

11 Soviet republics to form own armies

KIEV, Soviet Union, Dec 1: Eleven Soviet republics agreed at a meeting in Moscow on the right to form their own armies, Ukrainian Defence officials said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Konstantin Morozov and Vasily Durdinets, Chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament's security and defence committee, told a news conference that Soviet Defence Minister Yevgeny Shaposhnikov also attended the meeting.

Durdinets said the republics approved a joint statement, saying there was nothing to stop any republic setting up its own armed forces in accordance with what it called the principles of collective security for a transitional period.

"This is the first official document concerning the right of all Soviet states to create their own armed forces," he said.

Only Georgia did not attend the meeting.

The Ukraine plans to set up its own army and has begun mobilising a separate national guard for internal security.

Morozov said, "It was very hard to reach a mutually acceptable agreement on this very important subject."

"The right of republics to set up armed forces had always existed in theory but its reaffirmation at the meeting on Thursday and Friday was politically significant," he said.

"What is important here is the reaction... of the leadership of the former union to the processes which are happening and their acceptance of those processes," he said.

Morozov and Durdinets said the meeting's statement was not legally binding but the Ukraine intend to get the state council, the top executive body chaired by President Mikhail Gorbachev, to endorse the principle of separate armed forces.

Ukrainian voters are expected today to endorse complete independence from Moscow in a referendum defying warnings of catastrophe from Gorbachev and leaving unclear future relations with the rest of the Soviet Union.

When Parliament in Kiev decided in principle last month to set up a Ukrainian army the West expressed concern about control of nuclear weapons and the risk of an open fight over who should control armed forces on Ukrainian soil.

Morozov and Durdinets indicated they believed the Moscow meeting paved the way for a political agreement on the long list of unresolved defence questions including the future structure of the armed forces conscription and the defence budget.

Durdinets said the Ukraine and the other republics agreed that all questions of military security should be decided in line with the Soviet Union's international obligations and with legal norms.

He said this formula meant the Ukraine would not take any unilateral decisions on defence without consulting other republics and Soviet central authorities.



MADRID: Jordanian Queen Noor (L) and Spain's Queen Sofia have a casual talk on Friday during the Together for Peace Foundation awards ceremony, an award given to those who worked for peace in the world. Queen Noor is one of the awardee. — AFP/UNB photo

Four Tamil bases destroyed in Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 1: Security forces destroyed four Tamil rebel bases in eastern Sri Lanka and found a large cache of weapons and ammunition, the military said today, reports Reuter.

A spokesman said troops hunting for rebel camps in the jungle in a week-long operation destroyed four bases at Thoppigala in Batticaloa district on Saturday.

Two soldiers were injured by two explosions during the raids. The rebels had already fled.

Troops found rifle magazines, grenade launchers, mines, 40 bicycles and a large stock of food at the camps.

SIHANOUK ARRIVES IN THAILAND

Prince Norodom Sihanouk, President of Cambodia's Supreme National Council (SNC), arrived Saturday at a military airbase in eastern Thailand, a Thai official at the base said by telephone, reports AFP Sunday from Bangkok.

Sihanouk arrived from Phnom Penh aboard a Thai military aircraft which landed at the navy's U-Tapao airbase in eastern Thailand at 4:27 pm local time (0927 GMT).

The Prince was driven immediately to the seaside resort of Pattaya.

In Pattaya, he will meet with Khmer Rouge leaders Khieu Samphan and Son Sen, who were attacked Wednesday by an angry mob in Phnom Penh and forced to flee back to Thailand hours after their arrival in the Cambodian capital.

Saddam holds talks with Kurds

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Saturday had talks with Kurdish rebel leader Massoud Barzani on ways of securing autonomy for Kurds in northern Iraq, the official INA news agency reported, says AFP Sunday from Baghdad.

Barzani arrived Friday in Baghdad after a four-month absence and had talks with key government officials.

His talks with Hussein were also attended by the Vice President of the ruling Revolutionary Command Council, Izzat Ibrahim, Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz and Defence Minister Ali Hassan Al-Majid, INA said.

Move to settle homeless Nepalese

The Nepalese government has formed a high-level commission to tackle the problems of Nepal's homeless people, state radio announced Saturday, reports AFP Sunday from Kathmandu.

A senior official from the Forestry, Environment and Agriculture Ministry said the 21-member commission will identify genuine landless people and settle them in a planned manner to implement the decision taken by the government in the past years.

The genuine sufferers will be provided land, he added.

