesies and privileges.

Kabila, pressed by reporters after the meeting, said he was prepared to wait until Monday for Mobutu's answer but refused to comment when asked by AFP whether he would order a halt to the rebel advance on Kinshasa, saying: "I have nothing to say."

AP adds: Eager to promote democracy in Zaire, the Clinton administration is getting an ambiguous response from rebel leader Laurent Kabila on staging elections in the Central African country after his expected takeover.

Kabila has told US diplomats there should be a "period of stabilization" before elections. US officials said Thursday. His stance was described as ambiguous.

Pro-govt party threatens to boycott polls in Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, May 16: The main pro-government party said Thursday it will pull out of upcoming elections unless officials hold the first round again, reports AP.

Results from partial elections April 6 favoured the party of ex-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, which could bring down the government if it gains control of the Senate.

"If the international community gives these elections its blessing, we can say goodbye to democracy in this country," said pro-government Sen. Paul Denis, appealing for support to annul the election.

The United States has said it believes the elections were free and fair — despite reports of ballot-stuffing and other vote-rigging.

But the Organization of American States has been more critical, with its team of observers charging last week that officials had tampered with election results. The OAS also questioned the legality of an electoral council decision to exclude blank votes from the count — a decision that ultimately favored Aristide's party.

Through irregularities and fraud, the electoral council has wished to reproduce the electoral masquerade of past dictatorships, the pro-government Lavalas Political Organization said Thursday.

It said it would boycott runoff elections scheduled for May 25 unless the elections were annulled and current members of the Provisional Electoral Council fired.

If not, pro-Aristide candidates likely will make nearly a clean sweep of the Senate. Aristide's party has said it would use such power to push for the resignation of President Rosny Smarth. Smarth is an executive member of the Lavalas Political Organization, the main rival of Aristide's party, the Lavalas Family.

The April elections had turned into a contest between the two Lavalas parties because the half-dozen other major political parties have boycotted the electoral process since June 1995 legislative elections.

Observers estimated that less than 10 per cent of voters participated in last month's balloting — for nine of 27 Senate seats, two spots in the 83-seat Chamber of Deputies and thousands of officers for local councils.

Croatia gave many of the abandoned Serb homes to Croat refugees from neighboring Bosnia. Those Croats are now angry because the Croatian government has promised to allow more Serbs to return home.

About 200,000 Serbs fled advancing Croatian forces in 1995, and the government subsequently settled about 50,000 Croats, mostly refugees, in some of their homes.

Drazen Sokler, a Croat who recently moved to an abandoned Serb house in Kostajnica after fleeing the Serb-controlled Bosnian region of Orasje in 1992, was at the rally.

"We were living in the refugee camps for years, and now we'll be expelled again," he said.

A government official at the rally assured Croats they had a right to stay in the area. "If the Serb owner returns, we'll find another accommodation for you," Lovro Pejckovic said.

BRIEFLY

33 Thais refused entry into NZ:

A group of 33 Thai nationals claiming to be tourists was refused entry into New Zealand and flown back to Bangkok from Auckland Friday morning, AP reports from Wellington.

Immigration officials at Wellington Airport became suspicious of the group when it entered the airport's immigration arrival hall Thursday, and believed the Thais were seeking work.

After inquiries, the officials decided they were not bona fide tourists on a short-term visit. They refused tourist permits to the 7 women and 26 men.

Shin Bet to draft female bodyguards:

The next time Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu goes abroad he may be flanked by a woman other than his wife — his bodyguard, AP reports from Jerusalem.

Israel's domestic security service, Shin Bet, decided to add women to its bodyguard ranks after the success of female bodyguards abroad, especially in the United States and Britain, the Maariv daily reported Thursday.

Shin Bet also fears it could face a court case claiming discrimination now that the Supreme Court has ruled that the air force must let women become pilots, Maariv said. As a result, women are expected to be included in one of the next bodyguard training courses.

2 lumberjacks to die in Angola:

Two foreign lumberjacks were sentenced to death for "espionage," according to a statement published Thursday by guerrillas seeking independence for the Angolan enclave of Cabinda, AP reports from Brazzaville.

Omar bin Norola, a Malaysian, and Marcelin Alime, a Filipino, "will soon be executed, as stipulated by the revolutionary tribunal in power in our territory," said a statement from the Cabinda Liberation Front/Armed Forces of Cabinda.

Road mishap claims 8 in China:

Eight people were killed and 20 injured in a crash involving a bus and two trucks in China's southern Guangdong province, reports said yesterday, AP reports from Beijing.

The accident happened Tuesday when a truck carrying a load of pigs on the Guangzhou-Shantou road crossed onto the opposite lane to overtake another vehicle, the official China daily said.

Construction of HK hall completed:

China has completed construction of the Hong Kong Hall in the Great Hall of the People, ahead of the colony's return from British rule on July 1, the official Xinhua news agency reported Friday, AFP reports from Beijing.

It is the biggest of the reception halls representing China's provinces or autonomous regions in the Great Hall, which overlooks Tiananmen Square. It will be used for the first time on Tuesday for a meeting of the Hong Kong Preparatory Committee.

