

International

Persecution by Mujahideen alleged

Hindus, Sikhs leaving Afghanistan for India

US plans to expel Russian attache

WASHINGTON, Jan 2: The Bush administration plans to expel a Russian Attache in Washington for espionage, but no action was expected before the US-Russian Summit, the Washington Times said Friday, reports AFP.

The newspaper, citing unidentified administration officials, said the Attache had been under surveillance for months by FBI Counter-Intelligence Agents.

The sources did not identify the Attache by name but said he was believed to be a senior officer in the Russian military intelligence agency, according to the Times.

A senior administration official told the Times no decision had been taken on the expulsion. But the Times said another officials said the Russian was guilty of improper intelligence activities and the State Department's European Affairs Bureau supported the expulsion.

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Thousands of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs are pouring into India, alleging persecution by the Mujahideen in one of the biggest influx of refugees from Afghanistan since the war there erupted more than a decade ago, reports AFP.

More than 10,000 reached New Delhi between July and early December, travelling through Pakistan. The hard pressed office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) here says it is unable to cope with the rush.

"The whole system is going to break down, very, very soon," said a top official of the UNHCR, which has already registered some 3,000 Hindus and Sikhs as refugees and is processing the applications of more than 5,000 others.

The officials said more Hindu and Sikh Afghans were on their way to India.

"They are still coming through," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity. He estimated that their number would reach about 20,000—or nearly half the Hindu-Sikh population of Afghanistan -- by June 1993.

The refugees, many of whom have never visited India before and speak Pashto better than Hindi or Punjabi, alleged that they were targets of the Afghan Mujahideen because they were not Muslims.

"We are here because of the lawlessness in Kabul," said Gurbux Singh, a middle-aged Sikh trader from Kabul. "We are sick and tired of being there."

"We have lost everything we

had," added Ghanshyam Gahai, 25, a Hindu.

Other Hindus and Sikhs waiting outside the small UNHCR office here said their problems began after the fall in April of Soviet-backed President Najibullah and the coming to power of the Muslim fundamentalist Mujahideen.

The UNHCR here was receiving 100-150 Afghans a month seeking refugee status until June 1992. In July, Sikhs and Hindus began overshadowing the Afghan Muslims, sending the total shooting up to 1,600.

Between July 1 and December 11, some 8,805 Afghans knocked at the UNHCR's doors, putting its limited staff, including the four legal officers who interview the applicants, under great strain.

The number of later arrivals, almost all Sikhs and

sought refuge in India over the years. Many still live in New Delhi and other cities, while others have moved over to the West seeking greener pastures.

Until now the refugees rarely included Sikhs and Hindus.

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The number of later arrivals, almost all Sikhs and

Hindus, may be higher because not all refugees seek help from the UNHCR, officials said.

Until June, an Afghan -- or any other potential refugee -- coming to the UNHCR was asked to come within one month for an interview. Now the waiting time has been increased to four months.

Meanwhile, the Hindus and Sikhs are trying their best to make both ends meet. Many live on charity, and hundreds are put up in makeshift tents near a Sikh shrine which also provides them with food.

Uttam Chand, a Hindu, said it was impossible to rent a house in New Delhi. "When we go house hunting, the owners ask what we do for a living. When we tell them we are refugees, they shoo us away."

Chand sells vegetables in

the Indian capital. Rajesh Kumar, 24, another Hindu, said he had a prosperous electrical business in Kabul. "Now I must think twice before buying a cup of tea."

The UNHCR says while it has enough money on its hands, it is getting snowed under by applications and is increasingly finding it tough to pursue individual claims for education and medical benefits.

"We are heading towards a crisis," the official said. "We are doing what we can. We are not slowing down. But the regulations take time."

He said the UNHCR was pressing New Delhi to intervene and permit agencies such as the Red Cross to take care of the health needs of the refugees.

Yangon announces remission of prison sentences

YANGON, Jan 2: Myanmar's military government announced today a blanket remission of prison sentences ahead of a national convention January 9 to draft a new constitution, reports AFP.

State media said the decree, which has the force of law, commutes all death sentences to life imprisonment, and any life sentences and prison terms in excess of 10 years to a maximum of 10 years.

The order, effective January 1, was signed by ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) Chairman General Than Shwe.

A general amnesty had been widely expected before the convention, which SLORC officials say is designed to introduce a multi-party system.

The announcement of the remissions did not indicate how many prisoners would benefit.

BRIEFLY

Russians free to go abroad: From Friday Russians can go abroad without an exit visa, but their passports will be very expensive, the official television has said, reports AFP from Moscow.

The passports, which all Russians are now entitled to, will cost from 5,000 to 10,000 rubles — the equivalent of a monthly middle-income salary, the television said.

This fee does not include the bribes which many people pay here to speed up the processing of passport applications — which can take a month or longer.

Plea to stop shelling in Sukhumi: Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze called on Abkhazian rebels on Friday to stop shelling the regional capital Sukhumi, threatening unspecified action unless the fighting stopped, Itar-Tass news agency said, reports Reuter from Moscow.

"If the Abkhazian side does not stop the intensive shelling of residential areas in Sukhumi, the Georgian leadership will consider taking steps to repulse the Abkhazian forces", Tass quoted him as saying.

Shevardnadze, the last Foreign Minister of the former Soviet Union, visited the Black Sea region on Thursday to try to end four months of fighting between Georgian forces and Abkhazian separatists.

5 Filipinos die in violence: Five people, including four soldiers, were killed in two separate incidents in the southern Philippines, the military reported Saturday, AP says from Zamboanga.

