

A country's action only true measure of its greatness

We won't sell our country to anyone: Premadasa

COLOMBO, Dec 7: Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa has implicitly criticised India ahead of a South Asian summit, saying a country's actions were the only true measure of its greatness, the state-run media said today, reports AFP.

"No country is big or small on the basis of her geographical size. No country is big or small on the basis of the numbers of her population. What is the use of bigness if it is not used generously and justly," the State-run daily news quoted Premadasa as saying.

Addressing students at a leading centre for international studies Friday Premadasa said: "organizations of countries will work well when

the sovereign equality of each member is recognised by all members."

Although Premadasa did not name India in his speech, political analysts here said it was a direct reference to New Delhi, who Colombo believes scuttled last month's South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit.

Premadasa's speech came as SAARC leaders prepared to finally meet in the Sri Lankan capital December 21, following intensive negotiations on the part of SAARC Chairman Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives.

The SAARC summit was originally scheduled to be held here from November 7-8 but collapsed at the last-minute

with the sudden withdrawal of Bhutanese King Jigme Singye, who cited domestic concerns.

Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and his Nepali counterpart Girija Prasad Koirala had insisted the summit could not take place without the Bhutanese monarch.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Harold Herat told parliament that it was Rao's "adamant" attitude that had led to the summit's collapse, while New Delhi has denied responsibility.

Relations between Sri Lanka and its giant neighbour have been strained since Premadasa took office in 1989 and ordered Indian troops, who had been deployed to fight Tamil separatism in the is-

land's northeast, to leave the country.

Premadasa refused to host the SAARC summit in Colombo in 1989 because of the presence of the Indian troops, which he said was a slur on the country's sovereignty.

In his speech Friday, Premadasa stressed that the sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka was not negotiable and that the country would "stand firm" and safeguard its sovereignty on matter what the cost.

"Let those who threaten us or those who betray us know this, whatever the cost, we will not be intimidated, whatever the cost we will not sell our country to anyone," Premadasa said.

Off the Record

Asteroid rather than space junk

TUCSON (Ariz): A mystery space object swooped within 290,000 miles (460,000 kilometres) from Earth — an astronomical "near miss" — but astronomers still aren't sure what it was, reports AP.

Asteroid-watchers at the University of Arizona hope a radar observation next week will confirm their belief it was an asteroid rather than space junk.

The object, known as 1991 VG, passed on a swing by the South Pole early Thursday, said James Scotti, a research specialist with the university's Lunar and Planetary Lab.

The only object known to have come closer to Earth was a 30-foot-wide (10-metre-wide) chunk of rock that passed within 106,000 miles (170,500 kilometres) on Jan 15.

The new object, believed to be about 60 feet (20 metres) in diameter, was spotted November 6 using the university's Spacewatch Telescope at the Kitt Peak National Observatory southwest of Tucson.

"We're leaning toward it being an asteroid, and if it is an asteroid it's the first of its kind and a fairly unique discovery," Scotti said.

Observations last week showed the object rotating slowly and appearing relatively dim, like an asteroid.

But another observation Sunday night by a German astronomer found it brighter, raising some doubt about its nature, Scotti said.

Scotti said orbital computations made based on last week's sighting indicated the object was "too far away for a manmade object launched from Earth."

Transistor resembles human brain cell

TOKYO: Japan has developed a transistor resembling a human brain cell which could revolutionise the way computer chips are made and accelerate research into artificial intelligence, a university said Friday, reports AFP.

Scientists at Tohoku University said the transistor, to be unveiled at a seminar in Washington next week, works with several inputs determining the switching mechanism instead of one as found in conventional transistors.

Whether the switch is turned on or off is determined by the weighted sum of all input signals, just like brain cells, they said.

The device, developed by a team led by Tadahiro Ohmi of the university's Electronic Engineering Department, takes up less than 10 per cent of the space required by conventional transistors used in integrated circuits.

Another feature, researchers said, included the ability to modify functions — a circuit designed to add numbers, for example — could be changed to multiply them instead by shifting the input signals.

The researchers also said existing semiconductor plants could be used to mass-produce the transistor, which they call the "neuron mosfet" — meaning brain cell — like metal-oxide semiconductor field effect transistors.

Beethoven's manuscript fetches record price

LONDON: The manuscript of the 27th of Ludwig van Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas, written in his own hand, has been bought for his birthplace museum in Germany for a record 1.1 million pounds (£1.98 million), reports AP.

After purchasing the Piano Sonata in E Minor at Sotheby's on Friday, London dealer Albion Rosenthal said: "I am very pleased to have got it and to have paid the world record price for the manuscript of a single work of the composer's hand."

