

Implementation of Wye Accord Arafat to meet Clinton to seek US support

GAZA, Jan 30: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will meet US President Bill Clinton in Washington next week to discuss Israel's suspension of a US-mediated land-for-security deal, a senior Palestinian negotiator said on Friday, reports Reuters.

Saeb Erekat said Arafat would ask Clinton, who last October brokered the Wye River interim deal between the Palestinians and Israel, to press Israel to move ahead with the accord's implementation.

Israel, citing alleged Palestinian violations, suspended the agreement last month, the United States has called on Israel to implement it.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of peace moves prompted Israel's parliament in December to move national elections up to May 17 from late 2000. Israel's election campaign has further clouded the chances of peace-making progress.

"He (Arafat) will ... be in Washington between the second and the fourth of February where he is scheduled to meet President Clinton," Erekat told reporters in Gaza after a weekly Palestinian cabinet meeting.

"Our message is clear, we need a mechanism to compel Israel to implement their obligations," he said, speaking in English.

"We seek President Clinton's help in order to ensure the accurate and precise implementation of the agreements signed," he said.

AFP adds: On Thursday Arafat is due to fly to Germany where he will attend a conference of international donors in Frankfurt. Thereafter he may visit France and Italy although this has not yet been decided according to Palestinian officials.

One leading Palestinian analyst sees Arafat's trip as part of a continuing campaign to drum up support for the possible announcement of a Palestinian state on May 4 when the interim period as set out in the Oslo Peace Accords comes to an end.

UNSC endorses autonomy plan for Kosovo-Albanians

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 30: The Security Council threw its support Friday behind a demand by the United States and European allies for an autonomy settlement for ethnic Albanians in Kosovo by mid-February, reports AP.

The council adopted a consensus statement welcoming the call by Contact Group — the United States, Britain, France, Russia, Germany and Italy — for Serbs to sit down Feb 6 with ethnic Albanians to end a year of violence.

The council said it supports international efforts to bring about a recognition of the "legitimate rights" of the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo while affirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia.

British Ambassador Jeremy Greenstock said Britain drafted the statement after the Contact Group met Friday in London to show the council was behind the call for a political settlement, which for the first time stipulated a timeframe for a deal.

He said it was now up to the politicians in Yugoslavia to make the plan a reality.

"I hope the momentum now generated will produce some agreement, some peace and some rights for the people in the Balkans that we can all support," Greenstock said.

The statement contains "very strong language demanding compliance in full, and we hope very strongly that the leadership in Belgrade gets the message," deputy US ambassador Nancy Soderberg said.

The statement expresses the council's deep concern at the escalating violence in Kosovo, where Serb police on Friday stormed a southwestern village, killing 24 ethnic Albanians. One Serb officer also was killed.

It repeats the council's concern about attacks on civilians and underlines the need for a "full and unhindered investigation" of such attacks.

