

US shifting 3 Patriot batteries to Israel

Yeltsin back at Kremlin

MOSCOW, Dec 11: President Boris Yeltsin returned to his Kremlin office on Friday, where he planned to meet several top aides, the ITAR-Tass news agency said, report AP.

It is the first time Yeltsin has gone to the Kremlin since Monday, when he fired his chief of staff and a number of other aides.

The report gave no other information about Yeltsin's Friday plans.

Yeltsin has been at a country residence, about 100 km outside Moscow, since Wednesday, when he was released from the hospital after a two-week stay to recover from pneumonia.

WASHINGTON, Dec 11: The United States is shifting three Patriot anti-missile batteries from Europe to Israel for a joint military exercise, reports AP.

The announcement Thursday coincided with preparations for President Bill Clinton's visit to Israel, Gaza and the West Bank this weekend.

Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon said only that the Patriot batteries would participate in an exercise called "Mobile Shiloh."

On Capitol Hill, meanwhile, Republican Sen John Ashcroft said expanding US assistance to the Palestinians was "especially imprudent given (Yasser) Arafat's continued incitement of terrorist violence and his refusal to hand over terrorists involved in the murder of Israelis and US citizens."

Incoming House Speaker Bob Livingston complained that the White House should have consulted senior members of Congress before "committing billions of taxpayer dollars to foreign governments."

Livingston referred to a US pledge of \$900 million in assistance to Palestinians over the next three to five years.

Clinton is expected to seek \$1.2 billion to help Israel implement the Wye River peace

accords with the Palestinians on top of about \$3 billion in annual economic and military aid. Jordan is due to receive \$300 million.

Livingston and Republican Rep Bill Young, the incoming chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, wrote Clinton the arrangement "calls into question an earlier agreement with Israel to phase out most economic assistance to that region."

State Department officials have said regular assistance to Israel would be reduced \$60 million a year.

"At the very least, we would

ask you to consult senior members of the congressional leadership on both sides of the aisle before committing billions of taxpayer dollars to foreign governments," Livingston and Young said.

However, Livingston later told reporters he expected the spending bill to pass, despite his reservations.

"The Palestinian people have great needs, and you all must be considerate of their needs, because if they are simply abandoned... they can never achieve the stability that is necessary to keep them from threatening the security of Israel," he told a group of Jewish

Republicans.

Meanwhile, seven former defense secretaries, all of whom served Republican presidents, urged Clinton not to grant the release of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard, "notwithstanding our strong support for Israel."

"While it is understandable that the Israeli government would urge a review of this matter, we believe that it would be exceedingly harmful to the interests of the United States of America for you to agree to that request," Donald Rumsfeld, Frank Carlucci, Richard Cheney, Melvin Laird, Elliot

Richardson, James Schlesinger and Caspar Weinberger said in a letter.

Clinton is awaiting advice from senior aides on Pollard, a former naval intelligence officer who was convicted and sentenced to life in prison on charges of spying for Israel in the mid-1980s.

US officials say the matter is not expected to come up during Clinton's trip.

Israeli officials insisted in October, as Clinton helped arrange the Wye River accords with the Palestinians, that they had an understanding Pollard would be released.

UN team continues intensive inspection in Iraq

BAGHDAD, Dec 11: UN teams returned to the field Friday, searching suspected weapons sites in intensive inspections that are scheduled to wind up after this weekend, reports AP.

At least three teams in white, four-wheel drive vehicles with the UN logo were seen leaving the Canal House, a former hotel that serves as the UN headquarters on the outskirts of Baghdad.

The searches this week have been the most intensive since UN teams were allowed to resume inspections last month.

Workers observe general strike in India

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Angry workers marched through a New Delhi industrial area Friday and other across the country to protest the government's plan to further open the Indian economy to foreign investment, reports AP.

The New Delhi marchers belonged to leftist unions who, along with leftist political parties, called a one-day nationwide strike Friday. The protests reached parliament, where leftist politicians held a hour-long morning sit-in and later normal business in both the upper and lower houses was interrupted by shouts from members whose demands to discuss the strike were refused.

Politicians also clashed in parliament Friday over plans to set aside a third of parliamentary seats for women, making it uncertain the bill will ever come to a vote.

