

International

Israel won't pull out of WB under US pressure : Netanyahu

EILAT, Israel, Dec 10: Facing US pressure for a speedy and substantial troop pullback in the West Bank, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tuesday that Israel would not be rushed into a decision, reports AP.

"When we are dealing with such a fateful process — and in the West Bank we are talking about the heart of the country — we will not act quickly and hastily," Netanyahu said. "No outside pressure will help. Before we have an agreement with the Americans, we need to reach agreement in Israel."

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has said she expects Netanyahu to provide a more "credible" withdrawal plan at his December 17 meeting than he has offered to date.

Last week, Albright told Netanyahu she wanted Israel to hand over at least 12 per cent of the West Bank to Palestinian control in the next stage, the Israeli dailies Haaretz and

Maariv reported Tuesday. But Netanyahu faces strong opposition to such a significant pullback from right-wing coalition allies, and many Israeli commentators believe he is stalling to avoid a crisis at home.

"There is talk of American pressure," Netanyahu said during a visit to this Red Sea resort. "The pressure that I feel is the responsibility of dealing with the future of our country. ... Nothing will force our hand."

Netanyahu would not say how much land he was ready to hand over. He reportedly has floated plans to add 6 per cent to 8 per cent of the West Bank to the 27 per cent of the territory where the Palestinians now have full or partial autonomy.

In a meeting with his Cabinet ministers Monday, Netanyahu was evasive when asked whether Albright had set a minimum.

"Yesterday, I clearly asked Bibi whether (Albright) dictated

a certain percentage, whether he had to come to the next meeting with certain percentages," Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani told Israel radio, referring to Netanyahu by his widely used nickname. "I did not understand his answer."

As part of a US-brokered agreement, Israel has agreed to pull back troops in the West Bank in three stages by mid-1998. The Palestinians rejected the first pullback offer of 2 per cent in March as insufficient.

Israel recently declared readiness to withdraw troops from an as yet unspecified area in a second stage, on condition that the Palestinians do more to fight terrorist groups.

Israel wants to skip the third stage and go straight into talks on a permanent peace agreement, which would address final borders, the status of Jerusalem and the future of Jewish settlements.

But the United States apparently is siding with the

Palestinians in their demand that Israel must carry out the third withdrawal, Maariv said. Israeli media reports said Foreign Minister David Levy and Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, will meet Wednesday in Jerusalem to discuss the troop pullback and other issues.

Earlier Tuesday, Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh said Israel would only decide on the troop redeployment after it has sketched a map for final borders with the Palestinians.

A Cabinet debate on final borders is scheduled for Sunday, but the debate is likely to require more than one session.

Levy apparently is the only Cabinet member pressing for a speedy decision. "If someone thinks that the prime minister can go into the meeting (with Albright) without having any idea of what kind of redeployment we are talking about, he should think carefully," Maariv quoted him as saying.

