

## International

## Mamata vows to mobilise all forces against CPI-M

CALCUTTA, Dec 20: The Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, yesterday took the ruling BJP-led coalition to task for its failure to take action against the state's Left Front government on various charges of corruption and scams and said that the "weak centre is busy defending itself," reports PTI.

Announcing that her agenda for the coming year would be to mobilise all forces opposed to the CPI-M to fight the ruling Marxists, the firebrand leader told newsmen that she would contact all anti-CPI-M parties, including some left parties, who were not happy with the CPI-M for the purpose.

The Trinamool Congress, she said, would set its agenda at the public rally at the Brigade Parade Ground which has been

deferred to February 17 from January 28 due to Republic Day preparations.

She said that after the current session of parliament she would talk to the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, regarding law and order in West Bengal besides implementation of the Bengal package.

In an effort to increase bargaining power with the Vajpayee government, Banerjee, meanwhile, roped in two more parties — Arunachal Congress and Haryana Lokdal — to the "Progress Alliance" formed by her.

Confirming that she had talks with the Arunachal Congress and the Haryana Lokdal of Om Prakash Chautala, Banerjee today said that the second meeting of the alliance would take place in New Delhi on December 22.

## Infidelity, scandals reign US politics

WASHINGTON, Dec 20: America's capital is aflame with scandal and its aftermath. Clinton, Gingrich, Hyde, now Livingston — the toll seemingly mounts by the day, reports AP.

What one Democrat called "sexual McCarthyism" is bringing official Washington to its knees.

Rep Bob Livingston shocked the House on Saturday by announcing he would not accept the speakership after admitting two days earlier to extramarital affairs. One confessed sinner to another, he urged Bill Clinton to resign as president.

"I must set the example that I hope President Clinton will follow," he said in a startling aside to a debate that ended with Clinton's impeachment.

Livingston's example is one that few politicians wanted set. "No one standing in this House today can pass a puritanical test of purity that some are demanding that our elected leaders take," House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt of Missouri said after Livingston's remarks. "If we demand that mere mortals live up to this standard, we will see our seats of government lay empty."

United on this point, the whole House applauded his remarks.

Livingston was the latest casualty of a yearlong purge rooted in Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. The long-running scandal is snuffing out careers and ambitions in head-spinning fashion.

House Judiciary Chairman Henry Hyde, charged with prosecuting the case against Clinton, was forced in September to admit to an affair dating to the 1960s.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich announced his resignation shortly after the Nov 3 elections after being blamed for the Republican Party's poor showing. His decision to make the Lewinsky saga an eleventh-hour campaign issue helped energise Democratic voters in critical House and Senate races.

"It is not an ennobling time," lamented Thomas Mann, director of governmental studies at the Brookings Institution. "I've never been so ashamed of our national political leaders, and never so saddened by the behavior of the Congress."

One senior White House official gladly left town for the holidays. "I expect to look through my rear view mirror and see black plumes of smoke rising from the ashes," the official said.

Washington powerbrokers have long fed on each other's troubles, if not always in this dramatic fashion.

Bob Packwood resigned from the Senate in 1995 amid allegations that he made unwanted sexual advances to 17 female employees and colleagues.

John Tower's nomination as Pentagon secretary was jettisoned by the Senate in 1989 amid questions about his fondness for drinking and womanising. The Senate narrowly con-

firmed Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court in 1991, but only after hearings over sexual harassment allegations that he equated to a "high-tech lynching."

Gary Hart dropped out of the 1988 presidential race, refusing to confirm whether he had an affair with Donna Rice.

If only Livingston could say the same thing.

One after another, Democrats and Republicans alike urged the Louisiana lawmaker to reconsider his decision. Quitting now would be a concession to what Gephardt called "the politics of slash and burn."

Democrats had extra incentive to protest: They're trying to stifle calls for Clinton's resignation.

"It would be wrong (for Livingston) to give in to this insidious politics of person destruction which seems so pervasive in this town now," said Joe Lockhart, speaking for Clinton.

Some Republicans seemed to suggest that Livingston was setting a standard they're willing to live with.

"The example is that principle comes before person, and it is an example that we must all hold to ourselves," said Rep Dick Armey of Texas.

It was left to Hyde, the silver-haired Clinton nemesis, who summed up the day and this era the best. "My friends," he said from the well of the House, "those of us who are sinners must feel especially wretched today."

## China sends detained ailing dissident into exile

BEIJING, Dec 20: China released an ailing labour rights campaigner from a prison work camp on Sunday and immediately sent him into exile in the United States, a human rights group reported, says AP.

Liu Nianchun's release contrasted with a relentless three-week-old crackdown against dissidents trying to form an opposition political party. A third leading organiser of the China Democracy Party and the group's most prominent leader, Xu Wenli, goes on trial for subversion Monday.

