

Jordan accuses Israel of 'demolishing' ME peace

AMMAN, Jordan, Dec 6: Jordan's King Hussein accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday of "demolishing" the peace with the Palestinians, reports AP.

In a letter to Jordan's prime minister, broadcast on state radio, the king said Netanyahu seemed to want to plant "a fear of peace in the Israeli society instead of a serious drive towards attaining it."

"It appears that there is a continuous effort by the Israeli prime minister to demolish ... Israeli-Palestinian accords and to change the essence and facets of the peace process," Hussein said.

Hussein said peace would remove "all the causes of fear" while its absence "threatens a certain coming catastrophe."

"These are times characterised by uncertainty and confusion, even bordering on apprehension towards the quest of a just and comprehensive peace," he said.

"Peace is not just signed papers, but rather a contract between generations for the building of a more promising and less threatening future."

In the letter, the king told Prime Minister Abdullah Majall to pursue closer ties with the Palestinians and out-

Cambodia hopes to get aid for clearing mines

PHNOM PENH, Dec 6: The government expressed optimism Saturday that the creation of an international fund for the deactivation of anti-personnel landmines will help Cambodia eradicate a deadly legacy, reports AP.

"Cambodia will certainly benefit from this," said First Prime Minister Ung Huot upon his return from Ottawa where he attended the signing of a global treaty to ban landmines.

"The creation of a fund, to be administered by the United Nations, is expected to draw 350 million dollars in commitments. Its formation was announced by the Canadian government, which itself pledged 70 million dollars, at the Ottawa meeting."

"We are hopeful for money, but also for technical assistance," said Ung Huot, stressing that individual countries likely to benefit from the international fund have not yet been identified.

Two decades of war and lingering civil unrest has turned Cambodia into one of the most heavily mined countries in the world.

As many as 300 people are maimed or killed each month from some of the estimated four to six million mines in Cambodian soil.



Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe and First Secretary of ZANU (PF) gives a speech concerning the land acquisition programme during the third National People's Conference at Mary Mount Teachers' College, in Mutare, Zimbabwe, Friday. Nearly 4 million hectares of commercial farm land, predominantly owned by white farmers, has been identified to be re-allocated to black peasants. — AP/UNB photo

SAARC to mark its 12th Charter Day tomorrow

KATHMANDU, Dec 6: The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will celebrate its 12th Charter Day on December 8, said a press release issued yesterday by the Kathmandu-based SAARC Secretariat, reports Xinhua.

The SAARC was established on December 8, 1985 with the signing of its charter by the heads of state or government from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Since its establishment, the SAARC has taken a number of significant steps to expand the areas of cooperation including socio-economic and poverty eradication which are utmost relevant to the member countries, the press release said.

Other issues of the SAARC agenda include matters relating to children, women and disadvantaged groups of society, the press release said.

The most significant achievement of the SAARC in recent years is the operationalisation of the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) in December 1995.

George Carey in Pakistan Archbishop calls for Christian, Muslim unity

ISLAMABAD, Dec 6: The Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey had made a plea for greater unity and understanding between Muslims and Christians while on a visit to Islamic Pakistan, reports AP.

In a speech to Pakistan's Islamic University the archbishop called for "mutual growth of religions" and warned against hiding behind repeated and often hollow calls for tolerance, the independent newspaper The News reported Saturday.

"I wish for better understanding and peace among Muslims and Christians," The News quoted Carey as saying.

Carey arrived in Pakistan on Thursday on a four day visit to this poor country of 140 million people, many of whom can neither read nor write.

Carey has been meeting with Pakistan's minority Christian communities in the eastern Punjab capital of Lahore, in the federal capital of Islamabad and on Saturday was in the rugged frontier capital of Peshawar.

Harassment lawsuit Judge denies lawyers' effort to help Clinton

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas, Dec 6: A federal judge Friday rejected an effort by eight lawyers to come to the aid of US President Bill Clinton in the sexual harassment lawsuit filed against him by Paula Corbin Jones, reports AP.