Army Gen in charge of security in Colombo

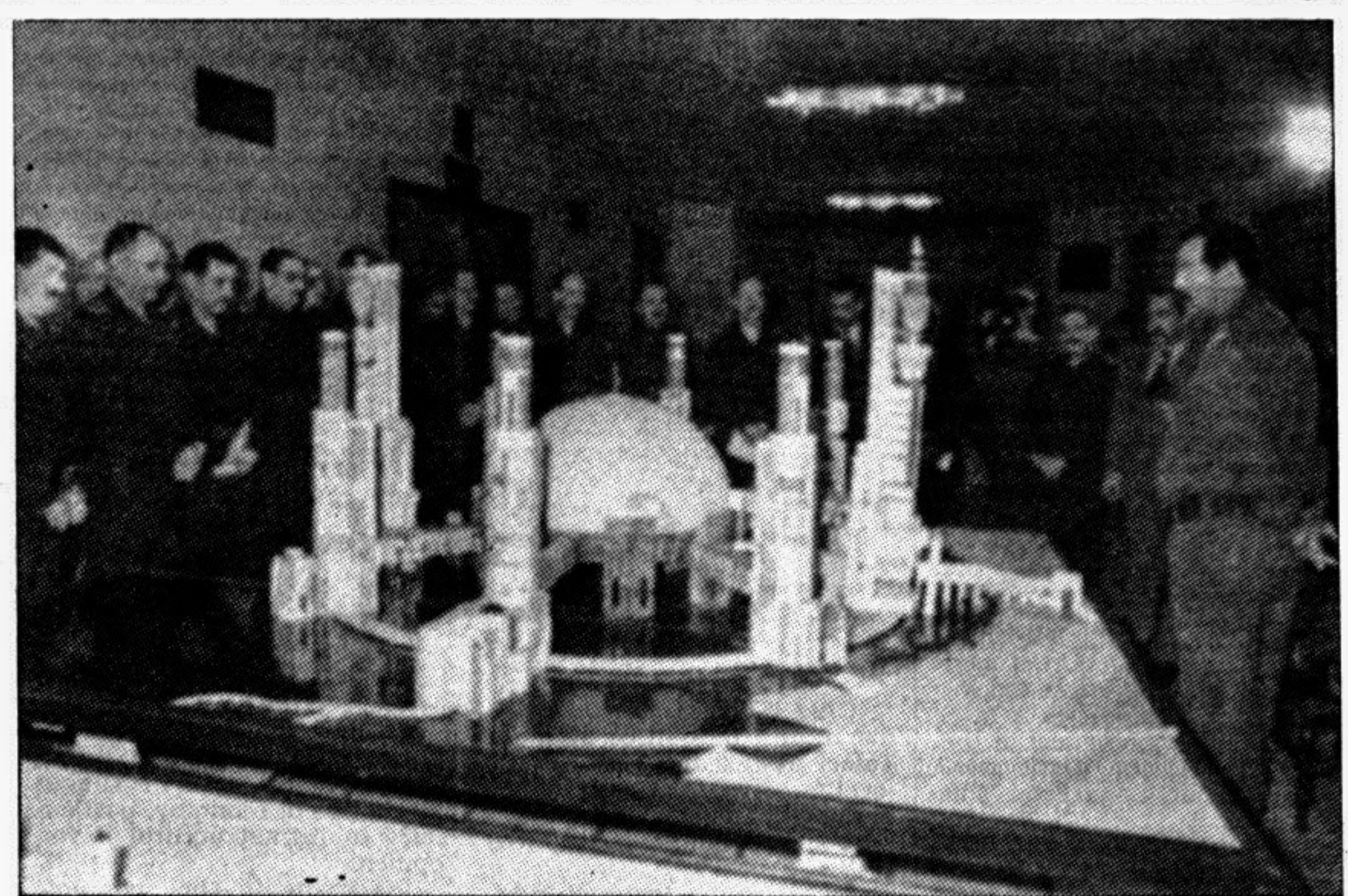
COLOMBO, Dec 10: An army general has been placed in charge of security in Sri Lanka's capital following recent attacks by rebels, news reports said Wednesday, says AP.

The island newspaper said Maj General Jalla Mammuni, the army's fourth senior most officer, will be in charge of Colombo. Mammuni's appointment may have been intended to strengthen coordination — the army, navy, air force and police all play a role in the capital's defence.

The police will remain in charge of controlling ordinary crime.

