

UN rejects Iraq's request to replace US, UK aid workers

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 6: The United Nations has rejected Iraq's argument that American and British aid workers shouldn't remain in the country because of security concerns after last month's missile strikes, diplomats and UN officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

UN officials were drafting a letter to Iraq reminding Baghdad that the United Nations alone determines who works on its programmes and doesn't accept discrimination against any nationalities, diplomats said.

The letter would also "underline Iraq's responsibility for safeguarding the security of all UN personnel," said Britain's deputy ambassador, Stewart Eldon.

He spoke to reporters after the Security Council was briefed on Iraq's decision not to renew visas for nine Britons and an American staffer, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's

deputy chief of staff, Rolf Knutsson, conducted the briefing.

Iraq told the United Nations in an unsigned note Monday that it could no longer protect American and British aid workers from popular anger felt by Iraqis who suffered from the Dec 16-19 US-British airstrikes on the country.

US and British forces bombed Iraq after UN arms inspectors accused Baghdad of obstructing efforts to search out and destroy Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Economic sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait cannot be lifted until UN inspectors certify Iraq is free of such weapons.

UN spokesman George Somerville said Tuesday in Baghdad that the workers hadn't encountered any security problems since the airstrikes. American and British journal-

ists in Iraq have similarly detected little public hostility.

Iraq has said the inspectors cannot return and has recently shifted much of its ire towards humanitarian and other UN work in the country.

Baghdad has halted flights by the UN observer team that monitors the Iraq-Kuwait border and has complained that international aid organisations were working illegally with the United Nations on land mine removal in the North.

Iraq's quest to have the US and British staffers replaced with other nationalities, however, marked the first time Baghdad has tried to dictate the composition of the UN aid teams.

"We're pleased that the Secretariat has decided not to accede to the latest Iraqi effort to undermine the efforts of the humanitarian workers there in their efforts to discriminate against some nationalities,"

said deputy US ambassador, Nancy Soderbergh.

She said that while the humanitarian work is dangerous, there had been no specific threat to Americans working in Iraq. Similarly, Eldon said the security of UN personnel was under close review.

The UN humanitarian team, made up of about 400 people, is in Iraq to distribute food and medicine under the UN oil-for-food programme, which allows Iraq to sell limited quantities of oil. Iraq has been barred from selling oil on the open market as part of the UN sanctions.

Baghdad has said that it will not renew the visas of nine Britons and one American working with the programme. Many diplomats pointed out that Baghdad's argument seemed undermined by its decision to let four Britons and three Americans remain.

Clinton, King Hussein discuss ME peace process

WASHINGTON, Jan 6: President Bill Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan discussed the Middle East peace process, Iraq and the Jordanian economy during a White House meeting on Tuesday, a senior US official said, reports Reuters.

The 63-year-old monarch visited Washington on his way home after six months of cancer treatment at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

