

Big Four meet on N-arms soon

WASHINGTON, Feb 5: The United States Tuesday agreed to French proposal for a meeting of the four powers with nuclear weapons stationed in Europe, the State Department said, reports AFP.

Undersecretary of State for International Security Affairs Reginald Bartholomew will discuss issues of mutual concern regarding former Soviet

US not worried about its forces in Europe

WASHINGTON, Feb 5: The Pentagon has abandoned its concern about the ability of US forces to remobilize quickly in Europe, estimating that it could be years before Russia is ready to mount an attack, General Colin Powell said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Powell, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that only 18 months ago he feared the two weeks the United States needed to mount a defence in Europe would not be sufficient in the face of Soviet aggression.

But now it could take the new Commonwealth of Independent States

(CIS) years, decades, a generation to create such a threat, Powell said.

nuclear forces" in meetings with France, Britain and Russia, according to a State Department communique.

"We have discussed and continue to discuss the same issues bilaterally with officials of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, said the communique, which did not specify whether these nuclear powers of the former Soviet Union would participate in the talks.

Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will continue to be consulted on the issue, the State Department added.

President George Bush, initially cool to the proposed conference, had given his agreement in principle when he met with President Francois Mitterrand Friday at the United Nations, a US official speaking on condition of anonymity said.

French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas had said Tuesday that the US government had agreed to attend the four way meeting at a place and time yet to be determined.

Mitterrand had proposed the meeting September 11, but it drew a lukewarm response from the United States, which said talks on the fate of nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union should take place within NATO.



Former Pak Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto walks with her daughter Bukhtawar and son Bilawal on Wednesday as she comes out from Sind High Court building where she met her husband Asif Zardari who is under detention and facing trial. —AFP photo

Abortive coup in Venezuela: 300 feared killed

CARACAS, Feb 5: Fourteen soldiers and one civilian were killed in Tuesday's abortive coup against President Carlos Andres Perez, Defence Minister Fernando Ochoa Antich said, reports AFP.

However, police sources speaking on condition of anonymity placed the toll at around 300 dead or wounded, but offered no breakdown.

Another 51 military personnel were wounded in the uprising, while 133 officers and 950 soldiers were arrested, Ochoa Antich told a press conference. He said only army personnel were involved, not the air force or navy.

The minister declined to provide a breakdown of rebels and loyalists killed in the fighting that broke in Caracas and spread to other cities after mutinous forces led by disgruntled mid- and low-level officers attacked the Miraflores presidential palace and La Casona presidential residence before dawn with small arms, mortars and tanks.

Ochoa Antich announced around mid-day that the attempted putsch had been crushed.

With the government reporting sniper fire still ringing out near the presidential palace, Perez went on national television and

radio Tuesday night and called on Venezuelans to go about their normal routine Wednesday and report for work. Students should attend classes as usual, he said.

Perez also expressed gratitude for international solidarity towards him and his government.

Inter-Korean summit in March

SEOUL, Feb 5: South and North Korea have agreed in principle to hold a historic inter-Korean summit talks in March to discuss peace and prospects for unification, state radio reported today, says AFP.

The Korea Broadcasting System (KBS) radio quoted a high-ranking government source as saying the two Koreas had agreed in principle to hold the meeting between North Korean President Kim Il-Sung and his Southern counterpart Roh Tae-Woo early March.

The exact date will be fixed when South Korean Prime Minister Chung Woo-Shik meets Kim on February 20 during his visit to Pyongyang for inter-Korean prime ministers' talks.

Off the Record

Minor does major crime

MARQUETTE, Mich: A 12-year-old boy sexually assaulted a 5-year-old girl and beat her into a coma, police said, reports AP.

The boy was charged Monday after the girl was found unconscious Sunday behind a hotel where she and the Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, boy had been staying with their families, police said. She was in critical condition Tuesday.

The boy admitted beating the girl, saying she had been 'bugging' him near the hotel's vending machines, police said. He was held by juvenile authorities on 75,000 dollar bail on charges of assault with intent to kill and criminal sexual conduct.

If convicted, he could be held until age 21.

Shake it free by Jupiter

PASADENA, Calif: The Galileo spacecraft fired its thrusters Tuesday in the latest attempt to open a jammed antenna that threatens to cripple the spacecraft's 1995-1997 exploration of Jupiter, AP reports.

The three-hour series of thruster pulses turned the spacecraft 165 degrees so the umbrella-shaped main antenna dish was shielded by Galileo's sun shade, said Jim Wilson, spokesman for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

It was the fourth time engineers turned the spacecraft in an effort to free the antenna, which failed to fully open to its desired 4.8-meter width last April 11.

