

3 soldiers burnt to death in Kazakhstan

MOSCOW, Feb 27: Three soldiers were burnt to death as members of a construction battalion at the Baikonur Space Center in Kazakhstan went on the rampage because of poor living conditions, Moscow television said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The television said three days of rioting were sparked on Sunday by the "extremely unsatisfactory living conditions of the servicemen, bullying and the conscription of young men who are ill."

It said that "several hundred fighters of the construction battalion" had "broken through protective cordons of armed militia and the regular army" and burned four barracks, stolen 35,000 rubles and hijacked 17 vehicles.

The charred bodies of three members of the construction battalion were found following the riots, the television said.

Major General Epril Kilmuk, the Head of the Cosmonaut Training Center at Baikonur, told the Itar-Tass News Agency that the disturbances would not affect the scheduled March 17 launch of the Soyuz-TM-14 spacecraft, which will carry a German cosmonaut into space.

Moscow television said the Kazakhstan government has set up a commission to look into the riots and that "criminal proceedings have begun against the soldiers responsible for the disturbances."

It added that "the troops have been fed and salaries have been paid."

Palestine, Israel divided over fundamental issues

WASHINGTON, Feb 27: Palestinian and Israeli negotiators traded barbs here Wednesday as they outlined their respective proposals for the future of the Israeli-occupied territories on day three of their bilateral round of Middle East peace talks, reports AFP.

Israeli spokesman Yossi Gal jumped on a remark attributed to a Palestinian counterpart, calling it an "incitement to violence."

A senior member of the Palestinian team hiding behind anonymity said the Israeli offer to have their necks broken for their proposals on Palestinian self-government, said Gal, warning the Palestinians to halt the "verbal abuse."

Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi dismissed the statement as "nothing but hearsay" and regretted that the Israeli had been upset by it.

Gal also accused the Palestinians of "ridiculing and downgrading" Israel's proposals and promoting the view that the Israelis "Only want to give us sewage and something else."

Ashrawi called that charge "an insult to the intelligence" of her delegation.

An Israeli official said Wednesday that Jerusalem's proposal presented Monday aimed at giving the Palestinians in the occupied territories control over a day-to-day life.

The 11-point working paper would turn over administrative control of the Gaza strip and West Bank to the Palestinians but does not provide for a withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories.

The document covers health care, education, taxes, agriculture, industry, commerce, religion, city management, transportation, local security and tourism.

But, the Israeli delegate stressed, "power would remain in the hands of the army for the transition period until a final status of the territories is determined."

Gal reiterated his criticism of the proposal put forward by the Palestinian delegation during the last round of talks in January, saying it was aimed at creating a Palestinian state.

AP adds: Baker's State Department declines to come down on one side or the other.

On Monday, Baker again called for an end to Israeli settlements on the West Bank and Gaza. Otherwise, Baker said Israel would not get US backing for the 10 billion dollar in bank loans it seeks to help absorb tens of thousands of Soviet refugees.

Otherwise, Baker has not jumped into the debate between Israel and the Palestinians.



MOSCOW: Boots, beer and milk for sale at a street corner in Moscow as the vendor lights up his cigarette. After price reforms in January, many people started supplementing their income by selling a variety of consumer goods on the streets —AFP/UNB photo

5 CIS members sign Helsinki final act

HELSINKI, Feb 27: Presidents of five members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — Armenia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kirghizstan — failed to attend the signing ceremony chaired by Finnish President Mauno Koivisto.

The act was approved in 1975 by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

However, the presidents of other five CIS member states — Armenia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kirghizstan — failed to attend the signing ceremony chaired by Finnish President Mauno Koivisto.

The 10 CIS member states were accepted as new members of the CSCE on January 20 this year at the CSCE foreign ministerial meeting in Prague.

BRIEFLY

Afghan FM meets Ghali: Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil has met United Nations Secretary General Boutros-Ghali in Geneva to discuss the progress of a UN peace formula for the war-torn country, officials in Kabul said Wednesday, reports AFP.

