

91 troops killed in Sudan

CAIRO, Feb 8: Forces of Sudan's opposition national democratic alliance claimed to have killed 91 government troops in a dawn attack Saturday on a military garrison near the Ethiopian border, reports AFP.

An alliance statement said the attack, after a siege of several hours, had wiped out the garrison of 150 men on the island of Doud, south of Galabat killing 91 and wounding others.

The alliance forces had also captured vehicles and weapons the statement said.

The NDA groups Sudan's northern and southern opposition groups and is trying to overthrow the Islamic regime of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir.

Congress wins assembly polls in Nagaland

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: India's beleaguered Congress Party has won assembly elections in the far-eastern state of Nagaland after the opposition announced a boycott, newspapers reported today, says AFP.

Congress candidates were declared elected unopposed in 43 out of the Nagaland assembly's 60 seats after the opposition stayed away from the polls scheduled for February 23. The Tribune and other dailies reported.

Balloting will now take place for the remaining 17 seats, where Congress nominees are pitted against independents without any party affiliation, they said.

The Congress retained power in Nagaland, a Christian-majority state bordering Myanmar that has been wracked by a bloody separatist insurgency for almost 50 years.

The opposition refused to put up candidates in the elections in response to appeals by local activist groups, which said the polls were "untimely" due to negotiations underway between New Delhi and Naga insurgents.

Chinese dissident leader held

BEIJING, Feb 8: A leader of the US-based Chinese dissident movement, Wang Bingzhang, has been seized by security police after sneaking into China under a false name, dissident sources said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

Wang, a 50-year-old US citizen, was arrested on Friday along with another activist Wang Tingjin in the central province of Anhui, the sources said.

The two were taken away by public security officers after leaving Wang Tingjin's home in the city of Bangbu to photocopy documents, the sources said.

Wang Tingjin's wife was detained later the same day, but was released on Saturday after being questioned overnight.

The head of the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China, Frank Lu Siang, said Wang Bingzhang had entered China from Portuguese-run Macau last month under an alias.

Wang Bingzhang, a participant of the 1979 democracy-wall movement in China, has been a staunch overseas critic of Beijing's communist regime for the past 15 years.

Sent by the Chinese government to study medicine in Canada in 1978, he later defected to the United States where he founded the magazine China Spring and the Alliance for Democracy, an organisation of dissidents in exile.

His detention mirrors the case of prominent Chinese human rights activist Harry Wu, who is a US citizen, who was arrested as he tried to sneak into China in 1995 to collect information on China's penal colonies.

Wu was expelled that same year, hours after being sentenced to 15 years in jail on spying charges.

Bosnian Serb govt protests arrest of murder suspect

PALE, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Feb 8: The Bosnian Serb government protested Saturday the arrest of a man suspected of killing a senior Muslim official during the war, suggesting it boded ill for attempts to reconcile the two ethnic groups, reports AP.

Two men were arrested Friday by Sarajevo police on suspicion of involvement in the January 8, 1993, killing of Hakkija Turajlic, a deputy prime minister, who was shot in a UN vehicle in full view of French UN soldiers escorting him. One of those arrested was subsequently released.

The new government of the Bosnian Serb substrate is considered relatively moderate and committed to honouring the Dayton peace accords endorsed by the United States and its allies. It has shown more willingness to compromise with the Muslim-Croat Federation that makes up the other half of Bosnia than the previous Bosnian Serb government of hard-liners.

Still, its comments on Saturday were harshly critical of the federation.

Bosnian Serb Prime Minister Milorad Dodik said the arrest worked against creating the trust needed to realize recently made plans to achieve the returns of at least 20,000 non-Muslims to Sarajevo this year, who fled during or immediately after the war.

Clinton, Blair repeat warning to Iraq US warplanes only await order to attack

ABOARD THE USS INDEPENDENCE, Feb 8: Warplanes loaded with bombs roared off the deck of this aircraft carrier toward Iraq on Saturday, getting American fliers acquainted with the terrain they might soon bombard, reports AP.

The USS Independence and its escort ships entered the Gulf on Thursday, strengthening US force for a threatened strike against Iraq in the standoff over UN weapons inspections.

"We are always trained up and ready to go," said Capt John C Brandes, acting commander of the Independence, although acknowledging, "the tensions are a little more heightened here."

