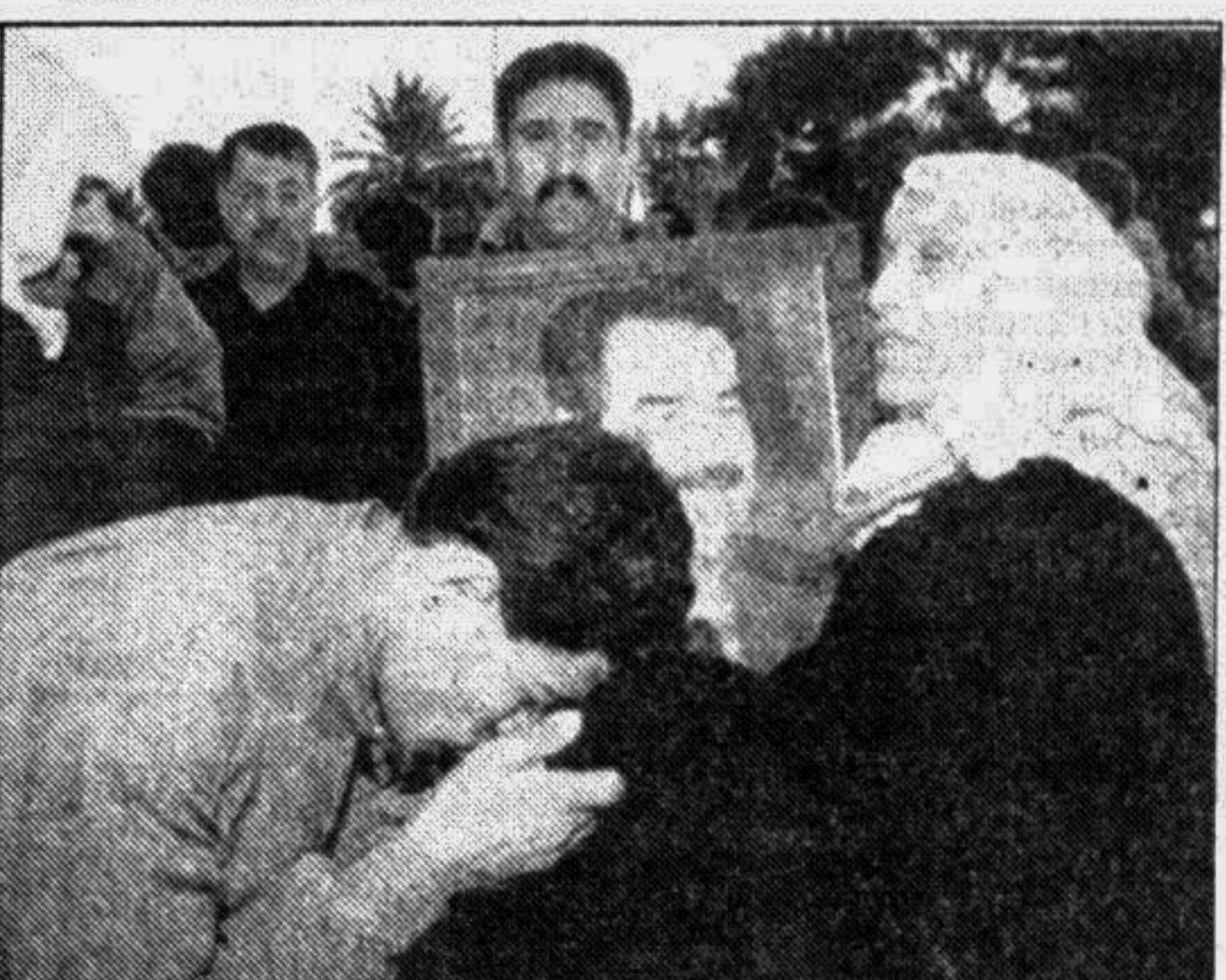


International

BRIFFLY



A Jordanian prisoner freed by Iraq on Wednesday, kisses the hand of his mother who came to Iraq to meet him. Iraq Wednesday released all 80 of its Jordanian prisoners, heading a request from Jordan made after six Iraqis were stabbed to death in its capital, Amman. — AP/UNB photo

15 die as boat sinks in India:

A crowded boat carrying Hindu pilgrims sank in a lake and at least 15 people drowned, local news agencies reported Wednesday. AP says from New Delhi.

