

Most Americans support attack

WASHINGTON, Dec 17: Most Americans support US and British air strikes against Iraq and reject speculation that the action was intended to delay a vote by the House of Representatives on whether to impeach President Bill Clinton, according to polls, reports Reuters.

A CNN poll of 543 Americans on Wednesday after Washington and London launched a round of air strikes showed strong support for the new get-tough stance against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Seventy-four per cent supported the US military action, while 13 per cent were opposed.

Thirty per cent viewed the military strikes as an attempt to divert attention from a vote originally scheduled today on whether to impeach Clinton over the Monica Lewinsky affair, while 76 per cent were confident about Clinton's ability to handle the situation in Iraq.

A separate poll of 510 adults taken by ABC News showed similar results, with 73 per cent supporting military action against Iraq, and 62 per cent rejecting the notion that Clinton ordered the strikes to delay the impeachment vote.

Americans' views on impeachment remained essentially unchanged with some 58 per cent opposed and 40 per cent supporting an impeachment vote by the house, the ABC poll showed.

Staunch allies offer support, others condemnation

LONDON, Dec 17: Staunch allies such as Germany and Canada offered quick support for Wednesday's US-British attack on Iraq, while Russia and China angrily condemned the airstrikes and France said it deplored "the grave human consequences that they could have for the Iraqi population," report agencies.

The news broke too late for the first editions of most British papers, but the country's largest-selling tabloid, The Sun, led its front page with the headline "BLITZED."

"Saddam must be crushed. Blitz about time too," the paper declared in a Thursday editorial.

The German government noted, however, that the Iraqi leadership "had been warned" the international community would have to act if it failed to cooperate fully with UN weapons inspectors.

In Moscow, President Boris Yeltsin denounced the United States and Britain on Thursday for attacking Iraq and demanded an immediate end to the campaign, warning it could shatter regional security.

"Russia demands an immediate end to military action, to show common sense and restraint and not to allow further escalation of the conflict which could result in the most dramatic consequences not only

for the Iraqi settlement but for the stability of the entire region," Yeltsin said in a statement.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, speaking in Madrid, Spain, blasted the use of force as "a violation of the United Nations charter."

China's UN Ambassador Qian Huaiwen was visibly angry when he emerged from Security Council session Wednesday evening, learning of the attack only after the fact.

"There is absolutely no excuse or pretext to use force against Iraq," he said.

The German government noted, however, that the Iraqi leadership "had been warned" the international community would have to act if it failed to cooperate fully with UN weapons inspectors.

"The federal government regrets that, in the face of the attitude of the Iraqi leadership, it had to come to the use of military measures," its statement said.

And France added that it also "regrets that Iraqi leaders were unable to show proof of the spirit of complete cooperation" demanded by the February 23 memorandum of understanding signed by Secretary General Kofi Annan and Iraq's Tariq

Rezai Asifi as saying.

Iran condemned the US strikes as "unacceptable" and called for United Nations action to halt the operations, Tehran Radio said. Iran also urged Baghdad to cooperate with the United Nations to implement Security Council resolutions, it said.

"Such unilateral attacks against Iraq will worsen the suffering of the Iraqi people and increase instability in the region," the radio quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asifi as saying.

Israel's Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka backed the United States and Britain, saying, "We strongly demand that Iraq immediately and unconditionally implement the UN Security Council's resolutions."

India said the air strikes on Iraq undermined the authority of the UN Security Council and called for an immediate halt to military action.

"This attack raises serious question regarding the functioning of the collective and consultative procedures of the UN Security Council," Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said in a statement to parliament.

Calling the United States "international terrorists" for its attack on Iraq, Islamic

Pakistan's right-wing religious groups on Thursday vowed to show their anger in demonstrations outside mosques throughout the country on Friday.

Several senators in Pakistan's Upper House of Parliament added their voice to the chorus of condemnation.

The government of Pakistan, however, has been silent, although one senator belonging to the ruling Pakistan Muslim League also condemned the attack.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka backed the United States and Britain, saying, "We strongly demand that Iraq immediately and unconditionally implement the UN Security Council's resolutions."

While Afghanistan's Taliban rulers on Thursday condemned the attack, most Afghans said they felt only pity for the Iraqis "who are suffering, while Saddam Hussein is safe in some basement."

