

International

Iraq declares Jihad against UN sanctions

US takes hard line on Saddam's latest ultimatums

WASHINGTON, Jan 19: Responding to Saddam Hussein's latest ultimatums, US officials stressed Sunday that Iraq not only must allow weapons inspections but must show a commitment to peace before crippling trade sanctions can end, reports AP.

Republican leaders went further. They said it's time for the United States to issue its own ultimatum that the Iraqi president must either cooperate or face US military retaliation.

"The burden of proof is on Saddam Hussein," Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on NBC television. "The bottom line here is, has Saddam isolated himself by not fulfilling the obligations that have been laid on him by the Security Council."

Saddam, in a speech Saturday marking the seventh anniversary of the Gulf War, threatened to bar future UN weapons inspections if sanctions against Iraq are not lifted. Widespread military training of Iraqis was ordered.

Saddam's speech also came on the eve of a visit to Baghdad by chief UN arms inspector Richard Butler. He said he will state plainly to the Iraqis that the inspection teams must have total freedom of movement, including access to presidential palaces that the Iraqis have declared off limits.

"There can be no such sanctuary," Butler said on CNN. "That's what I will be putting before (Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister) Tariq Aziz."

Administration officials insisted the policy of applying diplomatic pressure through the United Nations is working. "There are no prospects of sanctions being lifted," said Bill Richardson, America's UN ambassador. Saddam has "got the (UN) Security Council against him and we have once again a state of desperation on his part," Richardson said on ABC television.

"I don't want to saber-rattle," he said, but "What Ambassador Butler's trip brings back will be a very important threshold."

White House National Security Adviser Sandy Berger repeated on CBS television that the United States is prepared to use unilateral military force against Iraq if that becomes necessary.

But Republican Sen John McCain told CBS that the time has come for an ultimatum. He said military action now appears inevitable. And unlike the limited military strikes of

the past that did little damage to Saddam, McCain said, this time the attacks should be crushing.

He said there should be sustained air operations against Saddam's Republican Guard and his facilities, including his palaces. "It's time that he understood that we're serious about complying with the agreements signed," McCain said.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott also urged a more forceful US policy against Iraq. "We cannot tolerate or allow him to do what he is threatening to do," he said on CNN.

Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations, Nizar Hamdoun, appearing on Fox and NBC, said Saddam had no choice but to set a deadline for an end to the inspections. They are unfair, Hamdoun said, and US policy has been to continue sanctions even if Iraq proves it no longer has weapons of mass destruction. He strongly denied recent reports that Iraq has used human subjects to test its chemical weapons.

Meanwhile, as Iraq steps up

preparation for a possible military confrontation over UN arms inspections, the chief international inspector is traveling to Baghdad for talks with Iraqi leaders.

Richard Butler's visit today comes at a time of renewed tensions between Iraq and the United States, the chief proponent of the inspections.

Iraqi officials, fearing an American military strike, urged residents Sunday to volunteer for weapons training.

Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan accused the United States of "increasing its aggressive stands" to prolong UN economic sanctions.

Reuters adds: Iraq declared holy war on UN sanctions today, calling for a one-million volunteer force to push for an end to the seven-year-old embargo it says has caused widespread starvation and death.

"We are determined to carry out a great Jihad to lift sanctions," Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan said. "There is no alternative to this after seven years of patience and co-

operation with the United Nations and its committees."

However, Washington immediately rejected Baghdad's ultimatum and insisted that Iraq must first comply with all UN resolutions for sanctions to be lifted.

"It is not up to Saddam Hussein to be offering this kind of ultimatum... sanctions will stay on until he carries out his obligations, which is to come clean on the weapons of mass destruction," Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said in Washington.

Official Iraqi News Agency (INA) quoted Ramadan as saying one million people, men and women, would be given weapons training in a volunteer force from the start of next month.

Iraq called on people early today to register for the training by next month.

The Defence Ministry calls on all Iraqi men and women to enlist in popular training which will take place in all governorates of the country from the first of February," the agency said.



