

OAS plans to suspend army-ruled members

WASHINGTON, Dec 13: The Organization of American States (OAS) is preparing to change its charter to allow suspension of members if a democratic government is ousted in a military coup, reports AFP.

The suspension would be invoked only as a last resort after all diplomatic avenues are exhausted, according to a draft of the resolution to be discussed in an OAS Foreign Ministers meeting Monday and Tuesday.

The OAS approved anti-coup measures at a General Assembly meeting in June 1991.

Most of Indian riot victims are Muslims

BOMBAY, Dec 13: Two-thirds of those killed in religious rioting in India in the past week were Muslims, Defence Minister Sharad Pawar said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Pawar told reporters in Bombay the death toll from rioting that broke out after Hindu zealots tore down a mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya on Sunday stood at 1,097.

"The death ratio between Hindus and Muslims was one to two," he said.

The government said on Saturday the unrest had eased but some parts of the country were still tense.

The US human rights organisation Asia Watch asked

Asia Watch demands to probe securitymen's involvement

the government to investigate allegations that police joined Hindu mobs targeting Muslims in the six days of sectarian clashes.

Pawar rejected complaints that security forces had failed to act quickly. "Millions of people saw the mosque being demolished on BBC and CNN and their anger was uncontrollable. The security personnel did their best," he said.

Asia Watch said in a statement: "The government should... undertake a full investigation of reports that police and other security personnel may have participated in the... riots or engaged in summary executions... of Muslims in their efforts to put down the violence."

India's Muslim League was one of the several groups to accuse the country's largely Hindu police of targeting Muslims. Senior opposition politicians supported the allegation, saying the strife had kindled passions in police force throughout the overwhelmingly Hindu nation.

India has more than 100 million Muslims among its 870 million population, 82 per cent of which is Hindu. It is the world's second largest Muslim community after Indonesia.

"Almost 80 to 90 per cent of the killings across Uttar Pradesh have been of Muslims with police bullets," Former prime, Minister Vishwanath

Pratap Singh of the centrist Janata Dal party told Reuters. Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao had ordered an inquiry into the violence, including allegations against government employees.

New York-based Asia Watch condemned the demolition of the 16th century Babri Mosque, saying policemen stood aside to allow a five-hour frenzy which reduced it to rubble.

In its place Hindu militants built a small, temporary shrine to their Warrior-God Lord Rama.

"The Asia Watch demand is late by several days," a government spokesman said. "The government is already looking into all aspects of the issue,

including allegations against police."

The destruction of the mosque incensed the Islamic world. In neighbouring Pakistan Hindu temples were destroyed and crowds ransacked the home of the Indian consul-general in Karachi.

In the Gulf state of Qatar foreign ministry officials said the destruction of the mosque was a challenge of Islam.

K R Malkani, Vice-President of the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party, accused Rao of failing to protect India's interests abroad and of yielding to Islamic pressure.

"When the question of national honour is concerned and when there is blatant interfer-

Afghans fail to meet to elect president

KABUL, Dec 13: A meeting of nationwide representatives to elect a new Afghan President failed to open on schedule on Saturday that a spokesman said it would take place within a few days, reports Reuter.

The Hal-O-Aqad council of 1,500 elected representatives had been due to meet until December 15, when the term of interim President Burhanuddin Rabbani ends.

"We are sure that we will hold the Hal-O-Aqad council in the next few days," presidential spokesman Aziz Murad said. He was unable to give a specific date.

Rabbani's failure to hold the meeting on time raised fears among other Mujahideen leaders in the Islamic coalition that he wanted to cling to his job.

Indian diplomat's car damaged:

A bomb damaged an Indian diplomat's car on Saturday, but caused no injuries, the semi-official Anatolia news agency said, reports AP from Ankara.

The news agency said police suspected that the attack was linked to the latest outburst of Hindu-Muslim violence in India.

