

South Korea urges North to abandon N-arms programme

SEOUL, Dec 14: The South Korean government today urged North Korea to immediately abandon its nuclear weapons programme and agree to Seoul's proposal to denuclearize the entire Korean peninsula, reports AFP.

Information Minister Choi Chang-Yoon, in a statement lauding the South-North reconciliation agreement concluded Friday, declared that North Korea also should immediately abandon its nuclear arms programme and accept international inspection of its nuclear facilities.

"The government once again strongly urges the North to accept President Roh Tae-Woo's initiative for denuclearization at the meeting of working-level representatives to be held in Panmunjom within this month," the statement said.

Pyongyang should "immediately abandon its nuclear arms development programme while accepting international nuclear inspection as it is obligated to do under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty," the statement added.

Roh announced on November 8 that South Korea would not possess, manufacture or use nuclear weapons and demanded that North Korea do likewise.

The prime ministers of the South and North, in signing the historic document on rapprochement ending four decades of hostility, announced jointly that both sides recognised the need to banish nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula and that talks would be held at Panmunjom to discuss the matter.

Tibet a part of China: Rao Li urges Dalai Lama to give up stance of independence

NEW DELHI, Dec 14: Visiting Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng urged the Dalai Lama here yesterday to give up the stance of Tibetan independence, reports Xinhua.

Li made the remark during his second round of formal talks with Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao at the Presidential palace.

He said the door to negotiations between the Chinese government and Dalai Lama is wide open. But he stressed that Dalai Lama should give up the attempts to seek Tibetan independence and stop the political activities aimed at splitting the motherland.

During the talks, Rao reiterated that the Indian government recognises that Tibet, as an autonomous region of China, is a part of the Chinese territory.

He noted that the Indian government does not permit the Tibetans to engage in

political activities against the Chinese government on the Indian territory.

The Chinese Premier appreciated this position of the Indian government, according to Chinese sources.

Li Peng arrived here Wednesday on a five-day official goodwill visit to India, the first by a Chinese head of government in 31 years.

AFP adds: More than 100 Tibetan women and children jailed for protesting Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng's visit have been released following a Supreme Court order, a spokesman for the Dalai Lama's bureau in New Delhi said today.

The 106 Tibetans were freed from the high-security Thar jail shortly before midnight Friday (1830 GMT) and have since returned to their refugee settlement, the spokesman said.

Some 250 Tibetan men

were still in prison, and most were expected to be let off later today, he added.

The Supreme Court had ordered police to free scores of Tibetans jailed since last Sunday as part of a crackdown aimed at preventing protests during Li's trip, the first by a Chinese premier since the 1962 Sino-Indian war.

But other Tibetans — 100,000 of whom live in India along with their spiritual leader the Dalai Lama — managed to stage dramatic protests almost every day since Li arrived Wednesday on a six-day visit.

On Friday, the Supreme Court said the police had "no power to detain (the Tibetans) even for a minute" and that burning of Chinese flags could not be seen as "violence in the true sense."

The order followed a petition by an Indian MP sympa-

thetic to the Tibetan campaign for independence from Chinese rule.

The Tibetan spokesman expressed happiness at the mass release.

"We are very happy," he said. "We always believe that you cannot find a parallel to this country for the magnanimous help rendered to Tibetans and the freedom given to us."

The judgement by the Supreme Court only reflects that the democratic institutions are firmly rooted (in India) and therefore justice is being done," he added.

Tibetan protests would continue until Li leaves New Delhi, he said.

The Dalai Lama lives in the Indian hill town of Dharmasala, heading a government-in-exile which is not recognised by any country. New Delhi considers Tibet as an autonomous region of China.

Off the Record

Bush's X-mas spirit

WASHINGTON: President Bush and his wife, Barbara, are sending out 160,000 Christmas cards depicting a colourfully decorated tree in the family quarters of the White House, reports AP.

The scene was done by Kamil Kubik, born in Czechoslovakia, a painter of cityscapes and floral pieces.

His painting, entitled "The Family Tree, Upstairs at the White House," depicts the Yellow Oval Room on the second floor of the presidential mansion.

The card's message, in red script, reads: "The President and Mrs Bush extend their warmest wishes that you and your loved ones will share a joyous Christmas and a peaceful new year."

The Republican National Committee pays for the printing and mailing costs.

War and love

KUWAIT CITY: The Iraqi major helps a beautiful Kuwaiti nurse named Zubeida climb into a car that will whisk her to safety in Saudi Arabia, reports AP.

Major Fariadaq was supposed to interrogate her about giving lethal injections to at least two Iraqi soldiers. Instead he risks his life to organise her escape.

While his fellow officers think he is torturing her in his villa, the major and Zubeida actually spend the three days since her arrest talking, laughing and watching videos.