Iraqi women who joined a para-military group on Sunday, making a victory sign and holding guns. They were responding to a call-to-arms by president Saddam Hussein. The newly established group is expected to start training on February 1, 1998. They will be supervised by the party and trained by the defence ministry. — AP/UNB photo

Israeli cabinet delays decision on WB pullout

JERUSALEM, Jan 19: Israel's Cabinet delayed any decision Sunday on how much West Bank land to give the Palestinians, setting the stage for a critical summit in Washington between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Bill Clinton, reports AP.

The non-decision gives Netanyahu room to maneuver in his meeting Tuesday with Clinton, who is pressing Israel to announce a swift and significant pullout. Palestinian officials, however, charged that Netanyahu has no intention of carrying out the promised withdrawal, and is only paying lip service to Israel's peace agreements with the Palestinians.

"Netanyahu is going to Washington with nothing — no maps, no percentages. That means he doesn't want to implement a redeployment at all, and this is unacceptable to us," top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told The Associated Press.

"We urge President Clinton to tell him, 'Enough — our patience has run out.'"

Netanyahu defended the Cabinet action, saying any decision on a specific size of a West Bank pullout might have

been rejected out of hand by the Palestinians and Americans.

"I prefer to explain privately to President Clinton our limitations and our flexibility within the existing limitations, and to try together with him to advance the process in the best possible way," Netanyahu said Sunday night.

"I'm sure that numbers will come up in this conversation — the Americans will raise them and we will respond."

Clinton is to meet Tuesday with Netanyahu, and two days later with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said in Washington that she does not expect Netanyahu and Arafat to reach agreement while they're in Washington. But she said, "It will be useful for them to her the president's words."

Both Israeli and Palestinian security officials have warned that failure to reach agreement soon on a withdrawal could lead to violence in the Palestinian territories, where frustration over the stalled peace process is growing.

A Palestinian official said Sunday that Palestinian security forces have arrested two Hamas militants.

King's role to solve crisis

Constitutional debate begins in Nepali SC

KATHMANDU, Jan 19: Nepal's Supreme Court began a constitutional debate today on whether King Birendra could disband parliament and order fresh elections or give the opposition a fresh attempt to rule, officials said, reports Reuters.

A special nine-judge bench heard arguments from legal experts on what the 52-year-old monarch should do to solve the Himalayan kingdom's political crisis.

The debate is expected to continue for two weeks," Badri Kumar Basnet, a court spokesman told Reuters.

Legal experts said the judges would formulate their "advisory opinion" to the king after the debate. This suggested the political confusion could continue for some time.

King Birendra asked the Supreme Court for its opinion last week after receiving two conflicting requests from Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa and the Communist opposition.

Thapa asked the monarch to

disband Parliament and order fresh elections, but the Communists urged him to ignore this and give them a chance to rule.

Legal experts say Nepal's constitution, prepared in 1990, is ambiguous on the question.

