

N Korea blasts Japan's plan to send troops abroad

TOKYO, Dec 6: North Korea today blasted Japanese plans to send troops abroad under UN auspices, saying the country is trying to become a military power commensurate with its economic power, reports AFP.

"It cannot be concealed that Japan is intending to become a military power and have the way to military aggrandizement by using the international signboard of the United Nations," the Minju Choson said.

"Japan's attempts to become a military power commensurate with its economic power are all the more pronounced at the moment when the international balance of forces has collapsed," the government paper was quoted as saying by the official Korean central news agency monitored here.

The Lower House of the Japanese Diet (Parliament) recently passed a bill that would allow the participation of troops in UN peace keeping

operations, in the first full-fledged dispatch of armed forces abroad since World War II.

The bill has drawn criticism, from leftists and others who argue that it breaches Japan's pacifist constitution, as well as from Asian neighbours who suffered Japanese invasion during the war.

The report implicitly criticised Japanese concern over Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions, claiming that it "raised a hue and cry over the fictitious nuclear threat from someone in an effort to find a pretext for equipping herself with nuclear arms."

Japan, along with the United States and South Korea, is demanding that Pyongyang open its nuclear facilities for inspection.

North Korea was opposed by United Nations forces led by the United States after it invaded South Korea in 1950. The conflict ended in a tense armistice which still persists.

Strike paralyses West Bank, Gaza

JERUSALEM, Dec 6: A general strike today paralysed the occupied Gaza strip and West Bank following a call from Islamic Jihad, the fundamentalist Muslim organisation, a Palestinian source said, reports AFP.

The group had called on Arab residents of the territories to stop working to mark the start-by its own count-of the fifty-first month of the anti-Israeli uprising, known in Arabics the Intifada.

According to Islamic Jihad, the Intifada began on October 6, 1987 while the unified leadership of the uprising in the territories maintains that the struggle began on December 9 that same year.

On October 6, 1987, four Islamic Jihad members were killed in the Gaza strip during clashes with Israeli troops.

Gorbachev urges republics to help Moscow with food

MOSCOW, Dec 6: Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev yesterday appeals to the Russian republics to help Moscow city with food supplies, Tass reported, says Xinhua.

He said the food situation in Moscow, which is not likely to change by the end of the year, is critical as other republics have stopped food supplies to the capital.

The Soviet President said Russia has to bring food to the capital from its region, and Moscow enterprises will be given the right to exchange their products for food, adding that foreign aid could also help Moscow overcome the crisis.

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US plans to sell missiles to S. Arabia

The Bush administration formally notified Congress on Thursday it plans to sell 14 Patriot missile batteries and 758 of the anti-aircraft missiles to Saudi Arabia for 3.3 billion dollars, reports Reuter from Washington.

The formal announcement followed earlier informal notification to lawmakers of the sale. Congress now has 30 days in which to veto the move or let the sale go through.

Patriot missiles, which are made by Raytheon Co, were used with success to shoot down Iraqi Scud missiles fired at both Saudi Arabia and Israel during the Gulf war.

Saudi Arabia has already ordered six Raytheon missile batteries in addition to the 14 in Thursday announcement, the Pentagon said.

Iraq obstructing UN experts

The top UN official in charge of dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction said Thursday Baghdad is still refusing to fully cooperate with the inspectors, reports AP.

"Non-cooperation and obstruction continue to be encountered" when UN experts attempt surprise inspections in Iraq, said Rolf Ekeus, in his report to the UN Security Council.

"Thus there is no progress to report which would indicate a change of policy on the part of Iraq to one of candour, transparency and cooperation at all levels," said Ekeus, head of the UN Special Commission investigating Iraq's nuclear programme.

The Security Council will consider relaxing its economic sanctions against Iraq in a meeting scheduled for Friday. Iraq's lack of cooperation with UN weapons inspectors is likely to be an issue at the meeting.

Sir Roy Welensky dead

Sir Roy Welensky, a former engine driver and boxing champion who became prime minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, died on Thursday aged 84, his widow said, reports Reuter.

A tall, burly man, standing over six feet (1.82 metres) and weighing more than 20 stone (127 kilos) in his prime, Welensky had a reputation for blunt speaking but won praise, even from critics, for his sincerity.

Welensky was one of the main architects of the ill-fated federation which grouped northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (Malawi). He became its prime minister from November 1956 until its break-up in December 1963.

