

International

Tigers attack military camps

Independence celebrations moved from bomb-scarred Kandy

COLOMBO, Jan 28: The Sri Lankan government has decided to move the independence anniversary celebrations out from Kandy where suicide bombers raided the main ceremony site killing 16 people, a government spokesman said Wednesday, reports AP.

"Now the celebrations will be held in Colombo," said Kusum Rodrigo, a spokeswoman for the Government's Information Department.

Prince Charles of Britain is scheduled to take part in the celebrations next week. Sri Lanka then known as Ceylon, was a British colony until 1948.

"We are working out details of celebrations in Colombo," Mrs. Rodrigo said, but declined to say if Prince Charles was coming.

Sunday's bombing in Kandy was blamed on Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which it has blamed for Sunday blast at Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist shrine in the central town of Kandy.

The truck bomb attack killed 16 people and wounded 23.

LTTE has been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east. The government says more than 50,000 people have been killed while the LTTE say the toll is higher.

The attacks came a day after the government formally outlawed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which it has blamed for Sunday blast at Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist shrine in the central town of Kandy.

Asked if he agreed to a phased withdrawal, Arafat told reporters in Gaza: "Definitely not."

US President Bill Clinton has proposed that the Israeli troop withdrawal takes place in phases, with each step matched by new Palestinian action to improve security.

Netanyahu said on Monday he was considering the US plan.

"We have not ruled out a possible staggered interim pullback.

The Palestinians must fulfill

part of their commitments and

they will receive a certain part

of land," he said.

Israel said the issue at stake

was Palestinian compliance with peace accords and not how Israel would implement its side of the bargain.

Palestinian fulfillment of their agreements is at the heart of the US proposal and therefore Chairman Arafat has to

address himself not to the mechanism and technical aspects but to finally honour signed agreements," Israeli government spokesman Moshe

Rabb, detailing to reporters one of the cabinet's decisions.

Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met separately with Clinton in Washington last week to try to end the deadlock.

The United States said on Monday it believed both Israel and the Palestinians had accepted its proposal to advance peacemaking, even though they still differed on basic issues.

Palestinians have said they want Israel to pull back from at least 30 per cent of the disputed area, but Israeli news reports indicate Netanyahu refuses to go beyond 9.5 per cent.

The United States, which has called on Israel to carry out a "significant and credible" troop withdrawal, has urged the

sides to meet halfway.

Arafat's cabinet slammed

Jewish settlement building in the West Bank and called for

"mass mobilisation" against Is-

rael.

"We call upon our people to hold peaceful demonstrations against this policy of robbery of Palestinian land," said Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo, detailing to reporters one of the cabinet's decisions.

He said the Palestinians would never accept anything less than what was outlined in Israel-PLO peace deals. He said the US administration did not accept Netanyahu's proposal.

In another sign of growing Arab impatience at Israel, senior PLO officials Nabil Shaath told reporters Arab states had agreed in principle to hold a summit to discuss the 10-month impasse in peacemaking.

"All Arab states adopt the idea of an Arab Summit in order to assert Palestinian rights.

Arab diplomatic activity will

lead to an Arab Summit but

what is under discussion now is

the mechanism — will there be

an expanded or a mini-sum-

mit?" Shaath told reporters in Gaza.

The summit would be the first since 1996, when Arab leaders gathered in Cairo to discuss the prospects of peace after Netanyahu's election victory.

