

Kabul assures UN envoy of backing peace move

KABUL, Feb 10: Afghan authorities on Sunday assured a UN envoy of their support for the world body's initiative to end civil war in the country, state-run Kabul radio said, reports Reuter.

The envoy, Benon Sevan, met Prime Minister Fazl Haq Khaliquyar and Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil over a UN call for an assembly representing all sides in the 13-year-old conflict.

Both Khaliquyar and Wakil supported the UN plan and assured the envoy of Kabul's co-operation, the official radio said.

Sevan, who met Afghan guerrilla leaders and Pakistani officials prior to his arrival in

Kabul on Sunday, is expected to see Afghanistan's President Najibullah on Monday.

The United Nations wants an assembly of about 150 delegates from all parties to consider an interim government that would take power in Kabul, halt the war and hold elections.

Radical Islamic guerrillas have rejected the plan, calling it an international conspiracy to deny them power.

Conservative guerrilla organisations and Pakistan, which plays host to the main rebel parties, have backed it.

Kabul radio quoted Wakil as telling Sevan that Kabul welcomed Islamabad's latest position on the Afghan problem.



MOSCOW: A woman holding a portrait of Lenin stands in the crush of the crowd during a pro-communist demonstration in front of the Red Square. — AFP/UNB photo

Ghali wants to include five more permanent members in UNSC

BONN, Feb 10: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali wants to increase the number of permanent members of the UN Security Council from five to 10 by admitting Germany, Japan, India, Brazil and Nigeria, the weekly Der Spiegel reported today, says AFP.

The move would be part of a package of revamp the world body before its 50th anniversary in 1995, the magazine said.

The Security Council's permanent members — The United States, Britain, France, China and Russia — have right to veto council decisions.

A spokesman for the foreign ministry here said Sunday the German government was not aware of Boutros-Ghali's plan.

Cutting short speculation that the European and Asian economic superpowers were vying for a permanent seat in the Security Council, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher have repeatedly un-

derestimated that the issue was not on the agenda.

"I feel very well represented by our friends on the Security Council. There is absolutely no reason to change that," Kohl said in an interview Friday.

Japanese foreign minister Michio Watanabe told the Bonn Newspaper General Anzeiger that Tokyo would not take any initiative in the matter.

"For Japan it is important that there is a thorough discussion of the issue among member countries," he said in the interview published Monday.

Germany would "naturally" be a candidate for a permanent seat "because of its economic power and the size of its international contribution," he added.

According to Der Spiegel, German officials are involved in some behind-the-scenes diplomacy to bring Germany's position in the United Nations in line with its post-unification economic and political weight.

Myanmar Junta plans to stay in power for long time

BANGKOK, Feb 10: Myanmar ruling generals are thumbing their noses at growing international criticism and plan to stay in power for a long time, political analysts say, reports Reuter.

The Junta's harassment and torture of political opponents and religious minorities has brought condemnation from capitals as diverse as Washington and Tehran. But instead of buckling, the Junta has railed against interference in its affairs and tightened its grip.

International protests against its policies have been too little, too late, says Martin Smith, British author of in-depth studies of Myanmar security apparatus and minority problems.

"The terrible irony is that while the world is waking up to what is happening in

Myanmar, the ability of the democratic movement in Myanmar to take advantage of the situation is very much reduced," he told a symposium last week.

Thousands of political opponents have been jailed and tens of thousands of people have fled the country since the junta seized power by bloodily suppressing a nationwide democracy uprising in 1988.

The generals held a free election in May 1990, but refused to turn over power when the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) won by a landslide.

Having silenced the opposition through arrests and intimidation, the Junta is turning its attention back to troublesome ethnic and religious minorities on its borders.

Towards the end of last year, tens of thousands of Muslim refugees began streaming from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The refugees, arriving with tales of rape and other brutality, say the Myanmar army is driving them out. The Dhaka government has been alarmed by a substantial Myanmar military buildup on its frontier, although fears of armed conflict appear to be receding, diplomats say.

Diplomats say there is a strong anti-Muslim undercurrent among Myanmar Buddhist Majority and the foreigners believe the Junta is using the issue to deflect from its domestic unpopularity.

Muslims were prominent in the 1988 uprising and the government then tried to divide the demonstrators by

Indian court places wanted ad in Lankan newspaper

COLOMBO, Feb 10: An Indian court has placed a wanted ad in a Sri Lankan newspaper for two top Tamil rebels charged in connection with the murder of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, reports Reuter.

