

Strike paralyses Kashmir valley

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: A strike called by Muslim groups to protest the massacre of 42 people by Indian paramilitary forces crippled the Kashmir valley today, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says AFP.

Shops, businesses, educational institutions, banks and even government offices were closed, while all but military vehicles went off the roads across the Muslim-majority valley, the news agency said.

The shutdown was called to denounce the massacre at Sopore town early Wednesday when the Border Security Forces (BSF) went on a rampage after an ambush by Muslim guerrillas left a trooper dead.

Police and residents alleged the border guards shot people

at random and set fire to scores of houses and shops in a bloody retaliation which lasted more than an hour, leaving at least 42 men and women dead.

Government officials in Srinagar, summer capital of the federally-ruled northern state, called the deaths "unfortunate" and ordered an investigation.

The Massacre triggered widespread demonstrations in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state where a bloody separatist campaign which erupted in 1989 has left thousands dead.

Indian army troops were patrolling curfew-bound Sopore and Baramulla, known rebel strongholds, PTI said.



UNITED NATIONS: Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic (R) answers questions at a news conference on Thursday at the United Nations with the help of his daughter Sabrina Berberovic as his translator, Lzetbegovic discussed the peace talks taking place in Geneva.

Alija demands changes in map of Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 8: Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic on Thursday demanded changes in the map of Bosnia-Herzegovina drawn up in talks among Yugoslavia's warring factions, saying the document legitimizes "ethnic cleansing," reports AP.

After meeting with UN Security Council President Yoshio Itano on Thursday, Izetbegovic told a news conference that the map was "acceptable as a basis for discussions."

But with its current boundaries, it "puts under Serbian control most of the ethnically cleansed territories, which means the occupier is given the fruits of ethnic cleansing."

The Bosnian President drew parallels between the Geneva talks and talks held in Munich on the eve of World War II.

Govt rejects truce offer by UNITA

LUANDA, Jan 8: Government forces are besieging two rebel-held towns, and rejected a ceasefire offer by UNITA rebel leader Jonas Savimbi as fighting was reported throughout Angola, says AP.

Angolan national radio said Thursday government forces had recaptured the port cities of Benguela and Lobito, and quoted the army chief of staff as saying thousands of rebel troops had been captured.

The government and UNITA signed a peace treaty in 1991 ending 16 years of civil war, but renewed fighting broke out after Savimbi refused to accept his party's defeat in post-war elections in September.

Prime Minister Marcelino Moco said parliament will meet next week to consider imposing emergency mea-

Ten weeks of fighting has left thousands dead. In Benguela alone, the government said 1,000 people were killed this week.

Moco rejected Savimbi's call for a ceasefire.

"UNITA has no business making proposals. They should limit themselves to complying with peace accords," he said.

Government troops on Thursday were shelling Savimbi's headquarters in the central town of Huambo, government radio said in a report monitored by the British Broadcasting Corp in London.

It said the army was besieging two rebel-held towns - Caxito, 30 miles (48 kilometers) north of the capital, Luanda, on the road to the northern oil fields, and Ndalatando, 115 miles (200 kilometers) to the east.

BRIEFLY

2 die in Indian train blast: Two people died and 20 were injured when a bomb went off on an express train Thursday in northern India, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The blast occurred as the train, called the Kashi Vishwanath Express, was travelling between two wayside stations in the Katghar and Dalapat areas of Uttar Pradesh state.

Six of the injured were in serious condition, the news agency said.

The day before, two police officers were injured in a bomb explosion in the industrial town of Kanpur, PTI said.

16 hurt in floor collapse: A concrete floor being poured Thursday at a computer chip plant under construction collapsed, sending several workers plunging about 20 feet (six metres). Sixteen people were hospitalized, two in critical condition, says AP from Hudson.

Workers had been pouring a concrete deck on the second floor, when a table used to hold wet concrete gave way, said Paul Hewins, project manager for Marshall Contractors Inc.

The workers fell about 20 feet and landed in 3 feet (0.9 metres) of wet concrete, said Hudson Fire Chief Tom Garrity.

Sixteen people were taken to hospitals and two were critically injured, said Judd Kline, chief of emergency medicine at Marlboro Hospital.

