

China urges US to cancel plane sale to Taiwan

BEIJING, Dec 18: Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqing urged the United States on Thursday to "face up to facts" and cancel its planned sale of 150 F-16 fighter planes to Taiwan, reports AP.

China has toned down its public campaigning against the sale since the US election in November resulted in defeat for President Bush. It apparently is waiting until President-elect Clinton takes office in January to see what he will do.

But Liu, meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State William Clark, warned that the issue is not closed for as far as China is concerned.

The American side must face up to facts (and) strictly adhere to the principle of the Chinese-US joint communique on gradually reducing and finally resolving US arms sales to Taiwan, the official Xinhua News Agency quoted Liu as telling Clark.

In the 1982 communique, Washington said it did not plan a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan and would not exceed "in qualitative or quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years."

Xinhua did not quote Liu as threatening retaliatory action.

Earlier Chinese statements have hinted that US imports might be reduced. Bush announced the F-16 sale in September while campaigning in Texas, where General Dynamics makes the F-16s. However, Clinton has indicated he supports the sale. Clark was accompanying US Commerce Secretary Barbara Franklin, who is in Beijing for trade talks. He also visited Beijing shortly after the sale was announced to so the Chinese anger.

Iraq rejects UN flights over Baghdad

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 18: Iraq on Thursday rejected UN weapons inspection flights over Baghdad in a letter that reviewed a recent feud with the United Nations over releasing arms data, reports Reuter.

Iraq's UN Ambassador, Nizar Hamdoun, said Baghdad felt that aerial reconnaissance flights within the city limits were unwarranted and provocative as the same sites could be investigated by inspection teams on the ground.

Lebanese soldiers turn back expelled Palestinians

GOODFENCE, Lebanon, Dec 18: Hundreds of weary Palestinian deportees shuffled under heavy rain between Israeli and Lebanese army checkpoints in southeast Lebanon on Friday, seeking shelter after their expulsion from Israel, reports AP.

Lebanese tanks and armoured vehicles formed a roadblock before dawn and turned back buses carrying nearly 400 Palestinian deportees who were forced from Israel in a mass deportation late Thursday.

When the deportees walked back to the Zommaraya gateway to re-enter Israel's self-styled "security zone" in south Lebanon, the passage was closed.

Security sources on the scene said Israel's surrogate militia, the South Lebanon Army, fired over the heads of the deportees at Zommaraya to send them away. No one was hurt.

In Beirut, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri discussed by telephone the plight of the deportees with Syria's Vice President Abdul-Halim Khaddam and later said the deportees would not be al-

lowed into government-held Lebanese territory.

"If any harm befalls any of the deportees, Israel will be responsible for it," Hariri said in a statement broadcast by several radio stations.

Syria maintains some 40,000 troops in Lebanon and is the main powerbroker in its eastern neighbour.

The Lebanese government has denounced such deportations and complained about Israel's choice of Lebanon as a place of exile.

The chief delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Bernard Pfefferle, said in Beirut that the Swiss organization was sending about 20 tents, 1,200 blankets, kitchen sets, stoves and medical care to the deportees, stuck in the no-man's-land between the two checkpoints.

He said emergency food supplies would be bought in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley to feed the deportees, who had not eaten for more than 24 hours.

Deportee Hassan Badra, a student at the West Bank's Najah University, said Lebanese army troops at Marj al-

Zohour told him the government's decision not to allow them past the checkpoint would not be rescinded.

Badra said he had suffered six gunshot wounds 15 days ago in a confrontation with the Israeli army in the West Bank. He said that there were four other men who had been wounded among the deportees.

The red-and-white buses full of deportees began arriving in Zommaraya, on the edge of the security zone, on Thursday. A security source in the zone said 22 buses, carrying 350 to 400 deportees, had entered the zone by early Friday.

Security sources said the Lebanese outpost, 4 kilometers (2 1/2 miles) from Zommaraya, had set up earthen mounds that blocked the road.

Five T-54 tanks and 15 M-113 armoured personnel carriers were then brought in along with 250 troops to reinforce the blockade.

