

Bush launches re-election bid in New Hampshire

WASHINGTON, Jan 15: President George Bush launched his re-election bid today in New Hampshire amid a full-blown recession which could bring both the country and the incumbent to their knees, reports AFP.

Political circles are anxious to see how Bush is received in the small conservative north-eastern state, the site of the nation's first primary and a hotbed of economic discontent.

No progress in ME peace talks

WASHINGTON, Jan 15: Middle East peace talks between Israelis and Arabs resumed here Tuesday, but immediately bogged down over what to discuss and where the next round of meetings should be held, reports AFP.

The already complex negotiations were further clouded by a government crisis for Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in Israel and a gun attack which wounded seven Israelis in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli delegation, meanwhile, confirmed that it intended to return home on Wednesday as originally planned unless the Israeli government ruled otherwise.

talks between Israel and Syria at the State Department, while negotiations opened between Israel and Lebanon on the one hand and Israel and Jordan on the other.

Jordanian and Israeli negotiators met for three hours at the State Department and exchanged ideas on an agenda for future talks, but reached no agreement, said Jordanian delegation chief Abdel Salam Majal.

He said that "had not yet looked at the points of difference on substantive issues".

Chief Israeli negotiator Eliakim Rubinstein said the two sides discussed "agenda ideas as well as general ideas of how to reach peace" and

that the meeting would continue Wednesday morning.

But he decried the shooting attack on an Israeli bus and car in the occupied West Bank, which left seven Israelis, including two children, wounded calling it "a very unfortunate event."

"We are trying to work for peace, but there are elements in the territories who are trying to scuttle the chances for peace," he said.

The 11-strong Jordanian delegation included two Palestinians under a formula hammered out on Monday to break a deadlock that had paralyzed the last round of talks here in December.

Under the formula, the

Palestinian team which was meeting later with the Israelis was to include two Jordanians. The Israelis had insisted that they would not discuss self-rule in the occupied territories with the Palestinians alone.

A Damascus report adds: Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad on Tuesday emphasized the importance of a European initiative to help overcome obstacles created by Israel in the Middle East peace process, an official source said.

Presidential spokesman Gibran Kurieh said Assad reaffirmed to visiting Dutch Foreign Minister Hans Van Den Broek his country's sincere desire to achieve a just and comprehensive peace

based on international resolutions.

He also underlined "the importance of an initiative from European and all countries concerned with peace in favor of action" aimed at overcoming Israeli obstacles.

Kurieh said the Dutch Minister noted the importance Europe placed on the peace process as well as the role Syria played in it given its influence in the pursuit, and success, of the negotiations.

Van Den Broek, who arrived here Monday and met with his Syrian counterpart Farouq Ael-Shara, is on a regional tour that takes him Wednesday to Jordan and Thursday to Israel.

Off the Record

Jiro is a hero, is a Macaque

TOKYO, Japan's latest heartrob is only three feet tall, wears diapers and enjoys chewing his toes, reports AP.

He's Jiro, a 6-year-old Japanese Macaque who has reached stardom through his antics in television commercials, street performances and theater acts.

One of his new show-stoppers is an imitation of President Bush collapsing at a Tokyo state dinner last week.

"Does Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's administration have much of a future?" asks Murasaki.

Jiro holds up a card with an X.

A theater piece starring Jiro as the famous 12th-century warrior samurai Yoshitsune was even recognized as quality art when Murasaki was awarded the prestigious government Art Festival Prize.

School for elephants!

BANDAR LAMPUNG: The provincial administration of Lampung is considering opening a new school for elephants, in addition to the existing one in way Kambas which has become 'too crowded' the head of the Lampung Forestry Office ASM Panjatan said here today, reports Antara Pool.

At the school in way Kambas, elephants are taught and tamed to, among other things, help people in their forestry and agricultural activities. Sixty elephants are currently on the school's rolls.

Panjatan said the new site would have to be chosen with great care as the cost of transporting elephants could prove phenomenal.

Lampung, the province on the southern tip of the Sumatra island, has about 450 to 600 wild elephants.