The bill, meant to increase women's participation in India's democracy, was first introduced in 1996 by a previous government, but has never come to a vote. Women accuse male politicians of being unwilling to surrender any power in a country where religious practice and tradition often keep women in the shadows.

Though the strike appeared only partially observed Friday in the capital, where shops and offices were open and traffic relatively normal, local news agencies reported most shops, banks, offices and the commuter railroad were shut down in the eastern city of Calcutta.

The state-owned airline cancelled service for the day in and out of Calcutta, the state capital of West Bengal, which is controlled by Communists. The city's stock market and major commodities markets were closed.

In Bombay, India's financial hub, the Reserve Bank of India said business was normal.

"There are two unions in the RBI, one for the officers and another for the clerical staff and neither have joined the strike," central bank spokesperson Alpana Killawala told Dow Jones News Wires from Bombay, India's financial hub.

Factories, shops and government offices were closed across the southwestern state of Kerala and the northeastern state of Tripura, news agencies added, saying protests were peaceful across the country.

The strike was sparked by a bill opening up the Indian insurance sector. The bill is expected to be presented to parliament for debate next week and is expected to pass.

Advani slates bid to communalise rape incident in Madhya Pradesh

NEW DELHI, Dec 11: Home Minister L K Advani yesterday criticised attempts to communalise the incident of rape of four nuns in Madhya Pradesh and said the heinous crime was committed by hoodlums, some of whom belonged to Christian community itself, reports PTI.

Intervening in the debate in Lok Sabha on atrocities against minorities, Advani said 12 of the 24 persons allegedly involved in the incident were Christians.

It was a case of rape of women and no words are strong enough to condemn this atrocious and outrageous act, he said.

The minister was responding to the charge by CPI-M member Suresh Karup that the frontal organisations of BJP were behind the rape incident in Jabhua.

Describing the incident as nation's failure, Advani said this one incident had maligned the whole country.

Earlier, Kurup alleged that the frontal organisations of BJP, in connivance with the government, were negating the traditional values of the nation.



President Clinton presents the newly created Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights to Bette Bao Lord, a Chinese-born human rights activist, scholar and novelist, as First Lady Hillary Clinton looks on, during a White House ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights Thursday in Washington. — AP/UNB photo

Off the Record

An ageless gesture

RANCHI: An 80-year-old and still going strong tied the knot with a woman 30 years his junior recently, reports PTI.

Anil Dasgupta, a freedom fighter and a lawyer, married for the second time after the demise of his first wife with the consent of his 44-year-old son, a government employee.

The octogenarian told PTI at his home here that he was prompted with the desire to help the woman living in penury. Her ability to sing folk songs was the other attraction.

"My legal profession is not just a means of livelihood for me — my principal objective is to help the poor litigants," he said.

The bride, Mita Dasgupta, is a divorcee and mother of a 28-year-old son. Her penury had forced her to live in her brother's house working like a maid in return for the shelter.

Woman's remains found inside Holy Roman Emperor's tomb

PALERMO, Italy: The remains of an unknown woman have been found in the tomb of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, scientists trying to determine whether he was murdered or died of illness said, reports AFP.

"It really appears that in the sarcophagus there are the remains of a woman," Nicola Cristaldi, the head of the scientific team examining the tomb, said Thursday. "This intrigues us a great deal, and we would like to know who she was."

"If it is proved to be a woman research will focus on the princesses of that period, because sharing the tomb of someone who was known as 'Stupor Mundi' (wonder of the world) would have been a great honour which few women could have shared at the time," Cristaldi said.

Apart from the mummified body of Frederick, who died in 1250, the tomb was thought to contain the remains of two descendants, both sons of Frederick III, who died a century later.

The tomb in Palermo cathedral was opened on November 2. Investigators want to know whether Frederick's death at the age of 56 was the result of illness, or whether he was killed on the orders of the pope with whom he had quarrelled.

BRIEFLY

Rebels kill 2 police in Assam:

Two personnel of the Assam police battalion were shot dead while arms and ammunition were snatched from two others by suspected Bodo extremists in Assam's Kokrajhar district Thursday, official sources said, PTI reports from Guwahati.

More than 20 extremists stormed the Dangtol Bazaar and started firing at the policemen who were on duty. Two policemen were sprayed with bullets and killed on the spot while extremists snatched arms and ammunition from two other policemen on duty.