The bomb, which was planted on a car wounded by Yaspur Kumar, the second secretary of the Indian Embassy, went off around 8 pm (1800 GMT), Anatolia said.

The car was parked in front of the diplomat's residence in the affluent district of Cankaya. The explosion shattered the windows of the building, the news agency said.

Tunisia to join UN force:

Tunisia is to send an army unit and a medical team to join the UN force in Somalia charged with protecting food shipments from gunmen and looters in that starving nation, AP reports from Tunis.

An announcement from the office of President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali did not specify how many Tunisians were involved in the operation or provide a departure date.

It said only that an army unit would be sent "reinforced by a medical team."

Tunisia had said earlier it was prepared to take part in the multinational force, led by the United States.

Tremor shakes Venezuela:

An earth tremor shook western Andean city Saturday, but no injuries or damage were reported, authorities said, according to AP from Venezuela.

The epicentre of the tremor, measuring 4.9 on the Richter scale, was in an area known as Paramo de los Conejos, about 25 kms (15 miles) north of Merida, officials said.

The Richter scale is a gauge of the energy released by an earthquake, as measured by the ground motion recorded on a seismograph. A quake of magnitude 5 can cause considerable damage.

Robert Rex dead:

One of the South Pacific's longest-serving leaders, Niue Premier Sir Robert Rex, 83, has died, New Zealand Prime Minister Jim Bolger said Sunday, AP reports from Wellington.

Rex died on Saturday. The cause was not made public. He had been premier of the tiny island state since it was granted self-government from New Zealand administration in 1974. Since then he had worked all Cabinet positions.

Bolger said the South Pacific had lost a great leader. "He had formidable political skills and was much loved," Bolger said.

Niue (pronounced noo-eh) is a tiny island of 260 square kilometers (100 square miles) about 2,400 kilometers (1,500 miles) northeast of Wellington.

Algerian cop killed in violence:

Three school children were wounded and a policeman killed in a hit-and-run attack last week in suburban Algiers, police said Saturday. A homemade bomb exploded the same day at a cinema but caused no serious injuries, AP reports from Algiers.

The attack Thursday that injured two girls and a boy, ages five, eight and 10, was the first known incident of children falling victim to a terror campaign blamed on Islamic extremists. They were by standers, accidentally injured in an attack on a policeman.

It was one of four such attacks carried out on three successive days last week, between Wednesday and Friday, which killed a police chief and three officers despite a renewed drive against Islamic extremists, capped by a 10:30 pm to 5 am curfew that went into effect Dec 5.

Cuban dissident beaten up:

Elzardo Sanchez, Cuba's leading dissident, regained consciousness in a Havana military clinic Saturday 48 hours after he was beaten by either Cuban police or pro-Castro vigilantes, a Cuban exile group said, AP reports from San Juan.

Sanchez had "traumas all over his body and face and his blood pressure was skyrocketing," said Angel Padilla, leader of the Puerto Rican chapter of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, quoting Havana sources.

Sanchez 49, was beaten Thursday by Cuban police or "rapid action brigades" — government-organized civilian vigilantes. Family members were able to visit him briefly at the Carlos F Finlay military hospital, but were not allowed to stay, Padilla said.

UK-Argentine talks end without accord

BUENOS AIRES, Dec 13: Two days of talks ended on Friday night without agreement on British proposals for Argentina to reduce South Atlantic fishing licences which had attracted foreign fleets away from the Falkland Islands, Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella said, reports Reuter.

After extensive discussions Argentina and Britain reaffirmed their respective positions. Di Tella told reporters. However, he added that he hoped an agreement would be reached within the coming week.

Argentina's decision last month to grant licenses to European and Japanese fleets to fish its territorial waters in the South Atlantic has cost the British controlled Falkland Islands around 30 million US dollars in lost licenses, according to diplomatic sources.