The deportations were in retaliation for the killing by Muslim fundamentalists of Israeli policeman Sgt Maj Nissim Toledano this week. He was the sixth trooper slain by

the Hamas organizations in two weeks.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization responded to the deportations by announcing in Tunis that it was suspending Palestinian participation in peace talks until Israel allowed the group to return to their homes.

In Washington, Arabs boycotted the last session of the eighth round of peace talks with Israel on Thursday to protest the deportation order.

The Arab teams representing Lebanon, the Palestinians, Jordan and Syria, met with President Bush and appealed for his personal intervention to block the deportation.

A US official said Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger sent a message to Israel expressing "strong objection" to the expulsion order.

An earlier AP report says, Buses carrying hundreds of Palestinians deported by Israel crossed the border Thursday into an Israeli-occupied southern enclave.

Lebanese troops waited at the northern boundary of the region to enforce the government's refusal to accept the Palestinians.

Off the Record

'I can make a muddle'

LONDON: Prince Charles expressed regret on Thursday at the lack of contact between the generations, adding he valued conversations with his grandmother, the Queen Mother, and his late uncle, Lord Mountbatten, reports AP.

Charles, speaking at an awards ceremony for the charity Age Resource, mixed up three of the commendations to the amusement of the mostly older audience.

"Even at my advanced age I can make a muddle," the 44-year-old heir to the throne joked in a rare lighthearted moment this month. His formal separation from his wife of 11 years, Diana, 31, was announced on Dec 9.

The prince, who has worked on behalf of youth, said he was saddened that "so often nowadays, there is less and less contact between generations."

"I have found it an enormous benefit to be able to talk to my grandmother, and to my late uncle," he said.

"Older people can provide a source of continuity and wisdom,"

Mountbatten, who was a father figure to Charles, was killed by the Irish Republican Army in 1979.



Rushdie complex

AMSTERDAM: A Dutchman suffering what prosecutors called a "Rushdie complex" was convicted of racism after using a Muslim pseudonym to write a book attacking Islam, reports AP.

"The Fall of the Netherlands, a Nation of Naive Idiots," published in 1990, accuses Muslims of fanaticism, corruption and stupidity and says they are taking over the country.

The author, identified by the court only as Z van E, was fined 2,000 guilders (dfls 1,200), a court spokeswoman said Thursday. He was sentenced Wednesday.

The 1971 racism law forbids any act likely to incite racial hatred. The liberal Dutch constitution covets freedom of speech, but also outlaws discrimination in any form.

State prosecutor Willem Mijnsen suggested the author suffered from "a kind of Rushdie complex" that made him want to attract negative publicity.

It was a reference to British author Salman Rushdie, who has been in hiding since his book "The Satanic Verses" was interpreted as an attack on Islam and Iranian religious authorities called for his execution in 1988.

The author wrote under the pseudonym Mohamed Rasool but was also known as Son of Tarzan, the stage name he uses for his cabaret act, said a court spokeswoman, who could not be identified in line with court practice.

Condoms for peace-keepers

TOKYO: A Japanese citizens group said on Thursday it would distribute condoms to UN peacekeepers in war-torn Cambodia to prevent the spread of AIDS, reports Reuter.

Members of the Peaceboat group plan to visit Phnom Penh later this month to hand out 10,000 condoms donated by Okamoto Industries, Japan's biggest condom manufacturer.

Many women from Thailand and Vietnam were apparently working as prostitutes for personnel of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), Peaceboat officials said.

At least 45 prostitutes were found to be infected with the HIV virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, they said.

Little prayer can help

HONG KONG: Where Chinese and British politicians have failed, maybe a little prayer can help, reports AP.

An advertisement in Friday's independent Chinese-language Ming Pao newspaper urged all Christians in this British colony "to pray continuously for 70 days for Hong Kong's safety."

"We are quite concerned about the current tense state of Sino-British relations and its impact on the well-being of the Hong Kong people," said a statement signed by 311 individuals and 16 religious groups.

The ad was sponsored by the Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement, a non-profit organization that has scheduled six special mass prayer sessions next week "for Hong Kong's safety."