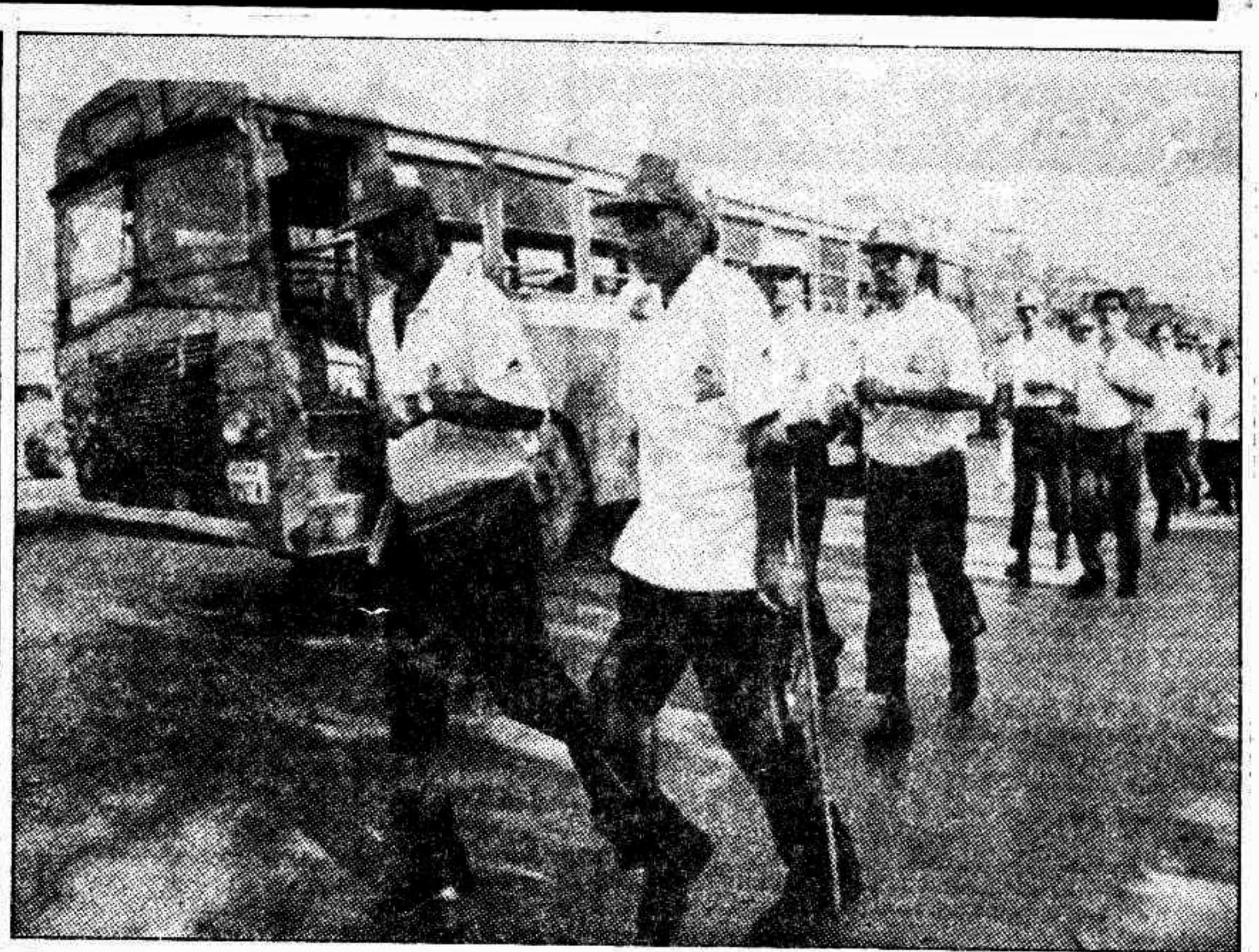
The statement constrains "very strong language demanding compliance there, and we

hope very strongly that the leadership in Belgrade gets the message," deputy US ambassador Nancy Soderberg said.

The two sides have been fighting since last February over the ethnic Albanian demand for independence from Serb-led Yugoslavia. Over 2,000 people have died and tens of thousands have been routed from their homes in the province where ethnic Albanians constitute 90 per cent of the population.

Neither the statement nor the Contact Group call suggests any use of force to compel Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic or the ethnic Albanians to comply with the demands. NATO, however, has already issued a stern warning and was expected to make an even tougher call on Saturday.

Russia's UN member on NATO, but has been able to exert its demand that force not be used in Kosovo in consultations of the Contact Group and Security Council, where it holds veto power.



Some 55 blind and disabled persons run a distance of 300 kilometres along with social workers in Bombay Friday. The programme was organised to create public awareness about the capability of blind people and improve the confidence of the participants from the Blind Graduates Forum of India. — AP/UNB photo

Strong quake jolts NW China:

An earthquake measuring 5.6 on the Richter jolted part of the northwestern Chinese region of Xinjiang yesterday official media said, AFP says from Beijing.

The tremor hit at 11:51 AM (0351 GMT) in the remote southern part of Toksun, Xinhuu news agency quoted the China Seismological Bureau as saying. The affected areas was sparsely populated and the bureau had not received any reports of damage or casualties there so far, the agency said.

Floods claim 7 lives in Indonesia:

Floods triggered by heavy rains across Indonesia killed at least seven people and forced thousands of people to flee their homes, newspapers reported yesterday, AP reports from Jakarta.

Four people drowned Friday when their boat capsized on a river that overflowed its banks in Bojonegoro, 400km east of Jakarta, the Indonesian capital. In two nearby towns, also on the main island of Java, a 9-year-old boy and an elderly woman were found dead in their flooded homes, the Suara Karya daily reported.

