

Pindi dismisses Indian charges as 'false'

ISLAMABAD, Jan 2: Pakistan on Wednesday dismissed as "false" Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's charge that it was waging a proxy war against India by training and arming separatists in Kashmir and Punjab, reports AFP.

"Pakistan had neither interfered in the internal affairs of India nor had any intention to do so," a Foreign Office spokesman said, adding that it "condemns and opposes terrorism in all its forms."

which is claimed by the two rival neighbours. The spokesman charged that "India has let loose a reign of state terrorism against innocent Kashmiris."

The spokesman called upon the Indian leaders "to resist the temptation of levelling baseless allegations." Instead India should enter into a "serious dialogue" with Pakistan on resolving the issue, he said.

India reportedly rejected Pakistan's offer Monday of talks on the Kashmir dispute.

"The rejection is a manifestation that India is not interested in negotiations and wanted to impose its will on the Kashmiri people as well as on Pakistan," the spokesman added.

Indo-Lankan talks this week

COLOMBO, Jan 2: Foreign ministers of India and Sri Lanka will meet in Delhi this week to discuss how to improve relations, a Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry spokesman said today, reports Reuters.

The meeting between Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Harold Herat and his Indian counterpart, Madhavsingh Solanki, will be the first session of the Indo-Lanka joint commission set up last year.

Rao charged Tuesday that Pakistan was sponsoring terrorism by training and arming Sikhs fighting for a separate homeland in Punjab state and Muslim militants waging a secessionist struggle in Kashmir.

In a statement Rao also accused Pakistan of trying to disrupt elections in the troubled Punjab state.

Expressing "surprise" over the Indian premier's "false accusations" the spokesman said Pakistan wanted a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Kashmir issue on the basis of the U.N. Security Council resolutions.

The 1948 U.N. resolutions called for a plebiscite in Kashmir, but India has refused to implement them and the dispute has resulted in two of the neighbouring countries' three wars since 1947.

Some 4,000 people have died in the two-year-old secessionist movement in Kashmir.

Ukraine starts taking N-missiles off alert status

LONDON, Jan 2: The former Soviet Republic of Ukraine has started taking the nuclear missiles on its territory off their alert status, Russian television said late on Wednesday, quoted Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk as saying that he would have no objection to Russian President Boris Yeltsin becoming the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the nuclear forces held by former Soviet Republics, reports AFP.

However Kravchuk said such a role for Yeltsin would be conditional on measures being taken to ensure that nuclear missiles could not be fired from Ukrainian territory.

Ukraine and Russia are the two most powerful republics in the nascent Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), set up to replace some aspects of the Soviet Union.

The 11 CIS states have agreed to joint control of nuclear forces on their territory, while allowing each other to maintain separate conventional forces.

Apart from Russia and Ukraine, only Belarus and Kazakhstan have nuclear weapons sited on their territories.

Reuter reports: British Prime Minister John Major said on Wednesday he has worried about the risk of independent former Soviet Republics selling their nuclear weapons technology to unstable Third World nations.

In an interview with British Broadcasting Corporation radio, Major said he saw no short-term risk of Soviet nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands.

But in the longer term there was a possibility that some of the smaller republics 'might sell all or part of their nuclear weapons armory.'

Equally damaging was the possibility that some of the former Soviet Union's nuclear expertise might be bought by a Third World country, Major said.

"We want to see no further proliferation of nuclear weapons and a reduction of the nuclear threshold that exists at present."

CIA worried

A New York report says: The CIA is worried at the prospect of nuclear experts in the former Soviet Union selling their expertise abroad to the highest bidder, the New York Times said Wednesday, quoting a US intelligence report.

The potential problem is so serious that the US government's main aim will be to slow down, not eliminate, the leaking out of materials and expertise, the newspaper said,

quoting the CIA report. But the risk posed by possible "nuclear mercenaries" seeking to sell their expertise elsewhere as the economy of the former Soviet economy sinks further was more worrying than the possibility of nuclear material going missing, it added.

The report requested by CIA Director Robert Gates said that 900,000 military and civilian personnel worked in the nuclear weapons industry in the former Soviet Union, 2,000 of whom had extensive knowledge of how the weapons were designed.

