



Deal with Annan a gain for Iraq: Tareq Aziz

BAGHDAD, Feb 25: Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz said on Tuesday the deal he signed with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on arms inspections was a gain for Iraq that could lead to the lifting of sanctions, reports Reuters.

"I believe that we have achieved excellent political gains for the present and the future and practical gains related to the lifting of sanctions," Aziz said on Iraqi television.

Six-year-old Rokaya Khazer, malnourished and suffering from severe skin rashes, cries and tugs her mother's dress for attention during a demonstration outside the UNDP headquarters in Baghdad Tuesday. Mainly women and children rallied to protest against food and medicine shortages as a result of the UN sanctions.

— AP/UNB photo

This was because inspections of the eight "presidential sites" at the core of the recent crisis would prove Iraq had no prohibited weapons hidden there.

Asked why Iraq had not

made access to the sites conditional on a time limit for ending sanctions, he said: We discussed this issue with the UN Secretary-General and he was unable to give us a guarantee on a time limit for an end to sanctions, not because he was unwilling, but because he was worried that this would enable the Americans and British to attack Iraq.

The UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) set up after the 1991 Gulf War must certify that Iraq has dismantled its weapons of mass destruction before sanctions can be lifted.

Aziz reiterated Iraq's complaints about the past behaviour and composition of UNSCOM inspection teams, accusing UNSCOM chief Richard Butler of "lies and exaggeration."

"An understanding was reached that there would be a more balanced selection of UNSCOM experts who would be from many countries, including some friendly to Iraq," he said. Though he said this was not spelled out in the text of the accord.

International Annan briefs Security Council about accord with Baghdad

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 25: Despite US concerns about the role of a new UN team in Baghdad, the UN chief is turning his attention to selecting diplomats to accompany inspectors to Iraq's most sensitive possible weapons sites, reports AP.

After a briefing, Annan said he had a "general sense of approval from the membership" of the 15-member council, though there were details that needed to be worked out.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan hasn't said who will serve on the diplomatic team or who will lead it — two key questions Washington wants answered before it gives its full backing to Annan's accord with Saddam Hussein. His selection could bring Iraq diplomats friendlier to its interests.

Russia's UN ambassador, Sergey Lavrov, said he was certain that Annan would balance the nationalities of the senior diplomats, since Iraq has complained that UN inspection teams were weighted with Britons and Americans.

"This has to be a representa-

tion team," Lavrov said Tuesday after Annan gave the Security Council an initial briefing on the accord.

The Security Council was to meet again Wednesday. For the time being, the agreement has averted a threatened US military strike to force Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions demanding that it destroy its weapons of mass destruction.

The Security Council will only lift UN sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait once UN inspectors have certified Iraqi compliance with the resolutions.

Annan didn't say when he would choose the diplomatic team or when the disputed inspections would take place, saying only that the accord would be tested "as quickly as possible." He said his advisers were still working out details.

In urging Annan to act quickly, Lavrov said he wouldn't expect a team leader to be from a permanent council member state — Russia, Amer-

ica, Britain, France or China. "I think a neutral country would be much more appropriate."

Annan returned triumphantly to the United Nations on Tuesday predicting unanimous approval for the accord that he says meets the demands of Security Council resolutions. He said the accord would allow UN inspectors to access to all sites suspected of harbouring weapons of mass destruction.

The accord signed Monday calls for Annan to appoint the diplomatic team to accompany UN inspectors on visits to eight presidential sites that Baghdad had declared off-limits, touching off the crisis.

Security Council members gave a generally favourable view Tuesday, though Britain and the United States cautioned that they still needed explanations since the accord left open what the diplomatic team will do and how it will affect the UN Special Commission, or UNSCOM, which is already charged with investigating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capabilities.

"We need clarifications on a number of issues, namely the importance of the UN inspection team and UNSCOM having the key role in any agreement," said America's UN ambassador, Bill Richardson.