Typhoon Faith hits Philippines:

Typhoon Faith slammed into the central Philippines early yesterday with wind gusts up to 150 km per hour, Manila's weather bureau said, AFP reports from Manila.

Typhoon Faith's centre hit central Masbate province at 4 am (2000 GMT) and was forecast to reach nearby Occidental Mindoro early today.

Chechen prosecutor disappears:

Only days after the gruesome beheadings of four foreigners, Chechnya's general prosecutor has disappeared, a news report said Friday, AP reports from Moscow.

Mansur Tagirov vanished Thursday evening as he returned to Chechnya's capital Grozny from a small village, according to the Interfax news agency. Citing unidentified sources, Interfax said Tagirov could have been seized by armed bands who want one of their colleagues freed from prison. Tagirov was investigating the deaths of four foreigners whose heads were found Tuesday lined up by a roadside in the breakaway Russian republic.

Cyclone Thelma nears Australia:

The last of 600 people were evacuated Friday from the sparsely populated Dampier peninsula in northwest Australia as cyclone Thelma's highly destructive winds bore down on the coastline, AP reports from Perth.

About 400 of them self-evacuated to Broome and Derby last night, and 200 are in a convoy to Broome as we speak," State Emergency Service (SES) Broome region assistant manager Alan Gale said. The category five cyclone packing 300 kph winds near its destructive core — the most severe on record to assault Australia — was brushing past Western Australia's northern-most tip Thursday night.

US college professor shot dead:

A college professor giving final exams Thursday night was fatally shot by a gunman who fired several shots before fleeing, AP reports from Detroit.

The Wayne State University professor died at Detroit receiving hospital, a statement from the university said. The professor was not immediately identified. A police spokesman said he had been shot several times. None of the students were injured.

House judiciary body ready to approve impeachment resolution against Clinton

WASHINGTON, Dec 11: In a pivotal day reached only twice before in the nation's history, Republicans are primed to muscle through the House Judiciary Committee an impeachment resolution that advocates removal of President Clinton from office, reports AP.

The committee where legal arguments are co-mingled with raw partisanship was to debate four articles of impeachment Friday and make its recommendations to the 435-member House.

The articles accuse the president of lying under oath to a court investigative panel known as a grand jury, lying under oath in the Paula Jones civil lawsuit, obstruction of justice and abuse of power. All of Clinton's actions were designed, they say, to conceal his extramarital affair with a former White House intern half his age, Monica Lewinsky.

Only twice before has the committee taken such a grave vote against a president, recommending impeachment of

Richard M. Nixon in 1974 and Andrew Johnson in 1868. Nixon resigned before the House could act. Johnson was impeached by the House and acquitted by a single vote in a Senate trial.

Anticipating the lame-duck House would have to convene for a roll call on sending articles of impeachment to the Senate, retiring Speaker Newt Gingrich has notified all 435 members to prepare to return to the Capitol next week.

Republican moderates will determine Clinton's fate on the House floor. Democrats fought for their support with an alternate proposal in committee to censure the president, a resolution the committee is virtually certain to reject in a vote, expected Saturday.

Although Democrats were said to be ready to stiffen their censure proposal with a call for a financial penalty from the president, it was unclear whether the full House would vote on any censure measure.

Congressional sources,

speaking on condition of anonymity, said Rep. Bob Livingston, the Louisiana Republican in line to become speaker, had said in private conversations he was unlikely to permit a vote on censure in the full House.

In alternating speeches Thursday night by Republicans who support impeachment and Democrats who oppose it, committee members set the stage and tried to prepare the country for what was to come.

The American people may wake up Sunday morning to find out that this committee has passed articles of impeachment on the president," said Rep. Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat. Schumer could ultimately vote on the president's fate in the Senate; he was elected to the Senate in November and will assume his seat in January.

"I think the American people are waiting for us to come to our senses and end this political game of chicken," he said.

Pro-impeachment Republi-

cans spoke of the need to respect the rule of law, to teach children right from wrong and to punish those who lie under oath — even presidents who don't tell the truth about an extramarital affair.

"We can't escape it, perjury and falsehood under oath still leaps out at us," said Republican Rep. George Gekas.

Democrats, however, contended there are degrees of perjury, and that personal and official misconduct are not the same.