The panel is to be chaired by Minister for Housing and Physical Development Bal Bahadur Rai, and will include Minister for Land Reforms and Management Jagannath Acharya, Minister for Forest Environment and Agriculture Sanjaya Acharya, the radio said.

Anti-AIDS militants light candles

Anti-AIDS militants lit hundreds of candles near the foot of the Eiffel Tower in Paris on Saturday at the start of World AIDS Day as a sign of hope for a breakthrough in research to curb the spread of the disease, reports Reuter Sunday from Paris.

They handed out leaflets recalling that more than 8,500 people in France had died so far of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

A further 16,000 have the disease and 70,000 have been diagnosed as being infected with the hiv virus which leads to it. Doctors believe a further 1,30,000 are HIV-positive without their knowledge.

Marches and public events are scheduled around France on Sunday to mark World AIDS Day.

11 Malaysians killed in road mishap

Eleven people on their way to a wedding feast were killed when their van collided with a lorry in Malaysia's Perak state, The New Sunday Times reported, reports Reuter Sunday from Kuala Lumpur.

Three van passengers were seriously injured.

Police said they were looking for the lorry driver and his assistant.

68 Rajya Sabha members to retire

A total of 68 members of the Rajya Sabha, half of them from the Congress-I, will retire next year, reports PTI Sunday from New Delhi.

One third of the members of the upper house retire on the expiry of every second year as per the constitutional provision.

Out of 68 members, 18 will retire in April, four nominated members in May, ten in June, 33 in July, two in August and one in October.

Party-wide, the largest number of members retiring during the year, would be from Congress-I (34), followed by Janata Dal (seven), Telugu Desam (five), three each from BJP and AIADMK two each of CIP-M and SJP, one each from DMK, AGP, NAGP, Lok Dal, National Conference, Muslim League, Akhili Dal and one independent.

Khmer Rouge leaders offered protection

BANGKOK, Dec 1: Khmer Rouge leaders have agreed to return to Cambodia's capital after the government promised to provide better protection against demonstrators, national reconciliation leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk says, reports AP.

The announcement eased widespread worries that the recent attack by an angry mob on the Khmer Rouge leaders may have indefinitely stalled a plan to end the country's nearly 13 years of civil war.

The attack on Wednesday bloodied Khmer Rouge President Khieu Samphan and sent him and his Defence Minister Son Sen fleeing from Phnom Penh just hours after they returned from exile to participate in peace efforts.

Before they signed a UN-brokered peace treaty October 23, Phnom Penh's Vietnamese-installed government had fought the Communist Khmer Rouge and two non-Communist guerrilla allies. The Khmer Rouge, now the largest guerrilla group, is widely hated by Cambodians for killing hundreds of thousands of people while it held power in 1975-78.

Off the Record

Passengers now take control of planes

MOSCOW: Angry air passengers took control of airplanes and airstrips at a Moscow airport late Friday when their flights were delayed, Tass news agency reported, reports AFP.

Heavy fog over the Soviet capital had aggravated the more usual delay for domestic flights due to a shortage of aviation fuel, as a result of which some 5,000 passengers were stranded at Domodedovo airport which serves Central Asia and Siberia.

A lack of computerised planning coupled with the distance of the airport from Moscow city — about 60 kilometres (40 miles) — obliged the passengers to stay at the scene in wait for their flights in extremely poor conditions.

Meanwhile hundreds of other passengers were stranded at another Moscow airport, Vnukovo, also because of fog and lack of aircraft fuel, while waiting for flights to Ukraine and the Caucasus, Tass said.

It quoted the Soviet Aviation Ministry as saying that fuel supplies for airport were dwindling daily.

Air travel used to be relatively popular in the Soviet Union.

