

Reporter apologises for his article

Clinton's enemies behind Paula Jones story: Brock

WASHINGTON, Mar 10: A reporter whose bombshell 1993 magazine article set the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit in motion...

David Brock, a freelance journalist whose story appeared in the conservative magazine American Spectator...

In his sensational 1993 story, Brock said state troopers who were Clinton's bodyguards when he was Arkansas governor regularly procured women for extramarital affairs with him.

Brock identified one woman who allegedly had an encounter with Clinton only as "Paula," starting a chain of events that led Paula Jones to file a lawsuit against the president...

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Digging by Jones' lawyers uncovered alleged ties between Clinton and a former White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, and triggered the White House sex scandal that now threatens to undermine Clinton politically.

"My ransacking of your personal life had given your political adversaries — who were now funding and fighting the Jones case — an opportunity to use the legal process to finish the job that I started," Brock wrote.

This was a reference to the Grand Jury investigation of allegations — vehemently denied by the president — that Clinton tried to cover up an illicit affair with Lewinsky by urging her to lie under oath.

Talks fail with PA

'Israel may launch offensive against Lebanon'

BEIRUT, Lebanon, Mar 10: A senior Lebanese guerrilla leader warned Monday that Israel might launch a major offensive against Lebanon to try to force it to accept a proposal for an Israeli troop withdrawal, reports AP.

Israel, whose army has suffered increasing casualties in southern Lebanon, has launched a diplomatic campaign to promote a plan under which it would withdraw its forces from the area in exchange for Lebanese guarantees that northern Israel would be safe from guerrilla attack.

"The Israeli maneuver is doomed to failure," said Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah or Party of God.

Hezbollah is the main force battling Israeli troops and Israeli-backed militiamen in southern Lebanon. Nasrallah spoke in an interview with The Associated Press and APTV that was conducted at a secret location in a Hezbollah stronghold in south Beirut.

terms of Israel's proposed troop withdrawal. Like Syria, the effective power broker in Lebanon, the Lebanese government insists that Israel must withdraw unconditionally.

Nasrallah said that Israel might use Lebanon's rejection as a pretext for a specific military action to impose a settlement.

Israel has controlled parts of southern Lebanon on its own or through proxy Lebanese militias since a 1978 invasion. It invaded again in 1982, going as far north as the capital Beirut, and pulled back into the area it now occupies in 1985.

Israel has lost about 900 troops during its 20 years of involvement in Lebanon. At least 400 of its allied militiamen have been killed, along with more than 2,100 Palestinian and Lebanese guerrillas. Deaths of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians run into the thousands — by Lebanese estimate over 21,000 have been killed.

Nasrallah predicted it would take Hezbollah guerrillas up to two years to evict the Israeli troops and their allied militia from the border zone.

Russia threatens to freeze Y'slav assets

Major world powers impose sanctions on Belgrade

LONDON, Mar 10: Major world powers imposed sanctions on Belgrade on Monday over its handling of the Kosovo crisis and demanded Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic end a bloody crackdown on ethnic Albanians in the region, reports Reuters.

But Russia — a traditional ally of the Serbs — dissented from a decision by five western powers to both impose the sanctions and threaten to freeze Yugoslav and Serbian government assets on March 25 unless Milosevic reversed course.

"The violent repression of non-violent, expression of political views is completely indefensible," ministers from the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy said in a joint statement. "The situation in Kosovo cannot be resolved by heavy-handed policing activity, and the international community will not tolerate the use of the police in

such a repressive way as we have seen over the past week with so many deaths," British Foreign Minister Robin Cook told a news conference.

The six-nation contact group, created to promote peace in Bosnia, urged the international criminal tribunal for former Yugoslavia in The Hague to consider prosecuting people accused of war crimes in the Kosovo crackdown, in which at least 80 people have been killed in the last 10 days.

The ministers called for former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez to mediate in Kosovo on behalf of the 54-nation organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

They also demanded that Belgrade allow the UN commissioner for human rights to investigate the situation in the southern Serbian province.

The five western powers agreed on an immediate ban on

government-financed export credit support for trade, investment and privatisation in Serbia, Cook noted that Milosevic was using the proceeds of privatisation to pay his security forces.

