

Three Baltic states seek UN membership

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 4: The three Baltic states took the first step towards United Nations membership by submitting applications to the Secretary-General on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which were independent states between the world wars, could become members of the world body this month.

French Ambassador Jean-Bernard Marre accompanied by British Ambassador Sir David Hannay handed the three letters to the Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar. No representative from the Baltic states was present.

This is a big and rather historic step, Hannay said. Before becoming members,

the three states must be approved by the Security Council, in which the Soviet Union has veto power, as well as the General Assembly.

The only criteria for membership is a declaration that a state is willing to uphold the principles of the UN charter.

Normal diplomatic practice, however, assumes that a state controls its own territory and can sign international treaties.

All three were part of Russia before the 1917 revolution and were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.

In Washington, the state department said it supported the applications and would sponsor a resolution to cut the usual waiting period from 35 to seven days in time for the 46th general assembly session it opens on September 17.

Seven killed as troops, Kurds clash in Turkey

ANKARA (Turkey), Sept 4: Clashes between Turkish troops and Kurdish rebels has killed at least seven people, as a wide-scale military operation continued in eastern Turkey to locate five abducted Westerners, officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

Three Americans, a Briton and an Australian were abducted Friday night from their vehicles by Kurdish rebels in Bingol province. They were on an expedition seeking the site of Noah's ark, which the Bible says landed on Mount Ararat in present-day eastern Turkey after the great flood.

A Turkish driver told police that the kidnappers identified themselves as guerrillas belonging to the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK).

Turkish officials have maintained a strict silence about the search, which involves about 2,500 soldiers and police and covers several

provinces.

But a senior government official in the provincial center of Diyarbakir told the Associated Press that the security forces had so far not made any contact with the kidnappers.

He said no American or other Western troops or experts were assisting in the search.

About 2,500 Western troops are based at Silopi on the Iraqi border to protect Iraqi Kurds from another crackdown by Baghdad after their failed March uprising. Last month, a PKK guerrilla commander expressed the group's displeasure with what he described a US plot to stifle Kurdish independence.

The Turkish official in Diyarbakir, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he did not know why the PKK has not officially claimed responsibility for the abduction.

Yeltsin wants to scrap Soviet nuclear weapons

NEW YORK, Sept 4: Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin said on Tuesday he wanted to scrap Soviet nuclear weapons and that 14 of the 15 republics were ready to sign an economic accord, reports Reuters.

He also called for dissolution of the KGB unit that bugged telephones illegally, said he tricked, the former KGB chairman into flying to the Crimea during last month's coup, and said he now "almost entirely" trusted Mikhail Gorbachev.

"It is not a major victory when 50 per cent of weapons are earmarked for elimination in a situation where five per cent is enough to destroy the

whole world," Yeltsin said in an interview with Cable News Network in the Russian Parliament.

"We need to continue our work to eliminate all nuclear weapons."

The Russian leader said the Soviet republics where nuclear arms are stationed were working on an accord to return them all to his republic and that he wanted to stop all underground testing.

Asked what he felt his responsibility was during the coup Yeltsin said, "To save Russia, to save this country, to save democracy and the whole world from a cold war, or a hot war for that matter. And that (hot war) would have been disastrous for the whole world."

Yeltsin said almost all of the 15 Soviet republics were ready to sign an accord to link them economically.

Yeltsin said he had complete trust in the New KGB Chairman, Vadim Bakatin, and that he had no doubts Bakatin would overhaul the security police.

He slammed the KGB's 12th department for illegally bugging his telephone and those of hundreds of other people over the years, and called for the unit's elimination.

Yeltsin said he sent Bakatin's predecessor, Vladimir Kryuchkov, to the Crimea allegedly to get Gorbachev to sign a statement

endorsing the August 19 coup attempt, but telephoned Gorbachev while Kryuchkov was en route urging the Soviet President to have him arrested.

On his relations with Gorbachev since the coup was foiled, Yeltsin said, "I trust him entirely, almost entirely... much more than three weeks ago when he was still capable of manoeuvring."

Yeltsin, who led popular resistance to the revolt, said he felt the worst during the coup when his five-year-old granddaughter asked him: "Will they shoot us right in the head?"

"This shows that the roots of totalitarianism are still there and we need to pull them out."

14 Croats killed in fighting

BELGRADE, Sept 4: Fighting in and around Sijek left 14 Croats dead in one day, Croatian radio monitored here, said today.

Overnight the bodies of 10 Croatian National Guardsmen killed Tuesday near the city, an important centre of the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia, were taken to Sijek, the radio said.