They said Wakil called on Ghali Tuesday to convey Kabul's appreciation of his efforts and those of his personal envoy to Afghanistan, Hemon Sevan to solve the 13-year-old Afghan civil war.

During his unannounced visit to Geneva, Wakil was also expected to meet Sevan and some prominent European officials who have indicated their willingness to help find a political solution to the conflict.

OAU summit from June 29: The Organization of African Unity (OAU) is to hold its next summit June 29 to July 1 in Dakar, Senegal, spokesman Ibrahim Dagash announced in Addis Ababa Wednesday, reports AFP.

Speaking after the three-day 55th session of the OAU ministerial council, Dagash said Dakar had been selected "at the request of the Senegalese government." Earlier it had been expected that Lome, capital of Togo, would be the venue.

The spokesman said the council of ministers on Wednesday approved the 1992-93 OAU budget. Set at 28 million dollars, it had been "adopted unanimously for the first time," he said.

Under the budget, OAU officials will receive a 15 per cent pay rise, their first in 11 years, Dagash said.

Four killed in Pak blast: Four people were killed and 10 others injured when a bomb exploded in a passenger van Wednesday night near Rawalpindi, the twin city of Islamabad, according to local press, reports Thursday, Xinhua says from Islamabad.

The bomb reportedly hidden under a seat of the wagon, with 16 persons travelling by it went off soon after the wagon departed from Rawalpindi for Chakwal, 90 kms west from Islamabad, the reports said.

The driver of the wagon was among the injured who were rushed to local hospitals.

The explosion blew up the van into several pieces which spread over 20 metre area. It has been declared as a terroristic activity, the reports said.

Reagan supports Bush: Former US President Ronald Reagan, trying to erase doubts about his backing for President George Bush's re-election, said on Wednesday he supported Bush to the fullest, Reuters reports from Washington.

But it was unclear whether the former President's statement would be enough to undo the damage done during the President's visit with Reagan on Tuesday, when Reagan seemed to hold his former vice president at arm's length as he sought Reagan's political blessing in California.

"President Bush and I had an excellent conversation on Wednesday... I support President Bush's candidacy to the fullest and will do everything I can to see that he is re-elected as president," Reagan said in a statement.

The President and First Lady Barbara Bush had gone in a motorcade to Bel Air in suburban Los Angeles and met for 20 minutes with the former President and his wife Nancy at their hillside home, protected by a tall metal fence and greenery.

US team to visit Vietnam: The United States is preparing to send its highest-level official delegation to Vietnam since the end of the war in 1975, the New York Times reported in its Thursday editions, Reuters reports from New York.

The delegation, to be headed by Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon, is expected to leave on Saturday, the newspaper said, quoting diplomats and congressional aides. The group also is planning to visit Laos and Cambodia.

The New York Times said there was speculation in congress that the administration of President George Bush was moving towards a new phase in relations with Hanoi.

Under a plan submitted to the Vietnamese a year ago, faster progress on solving cases of Americans missing in the war would lead to a partial relaxation in an American embargo that has frozen Vietnam out of trade and blocked assistance from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Ghali worried: UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali said he was deeply worried by shots fired at a UN helicopter in Cambodia that injured an Australian officer Wednesday, spokesman Francois Giuliani said, reports AFP from New York.

Boutros-Ghali who is currently in Geneva, called on all parties who signed the Cambodian peace accord in Paris to scrupulously respect the agreement, Giuliani said.

The Secretary General also asked the head of the UN preparatory team in Cambodia, French General Michael Lorrion, to look into the incident and report back as quickly as possible.

Australian Lieutenant Colonel Russell Stuart, the commander of the Australian contingent of UN ceasefire observer forces in Cambodia, was shot and wounded Wednesday in an attack on a UN helicopter flying over Khmer Rouge territory in central Cambodia, UN officials said.

Filipino reds kill 10 civilians

MANILA, Feb 27: Philippine communist guerrillas killed 10 civilians in the southern province of South Cotabato over the weekend, the military said here today, reports AFP.

The 10, who included an unspecified number of environment department employees, were slain by communist New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas in Tibuli town on February 23.

Four other civilians were wounded in the attack, the military said, but gave no other details.