Sikhs kill 38 more

Sikh militants shot and killed at least 38 people, mostly Hindus, and wounded 34 in separate attacks Thursday in three northern towns, police said, reports AP.

The killings underscored the Sikh rebels' growing influence outside Punjab where they have been fighting since 1982 to set up an independent nation. About 3,500 deaths this year in that rich farming state have been blamed on the militants.

In the first attack Thursday, a group of Sikh rebels speeding through Taryana in a car opened fire outside a liquor shop, a park and a factory, a police spokesman said.



Files: Smoke rises from the USS Arizona after the ship was bombed during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour December 7, 1941. Sitting in the water alongside the sinking USS West Virginia (L) and the slightly damaged USS Tennessee (C). — AFP/UNB photo

Stipe Mesic resigns US won't recognise Croatia, Slovenia

WASHINGTON, Dec 6: The United States, taking a firm stance against German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, said on Thursday it was strongly opposed to recognising the breakaway Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Slovenia, reports Reuter.

State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said the United States would not recognise any changes in the borders of Yugoslavia achieved by force.

"We believe the best hope of ending the violence in Yugoslavia and making progress towards a just and comprehensive solution is to stick to the principles we have been advocating since this crisis began," she said.

Tutwiler listed these principles as:

"No recognition of changes in the internal or external borders achieved through force, intimidation or threats"

Resolving disputes through negotiation.

Respect for the human rights of all citizens including ethnic minorities.

The statement brought into the open a wide split between Washington and some of its closest allies in Europe, led by Germany, on how to deal with the civil war.

Kohl promised Croatian President Franjo Tudjman on Thursday that Germany and as many of its European Community partners as possible would recognise the breakaway Yugoslav republics' independence by Christmas.

"The Chancellor confirmed the German government was ready to take definite step along with as many EC states as possible and to do so before Christmas," government spokesman Dieter Vogel said.

Kohl made the same promise to Slovenia two days ago. It is pressing the EC to

recognise the sovereignty of both republics by Christmas as a way to end civil war bloodshed.

Italy, Britain and the Netherlands have hinted that recognition is close. It may come at an EC foreign ministers' meeting on December 18.

Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky said on Wednesday Austria would recognise the two republics as soon as it was clear that others were prepared to join it.

AP from Zagreb says: Yugoslavia's President, a Croatian, resigned from his post Thursday, saying the federation had ceased to exist after months of warfare between his republic and Serbia.

Croatian officials said Serb-dominated federal forces continued attacks in parts of Croatia, violating a truce brokered by the United Nations.

Britain concerned at human rights abuse in Kashmir

LONDON, Dec 6: British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd today said Britain was "deeply concerned" over human rights abuses by Indian security forces operating in Kashmir and called on Pakistan and India to solve their dispute over the region, reports AP.

The British government wholeheartedly condemns terrorism in Kashmir... But there can be no doubt from the number and consistency of accounts that serious abuses by Indian security forces have taken— and are taking — place," he told a Conservative Party meeting in Luton, England.

He said Britain welcomed attempts by the Indian government to "bring wrong doers in the security forces to account, but confidence can only be enhanced by allowing responsible international groups such as Amnesty International access to Kashmir to monitor the situation."

"I strongly urge the Indian government to be more open in this area," he said.

Britain and its EC partners in recent weeks contacted Pakistan over evidence that "material support for Kashmiri militants is being provided from within Pakistan," he said. "We trust this will cease."

Britain, like other countries, had offered to help reach a settlement of the Indian-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir, he said, and still urged that the issue be settled "bilaterally."



KARLOVAC, Yugoslavia: Two year old Danijela Filipask, comforted by her mother lies in Central Karlovac hospital after she was hurt by shrapnel when a mortar shell hit her parents house December 4. — AFP/UNB photo

Y'slav army frees 260 Croats

ZAGREB, Yugoslavia, Dec 6: The Yugoslav army has released 260 civilians detained during the November 18 capture of the eastern Croatian city of Vukovar, the Croatian news agency HINA reported today, reports AP.

The agency said the 260, mostly elderly women and a few men, were allowed to return to Croatia late Thursday across a bridge at Slavonki Samac, 80 kilometers (50 miles) southwest of the eastern Croatian city of Osijek.

HINA said they had been held in various Serbian prisons and had been mistreated.

Vukovar, once a picturesque city on the Danube, was virtually destroyed during a three-month siege by the Serb-dominated federal army.

