

Butler accepts 3 Chinese arms experts

UNSC backs arms inspectors, deplores Iraqi action

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 15: The Security Council on Wednesday deplored Iraq's refusal to allow arms inspections by a team led by an American and branded the action an "unacceptable" violation of UN orders, reports AP.

The unanimous statement, sought by the United States, demonstrated support for the head of the UN inspection programme, Richard Butler, who leaves for Baghdad late Thursday to demand unrestricted access to all suspected weapons sites.

US Ambassador Bill Richardson hailed the council action and said the US government was eager to exhaust all diplomatic avenues to resolve the crisis with Iraq.

"My optimism is waning considerably," Richardson added. "I think the world community's optimism is waning too. Patience is wearing thin. But we should not abandon diplomacy." Council diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said even Iraq's friends on the council — Russia, France and China — were growing frustrated by Baghdad's continued refusal to cooperate fully with UN inspectors.

The statement said the

council "deplores" Iraq's move to prevent American Scott Ritter and his team from conducting inspections and "Iraq's subsequent failure to fulfill its obligations to provide the [inspectors] with full, unconditional and immediate access to all sites."

The council determines that this failure is unacceptable and a clear violation of the relevant (UN) resolutions," the council added.

The inspectors must certify Iraq has complied with orders to destroy its mass destruction weapons before the council will lift economic sanctions imposed in August 1990 after Iraq invaded Kuwait.

Security Council President Alain Dejammet said the members agreed on the statement after Butler provided details on the composition of the UN teams in Baghdad. British Ambassador John Weston said Butler's figures refuted Iraqi claims that the inspection programme is dominated by British and Americans.

In an effort to counter Iraqi claims of national bias, Butler said he had accepted three Chinese inspectors to join the team in Baghdad. China had repeat-

edly refused UN offers to nominate experts to join the inspection team.

Butler said he was pleased with the statement and the show of support.

"It's a very good, strong, clear statement," Butler told reporters. "I'll leave to Baghdad ... and I'm confident that state- ment will help."

The statement followed an appeal Monday by US President Bill Clinton for "strong and appropriate action" against Iraq.

Despite differences within the council on policy toward Iraq, Dejammet said all members believed they must stand united in affirming that Baghdad had no right to dictate the composition of the inspection teams.

Meanwhile, three Chinese weapons experts have been hired by the UN Special Commission as the first Chinese members of the team trying to determine if Iraq has destroyed its illegal weapons programme.

The Executive Director of the Commission, Richard Butler, said the three were accepted as inspectors Wednesday. UN officials said they were hired to deflect criticism from Iraq that the inspection programme is

Anglo-American dominated. Butler also plans to take China's representative on the Special Commission to Baghdad for talks with Iraqi officials next week. Butler will demand that Iraq grant full and unrestricted access to UN weapons inspectors.

Butler announced that he had hired the three Chinese inspectors after the Security Council issued a strongly worded statement deplored Iraq's refusal to allow inspections by a UN team led by American Scott Ritter.

In Baghdad, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said Ritter would not be allowed to work because there were too many "Anglo-Saxons" on his team.

Ritter, who is responsible for checking Iraqi ministries and other government sites, was blocked from working for a second day Wednesday when the government did not send required Iraqi escorts.

Although a permanent member of the Security Council, China had played only a minor role in the inspection programme since it was established in 1991 after the Persian Gulf War.

Laloo to fight corruption despite awaiting trial for corruption

NEW DELHI, Jan 15: An Indian politician who is awaiting trial for stealing government funds said Thursday fighting corruption would be a central theme of his campaign, local news agencies reported, reports AP.

Laloo Prasad Yadav, the former top elected official of the eastern Indian state of Bihar, was launching the election manifesto of his Rashtriya Janata Dal party, Press Trust of India news agency said.

Yadav, who is accused of siphoning off millions of rupees (dollars) meant for government agricultural programmes was jailed for four months before being released on bail last December.

Yadav stepped down as Bihar chief minister after he was charged, but had his wife replace him in the office.

Elections — the second in two years — were called after the powerful Congress party withdrew support from a minority coalition. Yadav's party has allied with Congress in the key state of Bihar, where he continues to wield great influence.

Ukraine ratifies friendship treaty with Russia

KIEV, Jan 15: Ukraine's parliament on Wednesday ratified a friendship treaty with neighbouring Russia, more than six years after the two countries were separated following the Soviet Union's demise in 1991, reports Reuter.

Foreign Minister Hennday Udomenko told the Chamber 317 to 27 vote of approval for the document, signed by Ukraine President Leonid Kuchma and Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Kiev last May, was an historic moment.

"First of all this document has solidified not only firm international obligations — to respect Ukraine's independence and sovereignty — but has become the legal basis on which mutual relations will be based in various areas," Udomenko said.

