

BRIEFLY



An Israeli soldier fits a girl with a gas mask at a distribution centre Thursday in Ramle near Tel Aviv. Gas mask distribution centres opened again across Israel hours after US-British joint military action in Iraq.

— AP/UNB photo

ROK troops sink DPRK spy vessel

South Korean troops on Friday sank a North Korean spy vessel in a fierce firefight in South Korean waters which left at least one suspected infiltrator dead, military officials said today. AFP reports from Seoul.

The shootout erupted in the early hours as South Korean military and coast guard vessels pursued a fleeing North Korean semi-submersible vessel carrying up to four commandos, the joint chiefs of staff said.

10 die as boat capsizes in China

A boat carrying farm families capsized on a river in rural southwestern China, killing 10 people, a newspaper reported. AP reports from Shanghai.

Four victims in the accident on the Jingping River in Guizhou province Sunday were children under age 10, the Xinmin Evening News said Thursday. The wooden motorboat was carrying 33 people and freight when it capsized at about 2 am near the village of Xizhai. The cause of the accident is under investigation.

Pope John Paul indisposed

Pope John Paul II has come down with the flu at the start of the busy Christmas season and cancelled his audiences Friday, the Vatican said. AP reports from Vatican City.

The Vatican described the pontiff's illness as a mild case of influenza. The illness struck the frail 78-year-old pope at the start of the busy holiday period.

11 killed in Siberian bus blast

A bus exploded in central Siberia, killing at least 11 people, police investigating the incident said Friday. AP reports from Moscow.

Police did not know how many people were on the bus, but had confirmed there were no survivors, according to the Interfax News Agency. Investigators speculate that a faulty fuel cylinder in the bus caused the explosion, which occurred as it passed a gas station in Kiselyovsk, about 3,000 km east of Moscow.

New Lebanese cabinet approved

The "salvation and change" Cabinet put together by Lebanon's new prime minister, Salim Hoss, won a vote of confidence from the Parliament after a two-day debate. AP reports from Beirut.

Eighty-five legislators voted late Thursday for the new government and 31 abstained. Twelve Parliament members were absent. Hoss, a US-educated economist who served as prime minister four times in the past, announced his 16-member Cabinet on December 4. Hoss was named to the post after Rafik Hariri, the previous premier, declined reappointment by Lebanon's new president, Emile Lahoud.

Lankan underworld leader killed

A notorious Sri Lankan underworld leader, ADU Ranjith, alias Soti Upali, was killed Thursday in the suburbs of Colombo, police said today. Xinhua reports from Colombo.

Police said a group of unidentified people had shot the victim at least four times when he alighted from a bus at Bokundara junction. Upali was accused of assassinating Lalith Athulathmudali, former minister and leader of the Democratic United National Front (DUNF) in April 1993.

Roman remains found in London

Archaeologists have unearthed two significant pieces of Roman history in central London — the foundations of a massive arch, and a wide river channel, long-buried in the heart of the capital, reports AP from London.

The foundations of the arch date back to the first or second century AD and are evidence that Roman London was a wealthy and sophisticated place, archaeologist Bruce Watson said Thursday. About 25 metres wide and 8 metres deep the river channel was found near the Old Bailey courthouse and is thought to have been a major tributary of the river Fleet, which still exists under the streets of London and is used as a sewer.

ROK bans funds for research in human cloning
SEOUL, Dec 18: South Korea banned funding for research into human cloning Friday, but admitted it can not stop "maverick doctors" from forging ahead with the controversial procedure, reports AP.

The move came after a medical team at Seoul's Kyonghee University announced earlier this week that it had successfully cloned a human embryo in its initial stage of development.

The announcement caught the government off guard and sparked protest rallies in South Korea, whose deep-rooted Confucian beliefs were shaken by the news.

We were not given any prior information about the experiment by the Kyonghee University doctors," said Kim Ho-sung, an official at the Science and Technology Ministry. "Our position is firm and clear: There will be no funding for any such research."

But Kim added the government planned no legal action against the scientists.

There will always be maverick scientists. We cannot do anything to stop them," he said. "They will be few in number and you do not burn down the whole house to kill a few fleas."

At the National Assembly, legislators prepared to pass a new law next month banning research on human cloning except for research on cancer or other diseases.