The lawyers claimed in a November 20 filing that Mrs Jones was illegally trying to manipulate the federal court to extract an apology from Clinton. They sought permission to file a "friend of the court" brief favourable to the president.

In rejecting their appeal, US District Judge Susan Webber Wright said the lawyers' brief "does not inform this court of matters or arguments of which it is not already aware."

Russell Hunt, a former FBI agent turned attorney who represented the group, said he was disappointed at the judge's action.

"I would be surprised if lawyers for Clinton did not incorporate some of the points made in our brief," he said.

In her 700,000 dlr lawsuit, Mrs Jones claims that Clinton asked her for oral sex in a Little Rock hotel room in May 1991 when Clinton was governor and she was a state employee.

BRIEFLY



President Vaclav Havel, right, meets Milos Zeman, chairman of the main opposition Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), left, in his residence at Lany Castle near Prague on formation of a new government Friday. Under certain conditions the Social Democrats are ready to support a new government despite not being part of it, Havel told journalists after their meeting. — AP/UNB photo

Nigerian attack on Cameroon forces: Fresh fighting has broken out between Nigerian and Cameroonian forces over the disputed Bakassi peninsula, the Cameroon weekly Aurore Plus reported Friday, AFP says from Yaounde.

"Violent fighting has taken place in Bakassi," the weekly which is close to the Cameroon government, reported, without saying when or whether there were any casualties. The report charged that Nigerian forces began hostilities on the oil rich peninsula, where both countries have stationed troops. "Soldiers of the Nigerian Army reportedly made a surprise attack" on Cameroonian Army positions Aurore Plus said.

57 drug traffickers held in US: US agents arrested a total of 57 people this week in major drug stings in California, Texas and North Carolina, successfully breaking up major drug trafficking rings, authorities said Friday, AFP reports from Washington.

Among those arrested were three top Mexican kingpins, the Justice Department in a statement said. Reno said the 57 arrests began early Thursday morning and ended in the middle of the night.

Fire claims 12 in Ecuador: A series of explosions in a fireworks market set off an intense blaze Friday in Ecuador's largest city, killing two small children and ten other people, AP reports from Guayaquil.

Witnesses said the fire started when a box of firecrackers exploded in a store in the La Bahia market, which spans three blocks in downtown Guayaquil. Witnesses reported hearing five more explosions. Firefighters pulled 12 bodies from the wreckage and more than 30 people suffered burns and asphyxia from the dense smoke from the fire that burned for two hours, police said.

Colombian official kidnapped: Suspected drug traffickers have kidnapped President Ernesto Samper's press secretary and a radio reporter, a radio network said Friday, AP reports from Bogota.

Two people describing themselves as members of "the Extraditables" phoned the RCN network Friday to say they were holding the spokesman, William Parra, and an RCN reporter, Luis Eduardo Maldonado, the network said. The two callers said Parra and Maldonado were in good condition, adding that a communique would be issued within hours, it said.

Ireland to amend constitution: Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern has confirmed that Ireland would change its constitution and drop a constitutional claim to Northern Ireland in a bid to promote the Northern Ireland peace process, Xinhua reports from London.

Ahern was reported by Friday's Financial Times as saying the newly envisaged changes to Ireland's constitution "would get rid of absolute claims of sovereignty over Northern Ireland by both countries (Ireland and Britain)". Ahern promised that the Dublin government would consider to change the country's constitution to enshrine the right of a majority of Northern Ireland to determine their future, the report said.

RNI wins 81 seats in Morocco polls: Centre right parties have won a majority in indirect elections to the 270-seat Chamber of Councillors, or Senate, according to partial results given yesterday, AFP reports from Rabat.

A total of 224 results for representatives of municipalities and professional groups, the centrist parties led by the RNI (Rassemblement National des Independents) of former prime minister Ahmed Osman had garnered 81 seats ahead of the rightwing Wifaq group — the outgoing majority — which won 69. Parties from the leftwing Koutla coalition had won only 41 seats but could expect to see their share boosted slightly when results were in for the 27 seats reserved for representatives of salaried workers.