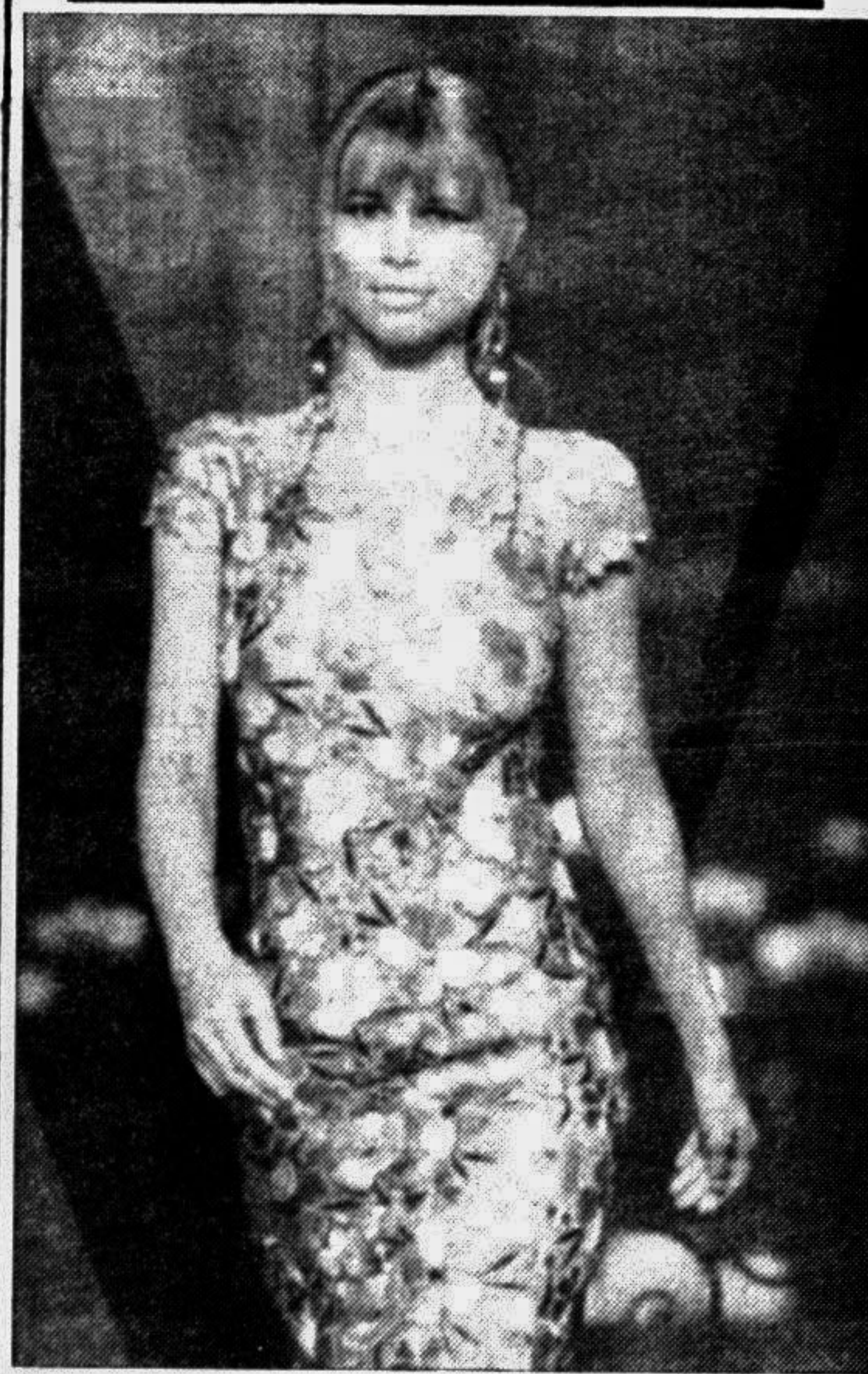
Multi-party democracy was restored in Nepal in 1990 after pro-democracy demonstrations forced King Birendra to shed his absolute powers.

Internal squabbles within the centrist Nepali Congress Party, which had led the kingdom's 50-year-old struggle for democracy, forced its government out of office.

The Communists won power after the 1994 general elections for nine months and again for seven months until they were replaced by Thapa in October last year.

Thapa, chief of the Katriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) which was formed by former royalists, is the nation's sixth prime minister since parliamentary democracy was restored.

Off the Record



German top model Claudia Schiffer sports a yellow flower-printed dress designed by Valentino for the 1998 Spring-Summer haute couture collections in Paris Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

Sporty Spice becomes Sickly Spice

TORONTO: Sporty Spice, also known as Melanie Chisholm, became Sickly Spice this weekend, forcing the cancellation of the Spice Girls' Toronto show Monday, reports AP.

Virgin Music Canada announced Saturday that Chisholm, a member of the enormously popular British bubble pop quintet, had come down with "a serious food bug."

