

International

US State Department disappointed

Annan fails to clinch deal with Gaddafi on Lockerbie case

TRIPOLI, Dec 6: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said Saturday he had failed to clinch a deal at a meeting with Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi on the Lockerbie case, despite 'fruitful and positive' discussions with Libyan officials, reports AFP.

Libyan officials 'confirmed their readiness to find a solution' to the Lockerbie stalemate, Annan told reporters at Tripoli airport but he said in that in the end he had reached no firm agreement with the Libyans.

Annan was hoping to clinch an agreement on the handover of two Libyan suspects in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing although Tripoli had already hinted strongly that the mission could end in failure.

It will require some time to reach a definitive deal, the UN chief said but stressed the talks were fruitful and positive and that Libyan officials had repeated their earlier pledge to let the Lockerbie suspects, both Libyan nationals, stand trial "in a third country."

Annan who flew back to Tunisia late on Saturday, said certain issues remained to be resolved and that at this stage, he preferred not to go into more detail.

Asked if he and Gaddafi had discussed lifting UN sanctions imposed in 1992 in connection with the Lockerbie suspects, Annan said "Yes," he said they had discussed the sanctions but that further progress was needed in the Lockerbie case.

It appeared earlier that the UN chief would not even get to meet with Gaddafi after the official news agency JANA said the Libyan leader would be unavailable to meet with Annan because he was at a desert camp.

But Annan finally left the Mediterranean town of Sirte, where he had arrived earlier in the day, and travelled into the desert to meet Gaddafi, accompanied only by key aides, the rest of his entourage remained behind.

The meeting lasted for 90 minutes.

JANA said Annan held a closed-door meeting in Sirte earlier with Foreign Minister Omar Al Muntasser and Libya's Permanent Representative at the United Nations Abu Zeid Omar Dorda, but it gave no further details.

Al Muntasser later said he and Annan had had "very positive and clear discussions."

Meanwhile, Libya called a meeting of its top decision making body, the General People's Congress (Parliament) for Tuesday.

The Congress which normally only meets once or twice a year, would "endorse the decisions of the Basic People's Congress in various fields," JANA said without elaborating.

Asked by journalists Saturday if the Congress would discuss a possible deal on Lockerbie, Al Muntasser said "The Congress is due to hold its annual session on Tuesday and will discuss all matters concerning Libya's internal as well as external policies."

On his arrival in Libya, Annan acknowledged that the

facted a tough task.

"Obviously, this is going to be a very difficult discussion, this is an issue that has persisted for 10 years he told reporters I hope that when I meet with President Gaddafi we will be able to come up with an agreement that will be satisfactory to all concerned, Annan said.

"I don't intend to go there to negotiate but to discuss to clarify and if need be to persuade, Annan said.

Another report adds: The US State Department expressed disappointment that a meeting between Libya and UN Chief Kofi Annan had failed to result in a breakthrough in the Lockerbie bombing case Saturday.

"We are disappointed that Libya is still not in compliance" with UN resolutions calling for Libya to hand over two bombing suspects for trial, James Foley, Deputy State Department spokesman said.

Another 21 NLD members quit party in Myanmar

YANGON, Dec 6: Another 21 activists have left Aung San Suu Kyi's Myanmar opposition party, the military-ruled country's official media said, reports AFP.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) office in Kyaukse township was closed when the activists left the party, the New Light of Myanmar daily reported Saturday.

NLD leaders say that military intelligence is forcing activists to leave the party in droves. The government maintains they are unhappy with the party leadership.

Hundreds of NLD members who have been held in government 'guesthouses' in recent months have resigned from the party after their release.

NLD officials say 176 of their MPs and 589 other activists are still being held by the government.

According to the government's last estimate, issued two weeks ago, 384 NLD members have been set free and 467 remained "as guests of the government."

'BJP attempting to alter basic structure of constitution'

MUMBAI, Dec 6: The BJP was attempting to alter the basic structure of the constitution and there would be a mass protest against any such move, former prime minister HD Deve Gowda said here yesterday, reports TTI.

