

1,079 killed by Lankan death squads?

COLOMBO, Apr 9: Opposition leaders produced affidavits from a former senior police officer Thursday claiming knowledge of 1,079 political killings by government-backed death squads, reports AP.

The sworn statements from Premadasa Udugampola, a former police deputy inspector general, also alleged that the government rigged the parliamentary and presidential elections.

The allegations referred to 1988 and 1989, when the government of President Ranasinghe Premadasa was fighting a racial Sinhalese rebellion in southern Sri Lanka.

The government has denied Udugampola's charges, which he had previously made public

in more general terms.

"All these revelations go to the root of the questions of the preservation of human rights, democratic rights of the country," said former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, leader of the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

Bandaranaike, speaking at a news conference, demanded an investigation by a judicial inquiry commission into the former policeman's statements.

Udugampola headed the Bureau of Special Operations and was instrumental in the crackdown on the Sinhalese insurgents.

In a letter to Mrs Bandaranaike, Udugampola claimed his life was in danger



A Bosnian militiaman protects Muslims praying on Wednesday at a mosque in a Muslim neighbourhood which has been sheltered for four days by Serbs opposed to independence for Bosnia-Herzegovina. — AFP/UNB photo

Fresh factional fighting in Johannesburg

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 9: Seven black men were killed, shot, stabbed or thrown from moving trains, in renewed factional fighting in South Africa's black townships on Wednesday, police said, reports Reuter.

Police said today that four men died in three separate incidents in Kaitshong, east of Johannesburg, where 20 people were massacred in an attack on Saturday.

One man was found shot in Vosloorus, another was found dead alongside a railway track at 'Booyens and a third was shot and killed in Alexandra, scene of fierce fighting last month.

The police report said at least one of the dead was stabbed and then thrown from a moving train.

DPRK missile to pose threat to Asia, ME

WASHINGTON, Apr 9: North Korea is developing a missile for the international arms market with range exceeding 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) which will pose a threat to Asia and the Middle East, a senior State Department official said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Pyongyang has not been satisfied with exporting missile systems to the Middle East such as the Scud-C type, with an average range of 600 kilometers (370 miles) but also appears willing to sell the equipment and technology to permit other countries to build their own missiles, said Under Secretary of State for International Security Affairs Reginald Bartholomew.

North Korea is working on production of a missile with a range greater than 1,000 kilometers which would enable it to "target all of South Korea and most of Japan," Bartholomew told a House of Representatives committee.

"It is highly likely that this system and the technology to produce it will become available on the international market," Bartholomew said. "Such a system is inherently so inaccurate that its only use will be as a terror weapons against cities."

These North Korean actions regarding missiles and missile technology represent a threat to the security of Northeast Asia, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, and anywhere else such missiles are procured.

BRIEFLY

US to continue N-tests: The United States said Wednesday it would continue nuclear tests despite France's announcement that it was suspending its tests in the Pacific and a call to other countries to follow suit, AFP reports from Washington.

"Nuclear deterrence continues to play a vital role in United States national security strategy," said State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler.

"We will continue to conduct tests as required. Those tests are critical to ensuring the reliability, safety, security and survivability of that deterrent."

French Prime Minister Pierre Bergegovoy said in his first general policy speech Wednesday that France had decided to suspend nuclear testing this year in the South Pacific.

Ukraine to create own army: Ukrainian lawmakers voted overwhelmingly Wednesday to create an independent armed force, and President Leonid Kravchuk appointed his own commander of the disputed Black Sea Fleet, AP reports from Kiev.

Both moves were likely to increase the tension between Ukraine and Russia, which have been squabbling for months over how to divide the military remnants of the former Soviet Union.

Ukraine's Supreme Soviet voted 323 to 6 in favour of a resolution backing Kravchuk's independent military policy.

State of emergency in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Apr 9: The government of President Alija Izetbegovic declared a state of emergency Wednesday in the newly independent Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, now plunged into civil war, reports AP.

The government is to take over forces guaranteeing the territorial defense of Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus replacing the Yugoslav Federal Army, an official communique from the Bosnian presidency said.

In a state of emergency, the presidency takes over all state powers, including commanding the army, and parliament is suspended.

Croatian representative to the collective Bosnian presidency Stjepan Kujacic said the presidency was preparing to negotiate with the army and would place the defence of Sarajevo, the capital, under a unified command.

"Some of these groups are taking advantage of the situation to carry out terrorism," he said.

He said the presidency would order a ceasefire in Kupres in Western Bosnia, where Croatian forces are fighting Serbian-led Yugoslav army troops, and that "this will be a test of the loyalty of the army to Bosnia-Herzegovina."