ROK to free 17 political prisoners:

South Korea will release 17 long-term political prisoners next month, including one who has been in jail for the world's record of 41 years, news reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Seoul.

The 17 prisoners, who have been in jail for between 29 and 41 years will walk free as part of a special amnesty to mark the March 1 Independence Movement Day, Yonhap News Agency and television reports said.

2 Thai policemen suspended:

Bangkok's police chief has suspended two officers suspected of torturing a female suspect to force a theft confession, police said yesterday, AP reports from Bangkok.

The move is unusual and a sign of gradual change in the police department. Usually, officers accused or found guilty of wrongdoing are shifted to an inactive post where they still receive a paycheck and full benefits.

Mexican teachers protest:

Thousands of Mexican teachers protesting at the arrest of five colleagues brought traffic to a standstill in the Mexican capital on Friday while riot police and troops protected the president's residence, Reuters reports from Mexico City.

"Political prisoners, free them," the crowd, estimated by police at 9,000 chanted under the eye of scores of riot police carrying batons and shields and presidential guards, some armed with high-power assault rifles. There were no immediate reports of any clashes.

Moro rebels kill 1 in Philippines:

Muslim rebels yesterday ambushed patrolling soldiers in the southern Philippines, killing one and wounding three others, in defiance of an official ceasefire that took effect early the same day, AFP reports from Cotabato.

The soldiers were patrolling a village in Shariff Aguak town in Maguindanao province when they were attacked by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas, military southern command spokesman Colonel Horacio Lapinid said.

4 killed in Lanka clashes:

At least three Tamil rebels and one government soldier were killed in fresh fighting in northern Sri Lanka, the defence ministry said yesterday, AFP reports from Colombo.

Army snipers attacked members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Wanni region on Friday, killing three of them, the ministry said in a statement. It said one soldier was killed when tigers fired mortar bombs at troops near the town of Paranthan on Friday.

2 more defect to ROK from DPRK:

A north Korean couple arrived in Seoul yesterday after escaping their hunger-stricken communist homeland to seek asylum, intelligence officials said, AP reports from Seoul.

The National Intelligence Service identified them as Lee Keun Soo, 57, and his wife, Lee Kyo Soon, 56. They brought to 19 the number of North Korean defectors so far this year.

IPI condemns Indian journalist's murder:

The International Press Institute (IPI) strongly condemned Friday in an open letter to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, the murder of a female journalist of the Indian Express Daily, AFP says from Vienna.

According to the IPI, Shivani Bhatnagar was strangled on January 23 at her New Delhi apartment by persons unknown. Her three-month old baby was with her at the time, the IPI said in the letter made public at the organisation's Vienna headquarters. The IPI said Bhatnagar was part of an Indian Express special investigative team, suggesting her killers may have been looking for confidential documents in her flat.

Clinton talks to Vajpayee on the phone Indo-US talks unlikely to bear any fruit

WASHINGTON, Jan 30: President Bill Clinton intervened personally Friday in US-India talks on nuclear non-proliferation with a phone call to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, the White House said, reports AFP.

The main reasons for the call was to express his hopes in the talks "in New Delhi between Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and Deputy US Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said.

Clinton expressed "some disappointment" that the US-India relationship "has not blossomed as he had hoped, and that his goal remains to work through differences and move the relationship forward," Lockhart said.

AP adds from New Delhi: US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh had little to say publicly about their eighth round of talks, which began Friday and were to conclude Monday. No one expected the delicate process to be quickly resolved.

During the talks Friday India refused to compromise on maintaining a credible, minimum nuclear deterrent, with Singh claiming that defining its minimum requirements in fixed terms "was neither possible nor feasible," officials told Indian news agencies.

But both sides publicly said the talks were positive.

Washington's suspicions that India, while declaring itself non-aligned, was in the Soviet camp during the cold war and India's sense that the United States was attempting to dictate to it have often kept the two nations at a distance. India's nuclear ambitions have also long been an irritant.

Indian officials have said they will not bow to pressure on the nuclear issue. Defense Minister George Fernandes repeated the point Friday, telling reporters, "No one else can decide our deterrence."