Addressing a "save constitution rally" organised by the Dalit Sena yesterday evening, Gowda said Dalits and other backward classes should oppose the BJP's move and appealed them to oust the BJP-led coalition government at the centre.

Speaking on the occasion, Dalit Sena President and senior Janata Dal leader, Ramvilas Paswan, said Dalits would not tolerate any such move as it was a question of protecting their self respect.

Janata Dal President Sharad Yadav said the architect of Indian constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar, had in his mind ten years' reservation to the Dalits. He had thought that caste system will end after 10 years, but after 50 years of independence, the caste system has become stronger now, Yadav said.



Newly elected Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh left, Communications Minister Jagmohan centre and Information and Broadcasting Minister Pramod Mahajan, 3rd from left, greet Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee right during the oath-taking ceremony in New Delhi Saturday. The expansion of the cabinet, although expected for months, is also seen as a reaction to the recent defeat at the hands of the opposition Congress Party in provincial elections.

— AP/UNB photo

Strike cripples Kashmir valley as Vajpayee makes his 1st visit

SRINAGAR, India, Dec 6: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee arrived in troubled Kashmir today, as a strike called by Muslim separatists crippled the Kashmir valley, officials said, reports AFP.

Shops and businesses were shut in Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir state, and adjoining districts to protest against the trip by the Hindu nationalist leader.

There was virtually no traffic on Srinagar's streets, guarded by men of the paramilitary Border Security Force (BSF), many of whom remained in their underground road-side bunkers.

The strike was called by Muslim political groups which support a bloody separatist campaign which has claimed some 20,000 lives since 1989 and shows no signs of ending.

Group of Muslim women separatists, meanwhile, took to streets of Srinagar shouting slogans against India and the Prime Minister, witnesses said. The protesters also de-

manded the reconstruction of a 19th-century mosque destroyed by Hindu zealots on this day in the northern Indian city of Ayodhya six years ago. Kashmir police chased the women away.

The strike also disrupted life in several parts of the Kashmir valley, residents and police said.

Vajpayee, 71, flew into the hilly town of Leh, about 400 kilometres southeast of here, in an Indian Air Force plane on his way to the tense India-Pakistan border, military officials said.

It was his first visit to the troubled state since taking office eight months ago.

A military spokesman said the Prime Minister was expected to visit Kargil, an Indian town close to Pakistan which has witnessed heavy border clashes in recent months between Indian and Pakistani troops.

Vajpayee, who heads a fragile Hindu nationalist-led coalition government, will spend two days in different parts of

the Himalayan state before returning to New Delhi late Monday.

India and Pakistan dispute the ownership of Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority province. Kashmir has been the cause of two of three wars between the two countries.

On Monday, he is to tour Tangdar, another town close to the Pakistan border, and Jammu, the Hindu-majority winter capital.

The Prime Minister's Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) has virtually no following in the Muslim-populated Kashmir valley although it commands sizeable support in Jammu.

Vajpayee, who has advocated closer friendship with Pakistan, is expected to announce during his visit government policies aimed at ending the Muslim separatist campaign.

But Muslim separatist leaders claimed he would achieve nothing.

Fighting claims 63 lives in Congo

BRAZZAVILLE, Dec 6: At least 63 people, including three soldiers, have been killed in fighting between the army and ex-militia members loyal to former prime minister Bernard Kolelas, Official Congo-Brazzaville Television announced late Saturday, reports AFP.

The fighting occurred Friday in the pool region at the village of Ntadi near the town of Mindouli, 100 kilometres west of Brazzaville, when a military convoy was ambushed by "armed bandits," the report said.

The term is used by the official media to designate the so-called Ninjas, Kolelas' former militia.

The three soldiers, including a high-ranking officer, were killed before the troops turned the attack against the Ninjas, killing at least 60, the report said.

Kolelas was the last prime minister under President Pascal Lissouba, who was ousted in October 1997 by General Denis Sassou Nguesso after a bloody civil war which left between 4,000 and 10,000 dead in almost six months of fighting.