In a television address Wednesday, a Yugoslav general warned officials of Bosnia-Herzegovina to respect the army while in the republic Sarajevo was surrounded by Yugoslav army troops and there was fear they would attack.

General Muharem Fetahagic said on television here that authorities in Sarajevo should not "play with the army."

He said paramilitary groups were thinking of attacking Yugoslav army troops.

"Let us make peace. Your interests and ours will meet," the general said, adding that "only dialogue will help us to avoid clashing."

Another report adds: The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on Wednesday urged its members to provide political, moral and material support to the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Secretary General Hamid Algabid called on parties to the conflict in the former Yugoslav republic, notably the Yugoslav government, to respect "the clear choice of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina for independence."

In a statement issued in the Western Saudi city of Jeddah, headquarters of the OIC, Algabid said he was "deeply concerned" by the stepped up interethnic violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where a civil war is pitting Muslim Slavs and Croats against Serbs and Yugoslav soldiers, leaving scores of dead in recent days.

Algabid met recently with the Muslim president of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic who also held talks with King Fahd.

The republic of Bosnia voted for independence on February 29 in a ballot rejected by the Serbian minority. The European community and the United States recognized Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent state this week.

Its population is 43.7 per cent Slav Muslim. Another 31.4 per cent are Serbs and 17.4 per cent Croats.

Off the Record

Warm welcome by Robot

OSAKA: Chinese Communist party Chief Jiang Zemin shook hands with a robot on his tour of Matsushita Electric Industrial Co Ltd here today a company spokesman said, reports AP.

Jiang was quoted as telling Matsushita executives in a brief meeting that he had long been paying attention to the company's management system and hoped to maintain friendly ties with the firm.

The censor robot measured his grip and body temperature. He was scheduled later to meet local officials in Okayama, where he is to inspect the series of bridges that link Honshu and Shikoku islands.

Sexism is moral, social evil

UNDATED: Sexism is a moral and social evil that the US Catholic Church should fight in forums ranging from its own youth education programmes to legislative battles for equal pay for equal work, a committee of bishops said Thursday, reports AP.

Treading between risking Vatican censure and the anger of millions of Catholic women, the committee did not back down to the demands of some top church leaders that its pastoral letter be downgraded to a pastoral statement.

In the third draft, the bishops also call for each diocese to establish commissions on women and society and more discussion on allowing female deacons and altar servers. They also say the willingness of priesthood candidates to treat women as equals should be taken into consideration for ordination.

But the document by the Ad Hoc Committee for a Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns also adheres closely to traditional church teaching in upholding the male priesthood and bans on artificial contraception. Abortion is described as an "unspeakable crime," and lesbians are called to practice chastity.

The letter has undergone a nine-year odyssey in which bishops were delayed by criticism from women that the subject was inappropriate for an all-male hierarchy and by concerns from Rome that the US church would move too far too fast in advancing women's issues.

But Sister Phyllis Price of New York said the letter will always fall short if the bishops continue to ban women priests.

"It's the dysfunctional system in the church that is the problem," she said.

The draft strongly condemns the 'sin' of sexism, which it traces back to Genesis for an understanding of the unjust domination of women and the failure to respect women as persons.

"Therefore, with the whole church, we repeat and affirm the truth that men and women are equal before God and one another. . . . In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, we denounce sexism as a moral and social evil," the letter states.

Newsman tortured in Haiti:

A crusading journalist held for nearly five months in a provincial jail was tortured after being transferred to the National Penitentiary a week ago, his lawyer said Wednesday, AP reports from Port-Au-Prince.

Prison authorities also took away Paul Jean Mario's medication for internal bleeding caused by earlier beatings, said Camille Leblanc, who saw his client, a reporter for privately owned Radio Antilles on Tuesday.

Leblanc said "the army is obviously trying to send other journalists a message — this is what awaits you if you try to do your job correctly. They are settling accounts with him."

Mario was arrested in November and charged with burning down a police station and courthouse following Aristide's ouster. He said he was only covering the turmoil that initiated the burnings.

Yeltsin cabinet threatens to step down

MOSCOW, Apr 9: The entire Russian Cabinet will step down if parliament forces President Boris Yeltsin to surrender his position as head of the government, says the architect of his free market reforms, reports AP.

Momentum swung back to Yeltsin's opponents at a crucial session of parliament on Wednesday, but Yeltsin still had time to lobby — or compromise — before a possible vote Thursday.

The vote would be to declare 'dissatisfaction' with his market reforms and revoke his authority to issue economic decrees without legislative approval.

France suspends N-test

PARIS, Apr 9: France has become the first nation to indefinitely suspend its nuclear weapons testing, it is urging other nations to follow suit, reports AP.