The Beethoven House in Bonn did not have that sort of money," he explained of a joint effort by German banks and local governments to acquire the work.

The Beethoven House has a portrait of the composer and a celebrated collection of his letters, manuscripts, books and instruments which he played. The sale leaves only one Beethoven Sonata in private hands.

Rosenthal said the 27th is likely to be the last to reach the sale block as the other is owned by a German family who will probably give it to a public institution.

The manuscript is in brown ink on 28 pages and was written in Vienna. It is signed by Beethoven who noted in it that he started the composition on August 16, 1814. It was the only important work he composed in that year.

Assam newsmen accused of having links with ULFA

NEW DELHI, Dec 7: India's Assam state administration has cancelled the identity cards of all local journalists after arresting two of them on charges they had links with a guerrilla group, a newspaper reported Friday, says AFP.

The Times of India said journalists in the northeastern state were told Thursday to surrender identity cards issued by the administration.

New cards would be issued after a thorough screening of journalists' bonafides, the daily said.

The move followed the arrest last week of Manjit Mahanta, a reporter with the Assamese-language daily Ajom, and Rajit Bora, a sub-editor with the English-language newspaper the Sentinel.

Both men were accused of having links with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which is spearheading an insurgent campaign for Assam's independence.

The Assam government justified the cancellation of identity cards on the grounds that they were being misused by non-journalists, including members of banned militant organisations and political activists, the Times said.

The Assamese press is locked in a confrontation with the state administration, controlled by India's ruling Congress (I) party, over the arrest of Mahanta and Bora. Journalists have been staging daily anti-government protests.

Bora allegedly confessed to having been a "contact man" for the ULFA.

Filipino govt asked to extend X-mas ceasefire

MANILA, Dec 7: Philippine congressmen have asked the government to extend by 20 days its traditional 48-hour Christmas ceasefire in offensives against communist guerrillas and military rebels, reports Reuter.

The Government has already said it will declare a 48-hour unilateral covering Christmas and New Year's Day.

Manila newspaper today said a group of congressmen had proposed that this year's ceasefire last from December 16, the state of Christmas dawn masses, until January 6, the end of the holiday season.

6m Nepali suffer from iodine deficiency

KATHMANDU, Dec 7: More than six million people or 32 per cent of the population in Nepal is suffering from iodine deficiency, according to an international seminar here, reports Xinhua.

The seminar on control of iodine deficiency disorders, jointly sponsored by the Nepalese Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO), was attended by 35 representatives from 21 countries.

Nepalese Minister of State Ram Varan Yadav told the seminar that the Nepalese government plans to eliminate goitre and cretinism caused from iodine deficiency by the year 2000 and as the first step, iodized salt will be distributed throughout the country and iodine injections will be provided for high risk population groups.

Shooting rampage in UP, Haryana

Sikhs claim responsibility

CHANDIGARH (India), Dec 7: A coalition of four Sikh militant groups which kidnapped a Romanian diplomat in October claimed responsibility today for a shooting rampage in which at least 51 people died, reports Reuter.

In a statement sent to reporters in Punjab, where Sikh militants are fighting for independence, the groups said their men carried out the shootings in nearby Uttar Pradesh and Haryana states on Thursday and Friday.

It said the gunmen struck in Uttar Pradesh because the state's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party government was considered anti-Sikh and in Haryana because the administration there had demanded the deployment of the army in Punjab.

"We wanted to make our presence felt and tell these governments they cannot ride roughshod over the sentiments of the Sikhs," the statement said.

Among the 51 killed in separate and sometimes indiscriminate attacks were 10 people gunned down at a railway crossing in Uttar Pradesh early on Friday.

Thousands of soldiers were sent to Punjab last month to suppress the decade-old Sikh

BRIEFLY

Four killed in Mujahideen attack: Afghan guerrilla rockets have killed four people and injured 12 in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, state-run Kabul radio said on Friday, reports Reuter from Islamabad.

It said rebels fired ground-to-ground rockets and artillery shells on the residential areas of the city and surrounding military positions on Thursday.

The radio, monitored in Islamabad, also reported heavy damage in the city.

US arms embargo on 3 states goes: President George Bush announced Friday an end to the U.S. arms embargo imposed 30 years ago against former Warsaw Pact members Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, reports AFP.

The President waived the 1961 ban on arms sales in order to "strengthen the security of the United States and promote world peace," according to a memorandum published here where Bush stopped en route to Hawaii.

A White House spokesman, Dill Harlow, said Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were the first former Warsaw Pact members to have the embargo against them lifted.

He added that they would not receive technologically advanced weapons but equipment such as radar systems and trucks.

Harlow said the countries had legitimate defence needs and were no longer reliably supplied by the Soviet Union, which led the Warsaw Pact.

