

International

'British govt split over arms sales to Pakistan'

LONDON, Jan 12: The British government is deeply split over whether to end a freeze on arms sales to Pakistan imposed after last October's military coup. The Guardian newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

Lanka coup bid takes new turn with state media involvement

COLOMBO, Jan 12: Sri Lankan police have questioned a government media boss in connection with a bid to assassinate President Chandrika Kumaratunga and establish a military regime, a state-run newspaper said Wednesday, reports AFP.

National Party (UNP) accused the government of 'fabricating evidence' to show a link between the assassination attempt and an alleged coup to form a military administration.

Telephone conversations. Top businessmen were directly linked to the conspiracy, it claimed.

There are also reports that several army personnel too are linked to this alleged plot and there had been plans to capture power through a military coup if the president was killed in the town hall bomb blast, the Daily News said.

The Daily News which has been reporting on a wider conspiracy to stage a military coup following the attempt on Kumaratunga's life on December 18 said the questioning has thrown new light on the case.

'By all means, investigate the assassination attempt but don't fabricate evidence to show there was a coup and make that an excuse to crack down on media freedom and suppress democracy.'

The state media said two newspaper editors, which it did not name, were linked to the conspiracy, although their alleged roles were not specified.

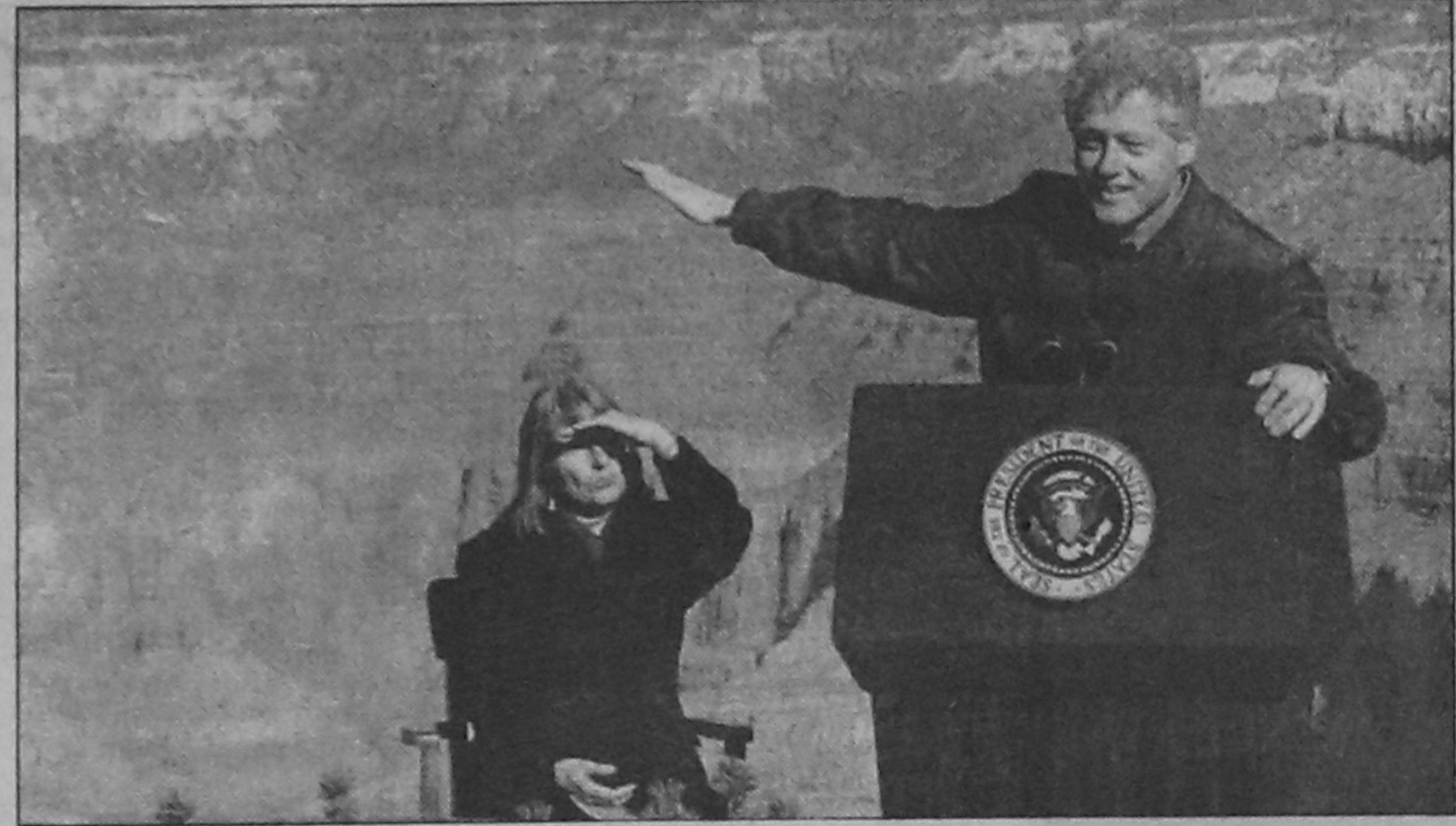
The opposition says the charges against it and journalists were made after Kumaratunga appeared on state radio and television for over three hours last week and lambasted her rivals and accused two military officers of treachery.

