

Serbs, Muslims fail to agree on peace

GENEVA, Jan 4: Leaders of Bosnia's warring Muslims and Serbs met to talk peace on Sunday and disagreed afterwards on whether they had made progress towards ending their conflict, reports Reuters. A spokesman for the international mediators Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, who chaired the three hours of discussion, said the meeting itself was a breakthrough.

"No progress," declared a grim-faced President Alija Izetbegovic, head of the Muslim-led Bosnian government as he left the conference room in Geneva's Palais Des Nations.

A relaxed Radovan Karadzic, political leader of the rebel Serbs who control 70 per cent of Bosnia, told reporters a lot of progress was made, adding: "We talked as if there were no war."

The meeting took place on the second day of talks in Geneva attended by all three parties to the conflict to try to agree on how to halt the nine-month-old conflict.

It was the first face-to-face encounter between the two foes since Karadzic led his supporters out of Bosnia's coalition in March and launched a fight for a separate Serb republic.

The Muslim-led government raised objections Sunday to a peace plan proposed by Vance and Owen, saying it would enshrine ethnic division of the republic and lead to more bloodshed.

Myanmar opposition, rebels meet to rival govt's national convention

BANGKOK, Jan 4: Myanmar guerrilla and opposition leaders began talks at their jungle headquarters today designed to rival the Yangon military government's January 9 national convention on a new constitution, reports AFP.

Ethnic minority guerilla leaders and exiled opposition politicians convened a meeting of the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) at the Manerplaw headquarters of the ethnic minority Karen guerillas, a Karen official said.

"We have to try to make the world understand that the national convention in Yangon is not the inspiration of the people of Myanmar," said the official who asked not to be identified.

The Yangon convention is due to open Saturday, and the organisers of the jungle meeting plan to conclude the same day with a rally and a press conference.

The convention will begin drawing up guidelines for a new constitution and a return to some form of multi-party democracy, Junta leaders have said.

The Junta has already made it clear, however, that any future constitution must guarantee a "leading role" for the military.

Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest for three and a half years,

and other senior opposition leaders remain in detention and will not participate in the Yangon meeting.

The exile opposition leaders have denounced the Yangon convention as a sham and a thinly-disguised manoeuvre to preserve the rule of the military.

The NCUB, an umbrella organisation which the opposition calls the de facto parliament of Myanmar, groups ethnic minority guerillas, pro-democracy student fighters and the dissident government made up of politicians from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD).

They formed a parallel government at Manerplaw in late 1990 after it became clear that the Junta had no intention of recognising the sweeping NLD election victory the previous May.

The Karen official said the NCUB meeting would also discuss and possibly adopt a rival draft constitution which the opposition has been working on "for many months."

This draft constitution was expected to enshrine a democratic as well as a federal framework for Myanmar.

The NCUB would also discuss signing the Geneva convention, in particular its articles relating to the treatment of prisoners of war, the official said.

Sihanouk refuses to cooperate with UNTAC

BEIJING, Jan 4: Cambodian Leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk said here today that he would no longer cooperate with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and the Phnom Penh government, reports AFP.

In a message dated today to UNTAC head Yasushi Akashi released to the press in Beijing, where Sihanouk is having medical treatment, the prince cited harassment of the pro-royalist Funcinpec party for his decision.

He alleged "persistent and ignominious crimes" against Funcinpec, one of the parties represented on the supreme National Council which Sihanouk heads along with the Phnom Penh government, the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front.

UNTAC is preparing the country for general elections later this year under the agreement that officially ended the Cambodian civil war in October 1991.

Funcinpec, headed by Sihanouk's son Prince Norodom Ranariddh, had been the target of several attacks over the weekend which had left five party workers dead, Sihanouk alleged in another message to Akashi dated Sunday but only published today.

The alleged authors of the attacks, on Funcinpec offices in Prey Veng, Battambang and Bante Meanchey, were not spelled out.