UK wants India to start proper political process in Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, Jan 8: British Home Secretary Kenneth Clarke said on Thursday that London wanted Pakistan to stop weapons reaching militants fighting Indian rule in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, reports Reuter.

But Britain also wanted India to start a proper political process in Kashmir, where more than 9,000 people have been killed in the three-year-old insurgency.

Clarke, who visited India earlier this week and held talks with Pakistani authorities on Thursday, repeated a British offer to help the two old enemies to reach a peaceful settlement over Kashmir

through dialogue.

Islamabad denies India's charges that it arms Muslim militants fighting for Kashmir's independence or union with Islamic Pakistan. It says its support for them is only political.

But Clarke, whose visit followed one by British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd last October, said he believed some of "the great deal of military equipment" in Kashmir came over the Pakistani border.

"How it is getting there... is not a matter for me, (but) I think it is an element in the conflict," he said, adding that the Pakistani government firmly denied army involve-

ment in sending material aid to Kashmiri militants.

Clarke said Britain defended everyone's right to give political, moral and diplomatic support to a cause, but "We do not agree with violent furthering of aims of this kind."

"We wish the Pakistan government would do what it can to control the flow of assistance over the border," he said.

Clarke said Britain made a similar request to India and was pressing it on alleged abuses of human rights in Kashmir.

Indian leaders told him they hoped to start a political process in Kashmir. They said they planned talks with the

Human Rights Organisation, Amnesty International, which wants access to Kashmir, and would set up their own human rights commission.

New Delhi, which controls two-thirds of Kashmir regards the whole of the former princely states as part of the Indian union.

Islamabad, which controls the remaining third, wants the predominantly Muslim Kashmiris to decide in a UN mandated plebiscite whether to join Pakistan or Hindu-majority India.

Some of the militant groups want Kashmir to be independent.

Eagleburger fears failure of Yeltsin

WASHINGTON, Jan 8: Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger warned Thursday that an anti-American government could seize power in Moscow if President Boris Yeltsin's reform programme is unsuccessful, reports AP.

"If Yeltsin should fail, if reform fails, we will be confronted once again with a nationalist - not communist - but Russian nationalist government which will be antagonistic to many of our purposes," he said.

Eagleburger, who is to retire, when President George Bush's administration leaves the White House January 20, urged support for the Yeltsin government in his last major address as Secretary of State.

"We are in the middle of a global revolution, a period of change and instability equalled in modern times only by the aftermath of the French and Russian revolutions, he said.

In one of his last official duties, Eagleburger is to travel to Paris next week to sign an international agreement on chemical weapons control.

CIS summit now on January 22

MOSCOW, Jan 8: The leaders of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan Thursday said they would attend the upcoming summit meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Minsk, capital of Belarus, reports AP.

The meeting has been delayed several times. It has now been scheduled for January 22.

The previous summit, which was held in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek in October, achieved practically nothing.

The announcement came after heads of state from five Asian countries of the former Soviet Union said at a summit meeting in Tashkent Monday they had become concerned at the lack of effective action by the CIS, which replaced the Soviet Union in December 1991.

The presidents involved - Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, Saparmurad Niyazov of Turkmenistan and Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan, together

with the President of the Fajik Parliament Ali Rakhmanov - also announced that they intended to create a union of central Asian peoples, a decision seen as amounting to a step away from the CIS.

The presidents of CIS member states were to have met in Minsk at the beginning of December to mark first anniversary of the CIS.

Armenia will very actively take part in all constructive CIS procedures, an Armenian spokesman quoted President Levon Ter-petrosian as saying, according to Itar-Tass news agency.

Nazerbayev said that "on Thursday he would push for concrete steps aimed at developing and implementing previous CIS agreements."

It is too early to bury the CIS, Uzbekistan's Karimov said.

We are far from having explored all possibilities of a profitable partnership, even though for the time being our hopes have been dashed.

Relief reduces death rate in Somalia

WASHINGTON, Jan 8: A massive international relief effort has brought only slight decline in death rates in Somalia but a marked improvement is expected by the end of the month, a senior US official said Thursday, reports AP.

James Kunder, head of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, told a news conference the foreign military intervention that began a month ago "has succeeded far beyond my expectations."

But he said it would be a mistake to assume that the situation could be turned around overnight, given the catastrophic death rates last fall.