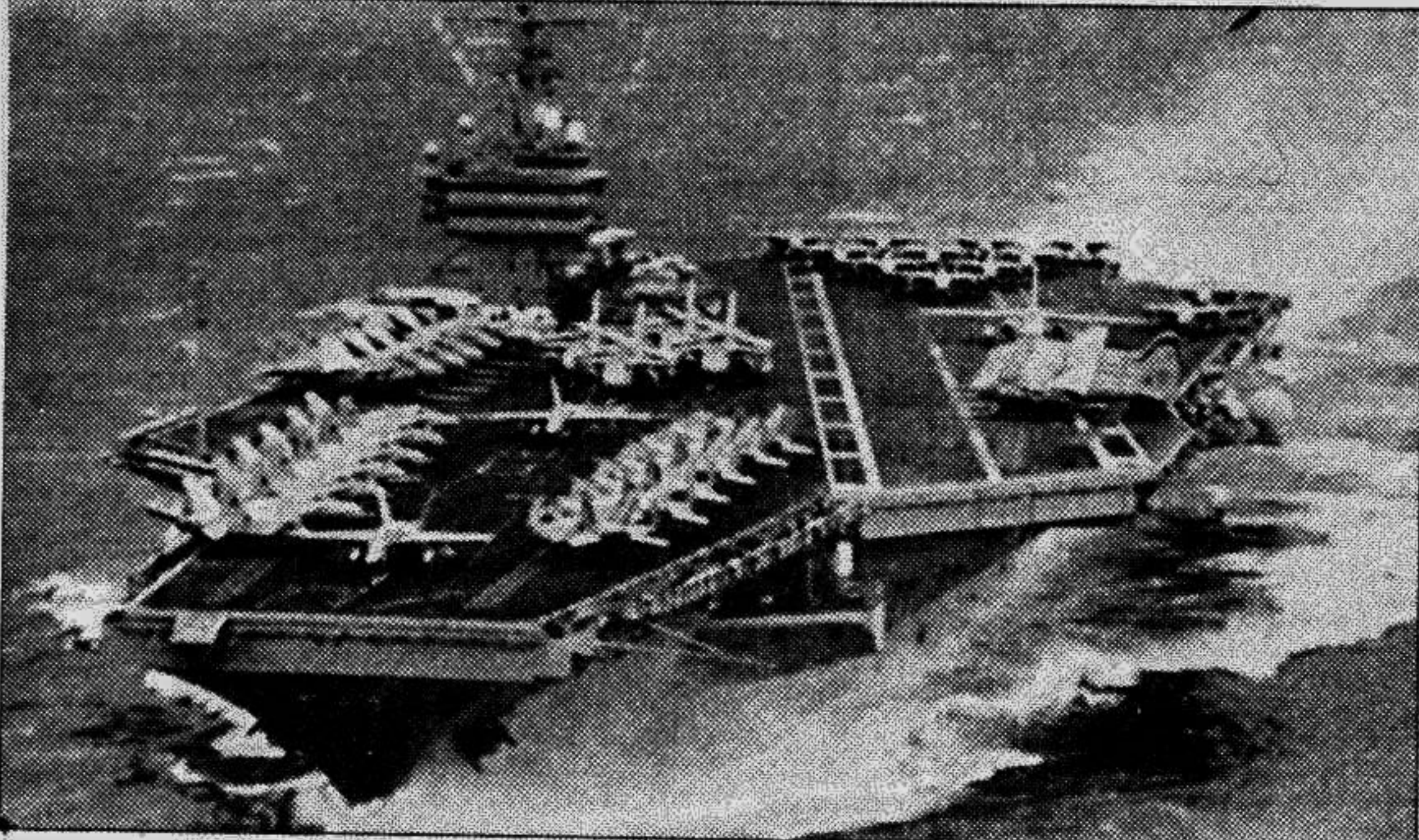
National security council spokesman David Leavy said Clinton and Hussein met for about half an hour in the Oval office and discussed Iraq, the Middle East peace process and ways that the United States might aid Jordan's ailing economy.

"The President made clear he continues to believe that Iraq is a threat to regional stability and needs to be contained," Leavy said.

"On the Middle East peace process, the King and the President agreed it was important to implement the Wye accords as negotiated."



The largest boat to be displayed at the international boat fair, "BOOT '99" is transported Tuesday from the River Rhine to the exhibition centre in Duesseldorf, Germany. The boat was built in the PR Marine shipyard in Saal on the River Danube in Bavaria, Germany. The 29m-long boat is powered by two 16 cylinder diesel-engines with a speed limit of 50 kph. — AP/UNB photo



The US Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson is shown in this May 27, 1996 file photo. Four US fighter jets fired missiles at Iraqi planes Tuesday in a confrontation in the "no-fly" zone over southern Iraq, a senior US administration official said. The official said the US planes — two Air Force F-15 strike aircraft and two Navy F-14 fighters — returned safely after the confrontation. The Navy planes were from the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson which is currently patrolling in the Persian Gulf. — AP/UNB photo

Anwar slams police report on beating

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 6: Anwar Ibrahim on Wednesday slammed the attorney-general's report on his beating by police, wondering why the inspector-general of police had yet to be interviewed about the incident, reports AP.

"After four months, they haven't questioned the IGP? I am shocked," Anwar told reporters during a recess in his sex and corruption trial, now in its third month.

Attorney-General Mohhtar Abdullah on Tuesday issued a statement that finally conceded that some of Anwar's injuries on the night of his arrest were caused by police.

But Mohhtar still insisted that Anwar exaggerated the facts of his beating.

"Based on the medical reports and the investigation file, I am satisfied that several injuries alleged by Anwar are not true while there are other injuries on some parts of his body which are proved to have been caused by police officers," Mohhtar said.