7 feared drowned in China:

Seven people on board a Chinese passenger ferry were feared dead after a collision with a Singapore-registered container vessel off the northern Chinese port of Dalian, a Hong Kong newspaper reported yesterday. Reuters says from Hong Kong.

The passenger ship Lubo Ferry 2, carrying 73 people, sank after it collided with the Yucheng on Wednesday afternoon, the Ming Pao reported.

Sixty-six people aboard the ferry were rescued and later brought to Dalian, it said.

12 die as boat sinks in Indonesia:

A fishing boat sank in the Strait of Selayar, south of the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, leaving 12 dead and eight missing, a report said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The boat, the Harapan Jaya, which was used to transport around 50 passengers between Pasitanete and Salayar islands, sank early Thursday, the state Antara news agency reported.

Bad weather and overloading were thought to be the cause of the accident, Antara said.

Israel attacks guerilla bases in S Lebanon

RASHAYA, Lebanon, May 16: Israeli warplanes fired missiles at guerilla bases in south Lebanon Friday after pro-Iranian fighters killed three Israeli soldiers and wounded four others in nightlong clashes, officials said, reports AP.

Two guerillas were killed in the fighting, an Israeli army spokesman said.

Israeli warplanes fired eight air-to-surface missiles at bases used by the pro-Iranian Hezbollah militia, Lebanese officials said, speaking on customary condition of anonymity.

The fighting began late Thursday after an elite para-troop unit stumbled on a squad of Hezbollah guerillas in the southern Bekaa Valley, an Israeli army spokesman said.

One soldier was killed and three wounded before the Israelis returned fire killing two of the guerillas, the army spokesman said.

Two more soldiers were killed and one wounded when the guerillas opened fire as the Israelis began evacuating the area, the army spokesman said.

In the two hours after the start of the fighting, Israeli soldiers fired more than 350 shells at the area, Lebanese officials said.

The Israelis battled the guerillas about 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) north of the enclave that Israel occupies in south

Lebanon.

After the clash, Israeli helicopters later fired four missiles at suspected guerilla positions near the fighting. Lebanese army units fired anti-aircraft guns at the helicopters, and a Lebanese armored personnel carrier was strafed, officials said.

Albania passes new electoral law

TIRANA, May 16: Albania's parliament today passed a new electoral law that was expected to pave the way for vital elections planned for the end of June, politicians said, reports Reuters.

The elections are a key part of international efforts to restore stability to Albania and were agreed as part of a package of measures to stem widespread unrest which flared earlier this year after the collapse of Pyramid investment schemes.

The passing of the new law followed an emergency visit by European envoy Franz Vranitzky, who persuaded politicians to revise previous legislation after most political parties threatened to boycott the vote.

These parties said the earlier law favoured President Sali Berisha's former ruling Democratic Party.



Zairean rebel leader Laurent Kabila (L) stares fixedly ahead while South African President Nelson Mandela makes a brief statement to the press during a meeting in Cape Town on Thursday to discuss a transitional settlement in the conflict in Zaire. — AFP/UNB photo

UK researchers say 250 items can cause asthma at work

LONDON, May 16: About 250 items, from hairdressers' henna to crabs in canneries, which different categories of workers handle daily on the job can cause asthma in those allergic to it, researchers say, reports AP.

"Level of exposure is an important risk factor and reduction of exposure is the only certain method of prevention," Katherine M Venables of London's National Heart and Lung Institute and Moira Chan-Yeung of Canada's University of British Columbia reported.

"Occupational asthma" — asthma contracted at work — "is a potentially fatal condition," they warn in the May 17 issue of the British medical magazine The Lancet, advance copies of which were available Friday.

Asthma is usually caused by an allergy to ingested substances. It is characterized by wheezing, coughing and feeling suffocated and is very common throughout the entire population.

The report said up to 10 per cent of people suffer from asthma and that an estimated fifth of sufferers in the United States and Japan have it as a result of exposure at work to one or more of the 250 items

they listed. The list included animal urine that researchers and animal handlers in laboratories are exposed to, grain mites that farmers are exposed to, prawns and crabs in canneries, egg protein, grain dust and wheat and rye flour in bakeries.

Latex, castor beans, green coffee beans, henna, gum acacia used in printing works, and oak, mahogany, western red cedar and some other kinds of wood dust in sawmills were also on the list.

The report said workers allergic to asthma are also at risk from a variety of items used in the plastics, rubber, dyeing, textiles and pharmaceutical industries and in photographic laboratories.

Asthma-allergic health care workers are at risk from penicillins and other drugs, engineering workers from oil mists used in tool setting and electronics workers from a substance called colophony used in soft solder flux, it added.

