

Russia fears ethnic strife in Tatarstan

MOSCOW, Mar 6: The Russian parliament on Thursday warned the oil-rich Tatarstan region that an independence referendum it plans for later this month could lead to ethnic strife, news reports said, reports AP.

Leaders of the region where Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin began his revolutionary career say the March 21 referendum is not intended to lead to independence, only to strengthen Tatarstan's claim to stronger self-rule.

The referendum, however, asks voters whether they want Tatarstan to be a "sovereign state building in relations with the Russian Federation and other republics on the basis of treaties that stipulate equal rights."

The Russian parliament voted unanimously for a resolution warning that events in Tatarstan "carry a danger of ethnic strife in the republic and the destruction of the Russian Federation," the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Russia fears that the referendum might deprive it of the rich Volga River region of about 4 million people and boost secessionist sentiments in other autonomous republics or geographic regions that make up the vast Russian Federation.

The parliament said Tatarstan's "unjustified haste-

ness in conducting the referendum is an act of utter disrespect for the statehood of the Russian Federation... aimed at breaking centuries-long ties between the Tatar people and other peoples at Tatarstan's secession from the Russian Federation."

Once independence, Tatarstan was invaded and annexed by Russia in 1552. The region is an important industrial center, producing machinery, heavy trucks and strategic bombers. Lenin began his career in the region as a revolutionary at Kazan University.

The Russian parliament also asked Russia's Constitutional Court to examine the Tatar referendum decision, the Interfax news agency said.

In Kazan, the Tatarstan capital, the region's parliament, or Milli-Majlis, said it reserves the right to take action on its own if the referendum does not take place or voters reject it, the Interfax news agency said.

Milli-Majlis head Talgat Abdullin said such actions could include taking over the region's government, Interfax reported.

Other secessionist leaders have said in interviews that they would support such a move if the parliament is expanded to include them.

Further rescue efforts hopeless : 200 still missing Turkey seals off coal mine

KOZLU, (Turkey) Mar 6: Declaring further rescue efforts hopeless, officials sealed the blazing Kozlu coal mine last night, and with it the fate of up to 200 men still below in the worst mining disaster in Turkey's history, reports AFP.

With 138 bodies brought out, and all hope abandoned for the 148-200 listed as missing, the death toll would be "around 300", said a government source quoting mine officials.

Rescuers estimated that 200 men remained underground but the semi-official Turkish news agency Anadolu published a list of the missing men with 148 names on it.

The mine's management ordered the Yenikuyu and Uzun Mehmet pits, two kilometers apart, as well as all ventilation shafts in between sealed with clay.

They said the move was an

effort to squelch the methane gas fed inferno and prevent its spread to as yet untouched parts of the vast network of galleries ranging from 200 to 560 meters below the surface.

"We will reopen the entrances when we are satisfied the fire is out", said the engineer in charge of sealing the mine.

Of the approximately 100 miners injured when the methane gas explosion ripped through the Black Sea colliery, about 40 remained hospitalized Thursday night.

A member of the rescue team that withdrew said the heat, gas levels and the shortage of oxygen would make it extremely unlikely that of the miners underground could still be alive.

"The danger at the bottom of the two pits is extremely great, one of the engineers in charge of the operation told

AFP. Three teams that attempted to enter the mine on Thursday morning rapidly withdrew because of the risk of explosion, particularly because of gas leaks and fires.

The missing miners were thought to be trapped 500 metres below ground, close to the site of the initial explosion in a gallery linking the two pits.

Shortly before the decision to seal the mine was announced, engineers said it would be very difficult to continue either rescue efforts or attempts to block off and control the fires.

"The public will be shocked if we abandon the victims at the bottom of the pits but I can't ask my men to go back down," said Nihat Isik, one of the specialist engineers involved in the rescue operation.

The suspension of rescue attempts prompted bitter re-

criminations among survivors of the disaster.

