

Fahd invites Afghan warring factions for peace talks

DUBAI, Jan 23: King Fahd, appealing for an end to the fighting in Kabul, has invited warring Afghan Mujahideen groups to meet in Saudi Arabia for talks on ways to settle their differences, reports Reuter.

"In the name of Islam, I urge you to lay down your arms and let reason, conscience and logic govern you," the King

said in a statement carried by the official Saudi press agency Alite on Friday. "I address to you a sincere invitation to Saudi Arabia to meet... and discuss your views and differences."

The Saudi monarch, among the world's most influential Muslim leaders as the custodian of Islam's holiest shrines, issued his appeal against a background of intensified fighting in Afghanistan.

Saudi Arabia was one of the major backers of the Mujahideen groups during their 14-year war against the Soviet-installed government that was swept from power last April.

In his announcement King Fahd reminded Mujahideen groups of Saudi Arabia's former support, mostly in cash for military equipment.

Saudi Arabia also gave tanks, artillery and rockets captured from Iraq during the Gulf War.

Clinton meets security advisors soon

US will consider arming Bosnian Muslims

WASHINGTON, Jan 23: President Clinton will hold a meeting of his National Security Council soon — probably early next week — and it will consider arming the Bosnian republic in its battle with Serbs, US officials told reporters Friday, reports AP.

The Clinton administration will consider providing weapons to Bosnia's embattled Muslims, while supporting efforts by international mediators to end the war in the former Yugoslav republic, the State Department said.

"At this point, it is an idea we are considering," spokesman Richard A. Boucher said even as Serbs intensified their military pressure on the Muslims on the eve of a resumption of peace talks in Geneva, Switzerland.

He emphasized that lifting the present embargo on arms to the republics of former Yugoslavia would require consultations with other governments at the United Nations.

Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher raised the possibility of arming the Muslims at his Senate confirmation hearings and the statement Friday gave the option new emphasis.

Clinton pledged during the campaign to seek UN authorization for air strikes against forces that disrupt air relief efforts in Bosnia while using US and European naval forces to tighten economic sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro.

He also accused the Bush administration of not doing all it should to assist Bosnia's Muslim majority.

Last month, then-Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger sought European support for arming the Muslims but failed. Only Turkey, a mostly Muslim country, backed his appeal.

The NATO foreign ministers, at Eagleburger's urging, called on the UN Security Council to enforce its no-fly zone over Bosnia. There have been more than 300 Serbian flights despite the embargo imposed by the Council.

But the Council has not acted. Boucher said Friday a draft resolution had been prepared but that "several important details remain to be decided."

White House Communications Director George Stephanopoulos said the president supports the efforts

of the United Nations and the European Community to bring together the warring sides in Bosnia, but emphasized that it is the parties who must agree to any settlement.

The United States has not formally a party to agreements. Former US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance has been a leading intermediary, but acting on behalf of the United Nations.

Clinton's nominee for deputy secretary of state expressed hope Friday for peace, the day after Christopher was quoted as doubting the negotiations would work.

"I am very hopeful that the recent Geneva accords will work," Clinton Wharton Jr told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at his confirmation hearing.

Off the Record



NEW DELHI: Artists giving the finishing touches January 22 to a tableau depicting India's population explosion. The tableau will be on display during India's Republic Day celebration to be held January 26. British Prime Minister John Major will be the chief guest in the celebration. —AFP photo

Dixit to visit Thailand

BANGKOK, Jan 23: Indian Foreign Secretary Jyotindra N. Dixit will make a three-day visit to Thailand at the end of this month to strengthen bilateral ties, it is learned here today, reports Xinhua.

During his stay in Bangkok from January 31 to February 2, Dixit will have talks with Thai Foreign Minister Permanent Secretary Pracha Kunakastem on bilateral and regional issues,

BRIEFLY

Pakistani beheaded in Jeddah: A convicted drug trafficker from Pakistan was beheaded in Jeddah Friday, the fourth Pakistani executed this year on drugs charges, the Saudi Interior Ministry said, reports AFP from Jeddah.

The Ministry, quoted by the Saudi press agency, said Shaker Khan was caught trying to smuggle heroin into the country.

Riyadh has voiced concern to Islamabad about an increase of drug trafficking from Pakistan.

Five other people, including a Pakistani woman who strangled her husband have been beheaded since January 1. Executions normally take place on Friday, the Muslims day of prayers.

Blast kills 8 in Iraq: A car bomb killed eight people and wounded 120 on Friday in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil, inside the safe haven for Kurds set up by the US-led Gulf war allies, a Kurdish party official said in Ankara, reports Reuter from Ankara.

The bomb exploded in a central and crowded area at 1310 local time. It also wrecked many nearby stores and cars, an official from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) told reporters.

The PUK official said: We are 80 per cent certain that the bomb was planted by Baghdad.

Rebels kill 7 troops in Peru: Maoist Shining Path guerrillas ambushed an army patrol in Peru's central jungle, killing seven soldiers and wounding two others, military sources said on Friday, reports Reuter from Lima.