Anwar, reading Mohhtar's

statement in a local newspaper, raised his eyebrows and asked reporters who for the first time were not prevented by police from approaching him: "What about the other injuries?"

Anwar was fired Sept 2 by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who deemed him morally unfit to lead.

After leading massive political reform rallies, Anwar was arrested Sept 20. He said that on the night of his arrest, he was punched and kicked until he fell unconscious.

Nobody knew of the beating until Anwar showed up in court for his arraignment nine days later with a black eye and bruises. The beating cause and international outcry against his treatment and the AG's office launched an investigation.

Anwar currently is on trial for charges that he tried to abuse his power as deputy prime minister and finance minister to cover up illegal sexual activities.

The government inquiry

into his beating has so far failed to identify the officers responsible for the injuries.

Mohhtar said the probe was still under way and that any police officer found guilty of hitting Anwar would be punished.

Opposition leaders, meanwhile, called the incomplete inquiry pathetic.

"After having allowed this inquiry to drag on for more than four months, the AG is only able to report that the inquiry is still incomplete," Syed Husin Ali, president of the Malaysian People's Party, said in a statement Wednesday. "This is thoroughly scandalous."

Lim Kit Siang, the opposition leader in Parliament, demanded an independent investigation into the beating.

"Justice for Anwar and justice for all Malaysians demand a royal commission for inquiry to conduct public investigations into Anwar's black eye and other injuries while in police custody," Lim said.

Attacks on Christians India reacts angrily to Pakistan's condemnation

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: India reacted angrily Wednesday to a resolution by neighbour and rival Pakistan condemning attacks on Christians in India, reports AP.

The resolution, which constitutes a gross interference in India's internal affairs, is entirely baseless and mischievous, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. The ministry added Pakistan had its own religious troubles. "It is particularly regrettable that an assembly representing an increasingly intolerant society should make such observations," it said.

Government and opposition legislators in Pakistan unanimously adopted two resolutions Tuesday, one condemning attacks against Christians in India blamed on extremist Hindus and another condemning Monday's massacre of 16 Shiite Muslims in Pakistan by Sunni Muslim extremists.

Since Christmas Dec 25, a score of churches, prayer halls and Christian schools have been attacked by mobs wielding axes, iron bars, hammers and stones in the Indian state of Gujarat. The Indian government has condemned the attacks and called for religious tolerance, but refused to ban extremist groups linked to Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party that have been accused of orchestrating the violence.

India, which is overwhelmingly Hindu, is governed by a secular constitution. But fundamentalists say all Indians should accept Hinduism as part of their culture.

Pakistan is largely Muslim, and last year its parliament took steps to amend the constitution to give the federal government sweeping powers to interpret and impose laws based on its interpretation of the Holy Quran.

BRITFLY

Grenade attack on Iranian judge: One of Iran's most prominent hardline judges survives an assassination attempt Tuesday when a man on a motorcycle threw a hand grenade at him, Iranian security officials said, AP reports from Tehran.

Hojatolislam Ali, Razini, who has close ties to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was slightly injured in the leg, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported. He was rushed to hospital where his condition was reported as satisfactory. The attack killed a passerby and injured Razini's driver and two others pedestrians.

2 hurt in Corsica bomb blast: Two people suffered minor injuries in a bomb explosion which ripped through a local government building at a town in eastern Corsica early yesterday morning, police said, AFP reports from Bastia.

The blast caused heavy damage to the offices of the departmental Planning and Tourism Bureau at Ghisonaccia on the east coast of the troubled Mediterranean island. An hour earlier, a bomb seriously damaged an office of the Corsica Economic Development Agency south of Ajaccio, police said.

Canada sends aid to Russia: A Canadian plane carrying food, medicine and other aid arrived Wednesday in Russia's Arctic territory on a mission to assist the local population, the ITAR-TASS news agency said, AP reports from Moscow.

The plane was carrying 500,000 dollars in aid paid for by the Canadian government and arranged by the Canadian Red Cross. The aid will be distributed in the Chukchi Autonomous District, the most eastern region of Russia. Canada also plans to send aid to the Kamachatka and Magadan regions of Russia's Far East, the report said.

Murderer executed in Texas: A parolee who raped and strangled a 77-year-old woman after she gave him a job doing lawn work was executed by injection Tuesday, AP reports from Huntsville, Texas.