In Washington, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright declared that UN inspectors and not diplomats would have the ultimate say in where and when inspections are made.

Richardson also warned that Iraq could use some of the ambiguities in the accord to its advantage. "Our concern is Saddam Hussein, and whether he will find loopholes in some of the ambiguities of the language."

Britain's UN ambassador, John Weston, who also said he was concerned that the "professional integrity of the inspection process remain intact" said he wanted to begin drafting a resolution to reinforce the agreement.

Such a resolution should "enable it to be put into real practice," he said.

Seizure of Turkish plane ends with surrender of hijacker

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, Feb 25: The seizure of a Turkish Airlines plane ended early today when the lone hijacker surrendered, state-run Anatolian news agency said, reports Reuters.

The hijacker ended the incident by surrendering. Anatolian said. The hijacker, who claimed to have a bomb hidden in a teddy bear, had demanded to be flown to Iran.

Officials and witnesses, including passengers, said the incident began when the man seized control late on Tuesday of a domestic Turkish Airlines flight, from Adana to the capital Ankara, and diverted it to southeastern Turkey.

The hijacker, a man in his 30s, told crew he had hidden a bomb inside a teddy bear he was carrying.

Another Serb war crimes suspect awaits handover to The Hague

BOSANSKI SAMAC, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Feb 25: A Bosnian Serb war crimes suspect declared his innocence Tuesday as he left to surrender to a UN tribunal on charges of helping terrorise non-Serbs into fleeing northeastern Bosnia, reports AP.

"I am not guilty," Simo Zaric told The Associated Press in his lawyer's office in Bosanski Samac shortly before departing for The Hague, Netherlands, for trial.

About 1,000 well-wishers gathered in the town's main square to say good-bye to Zaric as he drove off accompanied by his son and lawyer, escorted by two Serb police cars. Many were crying and attempting to shake Zaric's hand or kiss him.

"Good luck, truth to freedom" and "See you later this year" read two of many banners. Said another: "After Hague — Nobel Peace Prize."

Six Serbs from the northeastern town are charged with deporting non-Serbs in 1992. Zaric was the head of the town's police.

The indictment for the "Samac Six" alleges they organised a campaign of terror to drive non-Serbs out of the northeastern town, including setting up of camps where they tortured, raped and killed inmates.

BRIEFLY

Kabila returns to Congo: President Laurent Kabila returned to the Democratic Republic of the Congo on Tuesday, saying he had cut short an intended 10-day rest in Switzerland because of rumours in the media that he was ill, Reuters reports from Kinshasa.

Interviewed on state radio on his arrival at Kinshasa airport, Kabila said laughing: "You see I am not ill." I wanted to rest for 10 days. It wasn't possible because of the slander in the international press. I rested a bit for four days and then saw the lies were serious. I had to return to tackle my daily problems," he told state radio.

6 Palestinians held in West Bank: Israeli soldiers arrested six Palestinians on Wednesday in an early morning sweep of three West Bank villages, after a spate of stone-throwing at troops and Jewish settlers, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The Palestinians were arrested in the village of Kalandia and Jalazoun not of the autonomous city of Ramallah and in the village of El Aroub north of Hebron, the army said. The arrests came after increased stone-throwing incidents in those areas, the army said, adding that Israel was considering taking additional steps to stop the violence.

Malaria claims 31 in Philippines: An outbreak of malaria has killed 31 people in the southern Philippines and officials yesterday blamed bandits for frightening off health teams sent to kill mosquitoes in Menote villages, Reuters reports from Zamboanga, Philippines.

The Department of Health has sent medical teams to Siasi island, 120 kms (75 miles) southwest of Zamboanga city, to contain the outbreak, which started in January, Regional Health Director Lourdes Labiano said. Twenty-four villagers on the small island died last month and another seven on Sunday. Another 200 have the disease, she said.

Quake shakes central NZ: An early-morning earthquake of magnitude 5.4 shook central New Zealand Wednesday, a spokeswoman for the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences said, AP reports from Wellington.

