

Russia dismisses Ukraine's claim to Black Sea fleet

MOSCOW, Feb 7: Russia's parliament dismissed Ukraine's claim to the Black Sea fleet on Thursday, but put off until late February further debate on whether Moscow should have given the Crimean peninsula to Ukraine in 1954, reports Reuter.

Crimea now has the status of an autonomous republic within Ukraine. But Russia's parliament has recently questioned the legality of the gift.

Delaying the debate will ensure that problems between Russia and Ukraine, the two most powerful members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, top the agenda at a Minsk summit of the grouping's leaders on February 14.

demanding that the nuclear-capable Black Sea fleet, based in the southern Ukrainian Crimea, stay under the unified command of the new Commonwealth of Independent States.

Ukraine has claimed large parts of the fleet as its own. Kiev, trying to calm fears among the mixed Russian and Ukrainian population of Crimea, earlier granted them the right to take in decisions about the future of their land.

The dispute over the future of the fleet, as well as disagreements of economic policies and Russia's moves to re-examine the Crimea's status, have dogged relations between the two republics for several weeks.

If reforms fail in Russia dictatorship will appear

PARIS, Feb 7: President Boris Yeltsin issued a dramatic warning to the West on Thursday that time was running out to aid democratic Russia and said dictatorship loomed if his reforms failed, reports Reuter.

France responded by granting Russia 3.5 billion franc (650 million dollar) in state-backed credit to buy French Grain and industrial goods but said private investment would depend on Moscow's ability to create stable economic conditions.

"The delay in the international community's aid to Russia is becoming dangerous," Yeltsin said in a speech at the Paris city hall. "It must be understood that if Russia fails in its reforms, dictatorship will appear."

Russia, floundering in economic

chaos after the collapse of the Soviet Union, risked either fascism or communist military dictatorship if it did not manage a rapid transition to a market economy, he suggested.

"If our reforms fail, then I tell you we can feel the breath of the brown shirts and red shirts on the back of our necks," he said at a reception hosted by Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac.

French Prime Minister Edith Cresson announced the loans, most of which were originally pledged to the Soviet Union but never disbursed, in a luncheon speech pledging to work for Russia's integration into the world economy.

In a last-minute gesture, France raised the credits from 1.5 to two billion franc (280 to 370 million dol-

lar). Russian Finance Minister Yegor Gaidar commented: "You always recognise who your friends are in times of adversity".

Cresson said: "State credits cannot substitute for direct investment by our firms. These will not be forthcoming in Russia unless a framework is established to protect their presence."

Laying the foundations for a new economic relationship, France and Russia signed 12 practical agreements on Thursday covering such topics as investment protection, avoidance of dual taxation, transfer of management know-how, training of Russian businessmen and scientific exchanges.

Western states have been slow to help Russia partly because of the absence of struc-

tures to receive financial aid and investment, and partly because of concern that emergency food supplies were falling into the hands of organised crime.

Yeltsin, whose warnings echoed largely unheeded plans for western assistance by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev last year, said the next three months would be crucial.

He chided reluctant French businessmen, saying they were not taking the place they should in the Russian economy. Many business leaders are sceptical of the prospects of profitable investment in Russia, apart from the energy sector, because of the economic and administrative de-forestation left by 74 years of communist rule.

Germany is by far Moscow's biggest economic partner and France lags behind some other European countries in investing in the former Soviet republics.

Yeltsin raised the specter of a return to east-west confrontation if industrialised countries were stingy in their aid for political and economic reforms in Russia.

"Perhaps you can save a franc today, but if there is a return to the Cold War you will have spent thousands of times more," he said.

Yeltsin said Russia planned to reduce its nuclear arsenal to "a minimum force sufficient to deter terrorists and irresponsible leaders" and he urged France to play its part in east-west disarmament measures.

"We respect France's position on nuclear matters and we hope that when the programme to reduce and eliminate nuclear arms is put into practice in Russia, France will in turn abstain from increasing its nuclear armament," he said.

France has consistently refused to join nuclear arms cuts, saying its atomic arsenal is bare minimum and cannot be compared with tens of thousands of warheads held by the United States and the former Soviet Union.

But the French cancelled a planned new strategic missile and cut back production of a new short-range mobile nuclear missile last year in response to the end of the Cold War.

Off the Record

Bill for animal waste

OLYMPIA, Wash.: A Washington state senator wants to help ranchers who can't stop their cows from relieving themselves while riding on ferry boats, reports AP.

Sen Scott Barr has proposed a bill making it legal for animal waste to fall off a vehicle travelling on a ferry boat with 25 cars or less.

It's aimed at helping cattle ranchers who use the Keller Ferry to cross Lake Roosevelt near the town of Wilbur in north-central Washington.

