

Japan, US to keep sharp watch on DPRK's further missile test

TOKYO, Jan 14: US Defence Secretary William Cohen and Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura reaffirmed their commitment Thursday to continue joint efforts to watch for any signs of further missile testing by North Korea, reports AP.

"We discussed the need for Japan, South Korea and the United States to deal cooperatively with the challenges posed by North Korea," Cohen told reporters after meeting with Komura.

In a separate news conference, Komura said he had suggested to Cohen that Japan, South Korea and the United States "should send a strong warning to North Korea if it shows signs of firing another missile," a Foreign Ministry official said.

Cohen was scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi later Thursday before flying to South Korea for meetings with top officials there.

On Wednesday, Cohen met with Japan's Defence Agency director general, Hosei Norota, and discussed a bilateral plan to build an anti-missile defence system to beef up security in Japan, a spokesman for the agency said.

### Israel threatens action against unilateral declaration of Palestinian state

PARIS, Jan 14: Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon told French foreign policy makers and experts Wednesday that Israel would take action if the Palestinians declared a state unilaterally, reports AP.

In a speech at the prestigious French Institute for International Relations (IFRI), Sharon stressed that Israel "wishes to avoid taking such actions."

Sharon, who is in France until Friday, made similar remarks in the Le Monde daily in an interview that was published Wednesday, the day his trip began.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has not said whether he will declare a state May 4, the target date set by the Oslo accords for completing a permanent peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

But Sharon said in his speech at IFRI any such action would be a "flagrant violation of the principles of the Oslo and Wye accords" that could lead both to a collapse of the peace process and retaliatory measures by Israel.

He told Le Monde that autonomy will lead to a Palestinian state, an objective that would be reached "negotiation and only under certain conditions," he said.

### Lankan police unveils LTTE plot to kill minister

COLOMBO, Jan 14: Sri Lanka's police say they have uncovered a Tamil rebel plot to assassinate the country's defence minister after arresting a would-be suicide bomber and his accomplices, a top police official said Thursday, reports AP.

The assassination of Gen Anuruddha Ratwatte was to have been carried out in Kandy, the holy city that houses a tooth Sri Lankan Buddhists believe is a relic of Buddha. Kandy is 90 kilometers (55 miles) east of Colombo.

Kandy's police chief Sirisena Herath told The Associated Press that the Special Investigation Unit, which is entrusted exclusively to investigate Tamil rebels, became suspicious when a teenager from the predominantly Tamil city of Vavuniya enrolled in a Kandy school late last year.

Police kept a close watch on Muhundan Logeswaran and one day picked him up for questioning.

Logeswaran, under sustained interrogation, confessed that he was assigned to ram an explosive-laden truck into a motorcade of the defense minister. Police also arrested a Tamil Hindu priest who had allegedly helped Logeswaran settle in Kandy.

### Kosovo rebels free 8 captive Y'slav soldiers

LIKOVAC, Jan 14: Kosovo rebels freed eight Yugoslav soldiers Wednesday after getting private incentives from international officials who were determined to head off a return to war in the troubled Serbian province, reports AP.

The release, brokered by US and European mediators, defused a five-day showdown in which Yugoslav forces massed tanks and troops near the northern Kosovo village where the soldiers were being held.

The Kosovo Liberation Army only agreed to the release after government authorities promised the mediators to free KLA prisoners within 10 days, the ethnic Albanian radio station Koha Ditor reported, citing sources close to the negotiations.

William Walker, the US head of international monitors in Kosovo announced the release after a final flurry of talks with Kosovo Liberation Army leaders at the rebel stronghold of Likovac in the hills of central Kosovo.

# Iraq rejects UN arms inspection for good

BAGHDAD, Jan 14: The UN weapons inspection team will never be allowed back into Iraq regardless of any changes that might be made to its leadership or its mission, Iraq said Wednesday, reports AP.

Iraq repeatedly has called the UN Special Commission a cover for espionage and has accused of working to prolong UN economic sanctions against Iraq.

The Special Commission is now something of the past," Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said at a news conference.

Iraq has branded UN weapons inspectors spies. But it has not criticized the arms monitors, who are part of the same commission and are responsible for checking that equipment at Iraqi factories is not diverted to make banned weapons.

The weapons inspectors have a more aggressive mission that includes surprise searches of government buildings and military bases to check for evidence of banned weapons.

The UN weapons teams were

stricken.

The current UN sanctions, imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, cannot be lifted until the inspectors certify the country is free of weapons of mass destruction.

Ramadan did not reject the French proposal outright. But he said the French initiative "does not match our point of view."

However, Ramadan added that "any resolution which is not discussed or negotiated with Iraq ... will be rejected and we will not implement it."

On Wednesday, Ramadan said that "any resolution which is not discussed or negotiated with Iraq ... will be rejected and we will not implement it."

His comments came as France put a proposal before the UN Security Council in New York calling for lifting an oil embargo against Iraq but imposing a new monitoring system that would focus on preventing Baghdad from acquiring new weapons of mass de-

struction.

Withdrawn before US and British airstrikes against Iraq in mid-December.

The raids came after the commission released a report saying that Baghdad was blocking the work of the inspection teams.

