

Czechoslovakia recognises Byelorussia

PRAGUE, Dec 24 : Czechoslovakia today recognized Byelorussia as an independent state, saying the two countries will soon open talks on the establishment of diplomatic ties, reports Xinhua.

Byelorussia is the second former Soviet republic after Ukraine recognized as an independent state by Czechoslovakia.

The Czech and Slovak federal government said in a statement that it will 'Establish a new kind of relations with members of the commonwealth of independent states, which has replaced the Soviet Union.'

Czechoslovakia hopes to see a guarantee by commonwealth members of their commitment to Nuclear disarmament, security and other international obligations, including those concerning Czechoslovakia, the statement said.

Czechoslovakia used to have wide ranging economic and trade cooperation with former Soviet republics.

US recognises Russia tomorrow as successor to Soviet Union

WASHINGTON, Dec 24 : President George Bush has decided to recognize Russia as the successor to the Soviet Union on Thursday after talks with Russian leader Boris Yeltsin, administration sources said on Monday, reports Reuters.

'We will do de facto recognition, which means we will recognize Russia as the successor state to the Soviet Union,' said one administration official.

'As a result, it will have the rights and privileges of the former Soviet Union,' said the official who spoke on condition he was not identified.

The decision to recognize Russia as the replacement for the Soviet Union means that it would be instantly elevated to a major place on the international stage.

It would become co-sponsor of the Middle East peace talks, along with the United States, according to administration of-

officials, who also said Washington would push for Russia to sit on the Security Council of the United Nations.

The officials said Bush would make a formal announcement on Thursday after US allies were notified.

Yeltsin called Bush on Monday and spoke with him for about 25 minutes, urging the President to recognize his government.

'I had a long talk with Yeltsin today,' Bush told reporters on Monday night as he was about to leave for his Camp David, Maryland, retreat to spend the Christmas holiday. He declined to elaborate.

The administration officials said the relations that have existed between Washington and the Soviet Union will be transferred to Russia. The other republics will be treated separately.

'This is a neat, clean solution' to the question of what to do with the demise of the

Soviet Union, said one official.

'We just pick up where we left off, with a new set of characters,' he said.

The majority of the nuclear arms of the Kremlin Military machine now are under the control of Russia, and Secretary of State James Baker's recent trip there has satisfied Bush's concerns about the weapons.

Administration officials said the United States decided to accept the inevitable and will begin formally recognizing the independence of other former Soviet Republics as well.

The process will vastly complicate foreign policy-making, raising the likelihood that Washington will have to deal with as many as 12 governments where it previously dealt with one.

Washington also is expected to grant recognition to Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Byelorussia - all nuclear-armed states - as well as to

Kirgizia.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater told reporters he expected there would be an international conference in Washington in January to coordinate worldwide relief efforts, despite the misgivings of some countries, particularly France.

He said Washington was consulting with a number of countries around the world - European, Asian and Middle Eastern - about the President's proposal for an international conference on aid to the Soviet Union.

'We're certain there will be a conference and there are any number of positive responses,' he said.

'The conditions and situation there are so complex, there is so much money going in there for so many different reasons, I think most everybody agrees there needs to be some form of coordination,' he said.

8 Harijans killed in Gaya

GAYA, Dec 24 : At least eight Harijans were killed in two separate incidents by unknown miscreants in Gaya district last night, the Dig police, Niaz Ahmed said, reports PTI.

Four persons were killed in the Mel village under Belaganj police station, while four others were killed in the Barshima village under Tegari police station, Ahmed said.

Senior district officials have rushed to the two villages.

Miyazawa to visit Seoul from Jan 16

SEOUL, Dec 24 : Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa will visit Seoul from January 16-18 at the invitation of the South Korean government, a Presidential spokesman announced today, reports Reuters.

He will meet South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo twice to exchange views on world and, in particular, Northeast Asian developments, Presidential spokesman Kim Hak-Soon said. He gave no further details.