The United States and Britain have threatened to attack Iraq if it does not give full access to UN inspectors monitoring the dismantling of its weapons of mass destruction.

The Independence was the third US aircraft carrier to arrive in the Gulf, joining the USS George Washington and the USS Nimitz. Britain has also sent a carrier, the HMS Invincible.

Defence Secretary William Cohen said Saturday that one of the huge warships will be allowed to return home in the next several days. He wouldn't say which one, but the Nimitz is approaching the end of a six-month tour of duty.

Pentagon officials have maintained for some time that a military force with two carriers is adequate to mount a sustained bombing campaign.

Asked if the standoff with Iraq was coming any closer to a military strike, Cohen said, "The window of opportunity is closing."

"There is an opportunity for diplomatic solution, and Saddam Hussein holds the key," Cohen said in Munich, Germany, after meeting with the Italian defence minister.

The Independence, which was earlier on duty off Japan, is now about 160 kilometres (100 miles) off southern Iraq.

"It will take us one or two days to actually get used to the area," he said, while about 500 people toiled on the ship's deck readying fighter jets, including F-18 Hornets and F-14 Tomcats.

Cohen said Friday that he was sending several dozen additional warplanes to the region, bringing the total to about 450 aircraft there. He also has dispatched the 2,200 Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit on board the USS Guam into the region.

In all, there are about 30,000 US servicemen and women in the Gulf area of operations.

Another reports from Washington adds: Speaking from the map room where predecessors plotted World War II, President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair redoubled warnings of military retaliation against Iraq. "We will again prevail," Clinton declared Saturday.

Separately, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl lined up behind any US-led military action should diplomatic efforts fail to force Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to comply with United Nations resolutions requiring him to open all potential weapons-production sites to international inspectors.

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A line of F-18 jet fighters aboard the USS Independence in the Persian Gulf Saturday, as the US military buildup continued in the face of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's refusal to allow United Nations weapons inspectors access to presidential sites. Two F-18s from the USS George Washington collided in mid-air Friday, killing one pilot. — AP/UNB photo

Ist verdicts on Rwandan genocide likely today

ARUSHA, Tanzania, Feb 8: The UN court trying Rwandan genocide suspects is expected to hand down its first verdicts after it resumes its hearings here Monday, nearly four years after the facts, reports AFP.

The tribunal was set up by the United Nations Security Council in November 1994, following the massacre of between 500,000 and 800,000 minority Tutsis and moderates of the Hutu majority by troops of the Hutu-dominated government and extremist militias.

Possessing limited resources, accused of slowness and disputed by the present Tutsi-led Rwandan government, the court has so far only managed to deal with four defendants.

The first verdicts, which may still not be delivered until June, will help to convince Rwandans of the court's good faith, deputy prosecutor Bernard Muna said in Kigali recently.

One trial expected to conclude is that of Jean-Paul Akayesu, a former mayor accused of the murder of thousands of Tutsis in his central Rwandan district of Taba between April and July 1994.

Canada's General Romeo Dallaire, who headed UN forces in Rwanda in 1994, will testify on February 23 as a defence witness in the case of Akayesu, who has been charged with both genocide and crimes against humanity.

On January 13, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan partially lifted diplomatic immunity bestowed on Dallaire — who had warned in 1994 of an impending ethnic catastrophe — to allow him to appear before the international tribunal.

Annun specified that the hearing should not be transformed into a trial of UN peacekeeping operations in Rwanda and the governments involved.

Apart from the Akayesu case, the court will resume the joint trial of the former district administrator of Kibuye in western Rwanda, Clement Kayeshima, and businessman Obed Ruzindana, both accused of massacres in the Kibuye region.

A third trial, of Georges Rutaganda, a leader of the Hutu Interahamwe Militia, begins again on March 4.

Some 17 others are still awaiting the start of their hearings in the maximum security courtroom, including former Rwandan prime minister Jean Kambanda.

Another suspect, Hassan Ngeze, former publisher of the extremist newspaper Kangura, tried to commit suicide on January 24 by swallowing chemicals and detergent.

Defendants before the court in northern Tanzania face maximum penalties of life imprisonment.

BRIEFLY

Kuwait to call up reserved army: The Kuwaiti Defence Ministry has decided to call up its army reserve, according to the official Kuwaiti news agency KUNA, AFP reports from Kuwait City.

