

Kurds reject Iraqi terms for lifting blockade

KHALIFAN, Iraq, Jan 9: Kurdish rebels have decided to reject the Iraqi government's latest terms for lifting the blockade it imposed on Kurdistan 10 weeks ago, a Kurdish leader said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The Kurds say the government has offered to lift the blockade if the rebels let Iraqi military and security personnel back to rebel held territory.

We are rejecting it, Mahmoud Osman, Chairman of the Kurdistan Socialist Party (KSP), said after a meeting of the Kurdistan front in the town of Khalifan. It is unacceptable.

The Kurdistan front, an alliance of eight political parties backed by guerrilla armies, functions as the de facto government in northern Iraq.

Baghdad interrupted fuel and food supplies to Kurdistan

and cut off the salaries of government employees there in late October, apparently in an attempt to win Kurdish assent to a draft autonomy agreement.

Kurds queue for days to get petrol and many households are without kerosene for heating in the dead of winter. Some families are doing without meat and milk because food prices have more than doubled.

The autonomy negotiations began soon after the Kurdish rebellion against Saddam Hussein collapsed last year. They have been stalled for months because the Kurds and the government disagree on territory and security arrangements.

The Kurdistan front will meet again on Sunday to decide on the exact wording of its rejection, front officials said.

Tamil rebels kill 8 Lankan troops

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Jan 9: Tamil rebels ambushed and killed eight Sinhalese soldiers Thursday in the jungles of eastern Sri Lanka, the military said, reports AP.

Four soldiers also were injured in the ambush near Paladivetti village in Ampara district, 210 kilometers (130 miles) northeast of Colombo, said a spokesman of the Joint Operations Command. He did not give details.

In northwestern Mannar district, government troops killed three rebels, said the spokesman who cannot be identified under briefing rules. Mannar is 240 kilometers (150 miles) north of Colombo.

The Joint Operations Command in Colombo is the nerve center of military's operations against Tamil rebels who have been fighting since 1983 to set up a separate nation in Sri Lanka's north and east.

More than 8,000 people have been killed since June 1990 when the guerrillas resumed their insurgency after a brief ceasefire.

Tamils, most of whom live in the northern and eastern districts, make up 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people.

The separatists say Tamils are discriminated against by the Sinhalese dominated government in jobs and education. Sinhalese make up 75 per cent of the population.

Nixon accuses Vietnam of misdeeds

WASHINGTON, Jan 9: Former US President Richard Nixon on Wednesday accused Vietnam of a series of misdeeds and said the United States should continue to withhold diplomatic recognition, reports Reuter.

Nixon, in an interview on Cable News Network television, said Vietnam had not complied with the 1973 Paris Peace Agreement

BRIEFLY

Lithuania sets up ties with Israel: The Baltic state of Lithuania has established diplomatic relations with Israel, Tass news agency said Wednesday, reports Reuter from Moscow.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Algirdas Saudargas and Israel's ambassador to Moscow Arye Levin exchanged notes in Vilnius on Wednesday establishing diplomatic links.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis also held talks with Levin on political, economic and cultural ties.

Lithuania regained its independence last September along with Baltic neighbours Latvia and Estonia, half a century after all three were annexed by the Soviet Union.

Israeli FM to visit China: Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy will make an official visit to Beijing in late January to establish diplomatic relations with China, diplomatic sources in Beijing said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Levy is expected January 22 in the Chinese capital and will stay for at least three days, forging diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level with his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen, the sources said.

UN to send observers to Yslavia: The UN Security Council Wednesday approved the immediate dispatch of 50 military observers to Yugoslavia to assist in the monitoring of the ceasefire, reports AFP from New York.

The council unanimously approved Resolution 727 asking all the parties in the conflict to take the measures necessary to ensure the security of UN and European Community personnel.

Journalist Moussa Sabri dead: Journalist Moussa Sabri, who wrote major speeches for the late President Anwar Sadat at the time of Egypt's historic peace treaty with Israel, died of cancer on Wednesday, colleagues said. He was 68, reports Reuter from Cairo.

Sabri, a law graduate from Cairo University, took up journalism in 1944 and worked for several newspapers and magazines.