"All lies are not perjury," said Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, the committee's senior Democrat. "Perjury may or may not be impeachable."

Before the members spoke, the committee's two chief investigative counsels — David Schippers for the Republicans and Abbe Lowell for the Democrats — offered lengthy summations of the evidence and showed the first public clips of Clinton's deposition last January in the Jones case.

Hun Sen pessimistic about Cambodia's entry into ASEAN

PHNOM PENH, Dec 11: With Southeast Asian nations still split on whether Cambodia should be admitted into its regional bloc next week, Prime Minister Hun Sen sounded pessimistic Friday about his country's chances at entry, reports AP.

Hun Sen will travel to Hanoi for a state visit two days before the Dec 15-16 summit of the Association of Southeast Nations. He appeared Friday to have already accepted that the consensus required among ASEAN's nine countries to admit Cambodia would probably not emerge.

He said before a Cabinet meeting that whether or not Cambodia is able to enter ASEAN at next week's summit, "it will still remain a future member of the association."

But Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Nam Hong expressed cautious optimism on admittance as he left for the Hanoi summit on Friday along with Finance Minister Keat Chhon.

"We'll see. It depends on ASEAN," Hor Nam Hong said at the Phnom Penh airport.

Cambodia was originally scheduled to join ASEAN in July 1997 along with Laos and Myanmar, but its application was indefinitely suspended when Hun Sen ousted his co-prime minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh in a violent coup d'etat.

Following a disputed election in July, Hun Sen and Ranariddh set aside their difference last month and formed a coalition government. Hun Sen was made sole Prime Minister in the deal, and the prince became president of the National Assembly.

Hun Sen's new government has lobbied hard to regain the international legitimacy Cambodia lost after the coup, and on Monday it successfully reclaimed its seat at the United Nations.

Sam Rainsy said the government must do more to curb political violence and promote democracy.

Suharto's son suspect in corruption case

JAKARTA, Dec 11: Prosecutors have formally named the youngest son of former President Suharto as a suspect in a corruption case involving a shady land deal, news report said Friday, reports AP.

The development comes two days after prosecutors questioned the ex-president in a separate investigation over allegations that Suharto had corruptly amassed a fortune during 32 years in power.

Suharto, who stepped down in May after a wave of protests and riots, has denied any wrongdoing.

But opponents allege that he abused his power to build massive business empires for his six wealthy children.

Saramago attacks govts for failing to improve HR

STOCKHOLM, Dec 11: Nobel literature laureate Jose Saramago of Portugal attacked governments on Thursday for failing to improve human rights, and condemned multinational companies for exerting power undemocratically, reports Reuters.

The veteran communist, who once served on the Lisbon city council, was speaking at a sumptuous banquet after the 1998 Nobel Prize Award ceremony.

Saramago, 76, the first writer in Portuguese to receive the world's most prestigious award for literature, recalled that Thursday marked the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"In this half century, government have not done all they should for human rights," he told 1,300 guests in full evening dress at Stockholm's city hall. "Injustice has multiplied, inequalities have got worse."

Speaking firmly in Portuguese, with an interpreter translating his speech, he condemned "the multinational and plurinational companies whose power absolutely undemocratically reduces the remains of democracy to next to nothing."

Israel seeks vote on PLO charter clause of its destruction

JERUSALEM, Dec 11: Israel affirmed Friday that it will not withdraw troops from the West Bank unless the top Palestinian decision-making body holds a vote to annual clauses of the PLO charter calling for Israel's destruction, reports AP.

Israel also rejected a US compromise on the release of Palestinian prisoners, an issue that has sparked riots in the West Bank.

The Palestinians have said they would revoke the clauses only by acclamation, not by a vote, when the Palestine National Council meets on Monday in the presence of US President Bill Clinton.

With its demand, Israel may be setting itself up for a showdown with Clinton who is visiting Israel and the Palestinian areas to usher in the next stage of the Wye River land-for-security agreement.

Under the accord, the an-

nulment of the offending provisions by the PNC is to clear the way for an Israeli troop pullback. Clinton is unlikely to declare that the PNC has not completed its task.

However, Israeli officials said they would not drop their demand for a vote. "They have to vote in the PNC," said Israeli government spokesman Moshe Fogel. Otherwise, he said, Israel will not turn over additional West Bank territory to the Palestinians because "transfer of territory is irreversible."

