

International

BJP demands apology from Cong for partition of India

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: BJP yesterday demanded an unconditional apology from Congress for partition of the country and Congress chief campaigner Ghulam Nabi Azad's description of those who came to India after partition as "foreigners," calling it "callous and foolish," reports PTI.

Talking to newsmen here, party general secretary Venkaiah Naidu said BJP leaders like L K Advani had to leave their homes in Sindh due to partition as they "are Indians, will be Indians till the end."

Naidu and party vice-president Sikander Bakht said the remarks by Ghulam Nabi Azad only showed his "total ignorance of history" and that by making such remarks he was only adding insult to the injury suffered by those who fled the area which went to Pakistan after partition.

Blaming the Congress for the partition, Naidu said "All that Congress was interested in was power at any cost and Azad's statement is an insult to those who came to India immaterial of their caste or religion."

Naidu said the Congress

should not forget that unlike BJP leaders who were born in India, Congress Party's star campaigner had taken Indian citizenship only 14 to 15 years ago.

BJP expecting 300 seats in Lok Sabha

Meanwhile, BJP prime ministerial candidate Atal Bihari Vajpayee has claimed that BJP and its allies would win 300 seats in the coming Lok Sabha elections and form the new government.

"We are expecting 300 seats for BJP and its allies," he said adding "We will form a government on our own." He stated this on "Janata Ki Adalat" to be telecast on Sunday on Star Plus, according to a release by the programme coordinator.

Vajpayee laughed at the suggestion that BJP may have to look for more allies to form the government after the elections.

The BJP leader refuted reports that there were any ideological differences between him and party president L K Advani. "It is Advani who proposed my name as part candidate for prime ministership without

even consulting me," he said.

Reiterating that Kashi and Mathura were not on BJP's agenda, he said if BJP comes to power "Ayodhya will not be repeated," the release said.

He also denied that BJP would be run by RSS remote control. We are an independent organisation and we take our own decision.

Another report from Jaipur says, Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav yesterday accused the BJP for changing its colour and slogans every now and then.

Earlier the BJP attempted to woo voters on the Mandhir issue. Now it is after providing able "prime minister, stable government," though the party itself is unstable in every state, he said addressing a public meeting at Sapotra village in Sawai Madhopur parliamentary constituency.

Asking voters to support his Sawai Madhopur candidate Kallash Meena, who is the party chief in Rajasthan, Yadav said it would be again a coalition central government of United Front constituent with the SP as a major partner.

Sonia criticises India's coalition governments

NORTH LAKHIMPUR, Feb 7: Congress star campaigner Sonia Gandhi Friday criticised coalition governments which could never last a full term and unleashed a blistering attack on communal and divisive forces, reports PTI.

Addressing mammoth election rallies in the northeast states of Assam and Meghalaya, she accused the United Front government for the prevailing terrorism and chaos in the country and claimed the Congress alone could provide peace, unity, development and a strong government.

US jets collide over Gulf, one pilot killed

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: Two US Marine Corps fighter jets collided over the Gulf Friday. Officials said both pilots were recovered from the water, but one died, reports AP.

The jets were headed toward Iraq on a routine patrol of the zone over southern Iraq in which no Iraqi aircraft are permitted to fly, defence officials said.

The names of the pilots of the single-seat F-A-18 fighter jets were being withheld until their relatives were notified of the accident.

Suicide bomber kills 9 in Colombo

COLOMBO, Feb 7: A suicide bomber killed eight other people and wounded five more in downtown Colombo hours after Britain's Prince Charles left the Indian Ocean island nation, reports AP.

There was no indication that the attack was aimed at Prince Charles, who had condemned an earlier bombing blamed on rebels of the Tamil minority.

The nine dead included the suicide bomber and her three companions, two soldiers and three airmen.

A police official said Sri Lanka's air chief, Air Marshal Oliver Ranasinghe, passed through the area moments before the blast, but it was also unclear whether he was targeted.

William, Harry will finally leave Di's London home

LONDON, Feb 7: Prince William and Prince Harry will finally leave their mother Diana's London home this weekend and move across town to their father Charles, it was reported Saturday, says AFP.

The Daily Mail said a suite had been designed for the two brothers at Saint James' Palace near Buckingham Palace.

Balloonists smash 2nd world record

GENEVA, Feb 7: It wasn't exactly the prize they had aimed for, but the team of Europeans who unsuccessfully tried to orbit the globe in a balloon have notched up a second world record, reports AP.

The crew of the Breitling Orbiter 2 achieved the longest-ever non-stop unrefuelled flight Friday as their balloon floated towards Myanmar on the final leg of its journey from the Swiss Alps.



Britain's Prince Charles greets with children upon his arrival at Katmandu Airport on Friday. The Prince of Wales is on a three-day visit to Nepal. — AP/UNB photo

Clinton, Blair keep pressure on Iraq, laud US-UK ties

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: Sharing a radio microphone, President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair predicted Saturday that US-British ties would remain as unshakable in the next century as throughout the 20th. They also repeated a stern warning to Iraq's Saddam Hussein: Grant full access to UN weapons inspectors or face military retaliation, reports AP.

"I stand foursquare with you in our determination to bring Saddam into line with the agreement he made at the end of the Gulf War," Blair told Clinton. He said the Iraqi leader has stockpiled enough chemical and biological weapons "to wipe out the world's population."