Some 3,000 to 5,000 had worked in producing Plutonium and enriching Uranium, and a large percentage of these people could be of value to foreign buyers," the Times quoted a government expert as saying.

5 states become UN Council members

NEW YORK, United Nations, Jan 2: Five countries, including Japan and Hungary, Wednesday became non-permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, beginning a two-year mandate, reports AFP.

Japan replaces Yemen, and Hungary takes over from Romania, while Cape Verde, Morocco and Venezuela take the places of Ivory Coast, Zaire and Cuba.

Ramos nominated president candidate

MANILA, Jan 2: Hundreds of supporters of former Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos formed the "People Power" party Thursday and nominated him as their standard-bearer for the May presidential election, reports AP.

Ramos, who served under President Corason Aquino, said he was running to provide an alternative to traditional politicians who he says have not improved the country since it gained independence from the United States 46 years ago.

"We stand in this campaign for a party offering a government that works (and) that will tolerate neither corruption nor incompetence, in public office," he said.

Mother Teresa recovering

LA JOLLA, Jan 2: Mother Teresa spent the first day of the new year recovering from pneumonia and congestive heart failure as hundreds of thousands of followers worldwide prayed for her, reports UNB.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate remained in serious condition Wednesday at Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation. Doctors said it was too early to tell how she was responding to treatment.

"Her condition is essentially unchanged, but it has not worsened," Dr. Patricia Aubanel told a news conference.

Dr. Anita Figueiredo said Mother Teresa could be seen



in her room praying with sisters of her Missionaries of Charity order and clutching rosary beads.

Meanwhile, thousands who have worked beside her to help the sick, the dying and the hungry agreed to pause at noon each day during the new year to pray for the recovery of the Roman Catholic nun.



United Nations envoy Cyrus Vance (R) shakes hand with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade on Tuesday. -AFP photo

Dispute over river water rights Strike paralyses Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: A dispute over river water rights between two Indian states escalated Thursday into a government-sponsored dawn-to-dusk strike that paralysed Tamil Nadu, a state of 85 million people, reports AP.

The 12-hour strike shut government offices, most shops and businesses and severed air and rail links with the rest of India. Indian Airlines said it cancelled three flights to the state capital, Madras, India's fourth largest city.

The Tamil Nadu government called the strike to protest the alleged ill treatment of ethnic Tamils in the

neighbouring state of Karnataka, which is populated mostly by ethnic Kannadas. Karnataka has a population of 45 million.

The government in Madras claims 70,000 Tamils have fled across the Karnataka border following attacks and beatings, but the number of refugees is disputed by the Karnataka government in Bangalore.

Police in Bangalore made a mass arrest of about 1,000 people who were blocking the road to the governor's mansion in a demonstration against Tamil Nadu, said Press Trust of India.

Three Karnataka politicians

were detained for setting alight an effigy of the head of the Tamil Nadu government. In Madras, police arrested six people who were burning an effigy of the chief of the Karnataka state government.

The dispute erupted into ethnic violence following a Supreme Court decision in December to set up a tribunal to decide on the rights to the water of the Cauvery River.

Tamil Nadu claims Karnataka had falsified statistics and was siphoning off more than its share for irrigation, leaving an inadequate trickle for Tamil Nadu's rice-growing region.

US to remain a military power in Pacific: Bush

CANBERRA, Jan 2: The United States intends to remain a military power as well as a trading power in the Pacific, US President George Bush said today, reports AFP.

But speaking to a news conference here, he was unable to say how many men or ships the United States would deploy in the region because circumstances "can change dramatically."

"We had a different security deployment in the Middle East a year ago than we have today," he said.

In a speech to a joint session of the Australian parliament earlier, Bush declared: "we know that our security is inextricably linked to stability across the Pacific, and we will not put that security and stability at risk."

The United States would "retain an appropriate military presence to protect its allies and to counter threats to peace," he said.

While the cold war was over, "ethnic rivalries and re-

gional conflicts" remained a threat. He did not specify which peoples or areas he had in mind.

At a news conference later,



when asked what "appropriate" meant, Bush replied: "an appropriate level of security depends on the conditions at the time."

His remarks were designed to reassure people in the Pacific area about the closure

this year of Subic Bay military base in the Philippines, he said.