'His visit here will give a major new impetus to consolidating ties of friendship and cooperation between the two nations,' Kim said.

The visit will be Miyazawa's first overseas trip since he became Prime Minister in Early November. His predecessor, Toshiki Kaifu, visited Seoul last January.

Sobhraj to write novel on Rajiv assassination

NEW DELHI, Dec 24 : Convicted murderer and alleged mass killer Charles Sobhraj is planning to write a novel based on the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Express said today, reports AP.

'My novel is going to be a fictional account of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination,' the newspaper quoted Sobhraj, 46, as saying in an interview during a court battle for a vitamin-rich meat diet in prison.

The Vietnamese-born Frenchman has been reading 'all the books he can' on Gandhi, who was assassinated by a woman suicide-bomber at an election rally in southern India May 21. The Express said.

The Saigon-born Sobhraj, sought by authorities in 10 countries for a string of tourist murders, drug peddling and armed robbery, is serving a life sentence in India for murdering an Israeli tourist in 1983.

Armed with a stack of legal books, Sobhraj appeared before a judge Monday to plead his case for a non-vegetarian diet in Thar Central Jail, saying prison authorities had ignored an almost year-old court order that he be given meat to eat at his own expense.

Maxwell's son resigns from Daily News

NEW YORK, Dec 24: The son of the late Tycoon Robert Maxwell, Kevin, resigned as chairman and publisher of New York's Daily News. His father bought less than a year ago, the newspaper said on Monday, reports Reuters.

His brother, Ian, also resigned from the board, the paper said. Both resignations take effect on January 1.

Kevin Maxwell, 32, took control of the newspaper after his father's mysterious death overboard his yacht on November 5. Since then, Maxwell's vast publishing empire has all but collapsed under five billion dollars in debt.

The Daily News, one of the largest circulation papers in the United States, filed for bankruptcy protection earlier this month.

Turkish forces kill 11 Kurds

ANKARA, Dec 24 : Security forces killed 11 rebels of the Kurdish Workers Party PKK in southeastern Turkey, the semi-official Anatolia News Agency reported yesterday, says Xinhua.

China, Israel likely to set up ties

TEL AVIV, Dec 24 : A senior Chinese Foreign Ministry official arrived in Israel on Monday as Beijing edged closer to establishing its first formal diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, reports Reuters.

The official will hold talks with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir later this week, a Shamir aide said. But the aide declined to identify him.

An Israel radio report naming the official as Vice-Foreign Minister Yang Fuchang could not be confirmed.

Israel television said China had urged the visit be kept secret but Foreign Minister David Levy disclosed it at a parliamentary committee meeting earlier in the day.

The visit follows months of intensive, largely confidential contacts between Israel and China, which have never had formal ties.

The two nations' foreign ministers met at the United

Nations in October to discuss establishing relations.

Defence Minister Moshe Arens visited China for talks just after the Middle East peace talks in Madrid in early November, according to security sources in Israel. At the time, military censors barred publication of news of the trip, the first to China by an Israeli minister.

The Arens visit was closely followed by the first open talks between Chinese officials and a high-level Israeli trade delegation. The delegation included Dan Shomron, head of Israeli Military Industries and a former army Chief of Staff.

Israel has refused to comment on reports that it sells arms to Beijing.

Contacts between the nations began in the 1970s. The intensified in the 1980s and under the current Chinese leadership.

Last year Israel set up an academic institute in Beijing, China has opened a tourist office in Tel Aviv.



JERUSALEM : Santa Claus gives candies to Palestinian children on a street in East Jerusalem Monday. The Arab population in Israel and in the occupied territories is mainly of Muslim denomination but part is also Christian denomination. —AFP/UNB photo

Shelling of parliament building on Fierce fighting in Tbilisi

TBILISI (Georgia), Dec 24 : Opposition forces shelled the Georgian parliament building Tuesday and officials put the death toll at 30 in nearly three days of fierce fighting in the capital of the former Soviet republic, reports AP.

