

Nepali communists demand Koirala's resignation

KATHMANDU, Feb 15: The Nepal Communist Party (NCP-United Marxist and Leninist) demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Girtija Prasad Koirala on the first day of the parliament's winter session on Sunday, a parliamentary source said, reports AFP.

The NCP-UML parliamentary leader Bharat Mohan Adhikari slated Koirala for signing an unequal treaty with India on the Tanakpur hydro-electric and irrigation project.

He pointed out that the torrential river Mahakali, the source of water for the Tanakpur project, lay between the borders of both countries, claiming Nepal should therefore get fifty per cent of the facility's total output.

When Koirala stood at the

podium the NCP-UML MPs harassed him by beating their tables demanding his resignation.

The Prime Minister cautioned opposition members to observe democratic norms to sustain Nepal's fledgling democratic system.

Earlier in the morning a group of communist youths and activists had planned to demonstrate with black flags to show their resentment over the Tanakpur accord at the central secretariat and the main entrance of the parliament.

However, to avoid embarrassment, Koirala entered his office at last three hours before the protest began a police source said.

Pak govt, opposition reach political 'ceasefire'

ISLAMABAD, Feb 15: The Pakistan government and the opposition have reached a political 'ceasefire' after more than two years of extreme hostility, a senior government minister said on Sunday, reports Reuters.

But the two bitter rivals have yet to achieve a full reconciliation. Petroleum and Natural Resources Minister Nisar Ali Khan, who is also special assistant to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, told reporters.

The government and the main opposition alliance led by former prime minister Benazir Bhutto have not been on speaking terms for most of Sharif's 27-month-old government and Bhutto had vowed to unseat Sharif through massive popular protests.

"The present situation of ceasefire... could be described as a working relationship be-

tween the government and opposition," the official APP news agency quoted Nisar as saying.

The coalition Islamic Democratic Alliance government has no plans to offer a cabinet post to Bhutto's alliance, he said.

Reports said that the two sides had made up their rift since they stopped their harsh criticism of each other after Bhutto accepted a government proposal to head the important parliamentary standing committee on Foreign Affairs.

Some commentators suggested the two sides might join hands to amend the constitution to curtail the powers of President Ghulam Ishaq Khan before he seeks election for a second term.

"This working relationship is neither against anyone nor a reaction to any action," Nisar said.

Ishaq Khan appeared to have strengthened his position last month by appointing a new army chief of his choice after the incumbent died of a heart attack.

The President's five-year term expires late this year and tacit backing from the influential military could be crucial for his election for a second term by an electoral college of federal and provincial parliaments.

A controversial constitutional provision, introduced by late military President Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, empowers the President to dismiss a prime minister and dissolve the parliament's powerful Lower House.

Ishaq Khan used those powers to dismiss Bhutto in 1990 on disputed charges of misrule during her 20-month government.

Opposition politicians have demanded the President take the same action against Sharif's government for alleged corruption.

Bhutto led protest marches across Pakistan late last year to press her demands for the removal of Sharif's government, which she says is the product of rigged elections in 1990, and for fresh elections under a neutral interim government.

Last week, a court released Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari on bail from 28 months in jail without a conviction.

Nisar said the present working relationship between the two sides was "a process of defusing the situation which had taken place in the recent past due to lack of tolerance and political clashes on personal levels."

Off the Record



The small Pakistani left-hander Asif Mujtaba batted majestically against South Africa at Buffalo Park in the third international Monday scoring 74. He played a quicker one from Alan Donald on to his abdomen guard. He despatched the next delivery of Donald to the cover fence but the pain in his groin forced him to unzip his trousers and call for medical help.

Carter's 'Turning Point' may turn into a movie

COLUMBUS: Former President Jimmy Carter says his book "Turning Point," probably will turn into a movie, reports AP.

He said two producers contacted his agent about buying rights to the book, which chronicles Carter's 1962 campaign for state senate.

It describes how he ran afoul of state Rep. Joe Hurst, the political boss of Gaitman County in south Georgia.

Hurst wouldn't allow private voting booths, requiring constituents in his precinct to vote in front of him. Carter appealed his loss and a judge threw out the results of that precinct, giving Carter the victory.

Oscar fever sweeps Hollywood

LOS ANGELES: Oscar fever, the annual hype that accompanies the academy awards, is sweeping Hollywood again as movie studios vie to get their films or stars on the list of nominations to be announced on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Video-cassettes of about 30 films have been mailed to each of the 5,000 members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences who have been feted at lavish cocktail parties.

The studios argue that the cost of pushing their films no matter how high, is justified.

Even an Oscar nomination can add millions to a film's box office taking, particularly for the five considered for best picture of the year.

On Thursday, movie advertisements in newspapers throughout America will bear banners proclaiming "nominated for (number of) academy awards."