The plea from Hong Kong's normally apolitical religious community underscores the depth of concern in this capitalist enclave over the increasingly nasty political dispute between Beijing and London over the territory's future.

Hong Kong reverts to China in 1997, and many are concerned that Beijing won't keep its pledge to guarantee the territory's 5.9 million residents "a high degree of autonomy."

China has objected vehemently to Hong Kong Gov. Chris Patten's proposals to increase democracy here by expanding the voter base for the 1995 legislative elections. China fears increased democracy in Hong Kong will spark dissent at home.

Blasts in Bombay trains: 10 injured

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Two crude bombs exploded in two commuter trains in Bombay Friday, injuring at least 10 people, United News of India news agency reported, says AP.

The first explosion occurred in the luggage van of the Churchgate-Borivili train used by commuters of India's business capital. At least five people were hurt, UNI said quoting a railroad official.

The second blast took place in a car of Kuria-bound train at Chinchpokali railroad station in northeastern Bombay. Five travelers were hurt.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blasts, which appeared more intended to create panic than causing serious damage.

US warns Ukraine

BRUSSELS, Dec 18: US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger warned Ukraine on Thursday that its relations with Washington would deteriorate if it continued to delay ratifying a crucial nuclear arms treaty, reports Reuter.

The United States is anxious for Ukraine's parliament to ratify a special annex to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as non-nuclear state.

But Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoly Zlenko told Eagleburger earlier this week the Kiev parliament would not be able to act on START or the NPT until the beginning of next year at the earliest.

In his first public reaction to that news, Eagleburger delivered a blunt message at a news conference after a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting.

90 Algerian soldiers to be tried

ALGIERS, Dec 18: Ninety military officers and soldiers, some with ties to armed Islamic extremists, will go on trial in three days for allegedly trying to destabilise the Algerian Army, the independent newspaper El Watan reported Thursday, says AP.

The suspects, to be tried by a military court in Bechar, 950 kilometres (590 miles) southwest of Algiers, near the Moroccan border, are charged with plotting against state security, the paper said. They risk the death penalty if convicted.



A Somali boy runs towards a relief convoy upon its arrival in a village 25 km northwest of Beirout Thursday, as a French Legationnaire in firing position ensures the safe arrival of food. — AFP/UNB photo

Bosnian Serb parliament declares end of war

BELGRADE, Dec 18: The parliament of Serbs' self-styled republic in Bosnia-Herzegovina on Thursday unilaterally declared the eight-month Bosnian war over, reports AP.

The Serbian side wants the world to know it has no more offensive intentions and that it will no longer engage in counter-offensive action, said Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

Our forces will no longer reply to Muslim or Croat provocations, and if we are fiercely attacked, we will only defend ourselves without counter-attacking," Karadzic told the AP by telephone from his headquarters at Pale, just east of Sarajevo.

He said the declaration

would take effect in eight days, and that time was needed to get the world to troops on the ground.

There was no certainty the declaration would end the fighting. The Muslim-led government forces have given no indication they will accept a ceasefire line that leaves most of the republic in Serb hands.

Croat militias control most of the rest of Bosnian territory. Serbs rebelled against a Muslim-Croat vote for Bosnian independence from the former Yugoslavia, and in the last eight months they have seized about 70 percent of Bosnian territory. At least 17,000 people perished in the fighting and over 110,000 are missing.

The declaration came as NATO allies said they would

support the United Nations in enforcing a ban on Serbian military flights over Bosnia.

The Serbian move appeared intended in part to avert any military intervention and blunt international condemnation.

It also came just before crucial elections in Yugoslavia. Slobodan Milosevic, widely blamed for fomenting Bosnia's warfare, is facing a challenge in his bid for re-election as Serbian president by moderate Yugoslav Premier Milan Panic.

The declaration, adopted at Pale by a vote of 57-0 with five abstentions, proclaimed Bosnia's "ethnic-religious war" over, the Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency reported.

It said that battlelines at noon Thursday would represent the temporary borders of the Serb republic until a formal peace accord is concluded, Tanjug reported.