Liu was taken from the Tiananmen labour camp on the outskirts of Beijing, driven to the capital's airport and put on a Northwest Airlines flight, the Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China reported. It added that he was ultimately headed for New York.

Authorities released Liu exactly six months before the end of his prison term but made his

freedom conditional on his going into exile, the Hong Kong-based group reported.

Liu was one of the most respected figures in China's fractured, persecuted dissident community. His more than 30 and a half years in prisons and labour camps was a sad illustration of the way China's Communist Party rules punish people they deem a threat.

Liu was imprisoned at three times in the past 17 years. His last arrest came after he signed a petition calling for labour rights in May 1995. Liu was never put on trial. Fourteen months passed before his wife, Chu Hailan, first learned of his whereabouts: a labour camp in the frigid, far northeast.

His wife tirelessly campaigned for his release. Chu was dragged away and hit by security forces when she tried to hand a letter to UN human rights chief Mary Robinson outside a Beijing hotel in September.



President Clinton gets applause from Vice President Gore as First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton looks on outside the Oval Office after the House of Representatives voted to impeach the president on Saturday.

## Impeachment: Senators to face political pressures

WASHINGTON, Dec 20: The 100 Senators who will be asked for a verdict on President Bill Clinton will face pressures that jurors in other trials never feel, reports AP.

One-third of them are up for re-election in two years. A half-dozen might run for president. Senators on both sides will be pressed hard to stand with their parties.

Republicans had a large enough majority to impeach Clinton in the House no matter how the Democrats voted. But in the trial, Senate Republicans need Democratic votes to reach the two-thirds necessary for conviction.

If the 55-member Republican majority holds together, 12 members of the opposing party — more than one of every four Democrats would have to join them.

There are reasons for party members on both sides to stay put.

And Republicans who might be willing to work with democrats on an impeachment alternative would do so at the risk of alienating religious conservatives who are pushing for Clinton to be removed from office.

Conservatives are especially important in Republican presidential primaries, and the Republican Senators who are eyeing the White House in 2000 presumably don't want to alienate those voters.

Likewise, the Senate Republicans most likely to cross party lines the moderates — run the risk of angering conservatives.

A vote along party lines would mean Clinton would survive.

So far, however, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, has rejected any deal. He said Saturday the Senate will proceed with a trial following preliminary motions and pleadings.

Lott said the Senate would begin making preparations when it convenes in January, pausing for the White House to submit its response to the charges contained in the House's articles of impeachment.

Preparing for a trial is no small undertaking. The prosecutors the House approves for a trial would have to line up testimony of witnesses. Evidence would have to be submitted by both sides. The president would get to make his case. Legal challenges could occur.

For now, Senators of both parties are remaining mum until they get the facts.

## BRIEFLY

**John Glenn visits his hometown:** John and Annie Glenn have returned to the town they left more than 50 years ago so he could become a pilot and eventually fly into space. AP reports from Ohio.

Fans lined the narrow sidewalks of their hometown of 2,000 in eastern Ohio's hills to salute the Glenns with a parade on Saturday to celebrate 77-year-old John Glenn's second space flight aboard the shuttle Discovery. It was their second trip down the middle of Main Street. The first came in 1962 after Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth.

**Huge bomb found in Guwahati:** A 40-kg huge time bomb was found from a petrol tank a car parked at a space in front of the Dispur capital secretariat yesterday. PTI reports from Guwahati.

The time device, scheduled to explode at 1550 hrs, was detected from the petrol tank of an abandoned Ambassador car which was stationed at the parking space of the secretariat, official sources said. The device was timed as the government offices which was on yesterday normally ends around that time, sources said, and added it was not certain which extremist group was behind the incident.

**Muslim leader freed in Nigeria:** The leader of a Muslim sect campaigning for a fundamentalist Islamic state in Nigeria has been freed after spending two years behind bars, the Lagos Guardian newspaper reported Saturday, AP says from Lagos.

Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zak Zaky, who was jailed for making illegal radio broadcasts in 1996 during the rule of the late military dictator Gen. Sani Abacha, spoke with journalists on Friday soon after being freed from jail in the northern city of Kaduna, about 170 kilometres north of the capital of Abuja. El-Zak Zaky insisted he would continue to push for a government upholding Muslim religious principles.



Iraq's Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan gestures during a news conference in Baghdad on Saturday in which he declared that the Baghdad regime will end all dealing with UNSCOM, that oversees weapons inspections, in response to the American and British attacks.

— AP/UNB photo

## Key developments in airstrikes

UNDATED: Key developments in the airstrikes against Iraq:

The United States and Britain announce the suspension of attacks, declaring the mission complete. Hours earlier, the nations launched a fourth and final wave of strikes on Iraq. A half-dozen loud blasts rocked the capital, indicating missile hits, reports AP.