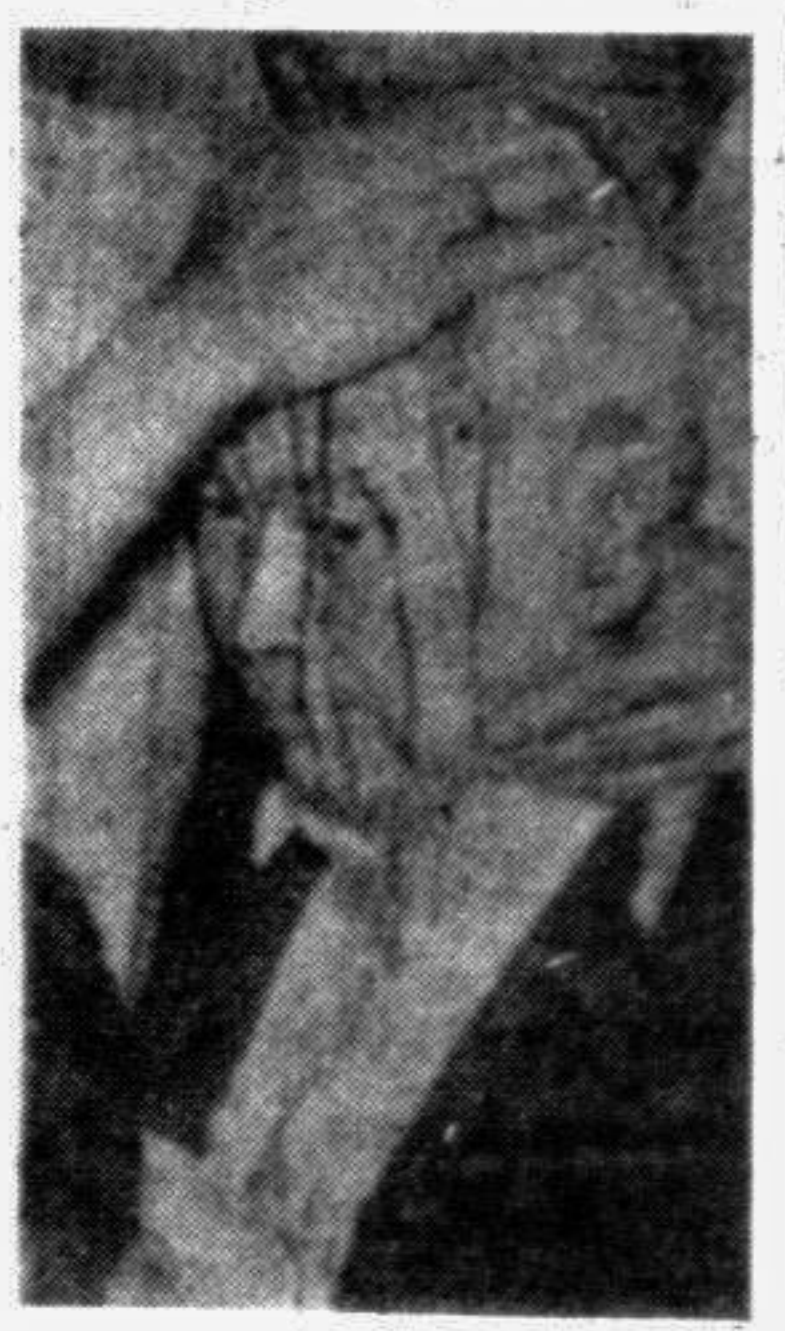
They need iron-clad assurances

PATTAYA: Khmer Rouge leaders, who fled Phnom Penh for their lives earlier this week, told Prince Norodom Sihanouk here Saturday they would not go back to the Cambodian capital unless they received ironclad assurances for their safety from the government, Khmer Rouge officials said, reports AFP.

The Khmer Rouge's titular leader Khieu Samphan and guerrilla chief Son Sen, the faction's representatives on the Supreme National Council (SNC), Cambodia's reconciliation body, were attacked on Wednesday in the Cambodian capital by an angry mob.

The attack was in retaliation for the deaths of over one million Cambodians in extermination campaigns during the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge rule over their southeast Asian country.

Officials of the ultra-Marxist faction, the strongest to have fought Phnom Penh's Vietnam-installed government in the Cambodian civil war, said Khieu Samphan and Son Sen told Prince Sihanouk they would seek what assurances the Phnom Penh government would offer during an upcoming meeting of the council in this Thai seaside resort.



22,000 AIDS patients in Bangalore alone?

BANGALORE: Over 22,000 persons could be suffering from AIDS in Bangalore city, which has a population of 40 lakh, going by the national average AIDS occurrence rate of 5.7 per 1,000 population, Karnataka government health official Dr R Rudrappa said Saturday, reports PTI.

Speaking to newsmen here along with representatives of several voluntary organisations in connection with World AIDS Day, he said 184 cases had so far been proved sero-positive in the state and of them five had died.

Dr Rudrappa, who is Joint Director (communicable diseases), said blood transfusion was the most important factor in the spread of AIDS in India and the five AIDS surveillance cells in the state had been asked to screen blood samples from all blood banks.

He said more awareness was required to check the spread of AIDS in India.