In 1959, he became Editor-in-Chief of Cairo's semi-official Al-Gomhouria newspaper and in 1974 he was appointed Editor of Al-Akhar, Cairo's best-selling daily.

During the 1970s, he became a close associate of Sadat and wrote his major speeches to the nation. Sadat was assassinated in 1981 by Muslim zealots opposed to the 1980 treaty with Israel.

14 Filipino soldiers shot dead: Communist guerrillas shot dead 14 soldiers, including an army commander, in an ambush in the northern Philippines, the military said Wednesday, reports Reuter from Manila.

Eleven soldiers were wounded in Wednesday's attack by New People's Army (NPA) rebels in mountain province, 250 km (155 miles) north of Manila, a military report said.

An army battalion commander was among those killed, it said.

No rebel casualties were reported in what was the bloodiest NPA attack in two months. Eighteen soldiers were killed in a guerrilla ambush in the northern region in November.

Sikh militants kill 17 more: Suspected Sikh militants shot dead 17 people and injured 25 on Wednesday in simultaneous attacks on two factory neighbourhoods in India's troubled northern state of Punjab, officials said, reports Reuter from Chandigarh.

A gang of militants wearing police uniforms stormed into a textile mill residential complex in Kharar town, about 18 km (10 miles) south of the state capital of Chandigarh, killing seven people and injuring 20, police in Chandigarh said.

Around the same time, a second group of militants attacked another mill housing complex in Malerkotla town in Sangrur district about 100 km (60 miles) from Chandigarh, killing 10 and injuring five, he said.

Almost all of the victims were Hindu, who form a minority in Punjab but are predominant in the rest of India, a police spokesman said, adding that Hindus were separated from Sikhs and gunned down.

Commander firm not to swear allegiance to Ukraine CIS faces confrontation over Black Sea Fleet

SIMFEROPOL, Ukraine Jan 9: The Commonwealth of Independent States plunged deeper into confrontation over the powerful Black Sea Fleet on Wednesday as its Commander reiterated his refusal to swear allegiance to Ukraine, reports Reuter.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin told Moscow Radio that the 300-vessel fleet, claimed by Ukraine, was indivisible and part of commonwealth strategic forces.

"The Black Sea Fleet cannot belong to any one republic. It has to be subordinate to the joint command," he said.

Admiral Igor Kasatonov, Commander in Chief of the fleet was quoted by a spokesman as saying: "The Black Sea Fleet is part of the navy and consequently must be part of strategic forces under a single command."

The row casts doubt on the ability of the former Soviet republics, 11 of which united to form the new commonwealth last month, to ensure a smooth transition from the old centralised political, economic and military structures.

Tension remained high in Georgia, the 12th former republic where 1,000 people defied warnings from the country's new military rulers and demonstrated in support of deposed President Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

Gamsakhurdia, who fled to Armenia on Monday after a bloody two-week power struggle, insisted he remained President and branded the rebels criminals and gangsters.

"I am not going to resign. I am still the President of Georgia," he said.

Yeltsin, whose government freed prices in Russia on January 2, was heckled by angry crowds as he visited provincial cities hard hit by steep rises.

He was surrounded by an indignant crowd when he visited a food shop. Tass news agency said in a report from

the town of Engles, 500 km (300 miles) southeast of Moscow.

In Sevastopol, headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet, news agencies quoted Kasatonov as telling local journalists at a news conference there could be no question of his men swearing an oath to serve Ukraine.

He added that he was taking orders from Navy Commander Vladimir Chernavin and Air Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, acting head of Commonwealth Armed Forces, and not from Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk.

Kravchuk has declared himself Commander of Non-Strategic Forces on Ukrainian territory and is building a Ukrainian army on the basis of former Soviet Forces stationed there.

Shaposhnikov told the Russian information agency in an implied criticism of Ukraine: "One should not rush to divide the army. He said negotiations with Kiev would continue."

Western governments have been especially concerned that control over the former Soviet armed forces, including some 30,000 nuclear war-

heads, be clearly established.

The Black Sea Fleet does not have nuclear weapons, and is therefore considered by Ukraine as nonstrategic and excluded from the commonwealth joint military structure.

But many of its vessels can be equipped with nuclear arms if necessary.