He said unless a new school was opened, the wild elephants would continue destroying people's agricultural land, especially in the Northern Lampung district where there are many transmigrants.

Unbelievable

ROBBINSDALE, Minn: A teen-ager who clenched a pencil in his teeth to dial for help after his arms were torn off in a tractor accident saved his life, and he may have saved his limbs, doctors said, reports AP.

John Thompson's arms were reattached in a six-hour operation at North Memorial Medical Center in this Minneapolis suburb, where the 18-year-old from Hurdsfield, ND, was listed in serious but stable condition Wednesday.

Thompson was home alone on Saturday when his arms were torn off. He walked 400 meters to his house, where he used his mouth to turn a doorknob and his foot to knock open a door.

Clutching a pencil in his teeth, he called paramedics by phone, then waited for them in his family's bathtub so he wouldn't bleed on the carpet.

"We just can't believe it. He is levelheaded and everything, but I'm surprised he could keep his thoughts all together and do it," said Thompson's sister, Kim Blotter of Fargo, ND.

US iterates concern about Pak N-plan

WASHINGTON, Jan 15: The United States reiterated its concern about the Pakistani nuclear programme Tuesday, but said its information on the programme was classified, reports AFP.

"This administration is concerned about unsafeguarded nuclear programmes in both Pakistan and India and hopes to make progress on regional non-proliferation," said State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler.

The Washington Post reported Tuesday that the United States believed that Pakistan had two nuclear weapons cores, essential parts for a nuclear device, and had demanded that they be destroyed as a condition resuming US aid to Islamabad.

Asked about this report, Tutwiler said that the information on the subject was classified. "We are unable to say Pakistan does not possess a nuclear explosive device," she said.

A Karachi report says: Former Premier Benazir Bhutto Criticised the government Tuesday for remarks made here by US Senator Larry Pressler, who said the US gov-

ernment believed that Pakistan had a nuclear bomb.

The Republican Senator from South Dakota at a news conference in Islamabad on Monday called upon the Pakistani government to "publicly dismantle its nuclear bomb" to qualify for US assistance.

"All this is being said because there is no popular government in the country," Bhutto told newsmen here, after meeting her imprisoned husband Asif Zardari in the Sindh High Court.

She was making her first public appearance after three days in the hospital for treatment of a kidney ailment, and looked weak.

Pressler's statement and what is considered here his pro-India tilt has enraged Pakistani leaders and the press. The president and Prime Minister reportedly cancelled their meeting with him on this account.

According to Radio Pakistan, the US State Department has dissociated itself from Pressler's remarks on Pakistan's nuclear programme.

Heavy attack on Karen rebel HQs

BANGKOK, Jan 15: Myanmar military commanders aiming to seize the main headquarters of the Karen National Union (KNU) guerrillas in southeastern Myanmar have launched ground and air attacks against rebel positions, an opposition official said yesterday, reports AFP.

An officer with a parallel "scientific socialism" or Maoism, has in the past refused to recognise the Indian constitution, calling oil and mineral-rich Assam a colony and India a colonial power.

It ruled out peace talks, saying Assam, a state of 22 million people, had never historically been a part of India.

In recent weeks, the group has softened its stand, declaring a unilateral ceasefire December 17 in the face of an army crackdown which threw its well-organised network into disarray.

The army operation code named 'Rhino' netted almost 2,000 of its activists.

Nobel laureates for peace in Croatia

NEW YORK, Jan 15: More than 100 Nobel laureates signed an appeal "for peace in Croatia" that appeared Tuesday as a full page ad in the New York Times, reports AFP.

Yeltsin's decree annulled

MOSCOW, Jan 15: The Russian constitutional court on Tuesday annulled a decree by President Boris Yeltsin that had created a super ministry out of the old Soviet KGB and Interior Ministry, reports AFP.

The court ruled the December 19 decree unconstitutional, and ordered the new ministry dissolved.

The court's 13 judges took 10 hours to reach their unanimous verdict.

The ruling found the new ministry contrary to the Russian constitution's provisions concerning "the separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers."