Life goes on for Bill Clinton

WASHINGTON, Dec 18: Yes, Thursday marked Day 2 of the airstrikes and the eve of the House impeachment debate. But at the White House, it was also "Wright Brothers Day." And a time to firm up next year's budget. And an occasion to don black tie in celebration of the Special Olympics, reports AP.

Life goes on for President Bill Clinton.

"It would be an understatement to say the president has been tested over the last week," spokesman Joe Lockhart said. "But I think what you can see — and what he has demonstrated — is that he is up to the challenge."

A temporary suspension of White House lobbying against impeachment — in deference to the military action against Iraq — was announced in the morning but didn't last through the day. Republican leaders said they would open House debate on the impeachment vote on Friday.

Much like her efforts at earlier crisis points in the Monica Lewinsky affair, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton joined the telephone campaign to beat back mounting support for the president's removal from office. She also consulted with histo-



Bill and Hillary in happier times. — File photo

rians and constitutional experts, her spokeswoman said, but was not preparing to make any public appeal on the matter. "She has talked to members" of Congress, said spokeswoman Marsha Berry. "She has talked to folks who are experts on our Constitution and historians, other folks in that area. She is concerned. It is an issue she takes seriously. She is one who

likes to have a lot of information."

Vice President Al Gore also went back to the phones lobbying House members, an aide said, for "a good chunk of the morning." Clinton himself called a handful of House Democrats to discuss their strategy for the debate and vote. The president would not concede defeat in the House until the final roll call, Lockhart said. "On a vote this important and this solemn, yes, there's always a chance."

The president's attention, meanwhile, was stretched to the bursting.

After a morning "bomb damage assessment" briefing by National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, Gen. Henry Sheltan, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other officials, Clinton worked the phones trying to hold together world support for his attacks on Iraq's Saddam Hussein for defying United Nations weapons inspectors. The president had "constructive and productive" conversations with the leaders of France, Egypt, Jordan and Israel.

By afternoon, he and Gore were huddled with economic advisers working through a list

of budget items that must be decided before Clinton's Jan. 19 State of the Union address, which speechwriters worked on in their separate meeting Thursday.

In among the tumble of activity, Clinton released 102.2 million dollars in emergency aid to a half-dozen states and territories cleaning up from Hurricane Georges. He signed a proclamation declaring Thursday, the 95th anniversary of Wilbur and Orville Wright's first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, "Wright Brothers Day."

And both of the Clintons headlined a black-tie gala honoring the Special Olympics 30th anniversary under a giant, heated pavilion on the South Lawn. Hillary Clinton glowingly introduced the president to the star-studded crowd — including Whoopi Goldberg, Sheryl Crowe, Eric Clapton and Tracy Chapman — as "my husband, my partner and our president."

On Friday, Clinton was scheduled to join a regular summit of European Union leaders to review trade tensions, confer again with his budget team and meet with his AIDS advisory panel.

Moscow recalls envoys from US, Britain

Russia's relations with West under strain

MOSCOW, Dec 18: Russia's relations with the United States and the West may be seriously damaged by the US attack on Iraq, wiping out years of progress since the end of the Cold War, top military leaders warned Friday, reports AP.

President Boris Yeltsin and Russian leaders across the political spectrum have denounced the US and British attacks on Iraq, demanding an immediate halt to the campaign.

The Foreign Ministry said Friday it had recalled Russia's ambassador to Britain for urgent consultations. The move came one day after the Russian ambassador to Washington was recalled to protest the attacks.

The State Duma, the lower chamber of parliament, was to consider calls Friday for Russia to unilaterally break UN sanctions against Iraq and provide aid to Baghdad, a long-time Soviet and Russian friend.

In unusually strong criticism from the military, Gen Leonid Ivashov, the head of the Defence Ministry's interna-

tional military cooperation department, said the attack could lead to a rift with the West.

Moscow "will be forced to change its military-political course and may become the leader of a part of the world community that disagrees with the (US) dictate," he was quoted as saying by the ITAR-Tass news agency.

The Russian navy was putting some units on alert because of the Iraq crisis, but there had been no deployment of ships, officials said. The move appeared purely symbolic. The Russian military is not considered an effective force after years of neglect and poor funding.

Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev said Friday the US and British strikes "flagrantly violated the norms of the international law and openly ignored the world community's efforts to settle the situation."