The Ukrainian Defence Ministry, in spite of agreements has started laying claim to ships and submarines and is demanding that we swear allegiance to Ukraine soon, the Deputy Commander of the fleet, Rear-Admiral Stanislav Alkxeyev, said.

Most officers and admirals are against such a decision, he told the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda.

A Reuter reporter and a CNN television crew seeking access to Kasatonov telephoned his office and were told arrangements would be made to let them enter Sevastopol, which is normally closed to foreigners.

But on approaching the city they were turned back by Ukrainian police at a checkpoint. They said they had received a call from the military commander of the region to turn all foreigners away.

The incident followed a Ukrainian decision on Tuesday to turn back a chartered plane carrying reporters from Moscow to meet Black Sea Commanders in Sevastopol.

Kasatonov's spokesman meeting there had adopted a decision that the fleet must remain united. They appealed to commonwealth leaders to resolve the dispute.

Grachov also said that 5,000 local citizens had rallied in Sevastopol to protest against any Ukrainian takeover of the Black Sea Fleet.

He said Kasatonov would fly to the Ukrainian capital Kiev on Thursday for talks on the future of the fleet, which has servicemen of more than 40 nationalities. There are about 75,000 Russian officers serving in Ukraine.



Kiev, CIS-Ukraine: Ukraine's Minister of Defence General Nikolai Marozov announces that Ukraine will nationalize all Soviet military installations, including the Black Sea Fleet. —AFP/UNB photo

Arab League call for UN sanctions against Israel

NICOSIA, Jan 9: A senior Arab League official called Wednesday for UN sanctions to be invoked against Israel, reports AFP.

League Deputy Secretary General Adnan Omran, speaking to journalists in Cairo, urged that UN provisions for the adoption of sanctions and ultimate use of force be applied to Israel to force it to comply with UN resolutions.

"It is time that the provisions of Chapter 7 of the UN charter be applied to Israel to remind it of the measures that can be taken by the United Nations to ensure that international law is respected, as was done during the Gulf crisis," he said.

That was an allusion to the use of Chapter 7 by the United States and its allies to justify

their military campaign a year ago to drive Iraqi troops out of Kuwait.

Omran's comments came as Arab delegates prepared to begin a round of peace talks with the Jewish state in Washington.

He stressed that Israel must be reminded that "Security Council resolutions are binding, especially 242 and 338, as well as 726."

The first two measures, adopted in 1967 and 1973, call for an Israeli withdrawal from Arab land in exchange for peace, while the third — approved Monday — condemns Israel for a plan to deport 12 Palestinians from the occupied territories.

The unanimous condemnation salvaged the third round

of bilateral Arab-Israeli peace talks that had been due to start in Washington on Tuesday.

Delegates representing Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians last week suspended their departure for the United States to protest the Israeli expulsion order, issued last Thursday.

But Arab negotiators reversed their decision following the Security Council vote Monday and were preparing to travel to Washington — where the Israeli delegation has been since Monday — by the end of the week.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry predicted that negotiations would resume next Monday or Tuesday.

Taiwan to ease visa regulations

TAIPEI, Jan 9: Taiwan will ease its visa regulations, allowing some foreigners to apply for visas upon arrival, to facilitate trade and tourism, the Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The cabinet had approved a ministry proposal to allow foreigners to apply for visas on arrival instead of having to apply overseas, a ministry spokesman said. A visa office was being set up at Taipei's international airport, he said.

The new rules will at first apply only to foreigners invited to Taiwan by government or private organisations, including companies, the spokesman said.

US reaffirms pledge to Asian security

TOKYO, Jan 9: The United States reaffirmed its commitment to Asian regional security in talks with Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa which lasted about half an hour here today, Japanese official said, reports AFP.

Bush said that despite the loss of its 7th fleet naval servicing base in the Philippines, the U.S. commitment to regional security remained strong, the official said.

Japan also pledged to continue to play its role under its security treaty with the United States.

During their talks, Bush invited Miyazawa to visit the

US reaffirms pledge to Asian security

United States.

Miyazawa accepted and a visit around May is being planned, the official added.

Bush also issued an invitation to Emperor Akihito to visit America, the first by a Japanese Emperor since World War II. Miyazawa said the invitation would be considered by the government.