There was no elaboration. A group of 51 Russian legislators had petitioned the court to rule on the constitutionality of Yeltsin's decree, and on its conformity with Russian law.

This was the first case the court had ruled on since it was created at the end of last year. The court rejected an officials request by Yeltsin to postpone deliberations.

Viktor Barnanikov, Russian Minister for State Security and Internal Affairs, had refused to testify before the court.

About 10 persons did testify.

"We appeal to the western and eastern governments to stop the Yugoslav army's wanton destruction. We appeal to all humanitarian organizations to provide aid for all the victims of Yugoslav military brutality," said the statement.

The 104 signers included such past winners of the Nobel Peace Prize as former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt (1971), the Dalai Lama (1989) and South African Bishop Desmond Tutu (1984).

The petition, which denounced "this senseless war," also appealed "to men and women of conscience to speak up against indifference to the plight of Croatian people who are facing not only the danger of total destruction of their country, but also the threat of their own extinction."

Writers Nadine Gordimer of South Africa (literature 1991), Claude Simon of France (1985), William Golding of Britain (1983), and Czeslaw Milosz, a Polish-born American (1980), also signed the text.

Scientists who signed included three of the most recent winners of the Nobel Prize—Pierre-Gilles de Gennes (Physics, 1991), Joseph Murray (Medicine 1990), and William Sharpe (Economy, 1990).

The petition was launched by a group called the American Initiative for Croatia. In association with various US Croatian organizations and with the ruder Boskovic Institute of Zagreb.



UN peace keeping force commander Australian Colonel Wilson (R) is greeted on his arrival with 50-man monitoring team by Yugoslav Army General Slavko Jovic. Jovic has reportedly served the UN peace keeping forces during the Iran-Iraq war. —AFP photo

Najib orders return of Zahir Shah's property

KABUL, Jan 15: President Najibullah issued a decree Tuesday ordering return of the property of the family of former King Zahir Shah, taken over by the state some 13 years ago, officials said, reports AFP.

The presidential decree revoked a May 1978 decision Nationalising the property of the overthrown King's father Mohammed Nader Shah, uncles Shah Wali Khan and Mohammad Hashim, and his cousin, Mohammad Daoud, they said.

The decree came on the eve of the fifth anniversary of the national reconciliation policy launched by Najibullah's administration on January 15, 1987, aimed at the fighting between government troops and

Mujahideen resistance.

The officials in the Afghan capital said under the decree the property of Zahir Shah would be restored to the legal heirs or their attorneys.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry would help in the process of property restoration, they said.

Zahir Shah, living in exile in Rome since his overthrow in a military coup in 1973, was also stripped of his citizenship in the communist revolution five years later.

However, Najibullah restored his citizenship in September 1991.

Najibullah's latest decision is seen here as part of his government's efforts to woo the ex-monarch to join the international peace efforts on

Afghanistan.

Zahir Shah's participation in the peace moves would be crucial because several Afghan groups are considering him as the possible heir for an interim government which would be set up before elections were held as part of a UN-sponsored peace package ending the 13-year-old civil war. Reuter from Islamabad adds: Afghan President has abolished the death penalty for 88 offences.

The broadcast, monitored in the Pakistani capital Islamabad yesterday, quoted a presidential decree as saying the death penalty could now be handed down for only five offences—murder, mass killing, killing by explosion, killing in robbery, and treason.

Opposition move to unseat Nawaz Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Jan 15: Pakistani opposition parties have sent two petitions to parliament seeking to unseat Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for alleged financial wrongdoing which he has denied, parliamentary sources said yesterday, reports Reuter.

They said the petitions were given on Monday to lower house speaker Gohar Ayub Khan, the opposition says he must send them to the government's top election commissioner upholding the opposition charge of immorality could unseat Sharif from the lower house and from office. But political sources said this was not expected to happen.

One petition by the People's Democratic Alliance of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto accuses Sharif of using his influence to obtain a 300 million rupee (12 million dollar) loan from a domestic bank for two sugar mills owned by his family.

