

ASEAN won't invite world powers to sign Treaty of Amity

SINGAPORE, Jan 23: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) scrapped plans today to invite the world's major powers to sign its 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, a senior official said here, reports AFP.

The official, who asked not to be named, said that in theory anybody could accede to the treaty, which commits signatories to the peaceful settlement of disputes.

But ASEAN foreign ministers, lacking a consensus in their meeting here ahead of next week's summit, agreed to dispense with an explicit invitation to world powers to sign the document, the official said.

Thailand had pushed for an invitation to the United States, Britain, France, Russia

and China—the five permanent members of the UN Security Council — to sign the treaty.

But Indonesia has said it opposed giving much greater weight to the treaty, which it sees as intended for regional countries only.

Jakarta prefers committing the powers to adherence to the 1971 initiative to make southeast Asia a "Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN)."

ASEAN Groups Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In addition to these six, the only outside country to sign the treaty has been Papua New Guinea.

The summit is expected to invite Vietnam and Laos to sign.

Russia to welcome China to ME peace talks

MOSCOW, Jan 23: Russia would welcome a Chinese delegation to the Mideast peace talks in Moscow, an official said Wednesday, reports AP.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Yang Fuchang was quoted on Wednesday as saying in Beijing he would lead a Chinese delegation to the Jan. 28-29 talks. It would be China's first appearance at Mideast peace talks.

Israeli state radio said Yang made the comment to visiting Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, who was in Beijing to establish diplomatic relations

with China, a longtime champion of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

An Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman traveling with Levy said Israel has agreed to China's participation.

In Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Vitally Churkin said he had no formal confirmation that China would attend the meeting. But he added "our attitude toward this would be, of course, that it would be desirable, considering (China's) significance in the international arena."

China's relations with the former Soviet Union have improved slowly since the countries patched a 30-year rift in 1989. Both sides have restrained their public criticism of each other, although privately Beijing has blasted Soviet reforms and Moscow has criticized China's hard line.

China is also interested in expanding its international influence to prevent too much power from accruing to the United States as a consequence of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Churkin congratulated China and Israel on establishing diplomatic ties. "We're generally very happy when relations between any two states progress and improve," he said at a briefing.

He said Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians so far have not accepted invitations to the multilateral session in Moscow, which will run parallel to bilateral talks aimed at finding a settlement between Israelis and Arabs in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestinians in Israeli-occupied lands.

13 killed in Lankan violence

COLOMBO, Jan 23: Eight government soldiers and five Tamil rebels were killed when rebels attacked soldiers escorting Tamil farmers to their fields in northern Sri Lanka, a military spokesman said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The 16 farmers from a refugee camp in an army-controlled area had gone to work their fields in areas near Vavuniya where the rebels are active when their escorts were attacked on Wednesday. None of the farmers was hurt.

Soldiers killed five rebels in a counter-attack, the spokesman said. The rebels are fighting for a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east.

Only parts of Vavuniya are under army control.

Hundreds of FIS activists held, rally outside mosques banned

ALGIERS, Jan 23: The government has arrested the leader of Algeria's Islamic party and banned all gatherings outside mosques in an effort to break the back of the Muslim fundamentalist movement, reports AP.

The moves Wednesday came 10 days after the military-backed government cancelled Algeria's first free parliamentary elections, which the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front was winning. Troops were sent into the streets, and hundreds of fundamentalists reportedly have been arrested.

The Islamic Front said its acting president, Abdelkader Hachani, was arrested while riding in a car in the suburb of Bachjara, a stronghold of fundamentalist support. Front officials said three companions arrested with Hachani were let go.

Hachani was later brought before a civil court for instigating an army mutiny, Algerian television reported.

It quoted Defence Minister Khaled Nezzar as saying the army would "apply the law in all its rigor." There were no details on the specific charges Hachani faced.

"Algeria is today at a crossroads buffeted by many dangers," Nezzar said. The Islamic Front issued a statement, signed by Hachani, on Tuesday that urged the army to "rid the people" of authorities now in power.