The quake, centred 12 miles (20 kilometres) southeast of the farming community of Seddon on the South Island, 50 miles (80 kilometres) across Cook Strait from Wellington, was felt throughout the region when it struck at 6.18 am. It occurred 12 miles (20 kilometres) below the earth's surface, the spokeswoman said. No other details were available.

IRA activist jailed for 20 years: An IRA activist has been jailed for 20 years after he was convicted of helping to organise three mortar attacks on London's Heathrow Airport, AP reports from London.

Michael Gallagher, 55, was a key "fixer" in the Irish Republican Army's bombing of the airport in March 1994, which caused little damage but achieved widespread publicity for the organisation's campaign against British rule in Northern Ireland.

Hashimoto's popularity low: Public support for Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's Cabinet remained low last month, while more than half of eligible voters said they don't support any particular political party, according to a newspaper poll published Wednesday, AP reports from Tokyo.



The British all girl pop group The Spice Girls perform at The Point Theatre in Dublin, Ireland, Tuesday, at the start of their World Tour. The five girls reportedly aim to prove to the world that they can perform live during this world tour, kicking off with a 6,000 capacity crowd in Dublin.

Saddam likes weapons more than he hates sanctions!

WASHINGTON, Feb 25: Seven years ago, it looked like an offer Iraqi President Saddam Hussein couldn't refuse: Cooperate with UN weapons inspectors, and a forgiving world would lift economic sanctions, enabling him to reap billions each year from renewed oil sales, reports AP.

Saddam was aware that the alternative almost certainly was international opprobrium, the impoverishment of his people — and possible air strikes against Iraq for his refusal to abide by his promises to the United Nations.

As is well known, Saddam chose not to disarm, and long years of sanctions have left Iraq's economy and its health care system in ruins. The UN Children's Fund says one-third

of Iraqi children younger than 5, nearly 1 million youngsters, are chronically malnourished.

On the plus side, Iraq's decision this week to allow the return of UN weapons inspectors has spared the country the prolonged air strikes that President Bill Clinton had been threatening for weeks.

But the agreement reached in Baghdad by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan offered little hope for economic relief. It noted only that the lifting of sanctions "is obviously of paramount importance" to the Iraqi people and the Iraqi government.

According to analysts, Saddam had withheld full cooperation with UN weapons inspectors because to do otherwise was tantamount to capitulation —

too steep a price to pay despite the financial rewards he would have received in return for good behaviour. He was determined to keep at least some forbidden weapons at all costs.

All this has left Richard Butler, the chief UN weapons inspector, at a loss.

"Why does anyone want these horrible weapons?" he once asked in an interview. "What were they to be used on, or for what purpose? ... Why would you subject your whole people to an awful process of sanctions just to have stuff like this? Why would you forgo 100 billion dollars worth of oil revenue — for this?"

Part of the answer can be found in Saddam's past statements. He has said that in the post-Soviet era, a new force is

needed to contain the United States and Israel, and he sees Iraq as filling that role.

Without such a counterweight, he believes these two rivals of Iraq would have unprecedented freedom to "depart from the restrictions that govern the rest of the world," and engage in "undisciplined and irresponsible behaviour."

Saddam also believes that Iraq has a geographical advantage that should not be squandered away. The country that controls the Gulf and its oil, he has said, "will maintain its superiority as a superpower, without an equal." Another strong motivation for keeping weapons is that Iraq does not want to be at the mercy of powerful neighbors, especially Iran.

In addition, a disarmed Iraq is anathema to Saddam because it would become virtually irrelevant internationally, no longer a force to be reckoned with says Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic International Studies.

"He is a man of incredible ambition who murdered his way to power," Cordesman says. He says a powerful military has been an obsession of Saddam's. And when UN sanctions deprived him of the means of obtaining conventional weapons through trade, he focused on non-conventional weapons — nuclear, biological and chemical.