Sergeev, the country's highest-ranking officer, said Moscow's relations with NATO

were threatened. "How can we talk about cooperation and partnership with the alliance now, when Russia's opinion is openly ignored," he said.

Yeltsin is under opposition pressure to curb ties with the West at a time when he has lost much of his political clout because of health problems and his failure to handle the country's worst economic crisis since the Soviet collapse.

Communist and other nationalist politicians have been demanding an end to Moscow's close ties with the West and NATO.

While Yeltsin is not likely to alter his pro-Western policy radically, he is angry about not being informed by Washington about the attack in advance.

The Anglo-American attack on Iraq was criticised by some other ex-Soviet republics. President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia said the United States had no justification for the attacks, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan called for an end to the campaign.

Key accord reached on N Ireland's new admin

BELFAST, Dec 18: Negotiators in Northern Ireland have reached a key agreement on the structure of the province's new administration and number of cross-border bodies, sources close to the talks said late Thursday, reports AP.

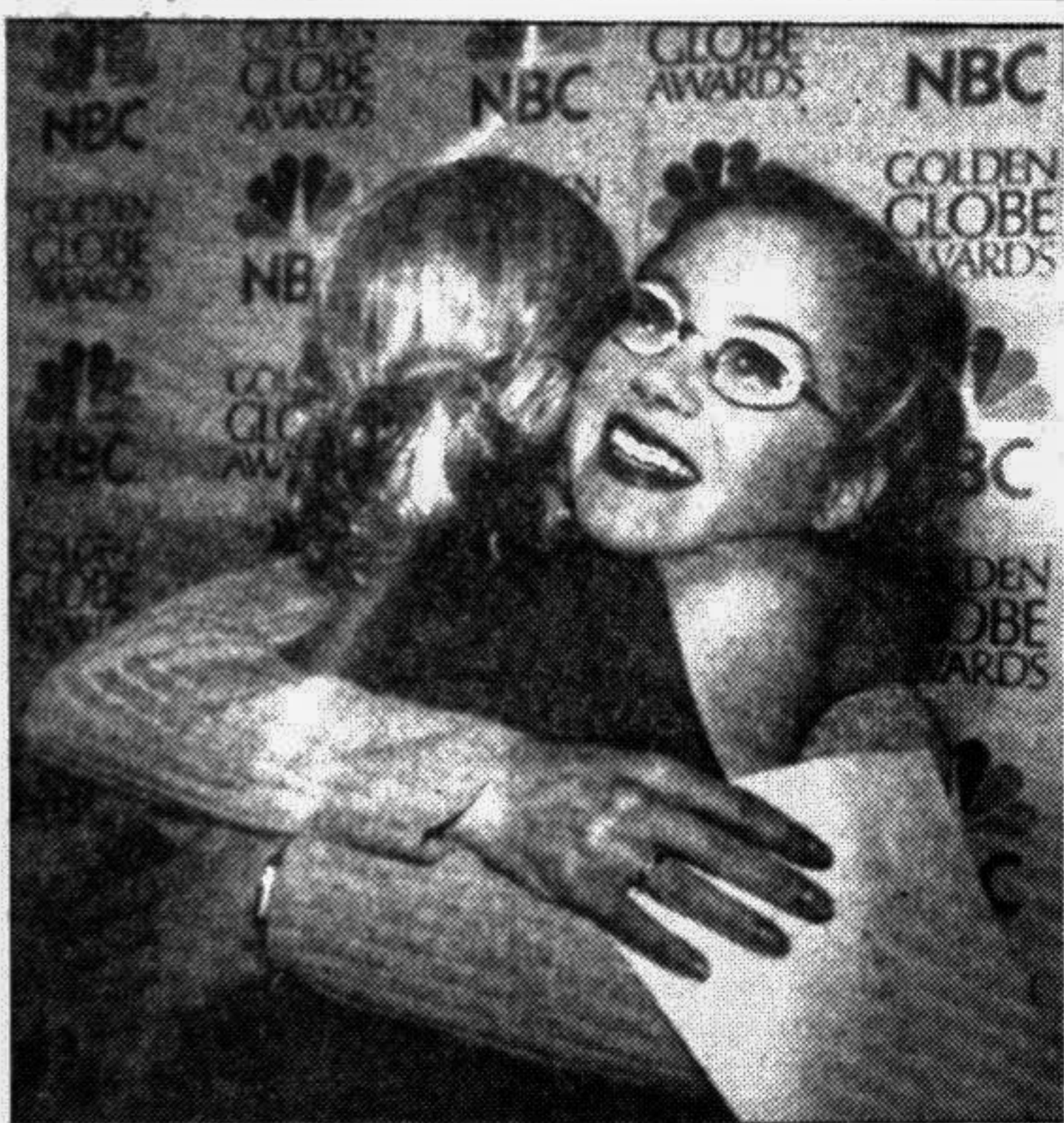
The sources said the parties had settled on 10 departments for the shadow government, which will be given full powers in February or March.