The newspaper did not name the head of a 'state media institution' who was implicated in the coup bid in which it said businessmen, the main opposition, private newspaper editors and military officers too were involved.

The Daily News said a wealthy ethnic Tamil woman identified as Renuka Shanmuganathan had been 'intensively and extensively' questioned by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) sleuths in the past few days.

The newspaper had earlier said police evidence of the plot, announced by state radio on Sunday, included several taped

conversations. Top businessmen were directly linked to the conspiracy, it claimed.



US President Bill Clinton speaks at Hopi Point on the Grand Canyon, Arizona, accompanied by hiker Ann Weiler Walka on Tuesday. President Clinton signed the proclamations creating new and expanding national monuments in the Grand Canyon area. — AFP photo

US to introduce resolution on human rights in China

WASHINGTON, Jan 12: Washington is to introduce a resolution condemning China for its human rights record at the upcoming United Nations Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva, the State Department said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The decision to go forward with this resolution at the commission is based on the fact that the government of China's human rights record has continued to deteriorate, said James Rubin.

'Over the past year, the government of China intensified its crackdown on political dissent, initiated a campaign to suppress the Falun Gong, and intensified controls on unregistered churches and on the political and religious expression of ethnic minority groups, especially Tibetans,' Rubin explained.

Putin approves new strategy after Chechen counter-attack

MOSCOW, Jan 12: New Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin approved a new strategy Tuesday to combat Chechen guerrillas after daring rebel raids inflicted heavy losses on Russian forces in the breakaway republic, reports AFP.

'Given that the amount of liberated territory has increased, we must of course change tactics,' added Sergei Ivanov, secretary of the Kremlin advisory body, the Security Council.

The rebel strikes were the first major setback for Putin, whose handling of the war has made him the hot favourite to win March 26 presidential elections.

Algeria grants amnesty to AIS members

ALGIERS, Jan 12: Algeria's President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has granted general amnesty to fighters of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), which has observed a truce since October 1997, government and AIS officials said Tuesday, reports AFP.

2 Pak alliances trying to restore democracy

ISLAMABAD, Jan 12: The 15-party Pakistan Awami Ittehad (PAI) and the 19-party Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) are making hectic efforts to evolve an unanimous strategy to make the military regime set a date for fresh polls, media reports said here on Monday, reports PTI.

UK ready to free Pinochet

LONDON, Jan 12: Britain announced Tuesday it wanted to free Chilean former dictator Augusto Pinochet for health reasons, marking the beginning of the end to a controversial diplomatic and legal wrangle that has reverberated around the world, reports AFP.



Supporters of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet celebrate the British government's intention to release Pinochet on health grounds on Tuesday near the embassies of Great Britain and Spain in Santiago, Chile. The former strong man, who is under house arrest in London, was charged with torture and human rights violations during his 1973-1990 rule. — AFP photo

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The surprise announcement -- although it is not a final ruling -- followed independent medical tests carried out on the 84-year-old general last week.

with which the British government has proceeded in this delicate issue.

Military takes over air, sea transport in Maluku islands

JAKARTA, Jan 12: The Indonesian military has taken over the operation of air and sea transportation in the strife-torn Maluku islands, the official Antara news agency said, reports AFP.

State-owned passenger ships temporarily will not visit harbours in Maluku islands... because of the uncertain security situation there.

Maluku waters to prevent outside ships from supplying weapons to the warring religious groups in the islands.

Israel, Palestinians agree on land handover

JERUSALEM, Jan 12: Israel told the Palestinians on Tuesday it would pull out of more of the West Bank and Gaza by September even if a final peace agreement is not reached by the deadline that month, officials said, reports Reuters.

difficult issues, including the fate of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, borders and millions of Palestinian refugees.

place on November 15 but was delayed by a row between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators over what areas should be included.

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Indian crime show producer's wife stabbed to death

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: The man behind India's most popular television crime-watch programme -- 'India's Most Wanted' -- has found himself in the police spotlight after his wife died from stab wounds to the stomach, reports AFP.

Quake jolts Japan

TOKYO, Jan 12: A moderate earthquake jolted eastern Japan today, shutting down an experimental nuclear reactor, reports AP.

2 Pak alliances trying to restore democracy

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Lankan troops kill 15 Tiger rebels

Sri Lankan troops shot dead at least 15 Tamil Tiger guerrillas in fresh fighting in the north of Sri Lanka amid heavy exchanges of artillery fire, the defence ministry said Wednesday, AFP reports from Colombo.

India treads delicately over political asylum for Tibetan boy

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: The defection of a young Tibetan spiritual leader from China has put India in a spot over political asylum, as New Delhi weighs its traditional support for Tibetan exiles with a desire to improve ties with Beijing, reports AFP.

Exercise may reduce risk of heart disease for diabetics: Study

CHICAGO, Jan 12: Elevated levels of insulin appear to make people prone to blood clots, a finding that could explain why diabetics are so susceptible to heart attacks and strokes, researchers say, reports AP.

Thai police seize 126 kg heroin

Thai and United States agents have seized 126 kilograms of heroin bound for the US and arrested two alleged drug traffickers, a senior minister said Wednesday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

2 killed in airport platform collapse

Two Singapore Airlines engineering staff were killed and one was in critical condition after an elevated platform they were standing on collapsed at Changi Airport in Singapore, the airline said Wednesday, AFP reports from Singapore.

BRIEFLY

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