Five others swam to safety at the Koyra Dam backwaters in the western state of Maharashtra Tuesday night, Press Trust of India news agency reported. Survivors said the boat overturned and got stuck in the silt, United News of India news agency said. The passengers were going from Kharoshi village to a Hindu fair in a nearby village. The area, south of Bombay, is 1,250 kilometres (800 miles) southwest of New Delhi.

Mudslide claims 26 in Mozambique:

Heavy rains triggered a landslide that killed at least 26 people and left 60 missing in central Mozambique, an official radio broadcast said Wednesday. AP reports from Maputo.

The rain and strong winds sent stones and mud sliding down Tumbane mountain on to settlements in Milange district of Zambezia province on Tuesday, state-run Radio Mozambique reported. Heavy rains have hit several areas of the southeast African country in recent weeks, causing floods and other problems in several provinces.

Doomsday cult leader freed on bail:

The leader of a suspected doomsday cult accused of trying to induce 31 followers to commit suicide was released on bail Wednesday. AP says from Santa Cruz De Tenerife.

A judge ordered the release of Heide Fittkau-Garthe, 57, a German psychologist, the state news agency EFE reported. The amount of bail was not disclosed. Fittkau-Garthe was arrested for allegedly planning the mass suicide on Jan. 8, just hours before the group believed the world would end.

Clinton to visit SA in March:

President Bill Clinton will visit South Africa and several other African countries in March. The White House announced Wednesday. AFP says from Washington.

"This historic visit will be an opportunity for the President to highlight the growing US partnership with a new Africa," the White House said in a statement.

1 killed in Ireland shooting:

Three men were shot, including one who was killed, in separate incidents Wednesday in northern Ireland, security forces said. AFP reports from Belfast.

The third victim was shot and badly injured on a Protestant estate in south Belfast, security forces said late on Wednesday. Hospital sources said he was in a "serious state" with "multiple gunshot wounds."

Earlier, a 55-year-old Catholic man was shot dead when gunmen opened fire on him as he was getting into his car in a staunchly Protestant loyalist area of Belfast.

US aircraft carrier off to the Gulf:

The US aircraft carrier Independence will leave its home port in Tokyo Bay today for the Gulf, a US military spokesman said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The 80,643-tonne Independence will depart from Yokosuka Port to replace the carrier Nimitz, which is to return home from the Gulf, the military spokesman said yesterday.

The carrier will be escorted by three warships and a submarine.

Famous US actor Jack Lord dead:

Jack Lord, whose gruff portrayal of a Hawaiian police chief helped turn "Hawaii Five-O" into one of television's longest running shows, died Thursday evening of heart failure. He was 77, AP reports from Honolulu.

Lord died at his Honolulu home with his wife, Marie, at his side.

"Jack loved acting and he loved these islands," Mrs. Lord said in a statement. "Through all his years he was blessed with kindness, affection and support of many fans and friends. He always appreciated that and forgot it."

4 killed in riot in Harare:

Four people were reported killed in the violent food riots that led to important material damage in Harare over the past three days, as life seemed back to normal in the city centre today, AFP reports from Harare.

Army units were still present in the southern outskirts of the city where street violence erupted earlier this week. Initial reports said two people were shot dead during the clashes between rioters and police and two others including a young child, died crushed by a fleeing crowd.

UNHCR high commissioner in Cambodia:

UN High Commissioner for human rights Mary Robinson arrived in Cambodia yesterday as government criticisms of the UN's rights operation mounted. AFP reports from Phnom Penh.

The former Irish president began her visit just one day after co-premiers Hun Sen and Hun Sen slammed the UN Centre for Human Rights (UNCHR) for "illegitimate and arrogant behaviour" and accused it of "psychological warfare." Robinson told reporters on her arrival that she was aware of the complaints and a letter sent by the prime ministers "raises a number of issues which will be addressed seriously and responded to."