MP Jailed for black rhino horn deal

HARARE: A member of Parliament for the ruling party began serving a 5-year jail term Sunday for trying to sell horns of endangered black rhinos, wildlife authorities said, reports AP.

Ben Moyo, 43, was convicted Thursday of trying to sell two poached rhino horns for 4,000 dollars.

He was the first high-ranking Zimbabwean politician to be jailed for involvement in rhino poaching.

His conviction was an embarrassment to the government, which has long denied conservationists' claims that politicians and senior military officials are involved in poaching.

Bid to sacrifice demon-son foiled

NEW DELHI: Police foiled a father's attempt to sacrifice his one-month-old son to the Hindu Goddess of Death in a central Indian village, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today, says Reuters.

Ramanand Dhruve, of Amori village in Madhya Pradesh state, agreed to have his son put to death after he was told by a neighbour, who claimed to have supernatural powers, that the baby would grow up to be a demon, PTI said.

Acting on a tip, police arrested the neighbour, Phool Singh Khadiya on Saturday. Khadiya had been collecting donations of food, money and clothing from Amori residents, who came to view an idol of Kali, Goddess of Death, in his house.

Human sacrifices to Kali were not uncommon in India's feudal past, but nowadays devotees usually sacrifice a goat at her temples.

74 Muslim extremists arrested in Egypt

CAIRO, Feb 15: Egyptian security forces arrested 74 Muslim extremists over the weekend, and seized leaflets calling for the government's overthrow as well as assassinations, police said Sunday, reports AFP.

Security forces arrested 35 extremists in Cairo and confiscated 20 weapons, police said. Five other militants were detained in the southern Egyptian village of Beni Sweif and 33 in the western province of Beheira.

Sun apologizes to Queen

LONDON, Feb 15: The Sun newspaper made a front-page apology to Queen Elizabeth II, who is suing the tabloid for publishing her Christmas message two days early, reports AP.

Another suspect identified as Ali Ramadan was captured Sunday in Sahragat Al-Kubra, a village 70 kms (43 miles) south of Cairo, who allegedly carried leaflets calling for the assassination of Interior Minister Abdel Halim Mussa and Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin.

In its early editions, Monday's Sun also said the newspaper would donate 200,000 pounds (dhs 284,000) to the Save the Children charity, of which the queen's daughter, Princess Anne, is patron.

It was not immediately clear if that would satisfy the queen.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said the queen's lawyers had received a telephone call from the Sun and that "any proposals... will be looked at carefully but in the meantime the matter remains with the solicitors."

The decision to apologize came from the Sun's publisher Rupert Murdoch, assistant editor Chris Davis said Sunday night.

Bahaeddin has recently been outspoken against attempts by teachers to force young girls to wear the Islamic scarf at school.

Police said Ramadan belonged to the underground Al-Jihad group, which was responsible for the killing of President Anwar Sadat in 1981.

Some 500 fundamentalist suspects have been detained over the past 10 days and five arms workshops dismantled.

The authorities accuse the fundamentalists of being behind recent attacks on tourists and police.

A police conscript was wounded in the latest attack overnight Saturday on the Mediterranean town of Marsa Matruh.



SARAJEVO: A boy and his sister eat together Sunday in front of their home in Sarajevo after the city rejected all aid until relief convoys can get through to eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Serbs block aid convoy in eastern Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Feb 15: Ten trucks carrying food and medicine for desperate Muslims isolated in eastern Bosnia were blocked by Bosnian Serbs over the weekend, but planned to make another attempt to get through, reports AP.

and Serbia, on Sunday morning have got only as far as Serb-held Zvornik on Bosnia's border with Serbia.

Bosnian Serbs refused to let the convoy pass, saying they had insufficient advance notice, said Judith Kuman, a spokeswoman for UN aid operations in Belgrade. The convoy would make a new attempt to reach Cerska on Monday, she said.

More than 18,000 people have died and more than 1 million have lost their homes since Bosnia's war began a year ago.

Fighting also raged in southwestern Croatia, and Serb and Croat leaders in that former Yugoslav republic repeated competing claims to territory as they prepared for talks at the United Nations this week.

Distribution centres in Sarajevo were quiet as the city's 380,000 residents entered the third day of what authorities have called hunger strike in solidarity with hungry and ill Muslims trapped in eastern Bosnia.

Officials in Sarajevo, Bosnia's capital, and Tuzla are refusing further aid to their residents to protest the failure to get supplies to the east.

Sarajevo's city council, backed by Bosnia's Muslim-led government, announced Friday that until convoys reached eastern Bosnia, it would stop distributing the food aid that had kept Sarajevo alive during a 10-month-old siege.