Engineers believe three of the antenna's 18 ribs became stuck against its central tower. By cooling the antenna, they hope to shrink pins that hold the ribs to sockets in the tower, letting the antenna fully open.

NASA won't know until at least this weekend if the repair effort succeeded. A smaller antenna is working but can transmit much less information than the main dish.

She's Sophia Loren by looks Mussolini by heart

ROME: Alessandra Mussolini, the granddaughter of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, says she will stand as a neo-fascist candidate in April parliamentary elections, says Reuter.

Alessandra 28, was on Tuesday quoted by the Milan daily Corriere Della Sera as saying she would run for the Neo-Fascist Msc Party because it is the party that is closest to the ideas of my grandfather.

"I feel very close to him," said Mussolini, who is also the niece of filmstar Sophia Loren. "It is a family tie of which I have always been very proud."

"If I am elected, I will follow the example of my grandfather," she said.

"Until recently the world Fascist was considered shameful. Fortunately that period has passed. In fact, there is now a reassessment of how much grandpa Benito did for Italy."

Alessandra, a medical student and actress who has inherited her glamorous aunt's looks would be the first Mussolini in the Italian parliament since her grandfather.

43 days on chocolate

KATHMANOU, Nepal: An Australian hiker who survived 43 days in a Himalayan valley on one chocolate bar and an inexhaustible supply of snow was reported Tuesday to be improving and glad his ordeal was over, reports AP.

A rescue team winched James Scott, 23, into a hovering helicopter Monday from under a rock overhang in a deep valley where he had sheltered from knee-deep snow and savage wether for six weeks.

"He was very relieved to be back in society...and alive again," said Frank H Garlick, another Australian working at Patan Hospital in Kathmandu.

The hiker's father, Ken Scott, said in Brisbane that his son's survival was a 'miracle'.

Garlick said Scott was suffering from malnutrition and dehydration and was being treated with intravenous fluids. "There is little improvement in his general condition," he said.



Singer Michael Jackson announces his 1992 "Dangerous" tour and a major sponsorship deal with Pepsi-Cola at a press conference Monday at Radio City Music Hall. The tour will kick off in Europe during the summer. —AFP photo.

BRIEFLY

Retrial of French novelist ordered: A French court on Tuesday ordered a retrial for a best-selling French novelist accused of plagiarising the classic US southern melodrama by Margaret Mitchell, Gone, With the Wind, AFP reports from Paris.

The decision by the Supreme Court of Appeal reversed an earlier ruling by the Paris Appeal Court in November 1990 on the three volume novel by Regine Desforges, La Bicyclette Bleu, (The Blue Bicycle), that a "similar starting point" with the American novel did not necessarily constitute plagiarism.

The case will now be re-submitted to the Appeal Court at Versailles, southwest of Paris.

Strike paralyses Philippine city: A transport strike against a power rate increase paralysed Cagayan city Tuesday on the second day of protests in the southern Philippines, reports AP from Philippines.

Police Chief Nilo Esqueria said tens of thousands of commuters were forced to walk when an estimated 80 percent of public transport workers struck at dawn.

Esqueria said demonstrators also put up barricades along major streets around the city to stop other vehicles. The strike also crippled transportation to provinces surrounding Cagayan de Oro, 800 kilometers (500 miles) southeast of Manila.

No arrests were made during the day's protest, which ended peacefully late afternoon.

Iran's policy on Rushdie unchanged:

Iran's policy on British author Salman Rushdie—sentenced to death three years ago by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini—has not changed, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said, Wednesday, AFP reports from Iran.

"Our policy is the same as previously," Velayati told a press conference during a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in the Cypriot, southern coastal resort of Larnaca.

Khomeini, Iran's former spiritual guide, sentenced Rushdie to death on February 14, 1989 on charges of blasphemy against Islam in the book "The Satanic Verses."

The Indian-born author has since been in hiding under British police protection and rarely ventures out in public.

Myanmar urged to stop crackdown:

Iran on Tuesday urged Myanmar to stop what it called an "inhuman" crackdown which has driven tens of thousands of Muslims to Bangladesh, reports Reuter from Iran.

"We hope the Myanmar government would create grounds for the return of the Muslims to their towns by quickly stopping the suppression," said a Foreign Ministry spokesman, quoted by Tehran Radio.

He denounced the crackdown as an "inhuman act" and said Iran was worried about the situation.

About 70,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar's Arakan state in recent week.

Palestinian prisoner dies in jail:

A Palestinian prisoner died Tuesday in jail from injuries sustained during questioning by Israeli forces and one day after he told a Military Court that he had been tortured, his lawyers reported, AFP says from Jerusalem.

Mustapha Akawi, 33, was arrested last week in Jerusalem during a crack-down targeting Palestinians suspected of belonging to the radical popular front for the liberation of Palestine.