It was a theme Clinton and Blair have been sounding

throughout the prime minister's visit. Clinton invited Blair to share his weekly radio address. The message was taped Friday evening before the leaders and their wives flew by helicopter to Camp David, the presidential retreat in the Catoctin Mountains of Maryland.

Clinton, speaking first, said the United States and Britain both had a responsibility at home to "prepare all our citizens to succeed in the information age."

"And abroad, we must not only take advantage of real new possibilities, but combat a new nexus of threats — none more dangerous than chemical and biological weapons and the terrorists, criminals and outlaw states that seek to acquire them."

Blair then said "no issue has been more pressing" in their meetings than the Iraqi crisis.

Iraq has resisted UN resolutions requiring it to open all potential sites to weapons inspectors. In recent weeks, the United States and Britain have been pouring new military hardware and personnel into the Gulf.

"We are pursuing all the diplomatic avenues open to us. But if they fail, and force is the only way to get him (Saddam) into line, then force must be used," Blair said.

"If that happens, Britain will be there, as we have been in the past," he added.

Clinton, wrapping up the broadcast, said, "On Iraq, as on so many issues, the United States and Britain speak with one voice."

BRIEFLY

French official killed in Corsica island:

A high French government official was killed by two gunmen on the violence-torn island of Corsica Friday evening, police said, AP reports from Ajaccio.

Authorities immediately set up a cordon sealing off the neighbourhood in the coastal city of Ajaccio where Claude Erignac, regional prefect of Corsica, was shot on his way to a classical music concert, police said.

Israeli soldier killed in S Lebanon:

Iranian-backed guerrillas attacked an Israeli position in southern Lebanon Saturday, killing one soldier and wounding three others, Lebanese security officials said, AP reports from Tyre, Lebanon.

Guerrillas fired about 50 mortar shells at the Israeli outpost near the village of Yater, 3 kilometres (1.8 miles) from the Lebanese-Israeli border, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Landslide claims 10 in France:

Torrential rains triggered a landslide on a small French Polynesian island that killed 10 people, including three children, Radio Australia reported said Saturday, AP reports from Sydney.

The wall of mud buried the 10 alive in three houses early Friday morning on the island of Tahaa, the radio quoted officials in Tahiti as saying.

China slams US HR report

BEIJING, Feb 7: Intensifying criticism of a US government assessment of China's human rights record, Chinese academics have labeled the report inaccurate and poisonous to relations, state-run media reported Saturday, reports AP.

The attacks on the State Department's annual evaluation appeared orchestrated. They were made by government-connected academics in a seminar specifically held to comment on the report.

Tan Songqiu of the China Society for Human Rights Studies, accused the state Department of fabricating and distorting cases to slander China, the Xinhua News Agency said.

He denied that Catholic Bishop Fan Zhongliang had been detained at home in Shanghai as reported. Instead, he said the bishop, who spent

more than 20 years in prison, was never arrested and is living with his niece. Fides, the news agency of the Vatican's missionary arm, said Friday Fan was "under strict control."

Although the State Department's January 30 evaluation was more positive than in recent years and noted China's greater tolerance for dissent, China has reacted angrily. Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao called the report a pretext to interfere in China's domestic affairs.

China has continued to detain and harass domestic critics it sees as challenging Communist Party rule. In the past three years, the government has launched relentless campaigns to close down underground churches and destroy separatist movements.

'US can't exclude any options to resolve crisis in Iraq'

TOKYO, Feb 7: US President Bill Clinton sent a letter to Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, saying he could not exclude any options to resolve the crisis in Iraq, a Foreign Ministry official said today, reports AFP.

Clinton expressed understanding for Tokyo's "diplomatic effort" to prompt Iraq to fully abide by the United Nations' call for weapons facility inspections, but said the United States "cannot exclude any options," the official said.

Clinton's letter arrived here Wednesday via the US Embassy in Tokyo, the official said.

Hashimoto sent his letter to Clinton in response, but the contents were not known, he said.

The official said Japanese Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi and his French counterpart, Hubert Vedrine, agreed in a telephone conversation on late

Friday to seek a diplomatic solution to the Iraq problem.

In a 15-minute conversation, Obuchi and Vedrine "agreed on the importance of working together towards a diplomatic solution to this problem," the official said.

Opinion among Gulf states hardening against Saddam

Meanwhile, opinion among Gulf states is hardening against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's refusal to allow unfettered UN weapons inspections, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said on Friday.

Cook, who visited Saudi Arabia and Kuwait on Thursday in an attempt to rally support for a possible US and British military strike against Iraq should diplomacy fail, said London and Washington were no longer isolated.

Clinton denies trying to influence secy's testimony

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: President Bill Clinton rejected on Friday any notion he tried to influence his secretary's testimony in the Monica Lewinsky investigation, reports AP.

Clinton complained about reports "leaking unlawfully" from the investigation of allegations that he had an affair with Lewinsky, a former White House intern. The president's attorney threatened to take the prosecutors to court, accusing them of leaking secret grand jury information.

"I never asked anybody to do anything but tell the truth," Clinton said as he was peppered with questions about the Lewinsky matter during a formal

news conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

"The leaking from your office has reached an intolerable point," attorney David Kendall said in a letter to Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr.

Kendall's stinging letter accused Starr's office of "selectively releasing both information and falsehoods in an attempt to pressure, manipulate and intimidate witnesses and possible witnesses."

A behind-the-scenes effort to broker a deal under which Lewinsky would tell her side of the story in exchange for immunity from prosecution evolved into a very public dispute between her lawyers and Starr.

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