Ukraine's Prime Minister Valery Pustovoit said the agreement would provide for stable growth of trade relations between the two countries.

Russia accounted for 47 per cent, or 28 billion dollars, of Ukraine's trade last year, he said.



President Clinton, with Vice President Gore, centre, and White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles, left, talks about Iraq during a ceremony in the Grand Foyer of the White House Wednesday, where he announced support of a proposed patient "bill of rights." In addition, the president endorsed a UN inquiry into suspicions that Iraq tested chemical weapons on prison inmates.

— AP/UNB photo

Israeli cabinet decides to keep vast areas of WB under control

JERUSALEM, Jan 15: In a move rejected by the Palestinians, Israeli Cabinet decided Wednesday that vast areas of the West Bank must remain under Israeli control in a final Mideast peace accord, reports AP.

The decision came a day after the ministers adopted a 12-page list of conditions they said the Palestinians must fulfill before Israel will live up to its promise to carry out a limited troop pullback in the West Bank.

The back-to-back resolutions made it increasingly unlikely that the latest US initiative to break the deadlock in the peace talks will succeed. US President Bill Clinton is to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on January 20 and with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on January 22 in Washington.

A senior US diplomat said the Israeli decisions should be considered as opening positions for the negotiations.

"Our position on what comes next is well known. We are looking for strong Palestinian efforts on security and we are looking for a credible Israeli further redeployment," John Herbst, the US consul general in

Sierra Leone junta barred from US

WASHINGTON, Jan 15: President Bill Clinton barred Sierra Leone military junta members and their families from the United States today until the regime turns over power to the former, elected government, reports AP.

Clinton said in a statement that he made the decision "in light of the refusal of the military junta in de facto control of Sierra Leone to permit the return to power of the democratically elected government."

A six-man UN team arrived in Sierra Leone Wednesday to plan the deployment of UN observers under an accord for the restoration of democracy in the West African state.



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, far left, speaks with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright before a dinner at the Secretary General's residence Wednesday, in New York. In background are British Ambassador to the UN John Weston, second for left, and Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs James Rubin.

— AP/UNB photo

Mahathir planning to visit Indonesia

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 15: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said today he was considering plans to visit President Suharto in Indonesia as the two countries grapple with their worst economic crisis in decades, reports AP.

"I'm just going there to see him. We are going to have a discussion because we are neighbours," Mahathir told a news conference.

"I have not yet fixed a date because I don't know if he is available. But I would like to make a visit," he said.

Earlier today, Suharto signed a letter of intent in the presence of International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Michel Camdessus for a revised reform programme linked to an international bailout led by the IMF.

With their radar-absorbing capacities are also difficult to spot.

The potential warship order is the latest development in Turkey's growing alliance with Israel, which enjoys US patronage but has been slammed by Arab states, Iran, Greece and Russia.

Israel is modernising Turkish fighters, is on the verge of deals worth hundreds of millions of dollars to supply missiles, tanks and early-warning systems.

Turkish Army Chief General Huseyin Kirikoglu is to visit Israel next month.

of them conducted since he arrived in August. But with Wolf a rookie spaceman, ground controllers gave more detailed instructions than usual.

"David, don't touch anything, just follow me," Solovyov told him before the two went outside.

Wolf, 41, who has been aloft since September and remained inside during spacewalks by his two Russian colleagues, was clearly impressed.

"Wow," he uttered while looking at the stars during one break. "Oh my God."

Playing tour guide, Solovyov told him: "David, turn around and you'll see the Earth behind your back," pointing out Cairo, Tel Aviv and a long stretch of populated coastline lit up at night.

"Look how beautiful it is." Solovyov's image of the leaky hatchway on the Kvant-2 module were evident in footage beamed back live to Mission Control, with a white residue visible around the rubber seal that encircles the hatch.

The air leak is more inconvenient than serious, forcing the crew to use a smaller adjacent compartment to put on and take off their bulky suits when making spacewalks.



The new portrait of Diana, Princess of Wales, by artist Marilisa Marino. The painting is to be auctioned at London's National Portrait Gallery, Wednesday to fund City Ballet of London, the successor company to London City Ballet of which the Princess was patron for 13 years.

— AP/UNB photo

Political hypocrisy is known as 'electoral adjustment' in India

Sunil Adam writes from New Delhi

If hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue, politicians in India seemed to have decided not to be hypocrites after all.

Leading the new "honest" breed is Atal Behari Vajpeyi, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) prime ministerial candidate. He admitted recently that his party has given up on "principles," saying they do not "enable it to come to power."

Vajpeyi was responding to reporters' queries on why the BJP has been making alliances with a host of regional parties and leaders that are ideologically opposed to the whole notion of Hindu nationalism.