After a telephone call with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in Moscow, Cook said all six countries had agreed the UN Security Council should consider a comprehensive arms embargo, would ban sales of equipment that could be used for repression and deny visas for senior Yugoslav and Serbian officials involved in the crackdown.

But Russia did not agree to the two key financial sanctions, saying its more restrained approach on solving the Kosovo crisis stood more chance of success because Moscow had more experience of ethnic and separatist conflicts than the West.

"We use a more balanced and

impartial approach which looks less spectacular at first glance but which turns out to be more productive. I think our partners will eventually see and understand who is right and who better understands the situation," said Deputy Foreign Minister Nikolai Alansayevsky.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said she was satisfied with the agreement despite Russia's reservations, adding "We need to remember the only kind of pressure president Milosevic understands is the kind that imposes a real price on his unacceptable behaviour."

Albright said it was vital to avoid a repetition of the international community's hesitant response to the start of the Yugoslav wars in 1991.

Climate experts say

Unstable global environment key reason for health problem

ATLANTA, Mar 10: The spread of malaria and dengue fever in certain corners of the globe should not be so lightly linked with global warming and climate change, disease experts said, reports AP.

"I think such an oversimplified explanation is dangerous," said Dr Paul Reiter, chief of entomology for the dengue branch of the US centres for Disease Control and Prevention. "When we talk about emerging diseases, we are missing the boat if we just mention climate."

Yet climate experts maintain there are significant global trends that can't be overlooked. For example, malaria is occurring high in the mountains of central Africa and the highlands of Papua New Guinea. These are the same areas where glaciers are retreating and plants are migrating upward.

"I am concerned because our environment is becoming more unstable," said Dr Paul Epstein, associate director of the Centre for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School. "I'm suggesting that some of these disease issues are

symptoms of that instability." The issue was among the most contentious Monday at the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases.

Reiter said the history of diseases such as malaria make him leery about chalking up the problem to climate change or warming. In the early 1920s, 16.5 million people suffered malaria in regions reaching the Arctic Circle, Reiter said.

Instead of sending all funds into exploring the link between climate and health, he said he would rather see more money invested in public health and vaccine programmes in disease areas.

"The real danger has been the breakdown of public health programmes, not five degrees in temperature," Reiter said.

But Epstein said climate and development need to be looked into as well. "We are both concerned about health," he said. "I'm saying that I am concerned about climate and health as well. It's going to take a whole new mindset to talk about how to develop without pollution."

23 killed as bus plunges into river in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, March 10: At least 23 people were killed and three injured when a minibus carrying wedding party guests fell into Astore river near the northern Pakistani town of Gilgit, police said today, reports AFP.

They said the driver lost control while negotiating a sharp turn late Monday in the mountainous region located close to the Chinese border.

Some 23 people including the driver were drowned while three other perched on the roof of the vehicle jumped off, they received minor injuries, police said.

The passengers were on way to Jaglot town, 50 kilometres (30 miles) north of Gilgit to attend a marriage ceremony, they said.

ROK opposition challenges acting PM's appointment

SEOUL, Mar 10: Opponents filed a lawsuit Tuesday challenging the legality of President Kim Dae-jung's appointment of his coalition partner as acting prime minister, says AP.

The Grand National Party, which holds a majority in Parliament, asked the Constitutional Court to "declare the appointment of Kim Jong-pil, 72, unconstitutional."

The move is expected to further complicate the efforts of the newly installed president to implement economic and political reforms amid the nation's worst financial crisis in years.

Kim Dae-jung named Kim Jong-pil, a veteran conservative politician, as prime minister right after he took office two weeks ago.

But after the majority party held up ratification of the nomination by the single-house General Assembly for more than a week, the president bypassed the lawmakers and named Kim Jong-pil acting prime minister.

Turkish troops kill 40 Kurdish rebels

ANKARA, Mar 10: Turkish Army troops have killed 40 separatist Kurdish rebels in the last three days in a major military campaign in the troubled southeast, the state-run Anatolia news agency reported Monday, says AFP.

The fighting between the troops and members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) took place in a mountainous area in the province of Binol, it said.

This was the largest-scale fighting in the whole southeast since late last year. It was not immediately clear if there were casualties on the Turkish side.