After a night of sporadic street fighting, heavy fire was exchanged in central Tbilisi between rebels and backers of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, whom the opposition accuses of dictatorial excesses.

Gamsakhurdia's troops were firing from inside Government House, the parliament, at rebel National Guardsmen who surrounded the huge, terraced building on Rustaveli Avenue, the capital's main thoroughfare.

The six-lane, tree-lined street was packed with troops and people watching the battle.

The Georgian Health Ministry said Tuesday that 30 people have been killed and

250 injured in the fighting. Gamsakhurdia and his wife were inside Government House, the Tass news agency said, quoting Georgian Foreign Minister Murman Omanidze.

The opposition fire came from the Hotel Tbilisi, its headquarters, and from the Communications Ministry building, where the opposition has taken over.

Fighting broke out early Sunday after a week of increasing tension and street demonstrations.

The fighting is a resurgence of the power struggle that paralyzed Georgia throughout much of September and October. The opposition, a loose coalition of democratic reform groups, former members of Gamsakhurdia's government and rebel National Guardsmen is demanding the president's resignation.

They say that Gamsakhurdia started acting like a dictator after winning an overwhelming

victory in presidential elections in May.

The current fighting ignited after Georgia refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent States that is replacing the Soviet Union. It was the only one of the 12 remaining republics not to join.

Georgia, a small nation nestled in the steep Caucasus Mountains, historically has been fiercely independent.

Gamsakhurdia's opponents accuse him of closing newspapers, stifling the Ossetian ethnic minority in northern Georgia and refusing to release political prisoners. The United States also accuses Gamsakhurdia of human rights abuses.

In an interview with British Broadcasting Corporation on Monday, Gamsakhurdia said he was willing to share power with opposition leaders but said 'they do not want negotiations.'

He flatly rejected opposition calls for his resignation. Omanidze told Tass that Gamsakhurdia does not plan to leave the parliament building.

Gamsakhurdia also told the BBC he was not opposed to joining the new Commonwealth of Independent States proclaimed Saturday by the other 11 Soviet republics.

Tass said Tbilisi Airport was allowing planes from Moscow to land, but not to take off again.

Danger comes from streets: Gorbachev

LONDON, Dec 24 : Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has ruled out a military coup in the Soviet Union and said the only danger comes from the streets, reports BBC quoting Tass, says PTI.

In an interview published in 'Komsomolskaya Pravda' today, he said he did not regard the signing of the commonwealth agreement as a coup d'etat.

'One political system is being replaced by another system which has its own laws of development and existence,' he said.

'I am convinced that a mili-

tary coup is out of the question. Neither will the people accept it, nor the army agree to it.

The only danger is from the streets. If discontented people take to the streets, and political prostitutes and speculators urge them on.'

Gorbachev said he did not believe in the conception of the commonwealth.

There exist great dangers connected with two matters the dismemberment of the country and the elucidation of citizenship issues. It is still not clear whether this is an alliance or a separation.'

Kurds to give Baghdad last chance for conciliation

SHAGLAWA, Northern Iraq, Dec 24 : The Kurdistan Front, an umbrella group for eight Kurdish parties, has decided to send a delegation to Baghdad in a last bid for a compromise to end a painful economic blockade, a Kurdish official said Monday, reports AP.

Dr Kemal Fuad the chief representative of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, said in this northern Iraqi town that the decision had been taken unanimously at a meeting held in nearby Khalifan on Sunday.

'We have decided to respond to the Iraqi request and send the Coordination Committee for the last time to Baghdad to go and see what Iraq is going to do about lifting the blockade,' he said.

He said the delegation to be

sent shortly 'will not stay in Baghdad for more than a week this time.' The Coordination Committee has unsuccessfully negotiated an end to the blockade several times in the past.

Iraq stopped sending food and fuel to Kurdish areas, suspended municipal services and halted wage payments to Kurdish civil servants in November. The steps have spurred acute fuel shortages with gasoline prices rising steeply.