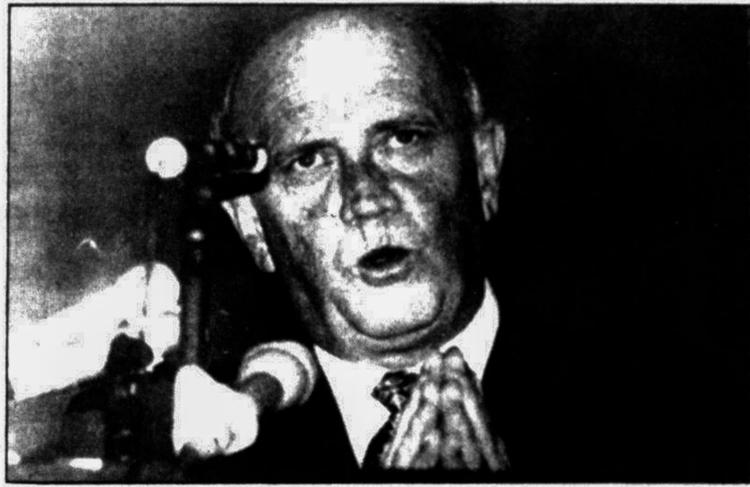
"The quantity of gas required to cause an explosion could never build up in 19 seconds despite what management says," said Mehmet Beyazyuz, a maintenance engineer at Yenikuyu.

The mine's management asserted that the gas build-up was "too quick for the computer-controlled alarm system."

Beyazyuz said the computer had recorded a dangerous level of methane in the gallery for 20 minutes prior to the blast.

"There was no alert, no alarm before the explosion," said Turgut Cayci, another maintenance engineer.

"In a lot of the galleries there aren't any detectors — how could you have an alarm?" he said.



UVONGO: South African President F.W. de Klerk invites whites to vote against Conservative Party (CP) in the March 17 referendum aimed at a campaign meeting in Uvongo, south of Durban. —AFP/UNB photo

Deng promises no reprisals to exiled Chinese

BEIJING, Mar 6: Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping has urged all exiled Chinese, whatever their political views, to come home and promised no reprisals. Chinese sources said on Friday, reports Reuters.

All Chinese who have gone overseas are welcome to return home "no matter what their political views and what views they have expressed in the past" one source close to the party quoted Deng as saying.

Dozens of students and dissident intellectuals have fled abroad since the people's liberation army used tanks and troops to crush student-led pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing in June 1989.

Begin in very critical condition

JERUSALEM, Mar 6: Former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who suffered a heart attack Tuesday, is in "very critical" condition, a relative told AFP late Thursday.

The relative, in a telephone call for Ichilov hospital in Tel Aviv where Begin is being treated, gave no details and declined to be identified.

Hospital spokeswoman said earlier that the 78-year-old former Prime Minister had regained consciousness and could leave a critical ward later Thursday or Friday.

"Begin is still on artificial respiration but his condition has slightly improved," said Bianca leaderman.

Seven killed as Myanmar plane drops bomb accidentally

BANGKOK, Mar 6: Seven people were killed and dozens injured when a Myanmar plane taking off to attack rebel bases accidentally dropped a bomb, a diplomat said on Friday, reports Reuters.

The incident happened at Mawbi Air Force Base, north of Yangon last week when the Chinese-made aircraft took off for a sortie against Karen guerrillas fighting near the Thai border, the diplomat said.

A series of explosions triggered by the bomb killed seven servicemen including the pilot and injured 30.

The Myanmar Air Force has launched a series of strikes against the Karen headquarters at Mauerplaw in support of a big ground attack.

China has supplied the Myanmar military with millions of dollars' worth of arms, including aircraft and tanks.

On Wednesday China demonstrated its K-8 jet trainer at Yangon airport, according to a state radio report monitored in Bangkok. The K-8 is jointly manufactured with Pakistan.

Shevardnadze to contest polls Georgia in bad shape

MOSCOW, Mar 6: Eduard A. Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister, will return to his native Georgia on Saturday and probably will run for parliament in the strifetorn republic, a top aide said Thursday, reports AP.

"Georgia is in bad shape, so he's going back to help" Teimuraza Stepanov, a close adviser and spokesman for Shevardnadze, told The Associated Press.

Unpublished, privately commissioned opinion polls indicate Shevardnadze, 64, is the most popular politician in the mountainous republic of 5.4 million people, according to reports in the daily Ivestia and weekly Moscow News.

Neither publication provided details of the polls or said who paid for them. Both said Shevardnadze was well ahead of all other politicians, even though he was once the republic's Communist Party boss and has lived in Moscow since 1985.

"The mood in Georgia is becoming formed, so to speak, in favor of my return, in favor of me taking part in the process of

building a democratic Georgia," Shevardnadze said Tuesday on commonwealth television.