"We can't believe this is happening. We were really looking forward to meeting our Canadian fans and the mayor of Toronto," the Spice Girls said in a statement.

The girls — nicknamed Sporty, Ginger, Baby, Posh and Scary — were to appear on MuchMusic, sign autographs at HMV's flagship store on Yonge Street and meet Mayor Mel Lastman.

What a big surprise!

DUBAI, UAE: A Saudi housewife who gave birth last week to septuplets had been told she was pregnant with four children, she said Sunday, reports AP.

"They said I was going to have four boys. The three girls were hidden behind their brothers," Hassan Mohammed Humair said in a telephone interview from her hospital bed.

Humair, a 40-year-old and already the mother of six, gave birth Wednesday to the septuplets in the southern Saudi city of Abha. It is only the third set of septuplets known to have been born alive.

Two of the septuplets remained in critical condition and were being helped to breathe by ventilators, said officials at the obstetric hospital in Abha, 1,200 kilometres (740 miles) south of the capital Riyadh. The other five were in incubators, in stable condition, said the officials, insisting on anonymity.

Humair said she had not sought fertility treatment but was given the fertility drug Clomid by her gynecologist after she complained of an irregular menstrual cycle.

"I was not trying to get pregnant. I already have children. I just wanted to stop the pain from my irregular periods," she said. Humair's eldest is a 16-year-old boy.

Doctors can prescribe Clomid to help women ovulate, said Dubai-based gynecologist Mustapha Ayyad.

Humair delivered the septuplets by Caesarean section eight weeks prematurely and was in intensive care until Saturday. She said she had a difficult pregnancy, and had a hard time keeping food down throughout the 32 weeks.

Bosnian Serb hardliners reject proclamation of new government

PALE, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jan 19: Bosnian Serb hardliners on Sunday rejected the proclamation of a new government for the Serb entity in Bosnia elected overnight by deputies loyal to President Biljana Plavcic, reports AP.

Three leading hardliners close to Plavcic's predecessor and rival Radovan Karadzic — Aleksa Buha, leader of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), Momcilo Krajinik, the Serb representative on Bosnia's collective presidency, and Nikola Popasen, leader of the Radical Party — combined to condemn

the election of Milorad Dodik as Prime Minister. Buha denounced the move as a "sort of coup d'etat" in which a government had been "designated and elected at speed... which in no way corresponds to the political will of the Serb electorate."

He warned that SDS deputies would not recognise "any decision taken against the will of the electoral body."

A parliamentary commission would be set up "to determine if these activities are legal."

BRIEFLY

Blast leaves 17 dead in China: A cigarette smoker who lit up in a small fireworks factory set off an explosion that killed 17 people, three of them children, the state-run Liberation Daily reported Monday, AP says from Beijing.

The owner of the illegally run factory and his family were among those killed in the Jan 11 blast in Susong, eastern Anhui province, the newspaper said. Investigators determined that the smoker's lighter touched off flammable materials stacked in the 120-square-metre (1,300 square foot), four-room factory, the Liberation Daily said.

Howard to visit Malaysia: Prime Minister John Howard said Monday he will visit Malaysia next month, AP says from Canberra.

Howard told reporters in Canberra Monday that he would be in Malaysia from Feb 22 to 24. He also announced that Foreign Minister Alexander Downer will visit Jakarta from Jan 25 to 27. "In both cases the visits are appropriate and directly relevant to the continuing and very close and important linkages that we have with countries in the Asia Pacific region," Howard said.

4 coal miners killed in Russia: At least four miners were killed and 24 remained unaccounted for Sunday after a blast ripped through a coal mine in the Russian town of Vorkuta, north of the Arctic Circle, Interfax quoted the mine's management as saying. AFP reports from Moscow.

Officials were fighting a fire which broke out after the blast: 900 metres (3,000 feet) below the surface and was hampering rescue work. As a result of the fire, the temperature inside the mine and carbon monoxide levels were rising and visibility had been reduced to zero, Vorkuta police chief Eduard Gervin said.