The hardline Taliban rulers issued a statement calling the attack on Iraq an insult to Islam.

While Indonesia, the world's most populous Islamic nation, called on the United States and Iraq to demonstrate restraint.

"We call on the conflicting

parties to settle their problem peacefully and through diplomatic ways," said acting Foreign Ministry spokesman Imron Kotan.

Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said his government supported the airstrikes, adding that Canada had not been asked to contribute militarily.

"Saddam Hussein has brought this crisis on himself," Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien said.

Australia, New Zealand, Spain and Norway gave their support to the air attacks, putting the blame squarely on Iraq.

Key southeast Asian governments expressed concern over the air attack but urged Baghdad to comply with UN Security Council resolutions in order to resolve the crisis.

"It's rather unfortunate that this happened. I hope we can avoid the loss of innocent lives," Philippine President Joseph Estrada told journalists after attending the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit, which ended Wednesday in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi.

"This is an unfortunate turn of events," Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar said in a statement issued in Hanoi.

Britain's top court debating Pinochet's fate for second time

LONDON, Dec 17: For the second time in a month, Britain's highest court is debating the fate of Gen Augusto Pinochet, reports AP.

His return to the court comes because one of the judges who denied the former Chilean dictator immunity from arrest is the director of the fundraising arm of Amnesty International.

A five-judge tribunal in the House of Lords may announce a decision Thursday.

If Pinochet wins this round, the judges would order a new hearing Jan. 10 on the key question of whether as a former head of state he has immunity from arrest. This would mark a setback in Spain's efforts to extradite the 83-year-old general to face charges of murder and torture.

If the Lords reject the latest move by Pinochet's lawyers, the extradition process would be back on a track — but it is a slow one anyway.

A final decision could take months, or longer. Pinochet, who was arrested Oct. 16 while recovering from back surgery, remains under police guard at a rented mansion in Wentworth.

Next month, the 83-year-old general is due to start fighting the Spanish extradition warrant at a London court.

BRIEFLY



A youth raises his arms on a burning car in a Toulouse suburb, southwestern France, during an overnight riot early Wednesday. Youths angered by the police killing of a 17-year-old, rioted for a third night, burning cars and throwing stones. Earlier, the policeman who shot and killed the teen during an arrest Sunday appeared before a judge to face possible manslaughter charges.

— AP/UNB photo

Navy gunboats sink LTTE boat:

Sri Lankan naval gunboats sank a Tamil Tiger rebel boat during a confrontation in seas off the country's north, killing at least 15 guerrillas who were on board, navy officials said yesterday. Reuters reports from Colombo.

They said the rebel boat was detected and engaged by naval gunboats on patrol on Tuesday south of Deltap Island off the northern Jaffna peninsula. "The boat was destroyed and sunk, sailors had seen some 15 people on board, they were killed," said a senior navy official. There were no navy casualties.

Dissident Wang's trial closes: The trial of pro-democracy activist Wang Youcai closed yesterday but without result, officials said. AFP reports from Hangzhou, China.

The hearing has been closed for the day but there is no result," an official with the Hangzhou Intermediate People's Court said but gave no further details. Wang, the founder of the fledgling opposition China Democracy Party (CDP), faces charges of subverting state power after he attempted to legally register the CDP during a visit to China by US President Bill Clinton in June.

Chechen rebels threaten Russia: Chechen Islamic militants accused of killing four foreigners threatened to launch attacks on Russia if authorities clamp down on their operations, a news report said Thursday. AP reports from Moscow.

Chechens President Aslan Maskhadov accused the group, Islamic Jamaat or Warriors of Islam, of beheading the foreigners after a rescue attempt went wrong last week. The group has denied any connection with the killings. In a statement made on Chechen television Wednesday night, group leaders threatened to attack Russian sites outside Chechnya if Maskhadov tries to fight them.

French anti-Israel writer jailed: Roger Garaudy, a 85-year-old author of "The Founding Myth of Israel" and some other works in which he attacked Israel, was sentenced to nine months in jail plus 160,000 francs (27,000 US dollars) in fines by an appeals court of Paris on Wednesday. Xinhua reports from Paris.

