

Clinton warns of further action

Iraq calls on UNSC to respect its sovereignty

BAGHDAD, Dec 17: Iraq said Tuesday it was ready to continue cooperating with UN disarmament inspectors but called on the UN Security Council to respect its sovereignty and be more objective, reports AFP.

After a meeting of the Revolutionary Command Council and ruling Baath party leadership chaired by President Saddam Hussein, Iraq said it was ready to "continue its cooperation with the UN Special Commission on Disarmament" (UNSCOM) "on the basis of total respect for Iraq's sovereignty."

"Iraq calls for the Security Council to evaluate in an objective and balanced manner results of the negotiations in Baghdad between Iraqi officials, and an UNSCOM delegation," said the statement by the two highest Iraqi authorities.

The statement, carried by the official INA news agency, said, "The UN Security Council is invited to affirm its respect for Iraq's sovereignty, pride and security, in conformance with UN resolutions."

They also called for the Security Council "to work sincerely to honour its commitments with regard to Iraq and

to implement paragraph 22 of resolution 687."

The paragraph concerns the lifting of the UN oil embargo

Kuwait ready to spend its wealth to topple Saddam regime

CAIRO, Dec 17: Kuwait is ready to spend its wealth to get rid of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's regime, a senior Kuwaiti official was quoted Tuesday as saying, reports AP.

"Kuwait's coffers are fully opened in order to topple the Iraqi regime," al-Hayat, a respected Arab newspaper, quoted Kuwaiti Information Minister Sheikh Saud Nasser al-Sabah as telling a select group of reporters Monday in Kuwait.

The comments could not be immediately confirmed with al-Sabah's office.

Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1990 and occupied the tiny emirate for seven months before a US-led alliance evicted Iraqi troops in Feb 1991.

against Iraq when UNSCOM certifies that the country has eliminated its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometres (93 miles).

The Security Council imposed the embargo seven years ago when Iraq invaded its neighbour, Kuwait.

The Iraqi statement came shortly after UNSCOM Chief Richard Butler left Iraq after a four-day mission. Butler said from UNSCOM's rear base in Bahrain that Baghdad categorically refused to open Saddam's presidential palaces to UNSCOM inspectors.

Another report says, President Bill Clinton warned Tuesday of further punitive actions against Iraq if Baghdad fails to give UN inspectors full access to its suspected weapons sites.

"If there is further obstruction of the United Nations mission we have to consider other options," Clinton said in a formal press conference.

Clinton would not specify what actions the United States might take but said: "I wouldn't rule out anything, I never have and I won't."

600 hospitalised in Japan while watching popular TV programme

TOKYO, Dec 17: Nearly 600 people mostly children, had been rushed to hospital across Japan by Wednesday morning after feeling ill while watching a popular animated cyberspace drama on television, news reports said, reports AFP.

Japan Broadcasting Corp (NHK), reported that 594 people, mostly children, were taken to hospital after the Tuesday evening programme and some were still there.

It said a five-year-old girl in Osaka, who was reported to have suffered serious breathing problems, was recovering.

Victims included a 30-year-old housewife who became ill late Tuesday after watching a video recording of the programme, the report said.

Some children were showing symptoms of convulsions and others were complaining of eye irritations. NHK and Jiji Press said.

BJP ties up with Tamil group in election

MADRAS, Dec 17: The Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) allied Wednesday with a major Tamil party in a southern state, dashing the hopes of the powerful Congress Party that was hoping to jointly contest the forthcoming general elections, report AP.

The alliance would force the Congress to contest alone from Tamil Nadu state, a prospect it was reluctant to face. The party has fared badly in past elections it contested without a partner.

Nationwide elections are likely to be held in February for 543 deputies in federal parliament. The Bharatiya Janata is widely favoured to win the balloting.

The Bharatiya Janata will jointly contest the 40 seats from the state jointly with the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party, BJP vice-president Jana Krishnamurthy told reporters.

Details of seat-sharing would be decided later, Krishnamurthy said at the end of an hour-long discussion with AIADMK leaders.

A warm embrace at ANC confce

CAPE TOWN, Dec 17: For one brief moment, President Nelson Mandela put aside years of bitterness and acrimony Tuesday and embraced his ex-wife Winnie Madikizela-Mandela before an audience of thousands, reports AP.