A defiant Iraq declared it would cut off all dealings with United Nations weapons inspectors.

At the Pentagon, Defence Secretary William Cohen told reporters the airstrikes had inflicted "significant damage" on Iraq's military systems. He said US analysts believe the assault had set back Iraq's ballistic missile programme by one year.

Iraqi vice president Taha Yassin Ramadan focused on civilian sites hit in the strikes, confirming earlier reports that telephone communications with southern provinces had been broken. He also said that

the United States and Britain had hit an electricity plant and destroyed a factory that had been inspected by the UNSCOM weapons inspectors.

State-run Iraqi News Agency said five people died and 21 were wounded in a missile attack on the Al-Riyad neighbourhood of the northern town of Kirkuk. The government said earlier that 25 people were killed and 75 injured in the first two nights of attacks.

A second US aircraft carrier battle group — led by the USS Carl Vinson — moved into the Persian Gulf to join the USS Enterprise group, US Navy officials said.

Operation Desert Fox: Duration: 70 hours.

Targets struck: nearly 100.

Aircraft missions: including combat support missions: 650. Cruise missiles launched from Navy ships: more than 325.

Cruise missiles fired from Air Force B-52 bombers: more than 90.

## Clinton 2nd in US history

WASHINGTON, Dec 20: William Jefferson Clinton will be forever marked as the second president in history to be impeached, struck low by sexual indiscretions and legal deception. The legacy he fretted over so much and worked so hard to build is indelibly stained, reports AP.

The president will endeavour to redeem his presidency, but his struggle for achievements in his last two years in office — if he survives at all — will be waged against long odds and a backdrop of unrelenting partisanship that strike many Americans as spinning out of control.

Surely history will be struck by the bewildering hostilities that strew casualties across the political battlefield of 1998, Republican and Democrat alike. Many social observers see the battle over Clinton as one more rancorous chapter in the culture clash going back to the 1960s over the Vietnam war, marijuana, Watergate, CIA spying and other troubles.

Even as they quarrelled over Clinton's fate, lawmakers decried the poisonous atmosphere surrounding their debate. Before shocking his colleagues by declaring he would not run for speaker and would resign from

Congress, Rep. Bob Livingston lamented "the enmity and the hostility that has been bred in the halls of Congress for the last months and years."

Clinton vowed to remain in office "until the last hour of the last day of my term."

But the months ahead won't be easy, for Clinton or for Congress, after the House impeached Clinton for perjury and obstruction of justice.

Can Clinton wage a successful battle for survival in a Senate trial as did President Andrew Johnson in 1868? Will the public turn and clamour for his resignation, forcing him to resign as Richard Nixon did 24 years ago even before the House took up articles of impeachment against him?

With an impeachment vote that seemed unthinkable after Republican election losses in November, the nation plunges into uncertainty unlike anything Americans have seen in 130 years.

The stakes are huge. "This is a mighty step because you're pulling out of office a man who was elected by 50 million Americans in 1996," said Columbia University historian Henry Graf. "It has always been my belief that democracies only work well

when what the people want and what they require coincide. Here we're seeing a Congress mostly on the Republican side saying this is what you need, and the public saying this isn't what we want."

The Republicans' crusade against the president, and the Democrats' support for him, raised the likelihood of more divisiveness in the new Congress that takes office in January, jeopardising a Social Security rescue plan and other major legislation.

Some believe Republicans will be punished in 2000 congressional elections by voters weary of the Republicans' handling of the yearlong scandal.

Indeed, Clinton's extraordinarily high approval ratings in the polls were never shaken by the revelations of his affair or the cover-up attempt that even his lawyer said could be reasonably construed as lying.

The capital's bitter mood was underscored by the sour cynicism that greeted Clinton's decision to launch airstrikes against Iraq on the eve of the scheduled impeachment vote.

"He's had nine lives or 12 lives or 14 lives," said Tom Cronin, president of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington.

## Bomb blast kills 10 in Assam

NEW DELHI, Dec 20: At least 10 people, including six policemen, were killed to day when separatist guerrillas blasted a police van in the far-eastern Indian state of Assam, the United News of India (UNI) said, reports AP.

The vehicle was also carrying four suspected rebels, who also died in the powerful explosion in Dhubri district, bordering Bangladesh, officials said.

UNI said the "high power time device" was reportedly set off by the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

Sunday's blast came a day after the police defused a powerful car bomb close to the Assam government headquarters in Guwahati city, a day after a similar device nearly killed nine people and injured 30.

## Lack of response was Iraq's tactic of self-defence?

WASHINGTON, Dec 19: Iraq's air force hasn't challenged US and British warplanes, and air defence units haven't fired off missiles in their nation's defence. Taking the latest Western onslaught in the chin may well be their best defence, Pentagon officials and military analysts say, reports AP.

