

Clinton preaches message of unity, freedom

BEIJING, June 28: From the simple sanctuary of China's largest Protestant church, US President Bill Clinton preached a message of unity and freedom Sunday in a nation where Christian leaders have been jailed or harassed by the government, reports AP.

"I believe that Chinese and Americans are brothers and sisters as children of God," the president told the congregation. "We come here in that spirit today."

In a country where Clinton's very attendance at church highlighted the quest for religious freedom, he said, "I believe our faith calls upon us to seek unity with people across the world of different races and backgrounds and creeds."

After the services, Clinton and his family toured the ancient places and courtyards of the Forbidden City, the spectacular walled enclave that was the residence for 24 emperors of Ming and Qing dynasties.

"It's an amazing place," Clinton marvelled. Then, the presi-

dential party set out to visit the Great Wall.

At the church, Clinton quoted from the Bible, Acts 17:26, "God has made from one blood every nation to dwell on the surface of the earth," and added, "I believe that is true."

He spoke in the large sanctuary of Chongwenmen Church with white plaster walls and brown wooden floor and ceiling. The squat gray building — unmarked by any steeple — is tucked at the rear of a hotel parking lot, past a row of shanties. Its has a congregation of about 2,500.

Parishioners were hopeful Clinton's appearance at the government-sanctioned church would make a difference. "Now that he's prayed with us, the Chinese government will greatly relax its policies toward us Christians and our churches," said Liu Suxing.

She complained that churches not sanctioned by the government, where many Christians prefer to worship, often are shut down.



US President Bill Clinton, his wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea stop for photographers as they tour the Forbidden City in Beijing Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

India accuses US, China of hypocrisy

BEIJING, June 28: India has accused China and the United States of hypocrisy and showing a "hegemonistic mentality" after their summit pledge on Saturday work together to head off a nuclear arms race in South Asia, reports Reuters.

An Indian government statement issued in Beijing today rejected a joint statement issued after the summit that called on India and Pakistan to curb their nuclear and missile programmes.

It rebuffed any attempt by Beijing and Washington to mediate in the nuclear stand-off between the two South Asian neighbours after they conducted nuclear testing last month.

India categorically rejects the notion of these two countries arrogating to themselves joint or individual responsibility for "the maintenance of peace, stability and security in the region," the Indian statement said, referring to the document that followed the China-

US summit in Beijing. "This approach reflects the hegemonistic mentality of a bygone era in international relations and is completely unacceptable and out of place in the present day world."

It is most ironic that two countries that have directly and indirectly contributed to unabated proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery systems in our neighbourhood are now presuming to prescribe the norms for non-proliferation.

The statement said India "cannot consider" calls to curtail nuclear weapons and missile development and would follow its own security needs.

It dismissed efforts by China and the United States to nudge the two South Asian neighbours towards reconciliation, saying New Delhi would pursue direct dialogue with Islamabad and "there is no place for any kind of third-party involvement whatsoever."

In the joint statement, China and the United States condemned nuclear tests by India and Pakistan and declared the blasts would not win them membership in the world nuclear club.

"Recent nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, and the resulting increase in tension between them, are a source of deep and lasting concern to both of us," the statement said.

Our shared interests in a peaceful and stable South Asia and in a strong global non-proliferation regime have been put at risk by these tests, which we have joined in condemning."

The statement called on India and Pakistan to join the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) immediately and to refrain from actually building nuclear weapons or the missiles to deliver them.

They should also adhere to the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the statement said.

China showed unprecedented flexibility, say diplomats

BEIJING, June 28: China showed unprecedented flexibility at a presidential summit to reward the United States for sticking by its policy of constructive engagement, diplomats said, reports AP.

During talks between presidents Jiang Zemin and Bill Clinton, Beijing dropped long-held objections to a deal allowing the two countries to de-target their nuclear missiles from one another.

It also pledged to take new measures to prevent proliferation of missile technology as well as chemical and biological weapons.