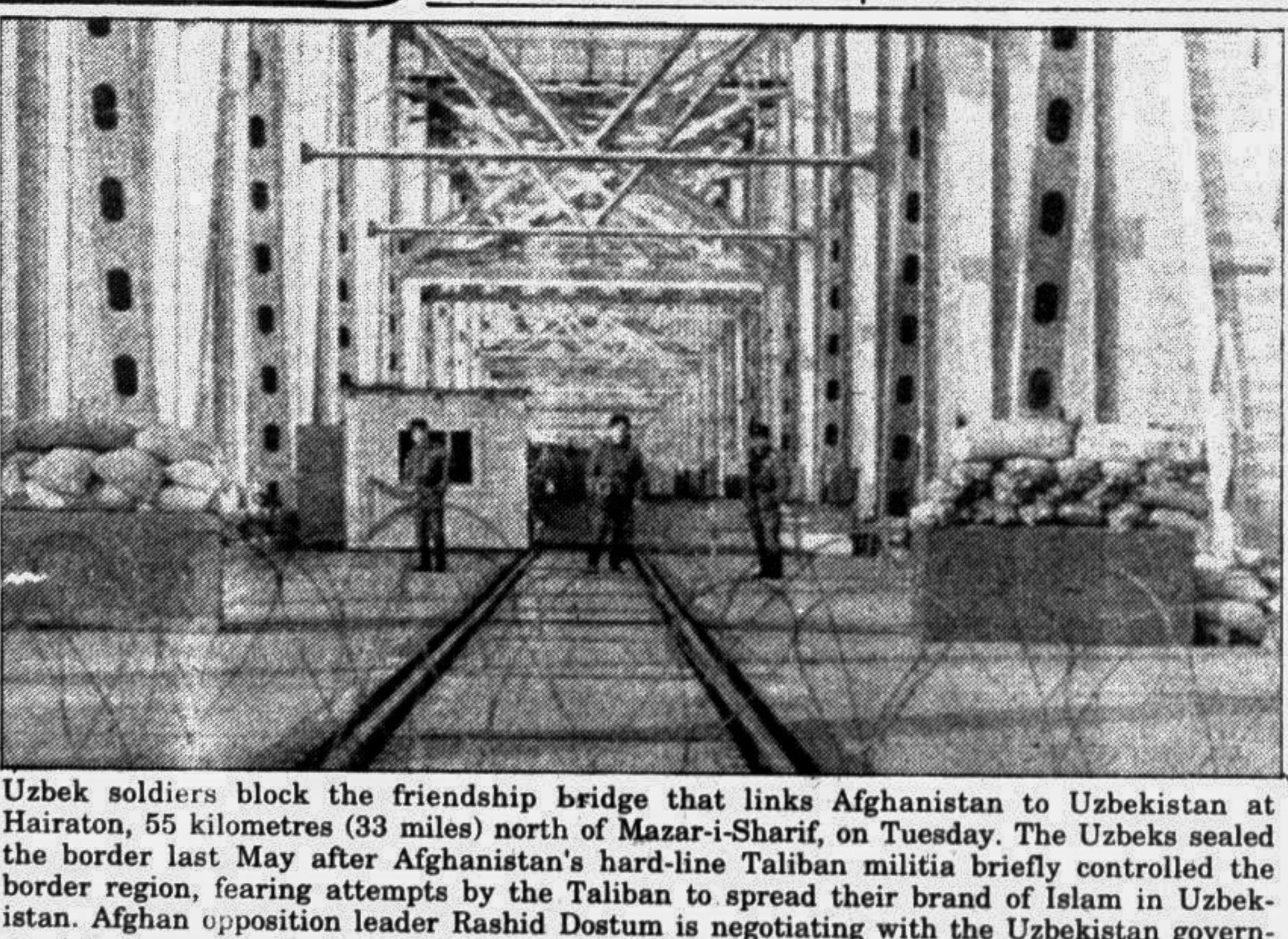
IRA rejects Anglo-Irish blueprint for peace

BELFAST, Jan 22: Republicans, whose ceasefire underpins northern Ireland's peace talks, have rejected an official Anglo-Irish blueprint for peace and said the whole process was "in crisis", reports Reuter.

The Irish Republican Army statement came on one of the bloodiest days in Belfast since the British-ruled province's first ceasefire in 1994 but made no threat to break its truce, which gained the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, a place at the negotiating table.

A middle-aged man gunned down in his car in the Wednesday evening rush hour was the sixth Roman Catholic to be killed since Republican prisoners shot a leading pro-British "loyalist" dead in jail last month.

A second man believed to work for a catholic taxi firm, managed to drive himself to hospital after he was shot.



Uzbek soldiers block the friendship bridge that links Afghanistan to Uzbekistan at Hairat, 55 kilometres (33 miles) north of Mazar-i-Sharif, on Tuesday. The Uzbeks sealed the border last May after Afghanistan's hard-line Taliban militia briefly controlled the border region, fearing attempts by the Taliban to spread their brand of Islam in Uzbekistan. Afghan opposition leader Rashid Dostum is negotiating with the Uzbekistan government to reopen the border now that the Taliban army has been pushed back.