TOKYO, Dec 6: Three Koreans who claim they were among nearly 100,000 women forced to serve as prostitutes for Japan's troops during World War II sued the Japanese government Friday for "crimes against humanity," reports AP.

The women, seeking 20 million yen (dls 156,000) each in damages were joined in the lawsuit by the relatives of 16 other "comfort girls" — the wartime euphemism for the prostitutes. Sixteen other Koreans represent the South Korean Association for bereaved families of Victims of the Pacific War.

"Any Japanese man in his 70s or 80s knows what a comfort girl is," plaintiff Kim Hak-soon told a tearful news conference. "Why does the Japanese government lie and say they weren't involved?"

She said that in 1939, when she was 17 years old, she was lured away from her home in Pyongyang, now the capital of North Korea, with the promise of a good-paying job. She said she was taken to China on a military train.

Once she arrived, she was forced to serve as a prostitute for a regiment of 300 Japanese soldiers on the front lines and threatened with death if she tried to escape, she said.

According to the lawsuit filed in Tokyo District Court, more than 100,000 women, most of them Koreans, were forced into prostitution from 1938 until the end of the war in 1945, first by the Japanese government and later by Japanese businesses.

Japan won't apologise for bombing Pearl Harbor

TOKYO, Dec 6: Plans for Japan's parliament to apologise to the United States, Asian countries and other World War Two enemies on the 50th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack have been abandoned, party officials said today, reports Reuter.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and opposition parties could not agree on the principle of issuing such an apology, a Socialist Party official said.

LDP officials said no formal meeting to write such resolution had been held.

On Thursday, arch-conservatives in the LDP said, "There was no need to sling mud on Japan's own history," according to newspaper reports.

President George Bush's comment this week that he saw no reason for Americans to apologise for dropping Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 aroused conservative resistance to an apology, the reports said.

Israeli troops arrest 150 Palestinians

JERUSALEM, Dec 6: Israeli army and security forces have rounded up 150 Palestinians in a widespread security sweep aimed at finding the killers of a Jewish settler, military officials said Thursday, reports AP.

Also Thursday, Palestinians in Gaza shot to death a taxi driver and stabbed a woman in two attacks against suspected collaborators with Israel, Arab reports said.

Mohammad Ball, was shot in the head in the Maghazri refugee camp Thursday. The army confirmed the killing.

Saad Abu Obeid, a 40-year-old Rafah woman, was hospitalised with stab and beating wounds. The army and Arab reports said.

Israel is considering deporting several Palestinian activists from the occupied West Bank, a step recommended by security officials after the Sunday shooting of the settler, the daily Haaretz reported.

Haaretz quoted unnamed security sources as saying the potential deportees were from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist PLO faction.

The paper said deportation of 10 Palestinians has been delayed for fear of hurting the peace process. Western governments have complained that deporting Palestinians violates human rights conventions.

Soviets mark anniversary of battle of Moscow

MOSCOW, Dec 6: Soviets commemorated on Thursday the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Moscow, in which Red Army troops turned back Nazi battalions on the outskirts of the Soviet capital, reports AP.

About 1,000 people ignored the snowy, cold weather and congregated outside the Kremlin in Manezh Square, many waving Soviet flags and carrying black-and-white portraits of Josef Stalin and war hero Marshal Grigory Zhukov.

"Every city has a certain glorious and important role in the fate of the country, but Moscow is a symbol of patience and courage," the newspaper Moshkovskaya Pravda wrote.

On December 5, 1941, Soviet troops aided by bitter winter weather, launched a counteroffensive against the advance of the Wehrmacht at the edge of the capital.

German soldiers had advanced so close they could hear bells ringing from Moscow's churches. A momentum marking the battle site was erected on the main road leading to St Petersburg near Moscow's international airport.

"It was a terrible time, there were bombs everywhere.

Off the Record

Diplomatic mail sent to prison laundry

LONDON: The Foreign Office accidentally sent mailbags full of Canadian diplomatic correspondence to a prison laundry, the government said Thursday, reports AP.

"We have the cleanest diplomatic mail in the world," Canadian High Commission spokesman Len Mader said, joking in a telephone interview about the incident, which a Foreign Office official said happened "some days ago."

He said almost all the mail — diplomatic correspondence of a classified nature — had been recovered.

A Foreign Office official, Mark Lennox-Boyd, told parliament that diplomatic bags are routinely sent to Wandsworth Prison for laundering, and that on one occasion, the bags still containing Canadian mail had been sent over.