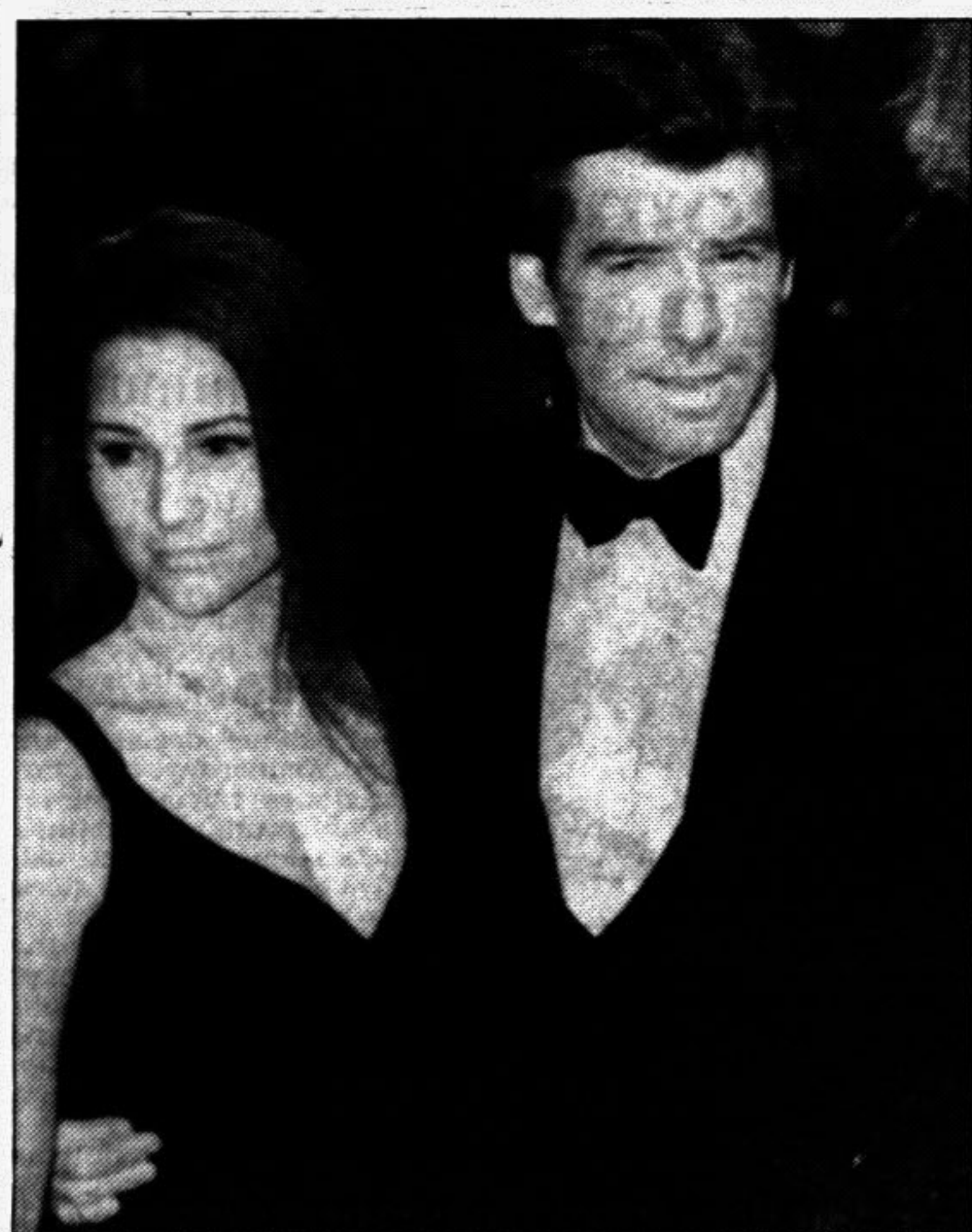
The Tamil Tiger rebels have attacked Colombo twice in the past two months. In October they bombed the city centre and a month later penetrated a high-security power station, setting it partly on fire.

The rebels accusing the majority Sinhalese of discriminating against ethnic Tamils, have been fighting since anti-Tamil riots swept Colombo in 1983.



