

Violence against women rises in Asia

BANGKOK, Mar 4: Asia's top UN official and a panel of three prominent experts have called on countries in the region to step up efforts to combat growing violence against women, reports AFP.

Rafeuddin Ahmed, who heads the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia (ESCAP) "urged governments, non-governmental organisations, activists, the media and communities at large, to consolidate efforts and, in particular, to combat violence against women," according to a statement issued here on Wednesday after a panel discussion on women's rights.

Panelists concluded violence against women in Asia is rising, and said abuses including wife battering, dowry murders, rape, trafficking of women and forced prostitution were on the increase, the statement said.

Move to appoint Pawar as CM a masterstroke in power play

Dissidents will ask Rao to revise decision

NEW DELHI, Mar 4: Loyalists rallied in support of Indian Defence Minister Sharad Pawar on Thursday, protesting the Prime Minister's surprise decision to send him to be Chief Minister of troubled Maharashtra state, reports AFP.

Pawar supporters in the ruling Congress (I) party demanded that he be retained in New Delhi by Premier PV Narasimha Rao, whose move Wednesday was described by newspapers here as a masterstroke in a power play.

Pawar challenged Rao in the race for the premiership in June 1991 after the Congress (I) was returned to power.

Rao has since considered Pawar, who sought and got the Defence portfolio, and Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh as his rivals. In political circles they are known as PPMs — potential prime ministers.

Pawar will be able to serve the country and the Congress (I) in better ways if he remains in the cabinet, said a dejected

MP, Gurudas Kamat. "Even at this stage, the Prime Minister should reconsider his decision", he told AFP, adding that some 20 MPs close to Pawar hoped to meet Rao Thursday and ask him to reconsider.

Rao, 71, stunned political observers when he named Pawar, 52, as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra state to replace Sudhakar Naik, force to quit in disgrace for failing to contain bloody riots in Bombay, the state capital.

Rao departed from tradition by issuing a statement wishing Pawar "all success in his new assignment and looking forward to his continuing role as a valued and trusted colleague".

Rao said Pawar had agreed to move "Okega disciplined soldier" of the Congress (I), India's oldest political entity.

Nearly 700 people died in January 10 days of Hindu-Muslim violence in Bombay, capital of Maharashtra, during which Pawar was accused by critics of trying to pull down Naik, his protegee-turned-foe.

Pawar, who was already served as chief minister of Maharashtra, said he would abide by Rao's decision. But newspapers said he was taken aback.

"It is a party decision and I will happily obey it", Pawar told reporters at his house here even as allies openly criticised the Prime Minister.

"A would-be prime minister as chief minister? impossible", shouted one.

Pawar will have to quit parliament and get elected to the Maharashtra state legislature in Bombay within six months.

Pawar was shell-shocked, said the Times of India daily. "A setback for Pawar", screamed the Statesman. The Hindu said Rao had emerged stronger by shunting him out of the cabinet.

A Congress (I) spokesman said Rao had opted to send Pawar back to his home state, overlooking other contenders, because he would be able to restore peace and stability in Bombay, India's financial capital.

Off the Record

Anti-smoking fans

TOKYO: More bad news for smokers: Japan's Sanrio Co. Ltd. is to start marketing ballpoint pens with a fan attached at the top to keep away cigarette smoke, a spokesman said today, reports AFP.

Colourful plastic fans on the pens, that come with such characters as Hello Kitty, the Kerokerokeropt and Fido Dido, will spin around by winding a spring or by pressing a button.

"They are small, but they are powerful enough to blow away the smoke" the spokesman of the country's biggest manufacturer of character goods said. The fans are six centimeters (2.4 inches) in diameter.

Sanrio will launch the pens for 500 yen (4.2 dollar) each later this month and aims to sell at least 150,000 units by the end of May. Exports to southeast Asia and the United States are planned for the near future.

Teenagers worried about Diana's separation

KATHMANDU: Nepalese teenagers at an elite school in Kathmandu said Thursday they were worried about Princess Diana's separation from the heir to the British throne and asked their teacher to convey their concerns to her, reports Reuter.