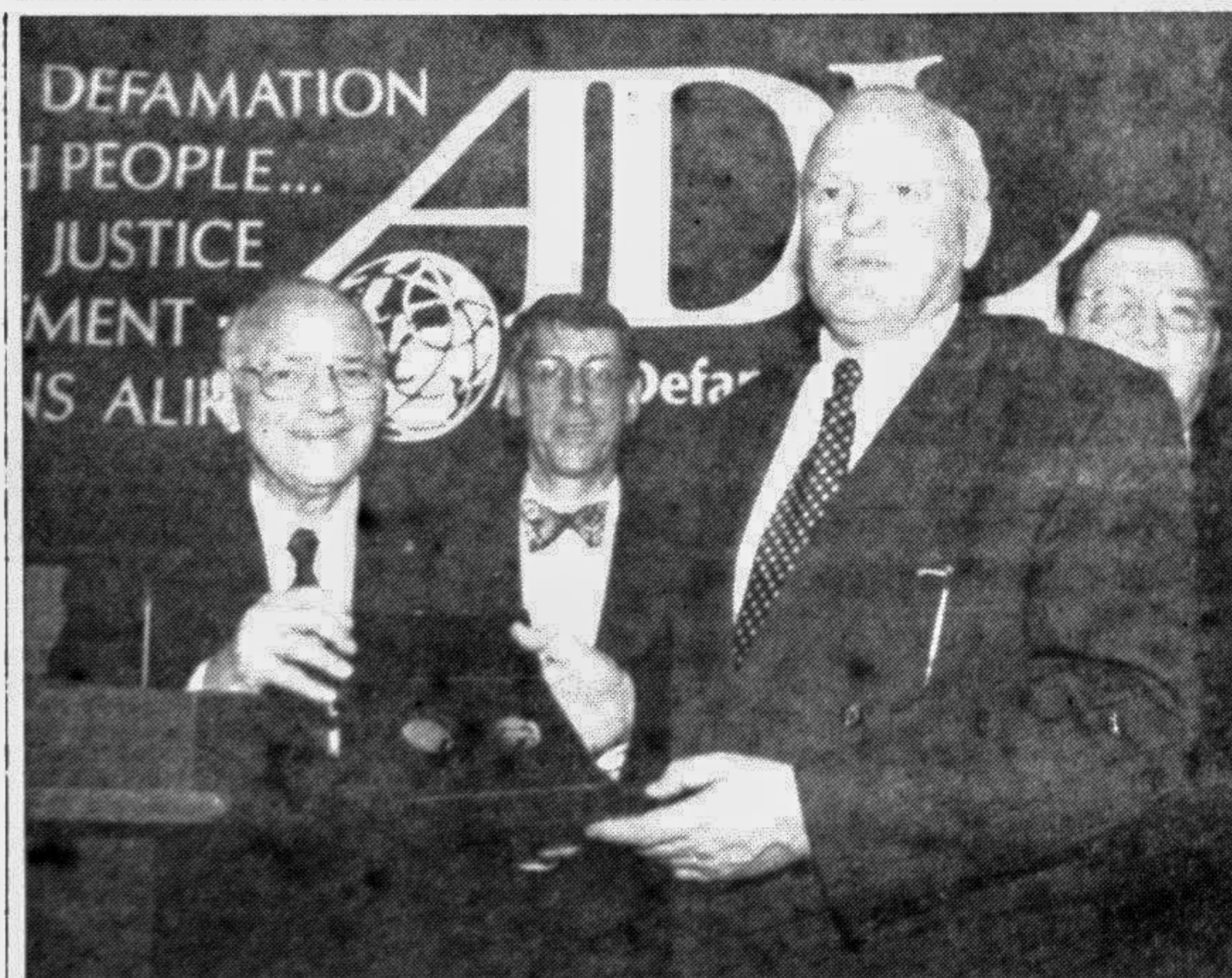
"In surveillance programmes in the United Kingdom and in British Columbia, Canada, occupational asthma accounted for 26 per cent and 52 per cent of occupational lung disease, respectively," it said.

"In a British bakery ... the prevalence of work-related chest symptoms was significantly related to a level of current exposure to flour dust," the report continued.

"During the epidemics of asthma in the enzyme-detergent industry in the 1960s and 1970s, the rate of sensitisation (to asthma) was highest among workers with high exposure, and it fell steadily after measures to suppress dust were taken."

Explaining how the risk can be passed from one category of worker to another, it said: "The hessian sacks used to transport castor beans are recycled for transporting other commodities and for making felt. The sacks contain enough castor-bean antigen to sensitize dock workers, and the felt has sensitized furniture workers."

It said an earlier study showed that giving workers respirators to wear did not prevent worsening symptoms of asthma. "Avoidance of exposure is the mainstay of patient management," the present report said. "Ideally, patients should withdraw from the causal exposure permanently, retraining if necessary for alternative employment."



German President Roman Herzog (2nd R) receives the 1997 Joseph Prize for Human Rights from Burton Joseph (L), Anti-Defamation League Honorary National Chair, on Thursday in New York. Herzog received the award for his work in promoting tolerance. Second from the left is Howard Berkowitz, Chair of the ADL National Executive Committee and far right is Abraham H Foxman, ADL National Director. — AFP/UNB photo