"For your eyes... I sacrifice my neck," Major Fariadaq murmurs to his love.

Author Fawzia Dorai licks her thick copper-coloured lipstick and sighs, "so beautiful," as she reads the end of one of the 20 stories in her new book, "Love Under Occupation."

No one may ever get to read them. The book just came back from the censor with Major Fariadaq's story and another marked "Do Not Publish."

But Dorai is determined to publish all or none of the stories. She says they are true — with minor details changed to disguise identities — and that she selected most of them during Iraq's seven-month occupation of Kuwait.

Flower pots are danger zones?

SINGAPORE: Singapore householders found with mosquito larvae in their homes will be able to choose between a 50 dollar (30 US) fine or going to court from January 1, the Straits Times newspaper said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The Environment Ministry, which carries out spot-checks of such danger zones as family flower pots, was not available to comment.

Currently anyone found allowing the insects to breed must appear in court and face a maximum 1,000 dollar (606 US) fine or three months in jail for a first offence. Repeat offenders face a 2,000 dollar (1,212 US) fine and six months jail.

Aedes mosquito larvae were found in 5,263 Singapore homes in first 10 months of this year compared with 6,385 last year. The newspaper quoted the ministry as saying, "The Aedes mosquito can transmit the killer dengue fever."

Gold teeth yanked out from corpses

PHILADELPHIA: Gold teeth were stolen from several cadavers at the University of Pennsylvania anatomy laboratories, and medical school officials said they'll change procedures for handling bodies, reports AP.

Gold teeth now will be removed from cadavers before students dissect them, said Dr John Weisel, associate anatomy professor. The teeth will be put back in when it's time to cremate the bodies.

The missing teeth were discovered by a first-year medical student when he found a vacant cavity in the jaw of a cadaver.

It was not immediately known how many gold teeth were yanked out of the bodies used for dissection studies. Each tooth could bring \$20 to \$40, said Dr Elliot Stellar, Anatomy Department Chairman.

The plan didn't work

CAIRO: This was the plan: scrap the swimsuit competition, emphasize "inner beauty," and maybe Egypt's new beauty contest wouldn't offend the powerful Islamic scholars who banned its predecessor last year, reports AP.

It didn't work.

Not only did make-up and thigh-high dresses raise eyebrows in a country where women are expected to be properly covered, but the Dec 1 contest's title — "Egypt's Ideal Woman" — ranked the powers.

"Ideal in what? Singing and dancing?" said Sheikh al-Sayed Shamseddine, whose clerical committee had last year's "Miss Egypt" contest banned. Egypt's ideal woman should be one that conforms to Islam's dress code and is virtuous, he said.

The dress code of mainstream Sunni Islam, the religion of 90 per cent of Egyptians, holds that a woman's body should be covered except for her face and hands.

"The way this contest was organised did great wrong to a society whose official religion is Islam," said Sheikh Mansour Ebeid of the government's Ministry of Religious Endowments.

"I tell every girl who participated in this competition to ask for God's forgiveness," he said.

The controversy illustrates a perpetual struggle in Egypt, where people outwardly espouse traditional Islamic values but are largely unwilling to give up the Western habits that have pervaded Egyptian life for decades.

For the "Miss Egypt" pageants, which began in 1985, such a climate proved fatal.

Last year, incensed by swimsuit competitions and the publicizing of contestants' measurements, Shamseddine's committee at Cairo's Al-Azhar Mosque, the Muslim world's most influential religious institution, issued a fatwa — or religious edict — that "Miss Egypt" offended Islam.

Fatwas from Al-Azhar lack the force of law in Egypt, but the government normally follows them in cultural matters. It banned the pageant.

Foreign intervention to stop war in Somalia sought

NAIROBI, Dec 14: A Somali faction leader on Friday called for foreign intervention to stop nearly a month of clan warfare in the capital Mogadishu that has left thousands dead and wounded.

"We can only find a united front of Somalis with international assistance. This will be the only way to stop the disintegration of the Somali state," Hashi Egal of the United Somali People's Front (USPF) told Reuters.

A bitter power struggle between factions loyal to Mogadishu warlords Mohamed Farah Aided and Ali Mahdi Mohamed in the last four weeks has killed up to 3,000 people, wounded at least a further 7,000 and reduced parts of the city to rubble, aid officials said.

Hashi Egal proposed that a military buffer zone be created in Mogadishu after a ceasefire in which all clan forces would withdraw from the city.

Military intervention organ-

ised by the United Nations or the United States follow if the truce fails, he added.

Both sides used mortars and rocket launchers on Friday to pound districts of central Mogadishu in each other's control for the 27th day running, aid officials in Nairobi said after contacting the city by satellite telephone.

The fighting, based on ethnic hatreds between rival sub-groups of the Hawiye clan, is one among many ethnic feuds in the impoverished desert nation of pastoralists bordering the Indian ocean in the horn of Africa.

