

People flee Jaffna as major army assault on Tigers feared

COLOMBO, Jan 18: At least 2,000 people have fled Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula fearing a major government offensive against Tamil rebels, aid workers said on Friday, reports Reuter.

They said at least 2,000 men, women and children had arrived in the town of Kilinochchi, just south of the peninsula, in the past Kilinochchi, just south of the peninsula, in the past few days and were staying with relatives and friends or campaign outside.

Tamil rebels have also warned of an offensive and asked residents to help protect their villages and also volunteer young members of the family to fight the army, one aid worker said by telephone from the northern town of Vavuniya.

Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam guerrillas, fighting for a separate state in the north and east for minority Tamils, have their main stronghold in Jaffna. Most Jaffna residents are Tamils.

The Tigers expect a major army assault, aid workers said. "They have just ordered and taken delivery of 5,000 coffins and distributed them to their bases," said one aid worker who visits Jaffna regularly.

The army has not revealed its plans. One senior officer said it needed just seven days to take control of the Tamil rebel-dominated region.

"All we need is the political will to go ahead with it," he said.

Political analysts say the government has often been reluctant to launch an offensive against Jaffna because of the risk to civilians.

'Enemy's day worthy of God's wrath' Saddam finally concedes defeat in Gulf War

BAHGDAD, Jan 18: Saddam Hussein finally conceded defeat in the Gulf War on Friday but served notice he intended to rebuild his once-powerful military machine and again make Iraq a leading Arab power, reports Reuter.

Saddam made his promise on the anniversary of the day one of the most intensive air attacks in history opened the war between Iraq and a US-led multinational alliance which mustered more than 750,000 troops.

Looking relaxed and wearing his field marshal's uniform, the Iraqi President told his sanctions-hit nation that Iraqi forces had been outgunned and outnumbered by forces representing "satan and treachery."

For the first time Saddam said that his armed forces, once almost a million strong and the fourth-largest in the world, had been beaten by the 33-nation alliance it faced in the war.

"If we see the confrontation within traditional material and technological considerations," he said, "then the camp of the faithful Iraq was defeated."

But Iraq had achieved a moral victory because they had kept their faith. "Today is the day of pride and glory and their (the enemy's) day is worthy of God's wrath," he said.

Saddam left no doubt that he had not abandoned his dream of building Iraq into a

regional superpower, an aim he pursued with single-minded purpose in the two decades he has effectively held power.

"The wounds in the economy will be healed. God willing, and its prosperity will be everlasting. Baghdad will continue furnishing the Arabs with skills, science, technology and

Under the terms of the cease-fire which ended the war 42 days after it began, Iraq agreed to destroy its nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programmes. Iraq imports of conventional weapons are banned under United Nations sanctions.

But Iraqi officials have reported progress in repairing

regime isolated, a parish among nations."

In contrast, Saddam sounded confident that the end of sanctions was in sight. "We are halfway through the embargo if we compare it with the siege imposed on Islam's Prophet Mohammad (SM) in Mecca 1,400 years ago," he said.

That blockade lasted three years. The embargo on Iraq was imposed 17 months ago, after Saddam's forces seized Kuwait in a lightning strike and declared the tiny, oil-rich country Iraq's 19th province.

The Saddam Iraqis saw on Friday provided a sharp contrast to the drawn, tired-looking leader who appeared on television on the second day of the war, when air strikes had left Baghdad without power, running water and telephones.

It was his fifth television appearance in a week as part of celebrations to mark "the mother of battles" against "tyrannical aggression."

Response to official sponsored events to mark the occasion, however, has been relatively subdued.

A public demonstration scheduled for 2.30 A.M. the time the first missiles and bombs slammed into Baghdad, drew only around 2,000 people—a modest figure in a capital where pre-war demonstrations used to draw half a million or more.



economic prosperity, as it did in the past.

"But this needs an armed force to protect it". Stressing the point, he said science and technology must be coupled with an influential military capability.

U.S. President George Bush reiterated on Thursday that his administration would maintain sanctions and "keep Saddam's military facilities smashed in more than a month of daily bombing raids and missile strikes."

Interim govt fears civil war in Georgia

TBILISI, Georgia, Jan 18: Georgian provisional Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua says there is a risk of civil war in the former Soviet republic where ousted president Zviad Gamsakhurdia is attempting to regain power, reports Reuter.

Sigua told the British television news company ITN on Friday his government had sent negotiators to meet Gamsakhurdia who was driven out of Tbilisi by rebel gunmen two weeks ago after a fortnight long siege which shattered the centre of the capital.

