

Afghan leaders meet tomorrow to form cabinet

ISLAMABAD, Mar 14: Afghan leaders who signed the Islamabad peace accord on March 7 will meet inside Afghanistan on Tuesday to discuss the formation of cabinet and implementation of the accord, reports Xinhua.

This was announced by Afghan Prime Minister designate Gulbuddin Hekmatyar on Saturday afternoon on board the special plane of Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif while flying to Tehran from Pakistan.

The would-be prime minister said every party would recommend ten candidates for two portfolios in the cabinet and ministers will be selected on the merit basis.

Hekmatyar said the meeting would continue for several days because these issues demand detailed discussion and concentration.

Rains kill 20 in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Mar 14: At least 20 people were killed and six injured as heavy rains lashed different parts of the country for the fourth consecutive day Saturday, reports reaching here said, reports AFP.

Most casualties were in the northwestern tribal area of Bajaur where 18 people died as mud houses collapsed on them.

About the future defence minister, he said, "we will induct such a person as defence minister who enjoys the blessing of all parties."

He expressed his belief that present defence minister Ahmed Shah Masood and militia chief Rashid Dostum would not create any difficulties for the formation of the government as they want peace and reconciliation.

The whole Afghan nation does not want war, he said, adding that the 10-month long battle has proved beyond all doubts that no one can gain anything out of it.

Moreover, all parties have agreed on the peace accord and it has emerged as the accord of the entire nation, he said.

He said the biggest problem he foresaw in taking over as prime minister was establishing internal security.

He said the issue of Dostum would be discussed at the meeting of the party heads, the first of its kind since the accord was signed.

Hekmatyar and Masood are also expected to hold an important meeting in Kabul prior to the announcement of the new cabinet.

Masood declared on Saturday he was bound to accept the Islamabad accord as his party chief and president of the country Burhanuddin Rabbani had signed it.

North Koreans asked to prepare for battle

TOKYO, Mar 14: Two days after North Korea abruptly pulled out of an international accord on curbing the spread of nuclear weapons, an official newspaper told North Koreans Sunday they should prepare for battle, reports AP.

The editorial in the ruling (Communist) Workers Party newspaper Rodong Sinmun was broadcast by official Radio Pyongyang and monitored by the Radio Press service in Tokyo.

International nuclear inspectors demanded in February that Pyongyang open up two facilities that they believe are part of plan to build a nuclear weapon. But the North's pullout Friday from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty means it can shut off suspect facilities from the outside world.

The newspaper condemned the "nuclear war moves of the United States" and said North Korea's pullout from the treaty was a "natural self-defensive measure."

It called on all North Koreans to adopt "a state of full battle readiness to be able to firmly crush any villainous provocative moves by the enemy forces." No details were given.

North Korea says it has no plans to build a nuclear bomb and claims the suspect sites are non-nuclear military facilities.

The editorial adds to tensions on the Korean peninsula, divided since 1945 between the Communist North and the capitalist South.

On Saturday, South Korea's defence minister ordered his nation's 600,000 troops to maintain a "high state of alert" in the event of a provocation from the North.

South Korean troops were already on alert for joint US-South Korean military exercises that the North has described as preparation for nuclear war.

The Rodong Sinmun editorial also warned that if "enemy forces" level sanctions against North Korea, "we will take self-defensive measures." It did not say what those measures might be.



US and South Korean forces in a joint military exercise codenamed 'Team Spirit' — Star TV photo

Off the Record



A model wears a long transparent black Muslin dress with silver embroidery and a matching transparent shawl by German designer Karl Lagerfeld for the Chloe Fashion House during the presentation of the 1993-94 Fall Winter ready to wear collection in Paris Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

Top police officer violates 600

CASABLANCA, Morocco: Prosecutors have demanded the death penalty for Morocco's national police commissioner, on trial for raping hundreds of women and girls and recording the encounters on videotape, reports AP.

The prosecution accuses Mohammed Tabet, 54, of rape "with violence" of about 600 women and girls, holding them against their will and torturing them.

In the scandal which has transfixed Morocco for the past several weeks, prosecutors also asked for a life sentence for Ahmed Washi, Casablanca's regional police chief, who is accused of trying to cover up for Tabet.

He tosses grenade as singer entertains others

MANILA: A drunk in a Manila bar, angry that the singer had left him to talk to other customers, tossed a grenade at another table killing four people and injuring 34, police said today, reports Reuter.

The suspect, who carried papers identifying him as a civilian agent of the Bulacan Provincial police, was caught by residents when he tried to escape after the Saturday night blast and taken to the police station for questioning.

The blast killed the bar's owner and three others police said, adding that many of the injured were in critical condition and that the death toll could rise.

Police said the suspect became angry when the male singer left him to entertain other customers.

China's parliament opens today Jiang Zemin may replace Shangkun as president

BEIJING, Mar 14: Chinese President Yang Shangkun will step down after a parliament meeting that opens on Monday today the being review reported today, reports Reuter.

It was the first official confirmation that the 85-year-old president will go. He is widely expected to be replaced by Jiang Zemin, who will hold the job concurrently with his position as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party.