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, right, accompanied by members of his cabinet, on Monday night, examine a model of the mosque which is to be built in Baghdad on the site of a former airport that was heavily bombed during the 1990-91 Gulf War. The mosque, to be named 'Saddam Grand Mosque', will be the largest in the world with a capacity for 30,000 worshippers. — AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY



Actor Pierce Brosnan arrives with his girlfriend Keely Shaye Smith, for the World Gala Premiere of the new James Bond movie "Tomorrow Never Dies" at the Odeon Cinema in London's Leicester Square, Tuesday. The new \$60 million-pound (US\$ 99,000,000) movie in which Bond, portrayed by Brosnan, tackles a media mogul bent on world domination, is claimed to be the most action-packed of the series. — AP/UNB photo

Kenya signs Ottawa Treaty: Kenya has become the 122nd state to sign the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines, a UN spokesman said Tuesday. AFP reports from United Nations.

UN spokesman Juan Carlos Brandt announced at a news briefing that Kenya was the first country to sign the treaty at the United Nations. The comprehensive global treaty banning the use, production and sale of anti-personnel landmines was signed by 121 countries in Ottawa on Thursday.

Cuban revolutionary leader dead: Cuba's noted revolutionary leader Carlos Rafael Rodriguez died on Monday night at age of 84, the government reported. Xinhua says from Havana.

Rodriguez took part in the Revolutionary Movement in October 1930 and was an active fighter against the dictatorship of Machado. He was one of the most brilliant leaders of the People's Socialist Party and co-founder of the Cuban Communist Party.

Blast leaves 2 dead in Algeria: A bomb exploded outside a school in northern Algeria, Tuesday, as students were pouring out of it, killing two and wounding several, witnesses said, AFP reports from Blida.

The blast occurred in Blida, 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of Algiers. The explosion blew a hole in a wall, damaged the facade of the school and triggered panic in the streets.

6 killed in Somalia fighting: At least six people were killed on Tuesday in fighting in the north Mogadishu enclave ruled by self-styled President Ali Mahdi Mohamed, witnesses said, Reuters says from Mogadishu.

Scores of others were wounded in the unexplained battle between rival groups within Mahdi's clan network. Mahdi is abroad on political business, aides said. Analysts said the fighting arose out of petty differences and Mahdi's absence meant there was a lack of tight disciplinary control over his forces.

Cooperation of India sought in intermediate N-reduction

A key US security adviser has urged India to endorse the concept of sharply slashing the arsenal of the nuclear haves to "small, immobilised forces" as an "intermediate" step on the road to total disarmament.

Former Ambassador Jonathan Dean, chief adviser on international security issues to the Union of Concerned Scientists, acknowledged that India's insistence for a disarmament timetable as a condition for signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is "useful and desirable". But he noted that this will not be the "actual route" to elimination of nuclear weapons from the world.

Dean, speaking at a conference titled "Towards the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons: Steps to Break the Impasse—A Role for India," however noted that "the actual route to elimination of nuclear weapons will not be through undertaking time-bound commitments or even by beginning negotiation on a convention to eliminate nuclear weapons."

He said, "Short of some massive nuclear catastrophe that promotes more rapid action,

the weapon states will strongly resist such undertakings."

Thus, he declared, "The effective route to elimination, the only practical route to elimination of nuclear weapons, is by agreeing to reduce nuclear forces to small, immobilised arsenals."

Dean said the "movement by the five weapon states towards nuclear disarmament can be sharply accelerated if the threshold states, especially India which has been most vocal in calling for action by the weapon states, would endorse the concept of reducing nuclear arsenals to small immobilised forces as an intermediate position on the road to abolition of nuclear weapons and actively urge the five weapon states to adopt this course."

He acknowledged that "pressure by India and other countries for time-bound commitments to eliminate all nuclear weapons is a useful and desirable way of maintaining a degree of general pressure on the weapon states to take action of some kind towards nuclear disarmament."