Asked if there would be a civil war in Georgia Sigua told ITN: "The risk is quite real. It can happen, but we are trying our best to avoid military confrontation."

We have already sent people there for negotiations with him."

Gamsakhurdia returned to Zugdidi, stronghold of his Magrelia homeland in Western Georgia, on Thursday after more than a week in exile in Armenia he has called for an armed march on Tbilisi.

Sigua said his troops intended to seal off Western Georgia.

This means he will be surrounded by our forces, he said. I know he is a scared man and he will try to run again.

An aide to Jaba Ioseliani, one of the two leaders of the military council now in power in Tbilisi, told local journalists about 400 of Ioseliani's Mkhedroni (horsemen) armed group had gone to Western Georgia in cars and buses.

He said the military council and the provisional government it has appointed did not want to shed blood but to bring Gamsakhurdia supporters in the west to their senses.

Asked how long Gamsakhurdia could hold out, Sigua told ITN I am sure that within a week he will find himself in such a situation that he will have to leave again, this time forever.

Ghali, Baker discuss UN participation in ME talks

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Jan 18: US Secretary of State James Baker and Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali have discussed making the United Nations a direct participant in the multilateral Middle East peace talks later this month in Moscow, reports Reuter.

Baker told reporters accompanying him on his trip to Mexico, El Salvador and Nicaragua that the issue was raised during a meeting with Boutros-Ghali in Mexico City on Thursday.

"Yes, there is a possibility that they could have a different kind of role" than the observer status position the United Nations held at the Madrid peace conference last October, Baker said.

"That has not been worked out finally and we will continue to work on it. As it was with respect to the bilaterals, it is a question to be determined primarily through discussions between Israel and representatives of the United Nations," he added.

Israel had long rejected an Arab-proposed international peace conference under United Nations auspices. So when Baker put together the Madrid peace conference last October, one compromise assigned the United Nations a minor position as an observer.

Direct talks called bilaterals have since followed, pairing Israel in separate negotiations with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestinians.

The multilateral negotiations for Moscow on January 28 and 29 are designed to involve many more parties and a broader range of issues, like water and refugees.

Boutros-Ghali, an Egyptian who was involved in the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, told Baker that if the United Nations was not made an active participant at the Moscow talks, he would send a lower-level aide in his place or the UN might not be represented at all. UN and US sources said.

He said he and Boutros-Ghali also discussed other matters, including civil war in Yugoslavia and efforts to rebuild El Salvador now that its civil war is ended.

Italy sets up ties with Croatia

ZAGREB, Jan 18: Italy established diplomatic relations with Croatia on Friday, becoming the second country to do so after Germany, reports AFP.

Italian President Francesco Cossiga and his Croatian counterpart attended the signing ceremony here.

The official protocol was signed by the Italian and Croatian Deputy Foreign Ministers, Claudio Vitalone and Bozidar Gago.

Gago thanked Italy for being among the first countries to have "understood the new pulse on the international scene and recognize the independence of Croatia then establish diplomatic relations with Croatia on Saturday."

The 12-nation European Community on Wednesday recognized the independence of Yugoslavia's breakaway republics of Croatia and Slovenia.

BRIEFLY

Violence claims 7 in S Africa: Seven people, including a two-year-old baby, were found murdered in a village on South Africa's east coast, police said Friday, reports AFP from Durban.

Police spokesman Captain Bala Naidoo said the victims, which included five members of the same family, were found Friday morning at Umtwalume, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of here.

No suspected motive was given for the murders by Naidoo, but the deaths are thought to be related to ongoing conflict in Natal province between the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party and the African National Congress.

The conflict has left over 1,000 people dead in the past year alone.

Shamir launches election drive: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has launched a drive for an early general election but says the move will not affect the Middle East Process, reports Reuter from Jerusalem.

Shamir is about to lose his parliamentary majority after two small right-wing coalition partners, Tehiya and Moledet, decided to leave his government in a bid to stop peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

"There are several options but it's almost certain... that we will have to go to early elections," Shamir said. He reiterated "in any event, my will is to continue the peace process."

IRA kills seven Protestants: Seven Protestant construction workers were killed and another seven injured when an IRA bomb blew their Van Off a remote northern Irish road in the worst civilian attack in just over four years, reports Reuter from Belfast.

The IRA, battling to oust Britain from northern Ireland, admitted responsibility for the attack on Friday. The guerrilla group said in a statement to the media that the bombing was carried out by its "county tyronne brigade."