The princess, on her first official overseas visit since separating from Prince Charles, visited the Budhanilkantha school to open a new girl's dormitory on the third day of her visit to Nepal, the world's only Hindu kingdom.

Niroz Bhattarai said he and his classmates had asked their teacher to tell Diana that she should not get a divorce. "It would have been better if she had come to school with her two children and her husband. In Nepal we always look to the royal members as a family," he told reporters.

Nepal's King Birendra ruled his Himalayan kingdom with absolute powers until he proclaimed a new constitution in 1991 that adopted the British model of constitutional monarchy.

"If higher class people do such things what will happen to the commoners?" 13-year-old Om Prakash Shrestha said of the separation. British officials have said the couple have no plans to divorce.

"In Hindu society divorce is very rare and not approved," said school-boy Milan Pradhan. "A break in an unhappy marriage is a good thing, but these two people are very lovely and they should stay together."

The school children had their own opinions about what was wrong with the royal marriage.

Pooja Sherchan, 16, said Diana was clamorous and charming.

"Prince Charles is having a complex about that. That is the main reason for their unhappiness. But they should not separate because they have to set an example to others," Sherchan said.

Wearing a pick jacket and matching skirt, Diana toured the school, chatted with teachers, and accepted margold garlands from a group of schoolgirls.

It was not clear if the teachers had told Diana how concerned their students were over her troubled marriage.

Saddam capable of obtaining N-arms

JERUSALEM, Mar 4: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein could have a nuclear weapon within four or five years if he escapes international controls, Israeli Army Chief of Staff General Ehud Barak, said Wednesday, reports AFP.

If he is no longer subject to the control of the international community, Saddam Hussein is capable of obtaining a nuclear weapons, in four or five years and a chemical weapon within one year, he said on Israeli television.

Iran, however, would take a good decade to have an atomic bomb, he said.

Syria is acquiring ultra-sophisticated conventional weapons and should be able to produce in one year or one and a half years, with help from North Korea, Scud-C ballistic missiles.

Barak still said the overall security of Israel was adequate and that war was unlikely in the immediate future with any of its neighbours.