US drug trafficker held in Philippines: Police have arrested an American who has been hiding in the Philippines for nearly 10 years to evade arrest for alleged heroin trafficking in Guam, officials said Monday, AP reports from Manila.

Marvin Scharff of Agana, Guam, was arrested on Friday in Manila as he was about to leave for a central Philippine province, immigration officials said.

Taiwanese PM to visit Indonesia: In a move sure to provoke China's anger, Taiwanese Premier Vincent Siew will fly to Indonesia on Monday for discussions with President Suharto on the economic crisis rattling Asia, the official Central News Agency reported, AP says from Taipei.

The trip will be Siew's second to a Southeast Asian nation in two weeks, representing a victory over intense pressure on those countries from China. Beijing considers Taiwan a breakaway province with no right to international relations. Out of fear of a Chinese backlash, many Southeast Asian countries rarely allow senior Taiwanese officials to visit.

2 killed in shootout in SA: Two men were killed in a shootout at a Johannesburg night club after doorman at the club tried to break up a fight, police reported in Johannesburg, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

The incident, in the upmarket northern suburb of Rosebank, happened at about 4:30 am (0230 GMT), police said. A 34-year-old doorman was shot dead when a man he ejected for fighting returned to the club and produced a firearm. Another man died later in hospital after staff at the club returned fire.

Charles' visit to Lanka opposed: Sri Lanka's top opposition leader Monday criticised the government for inviting Prince Charles to be the chief guest at the 50th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence, but said he would not oppose the visit, AP reports from Colombo.

"We have nothing against Prince Charles. But we would have preferred if the focus of the celebration was Sri Lanka," said Ranil Wickremasinghe, leader of the United National Party. "But now that Prince Charles has been invited, let him come," he told reporters.

3 rebels killed in Burundi: Three rebels were killed Sunday in an attack on a government military post north of Burundi's capital, army spokesman Colonel Isale Nibizi said, AFP reports from Bujumbura.

Three soldiers and a student at a nearby secondary school were wounded in the fighting and the "terrorists" were pushed back to the hills overlooking the capital, Nibizi said.

Sonia reluctant to attack DMK, TMC: Jayalalitha

CHENNAI, Jan 19: AIADMK general secretary Jayalalitha today alleged that there was a conspiracy between the Congress and the DMK-TMC combine to have a secret understanding in Tamil Nadu, and cited Sonia Gandhi's reluctance to attack these parties as proof, reports PTI.

At a crowded press conference at the AIADMK headquarters here, she said: "It is highly suspicious and fishy if Sonia Gandhi, the widow of Rajiv Gandhi, herself avoids any reference to the Jain Commission report or fails to attack the DMK, which has been indicted by it, and the TMC, which has once again joined the DMK."

4 BJP members expelled for six years

JAIPUR, Jan 19: Four BJP members of the Rajasthan assembly, suspended from the party last year after their unsuccessful bid to topple the Shekhawat ministry, were today expelled for six years for alleged anti-party activities, reports PTI.

The expelled MLAs are Chand Gurjar, Moti Lal Kharera, Madan Mohan and Shankar Bhanudha, a party spokesman said here today.

Chand Gurjar and Moti Lal Kharera had recently joined the Samajwadi party (SP) which nominated the latter its candidate for the Bayana (SC) seat in the Lok Sabha elections. Gurjar has been made the convenor of the SP's state election campaign committee while Madan Mohan had recently joined the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Israel due to get first 2 warplanes from US

JERUSALEM, Jan 19: Israel was due to receive from the United States today its first two F-151 long-range strike aircraft fighter bombers capable of hitting targets in Iraq or Iran without refueling, officials said, reports AFP.

Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai was scheduled to lead a high profile reception at a southern Israeli airbase for the two warplanes the first of 25 F-151s purchased by Israel for 2.2 billion dollars.

The aircraft, manufactured by Boeing will be the most advanced in Israel's air force, with a range of 4,500 kilometres (2,700 miles) capable of reaching any target in the Middle East night or day and in any kind of weather defence experts said.