In addition four civilians, including a 13-year-old girl, were killed inside Sijek. Aircraft attacking Sijek dropped three bombs in the centre and northern part of the city, the radio said.

Twenty-eight people were wounded in the day's fighting in the area 180 kilometres (110 miles) northwest of Belgrade.

On casualty figures were published by Serbian nationalists attacking the Croats or by the Yugoslav Armed Forces.



OSJEK (Yugoslavia): A petrol station attendant covers the advance of a Croatian soldier advancing on a Serbian sniper position Sept 3. Serbian forces have now infiltrated populated areas within Osijek while the Yugoslav Army continues bombardment. — AFP/UNB photo

Lankan troops go on offensive against Tigers: 82 killed

COLOMBO, Sept 4: Government troops backed by air cover continued Wednesday to trade heavy fire with Tamil guerrillas in northeastern Sri Lanka after fresh battles in the region left dozens dead, officials here said, reports AFP.

A military spokesman here confirmed the government was waging a major offensive in Mullaitivu District against Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas but said it had no details from the battlefront.

"We are tongue-tied. Field commanders have requested that no publicity be given during the initial stages of the operation. It calls for full secrecy on the ground," the spokesman said.

Officials in neighbouring Vavuniya District said four soldiers were killed and at least 40 others wounded in fierce clashes Tuesday while press reports Wednesday put army losses at 12 dead and LTTE

more than 70 killed.

The spokesman confirmed reports that dozens were dead but said casualty figures in the media could not be verified.

He said the operation was launched after a large number of LTTE guerrillas moved into jungle-clad Mullaitivu from neighbouring areas.

"There must be a big threat to security forces in the area for us to start such a big operation," the spokesman said.

Tamil sources said heavy air raids continued Wednesday in Mullaitivu, parts of which has been under an indefinite curfew since Sunday.

The numerous jungles and lagoons in Mullaitivu afford perfect terrain for the LTTE to wage its guerrilla war against government troops.

Mullaitivu is also one of the main strongholds of the LTTE which is battling security forces to set up a separate state called Eelam in the northeast for Sri Lanka's two-

million Tamil minority concentrated in the region.

The latest clashes were the worst since the army routed LTTE guerrillas in the recent battle for control of the northern Elephant Pass Army Camp which was under a 25-day LTTE siege before elite troops ended the blockade a month ago.

In that military offensive 186 soldiers lost their lives and more than 2,000 LTTE militants were reported killed.

More than 9,930 people have been killed since the LTTE renewed its independence campaign in June 1990 after calling off 14 months of peace talks with the Sri Lankan government.

Meanwhile, LTTE rebels Tuesday killed a civilian in northeast Velli Oya while security forces shot dead a Tiger guerrilla in eastern Ampara District and killed another in adjoining Batticaloa District, the spokesman said.

Riots continue in Oxford

LONDON, Sept 4: Police wearing riot gear clashed with about 150 stone-throwing youths in the English city of Oxford in a third consecutive night of violence, reports Reuters.

The youths pelted police officers with stones and bottles as they moved in late on Tuesday night to clear a square in front of a bar on the rundown Blackbird Leys housing estate.

Two women were stabbed and two men were injured during riots earlier this week in Oxford, better known for its ancient university and quiet streets.

Indian Gen falls from 4th floor, dies

NEW DELHI, Sept 4: A senior army officer was killed on the spot when he fell down from the fourth floor of the army headquarters here today, police said, reports PTI.

The officer, identified as Maj Gen A M Malik, Additional Director General, Military Training, died soon after he hit the ground near the staircase of 'Sena Bhawan'.

The body of the officer, who was in uniform, was immediately covered with a cloth, the eyewitnesses said.

'Brook Side' to be converted to a Tagore museum

SANTINIKETAN, Sept 4: "Brook side" the house in which Rabindranath Tagore stayed for three months during his first visit to Shillong in 1919, would be converted to a Tagore museum and a centre for art and culture by the Meghalaya Government, reports PTI.

The Meghalaya Government's Secretary of Education, Art and Culture, Surajit Mitra, said that the house, with 20 acres of land, had already been acquired for the purpose.

Off the Record



VILNIUS: A Lithuanian worker removes a communist emblem here Sept 3 as the recognition of the Baltic republics by the United States on Sept 2 is considered as the culminating point in the independence process of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. — AFP/UNB photo

Filthy, cramped KGB prison cells

RIGA (Latvia): The once-powerful KGB opened its main Latvian office to Western reporters Tuesday, revealing a domain of filthy prison cells the size of closets and banks of telephones that don't work, reports AP.