Last year, officials warned ranchers they'd enforce a law prohibiting trucks from leaking waste while travelling on public byways. Ferry owners were tired of cleaning up waste that slopped out of cattle trucks.

"It's very difficult for these cattlemen to have all their livestock trucks so tight that no droppings can get out," said Barr, a Republican from Colville.

Rancher Steve Katich agrees. "With all the boat traffic and sewage and minerals leaking into that lake, a little cattle waste can't hurt," he said.

Wrong time to play cop

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.: A motorist with a badge, flashing light and handcuffs picked the wrong time to play cop, authorities said. He pulled over an off-duty detective and found himself under arrest, reports AP.

Detective John Bugge said he was pulled over Wednesday by the man driving a Cadillac with a flashing green light on the dashboard.

"When I saw his badge, I realized he wasn't a police officer," Bugge said. "I told him I was a real police officer and he ought to get over to the curb. He was shocked."

Herbert Ayers, a 49-year-old security guard, was taken to the Pinellas County Jail on charges of impersonating a police officer.

They turn tail into legs

NEW DELHI: The tail of a baby frog was turned into legs by scientists in Bhubaneswar in what is said to be the world's first successful experiment in using a chemical to convert one organ into another, reports PTI.

When zoologists from the Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, cut off some tadpoles' tails and applied vitamin-A solution to the tail stumps extra hind legs grew instead of another tail.

This is the first case of homeotic transformation — replacement of one organ with another during development — mediated through vitamin-A in vertebrates, the British science journal 'Nature' which published a report by the Utkal University scientists says.

Arafat's mom-in-law proud & worried of her daughter

PARIS: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's new mother-in-law said Thursday she is proud of her 28-year-old daughter but worried that she faces a hard, dangerous life, reports AP.

Raymonde Tawil, a Palestinian activist, author and journalist, said her daughter, Suha, made the decision to marry the 62-year-old Palestinian Chief without consulting her family.

The marriage, disclosed only this week, took place in late November at Arafat's residence in Tunis. Only a few friends and Mrs Tawil were present.

"It was her choice, but we're very proud of her," said Mr. Tawil, whose 1979 autobiography "My Home, My Prison," describes her family's life under Israeli occupation in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

The Tawils are Christians. Arafat is a Sunni Muslim. His marriage to a much younger Christian was expected to draw criticism from the conservative Palestinian community.

Mrs Tawil described her new son-in-law as a symbol of liberation and Palestinian aspirations.

"He is a great man, fighting for his country, for the freedom of his people, so we hope God will bless them," she said.

Mrs Tawil, who helped found the Palestine News Agency, was placed under house arrest for four months in 1976 and spent 45 days in jail in 1978 for her political activities.

BRIEFLY

Croatia accepts UN plan: Croatia said it accepted in full a United Nations peace plan for Yugoslavia but the chance that UN peacekeeping troops would arrive soon remained poor, Reuter reports from Zagreb.

In the neighbouring republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, European Community envoy Lord Carrington persuaded rival ethnic groups to agree to hold their own peace conference in a bid to avert bloodshed.

In New York, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said it was still too early to deploy peacekeepers to divide the warring sides in Croatia.

The Secretary-General made it very clear it was not time to move ahead with peacekeeping," said US ambassador Thomas Pickering, this month's Security Council president.

5 Haryana policemen shot dead: Sikh militants shot dead five policemen Thursday in the northern state of Haryana as seven people died in separatist-disturbed neighbouring Punjab, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

An unspecified number of militants in a group shot dead two head constables and three constables in an ambush at Barara village in tiny Haryana's Ambala district late Thursday.

The assailants fled in a car, Haryana state government officials were quoted by the news agency as saying, without giving details.

In Sikh-majority Punjab, two constables were injured late Thursday in a land mine blast blamed by police there on militants fighting for an independent Sikh homeland called Khalistan, or land of the pure, PTI said.

US-Kuwait jt exercise from today: US and Kuwaiti forces will conduct another in a series of joint training exercises in Kuwait beginning on Saturday under a military cooperation agreement signed last year, the US Defence Department said Thursday, Reuter reports from Washington.

About 300 US army, navy and air force personnel will take part in nine days of combat training at the small unit level. The department did not say how many Kuwaiti troops would take part.

Some 900 US troops, including elite special operations forces, took part in a joint exercise in Kuwait in December, a month after 2,300 US marines conducted exercise there.

Four more killed in Peru violence: Suspected Maoist guerrillas rampaged through a shanty town north of Lima early on Thursday, killing four people and wounding three others whom they had accused of trafficking in drugs, witnesses said, reports Reuter from Peru.