Both Miyazawa and Bush commented on developments in the Commonwealth of Independent States, the former Soviet Union and hoped that the efforts of the new republics towards democratisation and economic reform would succeed.

Arafat meets Saddam

BAGHDAD, Jan 9: Palestine Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat met here Wednesday with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi news agency said here, reports AFP.

The agency gave no details of the content of the talks, which were the first publicly announced to have taken place between the two men since last July 13.

DPRK praises suspension of jt exercise

TOKYO, Jan 9: North Korea today praised the suspension of joint US-South Korea military exercises this year as a lucky circumstance, reports AFP.

We hail the South Korean authorities decision Tuesday to suspend the team spirit joint military exercise this year, the committee for the peaceful unification of the fatherland said in a statement in Pyongyang.

Guerillas kill Spanish air force commander

BARCELONA, Spain, Jan 9: Suspected Basque guerrillas killed a Spanish air force commander in a Barcelona street ambush on Wednesday, officials said, reports Reuter.

Gunmen struck for the second time in a month, targeting Barcelona for violence in the run-up to the 1992 Olympics.

Two attackers shot at the military car in a narrow street, wounding two other air force men — a lieutenant and chauffeur.

Off the Record

Bush did it to get attention

TOKYO: President Bush was well enough to crack jokes about his collapse at a state dinner and a bout of stomach flu, reports AP.

White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater said Bush was concerned about any inconvenience he might have caused the dinner guests, and joked he might have a large dry cleaning bill to deal with. The president vomited before collapsing.

Barbara Bush's press secretary, Anna Perez, offered from the first lady a report that Bush had told the prime minister, "Why don't you just roll me under the table and let me sleep it off."

Bush fainted, vomited and slumped to the floor during the dinner in his honour Wednesday evening, Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa leaped up and cradled Bush's head.

"I just wanted to get a little attention," Bush said with a wan smile and a wave to guests as he left the dinner.

Fitzwater also tried to deflect any lingering concern about Bush's health. He greeted the press corps the day after the dinner by quipping "You can't say President Bush and Prime Minister Miyazawa don't have a special relationship."

Fitzwater laughed when asked if the incident would hurt Bush's plans to seek re-election. The questioner pointed out that Bush has said only a major health problem would keep him from running.

"It doesn't include the flu," Fitzwater said.



Vampire boyfriend is injurious to health!

MILWAUKEE: A man was accused of slashing his girlfriend with a broken beer bottle and trying to suck her blood after watching a vampire movie, says AP.

Stephen J. Wilhelm, 35, of St. Francis was charged with reckless endangerment while armed in the alleged attack on Katherine W. Zielski, 30.

Police said Wilhelm flew into a rage after watching 'Son of Darkness: To Die for II', on New Year's Eve. Wilhelm threw knives around the apartment, choked Ms Zielski, broke a beer bottle and cut her chest and ear, police said.

Ms Zielski told authorities Wilhelm tried to drink blood from one of her wounds. She was treated for cuts and other injuries.

If convicted, Wilhelm could get up to two years in prison and a 10,000 dollar fine.

Kiss careful, TV merciful

COLOMBO: A little bit of kissing is essential, a government minister said Thursday when asked whether kissing scenes have been banned on the state-run television, reports AP.

"No we have not banned kissing," said A B Ranasinghe, deputy minister for information. "Taking into account Sri Lanka's culture and religion, we do censor kissing scenes in bedrooms," he told reporters.

Some reporters told him that a scene showing a mother kissing her children also was apparently removed from a programme broadcast by the Rupavahini television.

"That must be the work of over-enthusiastic officials... A little bit of kissing is also essential," the minister said.

The conservative state-controlled Rupavahini broadcasts mostly religious and political programmes. Entertainment is limited to British and American comedies and detective serials and romance on the screen is frowned upon.

Heil Hitler!

VIENNA: Police on Tuesday arrested an Austrian Neo-Nazi who told US and European television networks that Adolf Hitler was a "great man" and getting Jews out of Austria and Germany would be "no problem", reports Reuter.

Gottfried Kueschel, 33, made the remarks in interviews last month with the American network show ABC-Nightline and with the European network Tele 5, Justice Ministry sources said.