"Some felt that with the closing of Subic, that we would withdraw and pull way back from any possible security commitments," he said.

The size of a future US military presence "depends on events, it depends on deployment of various naval groups," he said. "We are a Pacific power we think."

"We know we are a Pacific trading power and we are going to stay involved with the security concerns of our friends."

"I can't tell you exactly what that means in terms of troops, where they'll be, or vessels, where they'll be."

In his speech to the Australian parliament, Bush recalled that "the joint defence facilities here in Australia played an invaluable role in detecting launches of Iraqi Scud missiles against Israel during last year's Gulf War."

Off the Record

It is utter balderdash

ROCKLAND, Maine: Robert Indiana, who created the 'LOVE' logo used widely on US postage stamps, is being sued by a man who alleges the artist hired him to perform sexual acts, reports AP.

Jason Mazzrini, 23, alleges that Indiana first hired him when he was 12 for sexual acts and nude modelling. The lawsuit, filed Monday in a court in Rockland, seeks unspecified punitive damages for alleged emotional distress.

Indiana's attorney, Jean B Chalmers, dismissed the allegations as "utter balderdash."

Indiana, 63, was born Robert E. Clark but adopted the name of his home state. His colourful representation of the word 'LOVE' in a square with the 'L-O' on top of the 'V-E' made him famous in the 1960s.

Ballet ties them

NEW YORK: In an offstage pas de deux, Peter Martins, the New York City Ballet's artistic director, married the ballet's star dancer, Doree Kistler, reports AP.

The couple were married in a private ceremony in Martins' native Denmark during Christmas week, said ballet publicist David Gray, who offered no other details.

Martins has been ballet master in chief of the New York City Ballet since the death of George Balanchine in 1983.

Kistler danced the part of Princess Aurora in the company's April production of 'The Sleeping Beauty.' She danced Sunday night in 'The Nutcracker,' Gray said.

Not surprising, since she's two months old

VANCOUVER: Pabulo Petras, had to be carried into the water for the 72nd Polar Bear swim in English Bay on Wednesday, reports AP.

Not surprising, since she's 2 months old. Petras was the tiniest tot registered among the 1,400 swimmers at the traditional New Year's Day plunge.

Swimmers were dressed as everything from beer cans to polar bears for the plunge into the waters.

"I don't know why we are doing it," said Rick de Ataide, 18, shivering in a toga. "We're not crazy — at least not yet. But I bet we will be when we get out. The cold does strange things to you."

More than 5,000 who turned out to watch the swimmers could only shake their heads.

"These people must all be a little mad," said Greg Davidson, 24.

The objective was to swim to a buoy 100 yards (meters) offshore. But most of the swimmers jumped out faster than they jumped in, and won a button for their efforts.

'I kill it, you grill it'

DETROIT: Rock star Ted Nugent doled out venison to the homeless in a soup kitchen, regaling them with tales about the deer he hunted himself with a bow and arrows, reports AP.

"I kill it, you grill it," the 43-year-old Nugent joked Tuesday at a Salvation Army center, where he ladled out deer meat that Nugent and other hunters had donated to the Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger programme.

"Anybody hungry? Come on," Nugent said as he flapped plastic bowls. "You got it, man. Good eating to you. Happy New Year."

The pony-tailed musician known as the "Motor City Madman" for his deafening brand of rock 'n' roll and boisterous stage antics shot three of the deer used in Tuesday's stew.

Nugent, whose hits include "Weekend Warriors" and "Cat Scratch Fever," said venison donations were a way for hunters to help the needy.

Fishy evidence

NAIROBI: A Kenyan lawyer produced 300 dead fish in court and his evidence was so overwhelming he was forced to ask for its removal, reports Reuters.

The case was against two men from Gura village: in central Kenya who were charged with damaging a farmer's property when they drained a pond and caused all the fish in it to die, the Kenya Times newspaper reported today.

Both men deny the charge and a hearing was set for March 6.

It was not clear if the evidence would be produced in court again.

Vance's move to win Y'slav, Croatian support

BELGRADE, Jan 2: U.N. envoy Cyrus Vance meets commanders of Croatian forces and the Serb-led Yugoslava federal army today in a bid to win their crucial support for a U.N. peace-keeping operation in war-torn Yugoslavia, reports Reuters.