The agency reported late Saturday that Defence Minister Sheikh Salem al-Sabah authorised Army Chief of Staff Ali al-Mumin to "call up the army reserves due to the crisis provoked by the Iraqi regime." The decision came as the Emirati's government said Saturday it would soon begin distributing gas masks to the population to use in the event of an attack by Iraq.

Mayor wins re-poll in New Orleans: New Orleans' incumbent mayor easily won re-election over two political unknowns, helped by a downturn in crime that overshadowed the tumult of his first term. AP says from New Orleans.

With 85 per cent of precincts reporting, Democrat Marc Morial had 74,008 votes, compared to 19,329 for attorney Kathleen Cresson, also a Democrat. An independent, art supply manager Paul D. Borrello, had 1,152. "I thank you for the greatest vote of confidence given to any mayor in the modern history of this great city," Morial said in his victory speech.

US, Bahrain hold defence talks: Bahrain's Defence Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Khalifa has met with the Commander in Chief of the US Central Command Anthony Zinni to discuss cooperation between the two countries. AFP says from Manama.

Bahrain's official news agency GNA reported that during the meeting Saturday the officials reviewed ways to boost cooperation and coordination between Bahrain and the United States as well as "the latest regional and international developments." Also attending were Bahrain defence force Chief of Staff Sheikh Abdullah ibn Sulman al-Khalifa and other high ranking defence officials and officers.

Khmer Rouge accuses govt: Cambodia's Khmer Rouge guerrilla group yesterday accused the government of sidelining King Norodom Sihanouk and said a July election would not be free or fair given the country's current political conditions. Reuters says from Phnom Penh.

In a broadcast on their clandestine radio, for years their propaganda mouthpiece, the guerrillas said powerful second Prime Minister Hun Sen and his supporters were to blame for the situation. "His Majesty King Sihanouk hasn't come back to the country because Hun Sen and his allies strongly attack and curse him," said the broadcast, monitored in Phnom Penh.

Cohen signs deployment order to Gulf

MUNICH, Germany, Feb 8: US Defence Secretary William Cohen, while in Munich, signed the formal deployment order sending nearly 50 US combat and support aircraft to the Gulf region, a Pentagon official said, reports AP.

The deployment includes six F-117 Stealth fighters; six B-52 bombers; one B-18 bomber; six F-16 anti-radar and electronic warfare jets; and roughly 30 other aircraft including tankers and other support aircraft, the official said.

Meantime, one of the three US aircraft carriers in the Gulf will be allowed to return home in the next several days, Cohen said Saturday. The USS Nimitz, which is approaching the end of a six-month tour of duty, is the expected choice.

Pentagon officials have maintained for some time that a military force with two carriers is adequate to mount a sustained bombing campaign.

Cohen also held a meeting Saturday with German Defence Minister Volker Ruehe. The German leader was questioned about his own nation's support for Washington, in light of recent criticism by some Congressmen that America's European allies have failed to support the US position on Iraq.

"It is not lukewarm," Ruehe said of Germany's support. "My understanding is what is needed is political support."

Ruehe pointed to earlier statements made to Cohen by Chancellor Helmut Kohl as signs of "clear support."

Maoists warn Sonia against campaign for Cong (I) BJP blasts Sonia's campaign as survey predicts Cong's victory

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: Hindu nationalists today lashed out at Sonia Gandhi, as a survey said her campaign blitzkrieg for upcoming elections will eat into nationalist votes and prop up her beleaguered Congress Party, reports AP.

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accused the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi of adopting hit-and-run tactics with her whirlwind campaign tour.

"The star Congress campaigner is running away from [a] debate and is continuing with her hit-and-run campaign," BJP General Secretary M Venkaiah Naidu said here.

"Her speeches and ghost-written, and ghost writers cannot address press conferences," he said. "We want a healthy debate on national issues between Sonia Gandhi and BJP."

BJP spokeswoman Sushma Swaraj, meanwhile, accused Sonia Gandhi of being ignorant of the history, culture and traditions of India.

She said in a statement late Saturday that the choice before the Indian voters in the February-March parliamentary election was between Sonia Gandhi and Hindu nationalist prime ministerial candidate Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

"The election will determine which leader will lead India in the 21st century," she said. "A leader ignorant of the history, culture and traditions of India or a leader born in this land and a son of the soil."