"Unfortunately, the Germans lost World War Two", the Austrian news agency APA quoted him as saying.

Kueschel also said the Nazi holocaust, in which six million Jews were murdered, was a myth. There had been concentration camps but no organised slaughter.

Kueschel also allegedly said he wanted to resurrect the Nazi party.

Conviction on such a charge carries a heavy prison term.

Army intervention in Algeria's polls feared

ALGIERS, Jan 9: Extensive movements of troops and police were reported by an Islamic fundamentalist leader Wednesday, one week before runoff elections in which his party was favoured, reports AP.

Algeria's Soviet-trained army leadership is hostile to the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front. Algerian media have speculated that the army might intervene to prevent the party from taking power.

Since the first-round voting December 26, Salvation Front spokesmen have urged the army to "protect the people's choice."

In an apparent attempt to soothe the generals, the fundamentalists have moderated their rhetoric while continuing to promise to run the country by strict Islamic law.

But on Wednesday, a nervous fundamentalist leadership reported the deployment of troops.

"Extensive movements of police and army soldiers have been noted during the last few hours in the majority of the country's regions," Salvation Front leader Abdel Kader Hachani told reporters at a news conference in the North African capital.

He said the deployments included districts where there will be no runoff. He provided no other details.

The government declined to comment on the report of troop movement.

However, a military source speaking on condition of anonymity said the army had been in a state of alert since December 26.

Libya woos Russian nuclear experts

MOSCOW, Jan 9: A Russian scientist said Wednesday that Libya has offered high-paying jobs to his colleagues at Moscow's top nuclear institute, providing new evidence the Soviet Union's collapse could spread nuclear technology, reports AP.

Western leaders have expressed mounting concern that the political breakup of the Soviet Union and its crumbling economy could lead to the transfer of nuclear weapons — or scientists capable of building them.

Vyacheslav Rozanov, deputy chief of the thermonuclear department at the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, told the Associated Press that Libya had offered jobs to at least two of his co-workers.

Both scientists turned down the jobs and tempting dirr 2,000-a-month salaries — very high by Russian standards, Rozanov said. But he added they might say 'yes' to more money next time.

"Many of the specialists at our institute are pursuing with great interest the chance to work abroad," he said. "The economic problems in our country affect scientists, too."

The demise of the Soviet Union has raised fears world-

wide that its technology could be bought by the highest bidder, including Libya, Iraq and other states that are trying to develop nuclear weapons.

Rozanov's story was originally reported in Wednesday's edition of USA Today.

Rozanov said the Kurchatov Institute, which carries out civilian and military research, is trying to discourage its scientists from emigrating or working abroad.

He said his two co-workers, both graduates of Russia's Power Energy Institute with knowledge of nuclear reactors, were approached twice by Libya. He declined to identify

them.

A private Libyan citizen originally made the offer at an energy conference in Moscow, inviting the Russians to work at the Trajura nuclear research centre on the Libyan coast just east of Tripoli, said Rozanov.

The scientists rejected the offer, he said.

Within the last month, the two scientists were contacted again by the same Libyan, who offered salaries "in the range of dirr 2,000," said Rozanov.

They again rejected the jobs, he said.

For most Soviets, whose average monthly wage is less than dirr 10 at the official ex-

change rate, dirr 2,000 a month is a huge sum.

Rozanov said the Libyan proposals were to work on peaceful uses of nuclear energy only. But he acknowledged that the two experts' abilities could easily be applied to nuclear weapons as well.

He said several dozen experts from the institute already have taken jobs in the United States, Japan and other countries.

Anatoly Zemskov, a spokesman for Russia's Nuclear Power Ministry, said he knows of one case in which a foreign government tried to hire one of the ministry's spe-

cialists and offered him dirr 5,000 a month.

But there is no trend of this kind — yet, said Zemskov.

The ministry is trying to improve "financial and social conditions" for its nuclear experts to keep them from leaving, he added.

"I cannot blame my colleagues if they go work for foreign countries," said Yuri Rogozhin, head spokesman for the Russian nuclear safety agency, Gosatomnadzor, which inspects the nation's nuclear facilities.

Rogozhin said there are probably "5,000 teams of scientists in Moscow

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