India, saying it needed a defence against the threat it sees in China and Pakistan, conducted a series of nuclear tests last May and declared itself a nuclear power. Pakistan followed India's tests with tests of its own, raising fears neighboring nations that have fought the conventional wars and remain bitter enemies could clash with nuclear weapons.

Talbott is trying to nudge both India and Pakistan to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. He goes on to Pakistan for talks next week.

New Delhi says the test ban treaty favours the declared nuclear powers like the United States. Pakistan refuses to endorse the treaty until India does.

Malaysia trial
Judge refuses to dismiss case against Anwar

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 30: The judge in the sensational sex and corruption case of sacked deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim refused Saturday to throw out the case against him, reports AP.

High Court judge Augustine Paul, after reviewing the prosecution's charges against the jailed politician, ruled that the evidence was sufficient to justify the charges. He ordered Anwar's attorneys to mount their defence.

"After having considered the evidence relevant to the charges, I find that the prosecution has made up a case against the accused," Paul said.

Though the defence had asked for two weeks to prepare, the judge only gave them one and set the trial to resume Feb. 8.

Anwar, in dock and with his back to the public gallery, made a victory sign with his right hand behind his back.

Defence attorney Raja Aziz Addruse said Anwar would be the first witness to take the stand in his defence.

"I've received instructions from my client. He'll be giving evidence from the witness box on oath," he said.

Raja Aziz said the defence intended to record a statement by Mahathir on Tuesday and then discuss whether to call him as a witness.

About 1,000 Anwar supporters crowded around the courthouse Saturday and shouted political reform slogans, as well as demands for Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed to step down.

They booed loudly as Paul drove from the courthouse in his gray Mercedes-Benz and vowed to hold more protests.

No one had expected Paul to dismiss the case, since he had repeatedly ruled against and criticised the defence team.

Anwar's wife, Azizah Ismail, said it was unfair for Paul to grant only one week for the defence to prepare its case.

"We have to be realistic," she said.

Anwar is on trial for four corruption counts. The prosecution claims he abused his power by ordering police to cover up alleged acts of sexual misconduct, including adultery and sodomy, crimes in this predominantly Muslim nation.

Kuwaiti newspaper says US to set camps in Gulf to train 'Iraqi militants'

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 30: The United States aims to set up five camps near Iraq's borders to train some 10,000 opposition fighters as part of an "Iraqi liberation army," Kuwait's leading newspaper said today, reports AFP.

"America wants to establish five bases for training Iraqis in countries neighbouring or close to Iraq," Al-Qabas said, citing information it said was leaked by Washington.

"Each camp will hold 1,500 to 2,000 Iraqis drawn from all opposition groups, and preferably deserters from the Iraqi Army," it said.

But Al-Qabas said two unnamed Gulf countries had already refused to host armed opposition groups.

UNSC nears agreement on new Iraq policy
Russia demands immediate resignation of Butler

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 30: Russia has demanded the immediate resignation of chief UN weapons inspector Richard Butler, angered at his "unacceptable" published comments accusing Russia's UN ambassador of making false statements to the Security Council, a Russian diplomat said Friday, reports AP.

Russia's Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov sent a letter to Secretary-General Kofi Annan Friday demanding that Butler step down as executive chairman of the UN Special Commission, which is charged with disarming Iraq. Russia's Deputy UN Ambassador Yuriy V Fedotov said.

Ivanov also called for Butler's resignation last month after he reported to the council that Iraq had failed to live up to its pledge to cooperate with arms experts. The report, which triggered four days of US and British airstrikes, was denounced by Russia and China as biased and dishonest.

In an interview published Wednesday in Australia's Sydney Morning Herald, Butler defended the report and accused Russia's UN Ambassador Sergey Lavrov of making claims to the Security Council about its findings which were "absolutely untrue."

The paper said the statements were being used to justify demands for Butler's resignation and the closure of his office.

Fedotov said the letter complained about Butler's behaviour "and his unacceptable statement against the position of the Russian Federation" and against Lavrov.

Meanwhile Security Council members are near agreement on charting the first step in a new Iraq policy, but are hung up by a few words concerning the future role of the UN Special Commission, responsible for disarming Iraq.

The dispute concerns a procedural proposal to convene three panels to study Iraqi disarmament, humanitarian issues and the status of looted Kuwaiti property and hundreds of Kuwaitis missing since the 1991 Gulf War.