He said the death rates in some areas were three and four times those of the famine that struck Ethiopia in the mid-1980s.

"It's going to take some time for those figures to be turned around," he said.

"What you see on the ground is not the beginning of the end but the end of the beginning," said Kunder, who just returned from a visit to Somalia.

Aspin wants air raid on Bosnia

Defence Secretary-designate Les Aspin said Thursday he favours air strikes to enforce the no-fly zone in Bosnia, says AFP from Washington.

But he said he was opposed to US ground troops being moved into the region.

European forces should be used instead of American troops, said Aspin during his Senate confirmation hearing.

Aspin, who chaired the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, said Europe has a bigger stake in the conflict because of the possible massive influx of refugees.

13 Pakistanis held in Bangkok

Thirteen Pakistanis have been arrested in connection with a major fake passport operation, police said yesterday, reports AP from Bangkok.

The 13 were picked up in a raid on a Bangkok apartment on Thursday when police seized numerous fake passports and forging equipment. An unlicensed handgun and ammunition were also seized.

Those arrested are facing charges of possession of false travel document, illegal possession of a fire arm and illegal immigration, police said.

Aid worker killed in Iraq

An Australian aid worker with the CARE agency was killed when his car was strafed by gunfire in northern Iraq, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade announced in Australia yesterday, says AP from Canberra.

A spokesman for the department said the 45-year-old worker from Brisbane was travelling to Sulamanyah, 270 kilometres (170 miles) northeast of Baghdad in the Kurdish region of Iraq when the incident occurred.

Another Australian, from Melbourne, was wounded in the arm, hand and shoulder but was reported in satisfactory conditions.

CARE Australia said the men's names would not be released until their families had been informed.

Attack on tourists near pyramids

An unknown assailant threw a molotov cocktail at a tourist bus on the road to the Giza pyramids Thursday, breaking the bus's windows but causing no injuries, the government said, reports AP from Cairo.

It was the first time that tourists have been attacked in the neighbourhood of the three Giza pyramids which are 4,600 years old.

The attack was identical to several carried out recently by Muslim extremists against tourists in southern Egypt. The attacks have left a British nurse dead and two Britons and five Germans wounded.

Prayer for peace in Yslavia today

Religious leaders of various faiths plan to gather on Saturday in Baltimore and in Italy to hold prayer vigils for peace in the former Yugoslavia, reports AP from New York.

Pope John Paul II has invited heads of every European Catholic conference and other conferences, along with Protestant, Jewish and Muslim leaders, to the gathering in Assisi. Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia will represent the US bishops.

Archbishop William H Kee-ler of Baltimore, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, is convening a gathering in that city of representatives of US religious groups with links to the Balkans. They include Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim organisations.

Kee-ler said the prayer vigil comes at a time of fresh hopes for some solution to the warfare involving mainly Orthodox Serbia, mainly Catholic Croatia and heavily Muslim Bosnia.



BAGHDAD: Iraqi Defence Minister Ali Hassan Al-Majid, brother of President Saddam Hussain inspects a guard of honour on the occasion of the Army Day on Wednesday in Baghdad.

UN forces arm Vietnamese troops: Khmers

BANGKOK, Jan 8: The Khmer Rouge today accused the UN forces in Cambodia of supplying arms and ammunition to Vietnamese soldiers and troops of the government in Phnom Penh, reports AP.

In a broadcast monitored here, Khmer Rouge radio said UN forces have recently transported a large quantity of weapons and ammunition to arm Vietnamese and puppet Phnom Penh soldiers in the district of Chom Khsane in northern Preah Vihear province.

The broadcast accused senior officials including the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAEC) Chief Yasushi Akashi of backing Vietnamese aggression against the Khmer Rouge.

Off the Record

Clinton the candidate and the President may not be same

WASHINGTON: Would it be unethical to suggest even before he takes the oath that Bill Clinton the candidate and Bill Clinton the president-elect may not be the same man? reports AP.

Consider: Clinton the candidate sang the praises of public schools. Clinton the president-elect is sending his daughter Chelsea to a private school that costs more than 10,000 dollars.

Clinton the candidate left the strong impression, at least with Haitians, that they would have a far better chance of gaining asylum in the United States. He said he would change President Bush's policy of turning away all Haitian refugees.