The hug and kisses drew cheers of approval from delegates to the 50th national conference of the African National Congress.

Mandela, 79, had just finished a more than four-hour speech in which he made several clear references to his ex-wife as they type of leader the party should avoid.

As people sang Mandela's name in praise and clapped rhythmically, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela joined a line of ANC officials waiting to congratulate the party's outgoing president on his speech.

When her time came, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela broadly and flung her arms wildly around him. The two held each other for almost 10 seconds, perhaps forgetting the anguish of their divorce last year and Winnie Madikizela's isolation by the mainstream ANC leadership, including Mandela.

UNSC urges Afghan to seek political settlement

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 17: Unable to find any solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, the UN Security Council called again Tuesday on the Afghans to seek a political settlement to their years-long crisis, reports AP.

The council also deplored the continuing discrimination against women and girls by the Taliban religious movement, which controls most of the country, expressed concern over looting of UN food supplies and noted with "deep concern" reports of mass killings of prisoners of war and civilians.

Off the Record

Bad news for converted Muslims

COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan Supreme Court has upheld a bigamy conviction against a man whose first wife says he converted to Islam only because he wanted to marry again, reports AP.

The unanimous judgement by five judges Tuesday does not affect the rights of Muslims by birth to have up to three wives in Sri Lanka.

Muslims make up seven per cent of Sri Lanka's 18 million population, most of whom are Buddhist. Hindus and Christians are the other minorities.

Many men convert to Islam and marry again if their wives refuse to grant them a divorce. Women in this country usually resist divorce because they are often dependent financially on their husbands. Divorce proceedings can drag on for years.

The Supreme Court upheld a lower court order convicting Christopher Abeyundera, originally a Christian, of bigamy and sentenced him to 18 months hard labour. Abeyundera's wife had complained that he became a Muslim so he could marry again without divorcing her.

Homosexual marriages legal?

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's court of appeal today ruled that marriage between homosexual couples is illegal, reports AP.

The full bench of five judges decided unanimously that homosexual marriages were barred under the 1955 marriage act and that anti-discrimination provisions in the bill of rights could not alter that outcome.

Three couples in long-term lesbian relationship launched the appeal against a High Court decision last year which rejected their attempt to be legally registered as married.

Somali faction leaders clear obstacle in peace talks

MOGADISHU, Dec 17: Somali faction leaders cleared the last obstacle Tuesday to a complicated power-sharing deal that, if implemented, could bring the nation back together, sources close to the talks said, reports AP.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the sources said key faction leaders Hussein Aidid and Ali Mahdi Mohamed had finally agreed on a figure for the number of delegates their factions would send to national reconciliation conference to select an interim council that will then choose a president and prime minister.

The faction leaders have been meeting in Cairo, Egypt, but reporters are banned from the talks.

The 465-member conference, the biggest gathering of warring Somali factions in years, is supposed to elect a 13-member interim presidential council to choose the nation's future leaders.

Accession to NATO

Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland sign protocols

BRUSSELS, Dec 17: The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland on Tuesday signed protocols for their accession to NATO, clearing the way for them to join the alliance in 1999, reports AP.

Providing the protocols are ratified by the parliaments of the three countries and the existing 16 NATO countries. The former Warsaw Pact states will become full members at the alliance's 50th anniversary summit in Washington in April 1999.

In Washington, President Bill Clinton hailed the signings as a milestone in "a grand effort to defend our shared values and advance our common destiny."

"The entry of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into the alliance will make America safer, NATO stronger, and Europe more stable and united," Clinton said at a White House news conference.

"Now we should be among the first to vote yes for NATO's historic engagement," he said, adding that he would seek the advice and consent of the US Senate when congress returns in January.

Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek said joining NATO would mean for Poland an end to centuries of being a "pawn on the chess board of great power politics."

His Czech counterpart Jaroslav Sedivy declared: "The division of Europe is overcome." The signing of the protocols was accompanied by a reiteration by NATO foreign ministers

Clinton to visit Russia after Duma ratifies START

WASHINGTON, Dec 17: President Bill Clinton said Tuesday he will pay a visit to Russia after the state Duma ratifies the START II strategic nuclear arms reduction treaty, reports AP.