Ongoing harassment of Kurdish settlements also has caused at least 200,000 people to flee settlements near the towns of Sulaymaniyah and Irbil, reports said.

Intermittent shelling and the economic blockade were generally seen as an Iraqi

stragem to force the Kurds to make concessions on their demands in the deadlocked talks for autonomy.

If the Iraqi government lifts the blockade, Kurdish officials would consider resuming the negotiations, Fuad said.

The autonomy talks bogged down three months ago over the size and borders of a projected autonomous area, and over Kurdish insistence on democratic reforms.

Of 1.5 million Kurds who fled to Turkey and Iran after a failed rebellion in March, most were resettled by a US-led Western force. However, about 500,000 unable to return to towns under Iraqi control still need shelter.

The Front's decision to send a delegation to Baghdad spelled a victory for the mod-

erate Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani, the chief negotiator in the autonomy talks.

AFP adds from Baghdad : Iraq is prepared to compromise on a UN resolution allowing it to sell a limited supply of oil, Oil Minister Ossama Al-Hiti disclosed Monday.

'An interim agreement of something in the range of 200 million barrels would probably be feasible to be pumped within the period specified by the United Nations. That's one year,' Hiti told AFP Monday.

While Hiti spoke of a year, the United Nations Security Council resolution limits Iraqi oil sales to a value of 1.6 billion dollars for a period of six months, with carrying capacity for the purchase of food and medicine and to pay for damages caused by the Gulf

Off the Record

Satyajit's thirst yet to be quenched

CALCUTTA : Cine director Satyajit Ray, who was chosen for the prestigious honorary Oscar this year, feels that he is 'more than satisfied' with his achievements but his thirst for making good films is yet to be quenched, reports PTI.

The 70-year-old director, who exploded into the film world way back in 1955 with the brilliant 'pather panchali' told PTI in an interview : 'I am absolutely enthralled by the sheer process of film making and the enjoyment that I derive from my work is what keeps me going as a film maker.'

Ray, who hopes to travel to Hollywood to receive Oscar in March, said winning Oscar was the climax because it is the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for a film maker and one cannot go beyond that.'



Where is the contradiction?

LAKE ST. LOUIS : Pornographic movie experience doesn't exactly look good on an application for police chief, but it's not stopping Suzi Wahl, reports AP.

If there's a contradiction, she doesn't see it. 'Just because a woman is beautiful and allows you to look at that beauty, does not mean that she's not qualified to do millions of other jobs that require brains,' Ms Wahl said.

Law enforcement is my background,' she said. 'I enjoy it.' City administrator Ron Nelson will choose the new police chief early next year. He said all applications will be considered seriously - even Ms Wahl's.

Police raided her sex-video business this fall in Lake St. Louis, a town of 7,500 near St. Louis, but did more damage to 'themselves': Four deputies ended up resigning, and Police Chief John Selby lost his job.

Carnations instead of tickets

WELLINGTON : New Zealand traffic police, much maligned like their colleagues around the world, awarded carnations instead of tickets to motorists Monday as a way of thanking will-behaved drivers, reports Reuters.

As a Christmas good will gesture, traffic officers stopped motorists and gave them a carnation.

Senior Sergeant Paul Kennedy said : 'too often we are doing something about people who do things wrong on the road. Today's the day for those who are driving safely.'

Kuwaiti X-mas gift for US tots

WASHINGTON : In what he described as a gesture of sincere gratitude and good will, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States gave 100,000 dollars to an American charity that purchases and distributes toys for needy children during the Christmas season, reports USIS.

At a brief December 19 ceremony during which he presented the check 'on behalf of the people and children of Kuwait' to the US marine corps reserves 'toys for tots' programme Shaikh Saud Nasir Al-Sabah said the donation 'is an indication of what the people of Kuwait feel in their hearts for the United States.'