Popular cynicism toward politics, however, has acquired such proportions that hardly any murmurs were heard about the rapid ideological and political mobility. But even by the standards set in the past few weeks since the mid-term election was announced, former Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's feat takes the proverbial cake. Once projected by the media as having the potential to become the first Prime Minister from southern India till he fell from grace because of corruption charges, Hegde callously transformed an amusing political comedy into a farce.

And then there was Lakshmi Parvathi, widow of former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao and leader of a ramshackle breakaway faction of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). In her single-minded ambition to defeat her stepson-in-law and Andhra Pradesh

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, she has been courting and was being courted by both the BJP and the Congress.

It must be, however, said that the de-ideologisation of the nation's politics did not begin now. Neither Hegde nor Parvathi, for instance, could match George Fernandes, the former high-deciled socialist, who is now a reliable ally of the BJP in Bihar. To his former comrades, George, as he is addressed, is no longer the dragon slayer, as he was known, but the dragon's keeper whose inspired campaign against "Hindu communalists" in the cabinet brought down the country's first coalition government in the late seventies.

This is not to suggest that brazen political mortgaging is confined to the people flocking to the BJP. Few, for instance, can outdo Kanshi Ram, whose Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), on the last count has allied with parties like the Congress in Punjab and Bihar, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and with Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) in Maharashtra.

All the same he has declared that these are all merely "electoral adjustments" and need not continue after the election. Further, he has not

ruled out the possibility of allying with the BJP if it came within striking distance of forming a government in New Delhi. But for now the BJP is the main enemy of the self-styled leader and crusader for the Dalit cause in India.

Less cynical, but of equal import is Prime Minister I.K. Gujral's gentlemanly defection.

He lobbied hard with the constituents of his United Front (UF) to let him contest from Jalandhar, Punjab, where the Akali Dal has vowed to support him as its own candidate. This might seem innocent enough, given the fact that the Akali support is an expression of gratitude for Gujral's financial largesse to his home state and a reflection of the state's pride in supporting the first Punjab Prime Minister.

There is, however, a contradiction — how can the leader of the UF, which is fighting the BJP tooth and nail, accept the support of the Akali Dal which is an alliance partner of the BJP both in Punjab and at the national level?

Anti-BJP rhetoric and constant obloquy to secularism by the so-called centrist parties have, obviously, evaporated when it came to personal and partisan ambitions.

It was not immediately known whether Abdelkader Hachani, detained after interviews with him published in

several European newspapers, was charged.

Algeria's refusal to accept a visit by a European Union delegation marked a return to Algerians' systematic refusal of offers of international aid or investigations into six years of violence that has claimed an estimated 75,000 lives.

Ex-Lankan envoy to US to head new UN deptt

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 15: Algerian authorities released the number three official of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algiers on Wednesday, a day after detaining him, the movement's overseas office said here, reports AFP.

He had previously said the official, Abdelkader Hachani, was arrested Tuesday night and taken to police headquarters in Algiers "for no apparent reason."

Hachani went to a mosque and prayed immediately after his release, the FIS said.

FIS leader, Abassi Madani, was released from jail last year after serving half of a 12-year term for threatening state security, but he was placed under house arrest in September after issuing an appeal for dialogue on the Algerian civil war to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Hachani has been banned from political activities, as were all the FIS leaders.

AP reports, Algeria has called off a visit by European officials seeking ways to end bloodshed in this North African nation because the delegation lacks prestige, the foreign minister said Wednesday.

Algerian police, meanwhile, freed a top leader of the banned Islamic Salvation Front on Wednesday, a day after detaining him, party sympathizers said.

It was not immediately known whether Abdelkader Hachani, detained after interviews with him published in

the spread of nuclear weapons.

BRIEFLY

Jet crashes in Czech Republic

A commuter plane crashed in fog in the southeast of the Czech Republic killing both people on board, police said Wednesday.

The L-410 aircraft, en route from Belarus to the Czech city of Kunovice, 200 kilometres (125 miles) east of Prague, crashed three miles from the airport in the city of Brno on Tuesday evening.

The two men who died — a 35-year-old American man and a 47-year-old Polish man — were the only people on board the 20-seat plane, police said.

Prosecutors question Hillary

Prosecutors questioned First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton for 10 minutes Wednesday about the White House's gathering of FBI background files on hundreds of political appointees from past Republican administrations, AP reports from Washington.

Mrs. Clinton has said she knows nothing about the controversy and is unaware of how the White House came to hire Craig Livingstone, the former aide who ran the office that gathered the FBI files.

Neo-Nazi denied entry to House

A convicted neo-Nazi terrorist was denied entry to parliament Wednesday to attend defence committee hearings on radical

rightism in the German Army, AP reports from Bonn.

Manfred Roeder, whose request to observe the closed hearing was denied, is at the centre of the investigation: Revelations last month that he was invited in 1995 to speak to German, military officers helped spark the probe.