Since former dictator Mohamed Siad Barre was overthrown last January, all semblance of central government has gone, despite three attempts to form a board-based transitional government.

The north of the country has seceded and declared an independent republic mirroring the borders of the former colony of British Somaliland.



WASHINGTON: In this picture released Friday by the White House, US President George Bush makes note as he speaks on the telephone with Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The two men spoke for 25 minutes, with Yeltsin upgrading Bush on the status of the new Commonwealth form of government.

Gorbachev assures Bush of safety of Soviet N-arms

WASHINGTON, Dec 14: President George Bush received assurances on Friday from Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on the safety of Soviet nuclear weapons, a top US concern during the political turmoil in the Soviet republics, reports Reuter.

Secretary of State James Baker ruled out any US interference in the fast-paced events in the former Soviet Union as he prepared to leave today for Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia and Kazakhstan.

White House spokesman Martin Fitzwater said Bush made a telephone call to Gorbachev and they spoke for

nearly 30 minutes.

Since then, Ukraine has voted for independence and joined Russia and Byelorussia in a commonwealth agreement that leaves out Gorbachev.

President Gorbachev assured President Bush that the command and control system for nuclear weapons remains secure, Fitzwater said. He said Russian President Boris Yeltsin had called Bush and given him similar assurances during an earlier phone conversation.

He said Bush assured both Gorbachev and Yeltsin of US support for humanitarian and medical needs for the re-

publics.

Baker said his trip would not be an effort to inject ourselves into this purely political process unfolding in the republics.

He said the international community "must stand ready to help those who embrace the principles and responsibilities that have become so much a part of the Euro-Atlantic community."

At a White House news conference, Baker said he would focus on ensuring the safety of the 30,000 Soviet nuclear weapons dispersed in several republics.

Nine terrorists executed in Iran

NICOSIA, Dec 14: Iranian authorities executed nine people described as "bandits" who were accused of terrorising the population of the south-eastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported, says AP.

The nine, who were hung in the provincial capital of Zahedan near the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan, were accused of clashing with security forces, blocking roads and "creating a state of terror," said the agency's report, monitored in Nicosia.

Although the report did not say so, the executions could

have resulted from widespread unrest resulting from declining economic conditions.

Iranian opposition leaders in exile say there have been

violent demonstrations, including clashes with the Revolutionary Guards, in various cities throughout Iran since the summer. They also say the Islamic Republic masks executives of opposition figures through drug and other charges.

Iran has hanged more than 2,500 alleged drug traffickers over the past three years.

Saturday's dispatch from Zahedan said: "Nine bandits were hung here Saturday morning for disturbing security in this southeastern province, upon a verdict issued by the Islamic Revolution's court."

500 babies die of pneumonia every hour

WASHINGTON, Dec 14: Every hour, nearly 500 children die of pneumonia in poor countries. Scientists and health care officials at a gathering here resolved to save at least a third of them — 15 million — by the end of the century, reports AP.

BRIEFLY

Kirghizstan forms national guard: Kirghizstan President Askar Akayev has issued a decree ordering the creation of a national guard for the republic. Kirghiz radio reported Friday, says AFP from Moscow.

The report said the cabinet had taken steps to ensure the financing for a national guard from December 1 and added that the guard would be brought to full strength by February 1, 1992.

The government planned to allocate "the necessary buildings, facilities and land to accommodate sub-units of the national guard" of the republic; it added.

Landslide kills 15 in Indonesia: A landslide in West Kalimantan, in the Indonesian part of Borneo, has buried 15 people alive in their huts, a newspaper said Saturday in Jakarta, reports AFP.

The landslide Monday, which followed hard rains at Bukit Langau in the central mountainous range of Borneo, buried several makeshift huts and a total of 15 people inside them, the Media Indonesia daily said.

The huts had been set up by planters on the fringe of a slope they had been clearing for planting, the daily said.

Authorities in Putussibau, 200 kilometres (120 miles) north of Bukit Langau, learned of the disaster only three days later, due to the difficult terrain and lack of roads in the area, it added.

Argentina, Brazil sign N-accord: Argentina and Brazil pledged Friday to use nuclear power exclusively for peaceful purposes, reports AFP from Vienna.

At the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Brazil's President Fernando Collor De Mello and his Argentinian counterpart Carlos Menem signed an unprecedented agreement allowing bilateral and international controls on each country's nuclear industry.

Menem said the agreement could constitute a "model for other regions in the world," while Collor De Mello said it would give a fresh impetus to efforts for worldwide disarmament.

6 die in chemical plant blast: A powerful explosion Friday set a petrochemical plant's storage tanks ablaze and killed six people, authorities said, reports AP from Rotterdam.