MOSCOW: Russian President Boris Yeltsin (L) and Parliamentary Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov shake hands in the Congress hall on Saturday after the Congress of People's Deputies approved a compromise reached between the two, calling for a nationwide referendum on the Russian constitution April 11. Deputies voted in favour 541 to 98. — AFP/UNB photo

Russia holds referendum April 11

MOSCOW, Dec 13: President Boris Yeltsin seems likely to keep his favoured economic helmsman as Head of government — at least for four more months — after a trial of strength with Russia's mutinous legislature, reports Reuter.

Yeltsin and the Congress of People's Deputies agreed a compromise deal on Saturday to end an acute political crisis that had threatened to divide the vast country.

Under a nine-point package, Russia will hold a referendum on April 11 to decide the outlines of a new constitution.

The compromise allows the President, battling the Conservative-dominated Congress to push ahead with radical economic reform, to have the final word on the choice of Prime Minister.

Under the deal, Congress will vote on several candidates for Prime Minister and Yeltsin will nominate on Monday one of the top three for the post.

Most Deputies say this, in all likelihood, will be acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, a free market radical and pivotal figure in Russia's economic reform drive.

If Congress rejects Yeltsin's nomination of Gaidar he will at least be able to keep him as acting Prime Minister until April. "If that person does not win a majority, I shall appoint Yegor Gaidar as acting Head of government until the eighth Congress," Yeltsin told Moscow channel one television.

European leaders expressed concern over Iran's record on human rights and terrorism and warned against an Iranian arms build-up. A declaration issued today at the end of a two-day European Community summit condemned Iran's "Fatwa" or death sentence, against British Author Salman Rushdie. The 12 EC leaders said it was important to maintain a "critical dialogue" with Tehran reflecting "concern about areas, particularly human rights. The Fatwa and terrorism."

gists see possible destabilization of an already dangerous region and a serious long-term threat to Western interests. They fear Iran will be made progressively less stable by continual political infighting among the Tehran elite, internal unrest, an economy unlikely to improve without Western assistance and a bur-

China's military will open its arms to foreign investors

BEIJING, Dec 13: China's military is opening its arms to foreign investors with promises of technical expertise, reliability and the benefit of good relations with the government, an official newspaper said today, reports AFP.

"Foreign investors have come to realize it will be safer to cooperate with military enterprises," an official of the China National Nuclear Corp. (CNNC) told the English-language China Daily.

"We have strong technologies and we keep promises," CNNC Planning Director Wei Guangwen was quoted as say-

ing. Meanwhile Reuter adds: China is seeking huge foreign investment to convert its military plants to civilian production and has decided to throw open its once top-secret nuclear facilities, a newspaper said on Sunday.

Shrinking demand for military goods had made much of the nuclear sector redundant and Beijing was trying to avoid mass layoffs, the China Daily quoted officials as saying.

"We welcome across-the-board investment in the nuclear industry by foreign businesses," Wei Guangwen was

quoted as saying. He predicted his company would produce more civilian military products this year. Last year civil production made up 54 per cent of the 420 million dollar total, and Wei said the proportion would top 80 per cent soon.

"We aim, and are able, to build joint ventures with foreign partners whose products, will be very competitive in the domestic market," Wei said.

The defence industry is one of the country's biggest employers

Benazir names Zardari to talk with govt

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto on Saturday named three jailed men, including her husband, as mediators to talk to the government about a proposed conference between the two sides, reports Reuter.

But she said in a letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that the "all-parties conference" which he proposed must discuss the opposition's demand for the resignation of his 25-month-old government and fresh elections under a neutral administration.

Political sources said Sharif's negotiating team was unlikely to agree to meet Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari and the two other proposed mediators, all of whom deny the criminal charges against them.

Sharif invited opposition parties to a meeting last Thursday to formulate what he called a national strategy to deal with the situation created by the destruction of an ancient mosque in India by Hindu revivalists last Sunday.

Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and most other opposition groups stayed away

from the meeting and held their own conference to demand Sharif's resignation.

Sharif said the door remained open to talks with the opposition and named a two-member committee to establish contact.