Clinton told a news conference that these next meetings in Russia with president Boris Yeltsin will advance work on the START III treaty that calls for deeper cuts in both countries nuclear warheads.

"We think it would be better for me to go to Russia after the Duma ratifies START II because then we can work on START III," Clinton said.

Signed in 1993, the START II treaty has yet to be ratified by the Russian state Duma, which argues that planned reductions favour the United States.

BRIEFLY



Sonia Gandhi, wife of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, at a Rajiv Gandhi memorial lecture in New Delhi Monday. The Congress Party, which pulled down the I K Gujral led 14-party coalition government, after an enquiry commission indicted one of the coalition members of helping the murderers of Rajiv Gandhi, will be looking upon her to campaign for them. Sonia has so far stayed out of politics. — AP/UNB photo

Yeltsin's condition stable

Boris Yeltsin spent his seventh day in a health resort recovering from a severe cold, and his office said Tuesday that the president's condition was stable and his temperature normal, AP reports from Moscow.

UN officials visit Libya

Egypt's official Middle East News Agency said the UN delegation, headed by Vladimir Petrovsky, met with a Libyan health official, hospital directors and other representatives of the health and insurance sector in the capital, Tripoli. The UN Security Council banned international flights to and from Libya in 1992 after Tripoli refused to hand over two Libyans indicted for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, which killed 270 people.

Hamis wins student council polls

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamis) won all the seats in student council elections at the Islamic University of Gaza Monday, the student council announced Tuesday, AP says from Gaza City.

Arafat, Netanyahu to meet EU chief

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will travel to Luxembourg Thursday and Friday to meet with the EU President, officials here said, AP reports from Brussels.

Labour MP faces vote-rigging charge

Police on Tuesday issued a warrant for the arrest of a Labour member of Parliament on charges of election fraud, AP reports from Edinburgh.

UAE to buy 30 Mirage fighters

The United Arab Emirates signed a dollars 3.4 billion deal Tuesday to buy 30 new Mirage fighters from France's Dassault Aviation SA, AP says from Abu Dhabi.

Quake shakes Pakistan

An earthquake of moderate intensity rattled northwestern Pakistan early on Wednesday, officials said, AP reports from Peshawar.

Mandela makes final speech as leader of ANC

MAFIKENG, South Africa, Dec 17: Nelson Mandela used his final speech as leader of the African National Congress (ANC) to sharply accuse his critics of political sabotage and some whites of trying to destabilise the country, reports AP.

Mandela's speech Tuesday — one of the harshest by the 79-year-old leader of South Africa's peaceful transition to black rule — ushered in the ANC's 50th national conference, which will elect new leadership and set policies to carry the party — and South Africa — into the next century.

Mandela will remain president of South Africa until the next national election in 1999, which the ANC is expected to win. That would make his likely successor as party president, Thabo Mbeki, the next government leader.

On Wednesday, Nelson's ex-wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, faces her last chance to bid for a top ANC post. Despite opposing her political aspirations, Mandela gave his ex-wife a lengthy hug at the end of his speech — even after vaguely referring to her when he criticised those who seek political posts for personal gain.

Mandela's unusually caustic tone Tuesday showed the ANC's sensitivity to mounting criticism from rivals — and even from some grassroots supporters — that it has failed to meet its goals after 3 1/2 years in power.



Miss World 1997, Diana Hayden, greets photographers with "Namaste," the Indian greeting style, at a press conference in Bombay, Tuesday. The Indian beauty queen quoted that Lady Diana is her role model. — AP/UNB photo

Pakistan has developed new missile

WASHINGTON, Dec 17: A former high-ranking official of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has confirmed that Pakistan has developed a new and sophisticated ballistic missile with Chinese assistance, reports India Abroad News Service.

Gordon Oehler, who resigned less than two months ago as director of the CIA's Nonproliferation Centre, said intelligence had revealed that Pakistani engineers have developed a 1,500 kilometre range missile which they call the "Ghauri."

Oehler made these remarks during a speech at a conference sponsored by the Jane's Information Group, which publishes the authoritative "Jane's Defence Weekly," among several other defence-related publications.

Oehler's comments were perhaps the first that have been made by an intelligence official on Pakistan's "Ghauri" programme in an open forum.