The Soviet Union declared a one-year moratorium on weapons tests in October. There was no sign the three other major nuclear powers were prepared to follow France's example. The US State Department said bomb tests in Nevada would continue.

Somen defeats Mamata

CALCUTTA, Apr 9: Somen Mitra, one of the stalwarts of the West Bengal Congress, was tonight declared president of the party after he defeated MS Mamata Banerjee, the Union Minister of State for Sports, in a keenly contested election that saw the party sharply polarised between two camps, reports PTI.

Mitra was one of the general secretaries of the outgoing PCC-I of which Siddhartha Shankar Ray was the president. He defeated Ms Banerjee by a margin of 27 votes. Mitra polled 214 votes while Banerjee got 187. One vote was rejected.

"I'm afraid that the odds are pretty good that the President will lose his additional powers," said Gleb Yakunin, a lawmaker and Russian Orthodox priest in black clerical robes. "Your can see that a large part of these deputies are still pro-Communist at heart."

The loss of Yeltsin's special powers, granted by parliament a year ago, would be a severe blow to the reforms and could lead to a complete overhaul of his Cabinet.

"If the president loses his extraordinary powers and his ability to lead the government, the entire Cabinet of course will resign," Vice Premier Yegor Gaidar told a worried meeting of Yeltsin supporters Wednesday night.

Yeltsin is prime minister and defense minister as well as president, but is under mounting pressure to abandon the extra posts.

Yeltsin had seized the initiative Tuesday in the 1,046-member Congress of People's Deputies, dominated by former Communists, by warning that a reduction in his powers could plunge the country into chaos.

He also bolstered his support among Russian hard-liners by countering Ukraine's claim to the Black Sea fleet and speeding up the formation of a separate Russian army.

But his opponents took the offensive Wednesday, forcing him to return to his lonely seat on a platform in front of the parliament and listen in silence as they accused him of leading the Russian people into poverty.

At the start of the session in the Grand Kremlin Palace, Yeltsin left his chair, directly under a huge Russian flag that covers a Communist-era portrait of Lenin. Aides said he was attending an important meeting — of Russia's Constitutional Commission in another wing of the former Czar's Palace.

But lawmakers voted 606-149 to demand that he come back and hear their criticism.

He sat impassively, with a crooked half-frown, for more than an hour as deputies denounced skyrocketing prices, poor medical care, rising crime, reliance on foreign aid, and the Cabinet that Yeltsin appointed without legislative approval under his special powers.

Reformers who began the so-called shock therapy must now learn two new words: first aid and resuscitation, because that is what most of the population needs," said lawmaker Valery Vorontsov.

Yeltsin's economic programme has caused prices to soar and "pushed millions of people into poverty," Vorontsov said.

The last time the formation of a government was regulated by laws like ours was under Mussolini, when Fascists came to power in Italy," lawmaker Sergei Polozkov said to rousing applause.

That prompted Yeltsin to get up and walk off the platform again, while Polozkov continued speaking.

"Boris Mikolayevich, we ask you to leave the post of prime minister. You have enough to handle with the military and other matters," he said.

Imelda vows to bring Marcos' body:

Former first lady Imelda Marcos will bring the corpse of her husband Ferdinand home to the Philippines as scheduled on Sunday despite a government ban, her lawyer said, Thursday, Reuter reports from Manila.

"I am willing to go to jail for it," lawyer Antonio Coronel quoted Imelda as saying, after being told of the government's decision not to allow a Philippine burial for the former dictator until after the May 11 presidential election.

"We are defying the ruling of the cabinet. We are bringing the body as scheduled on Sunday," Coronel said by telephone.

Decree to stop corrupt officials:

Russian President Boris Yeltsin, trying to pilot his country from communism to free-market capitalism, issued a decree on Wednesday to stop corrupt officials making a rouble on the side, Reuter reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin's decree bans government officials from entering into any commercial activity or from using their position to help others make money in return for payment.

It also stops them having any second source of income except for academic, teaching or creative work. Potential recruits to the country's civil service will be closely vetted and will have to declare any shareholdings or property interests.

Jobless riot in Panama:

Police have used tear-gas and birdshot to scatter hundreds of protesting jobless people in the northern city of Colon and authorities have declared a nighttime curfew to quell the riots, AP reports from Panama city.

Wednesday was the second consecutive day of violent demonstrations, mostly in Colon city, on the Atlantic entrance of the Panama Canal. The demonstrators were protesting high unemployment and poverty.

Police said 20 people were injured Tuesday and at least six more Wednesday evening. A total of 34 demonstrators were arrested.

Colon is a thriving freeport zone with trade amounting to about 6 billion dollars a year. It provides impoverished Panama with a large chunk of its income. But an estimated 35 percent of the province's 167,000 people are unemployed, and about half of them live in abject poverty.