The renewed attack on Sonia Gandhi, who is drawing huge crowds at her election rallies across the country, came as a new pre-poll survey predicted that her hectic campaign had greatly boosted the Congress prospects.

Meanwhile, Maoist guerrillas have warned Sonia Gandhi against campaigning for her assassinated husband's Congress (I) Party in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, a newspaper reported today.

The outlawed People's War Group (PWG) had posted a letter to the police in Tamil Nadu's Krishnagiri district, threatening "action against her if she visited the neighbouring town of Salem, the Asian Age said.

The Age said the authorities had beefed up security in the town, particularly in and around a stadium where the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi "is to address a party rally" tomorrow.

No further details were available, the Tamil Nadu police could not be reached for comments.

Netanyahu went on to explain why he is refusing Palestinian and US demands for Israel to hand over a significant part of the West Bank ahead of negotiations on a final peace arrangement.

"It would be very helpful if the Palestinian Authorities were to understand that we cannot carry out the withdrawal which it expects of us," he is quoted as saying.

"We prefer speeding up negotiations and getting to discussions about the final stage. They of course want to get to this stage after having received as much of the West Bank as possible," he said.

Currently the Palestinians have full or partial control over only 27 per cent of the territory, broken up into enclaves separated by Israeli-controlled land.

Troops destroy 2 Palestinian structures in Gaza

KHAN YUNIS, Gaza Strip, Feb 8: The Israeli army has destroyed two structures being built by Palestinians near a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip, according to a military spokesman, reports AFP.

The structures that had not undergone Israeli permits located just outside the Palestinian city of Khan Yunis were too close to a military road on the adjacent settlement, the spokesman said late Saturday.

Liaison officials with the Palestinian police issued a complaint to the Israeli army protesting that they were not contacted prior to the destruction of the buildings located in an area where the forces jointly oversee security. Palestinian police officials said.

But the spokesman said the army had repeatedly asked the Palestinians to destroy the structures, one of which belongs to a high ranking officer in the Palestinian police force.

Imelda files candidacy for presidency

MANILA, Feb 8: In an emotional prayer after filing for candidacy in the May presidential elections, former first lady Imelda Marcos walked on her knees to the altar of a nearby cathedral Sunday and prostrated herself there, reports AP.

Mrs. Marcos lay sprawled before the altar for several minutes and was crying silently while she clutched an ivory rosary and was surrounded by several nuns.

She was accompanied by about 500 supporters, chanting "Imelda, Imelda" as she entered the Manila Cathedral after filing her candidacy at the Elections Commission.

Mrs. Marcos, widow of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, filed her candidacy a week after the Supreme Court upheld her 1993 corruption convictions and 12-year prison sentence. She can appeal the ruling one more time, and is free on bond in the meantime.

Mrs. Marcos, a member of Congress since 1995, said she decided to run for president to correct economic programme she said resulted in a currency plunge that was part of the Asia-wide economic slump.

"My decision was not inspired by political reasons," Mrs. Marcos said in a statement. "My decision was triggered by the economic crisis we now experience because of wrong economic policies and programme implemented."

In an earlier statement, said she wants to be president "to ensure that the Marcos wealth through the Marcos Foundation will go directly to the Filipino people, and to bring back dignity, decency and leadership to the position."

Heavy fighting on in northern Lanka Tigers mount ferocious attack on troops

COLOMBO, Feb 8: Heavy fighting raged in northern Sri Lanka as Tamil Tiger guerrillas mounted ferocious counter attacks against advancing government troops, the rebels said today, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they lost 14 men on Friday and claimed inflicting "large military losses" on security forces in the fighting at Kilinochchi.

In a statement from its London office, the LTTE said fighting erupted when troops tried to retake an area lost to the rebels last week.

There had been conflicting claims about the fighting in Kilinochchi, the guerrillas' last bastion captured by security forces in September 1996.

The Defence Ministry has said that troops were consolidating their hold on the northern town where, according to claims by both sides, more than 650 combatants have been killed in the latest fighting.

Junior Defence Minister Anurudha Ratwatte told parliament Friday that more than 350 LTTE rebels were killed when the army repulsed an attack on Kilinochchi the previous Sunday.