BRIEFLY

Catholic father shot dead: Masked gunmen shot dead a Catholic father and son at their home on Sunday, the first victims of the violence in northern Ireland to die this year, police said, reports Reuters from Belfast.

A second son was also injured when the gunmen burst into the family's house at Lisangleer, West of Belfast in county Tyrone, through an adjacent grocer's shop.

The two sons were shot in a downstairs room while the father was thought to have been killed as he lay in bed. The mother, a daughter and third son were unhurt.

The motive for the killings, the first of the new year in northern Ireland, was not immediately known but the attack comes two days after Protestant extremists fighting a counter-campaign against opponents of British rule in northern Ireland-campaign against opponents of British rule in northern Ireland warned of increased violence.

Israeli agent stabbed to death: A member of the fundamentalist Hamas Organisation stabbed an Israeli intelligence agent to death Sunday in West Jerusalem officials said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

A police spokesman said Haim Nahmani, an agent for the domestic Shin Beth Intelligence Service, was stabbed and beaten with a hammer in a home in West Jerusalem while he was on assignment.

His body was found on a stairwell, the spokesman said.

This murder marks a new escalation following the slaying on December 15 of a border guard by the Hamas terrorists, said Housing Minister Binayamin Ben Eliezer on Israeli radio.

Russian Defence Minister in UAE: Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev arrived in Abu Dhabi Sunday what Russian sources said was a bid to sell weapons to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), AFP says from Abu Dhabi.

The official UAE news agency (WAM), which reported General Grachev's arrival, did not say why he was visiting but the Itar-Tass news agency in Moscow said the General planned to discuss arms sales with UAE officials.

Iranian team leaves for China: A delegation of Iranian Revolutionary guards led by General Mohsen Rezaei left Sunday for a six-day visit to China, the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported, says AFP from Tehran.

The agency said the delegation would meet Chinese political and military officials.

China's Ambassador to Iran, Hua Liming, recently declared that bilateral cooperation with Iran, notably concerning the sale by China to Tehran of a nuclear power station, would continue "despite western propaganda."

ROK seizes 34 Chinese crewmen: The maritime police said Monday they have seized two Chinese fishing vessels and their 34 crewmen for allegedly violating South Korea's territorial waters, AP reports from Seoul.

The maritime police in the southern island of Cheju said the two boats, each weighing 72 metric tons, were found fishing 10 kilometers (5.2 miles) off the southern island of Cheju Sunday afternoon.

The boats and the crewmen were taken to Cheju for investigation, they said.

Mayor cancels Israel visit: UNESCO Director Federico Mayor cancelled his planned visit to Israel Sunday because of its mass expulsion of Palestinians, Israeli officials said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

The head of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization was quoted by an official here as saying current circumstances did not permit him to make this trip.

On December 18, a day after Israel expelled 415 Palestinians to a 'no man's land' on the Lebanese border, the UN Security Council passed a resolution ordering Israel to take them back immediately.

Filipino bus mishap kills 9: A bus slammed into a concrete shed in a southeastern Philippine town Monday, killing nine, mostly students, police said, says AP from Santo Domingo.

Inspector Ricardo Gallardo, police chief of Sato Domingo, 335 kilometers (210 miles) southeast of Manila, said 31 passengers were injured in the crash.

Gallardo said driver Roberto Banaria, who surrendered to police after the accident, told investigators the brakes on the bus failed to work as it came down a bridge.

Egypt denies Sudanese claims: Egypt has denied Sudan's claims that some Egyptian troops had crossed the border into Sudanese territory, and asserted that Egyptian forces did not move beyond its borders, says Xinhua from Cairo.

Egypt's denial came in response to a memorandum filed by Sudan to the United Nations Security Council accusing Egyptian troops of violating Sudanese borders.

Foreign Minister Amr Mousa has sent a letter to the Security Council to explain Egypt's positions on the problem, and dismissed as "groundless" Sudanese allegations that Egypt was making military movements beyond Egyptian borders south of parallel 22.