It is widely believed that Oehler, who was a source for several intelligence leaks to newspapers like the New York Times, Washington Post and the Washington Times on China's clandestine assistance to Pakistan's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, was cajoled into resigning by the administration embarrassed by stories that despite Washington's contention to the contrary, Beijing continued to transfer technology and equipment in violation of the

Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

It is also well known in media and intelligence circles that Oehler was the source of the leak two years ago to the New York Times about India's preparations for a second nuclear test, which New Delhi vehemently denied.

Pakistani press reports earlier this year also said that Islamabad has developed a sophisticated ballistic missile to counter what Pakistan believes is India's "Pakistan-specific" Prithvi missile and the Agni, which is said to have a range of 2,000 kilometres. But these reports have referred to the missile as Mk-III and said it was produced indigenously.

Oehler said it was well known in the intelligence community that "Ghauri" had been developed with foreign assistance and that the likely source of technical assistance was China, which intelligence reports have said has also provided Islamabad with the M-11 missile.

Taking a hefty swipe at the Administration's failure to stem proliferation, especially by China to Pakistan, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries, Oehler said, "I would have to say that we are not on top of the problem."

He asserted that "We are not even staying even. We are slipping."

Last month, the Pentagon in a report submitted to Congress said the long-standing Indo-Pakistani rivalry continues to drive the pursuit of nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) weapons and especially ballistic missiles in South Asia.

The report said, "As with other weapons programmes, Pakistani and Indian pursuit of ballistic missiles is largely driven by the perception that these missiles are necessary to counter their rival's capabilities."

The Pentagon report however did not refer to the "Ghauri," which evidently the CIA seems to be convinced Pakistan has developed. It noted that Islamabad has two ballistic missile systems — the Pakistani-produced Hatf-1 with an 80-kilometre range and a 300-kilometre-range molle SRBM (short-range ballistic missile).

The report said a third missile, the Hatf-2, "was based on two Hatf-1 stages, but appears to have been discontinued." It said, "Pakistan received SRBMs and associated equipment from China during the early 1990s," and noted that in 1991 and 1993, the U.S. imposed economic sanctions, based on U.S. law, against both China and Pakistan for China's transfer of M-11 missile-related equipment.

The sanctions were lifted against China in 1992 and 1994, when "China reaffirmed its 1992 commitment to adhere to the MTCR."

National Party, which implemented and abolished apartheid and still represents Afrikaners.

"Various elements of the former ruling group have been working to establish a network which would launch or intensify a campaign of destabilisation," said Mandela, who spent 27 years in prison for resisting apartheid.

Their goals, he continued, include weakening the ANC and using crime to make the country ungovernable.

He also accused the media of perpetuating apartheid-era propaganda at the behest of white bosses. Since his party took power after the nation's first all-race election in 1994, he said, "The bulk of the mass media in our country has set itself up as a force opposed to the ANC."

Non-government organisations, such as aid and development agencies, also came under fire. Mandela quoted a 1996 US

congressional report as saying the US Agency for International Development challenged his government on key issues.

Some of Mandela's criticism fell closer to home. He said some ANC leaders used the party to further personal goals or became corrupt, a comment that drew a loud cheer.

When he finished the speech, using the revolutionary slogan "power to the people," the delegates stood and sang his name, clapping rhythmically, as ANC leaders lined up to embrace him in congratulations, as did Madikizela-Mandela.

In his speech, he made several veiled references to his ex-wife when urging delegates to avoid those seeking top posts for personal power. Madikizela-Mandela was isolated by the mainstream ANC leadership for breaches of party discipline, but may stage a floor revolt at the conference to get nominated for the deputy presidency.

The National Party reacted quickly to the speech, calling it paranoid and a sign of the ANC averting responsibility for its failures. Transport Minister Mac Maharaj told journalists he expected "whites would feel discomfited" by it.

Citing the achievements of his ANC government, Mandela mentioned a new constitution and development programme providing electric power, running water and housing for millions of poor blacks ignored under apartheid.



Gathered for "A Royal Evening" benefit at Sotheby's in New York Monday, for The Mentor Foundation are, from left Prince Dmitri of Yugoslavia, Princess and Prince Henri of Luxembourg, Queen Noor of Jordan, Queen of Sweden, and Judy Taubman, chairman of the event. The Mentor Foundation address the issues of substance abuse by working to reduce demand for drugs among the world's young people. — AP/UNB photo