There will also be six cross-border bodies, which comprise ministers from Belfast and Dublin for the first time, to co-operate on mutual interests.

A further body will contain a tourism marketing company to operate across the whole of the island and will be set up jointly by Belfast and Dublin.

Agreement on these issues is vital to implementation of the April 10 peace accord, which has been dogged by arguments.

The number of departments is also important because it will determine how many cabinet seats go to Sinn Fein, political wing of the paramilitary Irish Republican Army (IRA).



Announcers Christina Applegate, right, and Elisabeth Shue embrace during the presentation in Los Angeles early Thursday of the annual Golden Globe nominations. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association nominations, seen as a barometer for the Academy Award nods, were revealed during a predawn ceremony at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. Winners will be announced January 24 during an NBC-TV special.

Butler won't resign

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 18: Top UN weapons inspector Richard Butler said Thursday that he would not resign following a call for his resignation from Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, reports AP.

In response to a reporter who asked whether he would quit as UN Special Commission Chairman, Butler responded: "Absolutely Not."

But he also said that the request for his resignation from Ivanov had not been made to him personally. "He's not communicated that to me," Butler said.

Russia is one of the five permanent Security Council members, and is the first to openly call for his resignation.

Chinese Ambassador Qin Huasun also suggested at a closed-door council consultations on Wednesday that Butler should step down after ordering the evacuation of inspectors from Iraq without the approval of the 15-member Council.

China is also a permanent Council member.

The UNSCOM chairman spoke with reporters to deny suggestions that a negative report to the UN Security Council on Iraq cooperation with his inspectors, which triggered US and British air strikes, was dictated by Washington.

Nearly one lakh congressmen court arrest in West Bengal

CALCUTTA, Dec 18: About one lakh congressmen, including the WBPC working president P R Dasgupta, yesterday courted arrest throughout West Bengal during their law violation programme in protest against the ruling Left Front's 'failure' to check price rise, growing atrocities on women and deterioration in law and order, reports PTI.

Claiming that about one lakh party workers were arrested, P.C. sources said that the former state Congress chief, Somen Mitra, CLP leader, Atish Sinha, also courted arrest in north 24-Pargana and Howrah respectively.

The police said that the situation was peaceful and all the arrested were later released.

The Pradesh Congress earlier announced its decision to defy law in different parts of the state, but asked its workers to maintain peace.

Meanwhile, city traffic was seriously disrupted as congress processions traversed important thoroughfares at Burrabazar, BB Ganguly street and other areas.

Americans protest attacks on Iraq

NEW YORK, Dec 18: With US missiles falling on Iraq, protesters gathered Thursday in cities around America to express their opposition, reports AP.

About 600 protesters marched from Times Square to Grand Central Terminal during the evening rush hour in Manhattan while a brass band played "When the Saints Go Marching In."

"I find it ridiculous that people are worried about Christmas shopping when children are dying in another country because of us," said Cindy Wright, 28. "It makes me nuts."

In Cleveland, about 40 people braved freezing temperatures and biting winds to march outside the federal courthouse downtown. They shouted "No more sanctions, no more war!" and held signs that said "USA out of the Middle East" and "Clinton and Pentagon are the real terrorists."

"I think Clinton should be impeached for killing Iraqi children," said Areilla Ghanouni, a University of Iowa student among 50 protesters

gathered in downtown Iowa City.

Two protesters in Hartford, Conn., were arrested outside the federal courthouse as they demonstrated with about 30 others. The pair were charged with criminal trespassing.

For many members of the 200,000-strong Arab-American community in southeastern Michigan, the US attack is more than a political controversy — it is a deeply personal concern.