The minister said the military lost 55 men, including three officers. He accused the LTTE of refusing to accept the bodies of 218 tiger fighters killed by the security forces.

The Defence Ministry spokesman said they had released video footage on Thursday showing the army was in control of Kilinochchi.

"The fighting there is now over and we are very much in control," the ministry spokesman said.

The LTTE had earlier said it lost 150 fighters and killed more than 300 government soldiers in two attacks on Sunday.

Today's clashes were part of the continuing "sure victory" offensive launched by security forces last May in a bid to open 75-kilometre (46-mile) stretch of road through rebel-held territory.

Dodi's secret love child?

LONDON, Feb 8: Dodi al-Fayed had a secret love child as he romanced Diana, Princess of Wales, a British newspaper claimed today, quoting the child's mother, reports AFP.

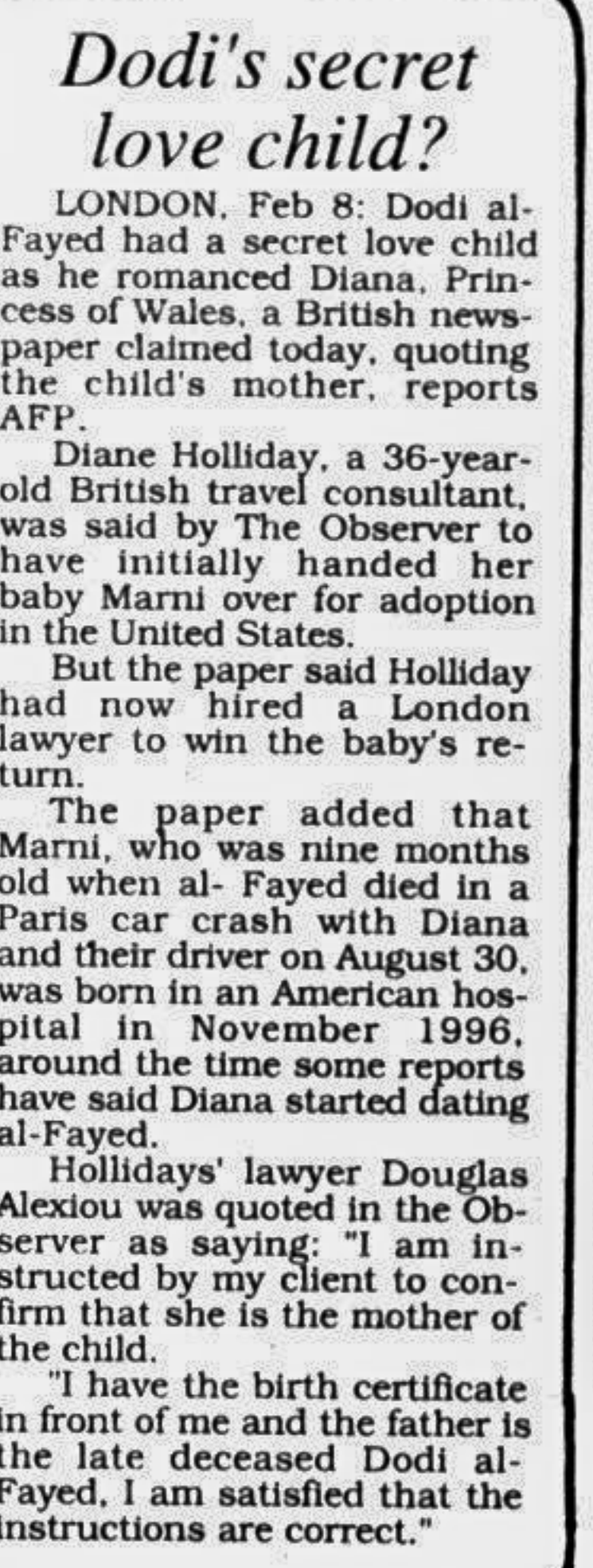
Diane Holliday, a 36-year-old British travel consultant, was said by The Observer to have initially handed her baby Marni over for adoption in the United States.

But the paper said Holliday had now hired a London lawyer to win the baby's return.