Leghari terms recent crisis as 'perceptions of nat'l interest'

ISLAMABAD, Dec 6: Former President Farooq Leghari said here Friday the recent constitutional crisis that led to his resignation reflected "a conflict" between his "perceptions of national interest" and those of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reports Xinhua.

Leghari, who resigned Tuesday after refusing to sign a reference against Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah as required by the Sharif government, said this in response to a letter from Sharif Thursday in which he had offered to forget the past bitterness.

"The divergence in our perception of the issue at the centre of the recent crisis and the consequent bitterness that plagued our relationship has no longer any relevance," Sharif said in his letter to Leghari.

Leghari in his response wrote: "You are right in saying that there was a divergence in our perceptions of the issue at the centre of the recent crisis."

He said he never harboured any bitterness against anyone during these trying times.

"Indeed, I tried my best to mediate the recent conflict in the supreme interest of the law and institution," Leghari said, adding "my consideration of the national interest is clearly different from yours."

The former president pointed out that the recent events that led to his resignation "reflected a conflict be-

New Beanie Baby doll named after Diana

CHICAGO, Dec 6: What do you get when you bring together one of the United States' hottest toys with one of the world's most popular princesses?

Mayhem, predict some shop owners. Each store in the United States that carries Ty Inc's Beanie Baby toys is expected to get just 12 of the royal purple bears named for the late Diana, Princess of Wales. The stuffed bears feature a white embroidered rose and matching purple satin ribbon, reports AP.

Ty also said it will donate profits from the Diana Beanie Baby to the memorial fund established by her family for her charities.

Beanie Babies, which are small fabric beanbag dolls, made their US debut in 1994. Sales have soared this year.

Ty, whose Beanie Babies are made in China, has limited distribution of the toys so severely that stores have run out nationwide. There are about 124 characters on the market.

Every six months or so, a few new Beanie Babies are "born." But for every new one, an old one is retired. The company has stopped production of 46 species — Beanie fans call them "extinct" — and those can be valuable to collectors.

Blasts kill 5 in 2 Indian trains Kuki rebels ambush police bus in Manipur: 8 killed

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 6: At least six Indian policemen and two civilians were killed Friday and 18 others seriously injured in an ambush staged by tribal rebels in the far-eastern state of Manipur, police said.

Manipur's additional chief of police L Jogeshwar told AFP that separatist guerrillas from the Kuki tribe, who comprise about 20 per cent of Manipur's 700,000-odd population, attacked a police bus near a provincial town.

"They fired on a bus carrying 40 policemen near Shanting," he said, referring to a town some 120 kilometers (75 miles) south of the state capital Imphal.

"The militants were hiding on a hilltop," he said. "As soon as they attacked, the driver lost control of the bus and it skidded off the road into a gorge."

Jogeshwar said the outlawed Kuki National Front group had staged the ambush. He added that manhunt had been launched in the area, a frontier region bordering Myanmar.

Ethnic and separatist violence in Manipur has claimed some 2,000 lives over the past 50 years. The Kuki rebels have

Iraq trying to shift attention from weapons to its plight of people

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 6: With the help of the Russians and French, Iraq is working to shift attention away from its weapons programme to the plight of its people, who are suffering under seven years of economic sanctions, reports AP.

That strategy could hamper a determined US effort to contain Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and deny him nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

The underpinning of the US campaign has been the sanctions, imposed on Iraq in 1990 after Saddam invaded Kuwait. The United Nations has left the sanctions in place to force him to relinquish his weapons of mass destruction.

Seven years later, Saddam remains in power, and by some assessments is stronger than ever.

In September 1996, then-CIA Director John Deutch told the Senate Intelligence Committee that instead of weakening Saddam, the sanctions had caused the infant death rate in Iraq to increase sevenfold since 1991.

Regardless of moral questions, Saddam's strategy of using the misery of his own people as a political weapon has already produced results.

More and more countries are finding it politically untenable to support a policy whose primary achievement appears to have been spreading hunger and

Role of NATO not confined to defending member states

NAPLES, Italy, Dec 6: The role of NATO is not confined to defending member states, Secretary General Javier Solana said here Friday during a visit to the alliances southern Europe headquarters in Naples, reports AP.