Bhutto's letter, copies of which were released to the press, said: "National unity cannot be achieved unless obstacles to democracy and human rights are removed."

She called for an end to the "economic and political victimisation of political opponents," and repeated her demand for an interim government to be set up to hold fresh elections.

The opposition says Sharif's Islamic Democratic Alliance rigged elections held in October 1990 after President Ghulam Ishaq Khan sacked Bhutto as premier on disputed charges of misrule. The government denies the charge and says it will complete its five-year term.

Zardari has been in jail since October 1990 while Bhutto and several of her former cabinet ministers face trial before special tribunals empowered to disqualify them from parliament.

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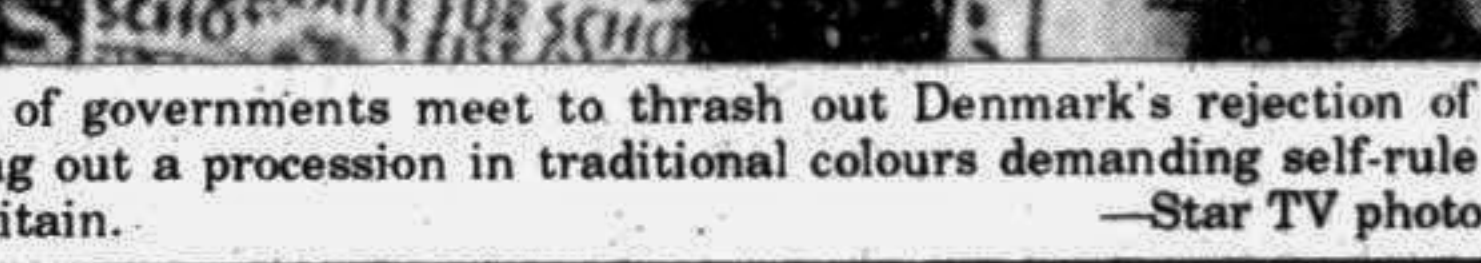
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EDINBURGH: As EC heads of governments meet to thrash out Denmark's rejection of Maastricht Treaty, Scots bring out a procession in traditional colours demanding self-rule for the northern part of Gt. Britain. — Star TV photo



Iran developing N-weapons in a clandestine programme?

NICOSIA, Dec 13: Iran may be trying to develop nuclear weapons in a clandestine programme similar to that unmasked in Iraq after the Gulf War, reports AP.

But Iran still appears far short of the goal. Iran says it seeks nuclear reactors and associated technology to expand industry and ensure growth once its oil runs out. It denies wanting nuclear weapons.

Iraq built a nuclear weapons programme before the Gulf War despite inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and some fear Iran is doing the same. Iran is engaged in a major rearmament — building chemical weapons, missile industries, and more — aimed at making it the region's strongest power.

The Islamic republic is nervous about its neighbours; the Saudis and their partners accumulating arsenals of US weapons, a possible resurgence by Iraq, chronic instabil-

ity in Afghanistan, and the restive, newly independent Central Asian republics, where Iran competes with Turkey for influence.

Nuclear weapons would give Tehran's fundamentalist leadership a military strength matched in the Middle East only by Israel, the region's sole nuclear power.

US and European strate-

geoning population expected to top 100 million early in the next century.

As ever, the inner workings of Iran's leadership remain opaque, and there is little verifiable evidence of its nuclear intentions.

Tehran signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1970, nearly a decade before revolution brought Islamic rule.

damentalist successors in 1985. President Hashemi Rafsanjani insists it has only a peaceful purpose, but contradictory signals are coming from Iran.

Ataollah Mohajerani, one of Rafsanjani's vice presidents, declared recently: "Regardless of the United Nations' effort to prevent nuclear proliferation, Muslims must... cooperate

Nations has since the Gulf War worked to dismantle Iraq's nuclear capability.