The Sri Lankan Daily News carried an advertisement today asking a Tamil rebel chieftain and his intelligence head to report to an Indian court on or before February 28.

Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and intelligence chief Pottu Omman are wanted in connection with the killing of Gandhi in May last year.

The Tamil Tigers have denied any involvement in the murder.

Off the Record

Reds throw rotten fruits to frustrate glittering Opera Ball

PRAGUE: With the help of Ivana Trump, Prague renewed its lavish Opera Ball after a hiatus of more than 50 years. Protesters said it has no place in a society struggling to overcome the poverty left by communism, reports AP.

Hundreds of anarchists and leftists gathered in central Prague late Saturday to protest the ball, which took place in Smetana Theater.

The ball, resurrected after World War II and a half-century of communism, was meant to raise money for much-needed reconstruction of the theater.

But the 500 crowns (17.80 dollar) for a regular ticket and 15,000 crowns (535 dollar) for a box infuriated many who claimed such prices are "scorning the regular working people," the CSTK news agency said.

Protesters from the Czechoslovak Anarchist Association and the Left Alternative threw rotten fruit at arriving guests, shouting "dirty money" and "shame."

Although it was expected that many high ranking officials would be present, most of their boxes remained empty, CSTK said.

Exclusively women made films exhibitions

SEATTLE: An energetic group of film enthusiasts has assembled one of the world's widest ranging—and most personal exhibitions of films made by women, reports Reuter.

The sixth international festival of films by women directors resisted feminist labels by selecting a broad range of films. It also omitted much of the socialising that occurs at festivals where film distributors and judging take centre stage.

"We never chose films for political reasons," said organiser Peggy Case. "The purpose of this festival is for people to have a personal experience with the director."

Women just have this profoundly different cultural experience from men in our society. Their voices just haven't been heard as much before," she said. You just scour the earth for a handful of excellent films filmed only by women.

Lyokoona's experimental movie "bottoms" showing a series of close-ups of naked buttocks, was in the the festival.

"Women filmmakers have the same right as any people to explore anything they like," said Australian director Jocelyn Moorhouse. Her spirited film "proof" about a triangle of relationships around a blind photographer, opened the three-week festival, which ended February 8.

Decoration art piece turns out to be rare painting

MINNEAPOLIS: A religious painting donated by a lumber baron to a church to decorate its Sunday school rooms has been identified as a rare work by 16th-century Flemish artist Pieter Pourbus.

The painting, 'Abraham and the Angels,' has not been appraised, but Institute curator George Keyes estimated its value at between 200,000 dollar and 300,000 dollar.

There are very few Flemish 16th-century paintings of this quality in the United States," said Lynne Ambrosini, assistant curator of paintings at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Pourbus paintings are rare outside the Netherlands or Germany, and this is something that any museum in the U.S. would be thrilled to own.

T. B. Walker, an internationally-known art collector who died in 1928, gave the picture to the Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church.

The painting, which depicts biblical patriarch Abraham with three angels seated around a table in a Flemish village, was identified by Keyes, an expert on Dutch and Flemish art.

Museum staff decided it was probably painted between 1565 and 1575, said Joan Gorman, the conservator who cleaned and restored the painting.

Iraq denies secret weapons programme

BAGHDAD, Feb 10: Iraq denied having a secret weapons programme on Sunday and blamed the United States for a UN Security Council decision to retain economic sanctions, reports Reuter.

In the first official reaction from Baghdad, Foreign Minister Ahmed Hussein Al-Samarei said the February 5 decision "had no legal or logical basis" and was based on the "hostile intentions" of one unnamed Security Council member.

This was clearly a reference to the United States which led moves to clamp a trade embargo on Iraq in August 1990 to punish its invasion of Kuwait.

The United States is also at the fore front of western states which want to retain the sanctions until it feels Iraq has complied with Gulf war ceasefire terms on scrapping its weapons of mass destruction.

Samarei's note was diplomatically worded and contained little of the bitterness or thunder Baghdad has previously voiced against sanctions.

The sanctions forbid Iraq selling oil, close Iraqi airspace and limit imports to essential food and drugs.

The Security Council said in its ruling that there was serious evidence of Iraqi non-compliance over its programmes of weapons of mass-

destruction and the repatriation of Kuwaitis and the third-country national detained in Iraq.