However he declined to comment on a report published Thursday in the Spanish daily El Mundo which said the future NATO sub-regional headquarters in Spain would have to be capable of deploying up to 50,000 soldiers in north Africa if the need for a peacekeeping operation arose there.

Solana said it was not his habit to comment on NATO business.

US isolated in its policy of trying to humiliate Iran

TEHRAN, Dec 6: American efforts to isolate Iran are crumbling, eaten away by the country's oil wealth and the Muslim faith it shares with Arab neighbours, reports AP.

Some of Washington's closest European allies are ignoring its pleas not to do business with Iran.

And Arab states that once bought the US portrayal of Tehran as a bogeyman are sitting down with the Islamic Republic mullahs this week.

The defections are leaving Washington isolated in its attempt to isolate Tehran, which the Americans accuse of exporting terrorism and trying to acquire nuclear weapons. Iran denies the charges.

A meeting of leaders from Muslim nations starting Tuesday in Tehran will be "the largest gathering of heads of state in Iran's history, both before and after the revolution," Iran's President Mohammad Khatami said recently. "It shows the power and stability of Iran."

The summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, grouping the world's Muslim nations, is held every three years. To boost the meeting, Iran's foreign minister personally delivered invitations to kings and presidents. Iran expects officials from more than 50 countries, including 34 heads of government.

The most important guest will be Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah, the highest-ranking Saudi official to visit Iran since the 1979 revolution ousted the Western-oriented shah.

Saudi Arabia is a staunch US ally in the region and has been among Iran's fiercest critics. But it has shown signs of warming up, feeding Iran's hopes for an Islamic axis between the two giants of the Muslim world.

Egypt, another strong American ally, sent its foreign minister, Amr Moussa, Egypt could help Iran mend ties with other Arab countries.

Iran is gloating over the meeting's expected success, especially since it follows last month's US-backed Mideast economic summit in Qatar, which fizzled when most Arab countries stayed away to protest Israel's presence.

The Islamic conference caps an upbeat year for Iran, whose fortunes turned in May with the election of Khatami as president. His soft-spoken manner has helped reduce the rogue-state image of Iran that is at the heart of the US campaign to isolate the Tehran regime.

After Turkey signed a 20 billion dollar natural gas deal with Iran last year, Washington sought to halt further breakthroughs for Tehran by enacting penalties for any US or foreign company that invests more than 20 million dollars in the Islamic Republic.

But Iran broke out of the US sanctions a month after Khatami took office in August. The French oil giant Total,

Confere on AIDS, STDS to begin in Africa today

ABIDJAN, Dec 6: More than 3,000 researchers, doctors, nurses and people living with HIV are expected to take up arms at the 10th international conference on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDS) in Africa, which opens here tomorrow, reports AP.

AIDS is spreading in Africa faster than anywhere else in the world. The conference will open in the presence of Presidents Henri Konan Bedie of Ivory Coast and Jacques Chirac of France.