The armed forces Southern Command said both incidents took place late Friday on islands south of this port city, about 864 kilometers (500 miles) south of Manila.

Caption: On Basilan island, unidentified assailants killed two military intelligence agents and wounded two civilians in an ambush in Isabela.

The report said the soldiers, from the Military Intelligence Group, and their companions had just attended a New Year's party at a nearby residence when they were waylaid.

OIC meet on Jan 11: The Organisation of the Islamic Conference is to hold a one-day meeting on January 11 to discuss the deportation of over 400 Palestinians by Israel, OIC Secretary General Hamid Alqabid said here Friday, says AFP from Dakar.

Representatives from Morocco, Kuwait, Turkey, Indonesia, Syria, Pakistan and Palestine will attend the meeting here in Dakar.

The officials will also discuss the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Alqabid said.

It will be chaired by Senegalese President Abdou Diouf, the current president of the OIC.

Nutritionist dead in Boston: Tufts University Chancellor Jean Mayer, a renowned nutritionist who helped establish the national food stamp and school lunch programmes, died Friday. He was 72, reports AP from Boston.

Mayer died of a heart attack while vacationing in Sarasota, Fla., said university spokesman Gail Bambrick.

The son of a physiologist, Mayer worked to combat hunger during much of his career. He served as an adviser to the late Sen Robert Kennedy and to Presidents Nixon, Ford and Carter.

"Jean Mayer made hunger unacceptable in America, and today millions of healthy children have him to thank," said Sen Edward M Kennedy, D-Mass.



FATHER IN ABSENTIA: A Palestinian deportee at no-man's land learns from a newspaper report that his wife has given birth to a child Thursday.

—Star TV photo

HK police came under fire for death of new year's stampede

HONG KONG, Jan 2: Hong Kong police came under fire today for the deaths of 20 revellers crushed during a new year's stampede in a crowded night life area, reports Reuter.

Politicians said police had previously been urged to limit the numbers allowed into Lan Kwai Fong, a warrant of narrow alleys containing some of Hong Kong's trendiest bars and restaurants.

Local government official Yuen Bun-Keung said if police had adopted proposals made earlier this month, the disaster might have been avoided.

MARJ AL-ZOHOUR, Jan 2: At 4:15 Palestinians deported from Israel made do in a no man's land between Israel and Lebanon, the two countries remained at an impasse over the return of 10 of them Israel says were mistakenly deported, reports AP.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Friday offered to take back all those deported December 17 after nine months, if the Palestinian uprising in the Israeli-occupied territories and all "violence and terror" were stopped.

A Palestinian spokeswoman suggested that Rabin did not make the offer in good faith.

The mass deportation was

retaliation for the slaying of six Israeli troopers. Israel blames the slayings on the Muslim fundamentalist Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements, and says the deported men are Muslim extremists.

Rabin said his offer was contingent upon a promise by leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas to stop the uprising, or Intifada, in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"If the heads of the PLO and Hamas say, 'We promise peace and quiet, a stop to the Intifada,' for nine months, I would return them (the deportees)," Rabin said on army radio.

Hanan Ashrawi, spokes-

woman for the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East peace talks in Washington, said the uprising would end when Israel withdraws from the territories.

"When Israel has done something illegal, it cannot try and find a way out through this kind of bargaining," she said.

Israel has said 10 of the Palestinians were mistakenly expelled and can return, but they remained stuck between the Israeli-occupied "security zone" in south Lebanon and the forward-most Lebanese army checkpoint at Marj Al-Zohour.

Israel has designated three crossing points between Lebanon and the "security

zone" that the 10 men could use to return home. They all involve passing through Lebanese territory.

Israel did not include the Zommaraya crossing on the northeastern edge of the zone — the crossing through which the deportees originally were.

The Israeli army claimed the three checkpoints were "organisationally the best and most easily accessible."

Lebanon, which has refused to become a dumping ground for Palestinians expelled by Israel, will not negotiate over the deportees and has insisted that Israel take them back through Zommaraya.

Deportee spokesman Gaza physician Abdul-Aziz Rantisi

The men have been living in a makeshift refugee camp between Zommaraya and Marj Al-Zohour. They say they will quit their tent camp only to return to the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Sources in Beirut said the 10 men could be taken by a helicopter of the UN peacekeeping force in south Lebanon from the camp to a UN police area near any of the three designated crossings.

On Friday, as the stalemate dragged on, the deportees carried on with their daily routine, making fires to heat water and prepare lunch.

Deportee spokesman Gaza physician Abdul-Aziz Rantisi

has said the 10 men had decided to go home, although some risk long prison terms in Israel.

Dr Omar Farawani said the condition of fellow deportee Zohair Lubbad, 32, remained critical. Farawani has said Lubbad, who is suffering from kidney failure, could die if he is not hospitalised.

The deportees have been living on dwindling food and medical supplies after the Lebanese army, seeking to force Israel to take them back, barred all humanitarian aid from reaching them 10 days ago.

Sympathetic Muslim villagers in Lebanon have smuggled some food to the men.

Japan to amend constitution

TOKYO, Jan 2: Japanese Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe said today Tokyo should amend its post-World War II Constitution so it can play a more active role in UN-endorsed peacekeeping operations.

"The present law constitutes and obstacle to the Japanese activities in Cambodia ... if the Constitution hinders, it should be amended," Watanabe told his supporters.

The US-imposed constitution bars settling international disputes by military forces.

Last June, after 20 months of heated debate, Japan's parliament passed a peacekeeping operation law.

Israel, Lebanon still at an impasse over return of 10 deportees

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