Part of Shevardnadze's political appeal is his international prestige, which could draw badly needed foreign investment and help the republic break its isolation. Georgia is the only former Soviet republic, other than the Baltics, that has not joined the Commonwealth of Independent States, and it is still trying to gain diplomatic recognition by the United States.

Early this year, Shevardnadze established an international fund to help rebuild Georgia after its capital, Tbilisi, was ravaged by two weeks of fighting between supporters and opponents of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

A military council has governed Georgia since ousting Gamsakhurdia on January 6. The council has promised to call parliamentary elections and turn over power to a civilian government, but has not set a firm date for the elections.

Senior Chinese official sacked

BEIJING, Mar 6: A senior Chinese provincial official has been sacked after a stampede at a festival last year in which 105 people were killed and 108 injured, the official China Daily said today, reports Reuters.

It said Li Zhenghua, vice-governor of Shanxi province in north-central China, lost his post on Wednesday.

He was in charge of security at the festival in the provincial capital Taiyuan. Some 50,000 visitors crammed into a park for the lantern festival on September 24 and melee ensued.

"Li was found responsible for unlimited ticket sales which caused the overcrowding," the newspaper said. He also provided inadequate police to control the crowd, it said.

Newsmen launch indefinite sit-down protest in Kashmir

SIRINAGAR, (India) Mar 6: Kashmir journalists launched an indefinite sit-down protest on a busy main street here today to protest a government ban on press coverage of Muslim militant activities, reports AP.

Nearly 80 journalists sat on residency road carrying placards denouncing restrictions on the press and demanding a judicial probe into Thursday's police action against demonstrating journalist, eight of whom were injured.

The writers said the "Dharna" (sit-down) would continue until the government withdrew the curbs slapped earlier this week forbidding Kashmir periodicals from reporting Muslim militant activities and statements.

Newspapers published from the Kashmir valley would not appear until the ban was removed, they said.

Police briefly arrested 82 protesting journalists Thursday in Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital, after breaking up a demonstration with batons. Eight journalists were injured, two needing hospital treatment.

BRIEFLY

Bush to meet Nixon: President Bush will join former President Richard Nixon next week in addressing a policy conference on challenges to America after the collapse of the Soviet Union, reports AP from Washington.

Bush will give the keynote address at a formal dinner in his honor on March 11, the opening day of the conference called "America's Role in the Emerging World." Nixon will speak at a luncheon the same day and will introduce Bush.

Other scheduled speakers include former Secretary of State Henry A Kissinger; Robert Gates, Director of the CIA; US Trade Representative Carla A Hills and Zbigniew Brzezinski. The conference, in Washington, is sponsored by the Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace.

African summit by this month: The presidents of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania are expected to meet in Tanzania's northern town of Arusha later this month to discuss a proposal to set up an East Africa joint commission for cooperation, Tanzanian Foreign Minister Ahmed Hassan Diria said in Dar-es-Salaam on Wednesday, reports Xinhua.

The Foreign Minister made the announcement on his return from a meeting of Foreign Ministers of the three East African countries in Mbarara, Uganda.

He said that the formation of the commission was recommended during the meeting.

The meeting also recommended the creation of a small secretariat based in Arusha to co-ordinate the work of the commission, said the minister.

Baltic states form new forum: Foreign ministers from the 10 countries around the Baltic Sea founded a new international forum Thursday to encourage democracies, clean up long-neglected pollution and create a zone of economic growth, reports AP from Denmark.

A declaration of the Council of Baltic Sea States is to be signed Friday by the foreign ministers from Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Finland, Sweden Norway and Denmark.

German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, co-hosting the founding meeting, said he would support association agreements between the European Community and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Danish Foreign Minister Uffe Elemann-Jensen predicted, "All Baltic sea countries will be then (1993) have concluded association agreements with the EC."

"Our goal is to support our neighbours to the east on their difficult way to democracy and the market economy," said Genscher.

11 FIS men arrested: Police arrested 11 Muslim fundamentalists including the leader of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), in Ouled Mousa, 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of Algiers, a television report said Thursday night, reports AP.

Six arms caches, explosives, medicine and food hidden by the group were found in the Ammal mountains, the report said.

Dozens of empty bottles that could theoretically be used for Molotov cocktails, weapons, medicine, military gear and a car reportedly used by the group were shown on television.

Wednesday's ban of the FIS on behalf of the Interior Ministry crowned a military-based crackdown on the movement, which was thwarted in January of certain electoral victory.