Mourners carry on Wednesday the body of a student killed in Patan district by police shooting during strike in Nepal. Over thousand took part in the funeral procession. — AFP/UNB photo

Fall of Bataan celebrated

MOUNT SAMAT (Philippines), Apr 9: Aging veterans gathered Thursday on this mountain with dignitaries from the United States, Japan and the Philippines to commemorate the World War II fall of Bataan a half century ago, reports AP.

On April 9, 1942, more than 70,000 sick, wounded and half-starved American and Filipino troops surrendered to the Japanese, who broke through defenses on this mountain stronghold 35 miles (54 kilometers) west of Manila.

Thousands died during the brutal "Death March" to prison camps 60 miles (96 kilometers) to the north after the worst defeat ever suffered by American forces.

Govt Commanders, Mujahideen form alliance in N Afghanistan

KABUL, Apr 9: Military commanders and resistance guerrillas have apparently prompted a United Nations peace plan for Afghanistan, forging an ethnic alliance and laying down arms in the North of the devastated country, reports AP.

The UN plan, due to take effect April 28, aims to install a neutral government in place of that of Soviet-installed President Najibullah, who is still holding fast in Kabul.

Mujahideen guerrillas and government commanders with whom they shared ethnic links formed a coalition last month in the strategic north, taking control of the region and accusing Najibullah of trying to prolong the 13-year-old war.

Leaders of what they call the "National Islamic Movement" — comprising ethnic Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen and Ismaili tribesmen — say they now control most of 11 provinces, from the borders of the old Soviet Union to the borders of Kabul province.

How the guns were silenced will likely remain a bit of a mystery.

But the man who instigated it three months ago, Brigadier General Abdul Momen, commander of the strategic frontier city of Herat, says no real decision to lay down arms in the region was ever made.

Momen, who refused to step down when Najibullah tried to replace him with a Pashtun, told foreign journalists Tuesday that Najibullah sparked the crisis by trying to prolong the war.

"It was not a major decision," he said in the Northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif. "It is just a small group of people around Najib who are keeping the war going."

Momen added that he and members of the ruling northern military council support and want to expedite the UN plan.

"We are not short-sighted," he added when asked whether the movement might spread to the rest of the country. "We support the UN process. It is necessary."

Momen and fellow commanders dismissed talk in Kabul that the Northern movement was "separatist and racist" in nature, implicitly charging that Najibullah was trying to stay in power by stirring a racial conflict.

Najibullah has argued plausibly that he has "too many generals" and that the 13-year-old war has left not only more than one million dead but too many people dependent on war for a living. The racial issue is explosive in Afghanistan, as UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's special representative on Afghanistan, Benon Sevan, emphasised last month.

Sevan warned that unless the UN peace process went ahead quickly, Afghanistan risked dismemberment along racial lines.

The Northern revolt followed Najibullah's attempt to replace commanders most with ethnic roots in the north, with Pashtuns from his own province of Paktya, apparently in advance of the peace plan.

Most of Afghanistan's five million refugees fleeing the fighting after the Soviet invasion in 1979 have been Pashtuns. The Soviets pulled out in 1989. The net result is that on both sides of the war, most people remaining inside Afghanistan have been non-Pashtun.

"The peace plan is too late," said one of the highest-ranking members of Najibullah's Watan (Homeland) Party, whose non-Pashtun members now outnumber Pashtuns, mostly because Pashtuns resisted the Soviets hardest and were driven out by carpet-bombing.

A diplomat at the former Soviet embassy here, bidding farewell before his Russian replacement arrived, said the country's internal ethnic mix had changed beyond recognition.

"Most Pashtuns inside the country," the diplomat said last week, "have no affinity with Pakistan or with Kabul," referring to the Pakistan-based Mujahideen and the Soviet-installed government here.

"The hard truth, and all realise, is that if the refugees come back, the elections could bring in Pashtuns who want to return to the old ways. But it was the non-Pashtuns who supported Najibullah, and the non-Pashtuns who fought him here on his own ground."

"They will not be content with going back to being subservient," he added.

3 get life term for murdering a Sikh family

NEW DELHI, Apr 9: A court has sentenced three men to life imprisonment for murdering a family of Sikhs in the riots that engulfed New Delhi after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, a newspaper said Thursday, reports AP.

It was rare instance of imprisonment of those accused in the 1984 riots in which 2,700 people, most of them Sikhs, were killed after Mrs Gandhi was gunned down by her Sikh bodyguards.

Failure to prosecute the rioters has been a central grievance of Sikh militants who have been fighting for an independent Sikh nation in the northern state of Punjab.