"How are you going to feel if your cousin, your brother, your mother is being attacked?" asked Iraqi-born John Yusuf as he watched CNN's war coverage with friends at a hair salon in Detroit.

"We all hope our family is safe. We hope for the best."

Telephones at the Chaldean Federation of America office in Southfield, Michigan were ringing with calls from people frantic for information about the US attack and their loved ones in Iraq. Iraqi Catholics are known as Chaldeans.

Three-fourths of Americans support the bombing, according to a handful of polls released Thursday.



Members of Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) burning an effigy of US President Bill Clinton in protest against the air-strikes over Iraq, in front of the American Centre in Calcutta Thursday. — AP/UNB photo

East Timorese rally for independence

DILI, Indonesia, Dec 18: At least 1,000 protesters on Friday demanded independence in the disputed territory of East Timor ahead of a planned visit by a special envoy from the United Nations, reports AP.

The UN diplomat, Jamsheed Marker, met in the nearby island of Bali with Indonesian military commanders who oversee East Timor, a former Portuguese colony that was invaded by Indonesia in 1975.

Marker was expected to fly to Dili, East Timor's capital, on Saturday in a visit that has heightened fears that demonstrations timed for his arrival could degenerate into riots.

Pro-independence activists who gathered outside the local Parliament in Dili ignored an appeal from East Timor's Nobel laureate, Roman Catholic Bishop Carlos Belo, to stay off the streets.

A harsh critic of Indonesian policy, Belo urged demonstrators to work for change through dialogue and refrain from disrupting Christmas celebrations as well as Ramadan, the Islamic fasting month which begins Sunday.

East Timor is predominately

Roman Catholic, while some 90 per cent of Indonesia's 200 million people are Muslim.

"How can you fight for (your) aspirations by parading all over the city, an act which will only be disadvantageous to you?" the official Antara news agency quoted Belo as saying on Thursday.

"The best way to fight for your aspirations is to sit down and have a dialogue," said Belo, a co-winner of the 1996 Nobel peace prize for his efforts to solve the long-running conflict in his homeland.

Some angry protesters waved separatist rebel flags and threatened to vandalise the Parliament building, which had been left vacant by government officials. But there were also conciliatory speeches.

"In order to get independence, we have to hold a peaceful dialogue," demonstrator Matias Guivarr told the crowd of students and townspeople.

Long-running talks between Indonesia and Portugal and chaired by Marker were revitalised earlier this year when Jakarta offered to grant autonomy to East Timor.

ROK bans funds for research in human cloning

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The announcement caught the government off guard and sparked protest rallies in South Korea, whose deep-rooted Confucian beliefs were shaken by the news.

We were not given any prior information about the experiment by the Kyonghee University doctors," said Kim Ho-sung, an official at the Science and Technology Ministry. "Our position is firm and clear: There will be no funding for any such research."

But Kim added the government planned no legal action against the scientists.

There will always be maverick scientists. We cannot do anything to stop them," he said. "They will be few in number and you do not burn down the whole house to kill a few fleas."

At the National Assembly, legislators prepared to pass a new law next month banning research on human cloning except for research on cancer or other diseases.

Chronology of events leading to air strikes on Iraq

BAGHDAD, Dec 18: Following is a chronology of events leading to the air strikes launched by the United States and Britain against Iraq, which is accused of refusing to cooperate with UN arms inspectors:

Jan 13, 1998 — Iraq prevents UN arms inspectors led by American Scott Ritter from working, Iraq says Ritter is a spy, a charge the Americans reject.

Jan 17 — Iraqi President Saddam Hussein threatens to halt UN weapons inspections.

Feb 12 — Iraq says it will not accept demand for unfettered UN Access to all presidential palaces.

Feb 20 — UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan arrives in Baghdad, saying he has a "sacred duty" to try to defuse the crisis. Security Council more than doubles the amount of oil Iraq is allowed to sell to pay for imports of food and medicine.

Feb 22 — Annan holds three-hour meeting with Saddam, and the UN chief's spokesman announces a deal on weapons inspections.

Feb 23 — Annan says there are "no time limits or deadlines" in the pact. The agreement provides for a "Special group," comprising UN weapons experts and senior diplomats, to carry out inspections of eight key presidential sites.