It was the bloodiest civilian attack in the British province since the Irish Republican Army (IRA) killed 11 people attending a war memorial ceremony in Enniskillen on November 8, 1987.

If they do repair work for British Security Forces. They are then accused of "collaborating with occupying forces."

Brazil inaugurates oil plant: Brazil inaugurated Friday its first plant to extract oil from the country's vast shale deposits, AP reports from Brazil.

The 93 million dollar plant in Sao Mateus do Sul, 550 miles (900 kilometers) southwest of Rio, will use technology developed by the state oil company Petrobras to produce oil at close-to-market prices.

The plant at first will produce 3,870 barrels of oil a day at a cost of 22.50 dollar a barrel Petrobras said. The company aims to lower the cost to 20 dollar a barrel, slightly more than it now pays for imports.

The plant also will produce daily 132 tons of fuel oil, 50 tons of liquid gas, 98 tons of pure sulphur, Petrobras said.

The United States and Estonia have shown interest in Brazil's shale technology, the company said. An executive of the U.S. company Unocal is to visit the plant next week.

Sikh militants to boycott polls: All main Sikh political parties announced Friday they would boycott next month's elections in Punjab, saying the polls would be "a mockery" because of the army's deployment in the state, reports AFP from Ludhiana.

At the end of a three hour meeting in this northern city, leaders of four Akali Dal factions and of the All India Sikh Students' Federation said they had unanimously decided not to take part in the elections on February 19.

This decision, which was expected, is a blow to New Delhi's hopes of settling the situation in Punjab, according to analysts. The state has been under the direct rule of New Delhi since 1987.

Earthquake shakes Russia: A strong earthquake shook Russia's Kamchatka peninsula in the far east on Friday, the U.S. Geological Survey reported, says Reuter from Colorado.

The earthquake, which measured 5.4 on the Richter scale occurred at 11:15 a.m. (0115 GMT).

FIS urges supporters to stay calm

ALGIERS, Jan 18: Muslim fundamentalists, blocked from winning Algeria's first multi-party general election by halting of the poll, have told their supporters to stay calm and play a waiting game, reports Reuter.

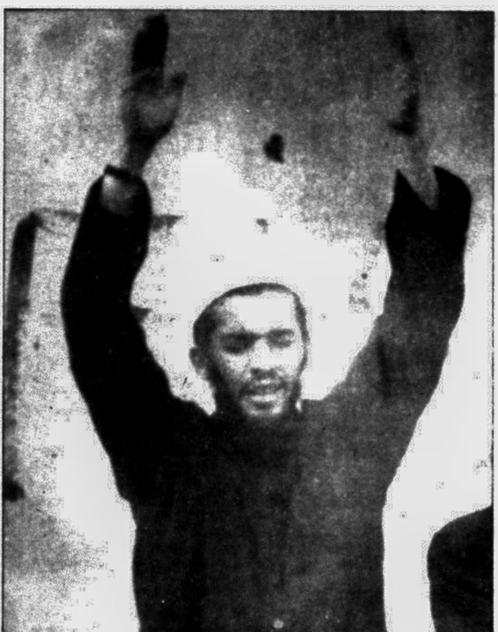
Urging militants to avoid provocation, Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) leaders predicted at Friday prayers that the collective presidency that took over the running of the country after the cancellation of the second round of voting would not last.

"This regime is going to fall. I ask you for vigilance and to avoid all provocation," FIS provisional leader Abdelkader Hachant said of the five-man high council of state sworn in 24 hours earlier.

He spoke at the Sunna Mosque in the working class FIS stronghold of Bab El Oued where a local fundamentalist leader said at least 500 people had been arrested before the prayers.

Hachant said the arrests, of which there was no official confirmation, were "a sign of the FIS victory," but added: "they will not assassinate the FIS or the Islamic state."

Algeria's army-backed leaders halted the elections before last Thursday's planned second round of voting in which the FIS needed just 28 seats to win control of parliament.



ALGIERS, A Muslim is praying in the Islamic Salvation Front stronghold of Bab El Oued, during Friday prayers. — AFP/UNB photo

UK recognises Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan

LONDON, Jan 18: Britain on Friday said it had recognised two more former Soviet Republics, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to complete its diplomatic recognition of all 11-members of the new Commonwealth of Independent States, reports Reuter.

The move left only Georgia, which has not joined the new grouping, un-recognised by Britain and its European Community partners, a Foreign Office spokesman said.