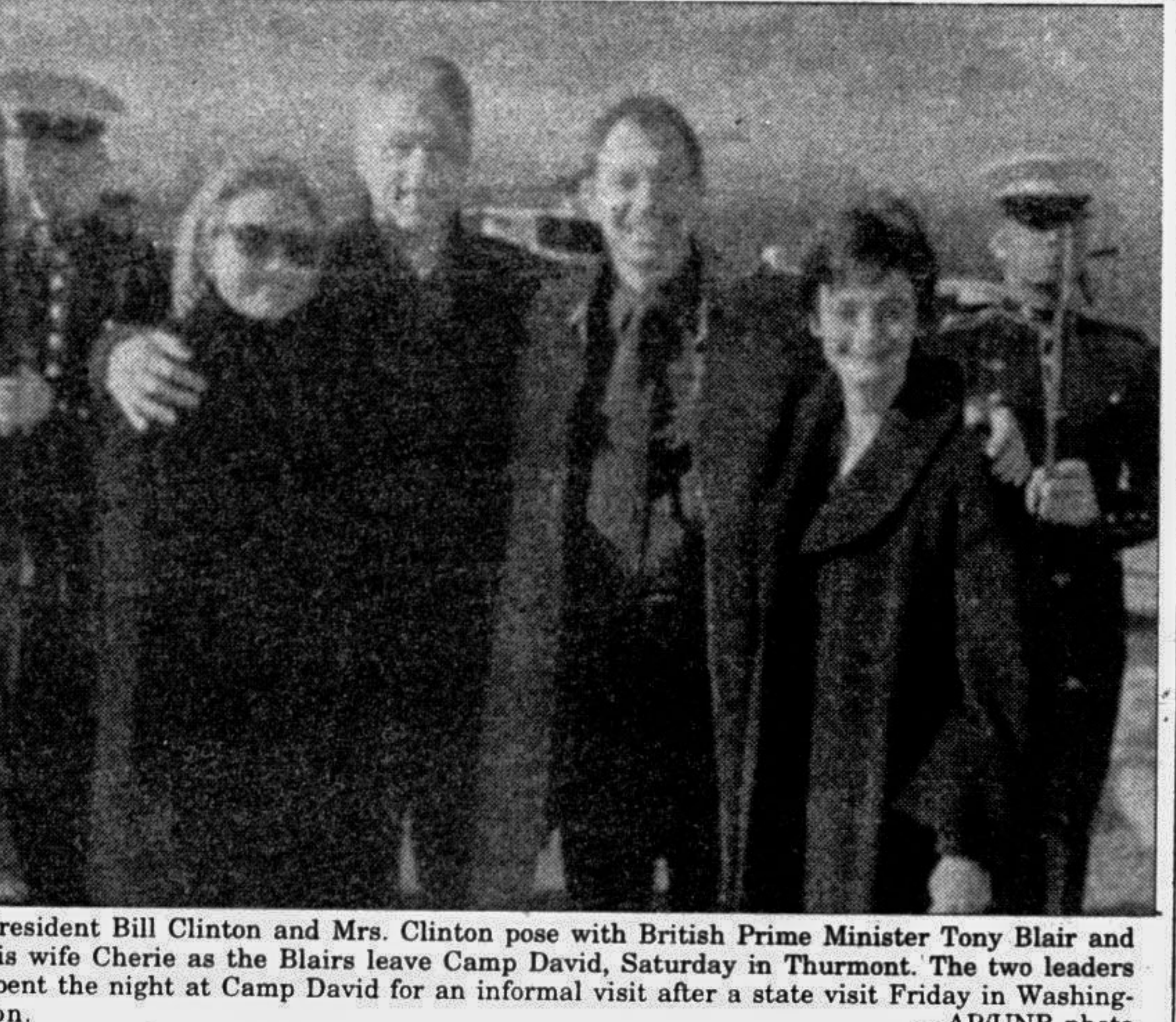
The paper added that Marni, who was nine months old when al-Fayed died in a Paris car crash with Diana and their driver on August 30, was born in an American hospital in November 1996, around the time some reports have said Diana started dating al-Fayed.

Holliday's lawyer Douglas Alexiou was quoted in the Observer as saying: "I am instructed by my client to confirm that she is the mother of the child."

"I have the birth certificate in front of me and the father is the late deceased Dodi al-Fayed. I am satisfied that the instructions are correct."