Samarei said the claim that Iraq has a secret weapons programme is completely surprising as it comes eight months after the start of the work of a special committee responsible for dealing with weapons of mass-destruction.

Baghdad maintains it is co-operating with UN inspection teams seeking to scrap Iraq's chemical nuclear and ballistic weapons but there have been periodic conflicts with UN weapons experts visiting Baghdad.

Cossiga pardoned Soviet industrial espionage ring

ROME Feb 10: Italian President Francesco Cossiga disclosed on Sunday that he pardoned the head of a Soviet industrial espionage ring smashed in 1990 and allowed him to leave the country, reports Reuter.

Cossiga told reporters in northern Italy that the ring, whose discovery was first reported by the government last month, was one of the most important Soviet spy organisations.

Pakistan reaffirms nuclear capability

ISLAMABAD, Feb 10: Pakistan reaffirmed Sunday that it possessed a nuclear capability, while stressing that it had frozen its nuclear programme and would not transfer relevant technology to another country, reports AFP.

Referring to a statement by Foreign Minister Shahryar Khan that his country had the components and know-how to assemble at least one atomic bomb, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Khan's remarks, published Friday in the Washington Post, should be taken in context.

In a statement carried by the national news agency, APP, the spokesman said Pakistan had assured the United States

that its nuclear programme was not geared toward military purposes.

Pakistan will not explode a nuclear device or transfer nuclear technology to another country, the spokesman said, adding that Pakistan had frozen its nuclear programme at its 1989 level.

The United States suspended annual aid to Pakistan in October 1990 on suspicion that Islamabad had begun to intensify its nuclear programme six months before.

During subsequent negotiations, Washington demanded that Islamabad return its programme to the level it was at prior to April 1990.

Israel to reject US demand to freeze settlements

JERUSALEM, Feb 10: Israel will reject US demand to freeze Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, the head of the Prime Minister's office was quoted as saying on Israeli television Sunday, reports Reuter.

Israel will reject any American demand to freeze the settlements or reduce them for political reasons, negotiations on this subject continue, the official, Yossi Ben Aharon, said.

Ben Aharon is said to be Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's right-hand man.

But the television correspondent said he conducted a survey of government members and found that most believe there is no choice but to make concessions to obtain

the guarantees. US Secretary of State James Baker said Saturday for the first time that Washington wanted Israel to stop rather than simply curb settlements in exchange for guarantees on 10 million dollar in loans to house Jewish immigrants.

He also said the amount of money Israel spends on settlements already under construction should be subtracted from traditional US aid to Israel.

Health Minister Ehud Olmert, speaking earlier, sought to play down Baker's comments about Israel's request for US guarantees on 10 billion dollar in loans.

We are only at the beginning of the negotiations and it's only a starting point for the

Americans, he said. As long as the US administration does not demand a commitment from the Israeli government to freeze construction in the settlements there is something to negotiate, Olmert said on Israeli Radio.

He said Shamir had refused to make such a commitment and the Americans have accepted that the homes already under construction should be completed, something which constitutes a victory for US.

What's important is that construction should continue and that the need to expand our presence in Judea-Samaria (West Bank) secures international legitimacy, said Olmert, who is considered close to the Prime Minister.



ALGIERS: Two Algerian women pass by an armed soldier standing guard near the Kouba Mosque in downtown Algiers Friday. Algerian leaders declared the state of emergency following an outbreak of violence between fundamentalists and security forces leaving more than 40 dead since Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

Unpaid soldiers demonstrate in Phnom Penh street

PHNOM PENH, Feb 10: About 55 soldiers, all amputees and many wearing ragged uniforms, demonstrated in the Cambodian capital today to demand more than a year's unpaid wages, reports Reuter.

The men, some on specially-adapted bicycles, gathered outside the council of ministers building in Phnom Penh after taking a ferry from the Kien Khlaing Centre for the handicapped on the other side of the Tonle Sap river.

"We want to ask for salary we haven't got for one year," said one soldier who lost a leg during the 13-year war against Khmer Rouge-led guerrillas which officially ended with the

signing of a peace accord last October.

After 20 minutes of peaceful protest, 50 police from the feared Ministry of Interior arrived to prevent the amputees from entering the building to put their grievances to government officials.

A few minutes later an army truck rolled up carrying a platoon of helmeted soldiers armed with AK-47 rifles.