Olzewski elected Polish PM: The Polish parliament elected Jan Olzewski, a former solidarity lawyer and candidate of a centre-right coalition, as prime minister Friday, reports Reuter.

The Sejm (lower house) voted 250 to 57 with 107 abstentions to appoint Olzewski, nominated by President Lech Walesa on Thursday.

Olzewski, 61 replaces Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, whose resignation was approved by the Sejm on Thursday. Bielecki offered his resignation after parliamentary elections in October.

Pneumonia kills 12,000 children a day: Pneumonia kills 12,000 children a day and is the biggest cause of mortality for under-fives, despite being easily cured, the World Health Organization said Friday, reports AFP.

The respiratory disease kills 4.3 million children a year, 95 per cent of them in developing countries, despite being easily treated by inexpensive antibiotics, the WHO said.

Mandela may visit Israel: African National Congress (ANC) President Nelson Mandela told U.S. Jewish organisations he plans to accept an invitation to visit Israel and wants to develop closer ties with Jews, the groups said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Relations between the ANC leader and Jewish groups worldwide have been strained since his 1990 meeting with Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat.

He recently met South African Jewish leaders to iron out differences over his support for the PLO and with Israel's ambassador to South Africa who invited him to visit Jerusalem.

"We are processing that invitation and in due course will be able to honour it," Mandela said on Thursday night, according to a news release issued by the Jewish groups.

FIS accused of killing soldiers: Algerian Defence Minister Khaled Nezzar on Friday accused the country's main religious opposition group, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), in connection with an attack on a border post in which three soldiers were murdered, reports AFP.

Major-general Nezzar said that 34 people took part in the attack on November 29 on the Gueummar post, on the border with Tunisia, and all were members or sympathisers of the FIS. He said one assailant was the Mayor of Gueummar, who was a FIS member and who prior to the attack had been living underground.

The minister, speaking on television after touring the region, denied that foreigners had been involved in the attack. "This was no foreign hand, only Algerian ones," he said.

The FIS had denied early accusations that it took part in the attack, during which three soldiers had their throats cut.

Thai parliament okays constitution

BANGKOK, Dec 7: Thailand's army-appointed national assembly approved a constitution for the country today that gives the military a strong say over who will govern after elections, reports Reuter.

"I am happy now," interim Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun said. "The constitution has been approved and the government is ready to hold elections, which I expect to be in the later part of March."

Anand had criticised earlier drafts that gave a Senate appointed by the junta wider powers than those in the measure passed today. The vote was 262 for, seven against and four abstentions. Fifteen members were absent.

The military ousted the elected government of Chattehal Choonhavan in February in a bloodless coup, accusing him of corruption and operating a parliamentary dictatorship.

The National Peacekeeping Council (NPKC), as the junta calls itself, won the right in today's vote to appoint a senate of 270 members who will be able to vote on confidence measures that could oust an elected government.

There will be 360 elected members of parliament.

Opponents of the constitution say that because of the fractious nature of Thai party politics the appointed senate could easily ally itself with a

US blamed for continuation of war in Y'slavia

VIENNA, Dec 7: Former Yugoslav President Stipe Mesic, a Croatian recalled from his duties on Thursday by the Croatian Parliament, accused the United States on Friday of being "responsible for the continuation of the war" in Yugoslavia, reports AFP.

He said in a talk with Styria State Governor Christof Zernatto that "Washington is holding back, leading the European countries not to recognise Croatia," the Governor's spokesman said.

Mesic told the governor he was "convinced that recognition of Croatian independence by Europe would bring peace."

Mesic also mentioned what he called a "strong Serbian lobby" in France "that has put pressure on Paris to prevent it from recognizing Croatia immediately."

But he said he was "convinced that my country will be recognised before the start of 1992 by the majority of European countries, and that recognition will mean the end of the war."

Fresh Kurdish crisis worries US

WASHINGTON, Dec 7: The United States on Friday expressed concern at a renewed Kurdish refugee crisis in northern Iraq, reports Reuter.

State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said, "the United Nations people there on the ground tell us they believe they can handle this situation. It is something that is a concern to us, and something that we are obviously watching closely."

United Nations officials say about 200,000 Kurds have fled Iraqi army attacks in northern Iraq in recent weeks, straining the resources of relief teams trying to help half a million uprooted people survive an icy winter.

Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein crushed a Kurdish revolt in the aftermath of Iraq's Gulf War defeat earlier this year. Up to two million

Refugees fled towards Turkey and Iran. Western troops created safe havens for their return.

Iraq is also trying to subdue the Kurds with sanctions and has also imposed a six-week economic blockade. Kurds who flee to the border mountains are living under plastic sheets, safe from Saddam's troops but exposed to snow, sleet and cold.