Japan to emerge as N-power, says DPRK

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 18: North Korea's U N Envoy denied on Friday that his country had any nuclear weapons programme but expressed fears that Japan would become a nuclear power within a few years, reports Reuter.

"We know that Japan is no planning to import plenty of plutonium to produce 100 or 150 nuclear weapons in a few year's time," Ambassador Pak Gil Yon said, quoting what he said were United States and South Korean press reports.

They claimed they were delivering copies of the Muslim holy book, the Quran, but most observers believe the shipments were arms.

Earlier this month, top Pakistani officials told Hezb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar they would support a moderate government in Kabul headed by the deposed king.

"I have been told the United States, the Russians, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Kabul regime, Pakistan and some groups of the Mujahideen have accepted Zahir Shah as the future ruler of Afghanistan," Hekmatyar said at a recent news conference at his base in eastern Afghanistan.

Days later, Islamabad con-

Off the Record

Presidential candidate denies rumour of womanizing

WASHINGTON: Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton's presidential campaign is dismissing as 'an old and discredited story' a report refashioning unsubstantiated rumours of womanizing by the Democratic presidential hopeful, reports AP.

The London Daily Mail, attributing its report to New York's Star tabloid magazine, carried in its Friday editions the allegations of a former Arkansas state employee who was fired for making repeated calls to Nicaragua on state telephones.

The fired state worker, Larry Nichols, who has vowed repeatedly to ruin Clinton, alleges in a lawsuit that Clinton had extramarital affairs with at least five women. Nichols made the allegations in a lawsuit challenging his dismissal, and frequently stages solo protests in Little Rock, the capital of Arkansas.

"All this was rooted in some lies and allegations made against me in the last election in Arkansas," Clinton said Thursday night. "The press exhaustively investigated it and never ran anything about it because it was all bull."

Clinton's campaign manager, David Wilhelm, called the allegations "an old and discredited story that no Arkansas paper felt obliged to run in the last (gubernatorial) campaign."

Equal rights the topless way

GUELPH, Ontario: A Canadian woman who strolled without a top on a hot day to support her claim that women should have the same right as men to take off their shirts was fined 75 dollar (\$5 US) on Friday for indecent exposure, reports Reuter.

The essence of the matter here is that anyone who thinks male breasts and female breasts are the same thing is not living in the real world," Judge Bruce Payne told Owen Jacob, a 20-year-old University of Guelph student of women studies.

Jacob strolled topless for four hours over two days last July in temperatures of 33 Celsius (90 Fahrenheit) before public complaints led to her arrest.

The judge, passing sentence, said he had considered an absolute discharge but objected to Jacob's promise during her trial last year that she would take more topless strolls to prove her point, the Canadian press news agency reported.

Jacob's lawyer had argued her rights to sexual equality under the charter of rights had been violated. But a prosecutor said women's breasts, unlike men's, can be sexually provocative.

"What's different this year is the flu and recession have taken people who ordinarily donate blood out of the donor pool," Lane said.

She said corporate mergers, layoffs and low morale have reduced employee blood drives.

Other blood bank workers say they have lost donors among returned Desert Storm veterans. The soldiers are forbidden to donate blood until January 1993 because some carry a parasite that can be transmitted through blood transfusions, said Patricia Grote, a spokeswoman for Life Source Blood Center, which serves 60 hospitals in Chicago.

Comfort girls may be uncomfortable to Japan

SEOUL: The Foreign Minister said Saturday that South Korea may demand compensation from Japan for tens of thousands of Korean women forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers during World War II, reports AP.

It was the strongest statement as yet by the South Korean government on the subject. It came only hours after Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa departed Seoul, ending a state visit marred by angry protests demanding that Japan atone further for wartime atrocities.

The Foreign Minister's remarks, coupled with a broad new investigation launched by the government, seemed likely to escalate the issue of the so-called "comfort girls," and heighten anti-Japanese feelings in Korea.

"Unlike forced draftees, the matter of 'comfort girls' was not included in the discussions when South Korea and Japan concluded a basic agreement normalizing relations in 1965," the official, Lee Sang-ock, told Korean reporters.

Historians say 70,000 to 200,000 young Korean women were forced into the Teishintai, a corps that included sex slaves for soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army in China, Southeast Asia and Taiwan.

Libya won't attend UN council debate

NICOSIA, JAN 18: Libya said on Friday its foreign minister would not attend a UN Security Council debate on alleged Libyan involvement in the bombing of two airliners, reports Reuter.