It said Bosnian Serbs were ready for formal peace negotiations and would urge all irregular armed groups to disarm.

We will be like a boxer who has taken off his gloves and does not want to fight any more," Karadzic said.

The international community should act as a referee and position its observers to monitor this unilateral ceasefire," he added.

Demands for international observers are unlikely to be accepted. The international community repeated has rejected Serb demands for the ethnic partition of Bosnia and any sanctioning of the seizure of territory.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (L) and his counterpart Yang Shangkun holding formal discussion in Beijing Thursday. — Star TV photo

BRIEFLY

Deng ill, reveals Yeltsin: Chinese senior leader Deng Xiaoping is ill, visiting Russian President Boris Yeltsin revealed Friday, AP reports from Beijing.

Yeltsin said at a news conference Friday that he had not met with the 88-year-old Deng because "he's not feeling too well, unfortunately."

It was the first disclosure that Deng was in poor health. Chinese officials routinely refuse to comment on his health because he no longer holds an official post.

8 UN relief trucks destroyed in Iraq: The UN World Food Programme (WFP) said on Thursday that eight relief trucks had been destroyed by time bombs in northern Iraq, reports Reuter from Rome.

The agency said the bombs went off on Wednesday after the trucks had taken food and seeds to Kurds in the town of Zakho.

Unexploded devices were found in nine other trucks, the WFP said in a statement. It did not say whether there were any injuries in the attacks.

The WFP said Wednesday's incident was the third in three weeks in which UN relief trucks, which are distributing winter food aid to the Kurds in northern Iraq, were targeted.

UN envoy to visit poor states: UN special envoy to Haiti Dante Caputo said Thursday he would travel to the impoverished country Saturday on the first UN mission to seek a resolution to its political crisis, reports AP from United Nations.

Caputo, a former Argentine Foreign Minister, said he reviewed his mission with Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali before leaving for Washington, where he will meet with deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Caputo said he hoped to meet in Haiti with members of the De Factor government installed after the military toppled Aristide in September 1991 coup, including Prime Minister Marc Bazin and army Commander General Raoul Cedras.

Portugal, Indonesia talk break off: Discussions between Portugal and Indonesia on the status of East Timor broke off Thursday at UN Headquarters with no progress made, diplomats from both sides said, reports AP from United Nations.

The talks will resume April 20 in Rome, official said. Portugal's Foreign Minister Jose Durao Borroso and his Indonesian counterpart Ali Alatas met for nearly four hours in the presence of Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Both ministers said the talks were positive and held in an open atmosphere.

The United Nations recognises Portugal as the official administrative authority in the former Portuguese colony seized in 1975 and later annexed by Indonesia. Portugal supports independence for East Timor.

People form human chain in Germany: About 100,000 people joined hands to form a human chain on Thursday in the latest protest against racism in Germany, reports Reuter from Germany.

Church bells tolled in the old town of Nuremberg as people linked up to form a chain six km (four miles) long in a peaceful demonstration against anti-foreigner violence which has claimed 17 lives this year.

The protest followed a torchlight march by 5,000 through nearby Wuerzburg on Wednesday and other street demonstrations throughout Germany in the past few months to condemn rising xenophobia.

More than 2,000 right-wing extremist attacks on asylum-seekers, foreign residents and Jewish memorials have been carried out this year, prompting authorities to crack down on neo-Nazis and prepare laws to stem the influx of refugees.

Oil spill causes damage in Spain:

A huge oil spill in northwestern Spain has done more damage to the area's fishing industry than an estimate of 50 million dollar released this week by the regional government, the environmental group Greenpeace said Thursday, reports AP from Spain.

Officials estimate the Greek tanker Aegean Sea lost some 21.5 million gallons (81.7 million liters) of crude oil when it ran aground on Dec 3, almost twice the 11 million gallons (41.8 million liters) spilled in the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster in Alaska.

The tanker was carrying 79,300 tons (23.79 million gallons or 90.4 million liters) when it ran aground in rough seas.