On Thursday, the Palestinians took an interim step when a smaller leadership body, the 124-member Palestinian Central Council, declared the charter clauses revoked.

The 95 members present were asked whether they approved a letter in which Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat informed Clinton that the charter clauses calling for Israel's de-

struction were null and void. In all, 81 voted in favour, seven against and seven abstained.

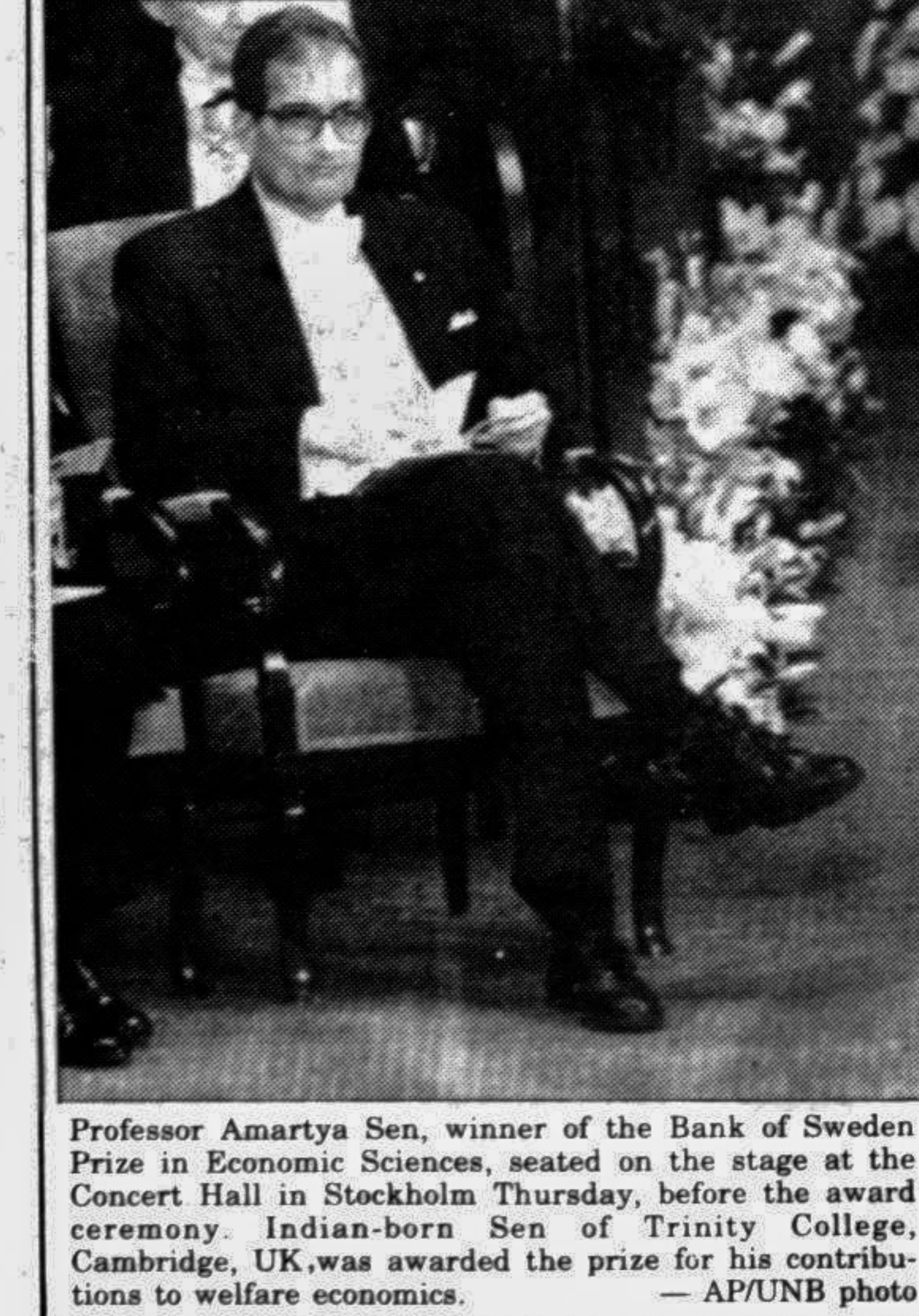
Asked about the decision, Arafat would only say that "it was a very important and constructive meeting." The Palestinian leader also said he hoped Clinton would exert pressure on Israel to keep its obligations under the Wye agreement.