Sharif under fire from opposition and media

ISLAMABAD, Dec 6: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was under attack from the opposition and a critical media today for talks with President Bill Clinton that failed to make a breakthrough on key disputes and a sharpening economic crisis, reports Reuters.

While Sharif stayed in America and was said to be planning trips to Disney World and Niagara Falls, opposition leader Benazir Bhutto termed his White House talks "a mere photo opportunity."

"It seems that Nero is fiddling while Pakistan is burning," Benazir said in a statement, three days after the IMF postponed for one month talks on a rescue package and a key ratings agency downgraded Pakistan's debt to a record low.

"Sharif's insensitivity to economic realities is evident from the sheer waste of taxpayers' money incurred in taking a huge delegation of 130 people, food costs, hotel costs, travel

allowances, daily allowances, etc. for a junkie to Niagara Falls, and Walt Disney. This is shocking behaviour," Benazir said.

The English-language media poured in vain over a joint US-Pakistan statement for signs that a crisis that started in May when Pakistan matched arch-rival India's nuclear tests might be easing, as the government had promised.

"So far the government's claim that the talks have been successful is not backed by any concrete evidence," the news said in an editorial. "The joint declaration fails to offer any hope to Pakistan, which expected more substantive results."

"A sombre joint statement on a sterile summit," was the headline over a commentary in the Frontier Post. The joint statement "makes for sombre, if not outright gloomy reading."

Clinton waived many of the sanctions Washington clamped on Pakistan's indebted econ-

omy before talks with Sharif but made clear that the lifting of all such punitive measures was dependent on Pakistan reining in its nuclear programme. Sharif repeated in a series of US interviews that Islamabad wanted the sanctions lifted before it would sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), while Washington stuck to its position that Pakistan's signature would have to come first.

The Pakistani leader also failed to persuade Clinton to take a high-profile role in so far fruitless talks with India on their 50-year old dispute over Kashmir, the cause of two of the rivals' three wars since independence from Britain in 1947.

Sharif said Kashmir was a "nuclear flashpoint" in a region where one fifth of the world lives, but Clinton said he would only mediate if India agreed — and New Delhi says the conflict is a purely bilateral matter that warrants no outside intervention.

BRIEFLY

Mall fire kills 8 in China: Fire erupted in a shopping mall in northwestern China, killing at least eight people and injuring 23 others, state media reported yesterday, AP says from Beijing.

The fire broke out Friday evening on the third floor of the six-story People's Shopping Mall in the city of Baotou in Shaanxi province, the newspaper Guangming Daily and the Xinhua News Agency said.

Cheetah's kill boy in French zoo: A 3-year old boy died after being fatally wounded by two cheetahs in a zoo on Saturday, AFP reports from Saumur.

The two cheetahs had escaped from their enclosure by scrambling enough mud away to squeeze out under the fence of their cage. The zoo was closed down temporarily.

Castro holds talks with US senator: Cuban president Fidel Castro held a long meeting with a US senator who has called for an easing of the trade embargo against Cuba to allow food and medicine sales to the communist-ruled island diplomats said Saturday, Reuters reports from Havana.

They said the meeting between the Cuban leader and Sen. Christopher Dodd, a democrat of Connecticut, started with dinner Friday evening and lasted well into the early hours of Saturday morning more than six hours in all.

US, DPRK end 2nd day of talks: US and North Korean delegations wrapped up the second day of critical talks Saturday on US demands to inspect a suspected nuclear facility, AP says from New York.

They were to meet again in Washington early next week. "Our talks are getting serious," North Korean vice-Foreign Minister Kim Kye-Gwan told reporters following a five-hour meeting.

Cuba arrests 18 foreigners: Cuban authorities said on Saturday they had arrested 18 suspected foreign drug-traffickers foiling several apparently linked attempts to smuggle cocaine and hashish from neighbouring Jamaica through Cuba to Britain, Reuters says from Havana.

The official newspaper Granma said a total of 535 kg of cocaine and 1.3 kg of hashish were seized in operations by police in Havana between Nov 6 and 16.