His arrest coincided with the detention under police guard in a Paris hospital of PFLP leader George Habash.

On Monday Akawi told a military court in Hebron, on the occupied West Bank, that he had been tortured during his detention, his lawyers said. They said the tribunal ordered an inquiry after seeing this body covered by bruises.

Bandits kill policeman in Karachi:

Armed bandits killed a policeman and abducted eight passengers after raiding a passenger train in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh early Tuesday morning, an official statement said, AFP reports from Karachi.

The train was attacked at the Piarogoth Railway Station in Dadu district, the statement said, adding that the bandits robbed passengers in several compartments, shooting dead a constable who tried to stop them.

Thirty-one passengers were abducted by the fleeing bandits but 23 of them were released later in a forest, a statement said.

India received Heavy Water from Ceausescu to make bomb

OSLO, Feb 5: Norway said on Tuesday that India illegally received a shipment of Norwegian Heavy Water, which can be used for making atomic bombs, from the government of former Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu nearly six years ago, reports Reuter.

The Heavy Water Norway sold to Romania was sent on to India," senior public prosecutor Anstein Gjengedal said after talks with Romanian officials in Bucharest.

The foreign ministry said Norway's embassy in New Delhi had asked the Indian government if it had any information on the rerouting of

the 12.5 tonne of heavy water, which was sold to Romania in 1986 for peaceful use in a planned power plant.

India has previously denied Norwegian suspicions that it received an earlier consignment of 15 tonne of Norwegian Heavy Water — deuterium oxide — which was illegally diverted via Switzerland in 1983.

Gjengedal said he and a Norwegian police officer visited Romania last month to track down in 1986 consignment, sold to a chemicals company with close ties to Ceausescu, the Romanian communist dictator toppled in 1989.

"The plane (with the water aboard) flew from Oslo to Bucharest on March 19 (1986), and took off the next day to Bombay," he told Reuter. Both missing shipments were addressed to a Bombay destination.

The indications are rather clear that it (the address) was a branch of the Indian atomic programme. Foreign Ministry spokesman Bjoern Blokhus said.

India denies having atomic bombs but carried out its first nuclear explosion in 1974, saying it was for peaceful purposes.

Gjengedal said investigators believed India was the final destination of the heavy water and not just a transit stop.

India has not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty aimed at stopping the spread of nuclear weapons. International regulations made it illegal to supply the country with more than one tonne of heavy water.

Heavy water is used to control the temperature in nuclear reactors, which can be used to make plutonium, the explosive substance in most atomic bombs. Norway halted heavy water exports in the late 1980s.

Mitterrand won't bow to pressure over stay of Habash

PARIS, Feb 5: French President Francois Mitterrand refused Tuesday to bow to political pressure to sack ministers over the stay here of Palestinian extremist Georges Habash, saying a special parliamentary debate would decide the matter, reports AFP.

The government will make a statement at the emergency session, after which, "if the opposition wants to put a motion of no confidence, then we shall see," a combative Mitterrand said on television.

"If the government is overthrown, I shall respect the institutions," he told interviewers from TFI and Antenne 2 networks, implying that only in that case would he sack his Socialist cabinet.

The president dismissed criticism from the opposition and from among his own Socialist Party ranks over the admission to a hospital here of

Habash this evening, saying that neither himself, nor his ministers had been informed in advance of the arrival.

Senior civil servants who allowed Habash in had made "an error of judgement" because they handled the case "like routine business," Mitterrand said.

Four senior civil servants from the foreign and interior ministries were sacked and Georgina Dufoux, the president of the French Red Cross, which handled the hospitalisation, was forced to resign from that post and also as an adviser to Mitterrand.

The Palestinian leader returned to Tunis on Saturday amid a growing political row after doctors refused to allow

a French judge to question him.

Mitterrand said there was no reason to detain Habash as there was no warrant out for his arrest.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which Habash heads, has taken responsibility for a number of terrorist attacks in the Middle East, including several plane hijackings.

Mitterrand angrily dismissed opposition calls for the resignation of Foreign Minister Roland Dumas and Interior Minister Philippe Marchand — two personal friends—saying he would not "give in" to opposition calls for early elections, a change of government or the resignation of ministers.



Francois Mitterrand

NAM fails to decide its role

LARNACA, Cyprus, Feb 5: Foreign ministers from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) ended a two-day meeting on Tuesday still uncertain what role the group could play in the post-Cold War era, reports Reuter.

Asked if the 24 ministers and representatives from 54 countries reached any agreement, Cypriot Foreign Minister George Iacovou and chairman of the meeting told a news conference.