MANILA : Philippines President Corason Aquino sings a song during a farewell Christmas party for journalists at the Malacanang Presidential Palace Monday. In a slightly off-of-tune voice singing for the first time in public, Aquino sang 'I'll never run again. I was just good for snap elections' to the tune of the pop song 'I'll never smile again.' —AFP/UNB photo

Clashes claim 28 in Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 24 : Sarath Munasinghe told reporters.

Four soldiers were wounded in the clash, Munasinghe said.

He said 150 more troops had been rushed to Mullaitivu district where soldiers were battling the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

'It is developing into a major confrontation,' Colonel

BRIEFLY

Clashes leave 6 dead in Peru : Six soldiers were killed and 10 others injured on Monday when an army patrol clashed with pro-Cuban guerillas in Peru's northern Amazon jungle, the armed forces said, Reuters reports Tuesday from Peru.

It said 100 guerillas of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) clashed with an army patrol near the military base of Sortor, 670 kms (400 miles) northeast of Lima, a statement from the joint chiefs of staff said.

Six soldiers including a lieutenant died, the statement said. Several MRTA fighters were also injured.

In the southeastern city of Ayacucho, two gunmen shot a local sports official to death and seriously wounded the leader of an Ayacucho neighbourhood as they walked down a street of this state capital.

Yeltsin to press nuclear button : Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia and Kazakhstan, the four former republics of the Soviet Union which have been deployed with nuclear weapons, have agreed to transfer the right to press the Nuclear button to the Russian federation, reports AFP Tuesday from Moscow.

Russian first Deputy Prime Minister Gennady Burbulis told press conference yesterday that this had been confirmed in the 'agreement on joint action in the field of Nuclear arms.'

The agreement was one of the six documents signed by 11 out of 12 former Soviet republics in the Kazakh capital of Alma-Ata Saturday.

India opens new routes for Nepal : India will provide 15 transit points to Nepal for its goods to and from third countries through Calcutta Port, according to the Nepal-India transit treaty, reports AFP Tuesday from Kathmandu.

The seven-year treaty, signed recently in New Delhi by the prime ministers of the two countries, said that these routes may be discontinued or new ones added by mutual agreement.

Facilities of ware-houses, sheds and open space will be available for the storage of transit cargo.

Bulk traffic, such as fertilizers and cement moving by rail, shall pass through Calcutta/Narayapur Anant route or any other agreed route subject to prior intimation being given to customs as and when such movements are anticipated.

US hails Haitian peace accord : The State Department on Monday welcomed reports that Haiti's political crisis may be nearing an end with an agreement between deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and parliamentarians on a new prime minister, reports AFP Tuesday from Washington.

'This seems to be a step towards a negotiated solution in Haiti, a goal the United States strongly supports,' said department press officer Joseph Snyder. 'We hope a developing consensus around President Aristide's candidate for prime minister will lead to quick movement toward a negotiated solution.'

Augusto Ramirez Ocampo, an envoy from the Organization of American States, said Aristide authorized him to announce that he would accept Rene Theodore, head of the Haitian Communist Party, as prime minister.

Aristide said Theodore would be acceptable 'if it is the will of the parliamentary majority.'

700 criminals surrender in China : More than 700 criminals have voluntarily surrendered to public security authorities in the Chinese capital, reports AFP Tuesday from Beijing.

The authorities announced November 5 that thieves, murderers, rapists, 'hoodlums and cheats' would be given 40 days to turn themselves in or face harsh punishment, the semi-official China news service said.

documents circulated Monday.

In a letter to the United Nations, Ahmad Hussein cited an October 4 news conference by President Bush and a New York Times report of December 11 to support his contention that Washington is trying to foment a military coup.

The New York Times article said that the US joint chiefs of staff were reviewing options to 'prepare the United States for a situation in which key officers in Iraq's armed forces might request support from Washington in an attempt to seize power from President Saddam Hussein.'

The article said two options were under consideration : one in which a coup attempt bogged down and US assistance was requested.