"I'm amazed that the Chinese have made all these concessions," a western diplomat told AFP.

He singled out China's decision to "actively study" joining the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) as extremely surprising.

The line we've had so far on this is that they wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole," the diplomat said, adding "that is quite a step forward."

"I had expected the Chinese to hold out on some of these non-proliferation issues to get concessions elsewhere, but it doesn't seem (the Americans) have conceded very much," he said.

Beijing got no new assurances on joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Clinton expressed "regret that the two sides could not make more progress."

Nor did the United States budge on Chinese demands for greater support over its aim to reunify with Taiwan.

Clinton stuck to long-held US positions and simply called for further negotiations between the rival governments, which have been separated since 1949.

In what may have been a mutually agreed tactic, the one-sided concessions undermined criticism from Clinton's US opponents, who have said the president was allowing himself to be pushed around by the Chinese diplomats said.

But a Beijing-based foreign affairs analyst stressed that Clinton's visit on its own was enough to buy a measure of gratitude from China.

"The Americans gave up a little in that they came to China and were willing to talk," he said.

US presidents do not travel very often, another diplomat said, adding that the visit has brought international prestige and legitimacy to China, whose international reputation was deeply tarnished by the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre.

Beijing places fanatical importance on face, or status, and it is difficult to underestimate the importance of a visit from the leader of the world superpower, he said.

The western diplomat said Beijing had also developed a more sophisticated understanding of US public opinion and politics.

"I get the impression that the Chinese know that Clinton has rather gone out on a limb for them and taken a lot of flak back home," he said, adding the Chinese had made concessions to boost the summit.

Typically, he said, the usual Beijing tactic is to put the burden on the US side to seek a concrete result, "because the US needs something to show for it to declare it a success, where as the Chinese will declare it a success anyway."

"I don't see that happening this time."

The foreign affairs analyst stressed that the summit should not be judged in terms of "who gets the most," however, as relationship-building achievements could dwarf minor concessions in the long run.

In a post-summit news conference Saturday, both presidents hammered the point home, with Jiang calling for bilateral ties to be handled from a "long term and strategic perspective."

Clinton has pursued a policy of "constructive engagement" with China over the last two years, stressing increased but frank dialogue especially on areas of difference glossed over in the past.

The news conference appeared to reflect the approach, with the two presidents at ease speaking publicly on sensitive issues such as human rights and the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators.

Israeli troop pullout from West Bank Agreement likely by end of July, says Netanyahu

JERUSALEM, June 28: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday he expected to reach an agreement with the Palestinians on an Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank by the end of next month, reports AP.

Critics, however, accused Netanyahu of coming up with new gimmicks to stall the peace process, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said the Israeli prime minister's objective was "to torpedo the peace process."

Pressed by Israel Radio as to whether agreement would be reached by July 29, when Israel's Knesset recesses for the summer, Netanyahu said Sunday, "I estimate this issue will be concluded by then."

"I can't say for sure because I can't tell the Palestinians what to do," he said.

The United States is pushing Israel to accept a US proposal to turn over 13 per cent of the West

Bank to the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinians already have accepted the offer, but months have gone by without a response from Israel.

Netanyahu insists that the Palestinians are the ones holding up the process by refusing to give specific commitments for fulfilling their obligations, such as cracking down on terrorism.

"This is what is delaying the process, nothing else," he said Sunday. He acknowledged there were "gaps on other issues, such as the West Bank withdrawal."

"But we are not dealing with that at the moment," he said.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since capturing it from Jordan in 1967.

In recent weeks, Netanyahu had appeared to endorse the idea of holding a national referendum on any withdrawal agreement, but he now seems to be backing away from that position.

He said Sunday that a decision on whether to hold a referendum would be made only after an agreement with the Palestinians was reached.

Netanyahu's latest idea is a European-sponsored conference to discuss Middle East issues — but not the Israel-Palestinian conflict specifically. The conference would address regional issues such as water, the environment and trade, he said.