The guerrillas ambushed the patrol as it travelled on a rural highway on Thursday in Huamaltes province, Huancayo department, some 300 kms (180 miles) northeast of Lima, said a source at military headquarters in the city of Tingo Maria.

Guerrillas killed a mayoral candidate in the same province Friday, bringing to six the number of candidates for next Friday nation wide municipal elections who have died at the hands of the guerrillas in the past 10 days.

US traders to visit Lanka: A group of American business executives will visit Sri Lanka Sunday, and their arrival is seen here as an indication that conditions are improving in the war-torn nation, says AP from Colombo.

American Ambassador Teresita C. Schaffer said the three-day visit by executives in agriculture, real estate, communications and financial services marks a significant advance in economic relations between the two countries.

The executives will meet with key government officials, business leaders and potential joint-venture partners, according to a statement from the United States Information Service.

Some of the businesspeople will later head to India for talks with Indian investors.

Brazil drops plan to build atomic plant

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil, Jan 23: Brazil, abandoning its dream of becoming a continental nuclear power, announced it has dropped plans to build a third atomic plant, reports AP.

President Itamar Franco said the planned 1,300-kilowatt plant known as Angra III will not be built "under any hypothesis," presidential press spokesman Francisco Baker said Thursday night in Brasilia, the capital.

Today, Angra III is simply an expensive hole in the ground. Brazil has spent \$1.1 billion just on the foundation at the site near Angra dos Reis, a southeastern coastal resort 100 miles (154 kms) west of Rio de Janeiro.

Another plant, Angra II, which is nearly finished, also could be scrapped, Baker said.

He said Franco, a long-time critic of the nuclear programme, will decide next week whether to resume work on the plant, deactivate it or continue doing nothing.

Baker said the president decided to drop Angra III after meeting with Marcelo Siqueira, head of the government power company Furnas that runs the nuclear energy programme.

Siqueira said the upkeep of Angra II alone cost the nation \$10 million a month, even though construction was stopped, Baker said.

Franco's decision apparently ends a dream of Brazilian generals to make Latin America's largest country a major nuclear power.



WASHINGTON: Flanked by Secretary of State Warren Christopher (L) and Secretary of Defence Les Aspin (R), US President Bill Clinton presides over the first meeting of his new cabinet January 22. —AFP photo

14 anti-junta campaigners arrested in Myanmar

YANGON, Jan 23: Authorities recently arrested 14 people who distributed pamphlets opposing a constitutional convention organized by the country's military junta, the state radio said, reports AP.

Those arrested included the group's leader, retired school teacher Shwe Htoo, 49, who had taken an active role in anti-military demonstrations in 1988 and later joined rebels along the Myanmar-Thai border, said the Friday night broadcast.

It said the group mailed the pamphlets to universities, factories and government offices in Yangon and Mandalay and also distributed leaflets in public places.

The broadcast warned that "organizations or persons that try to disrupt peace and tranquility in the state will be exposed and effective action will be taken against them."

The junta seized power in 1988, when soldiers slaughtered pro-democracy demonstrators. In 1990, pro-democracy parties won a landslide electoral victory but the junta refused to let them govern and said it would not yield power

to a civilian government until a new constitution was drafted.

A convention to endorse guidelines for the constitution began Jan 9 and met for a second day but has been adjourned until Feb 1. No timetable has been given for the constitution-drafting process.

Authorities have made it clear that the new charter's principles must include introduction of a multiparty democratic system, but also a leading role for the "tatmadaw," or military, the traditional arbiters of power in Burma.

The country's many dissident and armed rebel groups say the convention is merely an attempt by the junta to paint a veneer of legitimacy on military rule.

AFP adds: Myanmar jungle-based opposition hit out today at the Thai government for signing an economic agreement with Myanmar Junta.

The agreement earlier this week to form a joint commission to promote economic and trade cooperation "would never produce any benefit for the people of Myanmar," the Opposition National Coalition Government said.

Bukhari iterates call to boycott Republic Day celebrations

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Ahmed Bukhari, the Deputy Imam of the Delhi Jame Mosque, reiterated today his call for a boycott of next week's Republic Day branded his critics "government stooges," reports AFP.

Bukhari said Muslims would not join the celebrations because they were being killed by Hindu militants and security forces across the country.

"We are determined to observe a black day (on Tuesday)," Bukhari said in an interview. "When Muslims are being butchered, no one can force us to join the festivities. We will boycott the Republic Day (celebrations)."

Bukhari said Muslims, the largest minority in India, should hoist black flags on their homes Tuesday to protest large-scale attacks on them since the razing of the ancient Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu zealots last month.

Hundreds have been killed in bloody Hindu-Muslim violence across India since the Ayodhya sacrilege. Most victims have been Muslims.

Bukhari added some 500 Muslims would march to parliament Tuesday from his 17th century Jame Masjid to express our anger. "If the police stop us, we will offer ourselves for arrested."

Bukhari's call to observe the Republic Day, observed every January 26, as a black day has been widely criticised, includ-

ing by scores of Muslims, who total more than 100 million in Hindu-majority India.

But Bukhari dismissed his critics as "government stooges."