— AP/UNB photo

'Netanyahu ready to withdraw Israeli troops from 10pc of WB'

JERUSALEM, Jan 22: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US President Bill Clinton he was ready to withdraw Israeli troops from 10 per cent of the West Bank, but would forgo other pullbacks he had promised the Palestinians, a newspaper said Thursday, re-ports AP.

Netanyahu said the 10 per cent withdrawal could take place in three stages, the Haaretz daily said.

Clinton, in turn, told Netanyahu in talks at the White House on Tuesday that the Palestinians were now willing to settle for a 15 per cent withdrawal, half their initial demand, the Haaretz daily said.

The report came as Clinton was to meet with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Washington on Thursday. Arafat was expected to ask Clinton to pressure Israel to keep its withdrawal.

Haaretz quoted a senior US official as saying that Clinton would settle for a 12 per cent pullback. The official was not identified.

In a US-brokered agreement a year ago, Netanyahu committed himself to three West Bank troop pullbacks by mid-1998 without specifying how much land the Israelis would give up.

Israel's first offer, made in March, was to pull back from 2 per cent of the West Bank, but was never implemented because the Palestinians rejected it as insufficient. The second withdrawal is several months overdue.

Netanyahu has said he wants to skip the third pullback and only carry out the second once the Palestinians meet a 12-page list of conditions, most dealing with security.

Netanyahu told Clinton this week that cancelling the third pullback would give him the necessary leeway in his hard-line Cabinet for getting approval for a 10 per cent withdrawal, Haaretz said.

Meir Shetreet, a senior official in Netanyahu's Likud party, told Israel radio that such a proposal would likely win approval.

"Nobody in the Cabinet is naive enough to think that they will carry out a redeployment less than 10 per cent," Shetreet said.

Security in remote areas of Tripura beefed up

AGARTALA, Jan 22: Security has been beefed up in the remote areas of Tripura in view of the "boycot" and "Bandh" call given by the outlawed militant outfit, All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), on both Republic day and for the February 16 elections in the state, reports PTI.

The Home Minister Samir Choudhury today said the government had asked all security agencies to intensify patrolling in the remote areas of the four districts of the state to prevent any untoward incident on both days.

The Tripura People Democratic Front (TPDF), a political wing of the banned ATTF militant outfit, gave a call to observe "protest day" on February 16 coinciding with the elections to two Lok Sabha and sixty assembly seats in the state, this had created fear in the minds of the people, mostly residing in the rural areas of the state, official sources said.

Pak cabinet approves plan to combat terrorism

ISLAMABAD, Jan 22: Pakistan's federal cabinet approved on Wednesday a plan to combat terrorism which sets out to recover all illegal arms from citizens and ban the display of weapons in public, reports Xinhua.

The plan asks all the people holding licenses of weapons to deposit their arms at the offices of their respective district magistrates.

The plan also bans the display of weapons in public with the obvious design of threatening others.

"Every week Saddam Hussein

Iraq for freeze on presidential palace inspections till more talks

BAGHDAD, Jan 22: Iraq has proposed that the United Nations freeze its demand that weapons inspectors gain access to presidential palaces until more discussion on the sensitive issue takes place, the chief UN weapons inspector said Wednesday, reports AP.

The official, Richard Butler, said he was not sure how the UN Security Council would respond to the proposal, but added that he felt it defied UN demands for unfettered access to all sites.

Inspectors have accused Iraq of using presidential palaces as hideouts, but Iraq has challenged their right to enter later left for Bahrain.

A freeze on the palace inspections — until at least April — would end Iraq's confrontations with the inspectors it has blocked from so-called sensitive sites.

While making clear it would be the Security Council's responsibility to decide whether to accept the proposed freeze, Butler said he had told Aziz: "Your answer of a freeze flies in the face of the council's decision on access."

In New York, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, said the Security Council would wait for Butler to report to them Friday.

He added, however, that "the early news is quite disturbing."

Chinese spokesman Chen Ranfeng urged "all sides to exercise restraint" and said upcoming technical meetings with Iraq were important.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said Iraqi obstruction of UN inspections was serious because it defied the Security Council and allowed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein time to build chemical and biological weapons.

The move follows accusations by rival parties that she was a "foreigner" who should be barred from leading a political party.

India goes to the polls between February 14 and March 7 following the collapse of a minority coalition.

The Congress which ruled India for around four decades under the Gandhi-Nehru political dynasty, is hoping to exploit the family name to revive its sagging fortunes.

Another song starts with the line "Rajiv is my jewel," the third goes "Now that Sonia has come, the Congress will win and everything will be hunky dory."