To Iraq watcher Phebe Marr, Saddam's actions betray a man who is intent on not alienating

ROK president sworn in, promises political reforms

SEOUL, Feb 25: Former dissident Kim Dae-jung was sworn in as South Korea's president Wednesday, pledging democratic and economic reforms and a new relationship with communist North Korea, reports AP.

The inauguration marked the first transfer of power to an opposition party in the turbulent 50 years of South Korea's history as an independent nation.

"Today is a proud day when a democratic transition of power is taking place on this soil for the first time," Kim said before some 45,000 invited guests and common folk at a plaza in front of the National Assembly building.

Since its founding in 1948, South Korea has been governed by the same conservative political groups. And through most of those years, Kim, 74, was persecuted as a dangerous dissident, an apostle of democracy in a land of military dictators.

Among the invited guests were Kim's three immediate predecessors — Kim Young-sam, Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-

woo. Chun and Roh, ex-army generals, seized power in a 1979 coup, arrested the new president on sedition charges and condemned him to death.

Kim was spared after intervention by the United States, but spent 15 years in prison, exile and house arrest and survived what he believes were three assassination attempts by the military leaders who watched as he took the oath of office Wednesday.

In his acceptance speech, Kim renewed his promise that his "government of the people" will not seek political revenge and will push democracy and a free market economy hand in hand.

"Democracy and the market economy are two sides of a coin or two wheels of a cart. If they were separated, we could never succeed," he said.

"Some nations that have rejected democracy and accepted only a market economy have ended up suffering disastrous setbacks, as illustrated by Nazi Germany and militarist Japan," he said.

Off the Record

Curfew on women

JERUSALEM: Israel's married women must be home by midnight a panel of rabbis has declared, reports AP.

The ruling was handed down by the rabbinical court, in Haifa, as it approved a divorce suit from a husband who said his wife was in the habit of frequenting singles' bars and staying out until the morning.

"But he is sleeping with other women," the wife protested. This too was "insufferable," the rabbis conceded, but they insisted it is the wife who must be home by midnight, the newspaper Yediot Ahronot reported Tuesday.

In Israel, there is no civil marriage or divorce and Jews seeking a divorce have to apply to a rabbinical court even if they are not religious.

'Titanic' not fit for tranquil society!

SINGAPORE: Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, economies are melting down, forest fires in Indonesia threaten the region, and planes crash too often for comfort, reports AP.

But in small and affluent Singapore, the latest frenzy is over censors' deletion of a nude scene from the US-made, global mega-hit 'Titanic'.

An ongoing public debate in the leading Straits Times daily has been raging around the following issue: does the deletion of 14 seconds of film showing Kate Winslet's bar breasts spoil the experience of watching the movie?

Well known for its strict laws on littering, smoking and jaywalking, this rich city-state of 3 million also takes a serious attitude on the influence of the art and entertainment industry.

All movies coming into Singapore are screened and licensed by the Board of Film Censors (BFC), whether they are intended for public distribution or imported for individual use. In teams of two, censors decide whether to approve, cut, or altogether ban a movie.

Exempted are educational, training, sport and children's films, as well as US and British movies made prior to 1966. Known for their respect of law, Singaporeans usually don't make much fuss about daily interventions by the government into what they may see, read and hear.

But the BFC's intervention in 'Titanic' has stirred a rare commotion in this otherwise tranquil society.

Moviefogues did not question the need for the existence of censorship. Instead, they defended the nude scene as "necessary" for the portrayal of a young woman who betrays her class for freedom and love.

"Her nude scene was crucial and conveyed a real sense of the character being able for the first time to let go, do what she wanted and not what was expected of her," said local entertainer Hamish Brown, in a letter that sparked the debate.



'Bette Midler, a blue and white Persian cat with a coupe de lion haircut, is combed during a media preview for the 14th International Cat Show Tuesday, in New York. The show will be held on Saturday, and Sunday at Madison Square Garden.

— AP/UNB photo