The NPA is the armed wing of the outlawed Communist Party of the Philippines.

New type of TB among AIDS victims raises concern in US

WASHINGTON, Feb 27: US health experts say that recent outbreaks of potentially deadly strains of tuberculosis (TB) are raising concern and that steps must be taken to combat the disease before it gets out of control, reports USIS.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told a House Sub-committee February 24 that a new and dangerous type of tuberculosis is being spread among the victims of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) as well as others in contact with AIDS patients. "Most disturbing is the emergency of TB strains that do not respond to the standard antibiotics used to treat the disorder, Fauci said. "Outbreaks of strains resistant to several different drugs have been occurring throughout the country."

Totally new and different forms of TB have evolved in AIDS patients. And these TB strains are causing a new epidemic in the general population, warned Max Essex, Chairman of the Harvard AIDS Institute.

Essex and other health officials said that many people who are not infected with the virus that causes AIDS, including family members. Hospital workers and patients, guards and clients of drug abuse treatment programmes are now at substantial risk of infection with tuberculosis.

The American Lung Association said recently that 25,701 cases of TB were reported in the United States in 1990, an increase of more than 9 per cent from the previous year and the largest rise in new cases ever recorded.

While tuberculosis was the single most prevalent cause of death in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, antibiotic therapies were used to gradually reduce the number of cases. But this downward trend began to be reversed in the mid-1980s as TB spread among AIDS patients with weakened immune systems. The number of cases began to increase in 1985.

Fauci said that since one-third of the world's population is infected with a latent form of tuberculosis, the continuing spread of AIDS could lead to a global TB epidemic.

"Many of those infected with TB are in developing countries that have a high incidence of infection with the AIDS virus," he said, "put those together, AIDS-infected individuals with latent TB that could potentially be drug resistant, and you have a real potential global-type catastrophe on your hands."

Fauci called for research efforts to improve existing diagnostic tests for TB, to develop an effective vaccine for TB to protect those at risk, and to find more effective treatments for those already infected.

Fauci recommended an additional 40 million dollar be spent to accelerate tuberculosis research over the next two years. The Bush administration already has requested 66 million dollars in fiscal year 1993 for measures to contain and control outbreaks of tuberculosis related to AIDS.

Off the Record

Birthday surprises



ANAHEIM, Calif. Ornia: Elizabeth Taylor will celebrate her 60th birthday Thursday with Mickey Mouse and 1,000 invited guests at Disneyland, reports AP.

The theme park routinely is rented by companies or groups for private gatherings, but the actress is the first individual to reserve it.

Her guests will gather after the park closes Thursday evening. They'll go on rides and have a cake-cutting ceremony in front of Sleeping Beauty Castle, said Lisa Del Favero, a spokeswoman for Taylor.

There will be other "surprises" for the actress, who will have "happy birthday" sung to her by a celebrity whose identity is secret, Ms. Del Favero said.

"It's not Michael Jackson," she said. His attendance was uncertain.

'Please, he whispered—'I'm sorry' she responded

TOKYO: About 40 young lonely hearts stood in two lines outside the aquarium they had just visited, men facing the women for the ritualistic "proposal time" that ended a day-long bus tour, reports AP.

Each man approached a woman, asking for a date. Kenji Yushima, 23, ran to one woman he had hardly talked with, extended his name card and shyly, whispered: "Please."

Almost instantly, she responded, "I'm sorry."

The excursion, arranged by a tour group firm called The Neat, is part of a growing matchmaking market for young Japanese.

The company schedules such trips every weekend, and other companies offer similar one-day bus tours or short ski trips for singles seeking mates.

Traditionally, matches in Japan have been arranged by parents and friends of young adults. But with young Japanese moving away from home and into the frenetic pace of urban life an increasing number of people seem to be having trouble meeting members of the opposite sex.

By the time men enter their 30s and women enter their late 20s, they often are desperate.

"At first glance, I could tell these guys were not my type," said Tamaki Numazawa, a 24-year-old receptionist wearing a twin jacket and blue jeans who paid 80 for the tour. Men paid 60.