In the last reported clash, security officials said on Friday seven PKK members had been killed in Diyarbakir province. Fighting had eased in the area in recent months mainly due to winter conditions.

13 Tigers killed in sea battle

COLOMBO, Mar 10: At least 13 rebels were killed early Tuesday in a sea battle between government troops and Tamil rebels in eastern Sri Lanka, military officials said, reports AP.

Sri Lankan gunboats attacked a sea convoy of the guerrilla Tamil Tigers before dawn and sank two boats, military officials said on condition of anonymity.

There were no casualties on the government side in the clash off the town of Pulumudai in Trincomalee district, 250 kilometres (155 miles) from Colombo. Several other rebel boats, which were believed to be carrying fighters from the main war front in the north to the east, escaped in the darkness.

The military has reported large numbers of rebel fighters moving into the east, taking advantage of a lull in the north to launch attacks on the second front.



US Army Gen. H Norman Schwarzkopf accompanies Saudi Arabian King Fahd as he reviews US troops at an air base in eastern Saudi Arabia in this Jan. 7, 1994 file photo. King Fahd was in critical condition with a gall bladder infection Monday, and might have to undergo surgery, hospital officials said. After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 — and amid fears the Iraqi army might roll into Saudi Arabia — Fahd took the daring step of allowing thousands of US and other Western troops into his Islamic fundamentalist country to face the Iraqis. — AP/UNB photo

US, Russia seek ways to expand space cooperation

WASHINGTON, Mar 10: Russia may be allowed to launch more foreign commercial satellites to earn millions for its cash-strapped space agency as the United States urgently seeks assurances that Moscow can afford to participate in an international space station, reports AP.

Vice President Al Gore and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin met Tuesday to discuss US-Russia space cooperation and other programmes, including halting the spread of missile and nuclear weapons technology.

US officials say they are not linking the issues of whether Russia can launch more satellites and whether it will keep promises to stop assisting Iran's weapons programmes. But the Clinton administration acknowledges it doesn't want to reward Russia with new satellite contracts if Moscow continues to do business in weapons technology.

"It's not a question of the US government offering an inducement to the Russian government," said Jonathan Salter, a foreign policy spokesman for Gore. "In fact expansion of the US-Russia commercial space cooperation requires only that existing commercial plans be allowed to unfold free of concerns related to ballistic missile proliferation."

A senior administration official said the United States is hoping to boost Russia's space programme partly by helping Moscow come up with money to contribute to the 21 billion dollars international space station, which is supposed to

start construction this summer. The project, due to be completed in 2003, has been delayed by Russia's inability to pay.

"It's something that has to be talked through urgently," the administration official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

On weapons, Chernomyrdin insists that Russia is sticking to its promise that the government won't transfer nuclear weapons and missile technology to Iran. "We are true to our commitments, and we shall never depart from them," he said on Monday as he travelled to Washington.

Eighteen of Russia's 48 satellite launches last year were for US firms. The Russians also sent up satellites for China, Germany and Luxembourg. The launches were worth 60 million dollars to 100 million dollars each for the Russian Space Agency, which has had trouble paying its bills.

A 1996 agreement signed by

Gore and Chernomyrdin limited Russian launches of foreign satellites in order to protect American companies from competition. Since then, however, the situation has changed, with US firms — including Lockheed-Martin and Boeing — involved in consortiums with Russian agencies to work together on launches.

In their 10th semiannual US-Russia commission meeting, Gore and Chernomyrdin are expected to talk about reviewing the complicated formula that limits Russian satellite launches. They also are planning to meet with executives of Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed-Martin and visit one of its California facilities Thursday in Silicon Valley.

On the missile issue, Gore and Chernomyrdin will discuss a decree signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin in January aimed at halting assistance to Iran. The decree would prevent Russian export of so-called dual-use technologies that can be used to build missiles, nuclear biological and chemical weapons.

Despite the decree, Russia is continuing construction of a nuclear power plant in Bushehr, Iran, which Moscow says is strictly for energy purposes. Washington strongly opposes it, fearing it might help Iran get access to technology for its suspected nuclear weapons programme.

After two days of commission meetings, Gore and Chernomyrdin will talk with President Bill Clinton in the Oval Office on Wednesday. Chernomyrdin also plans to meet with members of Congress.