Two floors above the cramped basement cells, emptied a week ago in apparent haste, the soon-to-be jobless Latvian KGB director, Edmunds Johansons, met reporters in his sprawling office.

A picture of Soviet President Mikhail S Gorbachev was the only one left on the wall. Stained-glass windows allowed coloured light to filter into the drably modernized offices. Cheap wooden paneling and dull wallpaper covered most of the old carved ceilings and walls.

Latvian flags flew outside the five-story buildings, which nearly fills a city block in downtown Riga. It is now guarded by the republic's police as Latvia presses to implement its declaration of independence.

Many Latvians fear the KGB still has secret agents in place. They claim the organisation bugged hotel rooms, persecuted Latvians and trailed dissidents.

Johansons said no bugging equipment has been used in Latvia for the past year.

Trubins said political prisoners were kept in the basement cells with a filthy, primitive, communal toilet until Gorbachev's reforms began six years ago.

From then "until last week, the cells were just used for common criminals awaiting trial," he said. The facility could hold 24 people.

One cell, roughly 6 feet square (2 meters square), was heavily padded with dank mattresses. "That was for prisoners who were having a crisis," Trubins said.

It appeared the prisoners had been moved quickly. Dirty sheets were strewn on the floor. Cookies lay on the counter in the nearby kitchen.

A door from the basement led to a heavily fenced section of the building's courtyard, full of loose dirt and boxes. The few square yards of space were the prison's exercise yard.

Skull cracked for disturbing fish

CAIRO: An Egyptian greengrocer fishing in the river Nile attacked a waiter with a cleaver for disturbing fish in the river, the mass-circulation Al-Akhar newspaper said in its Wednesday edition, reports Reuters.

The newspaper said the greengrocer, angling on the banks of the Nile, repeatedly asked the waiter to stop talking because he was frightening away the fish. When he refused, the greengrocer attacked him.

The waiter was taken to hospital with a cracked skull and head wounds. Police arrested the greengrocer.

NATO war games to test rapid reaction force

BRUSSELS, Sept 4: Some 30,000 troops are to take part in a NATO exercise in Germany beginning next week, to test one element of the new rapid reaction force being developed by the alliance, military sources said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The annual exercises, dubbed Certain Shield, are to take place in northern Germany from September 10-20 to test a new multinational division made up of German, British, Belgian and Dutch soldiers, about 9,000 US soldiers are also to take part in the manoeuvres.

This year the number of troops taking part in the exercises has been reduced by more than half. About 78,000 soldiers took part in the last, "Certain Shield" exercises.

NATO chiefs of staff are to meet in Ottawa next Friday to discuss the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union, as well as reforms within its own organisation.

Regardless, Jewish leaders said, their challenge will continue — even once the Nazi hunt is over.

"The pursuit of truth will never end," Steinberg said. "There are individuals who deny the Holocaust. Perhaps there will be more attempts to revise and falsify history."

"A diagnosis of dementia does not render them automatically incompetent," said Dr. James Fay, Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. "The expectation is that they will be very competent to stand trial."

El Rosenbaum, OSI deputy director, said the courts have ruled that a small number of ex-Nazis have been physically or mentally unable to stand trial.

Regard, Jewish leaders said, their challenge will continue — even once the Nazi hunt is over.

BRIEFLY

Fire claims 25 lives in US

Fire engulfed a chicken processing plant Tuesday, creating an inferno in which panicked workers were trapped by blocked or locked doors, witnesses said. Authorities reported 25 people killed and more than 45 injured. AP from Hamlet says.

"They were screaming 'Let me out' said passer-by 'Sam' Breeden. 'They were beating on the door'."

Blackened footprints marked a door where workers tried to kick their way out to escape the fire, which gutted the building's interior. Workers apparently did escape through that door. A reporter found a padlock on a door marked "Fire Door - Do Not Block."

Some of the victims' bodies were found at exits, and others were found in a meat locker. Hamlet Fire Chief David Fuller said at a news conference. He wouldn't confirm that the exit doors were locked.

Witnesses said a 26-foot (eight-meter) fryer at the Imperial Food Products plant caught fire about 1230 (GMT). The company makes chicken nuggets and marinated chicken breasts sold at fast-food restaurants and grocery stores.

Baker plans to visit Moscow: Secretary of State James A. Baker III plans to go to Moscow next week to make a firsthand appraisal of fast-moving developments in the Soviet Union. US officials disclosed Tuesday, reports AP from Washington.