APS, the state news agency, and the radio also reported the arrest of journalists at the in-

dependent daily El Khabar, an Arab-language newspaper that had printed two Islamic Front communiqués.

About the time Hachani was arrested, the government announced a ban on any public assembly around mosques — an order certain to increase tensions with members of the Islamic Front.

All gatherings around

mosques are officially forbidden no matter what the day or hour," Algerian officials said in a published statement.

The ban comes two days before Friday prayers. Since it was recognized as a legal party in 1989, the Islamic Front's leaders have used prayer day at the mosque to gather support, demonstrate the party's strength and spread its message.

A government statement said the Cabinet also would take steps "to encourage education and religious practice and to prohibit all partisan activity" within mosques. It did not elaborate.

Hachani, a 36-year-old former teacher and petrochemical engineer, has been serving as head of the party since the arrest in June of party leaders Abassi Madani and Ali Belhadj.

He presided over the sweeping gains made by the fundamentalists during the opening round of parliamentary voting last month, the first multi-party national elections since independence from France in 1962. The party was expected to do well in runoff elections last week, but the government cancelled the vote.

Algeria had been ruled by the National Liberation Front as a one-party, Marxist state since independence. The army, whose leaders are hostile to the fundamentalists, forced President Chadli Bendjedid to resign Jan 11 because he was ready to share power with the Islamic Front.



Abdelkader Hachani ... charged with mutiny

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US urged to appreciate position Nuclear programme represents national consensus: Ishaq

ISLAMABAD, Jan 23: President Ghulam Ishaq Khan has said that Pakistan's nuclear programme represented a national consensus, and he urged the United States to appreciate this position, reports AFP.

According to an official report to Pakistani television Wednesday, the President made the observation during a meeting with the Chief of US Naval Operations, Admiral Frank Kelso.

Washington froze 600 million dollars in economic and military assistance to Pakistan 15 months ago on suspicion that Islamabad's nuclear programme is weapons oriented.

Ishaq Khan said the present difficulties in US-Pakistan relations over the nuclear issue could be resolved to mutual satisfaction of "each side objectively analyzed and appreciated the constraints on the other."

Pakistan respected US laws and could not "grudge" the US right to interpret them, he was quoted as telling the Admiral.

Ishaq Khan said the United States should also realize that "Pakistan's peaceful nuclear programme represented a national consensus arising out of objective needs and has to be

respected as such."

He said the difference in the approaches of the two countries was essentially a "difference in perceptions." Otherwise, he added, Pakistan's concern for nuclear non-proliferation was "no less serious than that of the United States itself."

Referring to the nuclear capability of other countries in the region, he said Pakistan could not possibly "close its eyes to them."

"This objective reality must be kept in view while singling out Pakistan for certain type of treatment," the President said.

The United States wants Pakistan to open its nuclear facilities to international inspection, while Islamabad insists on a regional solution to the nuclear issue that would include India which exploded a nuclear device in 1974.

Kelso was quoted as saying that it would be his effort "remaining within US laws" to better ties between the navies of the two countries.

The Admiral, who held talks with senior military officials on bilateral military cooperation after his arrival Tuesday.

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Off the Record

AIDS test for doctors

ASPEN, Colo: Treating celebrities who take a spill on the ski slopes is Aspen Valley Hospital's usual claim to the limelight. But its new policy of requiring AIDS tests of employees has put it at the forefront of a national debate, reports AP.

The hospital said it is trying to bolster public confidence with the move, which takes effect in March, but criticism is growing. Opponents of mandatory AIDS tests for health workers have prevailed elsewhere across the country.

The medical staff at the hospital, which serves 50,000 people in this Rocky Mountain resort and surrounding tourist towns during peak skiing season, unanimously agreed in December to annual AIDS tests for its health care workers, including 25 staff doctors.

"We want to be able to say to a patient, 'This medical staff is aware of your concern and we've been tested and will go along with the Centre for Disease Control guidelines,'" said Dr. John Freeman, president of the medical staff. "To practice safe sex, safe surgery, safe whatever, you've got to know what you are."