Council members have given general support to the proposal, but are divided on the role of the commission, known as UNSCOM, in the disarmament panel. The panel, also consisting of the International Atomic Energy Agency and others, would carry out an assessment of Iraq's disarmament as well as make recommendations on how to proceed with international oversight of Iraq's weapons programmes.

The United States wants UNSCOM and its chairman, Richard Butler, to play a prominent role on the disarmament panel, to help chart a future course for weapons inspections in Iraq. "There will be participation by UNSCOM," one US official declared Friday.

Russia, however, wants to minimise the influence of UNSCOM, which it has openly criticised as being dishonest and provocative.

Diplomats said the main issue blocking agreement boiled down to language on an amended Canadian proposal which called for the "participation and expertise of UNSCOM" on the disarmament assessment panel.

Russia wants the proposal to say "experience and expertise of UNSCOM," thereby limiting the active participation of the commission, diplomats said.

A UN official said Russia's proposed version could limit UNSCOM's role to simply providing the panel with documents it has gathered over seven years of weapons inspections, one UN official said.

The United States wants to keep the "participation" language.

The two camps were conferring on the proposal behind the scenes Friday, but were under some pressure to come up with an agreement before the end of the month, when the presidency of the council shifts from Brazil to Canada.



Prince Abdullah makes first public address

AMMAN, Jan 30: Prince Abdullah gave the world its first look at Jordan's next monarch since his designation, opening a regional conference on terrorism and drugs by praising his ailing father's efforts to promote world peace, reports AP.

Tens of thousands of Jordanians watched Abdullah's first public speech live on television, trying to satisfy their curiosity about the new and inexperienced heir appointed by the ailing King Hussein.

Opening the conference of Arab interior ministers, Abdullah said Friday that during his father's 46-year reign the king was known for his enthusiasm, "to ensure a safer world for the upcoming generation."

"Actions, not words, needed to thaw US-Iran ties"

DAVOS, Switzerland, Jan 30: Actions rather than words from the United States are needed to unfreeze relations between Iran and the United States, Iran's foreign minister said Friday, reports AP.

Kamal Kharrazi also repeated Iran's demand that the United States apologize and pay compensation for damage caused by a missile that struck southern Iran on Monday, when US warplanes attacked sites near Basra, Iraq.

An apology "is the simplest thing the administration can do besides compensation for the damage," Kharrazi said, moving on to criticize US and British airstrikes against Iraq in general.

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PM fasts in protest of sectarian violence Vajpayee calls for religious tolerance in India

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee underlined his calls for religious tolerance with a Gandhian tactic — a protest fast — on Saturday, the 51st anniversary of the death of Mahatma Gandhi, reports AP.

Vajpayee addressed the nation during his fast, focusing on recent attacks on Christians in India, including an Australian missionary and his two sons who were burned to death, that have been blamed on fundamentalist groups linked to his Bharatiya Janata Party.

"Such violence violates the country's tradition and culture of tolerance," Vajpayee said on national television. "Let no one be under any illusion: the laws of our land are clear, and they will be enforced — without exception and to the fullest degree — to punish those who violate this sacred guarantee."

Vajpayee said the anniversary of Gandhi's death, a national holiday in India, was this year being observed with "against an unhappy backdrop of sectarian violence. The nation cannot but be sad. We cannot but grieve." His fast, he said, was undertaken as an act of "atonement and introspection."

Vajpayee's gesture was met with some skepticism, with The Times of India calling it "fast as farce" in an editorial Saturday.

"A genuinely stricken prime minister would simply resign from office, owning responsibility for all that has happened in recent months to tarnish the country's image," The Times said.

Vajpayee has been lashed by both allies and opponents over his handling of the religious attacks, but his government does not appear in immediate danger of falling, Saturday, BJP member Madan Lal Khurana resigned as the Cabinet minister for parliamentary affairs and tourism after being rebuffed by party hard-liners for his public criticism of the government.

A group of writers and artists who organised a peace march in the capital on Saturday accused Vajpayee, considered a moderate within the BJP, of doing little to rein in more radical elements.

Some 10,000 people joined the peaceful march in downtown New Delhi, singing "We Shall Overcome."