March 2 — Security Council members agree informally on a resolution warning Iraq of

"severest consequences" if it again bars UN weapons inspectors from suspected sites.

March 26 — UN arms monitors begin mission to inspect a presidential site for the first time in seven years' work according to diplomats praise Iraq's cooperation.

April 9 — UN report says Iraq is still failing to provide a full account of its biological warfare programme and may still be trying to deceive UN

weapons inspectors.

April 28 — Iraqi Foreign Minister denies the agreement with Annan which allowed unlimited inspections of presidential palaces.

May 1 — Iraq warns the Security Council that prolonging sweeping sanctions against it will lead to "grave consequences."

June 17 — Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations says Baghdad will force a "last crisis" if sanctions are still in place at the end of this year.

June 23 — US officials say tests showed Iraq put VX nerve gas on missile warheads before the 1991 Gulf war prompting President Bill Clinton to say sanctions must stay in place. Iraq says UN army laboratory report cannot be accurate.

June 24 — The Security Council retains sanctions.

July 23 — Richard Butler, head of UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) on Iraqi Arms, complains to the Security Council that Iraq is refusing to hand over 10-year-old documents on munitions used in the 1980-1988 war with Iran.

July 23 — Iraq condemns the United States over reports that the Clinton administration is seeking authority from Congress to mount covert operations against Saddam.

July 27 — The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says it has no evidence Iraq has nuclear arms or related materi-

als but that information on its past programmes is incomplete.

July 29 — Russia proposes a Security Council resolution saying Iraq has complied with demands to destroy its nuclear arms facilities, splitting the 15-member body.

July 31 — Iraq accuses an American member of a United Nations arms team of spying during an inspection.

Aug 4 — Chief UN weapons inspector Butler leaves Baghdad after talks with Iraqi officials breakdown. He says Iraq has rejected his proposal to extend his team's work on missile and chemical weapons.

Aug 5 — Iraqi parliament votes unanimously to freeze the work of UN arms inspectors in Iraq.

Aug 9 — UNSCOM suspends inspections of new sites after Baghdad's decision to halt co-operation with the United Nations.

Sept 9 — In a move to punish Iraq for defying inspectors, the Security Council suspends periodic reviews of sanctions.

Oct 31 — Iraq suspends all cooperation with United Nations weapons inspectors and monitors with immediate effect.

Nov 11 — Butler orders inspections staff out of Iraq more than 100 inspectors and support personnel head for Bahrain.

Nov 12 — US Defence Secretary William Cohen warns

Baghdad any military strikes will be "significant". Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz says there will be no peaceful solution unless Washington agrees to the principle of lifting sanctions.

Nov 13 — Russia says it categorically opposes use of force against Iraq but warns Baghdad it faces risk of air strikes.

Nov 14 — Clinton halts a first planned bombing attack with just one hour's notice when Iraq offers to resume UN arms inspections. A second planned attack is halted the next day after Clinton accepts Iraq's offer.

Nov 17 — Eighty-six UN weapons inspectors return to Iraq.

Nov 22 — Iraq says "provocative" requests for documents by the chief UN weapons inspector are intended to provide the United States with a pretext for a military attack.

Dec 16 — UN weapons inspectors withdraw from Baghdad one day after reporting Iraq was still not cooperating with their work.

Dec 17 — US launches air strikes just before 1 am (2200 GMT on Dec 16) against what Clinton calls "Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programme and its military capacity to threaten its neighbours." — Reuters

Four senior Pak govt officials killed in chopper crash

LAHORE, Dec 18: A government helicopter crashed in foggy weather Thursday killing four senior government officials, including the chief of a high-level task force on the economy, said police authorities, reports AP.

There was no official statement about the cause of the crash and officials at the site near Daidan, some seven kilometers outside the provincial capital of Lahore, refused to give any details.

Eyewitnesses said that the helicopter hit a minaret of a mosque in the centre of Daidan. Two worshippers in the mosque were injured.

Three other people were seriously hurt they said, although they were not identified.

Economists Professor Sajjad Haider was among the people killed when the helicopter, belonging to the Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif crashed. Also killed was the commissioner of Punjab's Bawalpur city, Malik Salim, and Deputy Inspector General of Police for Bawalpur Tariq Mujahid and a Pakistan army soldier Mohammed Akram, said police.

The helicopter had taken off from Lahore for Daidan when it crashed.