In an editorial, The Denver Post criticized mandatory AIDS testing as expensive and unnecessary and said it "merely feeds the AIDS hysteria stirred up by the Kimberly Bergalis case."

Nose case runs nine years

NEW DELHI: After a nine-year trial, an Indian court sentenced a man to six months imprisonment for breaking his wife's nose, a newspaper said Wednesday, reports AP.

The Indian Express said Monday's court decision also fined the offender, Noor Ahmed, 20 dollars.

New Delhi district Judge RS Mahlia rejected Ahmed's appeal for leniency because he had endured the lengthy trial. The judge ruled that a crime had been committed and must be punished, the paper said.

Ahmed's wife, Fatma, told the court her husband beat her because she could not give him 2,000 rupees (dhs 77 at today's exchange rates) that he had demanded.

Abortion: A potential bugaboo for Bush

WASHINGTON: If one issue clearly divides Republican President George Bush and the five Democratic contenders seeking to unseat him, it is abortion and Bush has made it clear he is not wavering from his opposition to it, reports Reuters.

Bush, who favoured legalised abortion until he became the vice-presidential candidate on the winning ticket of former President Ronald Reagan in 1980, is now firmly against it.

He forcefully said so again on Wednesday, the 19th anniversary of a US supreme court ruling legalizing abortion, in an amplified telephone hookup to a rally near the White House.

Bush told some 70,000 marchers who came to Washington to denounce legalised abortion that the right to life begins with conception — a controversial view opposed by pro-choice activists.

The most compelling legacy of this nation is (Thomas) Jefferson's concept that all are created equal. He doesn't say "born," he says created, Bush said.

Abortion could become a politically explosive, pivotal issue in this campaign if the court outlaws legalised abortions or leaves it entirely to states to decide whether women can get them in their jurisdictions.



Khmer Rouge victim of aggression: Samphan

PHNOM PENH, Jan 23: The Khmer Rouge guerrillas on Thursday blamed the government for recent major fighting in central Cambodia and said they have invited UN peacekeeping forces to come and see for themselves, reports AP.

"We are victims of aggression," Khmer Rouge President Khieu Samphan said upon arriving in Phnom Penh to meet Yasushi Akashi, newly appointed head of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia.

At least 50 civilians have been killed or wounded in Kompong Thom province since January 5 in the country's worst fighting since an October peace treaty between the government and a Khmer rouge-dominated guerrilla coalition, government military commanders said.

Artillery duels have driven more than 10,000 people from their homes to refuge along National Highway No. 6, which links the provincial capital and Phnom Penh, 140 kilometers (85 miles) to the south.

Government officials said fighting also has erupted in northwestern Siem Riep province. They said Khmer Rouge guerrillas overran two government military positions there Monday. Details were not available.

Khmer Rouge officials said they have invited UN troops to come immediately to their zones in Kompong Thom. The UN forces refused, diplomats said, because a small advance UN contingent in Cambodia

does not have a mandate to investigate truce violations.

Akashi said Wednesday he does not expect the main peacekeeping force to arrive before April because of UN budgetary problems.

Premier Hun Sen's people "are opposed to the peace process and their territory," said a Khmer Rouge official in Phnom Penh, ambassador Mak Sen.

He said 10,000 to 20,000 troops of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia are needed as soon as possible.

Who can decide who is right or wrong? We need a third party to verify cease-fire violations and that is UNTAC," he said in an interview Thursday.

Diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Khmer Rouge began protesting the fighting early this month. The Phnom Penh government, they said, has not officially protested to a joint military working group that the four Cambodian factions established to monitor truce violations.

Netaji's birth anniversary celebrated

CALCUTTA, Jan 23: The 96th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was celebrated throughout West Bengal today in a befitting manner amidst taking out of prabhat pheris, unfurling of the national flag and seminars on national integration and Netaji's role in the freedom movement, reports PTI.