Western officials believe Iran's recent acquisition of Scud-C ballistic missiles from North Korea could eventually provide delivery system capable of reaching targets in Israel, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The Mujahedeen Khalq, the main Iranian opposition movement, claims Iran has spent 800 million dollar since 1988 and that 2 billion dollar move has been committed to Iran's nuclear programme. Much of the money is not declared in budget allocations, the organization says.

Just as Saddam skirted international controls with a global network of front companies, Iran's nuclear weapons programme — known as "the Great Plan" — has its own clandestine procurement system, according to the Mujahedeen.

Robert Gates, director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, testified before the

Senate in January that the Iranians "certainly don't have any nuclear weapons production facilities".

But The New York Times quoted a senior US official November 21 as saying the CIA now believes Iran could have nuclear weapons by the end of the decade.

Israel, which now sees Iran as a major threat, and the Mujahedeen Khalq, or People's Holy Warriors, make similar claims.

The Mujahedeen, who claim to have well-placed sources within the Tehran regime, claims Iran has established at least six secret nuclear facilities.

IAEA officials, eager to show the agency learned lessons from Iraq, sent an inspection team to Iran in February, asking to see nuclear research centres in Tehran and Isfahan that had not been declared.

Its inspectors went to several locations but reported finding no evidence.

Off the Record



CRATHIE, Scotland: Commander Tim Laurence and Princess Anne are seen in their car after their wedding at Crathie Church here December 12. The only daughter of British Queen Elizabeth II was wedded in this highland Scottish village in a private ceremony. — AFP/UNB photo

Miss Russia wins Miss World

SUN CITY, South Africa: Miss Russia, Julia Kurotchinka, a strikingly tall brunette, was chosen Miss World on Saturday in a spectacular extravaganza at this resort in the African bush, reports AP.

In a sign of the changing times in the former Soviet Union, the 18-year-old, blue-eyed new Miss World is a student from Moscow who says her ambition "is to be a financier" and travel the world.

Judges said it was the closest result in the pageant's 42 years, with Miss Russia winning by one point. Organizers said it was the first time Miss Russia had won the contest.

"A few years ago this would have been impossible," Miss Kurotchinka said. "I hope my victory will show other girls in my country what they can achieve."

Tallest of the 83 contestants at six feet 11.83 meters), Miss Kurotchinka also listed classical music as a hobby.

She was carried in triumph on a gold and zebra skin throne on a litter adorned by golden elephants and carried by men in African warrior costumes.

Miss United Kingdom, Claire Smith, 21, was second, while Miss Venezuela, Francis Gago, 19, came in third.

Crown should pass to Prince William?

LONDON: Most Britons expect that Prince Charles, the heir to the throne, and Princess Diana will divorce following their formal separation, according opinion polls published in early editions of Sunday's newspapers, reports Reuter.

Mass-selling tabloids also claimed that the royal family had turned against the 31-year-old princess, alleging the forced break-up and was determined that her son, 10-year-old Prince William, would become the next king rather than his father.

A Gallup poll for the pro-establishment Sunday Telegraph found 62 per cent of people surveyed expected the couple to divorce after the legally-recognised two year separation period.

An ICM poll for the Sunday Express said 49 per cent of a survey of more than 1,000 people wanted the throne to pass directly to Prince William, with only 45 per cent in favour of Charles becoming monarch.

The mass-selling news of the world said its poll showed that 86 per cent of Britons had lost respect for the royal family in recent years and more than half thought the crown should pass directly from Queen Elizabeth to Prince William.

BERLIN, Dec 13: At least 400 people were killed attempting to cross the Berlin Wall which until October 1989 marked the frontier between East and West Germany, an official enquiry commission announced today, reports AP.

The revised toll came during the trial of the former head of the East German communist regime Erich Honecker, who is accused of ordering the fugitives to be shot.

"We can say with certainty that more than 400 people died between the building of the wall in 1961 and the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, according to Manfred Kittlaus, head of the investigating commission responsible for registering victims who died at the wall.

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