Aides said Vance would chair talks in Sarajevo between senior military officials from the warring camps after securing political approval from Serbia and Croatia for a plan to deploy a 10,000-strong U.N. force in the war-torn Balkan Federation.

Vance seemed certain to stress to the warring sides that the U.N. deployment sought by their political masters remained out of the question until a durable ceasefire had taken hold.

"Senior military commanders will meet under the chairmanship of Vance and at his invitation," a source in his camp said late on Wednesday.

The source said the talks would take place in Sarajevo, capital of the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, though the exact location was not yet known.

Vance's announcement of Serbian and Croatian backing for the U.N. peace-keeping plan, after talks with Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, amounted to a breakthrough in his peace mission, his fifth to the Balkan state.

"I have seen steps taken that have not been taken before, the acceptance of our proposed plan in its entirety by both sides," Vance told reporters in unusually optimistic comments.

"The situation is radically changed since I came and observed what I had observed," he said.

His comments brought a new year message of hope to Yugoslavs, dramatist by six months of conflict following Croatia's declaration of independence in which at least 6,000 people have been killed.

Government officials were not immediately available for comment on the television report. Kim, North Korean President since 1948, has never met a South Korean President.

Earlier the two leaders, in messages marking the end of a year which has seen dramatic progress towards reconciliation, told their people reunification of the peninsula must be achieved soon, independent of outside forces.

BRIEFLY

Iraq recognizes CIS republics: Iraq on Wednesday recognized all the former Soviet republics, including the Baltic states and Georgia, recalling the tradition of close ties between Baghdad and Moscow, reports AFP from Baghdad.

The government said it was "ready to cooperate with the Commonwealth of Independent States" and hoped the CIS would "contribute positively to setting the rules of a just peace in the world based on mutual respect."

It also called on the 11 members of the CIS that replaced the Soviet Union to "reject military threats and political or economic hegemony."

Baghdad was recognizing the republics because of "strong relations between Iraq and the former Soviet Union, and the friendly ties between the Iraqi people and peoples of the states that have proclaimed their independence."

Israeli settler shot dead: An Israeli settler was shot dead in his car Wednesday at a crossroads near a Palestinian refugee camp in the occupied Gaza Strip, Israeli military officials said, reports AFP from Jerusalem.

Doron Shoshan, a resident of Kfar Darom settlement, was killed in a burst of automatic weapons' fire near Deir Al-Balah camp. He was hit in the neck and face.

The army imposed a curfew on Deir Al-Balah as part of their search for the unidentified assailants.

The attack took place on the 26th anniversary of the first armed action against Israel by the Palestine Liberation Organisation's mainstream Fatah group. The army had called for vigilance during the anniversary.

Shoshan was the first Israeli civilian killed in Gaza since the December 1987 start of the Palestinian uprising, and the fourth settler killed in the occupied territories since October when Arab-Israeli peace talks were launched.

Tbilisi Airport runway mined:

The runway of Tbilisi Airport has been mined by opposition forces seeking to overthrow Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a local airport official said Wednesday, reports AFP Thursday from Moscow.

Three anti-tank mines and remote-controlled demolition explosives were found on the runway on Tuesday, the official said, warning that the Georgian opposition was "prepared to take the most radical measures, and even to blow up the runway."

Passengers stuck at the airport since December 23 amid fighting in the Georgian capital offered to help clear the mines.

Air traffic into Tbilisi has been seriously affected by the fighting, with the majority of regular flights halted.

Storm claims 148 in Vietnam:

The death toll from a windstorm in a Vietnamese province has risen to 148, and more than 400 others are reported missing, Vietnamese radio said Thursday, reports AP.

More than 200 fishing boats were damaged in Saturday's storm in the central coastal province of Quang Nam, the official Voice of Vietnam said.

"Intensive efforts have been made to make up for the losses," said the broadcast, monitored in Bangkok.

The official media on Monday had reported 78 people killed and almost 300 missing in Quang Nam.

Bombay death toll rises to 91:

Victims of spurious liquor continued to pour in various hospitals of south Bombay even as the death toll in the tragedy rose to 91 this morning, reports PTI from Bombay.