John Glenn Moody, 46, had nearly two dozen convictions over 19 years. Moody had been out on parole for five months, having completed a seven-month term for burglary, when he was hired in July of 1988 by Maureen Louise Maulden to do yard work at her Abilene home. A sister found Maulden's body. She had been raped, beaten with a fireplace brush and strangled with a telephone cord.



Shania Twain waves after receiving the Top Selling Album award at the Canadian Country Music Awards in this Sept 8, 1997 file photo. Twain received six Grammy nominations Tuesday and will compete against a nearly all female field including Madonna, Sheryl Crow, and Lauryn Hill for Album of the year award. — AP/UNB photo

Landing facilities to be upgraded at Delhi Airport

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: India on Tuesday vowed to upgrade landing facilities at New Delhi's main international airport in a bid to overcome disruptions caused by winter fog, officials said, reports AFP.

Civil Aviation Minister Ananth Kumar said upgraded instrument landing systems would also be installed at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport by November this year.

The system would be on top of navigation equipment already installed in New Delhi and at the country's busiest airport in Bombay by Raytheon of the United States, they said.

Existing landing equipment here does not offer readings beyond 600 metres (1,980 feet) while winter fogs often brought visibility down to less than 100 metres (330 feet).

The fog, which blanketed northern India on December 18, also hit thousands of train services and caused innumerable road accidents.

Congolese rebels deny killing of 500 villagers

GOMA, Jan 6: Rebels killed at least 500 people in a village in southeastern Congo last week in apparent retaliation for an attack on their soldiers, Roman Catholic missionaries in the area reported Tuesday. The rebels have denied any knowledge of the massacre, reports AP.

The Misna missionary news services quoted sources as saying the rebels rampaged through the village of Makobola for three days beginning Dec. 30 swinging machetes and shooting guns.

"They killed many, many children, many women, many elders. Many innocent people," said the Rev. Giulio Albanese, head of the Misna news agency.

He declined to identify sources, fearing for their safety. "Our sources are eyewitnesses, some of them."

The agency said the killing was carried out by the Congolese rebels fighting to oust President Laurent Kabila, apparently in retaliation for an earlier attack on the soldiers by the local Mai-Mai militiamen.

10 ROK politicians barred from leaving country

SEOUL, Jan 6: Prosecutors barred 10 opposition legislators from leaving the country Wednesday to face an investigation into the theft of classified government documents, reports AP.

On New Year's Eve, members of the opposition Grand National Party broke into room in the National Assembly building and seized dozens of documents owned by the government intelligence agency.

They said the small, windowless room was used by intelligence agents to spy on politicians and that the documents they seized proved their accusations.

Both President Kim Dae-jung's ruling party and the spy agency denied the charges. They said the room was a liaison office for intelligence officials and accused opposition legislators of stealing documents that they said included classified material.

Prosecutors said they would summon the 10 opposition legislators for questioning this week about their alleged roles in the break-in and seizure of the documents.

Working without seeing the sun for 2 months

KATHMANDU, Jan 6: More than 70 children have been found working 18 hour days in deplorable conditions in two Kathmandu spinning factories, a Nepali daily reported today, says AFP.

The children aged 15 and younger, had not seen daylight for two months and were forced to eat as they worked at their spinning-wheels, the Kantipur, Nepal's largest selling daily said.

"They have not seen nor felt the warmth of the sun in this cold winter for months," the report said.

But the owner of one of the factories, Ganesh Karki, denied the children were being exploited or made to work against their will.

"The workers themselves want to earn more so they work longer periods. No one has been forced to work," he said.

One youth, 15-year-old Ram Bahadur Rai, was quoted as saying he had not been allowed to leave his factory for two months.

There were guards at the factories to prevent the children

Would a Senate trial close down Washington?

WASHINGTON, Jan 6: The US Senate agonizing over whether to throw Bill Clinton out of office, the chief justice presiding over the trial, the White House obsessed with defensive tactics: It sounds like a formula for gridlock, reports AP.

All three branches of the government — the executive, legislative and judicial — are about to be involved in what one senator, Republican Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, calls "the most important trial that's ever been conducted."

With the impeachment drama still playing out, it is possible that Washington could be headed for a standstill until Clinton's fate is finally settled.

That could take days, months, or even a year — depending upon the forerunner.