At a function held at Netaji Bhawan in south Calcutta, the annual "Netaji Award" of the Netaji Research Bureau was presented jointly to Major-General Shah Nawaz Khan (Posthumous), Colonel Prem Kumar Sahgal and Colonel Gurbaksh Singh Dhillion, the three Indian national army heroes tried by the British at the Red Fort in 1945.

The Acting governor of West Bengal Mohammed Shaif Gureshi, presided over the function which was also attended by the union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, Ajit Panja and the noted film actress Kanan Devi.

BRIEFLY

Israeli mock raids on Lebanon:

Israeli jets staged mock raids over a wide area of South Lebanon on Wednesday hours after pro-Israeli militiamen fought guerrillas trying to enter the Jewish state's "security zone", security sources said, Reuters reports from Lebanon.

They said at least six warplanes flew at low altitudes over the southern port cities of Tyre and Sidon and over the Iqlim Al-Toufah mountainous ridge, 40 km (25 miles) south of Beirut where pro-Iranian militants maintain bases.

Some 1,000 Israeli troops and the 3,000-strong client South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia patrol the 15 km (nine mile) deep border strip inside Lebanon. It was set up in 1985 to curb guerrilla attacks on northern Israel.

Violence claims 5 in S Africa:

Five people were killed in black faction fighting on commuter trains in the Johannesburg area, police said Wednesday, AP reports from Johannesburg.

An unidentified group armed with machetes and clubs got off a train Wednesday evening and assaulted people on the platform of a station between Johannesburg and the Soweto black township, police Capt. Ida Van Zweel said.

Rival political factions often attack each other's members on black commuter trains in the Johannesburg area. There was no immediate identification of the attackers in the latest incidents.

Rebels lay down guns in Nicaragua:

Rearmed Contra rebels and their Sandinista foes have begun putting down their guns, the government said Wednesday, reports AP from Nicaragua.

The Interior Ministry said 70 "recontras" and 80 former Sandinista soldiers disarmed Tuesday at a ceremony in Jinotega province, 110 miles (170 kms) north of Managua, the capital.

The weapons were destroyed on the spot as leaders of both groups promised to work for democracy and peace.

The head of the United Nations observer mission in Nicaragua, Santiago Murray, a representative of the Roman Catholic Church and Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado presided over the ceremony.

The government hopes to disarm all the recontras and re-compas, as the ex-soldiers are called, by the end of April.

F-16 crashes into Pacific:

A US F-16 jet crashed into the Pacific off Japan Thursday after brushing against a refuelling plane, a press report said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The jet took off from the US air force base at Misawa in Aomori prefecture, northern Japan, the Kyodo news agency report said.

Further details were not immediately available.

Journalist killed in Colombia:

A journalist who had received death threats was fatally stabbed while he slept on Wednesday in the city of Cali, the violent centre of Colombia's biggest drug cartel, authorities said, Reuters reports from Colombia.

Carlos Llanos, News Director of a radio station, was stabbed in his bed by an unknown assailant. Authorities said they did not know the motive for the attack.

Llanos, 39, was campaigning for a seat on the Cali city council and co-workers said he had received death threats.

He was the 63rd journalist killed in Colombia since 1977.

Zhao acquitted of charges

BEIJING, Jan 23: Disgraced former Chinese Communist Party leader Zhao Ziyang has been cleared of charges of counter-revolution made against him after pro-democracy protests were crushed, a reliable source said on Thursday.

The source told Reuters Zhao had been cleared by a party committee investigating him on charges of splitting the party and supporting the "rioting" the official term to describe the demonstrations crushed by the army around Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.

The announcement was made at a top level party meeting last month by Wang Renzhong, the official leading the investigation, the source said.

In a separate development, the source said Zhao's former right-hand man, Bao Tong, had been arrested by military security officers from his Beijing home at the dead of night on Tuesday.

Before leading him away, the uniformed men read out a document charging Bao with "counter-revolutionary incitement," according to the source, who is a close associate of Bao.