Gandhi, known as the "mahatma" — or "great soul" — was shot and killed Jan. 30, 1948 by a Hindu nationalist enraged by Gandhi's attempts to repair Hindu-Muslim relations following the division of the former British colony into the independent nations of India and Pakistan in 1947.

Muslim leaders had demanded the creation of Pakistan, saying they would be discriminated against in overwhelmingly Hindu India. But many Muslims stayed in India at partition and now form the largest of the country's religious minorities.

Gandhi, a devout Hindu, often fasted to protest the religious riots that erupted in the tense days before partition.

"I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e. to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian or wholly Muslim. Gandhi once wrote, 'But I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religious working side by side with one another.'"

US lawmakers spend the weekend preparing to grill key witnesses in impeachment trial

WASHINGTON, Jan 30: House prosecutors, senators and White House lawyers are spending the weekend preparing to question Monica Lewinsky and two of President Clinton's confidants in closed-door proceedings that could be made public next week, reports AP.

"I'm working my rear off," said freshman Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina.

A practicing lawyer until his election in November, Edwards is one of three members of Clinton's Democratic Party who will preside with three Republicans over the depositions that begin Monday.

Clinton, too, is planning his schedule around the final phase of the trial on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice. The president is accused of lying to a judicial panel and witness tampering in his efforts to conceal his affair with Lewinsky, a former White House staffer.

Clinton is considering delaying a trip to Central America Feb. 10-14 so he would be in Washington when the trial is supposed to end Feb. 12, said White House spokesman Joe Lockhart.

Although the Senate apparently lacks the 67 votes needed to remove Clinton from office, House prosecutors this week won the right to question Lewinsky on Monday, presidential friend Vernon Jordan on Tuesday and White House aide Sidney Blumenthal on Wednesday.

Lawyers for Clinton also will take part in the questioning.

As Sergeant at Arms James Ziglar sent the subpoenas to the witnesses Friday, Senate leaders chose six members to preside over the videotaped depositions.

At the White House, Lockhart complained that Senate Republicans were "making up the rules literally on the back of an envelope."

"That raises some issues about whether that's fair to all sides," he said.

Meanwhile, with the trial on hold until Thursday, senators

not involved in the depositions headed back to their home states, where they could expect a firsthand taste of sentiment about a trial that polls say most Americans want to see ended.

The Republican leaders in Congress have forged ahead with impeachment proceedings even though they are not likely to have the two-thirds majority vote needed to remove Clinton from office.

No other US president has been removed from office by Congress. President Andrew Johnson was acquitted by one vote in an impeachment trial in 1868.

A source close to the prosecutors said they will focus on questions not already asked of the witnesses during a year of investigations by independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and the House Judiciary Committee.

For example, they believe investigators did not adequately look into some private conversations regarding Lewinsky and Jordan regarding Jordan's job search for the former White House intern, said this official

who demanded anonymity.

The White House legal team is likely to accentuate Lewinsky's most favorable past testimony. Chief among those statements was her assertion that the grand jury last August, "No one ever asked me to lie and I was never promised a job for my silence."

One adviser, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the goal would be to show that any cover stories Lewinsky and the president developed were aimed at hiding their relationship from the beginning and were not constructed later to obstruct justice.

The president's legal advisers, both inside and outside the White House, said they want to use their side of four hours of questioning of Lewinsky to reassure the 44 Senate Democrats who have already voted to dismiss the case and who can deny prosecutors the two-thirds majority needed to convict Clinton.

The sessions will be videotaped by a private company under contract to the Senate.

Senior BJP leader resigns from Vajpayee's govt

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: A top Hindu nationalist politician has resigned from India's coalition government, after criticising the murder of an Australian missionary by a Hindu mob, officials said today, reports AP.

Tourism and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Madan Lal Khurana reportedly sent his resignation to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee a week ago.

The Prime Minister "has forwarded his resignation to (Indian) President KR Narayanan for acceptance," officials said.

Further details were not immediately available. The contents of his resignation letter were not revealed.

Khurana is one of the most senior leaders of the prime minister's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) and had led the party in New Delhi city for more than four decades.



Funeral ceremony for dead four police officers in Maitan, 240 kilometres southeast of Lahore on Friday. Four unidentified gunmen riding on motorbikes opened fire with automatic weapons on Thursday night killing four police officers. — AP/UNB photo