The deaths brought to 39 the number of people killed in political violence around the country since Monday.

Eight hooded shining path guerrillas arrived in the shanty town in the northern district of Comas shortly before midnight on Wednesday, saying they were going to clean up the neighborhood of drug traffickers, the witness said.

Hospital officials confirmed the number of dead and wounded.

It was the second mass killing in Lima since November, when suspected members of a para-military group indiscriminately shot 14 people dead.

Two Thai politicians killed: Gunmen on motorcycles have killed two prominent Thai political figures in what could be the start of a rash of violence linked to elections in March, police said Friday, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Patroj Santhakul, a municipal councillor and top provincial canvasser for the pro-Army Samakkhitham Party, was shot as he drove away from a party meeting in Chachoengsao Province in Thailand's eastern seaboard this morning, police said.

This is clearly a politically motivated murder. This man had been warned many times not to put party stickers on his car, said party deputy leader Arthit Urairat, who was briefly foreign minister last year.

High-tech navigation system stolen from Kennedy Airport

NEW YORK, Feb 7: High-tech navigation systems worth 100,000 dollar each have been stolen from planes at New York's Kennedy airport and sold abroad to drug smugglers, a newspaper reported on Thursday, reports Reuter.

New York Newsday, quoting police sources, said the navigation systems were lifted from commercial jets, mostly Boeing 747s, used for Transatlantic flights.

It said investigators declined to say how many thefts had occurred but that they were numerous and they believed an underworld ring was behind the operation.

The devices are used by drug traffickers flying to the United States from South America along routes close to the ocean to evade US Coast guard interdiction radar.

They are also helpful in locating small, unmarked landing strips at night, according to a law enforcement official quoted in the newspaper.

Industry officials said the navigation systems are worth at least 100,000 dollar when new and that investigators believe the computerised Avionics are sold overseas to drug smugglers for unknown prices.

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PARIS: Russian President Boris Yeltsin and French Prime Minister Edith Cresson pose for newsmen prior to their lunch at the Foreign Ministry. Yeltsin is on a 3-day official visit to France. —AFP photo

Fighting on in Nagorny Karabakh

MOSCOW, Feb 7: More fighting was reported in the Caucasus enclave of Nagorny Karabakh on Thursday, as 100,000 Azerbaijanis demanded the resignation of their president for failing to stop "Armenian aggression," reports AFP.

After two days of relative calm, clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani combatants resumed in Nagorny Karabakh, according to the Interfax and Tass news agencies.

Armenians launched massive attacks against two Azerbaijani villages south of the enclave's capital Stepanakert, the Azerbaijani presidential press service said, cited by

Interfax. The Azerbaijani news agency Assa-irada said Armenian fighters had dropped leaflets from a helicopter, warning Azerbaijanis that their villages would be destroyed if they did not evacuate the region.

Nagorny Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian territory within the republic of Azerbaijan, has been at the centre of a bitter four-year dispute between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

Interfax, quoting Azerbaijani sources, said Armenians had attacked several villages near the Fizuli region, leaving two dead and eight injured on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, 100,000 people rallied in the Azerbaijan capital of Baku Thursday to demand the resignation of the Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov, for his inability to "stop Armenia's aggression in Nagorny Karabakh, the Touran news agency said.

James Baker
AFP from Washington adds: Secretary of State James Baker is to stop over in Azerbaijan as part of his upcoming swing through the Commonwealth of Independent States, administration sources said yesterday.

Testifying before the house of representatives foreign affairs committee, Baker said Thursday that he favoured es-

tablishing diplomatic relations with the former Soviet republic although he slammed the Azeris' bellicose attitude toward Armenians.

The administration sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Baker would travel to Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, as part of his tour which begins Monday.

The state department has so far announced Baker's trips to Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan and Turkmenistan, the three central Asian republics he has not yet visited, before his arrival in Moscow scheduled for February 13.

No stop in Azerbaijan has yet been officially announced.

Star Wars chief welcomes Yeltsin's offer

BRUSSELS, Feb 7: The head of the US Star Wars programme on Thursday welcomed Russian President Boris Yeltsin call to join United States in developing a global missile defence shield, reports AP.

Henry Cooper, director of the Strategic Defence Initiative, said he found "satisfying" Yeltsin's comments last week to work with the United States on its Star Wars project.

Cooper, the SDI's first civilian director, said he has been in Europe since Yeltsin first made his proposal and had not seen any details. But "I'm quite favourably inclined from what I've read," Cooper told reporters during a visit to NATO.

The interview, conducted after Khan pledged to US officials that his country would not explode a nuclear device or sell the technology to another country, is the first time a Pakistani official has confirmed publicly the extent of his government's nuclear programme.