A party official said 300,000 cassettes of the "Sonia" songs would be distributed across India.

Lankan security tightened ahead of Charles' visit

COLOMBO, Jan 22: Sri Lanka has mounted its biggest security operation for the visit here by Britain's Prince Charles next month, amid fears of Tamil Tiger rebel attacks, a senior minister said, reports AFP.

Some 10,000 troops and police will guard the historic town of Kandy where ceremonies to mark the 50th anniversary of independence from Britain will be held on February 4, said Anuruddha Ratwatte, the junior Defence Minister.

Security was tightened due to fears that the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will try to disrupt the celebrations and avenge a military offensive against them in the north of the country, he said.

Princess Diana, the new male animal, was born last Wednesday at the Camel Reproduction Centre in Dubai. Skidmore achieved the artificial insemination that created Rama after a two-year effort. The camel and the llama descend from the same species that lived 30 million years ago.

— AP/UNB photo

Sonia Gandhi as Indian as Mother Teresa, claims Cong (I)

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: The Indian born widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi is as Mother Teresa, her party had claimed in a bid to play down a political row over her foreign origins, reports said Thursday, reports AP.

One went: There are those who questioned if Mother Teresa was ours after losing mother and husband she carried out her duty, here comes Sonia Gandhi."

Hindu nationalist right-wingers have also homed in on her Catholic faith.

Sonia Gandhi became an Indian citizen in 1986, 18 years after her marriage. Mother Teresa, born to Albanian parents and who died last year, had also taken an Indian citizenship.

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Fresh accusations against Clinton 'painful': Hillary

WASHINGTON, Jan 22: US First Lady Hillary Clinton admitted Wednesday that fresh accusations of wrongdoing by her husband, President Bill Clinton, were "painful" but said they were orchestrated by his political opponents, reports AFP.

"I wouldn't say that it's not hard, because it is difficult and painful any time someone you care about, you love, you admire is attacked and subjected to such relentless accusations as my husband has been," Hillary said in a radio interview.

"But I also have now lived with this for ... more than six years, and I have seen how these charges and accusations evaporate and disappear if they're ever given the light of day," she added.

The first lady spoke shortly after her husband, in a string of interviews, denied allegations he had a sexual relationship with a White House aide and later instructed her to lie about the liaison in testimony to lawyers.

Off the Record

A Lenin clone?

MOSCOW: First there was Dolly, the cloned sheep. Then came George and Charlie, the cows. So the question naturally arises: is the world ready for a Vladimir Lenin clone?

Probably not, but officials of what is left of Russia's Young Communist Union, or Komsomol, spent a wistful moment thinking about it Wednesday during an otherwise tendentious news conference about cloning (they're for it), reports AP.

"If the experiment succeeded, I would be happy," said Darya Mitina, first secretary of the Komsomol and a member of the Communist faction in the Duma, Russia's Lower House of parliament.

Among long dead historical figures, Lenin has a huge advantage from the gift-goat. The leader of the Bolshevik revolution is also the world's most prominently embalmed man, whose remains have been on display in Red Square since shortly after his death in 1924.

Smash the glass case and - bingo! instant gene pool, bald head, spiffy goatee and all.

"Of course, even Mitina conceded that a cloned Lenin just wouldn't be the same as the original.

"There will be no second Lenin," she said.

Older than the oldest!

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 22: A Malaysian record book due out later this year will feature a man said to be 140 years old, more than two decades older than the woman currently designated as the world's oldest living person, reports AP.

The book says that while the Malaysian man, Omar Abas, does not have a birth certificate, the registration department where he lives has confirmed his birth date was Sept. 26, 1857, according to a report in Thursday's New Straits Times newspaper.

That would make Omar older than Canadian Marie-Louise Febrionne Meilleur, 117, who was deemed the world's oldest person after France's Jeanne Louise Calment died last August at age 123.

"As long as his age is certified by the registration department, Malaysia Book of Records accepts this as proof of his age," said Irene Liang, spokeswoman for the record book.

Registration department director Wahab Mohd Yasin was quoted in the newspaper report as saying Malaysian citizens were not issued birth certificates until June of 1926. Residents born before then were given ration cards which recorded their particulars.

Omar, who says he will turn 141 on September 26, has 23 grandchildren, 73 great grandchildren and says the secret to longevity is proper diet and exercise, the paper said.

He married in his late sixties and lives with his 96-year-old wife, Minah.

Electioneering on wheels

MADRAS, India: An Indian political party will launch its election campaign with two million of its members taking to their bicycles, officials said today, reports AFP.</p