Gulf allied air forces are based just over Iraq's northern border in Turkey but there is no sign so far of military action to halt the latest Iraqi advances.

The West wants to avoid another mass refugee exodus.

The allies set up safe havens for the Kurds in Northern Iraq after the world was moved to act by nightly television pictures of starving Kurds in disease-ridden camps.

Small minority of elected legislator to depose a majority government.

Opposition politicians and student activists had planned mass demonstrations to demand that the proposed constitution be rejected. They cancelled them after King Bhumibol Adulyadej, a deeply revered figure, called for national unity to avoid bloodshed.

On November 19, 50,000 people gathered in the largest demonstration since the February coup to protest against the proposed constitution.

Only ten protesters showed up at the National Assembly today though student leaders said they would stage demonstrations on their campuses later in the day.

Opposition politicians said they would try to change the constitution after the election.

"The NPKC is trapped in the vicious political circle," said new aspirant party chief Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a former military chief himself "but we will break it."

Chavalit has long been considered a strong candidate to be the next elected prime minister.

Thailand has a long tradition of military coups.

HONOLULU: A group of Japanese tourists look on as survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbour march on a downtown street Friday in a parade marking the 50th anniversary of the attack, which led to US involvement in World War II.

—AFP/UNB photo

Los Horcones, El-Salvador: Guerilla leaders Roman Torres (R) and Romeo Acosta attend Friday a press conference in a village, 110 kilometres east of the capital, during which they hoped to sign a ceasefire agreement with the Salvadoran government before the end of 1991 to end the 12-year civil war. The UN Secretary General J P de Cuellar has asked to move Salvadoran peace talks to New York next week.

—AFP/UNB photo

Pearl Harbour survivors say apology too little, too late



PEARL HARBOUR, Hawaii, Dec 7: Survivors of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on Friday generally welcomed Japan's statement, it is in "deep reflection for having caused unbearable agony and sorrows," by starting the War in the Pacific, reports Reuter.

But some said the statement, issued on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbour, was "too little, too late."

The statement followed the collapse of plans by Japan's parliament to apologise to former World War II enemies when the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and opposition parties could not agree on the wording.

"I think it's about time," said survivor Lon Sigman of Friday's statement, "but I think they should go a little further."

"I think they should start talking about financial compensation for all the civilian prisoners they took throughout the area," added Sigman, who was on a submarine base when the attack came.

He spoke as the 5,000 survivors attending the anniversary events gathered for a parade in their honour along Kalakaua Avenue, Waikiki's main shopping street.

Thousands lined the 1.6-mile (2.5-km) parade route, and if there were any anti-Japanese feelings, they were not apparent as Japanese tourists and American visitors alike stood side by side cheering the survivors as they walked the parade or drove by in cars.

Some Japanese even waved American flags.

"Yes, I welcome the statement as an acknowledgement they were wrong. But it's been a lifetime in coming, and I think public recognition of the 50th anniversary has forced them to do this," said Agnes Cherry, as she proudly watched her husband, Ashley, who was on the USS Raleigh during the attack, march in the parade.

Al Stokes, who was a sailor on the repairship, USS Vestal, which received heavy damage, said he holds no grudge against the modern day Japanese government, or the

people of Japan, or indeed the Japanese pilots who bombed his ship.

"I was just a young kid then, 17. I don't blame those who participated in the attack. They were only following orders, as any military person is duty bound to do."

"I blame the Japanese government of the day and I blame our own government of the day, who knew there was a strong possibility of attack but chose not to do anything about it."

"In a sense, they sacrificed thousands of lives by not declaring war on Japan earlier," he said. Some 2,335 US military personnel and 68 civilians were killed in the attack on Pearl Harbour.

The Japanese statement, given to reporters by Chief Cabinet Secretary Koichi Kato at a news briefing in Tokyo, said: "The government of Japan is in deep reflection for having caused unbearable agony and sorrow to the people in parts of Asia and the Pacific in fighting started with the attack on Pearl Harbour."

'Japan not a reliable ally of US'

WASHINGTON, Dec 7: Three out of five Americans say Japan is not a reliable ally of the United States, according to an ABC news poll released on Friday night, reports Reuter.

The percentage of respondents mistrustful of Japan was the highest in 10 years of ABC polling and nearly double the percentage in a 1989 survey.

Three in five Americans say Japan's economic strength poses a threat to the United States, and three in five Japanese agree, according to the poll, carried out in conjunction with Japan's NHK network.

The survey, timed to gauge attitudes 50 years after the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbour, found that Americans and Japanese view each other with a mix of admiration and suspicion.

About three in five of those polled in each country view the other country favourably overall. The majorities think relations are good and holding steady.