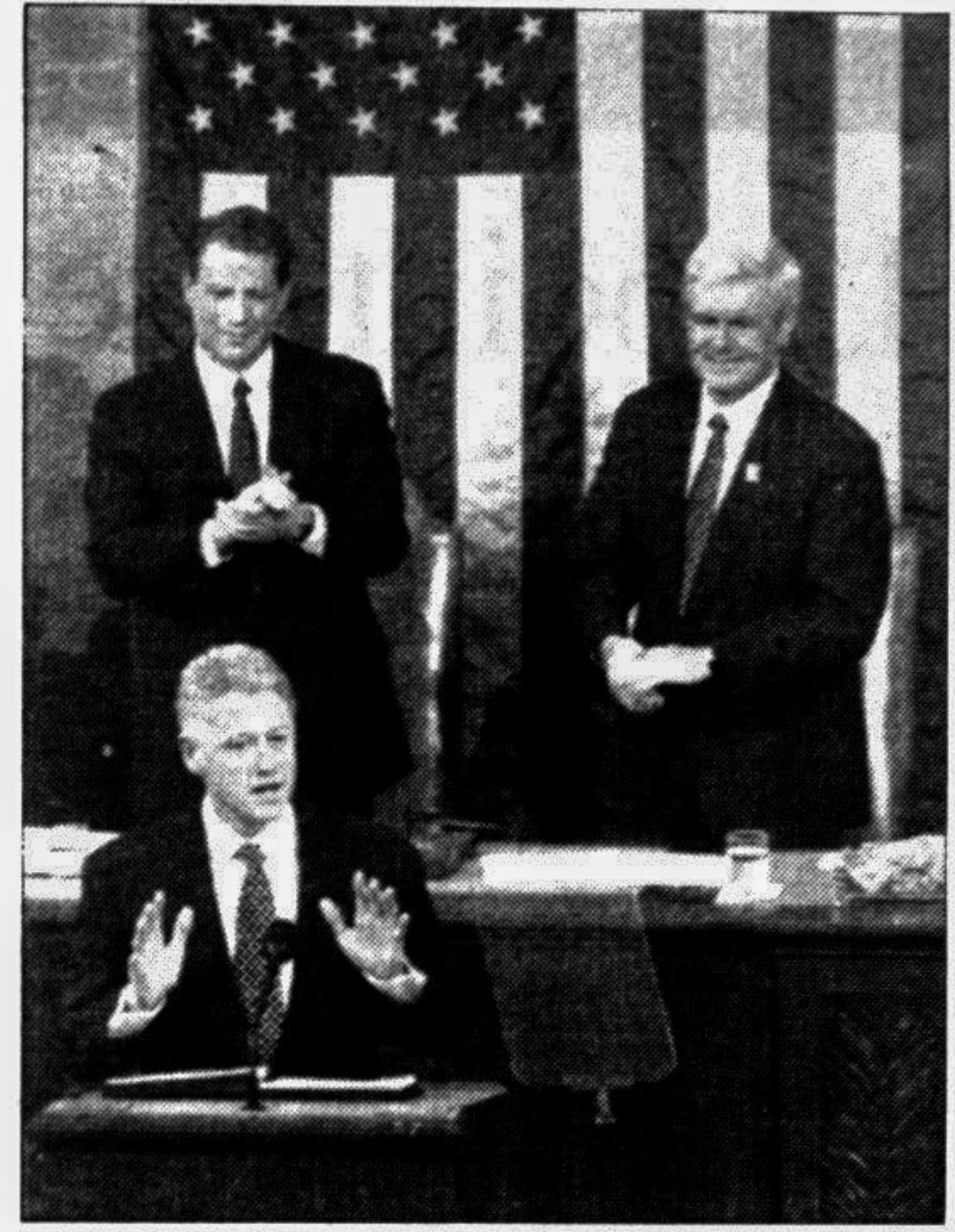
The next step will witness a widespread Arab and European diplomatic flurry of activity," said Shaath, adding that Arab leaders may hold a separate mini-summit with their European counterparts.

Palestinians and other Arabs have looked to the European Union to offset that they see as US bias towards Israel.

Fogel said an Arab Summit to discuss faltering peace efforts would violate PLO-Israeli peace accords.

"The Oslo Accords, which the Palestinians of course signed, have their own mechanisms for settling outstanding issues and therefore to go outside those mechanisms is a contravention of those accords," Fogel said.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair urged Israel in remarks published on Tuesday to stop building Jewish settlements on Arab lands and to implement other commitments to the Palestinians without delay.



President Clinton delivers his State of the Union speech Tuesday night, in Washington, as Vice President Al Gore and House Speaker Newt Gingrich look on.

—AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Crime rate down in Russia: Despite an overall drop in crime of 9 per cent last year, Russia has seen a sharp rise in serious crimes such as contract murders and kidnappings, the nation's top crime fighter said Tuesday, AP reports from Moscow.

Street crime fell by 13 per cent and robberies plunged by 8 per cent, Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov said a news conference.

Russian soldiers kill 7 comrades: In a second deadly incident in two days, a Russian soldier on guard duty in the Far East went on a rampage Tuesday, killing seven and injuring one of his comrades, military officials said, AP reports from Moscow.

The soldier, Pvt. Oleg Naumov, was detained shortly after the shooting in the settlement of Pobedino, according to military officials quoted by the Interfax news agency. Naumov hit one soldier with an axe, injuring him, shot dead his commander and another serviceman at his guard post and killed five more soldiers at his unit's canteen and rest room, the report said.

Blast kills Lebanese: A Lebanese civilian was killed in a bomb blast in South Lebanon yesterday, the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) said, AFP reports from Lebanon.

Building worker Antoine Helu, 57, died in the explosion in the Christian region of Jezzin, an area outside Israel's self-declared "security zone" in south Lebanon but which is controlled by the SLA, the SLA radio reported. No group has claimed responsibility.

Slovak deputies vote to elect president: Slovak deputies voted yesterday to elect a new president, but the ballot is likely to result in a power vacuum which analysts say will benefit populist authoritarian premier Vladimir Mečiar, AFP reports from Bratislava.

No candidate is expected to garner the required three-fifths majority in the vote, and most presidential powers are expected to pass to Mečiar's government pending legislative elections in September, analysts say.

Cohen likely to visit Gulf in Feb: US Defense Secretary William Cohen is tentatively planning to travel to the Gulf early next month to consult with US allies on possible military action against Iraq, the Pentagon said Tuesday, AFP reports from Washington.

"The purpose of the trip would be to consult with our friends and allies in the Gulf about possible military action," Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said.

21 troops executed in DRC: Military authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo on Tuesday carried out a public execution of 21 soldiers for murder, armed robbery and forming criminal associations, officials said, AFP reports from Kinshasa.

An official statement, read out on Voice of the People state radio, said President Laurent Kabila had refused to pardon them after the top military court condemned them to death. The men were the first to die in public execution in Kinshasa since Kabila seized power in the May ousting of long-time dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.

4th week without power in Quebec: About 150,000 Quebecers in towns near Montreal began their fourth week without power as utility crews struggled to complete repairs of transmission lines damaged by a devastating ice storm, AP reports from Montreal.

Power has been slowly coming back in most areas of Quebec as 1,225 repair teams work 12 to 16-hour days in bitter cold.

3 French cops burnt to death: Three French policemen were burnt to death on Tuesday in a fire in an apartment they had entered to deal with a family dispute, a police spokesman said, AP reports from Paris.

A fourth man also died in the blaze and another policeman suffered serious burns. Details were still not clear, but it appeared the unidentified man had spread petrol and barricaded the police in the flat when a fire broke out.

14 killed in Colombia violence: At least 14 people were killed in the latest round of Colombia's endemic political violence, authorities said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Bogota.

Police said the worst incident occurred in northern Santander province where about 150 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas staged an attack on the small town of Bolívar late on Monday. Two policemen and five rebels died in the attack. A handful of policemen fended off the guerrillas by holing up in a fortress-like barracks until army reinforcements arrived.

Ex-editor to die for spying in Iran: The former editor-in-chief of an English-language daily newspaper in Iran has been sentenced to death, the Iranian news agency IRNA said on Tuesday. Reuter reports from London.

Morteza Firooz, the editor of Iran News, had been in custody on spying charges since last May, said the IRNA report, monitored in London by the British Broadcasting Corporation. The sentence was passed some time ago but had yet to be approved, the agency quoted senior judiciary official Ojatoheslam Gadiani as saying. There were no further details.