He was convicted of contesting crimes against humanity, racial defamation, and provocation of hatred by the 11th Chamber of the Appeals Court of Paris, which rejected an appeal by Garaudy against an earlier sentence by a lower court. Garaudy, a former member of the politburo of the French communist party but now converted to Islam. In "The Founding Myth of Israel" said the number of dead in the holocaust as was claimed by Israel was exaggerated.

Serb security presence in Kosovo up: The Serb military and police presence appears to have increased on roads and in the cities of Kosovo, the State Department said Wednesday. AP reports from Washington.

Spokesman James P. Rubin said US monitors have also seen a pattern of combined military and police checkpoints and have raised this matter with police authorities. The deaths this week of dozens of Albanians and Serbs have shattered the Kosovo's fragile ceasefire.

Lebed may run for president: Former national security chief and regional governor Alexander Lebed said he would run for president of Russia in 2000 if he feels the country needs him, according to an interview published Wednesday. AP says from Moscow.

Lebed, who came in third in Russia's 1996 election, has said he would not run unless he solves the problems of the Siberian region of Krasnoyarsk, where he was elected governor in May.

Argentina, Chile sign border deal: The presidents of Argentina and Chile signed an accord on Wednesday ending the final border dispute between the two Andean countries. AP reports from Buenos Aires.

The agreement centres around carving up a lacier area known as the Southern Glaciers Field along the Andes Mountains, which divide the two countries. The plan still needs congressional approval in Argentina and Chile.

Army chief rejects LTTE's offer: New chief of Sri Lankan Army Lt. Gen. Srilal Weerasooriya yesterday dismissed the recent unconditional peace talks offered by the LTTE chief V. Prabhakaran, reports PTI from Colombo.

Weerasooriya, 54, who took over from Lt. Gen. Rohan Dhaluwatta, said ultimately a political solution to the ethnic crisis was needed to end the 15-year-old war. He said the objective of the 1.20 lakh strong army was to eliminate the fighting capability of the LTTE in order to pave way for a political settlement.

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What Baghdad experienced

BAGHDAD, Dec 17: Anti-aircraft guns opened fire over Baghdad shortly after midnight Thursday, and explosions were heard in the Iraqi capital. Orange tracers lit the sky as the guns let loose volley after volley of shots from rooftops, reports AP.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein said US and British airstrikes hit several targets, and accused the two nations of cowardice for using long-range missiles instead of fighting face-to-face.

In a statement carried by the official Iraqi News Agency, Saddam urged Iraqis to "fight the enemies of God, enemies of the nation, enemies of humanity." He did not say how many targets were hit.

He said the attackers did not "come to meet you face to face" and depended "on a long technological arm, which is not a measure of bravery."

Iraqi anti-aircraft guns opened fire after air raid sirens broke the night's silence — and just before Washington and London announced airstrikes on military and security installations. The explosions continued into the pre-dawn hours, stopping briefly before the morning azaan calling Muslims to prayer wailed from the city's mosques.

The anti-aircraft fire began at 12:49 am Thursday (2149 GMT Wednesday). A barrage of

blasts lit the sky several hours after the Clinton administration warned that it would make a military strike against Iraq at any time.

President Clinton ordered airstrikes on Iraq over a protracted impasse with Saddam over UN weapons inspections just minutes before the blasts began. Less than an hour later, Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that Britain had participated in the airstrikes.

An Iraqi official seemed resigned even before the attack began.

"We have done everything in our capacity," Iraq's UN Ambassador Nizar Haidoom said at the United Nations.

Earlier in the day, long lines formed outside Baghdad gas stations and customers cursed Clinton for planning an attack before the holy Islamic month of Ramadan, which is expected to begin Sunday.

"It seems that Clinton ... wants to kill some people in a hurry out of respect for Ramadan," said Amin Jadir, a government worker.

The crisis unfolded quickly after chief inspector Richard Butler submitted a report Tuesday, accusing Iraq of obstructing the inspections at the behest of the United States.

On Tuesday, Butler gave a report to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in which he said Iraq's claim to be free of banned weapons "cannot be accepted without further verification." But verification is impossible as Iraq is obstructing the inspectors, he said.

Until the chemical and biological weapons are destroyed, the United Nations will lift economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which led to the Persian Gulf War.

Iraq says it has complied with every UN demand, and accuses Butler of prolonging the inspections at the behest of the United States.