Crackdown on PPP activists deplored

Police raid illegal factory in Karachi: 200 bombs found

KARACHI, Dec 1: Pakistani police found 200 crude bombs and bomb-making equipment when they raided an illegal factory in the commercial capital Karachi, a government official said today, reports Reuter.

Two people were arrested in Saturday's raid and a third was caught trying to transport some of the bombs in a car.

An explosives expert said the bombs were small but some weighed up to 10 kg (22 lbs).

The discovery came during a crackdown on supporters of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto in Sindh province, of which Karachi is the capital.

Police said they believed the bombs were to be sold to the banned Al-Zulfikar guerrilla group which the Sindh government says has links with Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. The party denies any connection.

Al-Zulfikar was blamed in October for a car bomb blast outside government buildings in Karachi in which five people died.

A strike called by Pakistan opposition leader Benazir Bhutto in Sindh Saturday to protest an alleged government crackdown on her party drew a mixed response reflecting ethnic polarization in the province, AFP adds.

The strike was effective in rural areas while life in main urban centres remained largely unruined, political and other sources said.

Bhutto claimed the protest had been successful, but the provincial government said, the people had "ignored" her call.

Traffic flow was thin on highways, but public transport in cities and towns showed little impact of the protest, reports said.

On Thursday, Bhutto said more than 2,000 workers or her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) had been thrown into jails in "mass victimization" organised by Sindh Chief Minister Jam Sadiq Ali.

The Chief Minister has said the administration had rounded up only 318 people, whom he dubbed as "Indian-trained" terrorists belonging to the Al-Zulfikar Organization (AZO).

He has accused Bhutto of being the operational chief of AZO which, he said, has 6,000 agents operating in Sindh.

PPP rallies in which hundreds participated were held at Multan, Punjab and at Peshawar in North West Frontier Province to condemn the alleged jailing of compatriots in Bhutto's home province, reports said.

Political commentators said the strike heightened bitterness between the authorities and the opposition as well as widening the breach between Urdu-speaking Mohajirs and Sindh native Sindhi community in Sindh.

Addressing a press conference here, Bhutto said the response was positive, encouraging and very good from the small town and villages of Sindh.

Teheran to host talks with Mujahideen

KABUL, Dec 1: Iranians planning to host another conference with mujahideen and Pakistan in a bid to bring the resistance closer before a January 1 arms cut deadline by the superpowers, diplomats said today, reports AFP.

The tripartite talks will be held before the weapons supplies are stopped by Washington and Moscow to all sides in the Afghan conflict, the diplomats here said, adding that the conference aimed to help the mujahideen come closer.

The conference dates have not yet been fixed, but it will be held very soon, an Iranian diplomat said. He said he could not say if all mujahideen leaders would participate.

Nine relatively moderate rebel groups are based in Iran, home to more than two million Afghan war refugees, and a seven-party rebel alliance is operating out of Pakistan, where three million refugees have taken shelter since war flared in Afghanistan 13 years ago.

The Soviet-backed government of President Najibullah will not be participating in the tripartite conference, the second to be held in Tehran since September 1991, the diplomats said.

Arafat in Cairo

CAIRO, Dec 1: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived in Cairo today for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the run-up to the resumption of Middle East peace talks in Washington, reports Reuter.

Arafat, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was met at the airport by Mubarak's political adviser, Osama Baz, but said nothing to waiting reporters. Official sources said he would meet Mubarak this morning.

It was Arafat's second visit to Egypt since Arab delegations, including a joint Palestinian-Jordanian team, opened direct talks with Israel in Madrid a month ago.

Relations between Egypt and the PLO were badly strained by Arafat's support for Iraq in the Gulf war but the two sides have been working closely together since Arab leaders started preparing for the Madrid conference.

Known PLO members are excluded from the delegation sitting at the table with Israel. But the PLO has been intimately involved in planning the Palestinian negotiating strategy and PLO members were active behind the scenes in Madrid.

Gorbachev will be forced from power by year-end: CIA chief

WASHINGTON, Dec 1: The chief of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) believes Mikhail Gorbachev will be forced from power in the Kremlin by the end of this year, US news and world report magazine said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The magazine said in the "Washington Whispers" section of its latest edition that Gorbachev would be forced from office as President of the Soviet Union if the Ukraine secedes.

Ukrainians are voting in a referendum on independence today and they are expected to approve secession.

"In briefing late last month, Robert Gates, the CIA's new Director, predicted that after the secession of the Ukraine from the Union, Mikhail Gorbachev would be forced to quit by the end of the year," US news said.