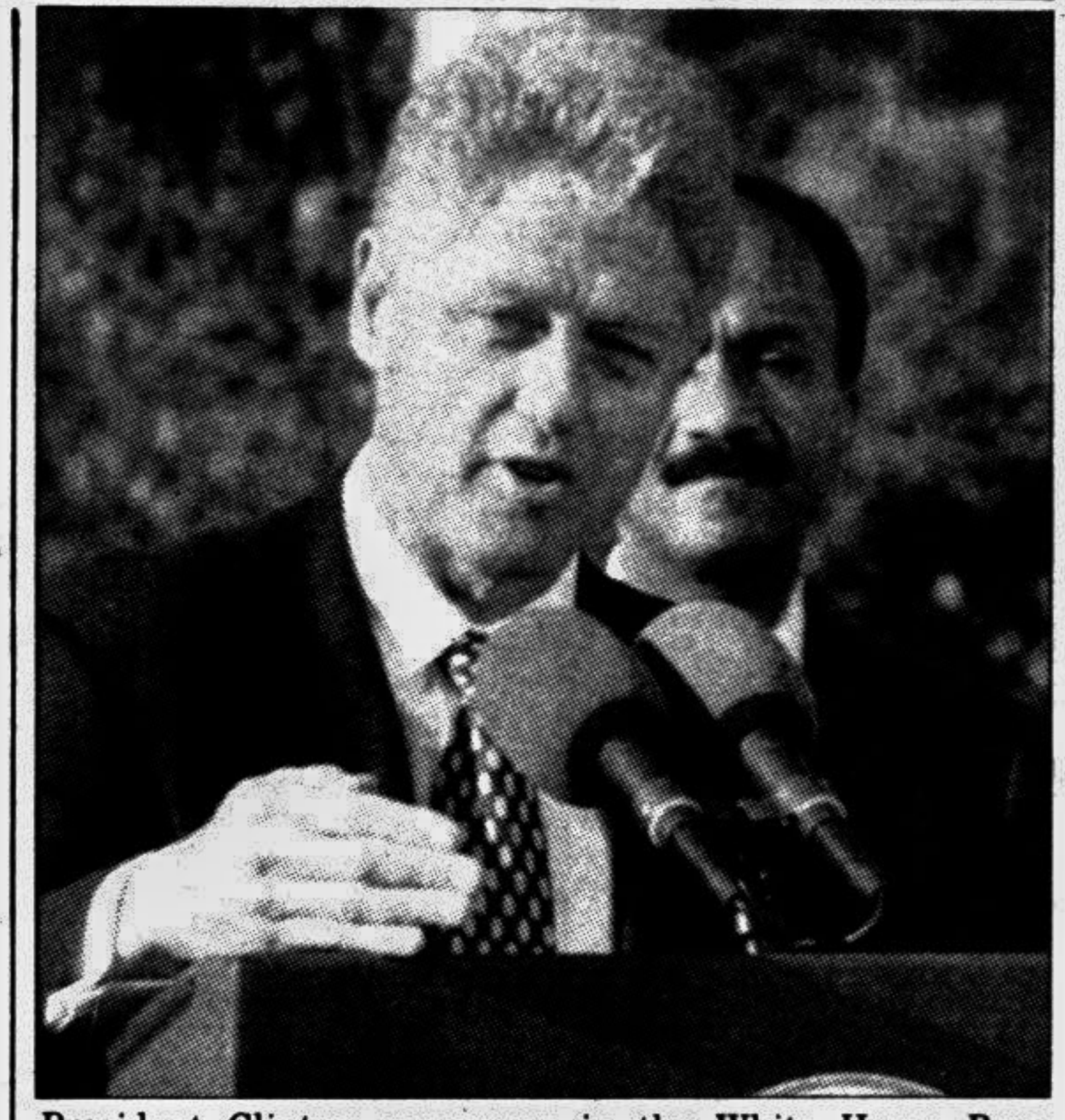
Chirac has said he wants to "help make the international community more active in the tragedy this disease represents for the people of Africa."

During his lightning visit to Ivory Coast, he is expected to emphasise the need to fight what is a two-speed virus.

More than 90 per cent of people infected with HIV live in developing countries and, thanks to anti-viral drugs, the spread of AIDS is slowing in industrialised countries.

Of the 30 million HIV positive people in the world, 20.8 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa and 7.4 per cent of Africans aged between 15 and 49 carry the virus, according to the latest figures published by UNAIDS, the United Nations coordinating body in the fight against AIDS.

Until December 11, hundreds of debates, conferences and seminars will look at a wide range of themes, such as "cultural obstacle in the fight against AIDS and STDS," "African solidarity and AIDS," "Population movements and HIV/AIDS."



President Clinton announces in the White House Rose Garden Friday his appointees to the commission that will make suggestions on keeping Medicare solvent as baby-boomers retire. "I look forward to their proposals to keep Medicare at the core of the American dream in the new century," Clinton said. At right is Franklin Raines, director of the OMB. — AP/UNB photo