Clinton the president-elect says he will allow refugees to petition for temporary political asylum, but not permit "mass emigration."

Clinton the candidate pledged to cut the federal deficit in half in four years. Clinton the president-elect appears to be backing off, blaming the Bush administration for camouflaging the magnitude of the deficit problem.

Promises are hard to keep, as Bush discovered with his promise not to raise taxes. He, too, had to confront the reality of understated revenues and overstated optimism.

She has to take 'princess education'

TOKYO: For Cinderella, all it took was a glass slipper. But for Masako Owada, Japan's new empress-to-be, becoming part of the world's oldest imperial family won't be so easy, reports AP.

In the months ahead, the 29-year-old daughter of Japan's top career diplomat will be required to undergo a "princess education," participate in several prenuptial rituals and learn to live with a gaggle of photographers in tow.

But first, her engagement to Crown Prince Naruhito must be approved by a 10-member government council headed by Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa. The council is to meet January 9.

Her family will then be called upon by an imperial messenger bearing gifts and an official request that Miss Owada marry the prince. Similar betrothal gifts are a common part of engagements in Japan.

To prepare her for the tradition-conscious life of a princess, she will be tutored in subjects ranging from imperial etiquette to classical poetry and constitutional law.

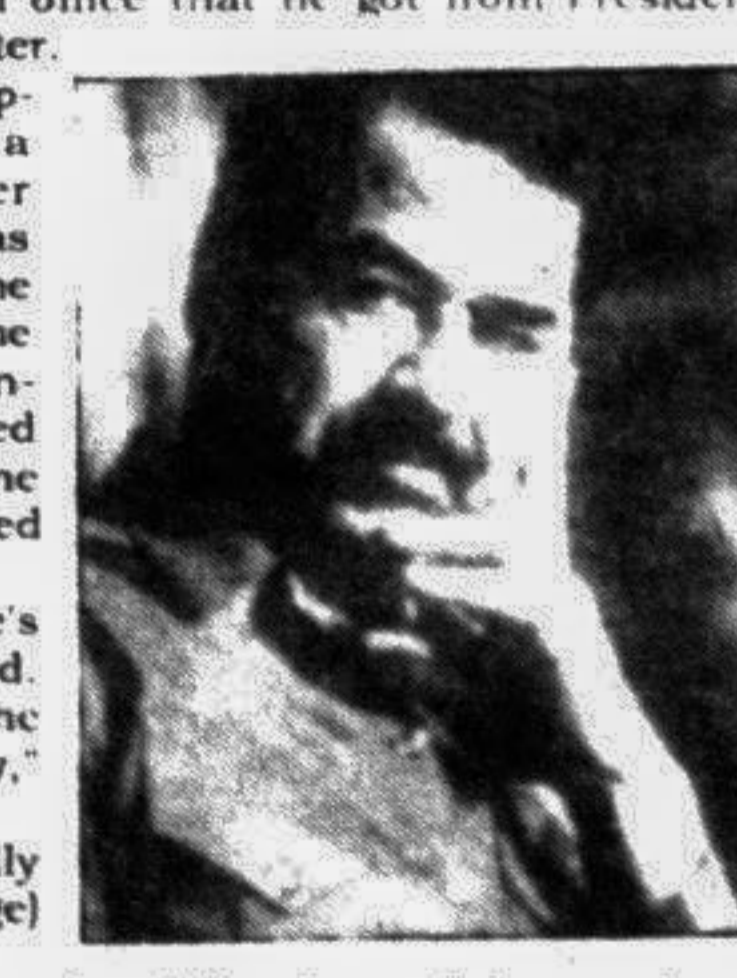
Saddam an 'outlaw'

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas: President-elect Bill Clinton's spokesman called Saddam Hussein an "outlaw" on Thursday and said the Iraqi leader would get the same kind of response from Clinton once he's in office that he got from President George Bush, reports Reuter.

Spokesman George Stephanopoulos was asked at a news conference whether he thought Saddam was testing the final days of the Bush administration or the incoming Clinton administration when he moved missiles into a "no-fly" zone in Iraq, menacing allied planes.

"I don't know what he's doing I can't read his mind. But he's going to get the same response either way," Stephanopoulos said.