AIDS patient to write sexual guide

NEW YORK: Basketball star Earvin "Magic" Johnson, who retired last month after disclosing he was infected with the AIDS virus, has signed a contract with Random House to write three books, the publisher said Thursday, reports AP.

The books will include his autobiography and a guide to responsible sexual behaviour, the company said.

Retired US Surgeon General C Everett Koop will collaborate with Johnson on the sexual guide, with proceeds to go to the new Magic Johnson Foundation to support education, care and research in AIDS and related subjects.

Random House said the sexual guide, a paperback by its Times Books, is due out in the spring. The ex-Los Angeles Lakers star's autobiography is scheduled for publication later in the year.

The content and timing of the third book was yet to be decided, said Harold Evans, president and publisher of the Random House Trade Group. The value of the contract was not disclosed.

Proud staff of dead magazine

LONDON: Marxism Today laboured for 35 years to reflect the vicissitudes of an ideology. Perhaps the magazine did it best in its December issue, when it died, reports AP.

"It's time to move on," editor Martin Jacques said in a farewell editorial in the final issue, which was available Wednesday.

A lively magazine that claimed credit for coining the term "Thatcherism" and put Karl Marx on the cover with egg on his face after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Marxism Today bowed out with the good wishes of Britain's establishment.

Among them were the chairman of the Conservative Party, the No. 2 man at the British Broadcasting Corporation and writers Ian McEwan, Margaret Drabble and Malcolm Bradbury.

"I shall miss Marxism Today more than I'll miss the philosophy in whose name it was founded," said Tory chairman Chris Patten, who complimented the magazine for writing about ideas rather than trading in political gossip.

Marxism Today expired without being granted a last wish — an interview with Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister and one-time scourge of communism. Instead, the monthly printed her rejection letter, written by an aide.

'Wonderful life' despite brain damage

WIESBADEN, Germany: Alann Steen will lead "a wonderful life" despite permanent brain damage he suffered as a result of a beating in captivity in Lebanon, the wife of the ex-hostage said Thursday, reports AP.

Mrs Virginia Steen said her husband was catching up with all the news he missed in captivity and is in "very good shape".

But she said she was a "little bit concerned about the public reading some of the information" on her husband's condition.

Dr Uwe Fohlmeister, the chief physician treating Steen at the military hospital, said Wednesday that Steen suffered permanent brain damage from a beating by his captors four years ago.

The injury causes Steen to suffer short lapses of consciousness and some uncoordination in his right foot and hand, Fohlmeister said.

"Essentially he was kicked and lost his balance with the chains and hit his head on the side of a chair," Mrs Steen said of the beating incident.

"A blow to the head doesn't mean that severe damage has occurred. Yes, he does have a lesion and, yes, he will be on medication, but he is going to lead a wonderful life," Mrs Steen said.

'Femidom' for birthcontrol

PARIS: After years of research, the female condom is due to go on sale to the public for the first time in Switzerland and France next spring, its French distributors said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Sold under the brand name "Femidom", the female condom is a polyurethane sheath that covers the sides of the vagina and blocks off the uterus, protecting the wearer from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS.

Although manufactured by British company Chartex, the female condom will be launched on the market in Switzerland early next year and in France in March.

Two lakh Kurds flee homes in two months

GENEVA, Dec 6: More than 200,000 Kurds have fled their homes in northern Iraq since the start of October and about half of them are without adequate shelter in freezing temperatures, a senior UN refugee official said, reports AP.

Carrol Faubert said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees was now trying to provide help for 700,000 people displaced by internal conflict in the Kurdish areas of Iraq.

Faubert, UNHCR's emergency coordinator for the Gulf, told a press conference Thursday that stockpiles of blankets, tents and food were running out.

He said Iraqi authorities were allowing aid convoys to reach refugee camps in the north of the country, but relief efforts were hampered by fuel shortages.

He said Baghdad continued to restrict distribution of fuel and food to the general population in many Kurdish cities. Relief workers feared that hungry people might flock to UNHCR distribution centres in the border region where there was little shelter, he said.

President Saddam Husseins' blockade early November to put pressure on Kurdish rebels, who are seeking an autonomous homeland for some 3.5 million Kurds in northern Iraq.

Kurdish officials say the blockade has eased in talks between central authorities and Kurdish leaders on the autonomy issue.

Faubert said the shelling of areas around Kalar, Kirki and Chamchamal in the Suleimaniya province had driven 1,40,884 people into Said Sadik near the Iranian border, since early October.