Fresh fighting erupts in Cambodia

BANGKOK, Jan 19: Cambodian government troops launched a fierce new attack today against the besieged resistance stronghold of O'Smach, but the defence was stiffened by the arrival of hundreds of Khmer Rouge reinforcements, reports AP.

Meanwhile, Thai soldiers monitoring the fighting between the Cambodian factions fired a dozen artillery shells at the Cambodian government troops in retaliation for several rounds that overshoot O'Smach and strayed over the border into Thailand.

The Cambodian army fighting for strongman Hun Sen renewed attacks with as many as 14 tanks against O'Smach last week, but the defenders loyal to the deposed co-prime minister, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, have held their ground.

Thai officers Monday reported no change in the positions of the front lines, with both sides several hundred meters (yards) apart.

Ranariddh's royalists have been reinforced by as many as 600 new guerrillas from a hard-line Khmer Rouge faction based further east at Anlong Veng. They have been deployed to stiffen the front line and to stage raids to disrupt army communications.

China's arms sale to Iran

US warns of consequences

BEIJING, Jan 19: In a pointed warning, US Defence Secretary William Cohen Monday told China that providing weapons technology to Iran could have a "damaging political effect" on China's relations with the United States and the West, reports AP.

Cohen made the statement late in a busy day in which he also signed a US-China agreement designed to avoid conflicts at sea and made an unprecedented visit to an air defence command headquarters outside Beijing.

In a speech to the Academy of Military Science, Cohen said Defence Minister Gen. Chi Haotian assured him in a meeting earlier Monday that China would not export anti-ship cruise missiles or nuclear technology to Iran. President Jiang Zemin gave President Clinton the same assurance last fall.

The United States fears Iran clandestinely is developing a nuclear weapons capability and that it might use Chinese-made anti-ship cruise missiles to disrupt oil commerce in the Persian Gulf, a conduit for much of the West's oil imports.

Cohen said a disruption of the flow of oil from the Gulf would hurt China, too. "Should that disruption oc-

cur through the use of weapon technology provided by China, it clearly would also have a damaging political effect on China's relations with many countries around the world, including the United States," he said.

Cohen's aides had said before his arrival in Beijing that one of the secretary's goals was to get the Chinese to go beyond saying they had no intention of selling more cruise missiles to Iran — to transform that into a firm promise against any sales.

In his assurance to Clinton at their meeting in Washington last October, Jiang had said China has "no intention" to sell more cruise missiles to Iran. Iran already had imported some and made them operational.

In his brief reference to Chi's reaffirmation of China's policy on arms sales to Iran, Cohen did not elaborate on whether a more iron-clad promise was made.

His speech to the military academy focused on encouraging China to be more open about its military capabilities and intentions.

He said China's willingness to cooperate with the United States will largely determine the future of security in Asia.

EU rules out plan to send peace-keepers in Algeria

BRUSSELS, Jan 19: European countries have ruled out sending a peace-keeping force immediately to the trouble-torn Algeria and called for a consensus among the member countries in the European Union (EU) on the issue, reports PTI.

"Algeria is a sovereign country. They do not want a peace-keeping force or detailed investigation into the massacres. So we do not want to force our opinion on that country," a senior Western European Union (WEU) official told a group of visiting foreign journalists.

Thousands of bloody massacres in the last few years, coincide with the visit of three junior ministers from Luxembourg, Britain and Austria to Algeria.

EU officials said the ministers from the EU Troika, who will go on a two-day visit, are planning to have discussions with the Algerian authorities on all aspects even though the Algerian government said the EU delegation could focus only on "combating terrorism."

The officials said there is no consensus now within the EU on sending an inquiry mission or a peace force to Algeria.



"X-Files" co-stars David Duchovny, left, and Gillian Anderson pose with creator Chris Carter after winning the award for Best Dramatic Television Series at the 55th Annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif., Sunday. — AP/UNB photo