On Sunday, UN envoy Jose-Maria Mendiluce criticized Sarajevo officials, saying they had not consulted the people who would suffer. He also said it was an insult to UN workers who brave snipers, mortar fire and numerous roadblocks trying to get aid through.

The Croatian army began an offensive January 22 to regain control of at least some of the Serb-held Krajina region in the southwest, one of the areas seized by Serb forces in fighting in 1991 after Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia. The latest combat was the first since a truce took effect early last year after warfare killed at least 10,000 people.

The 10 trucks in the UN convoy to eastern Bosnia tried to reach Cerska, which reportedly is a haven up to 40,000 Muslims. The convoy left Belgrade, capital of Yugoslavia

BRIEFLY

Six shot dead in New York: Six people were found shot to death in an apartment in the crime-ridden south Bronx district of New York on Sunday in a modern St. Valentine's Day massacre, police said, reports Reuters from New York.

The six Hispanics ranging in age from 15 to 40, were found face down in the living room with bullet wounds in their heads, a police spokesman said.

Police had received an anonymous tip that there were bodies in the apartment. They found the front door ajar and there were no signs of forced entry, the spokeswoman said.

The apartment belonged to a 40-year-old woman who was one of the victims. Her 15-year-old son and 17-year-old daughter also were killed and the other victims were two men aged 17 and 23 and a 26-year-old woman.

In the original St. Valentine's Day massacre, on February 14, 1929, seven unarmed members of a bootlegging gang were shot to death in Chicago, dramatizing the battle for control of the illegal liquor traffic during the prohibition era.

Clerides wins Cyprus polls: Challenger Glafcos Clerides won the Cyprus presidential election by a razor-thin majority on Sunday, reports Reuters from Nicosia.

With all the votes counted, official results gave Clerides 50.3 per cent to incumbent George Vassiliou's 49.7 per cent in a second round run-off a majority of about 2,000 votes.

The Vassiliou camp refused to concede and demanded a recount in the Nicosia district, where 162,000 votes were at stake.

Voting is compulsory on the Mediterranean island and more than 93 per cent of the 393,000 registered voters turned out.

Russian troops kill 3 intruders: Russian border troops clashed with a group of up to 30 people trying to cross illegally from Afghanistan into Tajikistan and shot dead three of the intruders, Inter-Tass news agency said on Sunday, reports Reuters from Moscow.

It quoted a border guard spokesman as saying one Russian serviceman had been seriously wounded in Saturday night's exchange of fire, but it said his life was now out of danger.

Shooting incidents occur regularly along the troubled frontier between the two Muslim states.

Hundreds and possibly thousands of people were killed in communal fighting last year in Tajikistan, the poorest of the former Soviet republics.

Christopher starts Egypt tour Feb 18: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will visit Egypt on Thursday on the first leg of his Middle East tour to revive stalled Arab-Israeli peace talks and resolve the crisis over Palestinian deportees, reports Reuters from Cairo.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said on Sunday Christopher would meet President Hosni Mubarak before leaving Cairo on Friday.

Christopher is also due to visit Syria, Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia. It was unclear whether he will go to Lebanon.

Moussa said the Egyptian-US talks would focus on reactivating the 16-month-old peace negotiations stalled since Israel's December 17 expulsions to Lebanon of more than 400 Palestinians.

Israel near Y'slavia-like situation, says Peres

WASHINGTON, Feb 15: Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres voiced concern on Sunday that his country was near a "Yugoslavia-like situation" and said Israel is ready to compromise on territory to bring peace with the Palestinians, reports Reuters.

Discussing the question of Middle East peace, Peres said, "Politically, we must be careful not to create a Yugoslavia-like situation in our own country. We are very near it."

"And if we shall not be careful and decisive and clear in our minds, we may endanger all the miracles that we achieved until now," Peres told US Jewish community leaders at a conference here.

Peres did not explain his reference to Yugoslavia. Parts of the former communist country declared independence and have since been racked by civil war.

In a conciliatory speech in advance of US Secretary of State Warren Christopher's first official trip to the Middle East this week, Peres said Israel was ready to allow Palestinian self-government.

"We are ready to let the Palestinians run their own life in their own environment, have a self-government, and we would like to see them, not just neighbours but happy neighbours and successful neighbours."

"We understand that peace call for a compromise and we are ready to pay our share and have not just a general compromise, but a territorial compromise as well," he said.

Arab-Israeli peace talks have been suspended since

December 17, when Israel deported 415 Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza to South Lebanon, accusing them of membership in violent Islamic fundamentalist groups.

Peres said he hoped the peace negotiations would resume "rather soon" following a resolution of the deportees' fate, which he called a political problem.

Beyond the peace talks, Peres outlined an Israeli agenda that called for regional action on problems of security, economy and the environment, notably the problem of agricultural productivity and water conservation.

Asked how US-Israeli relations would change in the Clinton era, Peres said the two countries would have to develop a political agenda.