Six killed in US plane crash: A plane crashed during a snowstorm in the Colorado mountains Thursday, killing all six people aboard. The weather also forced crews to suspend a search for two men missing in an avalanche, reports AP from Colorado.

But four people were rescued from an avalanche shelter after being trapped for hours by a slide of snow that piled up 40 feet (12 meters) deep.

The twin-engine Mitsubishi Mu-2 plane that vanished from radar had left Meacham Field in Dellas during the morning, the Garfield County sheriff's office said in a statement. It reportedly was bound for Aspen when it hit the storm and was diverted to another airport.

Talks on missing US soldiers begin

PHNOM PENH, Mar 6: US, Cambodian and Vietnamese officials opened unprecedented talks in Phnom Penh today to co-ordinate searches along Cambodia's eastern border for American soldiers missing since the Indochina War, reports Reuters.

US military spokesman Lieutenant-Commander Ken Patterson said the three sides would "address specific methods for investigating and researching those areas."

Around 60 of the 90 American civilians and servicemen unaccounted for from the war in Cambodia were lost in border areas controlled by

Southern Vietnamese guerrillas or regular Hanoi troops.

The forum, which might continue for a second day, marks the first time the three countries have met to discuss the issue of Americans who went missing in action (MIAs) and Prisoners of War (POWs), Patterson said.

The nine-member US team led by Brigadier-General Thomas Needham, Commander of Joint Task Force full accounting (JTF-FA) — which oversees the search for MIAs.

The delegation includes an officer who specialises in reported live sightings of POWs and MIAs.

Major Jim Moye is currently supervising a search in Southern Cambodia for the remains of five journalists — an American, a Frenchman and three Japanese — believed executed by Khmer Rouge guerrillas in 1970. He said earlier this week the military had received reports of live sighting in Cambodia.

Most observers say they cannot believe anyone could have survived the fanatical rule of the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979, which resulted in the deaths of more than a million Cambodians and some foreigners.

The Vietnamese delegation

is headed by a senior foreign Ministry official, Nguyen Xuan, while Phnom Penh's delegation is led by Deputy Interior Minister Nuon Sareth.

"Cambodia has been trying its best to resolve the issue... and is very pleased with the past fruitful cooperation with the American government," the Cambodian said.

The United States has never recognised the Phnom Penh leadership on the grounds that it was installed by invading Vietnamese troops.

Phnom Penh has agreed to let the United States conduct five searches this year.

Off the Record

Goat genes can save heart

NEW DELHI: Scientists have managed to alter goat genes to make the animal produce a miracle milk that dissolves deadly blood clots in victims of heart attack, according to a US-based researcher, reports AP.

Mushtaq Memon, a Pakistan-born scientist associated with a research group at the Tufts University in the United States, said the milk of the "transgenic" goats contained a clot-dissolving agent called Tissue Plasminogen Activator.

The project, supported by a US biotechnology company, held out the possibility of producing the drug, which now costs about 2,000 dollars a dose, at a drastically lower 50 to 200 dollars, the Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted him as saying.

Memon told the international conference on goats here Wednesday that the "appropriate" genes were inserted into goat embryos. The resultant transgenic goats become "live factories" of the life-saving drug. "Our experiments show that medically important human pharmaceuticals could be produced from such goats," PTI quoted the researcher as saying.

He said the development of transgenic animals could help transform animal products — decrease fat content in milk, increase its protein content and improve wool.

'Teacher-in space' husband has remarried

CONCORD, NH: The husband of NASA 'teacher-in-space' Christa McAuliffe, who was killed six years ago when the shuttle Challenger exploded, has remarried another teacher, reports AP.

Steven McAuliffe, president of the New Hampshire Bar Association, married Kathy Thomas, a reading teacher, for the Concord School District.

The newly weds, both 44, each have two children, ranging from ages 12 to 20. The wedding was private.

Christa McAuliffe, a teacher at Concord High School, was among seven Challenger crew members killed January 28, 1986, when the shuttle exploded.

McAuliffe has generally shunned publicity related to his late wife, but has spoken at some events in her honor, notably the dedication of the Christa McAuliffe Planetarium in Concord.

He would not say when the wedding took place.

'I told her to leave me'

NEW YORK: Burt Reynolds said he was deeply wounded by vicious rumours and friends who abandoned him when he was bedridden for two years after shattering his jaw in 1984 while making a film, reports AP.