Mubarak, speaking to reporters at a news conference Saturday, said Netanyahu's proposal was aimed at nullifying all the agreements that have already been reached.

Netanyahu criticised Mubarak's response on Sunday, saying "It would be good if Egypt, with all its influence on the Palestinians... were to act with a greater degree of caution."

Clinton's visit Beijingers' woe

BEIJING, June 28: Having a US president in town can certainly muck up your travel plans, reports AP.

For Beijingers, blocked roads, traffic jams, and heavy police security have been the inconveniences of President Bill Clinton's visit.

On Sunday, dozens of police, plain clothed and uniformed, sealed off roads around a church where the Clinton's attended service. Some members of the congregation of the Chongwenmen Church said they began lining up at 6 am for the service at 9:30.

Public buses couldn't pass for a while, leaving their passengers sweltering in the heat, and the local subway station was declared shut for four hours, with trains running straight through without stopping.

Pro-peace deal parties win majority in new Belfast assembly

BELFAST, June 28: Parties supporting the historic Northern Ireland peace deal have won a comfortable majority of seats in the new assembly, final results showed Saturday, reports AP.

Delegates in favour of the April 10 peace settlement between pro-British rule unionists and pro-Ireland Catholic nationalists obtained 76 of the 108 seats in the new assembly, elected Thursday.

The moderate Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) of David Trimble did not gain the convincing win that it hoped for over anti-agreement Protestant unionists, headed by firebrand Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Ian Paisley.

However, Trimble should hold a delicate balance of power, preventing Protestant hardliners from wrecking the peace agreement.

15,000 attend charity concert in Diana's memory

ALTHORP, England, June 28: About 15,000 people attended a charity concert Saturday in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales, which was mired in controversy over the high cost of the tickets set by her brother Earl Spencer, reports AP.

The Earl, who organised the "tribute" to Diana in the park at Althorp, the Spencer family mansion 100 km north of London, concocted a curious mix of pop songs and classical music for the event, designed to illustrate the eclectic musical taste of Diana.

Concertgoers were entertained by veteran pop singer Cliff Richard, and Chris de Burgh, as well as cellist Julian Lloyd Weber and opera singer Lleydy Garrett.

Off the Record

Posthumous dad!

LONDON: The woman who won a two-year legal battle over the right to her dead husband's sperm, announced Saturday that she is pregnant, reports AP.

Diane Blood, whose husband, Stephen, died of meningitis in 1995, was at first barred from using the sperm for artificial insemination because it was taken when he was comatose and unable to give his permission.

Her case won wide public sympathy, even from people instrumental in drafting Britain's 1991 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, which requires written consent from the donor.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority the government regulatory agency, barred the use of the sperm in Britain and denied her permission to take it abroad because it did not want to create a legal precedent. The High Court upheld both decisions.

In a statement issued to Press Association, the national news agency, Diane confirmed Saturday that she was "absolutely delighted" to be in the early stages of pregnancy.

Diane's father, speaking on her behalf, would not say where she had received treatment, but confirmed Stephen Blood's sperm had been used.

Festival of friendly 'ghosts'

LOEI, Thailand: Hundreds of friendly "ghosts" gathered in northeastern Thailand over the weekend, asking the powers above to provide adequate rainfall for the forthcoming rice planting, reports AP.

Referred to by local people as Phee Tha Khon, the festival is celebrated annually only in Dan Sai District of Loei Province, 430 km northeast of Bangkok.

Throughout the district, children and adults dress up in colourful, ghost-like outfits including masks fashioned from the trunks of coconut trees.

The masks are meant to hide their identity as participants make sexual gestures to each other and spectators with wooden phaluses, a symbol of fertility.

The young and old, males and females, marched down the streets poking phaluses at one another as they danced to local folk music and modern rock, including Ricky Martin's "Cup of Life."

Although the atmosphere was bric of fund and games, the rural dwellers had a serious purpose. Particularly this year, they hope that their calls to the heavens will be heard.