PARIS: US President George Bush (L) meets with French President Francois Mitterrand on Sunday in Paris, following Bush's signing of the START II disarmament treaty in Moscow. Talks are expected to centre on the situation in the former Yugoslavia. — AFP/UNB photo

Miyazawa may dissolve lower house of parliament

TOKYO, Jan 4: Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, leader of one of Japan's most unpopular governments in decades, could be forced to dissolve the lower house of parliament in April an call a general election, a senior Cabinet Minister was quoted as saying today, reports Reuters.

Some daily newspapers quoted Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe as saying: "In the event of a mistake, it (the dissolution of the lower house) could be in April. But we cannot know what will happen until the time comes."

They said Watanabe gave no specific reason for a possible general election other than to say that such a scenario was likely, depending on deliberations in parliament.

Janata Dal favours rapprochement Plan to face Hindu revivalism

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: India's main centrist opposition party said today it was considering a rapprochement with all its former constituents to meet the mounting challenge of Hindu revivalism, reports AFP.

The Janata Dal (People's Party) said the suggestion had come from senior party members who favoured unity with smaller groups that had broken away since a coalition government led by the party collapsed in 1990.

"There is a strong feeling among party people that some sort of unity of all those who constituted the Janata Dal should be revived," party spokesman Hari Kishore Singh said here.

He said the Janata Dal leadership had not taken an official decision on the plea, made at a party meeting Sunday, "but discussions are going on to meet the wider challenge of (Hindu) communalism."

"The spirit of 1989 has to be revived," he added, referring to the year in which a national front coalition government took power in India with Janata Dal President Vishwanath Pratap Singh as the prime minister.

The government collapsed in November 1990 due to internal bickerings and the withdrawal of legislative support by the Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), which until then was an ally.

The Janata Dal, with 39 MPs is the third largest group in parliament and rules two of India's 25 state. Another faction of the party was 20 MPs and is led by Ajit Singh, a former federal minister.

Two other smaller groups which once formed the Janata Dal are led by former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and Mulayam Singh Yadav. All of them are opposed to the BJP and other Hindu fundamentalist groups blamed for the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya on December 6.

Ajit Singh, Shekhar and Yadav were not available for comment.

India's secular opposition has called for a united front against both the ruling Congress (I) Party and the BJP since the Ayodhya sacrifice led to bloody Hindu-Muslim riots and new fissures between the two communities.

Kohl sees resurgence of 'evil spirit' of nationalism in Europe

LONDON, Jan 4: German Chancellor Helmut Kohl warned today that Europe faced a resurgence of the "evil spirits" of nationalism and intolerance that made a concerted drive towards integration all the more important, reports Reuters.

Kohl, writing in Britain's Financial Times called for the European Community to proceed as one to economic and political union as a defence against the "old-style" nationalism which has flared after the end of the cold war.

"I am against the idea of a two- or three-speed Europe," he said in his article, referring to suggestions that some EC members which have problems ratifying the Maastricht Treaty on European Union might move towards integration at their own pace.

But, in a warning to countries like Britain and Denmark not to get left behind, Kohl continued: "But... we cannot accept that the speed of European integration will be dictated by the slowest ship in the convoy."

The Maastricht blueprint for a united Europe has been thrown into some doubt by Denmark's rejection of treaty in a referendum and Britain's delay in ratification in the face of opposition within the ruling Conservative Party.

The European Community has played a decisive role in helping overcome traditional rivalries and policies of national egoism," Kohl wrote, but

said he doubted whether the "evil spirits of the past, which have brought us Europeans so much suffering this century, have really been banished for good."

Political uncertainties after the end of the cold war conflict have fuelled nationalism and ethnic rivalries in Europe, most notably in the former Yugoslavia, Kohl said.

Germany has itself suffered a wave of right-wing violence and attacks on foreigners.