President Bill Clinton and Mrs. Clinton pose with British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his wife Cherie as the Blairs leave Camp David, Saturday in Thurmont. The two leaders spent the night at Camp David for an informal visit after a state visit Friday in Washington. — AP/UNB photo



President Bill Clinton and Mrs. Clinton pose with British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his wife Cherie as the Blairs leave Camp David, Saturday in Thurmont. The two leaders spent the night at Camp David for an informal visit after a state visit Friday in Washington. — AP/UNB photo

US sends scary message to 8 UNSC leaders about Iraqi weapons

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 8: Washington's top man at the United Nations delivered a frightened message to leaders of eight Security Council nations: Saddam Hussein has stockpiled horrific chemical and biological weapons and is capable of making more and firing them farther, reports AP.

While the United States has been preparing to strike Iraq — an attack sources said would target stockpiles and factories — Bill Richardson traveled to four continents trying to convince the world that the danger is real and that military might may be the only solution.

"It takes a lot of explaining," Richardson said after an eight-day trip that ended Friday. He was accompanied by political, military and intelligence specialists armed with analyses, photographs and arguments.

"Many were surprised by the dramatic briefings on poison gas," Richardson said. "Many seemed unaware of Saddam's weapons programme. Having officials and experts on weapons and military issues was impressive."

All the leaders who heard Richardson's presentation agreed that the military option must be kept on the table. The ambassador made visits to Sweden, Slovenia, Portugal, Kenya, Gabon, Gambia, Brazil and Costa Rica.

UN inspectors and US intelligence experts agree that Iraq maintains an arsenal of chemical and biological agents and munitions and has some ballistic missiles. They say Iraq has hidden it. Baghdad has prevented UN personnel from carrying out unimpeded inspections, which Iraq was required to accept at the end of the 1991 Gulf War.

Saddam has scores of presidential palaces, mostly in central and north-central Iraq, where inspectors suspect weapons are hidden. Baghdad has barred more than 700 buildings, the palace at Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, is in 30-square-mile (78 square-kilometre) compound.

In the military part of last

week's presentations to eight member nations of the UN Security Council, experts were not specific about plans because US President Bill Clinton has not authorised military strikes.

If diplomacy fails and the United States decides to unleash its military might, administration officials speaking on condition of anonymity said strikes will be aimed at the stockpiles and at curtailing production capacity. They said strikes also would be used to smash the Republican Guard, Iraq's elite fighting force, and the Special Security Organisation, which is responsible for Saddam's personal security.

"We want to make sure it is a specific response to Saddam's denial of access to specific sites," one of the sources said.

The effort to hide weapons programs and stockpiles is believed to be run by Saddam's

youngest son, Qusai, under the Republican Guard and the Special Security Organisation.

American intelligence assessments differ in some ways from the UN Special Commission that oversees inspections, which is led by Australian Richard Butler. They agree, however, on the existence of an arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, missiles and warheads.

The Iraqis said they produced only a few drops of the deadly VX nerve gas, for example, but US Defence Secretary William Cohen said in December that 3.9 tons has been covered and perhaps 200 tons more exists. The United Nations found 2,100 gallons (8,000 liters) of anthrax material, Cohen said then, adding that Iraq has been working on missiles with a range of 3,000 miles

(4,800 kilometres).

Iraq has denied it is hiding anything from the UN inspectors, but, according to one administration official, the Iraqis have changed their "full, final and complete" declaration six times.

In most cases, it is not clear how much nerve gas or deadly toxin Saddam may have, and experts' figures are based on capacity and probability.

The Iraqis are obsessive record-keepers. They keep mountains of detailed documents and have given UN inspectors hundreds of thousands of pages. So, clear gaps in the records raise suspicions.

"The crisis now is not just what the United Nations thinks is out there," one of the administration officials said. "There is a potential for even larger production."

Three others were seriously injured in the deafening explosion, which destroyed the mill 15 kilometres (9.3 miles) from the city of Thanjavur, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

The police identified the dead and injured as supporters of a Muslim fundamentalist group which has called for a boycott of India's parliamentary elections beginning on February 16.

"The bombs were meant to be used to disrupt the elections," PTI quoted an officer as saying.

The police seized two pistols and bomb-making material from the site.

Tamil Nadu, on the southern tip of India, is divided from Sri Lanka by a narrow strip of sea.

Blast leaves 4 dead in India