Pindi admits N-capability

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: Pakistan now has the components and knowhow to assemble at least one nuclear bomb, the country's foreign minister said in an interview after meeting with US administration and congressional officials, reports AP.

"The capability is there", Foreign Secretary Shahryar Khan told The Washington Post in an interview that was published Friday.

The interview, conducted after Khan pledged to US officials that his country would not explode a nuclear device or sell the technology to another country, is the first time a Pakistani official has confirmed publicly the extent of his government's nuclear programme.

Reagan celebrates 81st birthday

SIMI VALLEY, California, Feb 7: Former President Reagan celebrated his 81st birthday Thursday with a surprise party at his presidential library, reports AP.

He said the components in his country's possession include "elements which, if put together, would become a device," including potential weapons "cores" fashioned from highly enriched uranium.

Khan said he acknowledged the extent of Pakistan's nuclear programme to "avoid credibility gaps" stemming from officials' past denials of any effort to develop an atomic weapon.

Disbelieving those denials, Congress in 1990 ordered a cutoff in roughly 573 million dollars in foreign aid to Pakistan. Khan said his government's current leadership, which came to power in October 1990, decided to set the record straight in an effort to win resumption of US aid.

He said he has not been told how many nuclear devices could be assembled from the components but added that his government last year permanently froze production of new weapons cores.

Destruction of the existing cores is one of the US conditions for resumption of aid, but Khan said Pakistan would undertake that only if neighbouring India does the same.

But Shamir said that Israel and Palestinians did not have to reach an interim agreement on autonomy for the 1.75 million people of the West Bank and Gaza Strip within 12 months.

"We did not commit ourselves to any date. We only said we have no interest in delays and dragging our feet. But nobody should be surprised if the process is protracted."

Israel may not stick to every word of Camp David accord

JERUSALEM, Feb 7: Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said Israel is not bound by every word of its 1978 Camp David accords which envisages Palestinian self-rule, reports Reuter.

"We are not obliged to every word written there. Time has passed and things have changed," he told Israeli diplomatic correspondents in an interview published today.

The United States, Israel's closest ally and biggest aid donor, coaxed the Jewish state and Palestinians to peace talks in October on the understanding that they would agree on self-rule within a year as stipu-

lated in the accords. Squabbling has undermined the talks and the two sides have yet to discuss the substance of proposed autonomy.

Israel's talks with Palestinians, Jordanians, Lebanese and Syrians are due to resume in Washington on February 24.

"In principle we are sticking to the Camp David agreements, but I cannot promise that we will meticulously stick to every word that is mentioned there," the Jerusalem post quoted Shamir as telling the correspondence.

The Camp David accords between US President Jimmy

Carter, Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin provided for autonomy for the West Bank and Gaza Strip after a five year transition period, and for a peace accord between Egypt and Israel. The accord with Egypt was signed in 1979.

Shamir, who abstained in the parliamentary vote on the Camp David agreements, said Palestinians were not committed to the accords.

"They say they don't accept, don't agree to Camp David. Our negotiators asked them explicitly, and they said no," he said.

The Palestinian part of the

Palestinian-Jordanian delegation, as is known, does not accept autonomy at all. For them, autonomy is a dirty word. They don't even mention the word. They speak of an interim solution," Shamir said.

Palestinians waging a four-year-old uprising ultimately hope to create an independent state. But both Israel and the United States say they would oppose one.

The US-Soviet invitation accepted by Israel to the talks launched in Madrid last October called for an interim solution in a year followed by a permanent solution within five years.



ALGIERS: Islamic female students gather as they are on strike for the third consecutive day at the Bab Ezzour Faculty near Algiers Thursday. The fundamentalist students' protest with their action against the new army backed regime and the arrest of most of the FIS leaders. The poster reads: "We are fed up with the arrests." —AFP photo

But Shamir said that Israel and Palestinians did not have to reach an interim agreement on autonomy for the 1.75 million people of the West Bank and Gaza Strip within 12 months.

"We did not commit ourselves to any date. We only said we have no interest in delays and dragging our feet. But nobody should be surprised if the process is protracted."

Shamir's hardline government opposes ceding any of the land Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war. But Israeli moderates envisage ceding some land which would then be federation with

Jordan. Shamir, likely to lead his rightist Likud Party in national elections in June 23, said both Israel and the United States expected success in talks mainly with a joint Palestinian-Jordanian team before success with Syria, Israel's arch-foe.

"The Syrian position has usually been very, very hard. As far as we understand the position of the Palestinian-Jordanian group, they should have more interest than any other party in the success of the negotiations."

"They can only gain from it, even if they get the minimum of the minimum."