"They are people who do not have a sense of shame," he said. "They don't speak out when clouds of death hang over the community. They speak whatever the govern-

ment wants them to speak."

On Friday, several Muslim movie stars, cricketers, journalists and scientists urged the community to ignore Bukhari's "boycott Republic Day" call.

"We share the agony of all who suffered in the course of violence in various parts of the country, but Republic Day is not the proper occasion for a protest," they said in a joint

statement.

"It is an occasion to affirm our common fraternity, respect for the rule of law and the majesty of the constitution," the statement added.

Another Muslim leader, Syed Shahabuddin, who had given a similar protest call on Republic Day in 1987, also termed Bukhari's appeal "irresponsible."



SHANGHAI, China: Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping meets local officials during a rare public appearance at Chinese new year festivities January 22. —AFP/UNB photo

Major urges India to give up N-option

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: On the eve of a visit to India Saturday, British Prime Minister John Major urged India to give up its nuclear option and sign the non-proliferation treaty, reports AP.

Major said the refusal by India and Pakistan to endorse the international accord made it more difficult for the United States and Russia to dismantle their own nuclear arsenals.

"Sane people around the world like to see them continue reducing those stocks. It becomes progressively more difficult for them to do so if an increasing number of nations actually have nuclear weapons," he said in an interview in Saturday's edition of The Hindustan Times.

India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, says it

does not have nuclear weapons but wants to preserve its options as a deterrent against neighbours China and Pakistan.

Major was due to arrive later Saturday on a five-day visit for talks with Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and with other government and business leaders.

He will be the first British head of government to be the guest of honor at India's Republic Day parade since the former British colony became independent in 1947. The parade, marking the anniversary of India's Constitution, is Tuesday.

Indian Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh, in an interview with United News of India, reiterated India's pro-nuclear stance.

US urges Savimbi to free 17 oil workers

WASHINGTON, Jan 23: The United States Friday urged Angolan rebels headed by Jonas Savimbi to free 17 foreign oil workers they have taken prisoner, reports AFP.

"We think the holding of innocent civilians and foreign workers is unacceptable, and we call on Dr Savimbi to order their release, immediately," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

Seventeen foreigners were captured Monday by the UNITA.

CIS divided over signing charter for closer integration

MINSK, Belarus, Jan 23: Three members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) refused to sign a charter for closer integration, highlighting cracks in its unity and conflicting visions of its future, reports Reuter.

One of the three was powerful Ukraine, still at odds with Russia over who should take control of nuclear weapons left on Ukrainian, Belarusian and Kazakh territory after the Soviet Union's disintegration.

Only seven states, less than half the 15 countries born of the Soviet collapse, signed the

charter at a CIS summit on Friday in the Belarusian capital Minsk, only five accepted its provision on collective security.

Even the countries now committed to the agreement—Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan—will have to get it ratified by their parliaments.

The parliament of Moldova, whose leader Mircea Snegur did not sign has not yet ratified documents marking Moldova's entry into the CIS in December 1991.

Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk insisted that Ukr-

aine, Moldova and Turkmenistan had not signalled they were leaving the commonwealth by refusing to sign.

But he said member states should start to become more independent of the grouping, the CIS must not be seen as an all-embracing body, he told a news conference.

The split over the charter seemed to indicate that the 10-nation commonwealth was headed for a two-speed future. But Russian President Boris Yeltsin remained hopeful about its fate. He said all 10 remaining member states had signed a statement on the statute, leaving open the possibility

that the three others would join it soon.

"I am sure that the year of 1993 will be the year of the commonwealth, Yeltsin said.

"We know that we need each other, all of us. Even Russia, although Russia can better protect itself because of its size, cannot live without Ukraine, Turkmenistan and Moldova."

CIS leaders made no progress on deciding the fate of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, CIS official Ivan Korotchenya told reporters.

The question was not put so categorically as to take a final and irreversible decision. The

heads of state did not take it upon themselves to reach a final decision, he said.

Ukraine has vowed to get rid of its 176 strategic missiles. But, sensitive about its sovereignty, it is resisting Russian demands to surrender control of them to Moscow.

The weapons are now under the operational control of a joint commonwealth military command.

Belarus fully accepts the principle of Russian ownership of nuclear missiles on its territory. Kazakh officials said they were sympathetic to Russia but wanted to see Ukraine's posi-

tion.

Despite the continuing nuclear row, CIS states did make two important collective decisions. One was to set up an inter-state bank and securities market.

Members also agreed that the five signatories of last year's collective security agreement would send troops to join Russian servicemen on the border of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

The troops are trying to close the border and contain an ethnic, political and clan conflict in Tajikistan which has spilled into Afghanistan.

Baird's former employees may face deportation

NEW HAVEN, Conn, Jan 23: The Peruvian couple laboured in obscurity like most illegal aliens—until their former employer was nominated to be US attorney general, reports AP.

Now Zoe Baird has withdrawn her nomination, and the couple who worked for her could get kicked out of the country—if they haven't left already.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service told Victor and Lillian Cordero on Friday to appear for questioning next week in Hartford.