9 Arabs killed in Afghan clash

PESHAWAR, Feb 15: Nine Arabs fighting with the guerrillas in Afghanistan have been killed in a clash in Kabul and 15 injured in the fighting were brought to Pakistan today for treatment, Arab sources said, reports Reuters.

The Arabs were fighting for the radical Hezb-I-Islami party of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in his bid to unseat President Burhanuddin Rabbani, according to the sources in this northwestern Pakistani city.

The casualties occurred in a clash with government troops near Kabul's Bala Hissar fort, they said.

Among those killed were a Palestinian, a Saudi, an Algerian, a Syrian and a Kuwaiti. The dead were buried south of Kabul.

The injured were taken to Peshawar's Al Fozan hospital, run by a Kuwait aid group.

Thai Gens oppose Nobel laureates' campaign for release of Suu Kyi

BANGKOK, Feb 15: Thai generals say they are worried that a campaign by Nobel Prize laureates for human rights in Myanmar will hurt Thailand's relations with China and Myanmar. But the government says the event will improve Thailand's international image, reports AP.

The peace prize laureates are gathering in Thailand this week to urge Myanmar military junta to release Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest since 1989.

The English-language Bangkok Post reported Monday that Thai army and air force commanders Sunday criticized the laureates for using Thai territory to protest neighbouring Myanmar's policies and for provoking China.

"It's like inviting the battle into our house," Army Chief Gen. Wimal Wongwanich told reporters.

According to The Nation

newspaper, Air Force Chief Gen. Gun Pimarnthip said: "I'm worried. If the Chinese believe it's US who brought them here, we will have trouble."

The Myanmar junta has called the campaign an interference in its internal affairs. The Chinese government has criticized Thailand's decision to grant a visa to Tibet's spiritual leader and peace prize laureate, the Dalai Lama, who advocates non-violent resistance against China's annexation of his homeland.

But Abhisit Vejjajiva, the government spokesman, was quoted as saying the decision to allow the campaign demonstrates Thailand's commitment to human rights. He said Thailand's relations with Burma and China would not be affected since a private organization was arranging the campaign.

The government and military often do not agree on foreign

affairs and security issues. Prime Minister Chuan Leekpa's administration of mostly pro-democracy parties came to power last year after elections that followed the military's bloody suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations.

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu arrived in Bangkok Sunday and other laureates are to arrive Tuesday and Wednesday. The group, which has been unable to obtain visas for Myanmar, will travel Thursday to Thailand's border with Burma to meet with Myanmar exiles.

They then will go to Geneva to testify before the UN Human Rights Commission.

The other laureates are Betty Williams and Mairead McGuire from northern Ireland, former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez, Adolpho Perez Esquivel of Argentina, and Ross Daniels, representing the human rights group Amnesty International.

Two other peace prize laureates, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and India's Mother Teresa, will not attend but have sent letters of support.

In a statement addressed to the Burmese government released by campaign organizers Monday, Mother Teresa said: "I come to you in the name of God, to ask you to release Aung San Suu Kyi and allow her to be reunited with her family."

Western governments and human rights groups have criticized the Myanmar junta, which came to power in a September 1988 coup after killing hundreds, if not thousands, of pro-democracy demonstrators.

Mrs Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in a 1990 general election, but the junta has refused to recognize the results and has killed, jailed or forced into exile many of its opponents.

UK rejects Iran's demand to hand over Rushdie

LONDON, Feb 15: The British Foreign Office rejected Sunday an Iranian leader's demand to hand over author Salman Rushdie to face a death sentence in Iran over the book "The Satanic Verses," reports AP.

The Foreign Office said the demand Sunday by Iranian spiritual guide Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was "clearly unhelpful" in efforts to improve bilateral relations.

It said it would continue efforts to remove the fatwa or religious decree issued against Rushdie on February 14, 1989 by the late spiritual guide Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini because of the book, which many Muslims consider blasphemous.

Khamenei had told Muslim clerics that Rushdie "must be executed" as Iran marked the fourth anniversary of the fatwa. "As a logical solution the British government must hand over this apostate to the Muslims so that he can be punished," Khamenei said.

A Foreign Office spokesman

said the British government was particularly "disturbed" by the positions taken by "senior Iranian figures" over Rushdie's situation.

"An improvement (in bilateral relations) would always depend" on Rushdie's situation, the spokesman said. Khamenei remarks "don't make it easier" and "make it difficult to see how that might be achieved," the spokesman added.

Ghali arrives in Tokyo

TOKYO, Feb 15: United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali arrived here today for his first visit to Japan since taking office in March last year, Japanese officials said, reports AP.

During his four-day stay he is scheduled to meet Emperor Akihito and have talks with Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe, principally on relations between Japan and the world body.