Kim sacks Seoul mayor

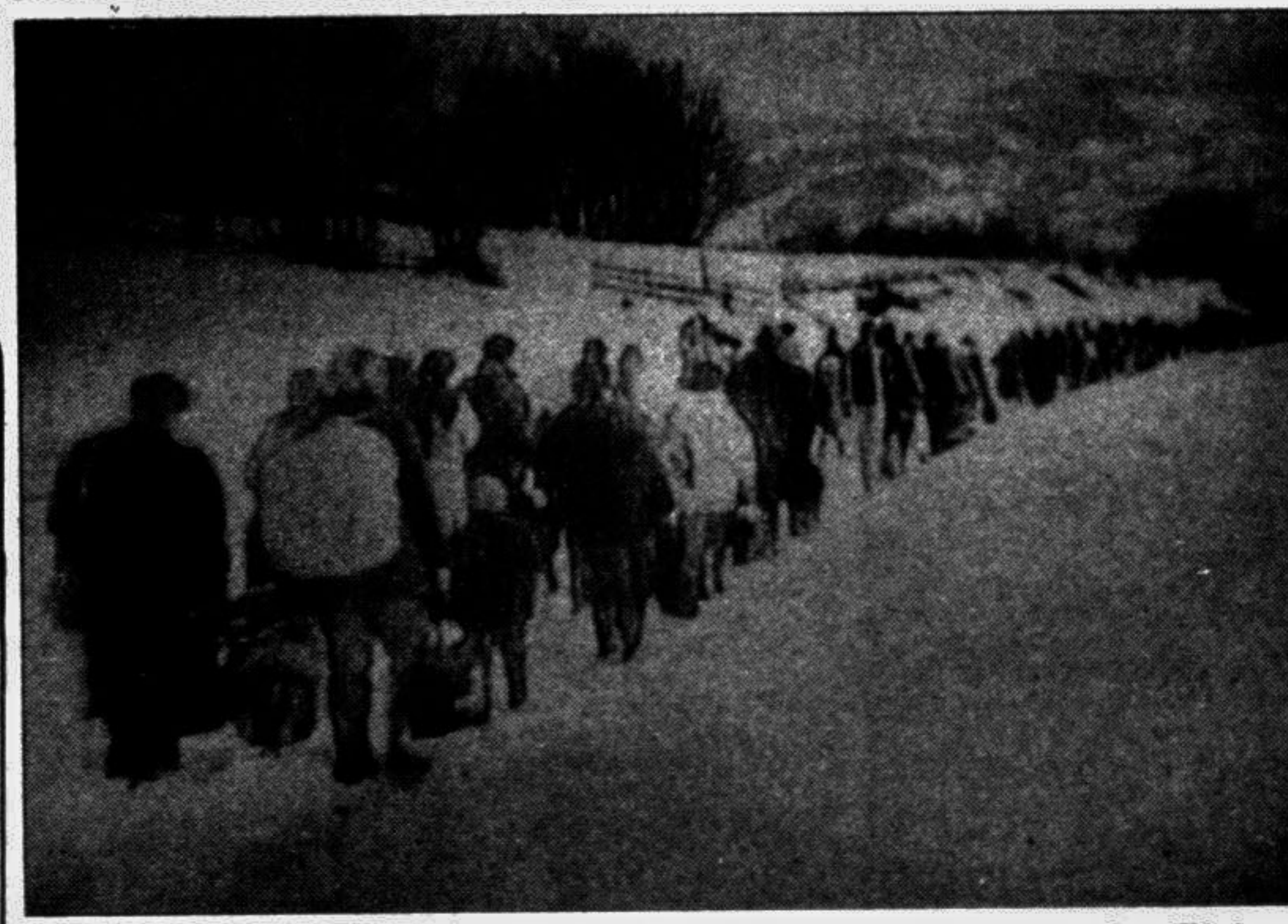
SEOUL, Mar 4: President Kim Young-sam fired the mayor of Seoul on Thursday, less than a week after appointing him, for involvement in a land scandal, reports AP.

The dismissal of Kim Sang-chul, 45, had been expected since early this week, when he was found to have built a garden in an area near Seoul that was restricted to development.

Kim, a lawyer, was appointed to the post last Friday, and became the second high-ranking official to be fired in two weeks. The President has also fired a senior aide whose father-in-law turned out to be an assassin of an old Korean patriot.

But the President decided Thursday to retain Justice Minister Park Hec-tae, who has been accused of having his US-born daughter give up her Korean citizenship in order to bypass the cutthroat entrance exam for Ewha Women's University in Seoul.

Park has agreed to have his daughter quit the school immediately and restore her Korean citizenship, government officials said.



Bosnian Muslims queue in cold and ice for relief. — Star TV photo

Tamil offer a propaganda ploy: Lanka

COLOMBO, Mar 4: The Sri Lankan government Thursday reacted coolly to peace overtures by separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas while a state-run daily said the rebel compromise offer was just a propaganda ploy, reports AFP.

Government spokesman and industries minister Ramli Wickremesinghe told reporters that if the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were serious, they could make their proposals to a parliamentary panel.

"I have seen newspaper reports... if the LTTE is serious they can send their proposals to the parliamentary select committee", Wickremesinghe said, referring to a panel trying to find a solution to the ethnic conflict. LTTE supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has said he was prepared to consider a federal form of government which has claimed thousands of lives in the 20 years.

In a rare interview, Prabhakaran told the BBC. Jaffna late last month:

Moscow offers arms to Kuala Lumpur

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 4: Moscow has offered to sell sophisticated guns, tanks and submarines to Kuala Lumpur after upgrading a package to sell fighter jets, Malaysian Defence Minister Najib Tun Razak said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"They have invited a Malaysian armed forces team to visit Moscow to have a better appreciation of the weapons that will be made available to us, said Najib after holding unscheduled talks with Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi.