"No one should be under the illusion that the spectre of European nationalism has been finally laid to rest or that this ugly apparition is confined to the Balkans," he wrote.

"In many parts of the east of our continent we are starting to see a return of nationalist thinking, of intolerance and even chauvinism."

Kohl, long an ardent champion of a United Europe, also said that the community needed to pull together in an economic union to compete as an exporter with Japan and the United States.



Helmut Kohl

Rally against Babri Mosque demolition in London

LONDON, Jan 4: More than 1,500 Muslims demonstrated in London on Sunday and presented a petition to Indian embassy in protest against last month's destruction of a 16th century mosque in Ayodhya, northern India, by Hindu Zealots, reports AFP.

Police put the number of demonstrators at about 1,700 and said the protest had been peaceful.

The destruction of the Babri Mosque on December 6 by Hindu militants in order to build a temple to the warrior god Rama on the site led to violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims in India and other countries. More than 1,150 people were killed in riots across India.

In England there were attacks on Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious centres.

At the weekend hundreds of Hindus in Ayodhya said prayers at a makeshift temple built on the site of the destroyed Babri Mosque.

Off the Record

The poet who did not worry much about AIDS

TOKYO, Jan 4: Although he frequented gay-bathhouses and didn't use condoms, poet Yutaka Hirata didn't worry much about AIDS, reports AP.

Now he knows he was dead wrong, and so does the rest of Japan. Hirata caused a national sensation when he became the first Japanese to publicly acknowledge he caught the AIDS virus through sex.

Hirata — who used only his pen name — made his announcement in October, long after the first AIDS cases surfaced here in the mid-1980s. But those cases were linked to foreigners, causing a false sense of security.

That complacency has been replaced by dread as the number of confirmed cases starts to soar. In the first 11 months of 1992, 424 cases of AIDS or infection with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, were reported — almost double the number reported in all of 1991.

In all, some 500 cases of full-blown AIDS and 2,500 cases of infection with HIV have been confirmed in Japan. Health officials estimate there are at least 10 undiagnosed cases for every person known to be infected.

But the fatal illness is still treated at arm's length, even though secrecy and the belief it is a foreigners disease has helped spread AIDS.

All work and no play made him a rich boy

NEW YORK: All work and no play has made Jack Nicholson a rich boy, reports AP.

Now commanding a reported 10 million dollars a picture, the 55-year-old actor told Entertainment Weekly that he no longer needs a paycheck.

"Money hasn't really been the issue with me for quite a while," he says in the magazine's January 8 issue. "I just do what I feel like — that's all there is to it."

Nicholson — currently starring in "A Few Good Men" and "Hoffa" — has spent much of his fortune on works by Picasso and other famous artists.



PARIS: Two youngsters roller skate on ice at the Trocadero Fountains in Paris on Sunday. There has been a very cold spell in the last few days. — AFP/UNB photo

Pendant for those who want to attract Dracula

SALT LAKE CITY: For centuries, people wore a crudifix of string of garlic around their necks to ward off vampires. Now there's a pendant for those who might want to attract one, reports AP.

The pendants bear the Dracula family crest — a stylized dragon — and a pinch of dirt from Transylvania where Vlad V of Wallachia was born.

The 15th century prince inspired the bloodthirsty monster of Bram Stoker's 1897 Gothic horror novel. And as any Dracula devotee knows, the count can't rest in his coffin without a bed of soil from his homeland.

The necklace is the brainchild of Joseph Klamt, a Salt Lake City businessman, and Dan Filipov, an electrician who immigrated from Romania seven years ago.

"Back in Romania, we really liked this guy, Vlad the Impaler," Filipov said. "Whatever we heard about him was great."

Despite a penchant for impaling his enemies on stakes, Dracula is revered at home for his courage and leadership in battling Turks bent on conquering Europe.

Filipov says he wanted to do something to improve the count's image in the United States.