Clashes leave 22 dead in Kenya: Kenya's police

Tuesday announced that the death toll in tribal clashes in the Njoro area of the Rift valley had risen to 22 since Sunday, AFP says from Nairobi.

That toll included an arsonist police shot and killed Tuesday in the town of Nakuru after he fired arrows at them on being challenged, a statement said. The death toll in ethnic clashes in the Rift valley's Laikipia district which broke out on January 14 meanwhile rose to 55 on Monday, the Daily Nation reported Tuesday.

Ted Hughes wins Whitbread award: Poet laureate Ted Hughes on Tuesday scooped the 21,000-pound (\$33,000 dollars) Whitbread Book of the Year award, Britain's richest literary prize, with his collection "Tales of Ovid," AP says from London.

The reclusive Hughes, 67, who recently broke a 35-year silence about his troubled marriage to the American poet Sylvia Plath with a searing new book of poems, was ill and did not attend the awards ceremony. The prize was collected on his behalf by TV presenter Melvyn Bragg. "Tales of Ovid" beat Jim Crace's novel "Quarantine," a biography of Victor Hugo by Graham Rob and "The Ventriloquist's Tale," debut novel of Pauline Melville.

Palestinian cabinet calls for 'mass mobilisation'

Arafat rejects US proposal for gradual Israeli pullback from WB

GAZA, Jan 28: Yasser Arafat on Tuesday rejected a US proposal for a gradual Israeli pullback from the West Bank and his cabinet called on Palestinians to take to the streets for peaceful protests against Israel, reports Reuter.

The Palestinian President convened his self-rule authority on his return from a tour of European and Arab states where he was trying to garner support for the PLO's demands that Israel implement withdrawals outlined in peace deals since 1993.

Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met separately with Clinton in Washington last week to try to end the deadlock.

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—AP/UNB photo



National Front leader and Prime Minister IK Gujral with Muslim cap (right) receives Sonia Gandhi at a Ramadan party which is hosted by Gujral in New Delhi Tuesday. General elections will be held during the months of February and March. Sonia Gandhi has started the campaigning to boost the Congress Party image in the forthcoming elections.

—AP/UNB photo

'Iraq had enough biological weapons to blow away Tel Aviv'

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 28: Reports that Iraq had enough biological weapons to "blow away Tel Aviv" raised some eyebrows here Tuesday, with some Security Council members complaining the press was given information that diplomats were not, reports AP.

Russia's UN ambassador, Sergey Lavrov, also said he was surprised. Lavrov has in the past complained about council business being conducted by "media diplomacy."

Dejanjet didn't specify Tuesday's story and didn't say which new information the council members found surprising. But later in the day, Butler acknowledged the Times story had raised some questions.

In a lunch time speech to The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Butler implied there may have been some confusion about what was new and what was old information.

Butler heads the UN commission responsible for making sure Iraq has complied with UN orders issued at the end of the 1991 Gulf War to eliminate long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction.

That is the main condition for the council to lift crippling economic sanctions imposed in 1990 after President Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait.

On Tuesday, Security Council members Russia and France complained that the information attributed to Butler in the Times went beyond what they had been privy to in private consultations with him.

Several delegations expressed preoccupation about press articles which were not, in their opinion, consistent

"In talking to the New York Times, what I was doing was reasonably extrapolating from the information we have," he said, referring to reports his predecessor, Rolf Ekeus, had made.

"I was not saying that I can take you today to a place in Iraq and say 'There's a missile that will do that thing,' partly because if it exists, they won't let us go and see it. That's the point."

UN inspectors have "sufficient evidence with respect to the BW capabilities [biological weapons capabilities] to justify the concern that's in the New York Times today, but we can't verify that," he told the gathering of Jewish leaders.

AFP from Baghdad adds: Iraq hit back late Tuesday at a warning by the head of the UN arms inspector Richard Butler, that Baghdad had enough germ weapons to wipe out Tel Aviv.

A government spokesman quoted by the Iraqi news agency (INA) accused Butler of raising tension between Baghdad and the United Nations and of seeking to involve Israel in attacks on Iraq.

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