Governor Clinton fully supports President (George) Bush's policy and Saddam Hussein should know that forceful policy will be continued when President-elect Clinton takes office," Stephanopoulos said. Clinton, the former Governor of Arkansas, will be inaugurated on January 20.



HK issue: China confident about power transfer

BEIJING, Jan 8: Chinese Communist Party general secretary Jiang Zemin said Friday he was confident that the transfer of power in Hong Kong from Britain to China in 1997 will go smoothly, reports AP.

However, Jiang repeated China's position that the British colonial government should "come back to the principles of the Sino-British Joint Communique and the Basic Law."

China has been using this language to pressure Hong Kong Gov. Chris Patten to give up a plan he announced in October to expand democratic participation in the territory before 1997.

Bad weather delays Red Cross men's visit to deportees

MARJ AZ-ZOHOUR, Lebanon, Jan 8: A snow storm today forced United Nations peacekeepers to postpone for at least 24 hours the flight of two Red Cross officials to the tent camp of 415 Palestinians deported by Israel to south Lebanon, reports Reuter.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said it had received the go ahead from UN Headquarters in New York for the mission, but the weather made it impossible for the flight to take place today.

"The weather is too bad... hopefully, we can make it tomorrow after talking into consideration the state of the weather, rain and wind," a UNIFIL spokesman said.

Witnesses said UNIFIL had

prepared one of its helicopters for the flight at its base in the border town of Naqoura. Red Cross stickers were placed on the white US-made helicopter.

AP reports: Bad weather could delay a visit Friday by International Red Cross officials to 415 Palestinian deportees stranded in south Lebanon, a UN spokesman said.

Meanwhile, UN envoy Chinmaya Gharekhan, an Indian, was meeting Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on Friday morning in Tel Aviv. He was to meet Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on Sunday.

In a small concession, Rabin agreed Thursday to let the Red Cross visit the deportees, a

step announced just before a UN envoy arrived to mediate the dispute over the expelled Palestinians.

The officials were to fly to the deportees tent camp aboard a helicopter provided by the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon. But Timor Goksel, spokesman for the force, said heavy winds would likely delay the visit.

"At the moment it is impossible to fly. The weather is very bad here: it's impossible even to walk around here," Goksel said from the force headquarters in Negoura, just above the Israeli frontier.

Goksel said he hoped the craft, bearing Red Cross insignia, would be able to fly

later Friday.

The deportees have been trapped on the edge of the Israeli-controlled "security zone" in southern Lebanon since December 17 when Israel deported them and Lebanon refused to accept their entry.

Both countries sides have blocked the Red Cross from delivering food and medicine.

Israeli officials have stressed that the visit Friday by Red Cross officials is to assess the needs of the deportees, not to deliver relief goods.

Rabin's move came after UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali hinted he may ask for sanctions against Israel if it does not show more flexibility.

While it's unlikely that the Security Council would impose sanctions, the issue of the deportations could interfere with resumption of US-backed Middle East peace talks.

Rabin's government took office last July pledging to push forward the talks, but Palestinian delegates have said they would not resume negotiating until the deportees are returned home.

Israel expelled the men as alleged supporters of Muslim fundamentalist groups. It blames for the slayings of six Israeli soldiers and an agent of the Shin Bet internal security service in the past month.

Meanwhile AFP adds: A UN envoy arrived in Israel late Thursday launching a new bid

to secure the return of 415 Palestinians deported to Lebanon.

The visit came only hours after the Jewish state agreed to have the Red Cross visit the deportees.

Chinmaya Gharekhan, who is the special envoy of United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, will try to convince Israeli officials to implement UN Security Council resolution 799, which calls for the immediate return of the deportees.

The Palestinians, suspected members of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas and Islamic Jihad Organisation, were expelled December 17 to an icy no-man's land between Israel and Lebanese lines.

Belarus President begins visit to China

BEIJING, Jan 8: Belarus President Stanislav Shushkevich began his first official visit to China today the latest leader from a former Soviet Republic to study Beijing's model of economic reforms, reports Reuter.

Shushkevich stopped briefly in Beijing before heading immediately for the coastal special economic zone of Xiamen, one of China's experiments with market-style economics, Foreign Ministry officials said.

Shushkevich was of the view that the experience of China's economic reform is worth learning by Belarus, the official news agency Xinhua said.