Khmer Rouge frees 46 UN peacekeepers

PHNOM PENH, Dec 18: Khmer Rouge guerrillas in central Cambodia released Friday 46 United Nations peacekeepers they had been holding northwest of the capital, reports AP.

"It would appear the 46 men left the location aboard two trucks and two anti-mine vehicles," UN spokesman Eric Falt said.

Falt said the 46 Indonesian soldiers, held overnight by the Khmer Rouge near the provincial capital of Kompong Thom, radiated their base just before noon saying they were returning.

Russia, US to sign nuclear arms treaty in Jan

BEIJING, Dec 18: Russian President Boris Yeltsin said Friday that agreement has been reached on a nuclear arms treaty with the United States and it will be signed in January.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky told The Associated Press that Russia is proposing a summit in the United States at the beginning of the new year.

Yeltsin made the announcement while meeting with a small group of Chinese intellectuals just before signing a series of treaties and agreements with China.

"I can tell you now that a START II agreement has been prepared for a two-thirds cut in strategic nuclear weapons between Russia and the United States, and it can be signed at the beginning of January of next year," he told the intellectuals in a ballroom in the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

He said it took 15 years of US-Soviet talks to achieve the first major strategic arms treaty, which cut nuclear weapons by one-third.

To cut down by two-thirds took negotiations of less than a year, and in January, we will sign such an agreement," Yeltsin said.

Yeltsin was on the second day of a three-day visit to China, his first tour of the country.

Immediately after the speech to intellectuals, he signed a joint declaration with China saying that neither side would conclude any treaties with third countries that are detrimental to Russia's or China's "state sovereignty and security interests."

The two sides also signed an agreement on military cooperation and a memorandum agreeing to reduce the number of troops along the border and strengthen mutual trust.

The troop agreement said

that by the year 2000, the number of troops will be gradually cut back to a "minimal level."

Russian and Chinese officials refuse to say how many troops they have along the 4,300-kilometer (2,670-mile) border.

Western intelligence estimated the former Soviet Union had about 600,000 troops on the border in the mid-1980s, facing about 1 million Chinese troops. Both sides have trimmed their total armed forces since then.

Yeltsin told the intellectuals that America, Japan and other major powers should not worry

that Russia and China are creating some new kind of alliance.

"Neither Russia nor China plans to revive the alliance of the 1950s," he said.

Earlier Friday, Yeltsin held successive meetings with Chinese Premier Li Peng and Communist Party leader Jiang Zemin.

Emerging from a 90-minute private meeting with Li in which both leaders brought only their foreign ministers, Yeltsin said they had "covered all the problems."

"We discussed everything from economic to security issues," he said. "As I have al-

NATO okays new peace-keeping role

BRUSSELS, Dec 18: NATO nations approved a new peace-keeping role for the alliance under UN authority on Thursday, saying they could join former WARSAW pact enemies and other European states in such missions, reports Reuter.

"We confirm today the preparedness of our alliance to support ... peace-keeping under the authority of the UN Security Council," the alliance's 16 Foreign Ministers said in a statement at the end of a meeting.

The alliance was limited to

the defence of its member nations during the cold war.

"We are ready to share experiences in peace-keeping with (former WARSAW pact members) and other CSCE participating states and to join them as required in supporting ... peace-keeping operations," the statement said.

The 52-nations Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) includes the United States, Canada and all European states. But the rump Yugoslav state is currently banned from attending meetings.

UN human rights official denied access to Suu Kyi

BANGKOK, Dec 18: UN Human Rights rapporteur on Myanmar Yozo Yokota confirmed Thursday that the Myanmar military government had denied him access to detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and said the junta had given no reason, reports AP.

Yokota, speaking on his arrival here from visiting Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh added however that his trip to Yangon which ended Monday had been worthwhile.

ready announced, the development of Chinese-Russian relations occupies one of the primary places in the new Russian foreign relations."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin said the two leaders discussed world issues, including the Korean Peninsula and Cambodia.

"Both sides believed that in today's fluctuating and complicated international situation, Russia and China as permanent members of the UN Security Council shoulder great responsibility for international peace and stability," Wu said.