Rutskoi later departed for New Zealand following a three-day visit here. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who on Tuesday received from Rutskoi a fresh offer for the sale of Mig-29s, had directed Najib to discuss further the arms deal.

The upgraded package came a day after the United States agreed to slash the price of F-18 and F-16 fighters it wanted to sell to Malaysia. Najib said among the

Russian weapons offered to bolster Malaysia's conventional warfare capability were amphibious vehicles, special 157 mm rapid fire guns, tanks with wire-guided missiles, laser-guided weapons and submarines.

The cabinet, which met Wednesday, directed the Defence Ministry to make recommendations on the new Mig-29 package offered by Rutskoi so that a final decision could be made on the purchase of the Russian or American warplanes.

Russia had reportedly offered Malaysia an original package worth two billion Malaysian dollars, (800 million US dollar) for 18 Mig-29s and six Mi-35 helicopters to replace Kuala Lumpur's ageing fighter aircraft.

American Manufacturers McDonnell Douglas and General Dynamics considerably slashed the price of their F-18s and F-16s in what was seen as an attempt to undercut the Russian offer, officials said.

Russians unhappy with democracy

MOSCOW, Mar 4: Most Russians think a dictatorship is imminent and are dissatisfied with democracy, according to an opinion survey released Wednesday, reports AFP.

The opinion poll of 19 central and eastern European countries was made last November by the Eurobarometer Institute at the request of the European Community. Komir, a Russian firm, questioned 1,000 persons whose ages ranged from 15 to 70 years in the European section of Russia, survey officials said at a press conference.

According to the result, 42 per cent of the Russian population said they believe a dictatorship is imminent within the next year compared with 33 per cent who disagree.

A large majority of the Russians surveyed, 77 per cent, said they were dissatisfied with the development of democracy compared with 11 per cent who claimed to be satisfied.

Russians were very unhappy with the director taken by their country. 51 per cent compared with 27 per cent who were satisfied, the survey said. Their outlook on the economic future of their country was gloomy. 45 per cent said they thought it would get worse.

The same questions were asked in eight other former Soviet republics: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. People surveyed in some of these fledgling countries were even more pessimistic than in Russia. For example, in Armenia which is suffering severe economic decay, 67 per cent of the population disagreed with "the direction taken by the country" 86 per cent deplored the lack of democratic progress and 63 per cent said they feared their economic situation would only get worse.

Most of the former Soviets surveyed said they did not think human rights were respected in their respective countries. This included 80 per cent of the Georgians, 67 per cent of the Russians and Armenians, 62 per cent of the Ukrainians, 53 per cent of the Moldovans and Latvians and 44 per cent of the Estonians.

Asked about the media, 54 per cent of the Russians surveyed said they trusted the radio, 53 per cent said they trusted television and 40 per cent trusted newspapers as sources of information.

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Jaruzelski admits mistake

NEW YORK, Mar 4: Gen Wojciech Jaruzelski, the Polish leader who tried to crush the Solidarity movement in 1981, says imposing martial law was a mistake, and if he had it to do all over again, "I'd rather shoot myself in the head," reports AP.

In an interview in Thursday's New York Times, the general, now 69 and retired in Warsaw, said he is "wiser" today and regrets mobilizing tanks and troops against the anti-Communist trade union.

He said he feared the Soviet Union would intervene if Poland disintegrated into civil strife.

"I can only speak in terms of what I knew then — everything that was happening, events inside and outside the country, the psychological imponderables.

Pakistan to restore women's seat in NA

ISLAMABAD, Mar 4: The Pakistani government will seek a constitutional amendment soon to restore special parliamentary seats for women abolished in 1990, Law and Justice Minister Abdul Ghafoor said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

He told the Senate (Upper House) that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government would introduce a bill in Parliament "within a month or so" for the constitutional amendment.

A constitutional provision reserves special seats for women in the National Assembly (Lower House) and the four Provincial Assemblies expired in 1990 after which the women could stand only for general parliamentary seats and compete with men.

Before that the National Assembly had 20 seats reserved for women in a 237-seat House, while such seats in the Provincial Assemblies were five per cent of their general seats. Women were also allowed to contest for general seats.