Bao, the intellectual force behind Zhao's programme of economic and political reform, was arrested a few days before the Tiananmen killings

Karami tells chiefs of missions Israel has annexed part of Lebanon

BEIRUT, Jan 23: Prime Minister Omar Karami told ambassadors of the United States and other countries Wednesday that Israel has absorbed part of a southern hamlet into its self-proclaimed "Security Zone", reports AP.

As the diplomatic demarche was under way in Beirut, a tank force of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army militia carried out a reconnaissance patrol north of the security zone in the western sector of the Bekaa valley in an apparent pursuit of suspected guerrilla infiltrators.

Six tanks advanced about half a mile (about one kilometre) north of the security zone in the Zummaraya sector at about midday (1000 GMT) behind cannon and machine-gun fire and withdrew an hour later. Police said no casualties were reported.

A statement released by Karami's office said the prime minister told U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker and the chiefs of the British, French, Russian and Chinese diplomatic missions about "the grave situation in south Lebanon arising from Israel's aggressions."

It said Karami, a Sunni Muslim, summoned the am-

Iran may take steps to end Afghan war

NICOSIA, Jan 23: Iran said on Wednesday it was considering launching a new initiative to end 13 years of civil war in neighbouring Afghanistan, the national news agency IRNA said, reports Reuters.

IRNA quoted Deputy Foreign Minister Allaeddin Boroujerdi as telling two Afghan rebel leaders: "Iran is studying prospects for a new initiative to solve the situation in Afghanistan."

Boroujerdi also said Iran was ready to offer relief supplies to Afghanistan and hoped that other Muslim countries would follow suit.

TASS may become RITA

MOSCOW, Jan 23: Tass, the state news agency that carried reports of Soviet officialdom for decades, said Wednesday that its name may become "RITA" under a reorganization proposed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, reports AP.

Russian Information Minister Mikhail Poltoranin told the parliament's media committee that under the proposal, the agency would be called the Russian Information Telegraph Agency. RITA's initials in Russian are the same as in English.

Ruling forces close in on Gamsakhurdia loyalists

KUTAISSI, Georgia, Jan 23: Forces loyal to the ruling Military Council were closing in Wednesday on supporters of ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia in western Georgia, officials said, reports AP.

The Russian TV news program "Vesti" said Military Council loyalists were preparing to storm the Black Sea port of Poti, where Gamsakhurdia's supporters have mined a bridge, the harbor and a bakery.

Talks on ending the conflict have failed so far although they

were resumed Wednesday, according to the Georgia's Iprinda news agency. Clashes between Gamsakhurdia loyalists and governing Military Council forces have disrupted transportation and resulted in shortages of food and medicine throughout western Georgia.

Kamaz Elgmezidze, head of intelligence in the office of the military commander of Kutaisi, said forces loyal to the Ministry Council had taken up position in Sinaki near the town of Zugdidi, a Gamsakhurdia stronghold 250 kilometers from Tbilisi.

He said senior Military Council member Dzhaba Ioseliani had several dozen men with him and a couple of armored personnel carriers.

The Russian Information Agency, in a dispatch from Tbilisi, said there were about 800 Gamsakhurdia supporters in Zugdidi, and about 120 of them had automatic rifles. The rest had hunting weapons, it said.

Military Council loyalists firing blanks into the air dispersed a pro-Gamsakhurdia rally of about 1,000 people Wednesday in Tbilisi, accord-

ing to Iprinda. There were no reports of any injuries.

News reports have said between one and four people were killed and up to 15 wounded in fighting in western Georgia since Tuesday.

Soviet military officials in Kutaisi, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Military Council forces were preparing for a final assault on Zugdidi.

Iprinda reported that Gamsakhurdia was in the town of Gali, 25 kilometers from the Black Sea.

The agency said Gamsakhurdia was feeling

poorly and was receiving intravenous transfusions. However, Iprinda did not say what Gamsakhurdia was suffering from or what kind of medicine he was taking.

Gamsakhurdia has not been seen in public since he returned to Georgia on Jan. 16 after a 10-day exile in neighboring Armenia, where he sought refuge.

Bloody fighting between Gamsakhurdia supporters and the backers of the New Military Council killed at least 113 people since December 22.