Pinochet meets Frei

SANTIAGO, Mar 10: Chile's former dictator Gen Augusto Pinochet slipped by waiting media on Monday through an underground tunnel to meet with President Eduardo Frei, the day after retiring as army commander-in-chief, reports Reuters.

Presidential sources said the 82-year-old Pinochet, who is taking up a permanent unelected seat in the senate used an underground passageway he built during his 1973-1990 rule to avoid the press and meet privately with Frei.

US to talk on non-proliferation issues with new Indian govt

Washington, Mar 10 - US officials say they are looking forward to talking non-proliferation issues with a new Indian government after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Atal Behari Vajpayee reiterated his party's intention "to induct nuclear weapons."

In an interview published in the latest issue of Newsweek International, Vajpayee said: "As we have already stated in our manifesto, we propose to review India's nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons," reports India Abroad News Service.

"I would like to mention here," he added, "that we believe in a nuclear-weapons-free world. But the nuclear powers do not believe in it; they would rather practise nuclear apartheid, which we are totally opposed to."

A Clinton administration official, when informed of Vajpayee's quotes, scrupulously eschewed comment on the BJP's intention of declaring India a

nuclear power. "We'll be talking with the new Indian government about non-proliferation issues and security issues," the official said.

But the official emphasised that "the United States is not a practitioner of nuclear apartheid."

Privately administration officials have acknowledged that they are troubled by the BJP's declarations that it intends to shed India's ambiguous nuclear stance when it comes to power.

Consequently, administration officials are keeping their fingers crossed that a BJP-led coalition will not go through with this overt declaration about India becoming a nuclear power.

Officials, particularly those in the National Security Council, have acknowledged that such a declaration could indeed be embarrassing if it is made before President Bill Clinton's proposed visit to India and Pakistan this fall and could generate unnecessary waves between New Delhi and Washington.

Commenting on relations with the United States, Vajpayee told Newsweek correspondent Sudip Mazumdar: "We expect the US to be more sensitive to India's security concerns and economic interests."

"Indo-American relations should be based on mutual respect," he said.

The US officials welcomed this statement and said Washington had absolutely no problems with this and described it "as a great idea." One official said, "The US is very sensitive to India's security concerns, we have complete respect for them and for India."

On relations with Pakistan, Vajpayee said, "We will focus on improving relations with our neighbours without any third party intervention." "As for Pakistan," he said, "we seek to persuade Islamabad to abandon its policy of hostile interference in our internal affairs through its insurgent and terrorist groups."

Off the Record

Aussies spend more on betting than on food

SYDNEY: When Australia's richest man, Kerry Packer, shelled out nearly a million dollars in cash to pay off race track bookies some years ago, he shrugged off the losses, reports AP.

"I, like many other Australians, like to bet," said the magazine and television network baron.

Packer, with an estimated personal fortune of about 3 billion Australian dollars (2 billion US dollars), is known from Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas to the Ritz in London as one of the world's highest rolling casino gamblers.

He isn't the only one in Australia with an almost obsessive love of gambling. According to an assessment of spending patterns, Australians are the Western world's biggest gamblers, spending more per capita on betting than they do on food.

The nation's 18.5 million people gamble more than 60 billion Australian dollars (40 billion US dollar) a year at race tracks and casinos, on lottery tickets and in card machines at clubs and bars — more than 3,300 Australian dollar (2,000 US dollars) for every man, woman and child.

Americans are not that far behind. According to the US Gambling Commission, gambling is a 500 billion dollars a year industry in the United States. With a population of about 267 million, that's more than 1,800 dollars each.

Those figures, of course, don't take into account bets between individuals over a handshake.

Alex Blaszczynski, an associate professor at the Impulse Control Disorders Unit at Liverpool Hospital in Sydney, said 90 per cent of Australians gamble in some fashion. At least 200,000 of those are "problem gamblers," betting more than they can afford to lose, he said.

Final effort to regain contact with Pathfinder

LOS ANGELES, Mar 10: Is the little rover sojourner still circling around Mars Pathfinder on a rocky piece of dusty real estate millions of miles from home?

Does the plucky lander have the ability to tell Earth one more thing from the Red Planet?