A Foreign Ministry source, quoted by the official Libyan news agency, Jana, denied reports that Ibrahim Mohamed Beshari would go to New York to contest a resolution sponsored by the United States, Britain and France.

The resolution is based on investigations into the destruction of a Pan Am aircraft in December 1988, over Lockerbie, Scotland, and a French plane in September 1989, over Niger. A total of 441 people died in the blasts.

"An informed source at the (Foreign Ministry) denied reports that have been circulated regarding the travelling of Ibrahim Beshari... to New York to attend the Security Council session," Jana, received in Cyprus, said.

The resolution, still under discussion, would call on Libya to respond immediately to requests for handing over two Libyan indicated in the United States and Britain for the Lockerbie bombing and for similar cooperation with the French case.

Yeltsin urges armed forces to remain united

MOSCOW, Jan 18: Russian President Boris Yeltsin on Friday called on the armed forces of the former Soviet Union to 'preserve civilian peace' and remain united, reports AFP.

While acknowledging that officers meeting here to discuss the former Soviet military's future had 'serious reasons' to convene, he noted that 'the army has made an entry on the political stage.'

Yeltsin's address to the 5,000 officers was broadcast by the central television network of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which replaced the Soviet Union last month.

The unity of the armed forces 'does not hamper independence (of CIS members) but rather strengthens it', Yeltsin said.

Pakistan's new Afghan policy worries Mujahideen

ISLAMABAD, Jan 18: Pakistan has begun distancing itself from rebels fighting for a fundamentalist Islamic government in Afghanistan, a move that could help end Afghanistan's civil war and enhance trade with Central Asia, reports AP.

The policy change has angered the Afghan guerrillas, who say they will fight until their country is under strict Islamic rule and could make Pakistan pay for its betrayal.

Throughout the 13-year-old war, Pakistan has been the conduct for more than 2 billion dollar arms from the United States and Saudi Arabia to the Mujahideen, or Islamic holy warriors, fighting the communist-style government

of Afghan President Najibullah. It has also provided safety for some 3.5 million Afghan refugees and bases for some of the heavily armed guerrillas. Many Pakistanis have tired of their guests.

Most of the weapons were funnelled to the radical Hezb-e-Islami, or Party of Islam, considered the strongest Afghan guerrilla group and one which would establish a government sympathetic to Pakistan.

But the collapse of communism and the breakup of the Soviet Union, Kabul's main benefactor, led Islamabad to re-think its policy. It now sees deposed Afghan King Zahir Shah as the key to a political settlement in Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who heads a conservative government, last month sent a high-level delegation north to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan to explore trade links.

At each stop, Pakistani and diplomatic sources said, the message was the same: the former Soviet republics won't accept a fundamentalist Islamic regime in Kabul and won't establish ties with any government that does.

Since the Soviet Army ended its nine-year occupation of Afghanistan and withdrew in February 1989, some Afghan rebels have occasionally crossed into the former Soviet republics.

They claimed they were delivering copies of the Muslim holy book, the Quran, but most observers believe the shipments were arms.

Earlier this month, top Pakistani officials told Hezb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar they would support a moderate government in Kabul headed by the deposed king.

"I have been told the United States, the Russians, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Kabul regime, Pakistan and some groups of the Mujahideen have accepted Zahir Shah as the future ruler of Afghanistan," Hekmatyar said at a recent news conference at his base in eastern Afghanistan.

Days later, Islamabad con-

firming that Pakistan's army chief, Gen. Asif Nawaz, had gone to Rome and met with Gen. Abdul Wali, a close aide and the former King's son-in-law.

Pakistan earlier refused any high-level contact with the former king or his associates, fearing it would jeopardize its relations with the rebels.

Fundamentalists oppose Zahir Shah, saying he paved the way for communist rule in Afghanistan, and Hekmatyar warned his return could provoke fighting.

He suggested Pakistan step up security around refugee camps supported by pro-Zahir Shah rebel groups.

Although some commanders have abandoned him and

his military strength is uncertain, most Afghans and diplomats believe Hekmatyar has enough weapons stockpiled to cause problems.

Zahir Shah, 77, ruled Afghanistan for 40 years before he was overthrown in 1973 by his cousin, Mohammed Daoud. He has been living in Italy ever since.

His name has been banded about for years as Afghanistan's key peace, though the idea was first dismissed as far-fetched.

Now many Afghans believe the 77-year-old former monarch is the only hope for peace and the only leader capable of heading a neutral, interim government that could oversee national elections.