It is such attitudes that have led to some criticism of the tours.

"People are looking for some perfect partners as if they were choosing goods," says Koichi Yamazaki, who writes books on youth culture in Japan.

'Donor' nevertheless 'Sinner'

ALEXANDRIA: Cecil Jacobson, the infertility doctor charged with fraud and perjury, acknowledged Wednesday that he used his sperm to artificially inseminate his patients, but insisted that was not wrong, reports AP.

And "it is my firm testimony that I did not lie" to them about donor identities, Jacobson testified during his second day on the witness stand. "I was never that frequently used as a donor."

The defence rested its case after Jacobson's testimony. After hearing from additional prosecution witnesses and closing arguments, the jury is expected to begin deliberations Thursday.

Under cross-examination by prosecutor Randy Bellows, Jacobson said he did not commit perjury in a 1989 sworn statement in which he said he did not donate sperm to his own patients.



NEW YORK: Singer Natalie Cole holds three of the seven Grammys which the tribute to her late father Nat Cole 'unforgettable' garnered at the 34th Grammy Award ceremonies, on February 25 —AFP/UNB photo

Canada to pull out Euro-based military forces by '97

RUSSELS, Feb 27: Canada is to withdraw all its European-based military forces by 1997 to save money, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) said here Wednesday, reports AFP.

Diplomats said the decision, announced at a meeting of NATO ambassadors, involved a mechanised brigade, two air squadrons and command staff totalling 3,000 people based at Lahr and Baden-Baden in south west Germany.

They said Canada had scrapped a plan to trim down this contingent to 1,100 after 1994, but had pledged to send armed forces back to Europe if they were needed in a crisis.

NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner said that he accepted the decision with "considerable regret," but that Canada would remain in NATO naval forces and keep forces on call for participation in various NATO emergency units.

A Canadian diplomat said Canada had been forced to cut

spending because of a serious budget deficit.

But she added that the decision would free funds to pay for Canada's participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Forces, such as the one being assembled for Yugoslavia.

US call

Another report says: The United States has asked its European allies to help shoulder the costs of some US military installations in Western Europe, north Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) diplomats said Wednesday.

Washington wanted the costs switched to NATO's budget to be shared by all 16 member countries, they said. This would save the United States about 300 million dollar a year.

The Europeans, who are also trying to cut their defence spending, have not yet responded officially to the request, the diplomats said.

NATO's infrastructure bud-

get, the lion's share of the cost of maintaining the Trans-Atlantic Alliance, amounts to about 1.3 billion dollars a year, of which 27 per cent is picked up by Washington.

The US request, which NATO officials said was presented last month, concerns depots for arms, fuel, tanks and other equipment, plus hospitals. They are concentrated mainly in Germany and Norway.

The installations are primarily for use by US troops brought into Western Europe to help protect NATO allies in a crisis, but could also be used as a staging area for US forces sent to other regions such as the Gulf.

A US diplomat, however, said Washington maintained that the installations were there to defend Europe and that it was only fair that Europe should share the burden of paying for them even though they were under US control.

22000 UN men to disarm Cambodian combatants

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 27: The Security Council is set to authorise the largest and costliest operation in its history and send 22,000 people to Cambodia to police and run the southeast Asian nation for 16 months, reports Reuters.

A draft resolution, expected to be adopted on Thursday, establishes the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to disarm the combatants, supervise key ministries and police forces, repatriate refugees and organise elections in 1993. The operation is estimated to cost about 1.9 billion dollar.

The document asks Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to deploy the peacekeepers, including 15,900 military personnel, as soon as possible.

The total budget, however, must still be approved before full deployment can take place.

Lanka will reimpose curfew on 2 dists

COLOMBO, Feb 27: A curfew will be reimposed in two northern districts Thursday, the military announced, reports AP.

The curfew, without deadline, will come into effect Thursday midnight in Vavuniya and the northwestern Mannar district, said Col Sarath Munasinghe, a spokesman at the military headquarters in Colombo.

The two embattled regions were under a 2 1/2-day curfew, which was lifted Wednesday, a day after troops destroyed an office.