The magazine also con-

firmed that Wan Li, Chairman of China's parliament, the National People's Congress, will relinquish his post.

Both Yang and Wan stepped down from their Communist Party posts at the party's 14th congress last October.

Diplomats believe they are being retired mainly for reasons of age and to indicate a clear generation break from the Long March veterans who have dominated Chinese politics since the 1949 revolution.

20 killed in Nepal bus plunge

KATIMANDU, Mar 14: At least 20 people were killed and 23 others injured this morning when a passenger bus overturned and fell 150 metres (500 feet) down a hillside, a Home Ministry spokesman said, reports AP.

The accident occurred on the Mugling-Narayangadh Sector of the Prithvi Highway, about 90 kilometres (56 miles) southwest of here.

The bus, run by a travel agency, was travelling from Kakadbhitta in eastern Nepal to Pokhara in the west, the spokesman said, adding that 18 people had died on the spot while two expired later in hospital.

Twenty-three people were being treated for injuries.

Iran reopens port of Abadan

Abadan is the hub of Iran's oil industry. The news agency, monitored in Nicotia, said the port opened Friday.

IRNA said the reconstruction cost 1.2 billion rials (dhs 17 million) and that 18,000 cubic metres (660,000 cubic feet) of the docks had been dredged of war debris.

It was not clear how much of the port, which was once a major harbour, had been rebuilt. IRNA said it was open only to ships with a draft of 3 to 7 metres (10 to 22 feet) which would not accommodate large oil tankers.

The port is on the Shatt-al-Arab, a narrow river which is a natural border between Iran and Iraq. Access to the Shatt-al-Arab was a major reason for the war.

182 kg drugs seized in Myanmar

Over 182 kilograms of narcotic drugs were seized in Myanmar in January this year, an official report said here Sunday, reports Xinhua from Yangon.

Among the drugs captured were 128.53 kilograms of opium, 36.44 kilograms of heroin and 17.41 kilograms of marijuana.

Meanwhile, the authorities seized 134.48 litres of phensedyl, a local cough medicine which are used by some drug addicts as substitution of narcotics.

Last year, the Myanmar authorities seized 2,193 kilograms of opium, 266 kilograms of heroin and other narcotics.

Newspaper editor killed in Colombia

Gunmen killed the editor of a daily newspaper in the Colombian town of Cucuta in front of his wife, police said on Saturday, bringing to 100 the number of journalists killed in Colombia since August 1987, reports Reuter from Bogota.

Police said three gunmen riding in a pick-up truck shot Eustorgio Colmenares Baptista, founder and editor of the newspaper La Opinion, as he and his wife were walking into their home on Friday night. His wife escaped unhurt.

Colmenares, 69, died of eight gunshot wounds at a hospital in the town on the border with Venezuela about 380 km (240 miles) northeast of Bogota.

Local news media said he was the 100th journalist to be assassinated in Colombia since August 1987, around the time the government began cracking down more harshly on the drug trade.

NASA telescope repair mission

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is planning a mission for December to repair the troubled Hubble telescope, Time magazine says in its issue due out Monday, reports AFP from New York.

The 100-million dollar repair mission will require more space walks and heavy equipment than any other in the history of the agency, the weekly magazine is reporting.

"This is the mother of all repair missions," said Frank Corollina, head of NASA's satellite servicing programme. "We're taking three to four tons of hardware into orbit and installing it over four days using two alternating crews. You're talking about a significant, exciting pioneering mission."

Britain committing 'perfidious act' to control Hong Kong: China

HONG KONG, Mar 14: China stepped up its attack on democratic reforms for Hong Kong today accusing Britain of committing a 'perfidious act' in order to keep a grip on its thriving colony after 1997, reports AP.

The British side seeks to foster its agents so as to maintain its influence over or even control Hong Kong and serve the interests of Britain after 1997 through them," Beijing's official Xinhua news agency said today.

Beijing's fierce words have flowed since Friday when Governor Chris Patten decided to print an electoral bill calling for expanded democracy ahead of 1997, when China resumes sovereignty here.

The bill, a plan to extend the electoral franchise to nearby half of Hong Kong's six million people, was put forth by Patten in October.

The British side tried to bring pressure to bear upon the Chinese side by threatening to publish the perverse constitutional package of Chris Patten," Xinhua said in a commentary that appeared in pro-Beijing newspapers.

Xinhua did not identify the British "agents," but the local pro-Beijing press uses the term "pro-British, anti-China agents" to refer to liberal legislative council members who want a quicker pace of democratization in both Hong Kong and China.

Patten's decision to publish, or "gazette," the bill came after a month of deferral, but in a legislative council session Friday, the Governor said the door was still open for talks with China.

He added that the main stumbling block was China's refusal to accept three Hong Kong officials — two of them Hong Kong Chinese — as full members of a five-member British negotiating team.

In a poll taken for Hong Kong's Sunday Morning Post newspaper, 51 per cent of respondents said they thought Patten should now to China on that issue if that would allow the talks to go ahead.

Forty-one per cent said they supported the bill's gazetting, while 22 were against and 37 were unsure, the English-language newspaper said. The poll was taken only hours after Patten's announcement Friday.