Engineers and scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory will make a final effort to regain contact with Pathfinder on Tuesday, listening for a radio signal originating from so far away it would take 19 and a half minutes to reach Earth, reports AP.

Pathfinder landed on July 4 and transmitted intriguing images and atmospheric data. Far exceeding its design life, pathfinder worked away until its main transmitter fell silent on September 27. A carrier signal from the tiny auxiliary transmitter was seen on October 1 and 6, then nothing.

Initially, daily attempts to regain contact were made. But that proved fruitless and efforts trailed off to about once a week and then once a month. Now it's time to face reality.

Using NASA's Deep Space Network antenna at Goldstone, California, Pathfinder project representative Ben Toyashima will take the position of primary flight controller and listen for the spacecraft signal during a tracking pass.

If an hour passes with no signal from Pathfinder, Toyashima will send commands telling the spacecraft to activate its auxiliary transmitter. If it's working the signal will appear as a blip on a computer monitor.

No one is holding their breath. Indeed, much of the Pathfinder operations team has moved on to other projects. But if Pathfinder signals, a team would be patched together to resume operations.

"We never got a conclusive evidence that said the thing was not recoverable when we kind of declared an end to the normal mission," Mission Manager Richard Cook said Monday.

"We're really at the point now where it just doesn't make sense to continue trying."

Suharto reelected for another term

JAKARTA, Mar 10: Beseit by economic turmoil and at an impasse with foreign lenders, President Suharto was elected Tuesday to five more years as chief of the nation he has steered with an authoritarian grip since the 1960s, reports AP.

A loyalist assembly awarded a seventh term to Asia's longest-serving leader as his government wavered on an economic reform plan that the International Monetary Fund says is crucial to Indonesia's recovery.

"Agree," intoned the rows of delegates sitting in cream-coloured vinyl seats of the Parliament building.

"I'm very pleased with this outcome, and I thank the people for it," said Tommy Suharto, son of the 76-year-old president and member of the People's Consultative Assembly.

Government delegates, who chose Suharto in a ceremonial re-election, extended his already-ready authority by granting him wide emergency powers Monday night.

In this regard he sought to reassure the Muslim minority. He noted, "We have already demonstrated our commitment to the safety and well-being of Muslims in the states where we have been in power."

He claimed that "we have been able to get this message across to Muslims, and I am of the view that the bogey of the BJP being a communal (sectarian) party no longer finds many takers."

Vajpayee also denied that either the BJP or any of its allies had called for the demolition of mosques. "I do not think any of our allies has ever called for the demolition of mosques," he said.

He acknowledged, "There are some disputes -- and every country in the world has such disputes -- which need to be settled through inter-community dialogue."

Vajpayee said, "If the government is sincere about seeking a peaceful solution, it can be done."

BRIEFLY

Irish rebels attack police station: Guerrillas launched a mortar bomb attack on a police station in northern Ireland early Tuesday morning, British news organisations reported, Reuters says from London.

The British Broadcasting Corporation quoted a police spokesman as saying no one was injured in the attack at Armagh in the south of the British-ruled province. The spokesman said at least two mortar bombs were fired at the police station. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

3 China Airlines executives sacked: Taiwan's China Airlines said yesterday it had dismissed three senior executives over the crash last month which killed 202 people, the worst air disaster in the island's history.

The dismissal takes effect on Tuesday. China Airlines spokesman Hamilton Liu told Reuters by telephone. Liu said China Airlines, Taiwan's biggest carrier, also would review its 68-member advisory body to determine whether any members should be dismissed.

French FM arrives in KSA: French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine arrived in Saudi Arabia late on Monday for talks on Iraq and the Middle East peace process, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported, Reuters says from Dubai.

The agency said Vedrine was met by foreign ministry officials. It quoted the French minister as saying he would discuss the situation in Iraq and the Middle East peace process during his visit, which was aimed at "developing mutual ties and cooperation".



Iraq's Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, right, talks with United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, left, at the United Nations on Monday. The UN chief is moving to test his deal to open Iraq's presidential palaces to weapons inspectors, seeking Security Council endorsement of his plan for searching those sites. Annan was to circulate his proposed rules for the searches to missions of the 15 Council member-nations Monday and send a top official to Baghdad to lay groundwork for the inspections. — AP/UNB photo