Dean said, "It is only after the weapon states have agreed

Aziz Haniffa writes from Washington

to a fissile cut-off, have reduced their nuclear forces to one or two hundred warheads each, dismantling all reduced warheads and transferring their fissile material to internationally monitored storage to prevent its reuse for weapons... that the weapon states will begin seriously to consider eliminating their weapons."

Dean predicted that the five weapon states will not be willing to reduce their own nuclear forces to immobilised residual arsenals unless all three threshold states — India, Pakistan, and Israel — "are prepared to take some concrete actions by their own to place their nuclear weapons potential under international control."

"To do this," he said, "India would have to be prepared to place its nuclear materials, without necessarily specifying their nature of amount, and also its potential delivery systems under international monitoring on its own territory with the same right as the weapon states to withdraw these materials in a situation of

national emergency."

He conceded that there may be objections that such a programme could take a long time, perhaps several decades, to reach fulfillment. But he noted that this is "probably true as matters now stand — if India and the other threshold states remain on the sidelines."

He said in indicating their support for this concept, neither India nor Israel nor Pakistan would be required to declare that they possess nuclear weapons material. "The threshold states would merely urge the five weapon states to proceed towards small immobilised arsenals, stating their own willingness to discuss these proposals further with the five weapon states."

Dean said India could make this announcement "even more effective in accelerating movement towards residual arsenals by indicating its own willingness to take some practical step to reach it, like joining negotiations on a fissile cut-off."

But, according to Dean, the essential Indian action here, while maintaining calls for the

US renews call for dialogue with Iran

WASHINGTON, Dec 10: The United States on Tuesday renewed its call for an official dialogue with Iran after Iranian President Mohammad Khatami made a similar appeal in a speech in Tehran, reports AFP.

"We want to have a dialogue with Iran," State Department spokesman James Foley said.

"Our only stipulation has been that such a dialogue take place with an authorised representative of the government."

Such an exchange would address US concerns that Iran sponsors terrorism abroad, violently opposes the Middle East peace process and seeks to develop weapons of mass destruction, Foley said.

But it would also address Iran's complaints, the State Department acknowledged. "The Iranians have items and things that they want to discuss with US and that is what an authorised dialogue would be all about," Foley said.

In the past, the State Department has offered to hold direct contacts with Iranian government officials but it has stressed that such talks would focus primarily on Washington's concerns, refusing to knowledge Tehran's

claims. AP adds: The administration of President Bill Clinton welcomed conciliatory statements toward the West by Iran's president on Tuesday and said it was hopeful these sentiments would translate into a less hostile foreign policy.

While repeating US opposition to Iran's policies in three key areas, State Department spokesman James Foley also said the United States does not seek to change the nature of the Iranian regime and reaffirmed American willingness to enter into a dialogue.

Kenyan president to face challenger in polls for 1st time

NAIROBI, Dec 10: When Kenyans vote on December 29, President Daniel Arap Moi will face a challenger for his parliamentary seat for the first time since 1989, reports Reuters.

The Presidential Press Service (PPS) said Amos Kiprotich Kandie of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) presented his nomination papers in Baringo central constituency on Tuesday in an "incident-free atmosphere."

Labour govt to shake up nat'l health service

LONDON, Dec 10: The government on Monday announced a shakeup of its national health service, undoing some of the changes made during the conservatives' 18 years in office and making use of the information superhighway, reports AP.

In a white paper announced in Parliament, the government outlined a 10-year modernization programme that will abolish the "internal market," introduced by the Conservatives in 1990, in which hospitals operated as businesses, competing with each other for patients and state funds.

Britain has universal, state-funded health care, providing free treatment to all. It is generally high-quality care, particularly in emergency cases. But because of the high costs and high demand, non-emergency patients often wait months, even years, for operations.

In some areas, such as heart operations and cancer treatment, there are delays that can cost lives or make more extensive treatment necessary. The five-year survival rate for women with breast cancer is as low as 20 per cent, compared with 40 per cent in the United States.