Ariane rocket launched: An Ariane rocket blasted off from the Kourou base in French Guiana at 23:43 (GMT) on Saturday carrying a Mexican telecommunications satellite into Orbit, Ariane Space announced, AFP says from Evry.

The launch originally scheduled for Friday, had been postponed because of a Technical problem on the satellite Ariane Space said.

Time magazine honours five: Time magazine paid tribute to five environmentalists for their work in preserving forests in its 'Heroes for the Planet' Awards Saturday, AFP says from Washington.

The news magazine singled out four Americans and one African for special note in the second of a two-year series of profiles on key environmental figures.

Al Gore's father dead: Albert Gore Sr, the father of US Vice-President Al Gore, died Saturday aged 90, the White House said in a statement, AFP says from Washington.

Gore Sr died of natural causes at 5:15 pm (22:15 GMT) at his home in Charthage, Tennessee, the statement said. The Vice President and his wife, Tipper, were at his bedside.

Over 50,000 AIDS cases in Pakistan: A total of 50,000 to 80,000 HIV infected cases have been reported in Pakistan which calls for prompt and stringent steps at grassroots level to contain the virus from further spreading, Xinhua says from Islamabad.

Talking to the local media Saturday, Barjees Mazhar Qazi, national AIDS programme manager asked Pakistanis to adhere to religious values and stick to their life partners and avoid "unethical acts."

Jiang Zemin to visit Thailand in '99: China's President Jiang Zemin will pay a state visit to Thailand late next year, possibly after September's APEC summit in New Zealand, the Bangkok Post reported on yesterday, AP says from Bangkok.

Akaphol Sorasuchart, the government spokesman, said the visit was confirmed during talks on Friday between Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and visiting Chinese Vice Premier Li Lanqing, the Post said.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is holding hands with former Swedish foreign minister Sten Andersson, right, while Souha Arafat is holding Arafat's right arm, after Arafat's arrival at a wintry Arlanda Airport in Stockholm, Sweden Saturday. Arafat will visit Sweden until Sunday and cut short his scheduled visit to Norway due to the tense situation in East Jerusalem and West Bank.

— AP/UNB photo

Arafat renews call for Palestinian state by May

STOCKHOLM, Dec 6: Palestinian president Yasser Arafat on Saturday renewed a controversial call for a Palestinian state to be declared by May next year, saying there could be no lasting peace with Israel without its existence, reports Reuters.

But Arafat, on a visit to Sweden, did not repeat previous pledges to declare a state unilaterally by May 4.

Instead he urged an agreement with Israel on Palestinian independence in a speech which both western and middle eastern diplomats said showed a willingness to compromise and negotiate.

He also pledged not to enter into any military alliance against the Jewish state which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has cited as a key concern.

There can be no just solution to the conflict without the agreement on the existence of two states... the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel, Arafat told Sweden's parliament.

"For our part, we wish to emphasise that the Palestinian side does not seek today, and will not seek tomorrow, to enter into any military struggle or any arms race with Israel or with any other party in the area," he said.

Arafat said there was an urgent need to decide the borders of a Palestinian state by the time a five-year transitional period under the Oslo Peace Accords ends on May 4.

Meir Shitreet, parliamentary whip for Israel's ruling right-wing Likud Party, welcomed Arafat's choice of words. "I see his speech as very posi-

tive, he puts forward some of his personal ideas. I think we're in a new era now," he told Reuters. An Arab diplomat said Arafat's approach was "encouraging and could ease tensions."

Palestinian Planning and International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath said the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) can only exist under the current Palestinian 'quasi state'.

Ruling KMT in Taiwan celebrates election victory

TAIPEI, Dec 6: Taiwan's ruling Kuomintang (KMT) today celebrated a major victory in crucial elections that marked a setback for the pro-independence opposition and were likely to be welcomed by China, reports AFP.

The KMT, which has ruled Taiwan for five decades and seeks eventual reunification with China, retook the powerful post of Taipei Mayor from the opposition in a hard-own race and won a comfortable majority in parliament in Saturday's polls.