The explosion occurred in a storage tank of benzoic acid and set fire to adjoining tanks loaded with explosive hydrocarbon fuels, including the solvent toluene, at the DSM plant here, said police spokesman Frank Hutzenaga.

About 100 firefighters put out the blaze. The cause of the blast was unknown.

The plant is located in a petroleum storage area in the middle of the Port of Rotterdam, the world's largest.

US relief for 3 Soviet cities: US Air Force cargo planes will deliver humanitarian relief supplies to cities in Russia, Byelorussia and Armenia next week, the US Defence Department announced Friday, reports AP from Washington.

A C-5 aircraft from Westover Air Force Base, Mass., will leave Andrews Air Force Base, Md., on Sunday with 150,000 pounds (68,000 kilograms) of relief supplies. It is due to arrive in Moscow on Tuesday with coats, blankets, clothing and medical supplies.

Half of the cargo will be unloaded in Moscow and the other half will be sent on to Yerevan, Armenia.

On December 18 an Air Force C-141 will leave from Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, with relief supplies for delivery to Minsk, the Byelorussian capital.

Pilot killed as jets collide: A South Korean air force pilot was killed and two teenage boys were injured Friday when two military jets collided then crashed in flames, the Yonhap News Agency reported, says AP from Seoul.

First Lieutenant Lee Sang-hee was killed in the accident, while the pilot of the other plane escaped by parachute, Yonhap said.

It also said two boys on the ground, aged 10 and 11, were admitted to a hospital with moderate injuries inflicted by flying debris from the crash near Kwangju, a provincial city 240 kilometres (150 miles) south of Seoul.

Military officials in Seoul said they were investigating the cause of the accident.

Serbs point finger at the West for civil war

BELGRADE, Dec 14: While much of the world blames Yugoslavia's civil war on Serbia, Serbia points the finger at Germany, Austria and the Vatican, reports AP.

Propaganda has convinced many Serbs that foreign conspiracy is responsible for their increasing isolation.

"The Vatican, allied with the losers of World War II, plans to destroy Yugoslavia," claimed Belgrade's Politika Ekspres daily, a mouthpiece of the ruling Socialist Party, the renamed Serbian Communists.

Thousands have died since Croatia and its western neighbour Slovenia declared independence June 25. Clashes in Slovenia ended, but the war between Croatia and Serb rebels supported by the army drags on.

Encouraged by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, leaders of Croatia's 600,000 Serbs say their enclaves will remain part of Yugoslavia. Serb militias and Serb-dominated army control one-third of Croatia.



ZAGREB: An unidentified Croatian soldier, a former prisoner of war searches Friday for some donated clothes after he and a group had been released from a Serbian camp as part of a POW exchange.

The few anti-war voices in Serbia say the official attitude reflects fear of the outside world and deep inferiority complex.

But unlike other former Communist countries, where many people discounted the propaganda, many Serbs take the official combination of chauvinism and communism to heart.

Milosevic "is not responsible for this war; the West truly wants to vanquish us," declared Duda Vasic, a Belgrade bank clerk. Dozens of drivers in a kilometer long gas line echoed her.

Although they allegedly share the same goal, the motives of the Vatican, Germany and Austria as depicted by Serbian media differ: the Vatican wants to convert Orthodox Serbs, Austria thrives for a new empire and Germany is set on a "Fourth Reich" with a Mediterranean port.

Serbs fought Germans and Australians in both world wars, and their current suspicion partly reflects lingering en-

emy. Germany and Austria also are among the most eager to grant Croatia and Slovenia international recognition.

Milosevic has described Croatia as a hotbed of fascism and urged Serbs to revive the anti-fascist struggle in Yugoslavia and Europe.

Pope John Paul II's pleas for peace with him no favour in Serbia. Serbs blame the Vatican for inciting the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Serbs and Jews by Croatian ultranationalists in World War II.

Croatia is traditionally Roman Catholic and for centuries was under Austrian rule while Orthodox Serbs lived under Turkish domination.

The relentless propaganda depicts Serbia and Yugoslavia as the main obstacle to German domination of Europe — ignoring the dominance Germany's economy already gives it.

"Serbia is victimized by the Vatican because it controls the most important crossroads in Europe," declared a recently

commentary in Politika Ekspres. "Whoever controls this region controls Europe."

"The West hates us and wants to destroy us because we are Orthodox, not because we are Communists," Batic Jovanovic, a senior Serbian Socialist leader, declared on television.

The breakup of Yugoslavia resulted from a German conspiracy to secure warm-water ports, claimed Branko Kostic of Serb-allied Montenegro, who heads the federal presidency. "In this, Germany has the support of the EC."

As the war rages on, Italy, Hungary, the US government, the CIA and the European Community have been targets of Serbia's scorn.

"It is well known that Catholics control most multinational corporations and over half of the capital in the United States," claimed Politika Ekspres, explaining America's disregard for Serbia.