US sends naval commandos to Bosnia to capture alleged war criminals

WASHINGTON, June 28: The United States has sent dozens of naval commandos to war-torn Bosnia in a dollar 50 million covert operation to capture alleged war criminals, US News and World Report said in its July 6 edition, reports Reuters.

The report, available on the magazine's web site, said the commandos, from the navy's elite seal counter-terrorism units, had been active for at least a year to try to capture the alleged criminals in former Yugoslav Bosnia. The Pentagon calls the suspects PIFWICS — persons indicted for war crimes.

A US special operations task force has been conducting one of the broadest covert operations since the Vietnam war, gathering intelligence on PIFWICS and helping to seize them in a series of raids," the magazine said.

A defence department spokesman said he had no information on the report and could not comment.

The magazine said one participant told it that 300 people or more were involved in the covert operation — unusually large for a venture of this kind. "So far the cost of the effort is at least 50 million dollars accord to the participant," it said.

But the commando teams had a mixed track record, US News and World Report said.

One operation was cancelled when a hardline Bosnian official told a US soldier he knew special forces were planning a raid.

An attempt to track down aides of former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic failed after observers lost track of a female French officer they thought was going to meet Karadzic associates.

But the magazine said US forces were involved in planning raids by other NATO forces which seized suspects last year and this year, and they had seized a suspect, Miroslav Tadic, early this year.

BRIFFLY

3 hurt in Delhi bomb blast: At least three people were injured Saturday when a bomb went off in a passenger car in the Indian capital, the Press Trust of India reported, AFP says from New Delhi. Several vehicles were damaged in the blast, it said.

Mudslide kills 12 in Nepal: At least 12 people were killed in a mudslide triggered by heavy rains in a village in western Nepal, the state-owned RSS news agency said yesterday, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The victims, including a 12-year old girl, died in the mudslide Friday morning in Marbhuying village. Bodies of five persons who were killed while sowing paddy have been recovered," the RSS said quoting Chief District Officer Moha Singh Khatri.

7 die in US thunderstorms: Fierce thunderstorms swamped parts of eight US states, bringing severe, sudden flooding requiring helicopter rescues. A train derailed and spilled fuel in the extreme weather that killed at least seven people, AP reports from New York.

In Vermont's Mad River Valley, the usually docile river jumped its banks to wash out roads, destroy homes and send terrified residents scrambling into trees to escape rising water. Three people were killed by lightning. Another man was electrocuted by fallen power lines, while two other victims were swept away by raging rivers. A woman died in Ohio when high winds blew her mobile home 91 metres off its foundation.

Algerian govt appeals for calm: The government and the family of slain singer-activist Lounes Matoub appealed for calm after rioting in Algeria's Berber region left two people dead. Mourners and police gathered near his burial site before dawn Sunday, AP reports from Algiers. Leaders in the mountainous region east of Algiers called a general strike Sunday, while the ethnic Berber singer was to be laid to rest at a cemetery in his hometown three days after he was killed by Muslim militants.



Members of the New Black Panthers carry rifles through the streets of Jasper, Texas Saturday. White-hooded Ku Klux Klansmen waving Confederate flags marched Saturday in the Texas town where three white men allegedly dragged a black man to his death behind a pickup truck. Black counterdemonstrators carrying guns showed up and police kept the two sides apart, making one arrest as the Klan rally ended. — AP/UNB photo

Plane mishap claims 1 in Congo: One person was killed when an aircraft landed badly Saturday at Mbuji-Mayi, in the centre of Democratic Republic of Congo, state radio reported, AFP says from Kinshasa.

The radio said it was not known why the Russian crew of the Ilyushin cargo plane had fouled up their landing, hitting and killing a person on the edge of the runway. The crew escaped unharmed from the accident, the second accident of its type in 24 hours. At Goma, in the east of the country, three crew members of a DC-8 were injured when the plane ran out of runway after touching down too late.