Also Wednesday, Iraq said that Western aircraft violated its northern airspace and fired four missiles at civilian areas, hitting a house. The statement carried by the official Iraqi News Agency did not say if there were any casualties.

In Washington, Army Col Richard Bridges said US planes fired at anti-aircraft missile batteries.

Wednesday's incident in the northern "no-fly" zone was the seventh involving firing by US jets since Ramadan announced on Dec 26 that Iraq would shoot at warplanes patrolling the area.

On Wednesday, Ramadan vowed that Iraq "will continue confronting this violation with all our means ... and at whatever cost."

A similar meeting by Gulf Arab ministers is scheduled for Thursday in the Saudi Arabian

port city of Jiddah.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf expressed displeasure on Wednesday that the Arab blocs had not included Iraq in their meetings.

"Those who are meeting in Cairo should realize that discussing any Iraqi affair without its approval and the presence of its representative ... is to disregard all norms that regulate dealing between countries," al-Sahaf was quoted as saying by the official Iraqi News Agency.

He added: "We call on those to stop following the policy of axes, blocs, conspiracies and maneuvering which are carried out in the dark alleys."

Meanwhile, using a French proposal as a springboard, the Clinton administration is huddling with US allies to try to find a way to get weapons inspectors back to Iraq.

But while the administration is seeking to keep the pressure on Iraq on inspections, it also is signaling a new US willingness to ease restrictions on Iraqi humanitarian purchases.

In a tepid reaction, the State Department spokesman, James P. Rubin, said the French approach had some "positive elements."

But he said Iraq should not be liberated from the sanctions until it rids itself of all weapons of mass destruction.

"We have a number of questions and concerns" about the French proposal, Rubin said. "The United States has always been skeptical and perhaps others are not as skeptical as we are" of Iraq's intentions.

Later, Vice President Al Gore, in a speech in New York City, said that the United States "is willing to look at ways to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian programmes in Iraq, including lifting current ceilings on funds which can be used to purchase food and medicine."

Gore, who was speaking to the Israel Policy Forum, a US-based lobbying group, did not say when the administration would make a decision or whether it would monitor how Iraq would spend the money.

### Koirala presents trust motion in Parliament

KATHMANDU, Jan 14: The sixth government to lead Nepal in the past four years presented a confidence motion in Parliament Thursday, hoping to stay in power just long enough to oversee early elections, reports AP.

The main objective of this government is to ensure a free and fair parliamentary election that will elect a government to take the country into the new era," Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala said as he presented the motion in the House of Representatives, Nepal's lower house of parliament.

"This government will not make any major policy changes. It will only concentrate on the election," Koirala said.

Voting was to follow at least three hours of debate.

Nepal's constitution requires Koirala to secure a simple majority of 103 votes in the 205-seat lower house. Koirala should be able to garner 103.

Koirala's Nepali Congress Party has 87 lawmakers. Among the party's coalition partners, the United Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Nepal has 49 members and Nepal Goodwill Party has three lawmakers.

All three parties in the government have already announced that elections will be held by April 13 when the Nepalese calendar year ends. General elections were originally scheduled for November when the present parliament completes its full five-year term.

### Four killed as US army plane crashes near Dutch border

FRANKFURT, Jan 14: A US military refuelling plane was making its final landing approach when it crashed and burst into flames near the Dutch border, killing all four crew members, a NATO spokesman said, reports AP.

The KC-135 plane, assigned

from the ranks of the LDP in 1993, was flying over the Dutch border, killing all four crew members, a NATO spokesman said, reports AP.

Two Cabinet posts — the National Land Agency and Science and Technology Agency — were eliminated under the coalition pact and incorporated as part of the Construction Ministry and

"I formed the coalition gov-

## New coalition govt in Japan

TOKYO, Jan 14: Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi formed a new Cabinet on Thursday to launch a coalition government with a major opposition group in a move designed to strengthen his administration's hand in Parliament, reports AP.

The announcement of the new Cabinet line-up came just hours after a last-minute breakthrough was struck late Wednesday which ended a dispute over security issues that had threatened to scuttle the partnership between Obuchi's ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the opposition Liberal Party.

Despite the deal, the Liberal Democrats still lack a majority in the Upper House of Parliament. But by joining hands with the Liberals, Obuchi hopes to help smooth the passage of key bills aimed at reviving Japan's economy and upgrading its defence alliance and upgrading its defence alliance and

WASHINGTON, Jan 14: In the first US-China human rights dialogue since 1995, the Clinton administration criticised a "disturbing and counterproductive" crackdown by China on pro-democracy activists, reports AP.

Harold Koh, an assistant secretary of state who briefed reporters Wednesday on two days of talks with a Chinese delegation, said US officials stated their firm conviction that China must end repression and improve its people's human rights situation.

"We forcefully raised our concerns about the current human rights situation in China, including the recent arrests, trials and sentencing of democratic activists for peaceful expression of their political beliefs," said Koh, newly installed assistant secretary for democracy, human rights and labour rights situation.

Reprocessing, in France and Britain, would end within 12 months, during which talks would take place with Cogema and British Nuclear Fuels respectively.

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