There have been doomsday scenarios. A few days before the House impeached Clinton, Paul Begala, a political adviser to the president, predicted that such an act would lead to chaos. "This is going to make the government shutdown look like a picnic," he said.

And a Republican congressman who opposed impeachment, Rep. Peter King of New York, foresaw bitterness so severe that it would eradicate bipartisanship.

"We are a nation intent on killing itself, on destroying itself," King said. "You won't see any cooperation, none at all. There's too much bad blood on the floor."

Of course, dire predictions are sometimes made for political reasons.

The case can be made that a Senate trial won't make much difference, especially if it ends in acquittal or compromise, and quickly.

After all, the country has lived for nearly a year with the scandal and has prospered. With the Cold War over and the economy good, what happens in Washington seems less crucial than it used to.

Republican Sen. Phil Gramm, who is dubious of

Fresh clashes in Sierra Leone ECOMOG troops kill over 200 rebels in 2 days

FREETOWN, Dec 6: Nigerian-led intervention troops, known as ECOMOG, killed more than 200 Sierra Leonean rebels in two days of fighting just 17 kilometres east of Freetown, civilian survivors said Tuesday, reports AP.

Witnesses said clashes began on Sunday with an attack on the small town of Hastings and then spread to Jul, where Nigerian infantry troops are based. The fighting forced residents to flee.

Members of the pro-government Kamajor militia, traditional hunters fighting ECOMOG troops, are deployed in strength in Jul, adjacent to an ECOMOG military base.

Witnesses said extensive bombardments by ECOMOG cut deep into rebel ranks, preventing them from retreating.

ECOMOG troops from Freetown intercepted fleeing civilians at a nearby junction and advised them to return home and remain indoors.

A witness said the rebels had split into two groups after a first attack at Hastings, one

Washington was engrossed, but government went on: soldiers soldiered, sailors sailed, mailmen delivered the mail. Elections were held, meat got inspected, Congress raised the minimum wage, and the Supreme Court handed down decisions despite a docket heavy with Nixon's attempts to defy subpoenas.

Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor last month said that even if the Chief Justice has to preside over a Senate trial in the afternoons, he'd be free to hear cases in the mornings.

Political scientist Stephen Wayne of Georgetown University,

an expert on both Congress and the presidency, says Clinton and congressional Republicans would both be motivated to be productive during a trial.

"President Clinton would play the role of a public president with a vengeance to try to demonstrate the importance of his public functions and the triviality of those accusations about his private behaviour," said Wayne.

As for Congress, "if the Republicans want to demonstrate that they are not mean-spirited," they might enact something like Clinton's forthcoming proposal to give a tax break to those who take care of the long-term disabled, Wayne said.

Sierra Leone's defence chief of staff, Nigerian General Maxwell Khobe said in an address that he did not "want to hear that a single innocent soul in Freetown was lost to the hit-and-run rebels who attack from the outskirts now and then."

Meanwhile, heavily armed troops and Kamajor hunters were continuing to comb the surrounding hills, caves and the bush for rebel elements.

New Peruvian cabinet sworn in

LIMA, Jan 6: Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori on Tuesday swore in a new cabinet headed by economist Victor Joy Way, who will serve as its president, reports AP.

The cabinet reshuffle — which affects most of the 16 ministries and will see nine new ministers — was widely seen as an attempt by Fujimori to bolster his chances for winning a third term in 2000 elections.

Joy Way, the former president of Congress whose appointment was announced Sunday, replaces Jorge Baca Campodónico, who was blamed for Peru's economic woes.

The new team includes some surprises such as Maria Luisa Cuculiza, the new minister for the promotion of women, who is considered a strong ally of Fujimori's main political rival, Lima Mayor Alberto Andrade.

Military posts in the cabinet did not change hands with General Julio Salazar Monroe staying as defence secretary and General Jose Villanueva Ruesta remaining at the top of the interior ministry.



In this August 25, 1995 file photo Sophie Rhys-Jones arrives at Heathrow Airport in London before flying to Aberdeen with Britain's Prince Edward. A British tabloid newspaper reported Wednesday that Prince Edward, Queen Elizabeth II's youngest son, and his longtime girlfriend Sophie Rhys-Jones will announce their engagement. Buckingham Palace refused to confirm or deny the report. — AP/UNB photo