Both sides have accused each other of violating the agreement. A key point of contention has been Israel's pledge to release 750 Palestinian prisoners in three stages by the end of January.

The Palestinians have said Israel broke a promise to release prisoners held for anti-Israeli activities. Israel said it never made such a pledge, and accused the Palestinian Authority of incitement over the prisoner issue. A week of Palestinian rioting has left two Palestinians dead and more than a hundred injured.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat embraces an unidentified hungerstriker at a tent in central Gaza Thursday where Palestinians are staging a strike in sympathy with prisoners held in Israeli jails. Arafat convened a meeting with senior officials and legislators Thursday to revoke clauses of the PLO founding charter which calls for the destruction of Israel. In a rare moment of openness Arafat told visitors that he may not live to see the peace process through. — AP/UNB photo



Professor Amartya Sen, winner of the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences, seated on the stage at the Concert Hall in Stockholm Thursday, before the award ceremony. Indian-born Sen of Trinity College, Cambridge, UK, was awarded the prize for his contributions to welfare economics. — AP/UNB photo

Anwar asked police not to probe allegations of sexual misdeeds

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11: A senior police officer testifying in the corruption and sexual misconduct trial of Anwar Ibrahim said Friday that Anwar told police not to investigate allegations that he committed sexual misdeeds, reports AP.

"When I told Anwar that our investigations were still not completed and were only in its initial stages, he told me that this matter shouldn't be pursued further," Musa Hassan, the prosecution's 13th witness, told the court.

Musa, the officer charged with investigating Anwar since last year, said Anwar issued the directive in the presence of Attorney-General Maktub Abdulrahman.

"Anwar told us that the investigations should be stopped because it goes against what the

prime minister had already pronounced, that the matter was slanderous," Musa said.

His testimony sparked off a storm of protest from Anwar's defense team, who accused prosecutors of using the witness to introduce prejudicial evidence unrelated to any of the charges leveled against the ousted deputy prime minister.

"This piece of evidence is clearly being introduced for its prejudicial value," said lawyer Christopher Fernando. "It offends the rule of relevancy."

Trial judge Augustine Paul overruled the objections, dealing the defense team another setback. On Thursday, Paul reversed his decision to let defense lawyers argue that a key prosecution witness was lying about being sodomized by Anwar.

The prosecution is trying to prove that Anwar put immense

pressure on the police to silence two people — the former driver of his wife and the sister of his former secretary — and obtain retractions from them.

Azizan Abu Bakar, the driver, testified that Anwar repeatedly sodomized him in 1992, while Ummi Hafidha Ali has accused Anwar of sleeping with her brother's wife.

The two were arrested briefly in August 1997 and have claimed they were forced by police to sign statement retracting their allegations against Anwar.

Earlier, Musa said that regular police were kept from interrogating Ummi Hafidha and Azizan.

Intelligence officers of the Special Branch were deputized to interrogate the two accusers and not the detectives from his criminal investigation department, Musa testified.

N Korea plans second satellite launch

TOKYO, Dec 11: North Korea is planning a second satellite launch despite protests over a first rocket test in August that flew over Japan, a senior North Korean official was quoted as saying today, reports AFP.

North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-Gwan told of the launch in talks with US lawmakers including Republican representative Ben Gilman in Washington on Wednesday.

Kim was quoted as saying the planned launch of a Taepodong 1 rocket was not a missile test but part of North Korea's satellite programme.

He declined to say when he launch was scheduled.

Pressed by the US side that the launch should be announced to neighbouring countries beforehand, Kim reportedly said North Korea saw no need to do

so with "countries legally at war."

Japan and North Korea has no diplomatic relations, and talks to normalise ties have mostly been stalled since 1992 over Tokyo's allegation that Pyongyang abducted Japanese nationals to train spies.

North Korea has claimed a rocket launched over Japanese territory on August 31 put a satellite into orbit. The United States and South Korea, however, said the attempted satellite launch was a failure.

Tokyo insists it was almost certainly a ballistic missile test. Earlier this month, Japanese reports said the United States had warned Japan that North Korea may test-fire another ballistic missile before the end of the year.