The other put forward by another opposition group accuses him of involvement in

two loans worth 2.17 million dollars. It says the Dubai branch of the collapsed Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) gave the loans to two members of Sharif's Ittefaq business group in February 1989.

on his first official western trip after taking office 14 months ago.

Sources in the ruling Islamic Democratic Alliance said the opposition was trying to pressure authorities to withdraw disputed corruption charges against Bhutto and several of her former cabinet ministers.

The opposition groups say they will bring six or seven more such petitions against Sharif and his Interior Minister Shujaat Hussain.

Bhutto was sacked as premier by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan in August 1990 on disputed charges of abuse of power.

She and several of her colleagues are facing trials by special tribunals which are empowered to disqualify them from parliament for up to seven years.

They deny the charges and accuse authorities of being vindictive.

BRIEFLY

Coming-of-age day celebrated:

Some 1.99 million Japanese celebrated Coming-Of-Age Day today, the day which ritually marks the passage into adult life during a person's 20th year, reports AFP from Tokyo.

The number, 50,000 more than last year, was the highest in 20 years, the management and coordination agency said.

The new adults accounted for 1.6 per cent of Japan's total population of 124.12 million, according to the agency. Men, at 1.04 million, slightly outnumbered women.

The number of Japanese turning 20 peaked between 1968 and 1970 when 2.4 million became adults each year.

In 1972 the number fell below the two million mark and dropped to 1.52 million in 1978. From 1979 on, it was steady at around 1.6 million until 1984 when it began to rise.

Under the law a person officially becomes an adult on his or her 20th birthday, but coming-of-age day is a public holiday in Japan.

Dy Director of CIA resigns:

The White House announced Tuesday the resignation of Richard Kerr from his post as Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), reports AFP from Washington.

The White House said in a statement that Kerr was stepping down from his post after 32 years with the CIA but gave no reason for his resignation, which will take effect March 2.

Kerr has been the No. 2 man at the CIA since March 1989 and he was Acting Director briefly before the senate confirmed Robert Gates as Director in November.

"He played a critical role in the recent transition at the CIA" during a time when the world was undergoing upheaval, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said in a statement.

Coal miners go on strike:

Work at half of the coal mines at Karaganda in northern Kazakhstan are on strike in protest against the recent increase of prices in response to deregulation, the daily Komsomolskaya Pravda reported on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Kazakhstan is the third-biggest producer of coal in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) after Russia and Ukraine.

Assam offers safe passage for Maoist rebels

NEW DELHI, Jan. 15: Assam authorities announced a 19-day safe passage for Maoist guerrillas in the North East India frontier state Tuesday, a day after New Delhi suspended a counter-insurgency drive by the army, reports AFP.

Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia said the safe passage was effective until February 1. It would enable members of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) to come from underground and would help pave the way for peace talks, he said.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted him as saying in Guwahati, Assam's principal

city, that the suspension of army operations against ULFA and the safe passage offer marked the start of the peace process.

By February 1, ULFA would finalise its agenda for talks to reach a peaceful settlement of its bloody independence campaign, he said, adding he was confident the group genuinely desired peace.

Saikia's announcement followed his return to Assam from preliminary talks here between the federal government of Prime Minister P.M. Narasimha Rao and the ULFA leadership.

The chief minister appealed

to 'all sections of the people' in Assam to help reach a settlement with ULFA, which has agreed to give up violence and negotiate with New Delhi under the framework of the Indian constitution.

The ULFA had adopted an armed struggle... but in the present situation, the issues could be solved within the constitutional framework," the group's General Secretary Anup Chetia told PTI.

The armed struggle would end if a peaceful settlement was reached, Chetia reportedly said.

The first note of discord came from the all Bodo

Students' Union, which is campaigning for Assam's division into two equal parts for ethnic Assamese Hindus and tribes people who live outside the Hindu caste system.

The government should not sign any accord that goes against the interests of the Bodos, said the union, which accuses Assamese of discrimination against tribes people.

Although it has existed since the early 1980's ULFA came into prominence only about two years ago with a series of well-planned kidnappings and murders, triggering panic in tea and oil industries.

ULFA, which has espoused