Ministers say the changes will cut 1 billion pounds (dls 1.65 billion) in red tape over the next five years, with the savings to be used to provide faster and more dependable services for patients.

The British Medical

Association said the announcement closed an unhappy chapter in the history of the National Health Service.

"I warmly welcome the new pragmatic approach which replaces the disastrous internal market with a system driven by patients' clinical needs," said Dr. Sandy Macara, chairman of the BMA council.

Christine Hancock, general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, said patients would benefit from a new partnership approach and the establishment of a "truly national, affordable service."

Demirel to visit Pakistan Dec 18

ISLAMABAD, Dec 10: Turkish President Suleyman Demirel will pay a two-day official visit to Pakistan from December 18-19, the foreign office said today, reports AFP.

He will be guest of honour at a ground-breaking ceremony for the 160 kilometre-long (100 mile) Islamabad-Peshawar motorway being constructed by a Turkish firm, officials said.

The ceremony will be held in the northwestern city of Peshawar on December 19.

Officials said he will also hold wide-ranging talks on bilateral and regional matters with acting President Wasim Sajjad, and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Demirel last visited Pakistan in March.

US envoy blasts Congress' refusal to pay UN debt

WASHINGTON, Dec 10: The US Congress refusal to pay off America's debt to the United Nations is straining relations with allies and making it more difficult to form a united front against Iraq, the US ambassador to the United Nations said Tuesday, reports AP.

"Our interests have been hurt... It's hard for America to be trusted at the UN right now. I'll be honest with you," Bill Richardson said at a National Press Club luncheon. "The United States is not a very popular player at the UN right now."

Richardson was bemoaning the defeat in Congress of a measure that would have paid off most of the 1.02 billion dollars in arrears the US government owes to the United Nations. The action came in the opening days of the Iraqi crisis last month, as Saddam was refusing further cooperation with international weapons inspectors.

Richardson said the United States would continue to insist on full Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions, including providing access to suspected weapons sites.

"We want to resolve it diplomatically through the United Nations with our allies," Richardson said. "If there is continued stalemate, if there

are continued threats to the international community — we've said it before — the use of force is not precluded."

Serial bombing Delhi police offer big reward for information

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: New Delhi police have offered a big reward for information on a group which has killed nine people and injured 239 others in 20 bombings this year, a newspaper here reported today, reports AP.

The 700,000 rupee (18,000-dollar) award was decided after police failed to make any "substantial breakthrough" over the serial bombings which began on January 4, the Pioneer said.

Some police officers have blamed Pakistani intelligence operatives for the bomb attacks, but no arrests or hard evidence have followed.

The last of the attacks occurred on November 30 when two bombs went off in quick succession in a crowded market place near the 17th century Red Fort, killing three people and injuring 62.

Off the Record

Kiss and Make-up Baby

NEW YORK: It's baby No. 4 for Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall, reports AP.

Hall gave birth early Tuesday in London to an 8-pound, 3-ounce (3.7-kilogram) boy, said Jagger spokeswoman Fran Curtis in New York.

Hall and the baby, Gabriel Luke Beauregard Jagger, were doing fine, she said.

Jagger "was clearly very excited," Curtis said. "They both are."

Jagger, 54, and Hall, 41, have lived together since the late 1970s and married in 1991. The couple have three other children.

Jagger also has two other older daughters. Newspapers reported last year that Hall had asked the longtime Rolling Stones singer for a divorce, furious at his reported liaisons with "Pulp Fiction" star Uma Thurman and Czech model Jana Rajch.

After going to see the same divorce lawyer as princess Diana, Hall agreed to patch up the relationship.

When she revealed in June that she was pregnant, British tabloids called the impending arrival a "Kiss and Make-up Baby."

Clinton's only pal in Washington

WASHINGTON: President Bill Clinton is taking to heart that old Washington adage, sometimes attributed to President Harry Truman: "If you want a friend in Washington, buy a dog," reports AP.