He returned to Romania in 1990 and persuaded the mayor of Draculavillage — Sighisoara — to permit removal of 90 pounds (40 kilograms) of soil from the Prince's birthplace, a modest castle and historic landmark still standing after half a millennium.

Policeman shot dead in Algiers

ALGIERS, Jan 4: A policeman and an armed civilian were killed in two separate incidents around Algiers over the weekend, after the reported slaying of five gendarmes by Muslim fundamentalists Friday in the south of the country, police said, reports AFP.

Algiers radio, meanwhile, reported that 69 suspected Islamic guerillas had been arrested in recent days in El-Eulama, near the city of Setif 300 kilometers (180 miles) east of here. The 69 were identified as members of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front.

UNICEF withdraws foreign staff from a Somali port

MOGADISHU, Jan 4: The United Nations Children's Fund has pulled its foreign staff out of the southern Somali port of Kismayu despite the presence there of hundreds of American and Belgian troops, reports Reuters.

The move followed the killing on Saturday night of UNICEF's officer in charge in Kismayu, Briton Sean Devereux by a lone Somali gunman 30 metres (yards) from the agency's residence.

The withdrawal reflected the relief community's concern that their security was still not guaranteed despite the presence of more than 27,000 US and other foreign forces in Somalia to protect the famine relief operations.

UNICEF statement said the agency welcomed the arrival of the American-led force and its efforts to provide security for the relief effort.

But it said the shooting of Devereux, the first foreigner killed intentionally in Somalia since the task force arrived, had set back plans to resettle more than 50,000 displaced Somalis who have fled to Kismayu from the lower Juba Valley.

UNICEF remains committed to reaching civilians caught in war. However, the assurances for the security of UNICEF and NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) staff remain a precondition to the provision of assistance, the statement said.

It said four other expatriate UNICEF staff in Kismayu had been evacuated but that Somali employees would stay on to provide essential relief to mothers and children.

The UNICEF statement did not mention the nationalities of the staff who were being withdrawn.

No motive had been established for Devereux's death and the identity of the gunman was not known, UNICEF said.

But the statement indicated the Devereux

had been singled out for murder. Two Somali UNICEF staff who were with Devereux when the gunman struck, were unhurt, the statement said.

The Briton had spoken up last month about an orgy of clan killings in Kismayu on the eve of the start of Operation Restore Hope and extortion of UNICEF and other aid agencies by locally-hired guards and drivers.

The UNICEF statement said a report earlier on Sunday that Devereux had been killed by his own security guards was unfounded and untrue.

US and Belgian troops secured Kismayu, 380 km (250 miles) south of Mogadishu, on December 20, 11 days after the first US mariners stormed ashore in the Somali capital.

Troops have spread out since December 9 to eight regional centres in central and southern Somalia's famine belt, from where they will escort food convoys into the countryside.

Staff of many relief agencies say, that while more food is reaching the starving, because of the troops, their own safety had become worse.

One senior aid agency official, who asked not to be named, told Reuters he was having trouble convincing expatriates on his staff to stay in Somalia and that relations between the relief community and the military were tense.

"They (the task force) have disarmed US and not replaced it with anything," the officials said, adding that it had only been a matter of time before someone was killed.

Kismayu, Mogadishu and the southern town of Bardere are the blackspots of insecurity, with looting, muggings and car hijackings still commonplace, according to aid workers.

Task force commanders say it is not their job to disarm Somalia, awash with weapons used during two years of clan war and anarchy which created the country's apocalyptic famine.

Hurd for peace in Bosnia

LONDON, Jan 4: Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd called Monday on all sides involved in the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina to "make peace" during the current talks in Geneva, reports AP.

Speaking to British Broadcasting Corp. television, Hurd warned that the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina could spread further. But said there was no immediate danger of it spreading at the moment.

"It will come if anybody, but I am thinking in particular of the Serbs, were tempted into some sort of new adventure which would involve other countries," Hurd told BBC television.