Study reveals AZT, C-section prevent AIDS transfer from mother to baby

GENEVA, Jun 28: Hopeful signs that HIV-infected mothers can protect their babies greeted 12,000 of the world's top researchers and others in the war on AIDS as they gathered for a biennial global review, reports AP.

Studies released Saturday in Chicago pointed to the virtual elimination of the risk of AIDS transfer if the mother takes the HIV-fighting drug AZT and gives birth by Caesarean section.

The studies are but a small sample of the more than 5,000 research projects on the whole gamut of work on AIDS that will come before the delegates to the 12th World AIDS Conference that meets until Friday.

The mother-child studies, which report on work done in Europe and North America, point up one of the main problems in the campaign against AIDS: that weapons needed may be too expensive or unavailable for developing countries.

The conference is dedicated to finding ways to help Africa, Asia and Latin America share more in the advances against the disease that are made in wealthy countries.

spread of the disease. They now have more than 90 per cent of the 30.6 million people in the world living with HIV or full-blown AIDS.

The mother-to-child studies found that an HIV-infected pregnant woman taking AZT alone could reduce to 8 per cent from 25 per cent the chance of passing the virus on to her baby.

Giving birth by C-section dropped transmission to 2 per cent or lower, according to a combination of studies of thousands of mother-baby pairs in Europe and North America.

The studies were put together by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in Washington.

A Swiss study found that performing the Caesarean section before contractions begin and before the waters break is their key to eliminating the dangers of infection from natural childbirth.

Those dangers include infected blood being forced through the placenta, the baby swallowing amniotic fluid after the waters break, and its skin coming into prolonged contact with infected fluids from the mother during birth, the study said.

Arafat blasts Israeli plan to expand Jerusalem

DOHA, June 28: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat held talks with Qatar's Emir on the stalled Middle East peace process on Saturday and blasted Israeli plans to expand Jerusalem, the Qatar News Agency (QNA) said, reports Reuters.

The official agency said Arafat met Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani after his arrival in Doha, his first stop in the Gulf.

It quoted the Palestinian leader as saying the expansion plans were a "very big conspiracy aimed at changing the identity of Jerusalem"

Israel drew international ire after it adopted a plan earlier this month to extend the boundaries of the holy city and tighten its ties with Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The United States, the European Union, China and many Arab nations have criticised the plan.

The future of Jerusalem, a city holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians, is ostensibly to be decided in final status peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

talks stalled in March 1997 after Israel began constructing a Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, which it occupied in a 1967 war.

Palestinian suicide bombings and disputes over Israeli troop redeployments have deepened the crisis.

QNA also quoted Arafat as saying he would announce a new cabinet within two weeks which would include members who had not served in his administration before.

He said consultations about the make-up of the new cabinet were continuing with all Palestinians political forces.

QNA said Arafat also affirmed he would declare a Palestinian state next year.

Top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat was quoted as saying earlier this month that Arafat would declare a Palestinian state on May 4, 1999, the date when the final status talks were due to be concluded.

return from China.

"The Palestinians, who have waited patiently for two years, will wait another 10 days until the American President decides what to do," Arafat said in Doha earlier Saturday, before arriving in Manama.

"The Security Council will study the question of Israel's controversial plan to expand Jerusalem," Arafat said.

But "the American government has asked that the discussion be put off until after the return of President Bill Clinton," he added.

The US Ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, called Thursday in a closed-door session, for the Security Council to put off any discussion of Israel's plans until July 6.

Clinton arrived in China Thursday for a nine-day tour.

The US State Department announced the same day that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had asked Arafat, in a telephone conversation Wednesday, to scrap efforts to enlist the UN in a drive to prevent Israel from expanding Jerusalem's boundaries.



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, former US President Jimmy Carter, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Austrian Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schuessel chat while waiting for the start of a panel discussion in Vienna's Austria Centre. The UN and the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a 2-day commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. — AP/UNB photo