In the forthcoming Parade magazine, Reynolds said he even advised Loni Anderson, now his wife, to leave him.

"I told her she was young, that I'd probably be an invalid all my life, the career was over the money would go leave me. Find someone else, she never left my side," Reynolds said.

The accident occurred while Reynolds was making "City Heat." He was hit on the temple with a chair. It shattered my jaw, the joint cracked like an egg. He couldn't chew, light and sound were unbearable.

And then the rumors started. The AIDS stuff. The gay stuff. I was incredibly hurt. But what amazed me were the friends who abandoned us.

Since his recovery, Reynolds and his wife adopted a son. Reynolds won an Emmy and a Golden Globe award for his CBS series, "Evening Shade."

Jhumjhum 'Miss Calcutta'

CALCUTTA: A city delight Jhumjhum Banerjee, was adjudged 'Miss Calcutta' at the Femina eastern zonal beauty contest here Thursday, reports PTI.

An arts student of 12th standard beauty Queen Jhumjhum finds pleasure in fashion designing and holds modelling — a charming career awaiting her.

Now decking up for the March 21 'Miss India' contest in Bombay, Jhumjhum won the crown walking past 25 other beauties drawn from the eastern and north eastern states.

Komal Sandhu, also from Calcutta, was declared the first runner-up followed by Ghanapriya Devi of Annapur.



KHORASAN, Pakistan: Afghan horsemen from the Northern province of Balkh and Kunduz battle over a headless calf, as they engage in a traditional Afghan sport called Buzkachi in a refugee camp near Peshawar. — AFP/UNB photo

Warring militias ignore truce call in Nagorno-Karabakh

AGDAM, Azerbaijan, Mar 6: Warring militias ignored calls Thursday for ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, and a pro-courier investigating mass killings in the town of Khozhaly said the bodies of 200 Azerbaijanis had been recovered, reports AP.

Armenian and Azerbaijani sources reported new attacks that left at least a dozen dead on each side of the fight for the disputed Caucasus Mountains region.

The deaths came despite a fresh peace effort launched Wednesday by Presidents Boris Yeltsin of Russia and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan,

who called for a ceasefire and negotiations to end the ethnic dispute that has raged for more than four years.

Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian issued a statement welcoming the peace initiative and called for an emergency session of commonwealth leaders to discuss the violence, the ITAR Tass news agency said.

The Azerbaijani president's office, meanwhile, said 12 people were killed in overnight Armenian shelling of the Azerbaijani village of Syrkhavend 25 kms northwest of this city on the border with Nagorno-Karabakh.

The independent Armenian news agency SNARK said 18 civilians were killed by Azerbaijanis in the Armenian village of Kazanchi, also near Agdam.

There was no way to verify either report independently. The disputed region's border is 5 km west of Agdam, and the fighting was moving closer to the city. Six tanks and an armored personnel carrier rolled out of Agdam on the road toward Kazanchi, but no one would say what their mission was.

In Baku, Azerbaijan's parliament met in emergency session and President Ayaz

Mutalibov said the main task was to strengthen the country's borders and form a well-equipped regular army, the Azeriform-Tass news agency reported.

There was a direct rejection of Nazarbayev's peace proposal Wednesday, which urged a moratorium on forming such armies by members of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

According to Azerbaijani radio monitored in London, Mutalibov said, "our lands and towns, which have been occupied by brigands, must be liberated."

troops of helping Armenia. He said Azerbaijan's setbacks in Nagorno-Karabakh were due to a " rapprochement between Russia and Armenia on the basis of common strategic interests," the Turan news agency quoted him as saying.

Earlier this week, Azerbaijan accused the Russian-led commonwealth troops of participating with Armenian forces in Khozhaly slayings. A commonwealth military spokesman denied the charge.

Outside parliament in Baku, thousands of people drawn to a rally by the opposition Popular Front of Azerbaijan shouted for the resignation of the government leadership and a demilitarized zone in Nagorno-Karabakh. About 200,000 people reside in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan appealed the United Nations on Thursday to help resolve the dispute. Foreign Minister Gusan Sadykhov sent Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali a letter asking him "to stop the aggression against the people of Azerbaijan, using for this your authority and the wide experience of the UN in the resolution of ethnic conflicts."

Sadykhov did not say what action the United Nations should take.