The soldiers collected most of the protesters and took them to a local military headquarters where they promised to negotiate their salary demands.

The amputees went voluntarily and there was no

violence. The protest broke up peacefully.

The Phnom Penh government introduced strict rules covering public demonstrations after a night of rioting on December 21 in which five were killed and scores injured.

Limbless veterans begging for money are a common sight in the streets and markets of Phnom Penh.

Most live in poverty, dependent on families for support and without any welfare payments from the cash-strapped government. Prosthetics and crutches are in short supply.

Landmines were widely

used by all sides in the war, killing or maiming untold thousands of civilians as well as soldiers.

In Bangkok, the nation newspaper reported that three Thai soldiers were injured in western Cambodia while removing landmines.

They are believed to be the first casualties among foreign troops deployed in Cambodia on a United Nations-run peace-keeping and reconstruction mission.

About 450 Thai soldiers last week began rebuilding roads and clearing mines along Route Five, the main highway from Phnom Penh to the Thai border.

BRIEFLY

Eight hurt in Istanbul blast: Eight people were injured when a bomb blew up in the restaurant of an officers' club in Istanbul on Sunday evening, military officials said, reports Reuter from Istanbul.

Two second Lieutenants two soldiers and four waiters were injured in the explosion in the residential district of Fenerbahce close to the Bosphorus, they said.

One of the victims was in serious condition, the private television channel Star-One said.

It was the ninth attack on Turkish security personnel in one week. Istanbul's top security prosecutor, Yasar Gunaydin, and eight policemen were killed in the other attacks.

The semi-official Anatolian News Agency said a man and a young woman planted the bomb in the restaurant. They entered the complex with military identity cards and the bomb went off soon after they left, it is said.

Koirala won't smoke in public: Nepal's Prime Minister Girtija Prasad Koirala has vowed not to smoke in public to avoid setting a bad example to children, reports Reuter from Kathmandu.

"It is difficult for me to give up the habit abruptly," Koirala, 67, told a meeting on Sunday.

"But I have decided not to smoke in public places in view of its possible effects on the health and moral character of children," he said.

Tigers kill 11 Lankan troops: Tamil Tiger rebels infiltrated the perimeter of a military camp in northwestern Sri Lanka and killed 11 soldiers, military officials said Monday, reports AP from Colombo.

They said 15 soldiers were injured when rebels overran six bunkers near the Mullaitivu army camp, 280 kilometers (170 miles) north of Colombo Sunday night.

The troops, who were occupying a 6,000-meter area around the camp, withdrew and attacked the rebels, said the officials at the Joint Operations Command in Colombo who cannot be identified under briefing rules.

Many rebels were also feared killed, but details were not available.

More than 8,000 people have been killed since June 1990 when the Tamil Tiger rebels resumed their campaign to carve out an independent Tamil homeland in northeast Sri Lanka.

US boeing makes emergency landing: A US Air Boeing 727 carrying 158 passengers made an emergency landing Sunday at Luis Munoz Marin Airport when the pilot discovered a problem in the landing gear, reports AP from US.

There were no injuries, airline and airport officials said. Airport officials said the plane landed on its right and nose gears with the left gear folding up.

Some sparks flew as the left wing hit the ground, but there was no fire. The aircraft was met by firemen, paramedics, police and other emergency personnel, but no foam was used on the runway.

USAir Flight 1688 had taken off for Philadelphia minutes before, but returned to the airport due to a mechanical failure, airport officials said.

The cause of the mechanical failure was not yet known.

15 killed in Soweto gunbattles: Rival Black groups fought sporadic gunbattles in Soweto late on Sunday after a weekend surge in political violence caused 15 deaths across South Africa, reports Reuter from Johannesburg.

A resident said by telephone: "people are shooting, so we are running away, you cannot stay for your death."

Fighting erupted again in the township's meadowlands district where six people were shot stabbed and burnt to death and 12 houses set on fire on Saturday night.

The fighting was between migrant workers loyal to the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party against township residents sympathetic to the African National Congress (ANC) and capped a week of rising tension between the groups following.

Israel appoints envoy to China: Israel appointed its first Ambassador to China on Sunday. The two countries established full diplomatic relations last month, reports Reuter from Jerusalem.

The Foreign Ministry said the new Ambassador is Zeev Sufot, 65, a career diplomat who spent the last two years as head of an Israeli research centre in Beijing.