According to police, methyl alcohol was mixed with the liquor. Drums bearing labels of methyl alcohol have been seized and it was found these were not shown in the record book.

The supplier of the killer brew, Raminiklal Desai, was arrested last night from Borivali in north-west Bombay.

A special police outpost with a team of 25 policemen has been set up outside the municipal Nair Hospital to help in handing over the bodies to relatives.

100 Burmese students held in Bangkok

BANGKOK, Jan 2: More than 100 Burmese students who fled their country's military government to Thailand are being detained in Bangkok pending transfer to a camp being built for them, an official said today, reports Reuters.

A source in the Interior Ministry said 112 students had been confined in a police school before transfer to a camp being built in Rachaburi province south of Bangkok.

The camp will be completed in the next four months.

Student exiles from Burma must register with Thai authorities or face charges of illegal entry.

Thailand is trying to maintain good relations with Burma's military rulers.

'Tibet's human rights situation better than ever'

BEIJING, Jan 2: Tibet's human rights situation is better than ever and foreign accusations of rights abuses are little more than attempts to destroy China, Beijing's official People's Daily said today, reports Reuters.

In a signed commentary, the Communist Party newspaper's overseas edition said the occupation of Tibet by Communist troops in 1951 ended centuries of human rights abuses by corrupt feudal slave-holders led by the region's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

"Dalai Lama, what kind of human rights do you want to restore?" the newspaper asked.

"You want to restore the Tibetan Serf system, and the

special rights of a small number of masters to oppress and exploit the broad masses of hard-working Tibetan peasants."

The newspaper said foreign critics of Chinese rule in Tibet had stepped up their campaign of "lies and slander" in recent months in an effort to encourage anti-Chinese elements toward revolt.

"We must completely expose and puncture these criminal plots and never allow them to succeed," it said.

China's rule over Tibet has been attacked in the west and by the Dalai Lama, who was forced to flee into exile in India after an abortive uprising against Chinese rule in the Himalayan region in 1959.

Beijing put Tibet's capital Lhasa under martial law in March, 1989, after three days of anti-Chinese rioting. The order was lifted after about a year, but Tibet remains under tight security and is mostly off-limits to foreign reporters.

The Dalai Lama is widely revered as a God-king and thousands of pilgrims make long journeys to Lhasa to pay homage in front of his image in all temples.

Outbursts of pro-independence unrest, and brutal Chinese retaliation, are periodically reported by travellers and other sources.

The People's Daily said China had secured the human rights of the majority of the population who it said had

once been virtually enslaved by the religious and aristocratic elite grouped around the Dalai Lama.

Tibetans were now guaranteed "the right of survival" which China has identified as the paramount human right, as well as the right to education, medical care, and freedom of religious belief.

Politically, Tibetans are allowed to rise in the Communist hierarchy, it said.

"The (Communist) party has promoted 350,000 Tibetan cadres in Tibet, or 66.6 per cent of the total number of cadres in the region," the newspaper said.

"The 'talking livestock' of the old society have become the masters of the new soci-

ety," it said.

The newspaper said the Dalai Lama, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his non-violent campaign to publicise the issue of Tibet, was fooling himself if he believed the Tibetans wanted him back.

China has repeatedly said the exiled "God-king" of Tibet will not be permitted to return until he drops his quest for greater autonomy for the region.

"You should immediately stop your misleading trickery," the newspaper warned the Dalai Lama.

The Tibetan people will continue to strive forward bravely on the Socialist road," it said.

Korean meet in March

SEOUL, Jan 2: The Presidents of North and South Korea, still technically at war but moving towards rapprochement, will hold a summit in March, South Korean television reported on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

It quoted an unidentified senior government official as saying the South's Roh Tae-Woo and the North's Kim Il-Sung might meet in the North Korean town of Kasong, just north of the demarcation line which has divided the peninsula since 1945.

The television quoted the officials as saying the two sides agreed on the summit during a fifth round of high-level talks in Seoul last month.

The officials was reported as saying that Seoul was re-

viewing measures to alleviate north-south tension for possible discussion at the summit.

Government officials were not immediately available for comment on the television report. Kim, North Korean President since 1948, has never met a South Korean President.