Observers have said that while the parliamentary win is more important overall, the Taipei mayoral race has greater symbolic implications. The victory of (the KMT's) Maying-Jeu for Taipei will ease Beijing's anxiousness to settle the Taiwan issue, it helps to stabilise cross-strait ties," said political science professor Chang Lin-Cheng of the national Taiwan university.

AG to question Suharto over accumulated wealth

JAKARTA, Dec 6: Indonesia's Attorney General Andi Ghalib is to question former president Suharto on suspicions he accumulated a fortune dishonestly while in power, the official state Antara news agency said today, reports AFP.

Ghalib, speaking after meeting Suharto's successor BJ Habibie who summoned him late Saturday, said the questioning of the fallen strongman would be held on Wednesday but did not say where it would take place.

The attorney general's pledge came as students maintained their street protests to demand Suharto's trial, unsatisfied by a decree issued by Habibie, Suharto's protégé and successor, last week.

The decree, issued amid mounting student demands for Suharto to be tried for corruption and abuse of power during his 32-year rule which ended May 21, ordered the Attorney General to take "legal steps" to investigate the former president of suspicion of corruption.

Ghalib heads a team set up by Habibie to investigate Suharto's wealth, but critics say the inquiry is already stalled and question Habibie's motives. Suharto told several journalists at his residence on Friday that he was prepared to be questioned by the Attorney General.

"I am ready to be questioned... I know no citizen can escape the law," the 77-year-old Suharto said.

Off the Record

Robber in a trash bag

FORT LUPTON, Colorado: A 1.52 metres woman tried to rob a bank while wearing a black garbage bag over her head, with holes cut out for her arms and eyes, police said, reports AP.

The disguise left Angela Martinez, 70, almost completely covered as she entered the Bank of Colorado, police said.

"The would be robber, with other bank customers staring at her, went to the front of a line and demanded money from a bank teller," Lt Joe Perales said.

Bank tellers alerted police, who arrested Martinez right away Monday.

Martinez is also a suspect in a Brighton bank robbery carried out last month by a small woman wearing a trash bag, police said.

Rudolph the real reindeer

HELSINKI, Finland: Rudolph the real reindeer wasn't as eager to please as the one in the song, causing havoc for a week in the outlying regions of the Finnish capital, reports AP.

The six-year-old Rudolph was brought last month from central Finland to Sotunki, outside Helsinki, where he was to entertain children and give sledge rides.

But he fled his enclosure, apparently spooked by a galloping horse, and plunged into the woods. Farmers reported several sightings, and motorists sometimes had to swerve to avoid the renegade reindeer.

With the help of vigilant reindeer-spoilers, Rudolph was nabbed by his previous owner who came south and tracked him down, the Ilta-Sanommat newspaper said Tuesday.

There are an estimated 200,000 reindeer in Finland, bred mainly by the Samis in Lapland, northern Finland. They are tame, unlike in neighbouring Norway and Sweden where there are also herds of wild reindeer.

Anniversary of Babri Mosque demolition Security tightened in and around Ayodhya

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Riot police took positions at dozens of places of worship across India to prevent religious flare-ups over the weekend as Hindu right-wingers geared to celebrate the sixth anniversary of the razing of a disputed medieval mosque Sunday, reports AP.

Hundreds of armed police and anti-riot squads cordoned off the small town of Ayodhya in the northern Uttar Pradesh where the 16th century Babri Mosque was demolished by

thousands of frenzied members of Hindu nationalist groups on Dec 6, 1992.

People were prohibited from organising congregations anywhere in the town on Sunday, United News of India quoted officials as saying.

The massive assault had come after Hindu and Muslim leaders reached irreconcilable positions on their rival claims to the mosque, which Hindu leaders said was built by Mogul invaders after destroying a temple.



Indian professor Amartya Sen smiles with his arm around the shoulder of his wife, Emma Rothchild Sen after their arrival at Arlanda Airport in Stockholm, Sweden Saturday afternoon. Professor Sen will receive the Nobel Prize for Economics at the Nobel festival on Thursday.

— AP/UNB photo