"It is too early to say we have consensus, each proposal received a significant measure of support although we did not

expect and consequently did not get consensus on each of these items."

He said although there was a "lot of enthusiasm" to strengthen the movement, the ministers had different ideas on the priorities of its 101 members, most of whom are plagued by economic and political problems.

They will be discussed further at a meeting of NAM foreign ministers in May to prepare for the group's summit in Indonesia, which is taking over the chairmanship of the group from war-torn Yugoslavia.

"It was a brainstorming session. There were a lot of ideas," Iacovou said, adding that some ministers felt that economic issues represented the main challenges facing the movement.

He said recognising that all economic issues are strongly political, the ministers called for increased cooperation between the NAM and the Group of 77, which also includes most third World states.

AFP adds: Non-Aligned foreign ministers and senior officials today agreed that their movement must boost its stature in the United Nations

Ghali invites African leaders

NEW YORK, Feb 5: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has invited chiefs of regional African organizations to a meeting here next week on the civil war in Somalia, UN officials said Tuesday, reports AFP.

A UN spokesman said Boutros-Ghali continued to hope for a solid ceasefire commitment from Somali general Mohamed Aaidid, who has waged a violent campaign since November against forces loyal to interim Somali President Ali Mahdi.

"It is indeed strange that such a bellicose stand comes immediately after discussions between the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers," the party's central committee said in a statement. "This can only be seen as an attempt to sow deeper the seeds of discord."

The Communist Party of India, meanwhile, said it "amounts to instigation for violating the line of control," the border between the two countries.

The line was set after the last war between India and Pakistan, in December 1971.

'Pak strike call blatant interference in Indian affairs'

NEW DELHI, Feb 5: Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and the country's main opposition parties denounced Tuesday the Pakistani Premier's call for a "Solidarity Day" over Kashmir, reports AFP.

Rao said Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's call for a work stoppage in Pakistan to support the Kashmiri independence movement amounted to interference in India's internal affairs and would set back bilateral relations.

"The discordant notes have their relevance and one has to draw conclusions," Rao told reporters.

In Switzerland, Sharif said millions of Pakistan government workers would have Wednesday off and called on other segments of society to take part in pro-Kashmiri independence rallies on the day.

Transport workers and others were expected to observe the worked stoppage.

"We note with deep concern the unacceptable call issued by the Pakistani Prime Minister for a nationwide strike tomorrow as a day of solidarity with the people of Kashmir," Rao said, adding that it raised serious doubts that Pakistan was sincere about reducing tension between the two countries.

India has accused Pakistan of aiding the state's violent secessionist movement, but Islamabad has said it provides only political support for the Kashmiris' legitimate right to self-determination.

Pakistan observed a nationwide work stoppage in 1990 soon after Muslim militants in Indian-held Kashmir launched a separatist movement.

Rao, interviewed upon his return from a trip to the UN Security Council Summit in New York, and Switzerland, where he met with Sharif before his call for the work stoppage, said he was not surprised by Sharif's action.

Setbacks in the bilateral relationship are nothing new, said Rao, yet the two countries should try to overcome their differences by continuing a dialogue aimed at improved relations, he added.

In a less conciliatory statement later, a spokesman for India's Foreign Ministry described Sharif's call "blatant interference in India's affairs" and an attempt to "inflame and incite" violence and militancy.

The Indian government's displeasure with Pakistan was supported by the main opposition party, the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (or Indian People's Party) which described the call for a

work stoppage as "new (Pakistani) adventurism."

The "Francic goings-on in Pakistan are signs of desperation induced by the increasing groundswell of popular indignation the party's parliamentary leader, Lal Krishna Advani.

Former Premier Vishwanath Pratap Singh's Janata Dal (People's Party) said the call went against the spirit of the 1972 India-Pakistan Simla Peace Pact, which provides for a bilateral, negotiated peaceful solution to the Kashmir dispute.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) said the planned protest was "disturbing".

'Bush's China policy has failed'

WASHINGTON, Feb 5: George Mitchell, democratic leader of the US Senate charged yesterday that President George Bush's talks with Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng last week had shown the failure of his China policy, reports Reuter.

The first official meeting between an American President and the Prime Minister of China an event that will help re-establish the legitimacy of this regime in the world community. Underscored the failure of the Bush policy, Mitchell said in a senate speech.

Bush met Li Peng at the United Nations where the two men attended a meeting of the Security Council.

Mitchell, who is from the state of Maine has long been a critic of Bush's policy of maintaining ties with the hardline Beijing government despite a disappointing response to US concerns he and other senators had urged Bush not to meet Li.

Yet the president rejects the evidence so clear to all of us and the watching world, and pursues a failed policy into deeper and more dangerous territory, Mitchell said.