Some fundamentalist Islamic parties, who regard an active participation of women in politics as un-Islamic, oppose a restoration of the special seats.

Hussain denied opposition charges that the government was delaying to introduce a constitutional amendment bill because of pressure from religious groups, some of whom are partners in Sharif's ruling Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA), which also leads all the provincial governments.

Italian F-1 driver marries Swedish model

MILAN: Italian F-1 driver Ivan Capelli and Swedish model Jasmine Lipovsek were married at Cusago, near Milan, Wednesday, reports AP.

Capelli, who drove with the Ferrari team last year, will start with Jordan in the 1993 World Championship opener — the Grand Prix of South Africa — at Kyalami on March 14.



Princess Diana in Kathmandu Wednesday. — Star TV photo

China iterates UK to abandon reform in HK

BELJING, Mar 4: Premier Li Peng said Thursday that China and Britain should "sit down and talk" about Hong Kong, but reiterated that London first must abandon a political reform plan for the colony, reports AP.

Li, meeting with a delegation from Hong Kong's General Chamber of Commerce, said cooperation between China and Britain should be strengthened to ensure a smooth transition in 1997, when the British colony reverts to Chinese rule.

Train stations only practical refuge for homeless in Moscow

MOSCOW, Mar 4: One-legged war veterans, impoverished grandmothers, deranged scholars, convicted robbers, hardened alcoholics, frightened refugees and children whose faces described a num cynicism unjustified by their years, reports AFP.

These are some of the people who each night seek a space large enough to lie down in and obscure enough not to be trampled over in Moscow's train stations, the only practical refuge for the city's growing number of homeless persons.

In many ways they are not

considered human beings, said Elizabeth Koremoss, a worker with Medicine Sans Frontiers (MSF), one of several international aid organizations working to alleviate the plight of homeless people in Moscow.

They have rights to nothing. This society has other problems and other objectives she said.

The results, in a country experiencing profound economic crisis and social upheaval, are grim, many suffer from severe malnutrition, skin diseases, confusions and other wounds and chronic psychological illnesses.

Several simply collapse on the concrete floor and die each night. "Three years ago we never had this, said a uniformed young man, a security officer in Moscow's Kurski train station, as he pulled on the arm of an elderly woman with a black eye, urging her to get out of here.

We just called an ambulance which would arrive a few minutes later, pick them up, take them away clean them up and put them back to work, he stated.

It is 2:00 am and the young man's boss, a barrel-chested

mustachioed man who has worked as a security guard at Kurski train station for the past 23 years, offered a less nostalgic assessment.

Every state has its problems, this is now also one of ours, he said. "They come from everywhere, especially conflict areas, thinking life in Moscow is calm — we'll go there and things will be better. Then they see things aren't so easy and this is as far as they get," he said.

For reasons ranging from the absence of post-prison services to basic inability to cope with Moscow's cumbersome bureaucracy, many

of the homeless do not have a propiska — an official residence permit, thus making them officially non-persons. The Moscow city government is unable to provide accurate figures on the number of homeless persons living in the city either because officials don't want to disclose them or more probably, because they don't exist.

A city hall statistics official, Anatoly Statsenko, told AFP there were about 24,000 unregistered unemployed people and 9,000 refugees living in Moscow. These figures fell far short of

the 71,600 moscovites officially registered as unemployed as of last October in a document published by the Moscow government's department of labour and employment.

"No one knows how many there are," said a spokeswoman for the Russian branch of ICRC. "The what is obvious is that their numbers are growing. There are so many categories of refugees, many of whom have become homeless by 'accidents' such as war, the sudden absence of government services, the social chaos," she added.

Kim seeks early meet with Miyazawa

TOKYO, Mar 4: New South Korean President Kim Young-Sam has called for an early meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, a Japanese government spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

He said Kim, who took office a week ago, made the request in a letter delivered to Miyazawa on Thursday by Kim Jai-Son, chairman of the South Korea-Japan Parliamentarian League.

Japan welcomed Kim's inauguration last week and called for ties between Tokyo and Seoul.