Gazetting the bill puts it in an official queue for formal discussion in legislative council sessions.

Krishna Rao asks Kashmir youths to abjure violence

JAMMU, Mar 14: The Janmu and Kashmir Governor, General (ret'd) K V Krishna Rao, has assured misguided youth of the state all government help for their rehabilitation if they gave up violence and also promised to make arrangements for safe return of those who are now in Pakistan occupied Kashmir, reports IPT.

In his first message to the people of the state after assuming the charge of governor for the second time, General Rao said "all possible help and assistance will be provided to misguided youth of valley for their rehabilitation if they abjure violence and adopt peaceful course for finding solution to their problems."

Suitable arrangement for return of those of our youngmen will be made who are lined up across the border and are stuck up there," general Rao said in his message to be broadcast over local station of All India Radio and Doodarshan today.

However, he warned that the operations against militants would continue till they gave up arms and returned to the mainstream.

Another report says: Over 5300 people have fallen prey to militancy in the Kashmir valley during the last three years.

According to a state government publication a total number of 5332 people were killed in the valley till December 31 last year.

Trial of Egyptian extremists adjourned again

CAIRO, Mar 14: The trial of 49 Muslim extremists accused of attacks on tourists was once again adjourned on Saturday at the request of the defence who said it needed more time to study their cases, reports AFP.

Defence lawyers also complained that their clients, jailed in civilian jails run by the Interior Ministry, were "badly treated" and secured a pledge by the judges to transfer the suspects to military prisons.

The trial had opened last Tuesday at Cairo's Hakset Military Court but had been adjourned until Saturday at the request of the defence, who charged that torture had been used to extract confessions.

US has failed to adhere to ME talks principles: PLO

AMMAN, Mar 13: A top-ranking PLO official accused the United States Saturday of failing to adhere to the basic principles of the Middle East peace talks, reports AP.

"It is not easy to go to a settlement that has lost its principles that (former US) President Bush stated in his initiative in 1991," said Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization's political department.

At the outset of the peace process in October 1991, the US administration said negotiations would be based on Security Council resolutions that demand the return of lands Israel seized from Jordan, Syria and Egypt in the 1967 Middle East war in exchange for peace.

Palestinian officials have complained that the Clinton administration has not confirmed its adherence to those resolutions.

Last week, the United States and Russia sent invitations to the negotiators — Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Palestinians — to return to the peace talks in Washington on April 20.

The Palestinians say they will not attend unless Israel repatriates about 400 Palestinians deported to south Lebanon in December.

Lebanon, Syria and Jordan are to withhold a response until after a Damascus meeting of their foreign ministers with Palestinian officials on March 28 and 29.

Fear, uncertainty grip Bombay residents

BOMBAY, Mar 14: New fear and uncertainty have gripped the residents of Bombay after a chain of murderous bomb blasts on "black Friday" brought high-tech urban terrorism to India's premier city, reports AFP.

The 11 explosions which ripped through the western Indian metropolis leaving nearly 300 people dead came just when the city of 12 million had begun to ease memories of the bloody Hindu-Muslim riots two months ago.

Comparisons with Beirut flared at the weekend as residents pondered their future, shocked by the savagery of the well-planned attacks in the country's once-peaceful financial nerve centre.

"Bombay is finished," said Kishore Chand, a taxi driver from a village in the country's north who came here eight years ago. "I don't think there is any future at all here for people like me."

The January riots were bad enough" he went on. "I sent back my family to the village after the violence subsided. But this is terrible. I am not sure if I will stay."

"What have we done to deserve this" was the question many people were asking after the devastating explosions. The bombers' targets included prominent commercial landmarks the Bombay Stock Exchange and the Air India headquarters.

Nearly 300 people were killed, many blown to bits, and about 1,250 injured. For the first time in India, sophisticated car bombs were used.

"Bombay flouted itself as the new Beirut, rivaling it in wealth, influence and siltter," the Times of India said. "On Friday it added a similarity that nobody wanted."

No one has a definite idea of who was behind the outrage. Police say Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas, blamed for the 1991 bomb blast slaying of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi are prime suspects.

The bombers could not have timed the attacks better.

The city had been crippled for a week and remained in limbo for another 10 days after the January riots in which nearly 700 people were killed. Thousands, mainly Muslims, then fled.



NEW DELHI: Police dogs and bomb experts search for explosives amid strewn lottery tickets in New Delhi following an alert Saturday. India is on a top security alert after Bombay bombing Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

UNITA condemns UN resolution

LUANDA, Mar 14: Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) on Saturday condemned a United Nations resolution that called for new peace talks and which criticized rebel violations of an earlier peace accord, reports AFP.

The authorities in Luanda however welcomed the UN Security Council resolution, though it made no comment on the UN's conditions for restarting the peace process.

In an editorial, UNITA radio Vorgan criticized the United Nations and said, the UN has lost all credibility in condemning UNITA.

On Friday the UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution demanding that UNITA accept the results of 1992 presidential and parliamentary elections won by the incumbent, Eduardo Jose Dos Santos, and his ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

It also set a seven-week deadline for a meeting "at the highest level" between the government and rebel representatives.