Baker also is likely to go to the Middle East to try to advance preparations for an Arab-Israeli peace conference, and he may visit the Baltic Republics, as well, the officials told the Associated Press.

The trip to Moscow will be centred on a 35-nation human rights conference that opens Sept 10 and runs through Oct 4. Baker is expected to spend three days at the meeting and to hold talks with the new Soviet Foreign Minister, Boris Pankin.

Managua recognises Baltic states: Nicaragua has formally recognised Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as independent states and will establish diplomatic relations with the Baltic countries, the Foreign Ministry announced, Reuters says from Managua.

"Nicaragua, along with other countries of Latin America and the world, has taken the decision to support the legitimate aspirations of independence, sovereignty and self-determination of the three Baltic republics," said a ministry statement issued late on Monday.

Bush returns to White House

President George Bush Tuesday returned to the White House after a month of work-filled vacations highlighted by historic developments in the Soviet Union in the wake of the failed coup on August 19, reports AP from Washington.

The failed putsch caused Bush to leave his seaside summer home in Kennebunkport, Maine, on August 20 for a 24-hour visit to Washington, where he swore in Robert Strauss as the new US ambassador to Moscow.

Israeli settlements deplored: The nation's largest Lutheran denomination on Tuesday urged US economic pressure to stop Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip despite warnings the action would offend American Jews, reports AP from Orlando.

The biennial assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America also continued to wrestle with a proposed policy statement on abortion that declares the practice to be an "option only of last resort."

The eight-day assembly continues through Wednesday. In a resolution on the Middle East, the assembly backed continued UN peacekeeping efforts to establish "mutually satisfactory and just solutions" for Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab states.

But representatives of the 5.2 million-member denomination also opposed further housing loan guarantees to Israel unless it stops expanding settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Finnish made new Greenpeace chief: Matti Wuori, an attorney from Finland has been elected President of the Greenpeace Ecological Organization, the group's Finnish Branch said in Helsinki Tuesday, reports AP.

He replaces Canadian David MacTaggart, who has retired. Wuori served previously as Head of the Board of Directors of the Finnish and Swedish Branches of Greenpeace, as well as a member of the group's International Board.

Time running out for Nazi criminals and their hunters

WASHINGTON, Sept 4: For Nazi war criminals and their hunters — time is running out. Most surviving Nazi war criminals will die of old age in the next few years, so the groups pledged to hunting them are redoubling their efforts, reports Reuters.

"One day, the tormented and the tormentors will be gone," said Elliott Welles, director of the Anti-Defamation League's Nazi Task Force. "And you need both to make a trial."

Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Los Angeles said his organisation has about 1,000 cases under investigation world-wide.

"We're very, very busy,"

Copper said. "We definitely hear the clock ticking. Most countries, Western democracies, are positioned to deal seriously with World War II criminals, especially in these final years."

In the United States, the Director of the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigation (OSI) anticipates the day when his job will no longer be needed.

But for now the work goes on, said OSI director Neal Sher, whose office was created in 1979 after years of allegations that ex-Nazis were living in the United States.

"Time doesn't really mitigate what these people have

done," Sher said. "They know we're out there. Many of them are just waiting to hear from us."

In fact, only last month OSI tracked down another alleged war criminal. The Office announced it will attempt to deport an Ohio man who was allegedly Nazi guard at Auschwitz.

Sher's office does not prosecute for war crimes, but arranges for deportation by proving that suspects falsified their applications to enter the United States.

OSI spokesmen said the Office has stripped 35 people of US citizenship and taken legal action resulting in deporta-

tions and extraditions against 75 people since 1979.

The Office has about 800 cases under investigation. Sher said the steady flow of cases can be attributed to the dismantling of communism in eastern Europe which has made World War II records more accessible to Nazi hunters.

Elan Steinberg, Executive Director of the World Jewish Congress, estimates that roughly 10,000 Nazis could have entered the United States since World War II. And he believes a substantial number of them are still in the country.

"It's more than hundreds and perhaps thousands," he said.

"There are people still out there, lying about who they are and what they didn't," said Ken Stern, an anti-Semitism specialist at the American Jewish Congress.

In the United States, Sher said, suspected war criminals tend to hide in big northern and mid-Western cities such as Chicago, New York, Detroit and Cleveland.

If the now-elderly suspects are caught, medical experts say most of them would be able to stand trial.

"A diagnosis of dementia does not render them automatically incompetent," said Dr. James Fay, Professor