Other than volleys of orange tracer bullets piercing the skies over Baghdad with anti-aircraft fire, there's been little resistance seen from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's military force.

"I think if there is any surprise it's the complete lack of response" on the part of the Iraqis, Pentagon operations chief Vice Adm Scott Fry told reporters on the third day of the attacks.

"I think they're essentially

trying to protect themselves right now, and believe that's a better tactic than trying to go and fight against the attack," added Fry's colleague, Rear Adm. Thomas Wilson, the Joint Staff's director of intelligence.

The contrasts to the Iraqi approach during the 1991 Gulf war, when Saddam ordered his troops into the "mother of all battles" against the allies. Besides engaging US and allied aircraft in that war, Saddam used his ground forces and fired Scud missiles.

In this latest conflict, Saddam has declared, "By Allah's will, we will be victorious."

But Iraq's response on Saturday was not a military one. Rather, it announced that it was cutting off all dealings with the UN Special Commission that is in charge of supervising Iraq's disarmament.



Rev. Ronald Schupp, centre, protests the US and British airstrikes against Iraq on Saturday in downtown Chicago. About 50 people attended the rally, sponsored by the Chicago Coalition to Stop the War Against Iraq. Others in the photo are unidentified.

— AP/UNB photo

## Iraqis greet end of strikes with relief, anger

## 'Clinton has won a battle but not the war'

gained? All these missiles and destruction ... all this suffering and it ends as if nothing has happened," said Muhend Fawzi, an engineer.

Fawzi was among a group of young Iraqis who spent the past four nights in a government shelter for fear of being hit by US or British bombs.

On Sunday, they rolled their bedsheets and left the concrete underground shelter, discontent evident on their faces.

"I am not happy. I'm afraid it isn't taking us anywhere. Again we are back to where we started," said Fawzi's companion, labourer Khalid Zuher.

Taxi Driver Abbas Zarzur, wearing traditional Arabic robes, defied the United States and Britain to continue their bombing.

"Let them continue to attack us, we don't care," he said. "We will always live and survive

and resist them. We will see the result of this later and in the end we will see who will win."

"The end of this aggression has no meaning," Zarzur said, warning: "They have won a battle but not the war."

May God curse him (Clinton). I can't see why he bombed and why he stopped," said Falah Hassan.

Clinton on Saturday night announced he was halting the airstrikes, saying the attacks achieved their goal and caused "significant" damage to the arms-making abilities of President Saddam Hussein's government.

But he also said the United States urged the continuation of trade sanctions imposed on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait that have impoverished the once-rich country by cutting off its oil exports.

Murad Muhesen, who had a

radio with him inside the shelter, said those holed up inside got up-to-date coverage not only on Iraq but on impeachment proceedings against Clinton.

"If the US Congress accuses Clinton of perjury and obstruction of justice how can we Iraqis believe what he says?" Muhesen said when asked his feelings about Clinton saying the latest offensive would help the Iraqis out of their predicament.

As dawn approached Sunday, it looked like a normal day for Ramadan, the holy month when Muslims fast during the daylight hours. The month began Saturday.

In Bab al-Sharji in downtown Baghdad, restaurants prepared lentil soup for sojour — the pre-dawn breakfast Muslims have during Ramadan.

At Sahat al-Tayran, a main

Baghdad square, members of the militia of ruling Baath Party sat in cafes with their rifles on their laps, sipping tea and listening to the radio.

Some militia members brandished rifles and shouted: "Saddam, your name has shaken America."

Abdulrazzaq Abdulhameed, who was cooking kebabs over burning coal on a vendor's cart, said: "The one who starts the war and ends it at will is the culprit. The Congress is right to send a liar like Clinton to trial."

Abu Yurub, a soldier, was bitter. "Clinton this time inflicted great harm on us. He had no reason to do that."

The loudspeakers atop a mosque minaret blared recitations from the Quran, the Muslim holy book. Old men strolled to mosque for prayer.

"I do not understand politics. I am going to pray," said Haji Umer, 65.

## LDP to form new coalition with Liberal Party in January

TOKYO, Dec 20: An unlikely coalition between Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party and opposition Liberal Party has been formalised with an agreement to restructure the Cabinet, senior politicians said today, reports Reuters.

Prime Minister and LDP leader Keizo Obuchi hammered out an agreement to reduce the number of Cabinet posts from 20 to 18 in a late Saturday night bargaining session with Liberal Party leader and former foe Ichiro Ozawa. Liberal Party senior member Takeshi Noda said on a national political talk show.

The two parties are expected to officially form the coalition government by the start of the next regular session of parliament scheduled for mid-January.