The magazine said Gate's analysis convinced US Secretary of State James Baker and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft to urge President George Bush to recognise Ukrainian independence.

A CIA spokesman had no comment on the report.

Bush said on Friday that there would be no major break with Gorbachev over the Ukraine. The United States is expected to begin a process towards recognition of the Ukraine if voters there approve independence.

The Soviet news agency Tass reported on Saturday that Bush called Gorbachev to discuss US relations with the Soviet republics. It quoted Gorbachev as telling Bush: "We will not view a decision of the citizens of the Ukraine in favour of independence as a break from the union."

"To push matters in this direction would mean heading for disaster — for the union, for the Ukraine itself, for Russia for Europe and the world."



MANILA: House Speaker Ramon Mitra accompanied by his wife Cecilia, wave hands to his supporters after clinching the Philippine ruling party's presidential nomination in a ballot marred by charges of rigging and violence. The Speaker beat former Defence Secretary Fidel Ramos by 2,062 votes to 1,613. — AFP/UNB photo

Police seal off ROK varsity campus to block rally

SEOUL, Dec 1: Thousands of riot police cordoned off Yonsei University on Sunday to block a rally sponsored by more than a dozen national dissident groups trying to form an anti-government alliance, reports AP.

About 2,000 police backed up by armoured tear gas launchers encircled the campus in western Seoul overnight to prevent thousands of dissidents from attending a mass rally on Sunday.

Police said the rally by students, workers, farmers, Buddhists and eight municipal and provincial organizations was illegal.

Some 4,000 students and dissidents who had sneaked onto the campus earlier said the new National Alliance for Democracy and Unification would be inaugurated as scheduled.

A statement said the coalition consisted of "democratic forces" which would unite to elect a popular government in

next year's parliamentary and presidential elections.

"We need a unified national organization to attain that goal," a statement said. The alliance would be the largest of its kind set up since division of the peninsula in 1945, it said.

The statement also said organizers would play a major role in unifying opposition candidates for the 1992 elections, a premise which could prove difficult in an opposition camp already wrangling over leadership.

Students armed with clubs guarded gates to the sprawling campus. Police armed with shields, tear gas masks and batons were deployed in alleyways and streets to prevent outsiders from entering.

The leadership of the new alliance was to include the Rev. Moon Ik-hwan, a dissident clergyman in jail on charges of illegally visiting North Korea, and Ko Kwang-sok, chairman of the smaller National Dissident Alliance.

Togo rebels resume siege of Prime Minister's residence

LOME, Dec 1: Troops trying to oust Togo's interim government resumed their siege of Prime Minister Joseph Kokou Koffigoh's official residence late on Saturday night, raising fresh fears of a full-scale coup, reports Reuter.

"They've surrounded us, again," said one source within the building. "We don't necessarily feel threatened but we've turned out all the lights to be on the safe side."

He said some 30 to 40 soldiers and two army jeeps were outside the seaside residence.

Soldiers also appeared to have returned to key points elsewhere in the capital, possibly to enforce the dusk-to-dawn curfew, the sources added.

Troops loyal to military President Gnanassingbe Eyadema had earlier besieged Koffigoh's residence for 48 hours but left early on Saturday after the President broadcast ordering them to return to barracks.

Elements of the army maintained their hold on the radio station, repeating communiques demanding dissolution of the government and threatening violence against any popular resistance. At least one tank guarded the radio building.

The crisis is the latest in a series of clashes between the army and the government, to which a national pro-democracy conference in August handed most of Eyadema's powers after he had controlled the West African country for more than 20 years.

It began when soldiers briefly occupied the radio station on Wednesday and escalated into a full attempt to topple Koffigoh.

At least 25 people were killed in three days of tension and clashes between soldiers and government supporters. One diplomat said the toll could be nearer 50 as many bodies could have been disposed of secretly.

As tension eased on Saturday, deserted streets and markets sprang to life. Lome's

international airport and the land border with Ghana were reopened briefly and local and international telephone links were restored after a total blackout.

But soldiers later said the borders and airport were closed again and declared a third night of curfew.

Koffigoh said on Saturday he was engaged in talks to resolve the crisis, sparked by the government's banning last week of Eyadema's former ruling party.

"We cannot work in normal conditions... if the military occupation in the capital, particularly the radio, continues," he told reporters at his colonial-style residence overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. "That must stop first of all, so that discussions can take place."

Looking drawn after his 48-hour siege Koffigoh said members of Eyadema's party, the Rally of the Togolese People (RPT), would be included in the talks. He did not say if the ban on it would be lifted.