Clinton made his decision to move a dog into the White House after a half-hour romp Friday on the South Lawn with an as yet unnamed three-month-old chocolate Labrador retriever, the president of a friend.

"I think he had a close encounter with the puppy and enjoyed the puppy," said White House press secretary Mike McCurry, "and bonding occurred."

The puppy will undergo a course of training before moving into the White House, he said.

But why supplement Socks, the presidential cat, with a brand new presidential dog? Was it to fill the vacancy caused by daughter Chelsea Clinton's move to Stanford University?

McCurry had another explanation. "It's the president's desire to have one loyal friend in Washington," he said.

Jackson's new palace

WARSAW: The King of Pop may have found his palace, says AP.

Michael Jackson has applied for a lease on a two-story baroque residence outside Warsaw and hopes to renovate it in time to hold his 40th birthday party there in August, according to one of his Polish friends.

Marek Kwiatkowski, art historian and longtime director of Warsaw's oldest park, says Jackson's prospective palace is in Otoczek, 25 kilometres outside the capital.

Jacques Toulre, Jackson's Polish representative, confirmed his client's lease application on the property, according to the Polish news agency PAP.

The palace, on a tree-covered island in the middle of a pond, is owned by the president's office and used for housing foreign visitors. Calls to the office of President Aleksander Kwasniewski requesting comment were not immediately answered.

The art historian, who met Jackson earlier this year, has become a kind of unofficial spokesman on Jackson's plans to open an amusement park near Warsaw. The pop star signed a letter of intent for the project in May.

Kwiatkowski said his friend also plans to open a "Michael Jackson Centre" and a tourist hotel at the Otoczek palace, and that his lawyers will visit Warsaw next week to discuss the amusement park plans.

Poet's war medals sold at auction

TORONTO: A Toronto businessman who read "In Flanders Fields" for the first time during an auction Saturday paid dls 400,000 (dls 280,000 US) to buy the war medals of the Canadian soldier who wrote the famed World War I poem, reports AP.

Arthur Lee, a clothing manufacturer, said he wanted to ensure that no foreign buyer would take the medals out of Canada. He promised to donate them to the Ontario museum at the birthplace of the poet, John McCrae.

Lee said he would give the medals to the McCrae House Museum in Guelph, Ontario. McCrae was born there in 1872, served as a military doctor in World War I and died of pneumonia in January 1918.

Just getting the North and South together in the same room and later Tuesday bringing them together at a Chinese-sponsored cocktail party — was considered a major breakthrough.

In Washington, US Defense Secretary William Cohen and his South Korean counterpart said the talks "provide the most realistic means to reduce ten-

Korea peace talks Begin 1st session shows little sign of progress

GENEVA, Dec 10: A first session of talks on bringing final peace to the Korean peninsula yielded little sign of progress, but delegates were hopeful that more meetings between North and South Korea could ease mistrust between the rivals, reports AP.

"Ongoing" was the terse comment from North Korean delegation leader Kim Gye Gwan, as he emerged from Tuesday's first meeting.

Four-party negotiations were to resume Wednesday, though peace talks could drag on for years.

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In Washington, US Defense Secretary William Cohen and his South Korean counterpart said the talks "provide the most realistic means to reduce ten-

sions and achieve lasting peace on the Korean peninsula."

Only an armistice, not a peace treaty, was signed to end the Korean War in 1953.

2000 Rwandans expelled from Congo

GENEVA, Dec 10: Authorities in Congo have expelled some 2,000 Rwandans from the east of the country, days after they kicked out aid agencies working in the area, the UN refugee agency said Tuesday, reports AP.

A group of 1,413 Rwandans, mostly women and children, told aid officials they had been forced by the Congolese military to walk towards the eastern town of Goma for several days, said Pam O'Toole, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

In Goma, they were put on trucks and driven back into Rwanda on the night of Dec 5.