

Amnesty complicates peace in El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR, Mar 22: An amnesty for people accused of atrocities in the civil war does not violate the letter of recommendations of a recent UN-backed report, but it does violate its spirit, critics say, reports AP.

The amnesty was approved Saturday evening by the right-wing-dominated National Assembly. The measure was criticized by opposition assembly members, former rebels, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador.

The assembly voted to grant a "general and absolute amnesty" for people named in the March 15 report, which was put together under UN auspices.

Lawmakers from the president's ARENA party, the National Conciliation Party and the Authentic Christian Movement voted for the amnesty.

Twenty-two lawmakers opposed to the amnesty stormed out of the assembly hall in protest.

The report said army officers, soldiers, leftist rebels and civilians who committed human rights violations between 1980 and 1990 should be expelled from the army and some banned from public life for up to 10 years.

But commission members who prepared the report said they would not recommend criminal charges because of the poor state of Salvadoran justice. "El Salvador's current judicial system is not capable of judging objectively and carrying out its sentences," the report said.

President Alfredo Cristiani suggested the amnesty, saying it was important for Salvadorans to put the memory of the war behind them and get on with rebuilding their devastated nation.

Major showdown ahead of convention likely Congress dissidents step up attacks on Rao

NEW DELHI, Mar 22: Dissidents in India's ruling Congress (I) Party have stepped up their attacks on Premier PV Narasimha Rao, indicating a major showdown ahead of a crucial party convention over the weekend, reports AP.

A senior minister and a former member of Rao's cabinet launched separate scathing criticisms of the Prime Minister Sunday, demanding that he give up the powerful post of the Congress President.

Human Resource Development Minister Arjun said in a statement in an obvious reference to Rao, 71: There has to be clear proof that any office in a democratic set-up,

whether of a party or the country, cannot only be adorned.

"There has to be clear proof that office is being used as an effective instrument to protect and project the basic interests of the country or the party as the case may be," Monday's newspapers here quoted him as saying.

Singh, a veteran of Indian politics, said the Congress (I) had failed to wage an effective campaign against the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), the main opposition group.

The swelling ranks of Congress (I) dissidents have made similar allegations, but Singh, while increasingly distancing himself from Rao, had until now refrained from publicly endorsing their views.

Also Sunday, former Health Minister Makhlan Lal Fotedar said the Congress needed "a full time president ... to meet the challenge of divisive and communal forces."

"Inactive and directionless, the Congress is being deliberately driven into the morass of frustration and decay," Fotedar said in a statement, calling for a "functional central leadership."

The dissidents hold Rao responsible for the December 6 razing of the 16th century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu fanatics. The shrine's destruction has been endorsed by the BJP and allied Hindu groups.

"Babri Masjid (Mosque) has been demolished," Fotedar said. "We want to ensure that its aftermath is not the demolition of the Congress also."

The attacks by Singh and Fotedar comes ahead of the March 27-28 convention of the Congress (I) at Surajkund, a tourist resort near here where the dissidents have said they will ask Rao to step down as the party president.

On Saturday, Rao, who became Prime Minister in June 1991 following general elections marred by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, warned of strong action against the dissidents.

Off the Record

Curry that will feed 10,000

EDINBURGH: An Edinburgh restaurant owner hopes to win a place in the Guinness Book of Records with what he says will be the world's biggest curry, reports Reuter.

Tommy Miah, who raises money for charity each year with a worldwide "Indian chef of the year" competition, will cook a one-tonchicken Korma in a specially made giant pan at London's ideal home exhibition next Saturday.

Miah says his curry will feed 8,000 to 10,000 people and will take at least six hours to cook. Visitors will be able to sample the result in return for donations to an orphanage in his native Bangladesh and a British children's charity.

Kids find 31 inches fossil egg

PERTH, Australia: Three children have dug up a massive fossil egg on a beach that a scientist said could have belonged to the giant elephant bird of Madagascar, reports AP.

The youngsters found the egg—which measures 80.5 centimeters (31 inches) in circumference—while walking in sandhills about a kilometer (half-mile) from the beach at Cervantes, 245 kilometers (150 miles) of Perth. It was not known when they found the egg.

Dr Ken McNamara, senior curator of paleontology at the Western Australian Museum, described the find as "extremely important."

He said Sunday he hoped the egg would be donated to the museum by a person currently negotiating to buy it from the father of one of the children. It is not known when the children found the egg.

"We could then examine it scientifically to see if it is from an Aepyornis—known as the giant elephant bird—or a giant relative of the emu, which roamed Australia 15,000 years ago," he said.

Gynecologist convicted for complicity in sex crimes

RABAT: A gynecologist has been stripped of his medical license and sentenced to 15 years in prison for his role in a sex scandal involving police abuse of more than 500 women, reports AP.

Dr Driss Lahlou is one of more than a dozen people, including several police officials, to be convicted in a case that has horrified this North African nation.

A death sentence has been handed to Police Commissioner Mohammed Mustafa Tabet, convicted two weeks ago of coercing more than 500 women and girls into sex acts and videotaping them.

A court Sunday stiffened a sentence against Lahlou that had previously been only two years plus a fine 110 fine after two women came forward and accused Lahlou of various crimes.

They included complicity in rape, performing forced abortions, and reconstructing the maidenheads of raped girls for Tabet. Other details of his involvement were not disclosed.

Under the sentence, Lahlou will lose his medical license for five years.

Horsehair wigs now in derision

LONDON: Their traditional horsehair wigs have been derided as silly, anachronistic and unhygienic but British judges want to keep them on in court, a newspaper reported today, reports Reuter.

After months of consultation, the nation's top judges have found that a massive majority want to wear their 18th-century headgear, the Times reported.

England's Lord Chief Justice Lord Taylor had said he would seek opinions on whether wigs should be abandoned as a move towards a "user-friendly judiciary."

He and Lord Mackay of Clashfern, the Lord Chancellor, are expected to announce next month that the wigs, robes and stiff white wing collars will stay, the Times said.

BRIEFLY

Bosnian peace talks postponed

Bosnian peace talks were postponed Sunday because UN mediator Cyrus Vance was sick, reports AP from United Nations.

European Community mediator Lord Owen met with Regional Bartholomew, the US special envoy to the Bosnian peace talks, but there was no word on what they discussed, according to a UN official.

Vance and Owen held several meetings Saturday but reported no breakthroughs on the last weekend before the Security Council votes on enforcement of the no-fly zone over Bosnia.

Owen said Saturday night that he and Vance reached an agreement with Bosnian-Serb leader Radovan Karadzic on an air corridor for helicopters to evacuate the sick and wounded from Srebrenica.

Owen said the Bosnian Serbs and Muslims remained far apart on a peace accord that would divide Bosnia into 10 largely autonomous provinces along ethnic lines.

A UN spokesman said Vance's illness was not serious.

Bomb blasts in Philippines

Homemade bombs exploded Monday in three cities in the southern Philippines, injuring one government official but causing little damage, police said, reports AP from Philippines.

Police said Gerardo Concepcion, regional director of the budget and management department in this city 550 miles (880 kilometers) southeast of Manila, lost his left arm after a homemade bomb exploded as he opened his desk drawer.

Also Monday, a homemade bomb went off at the runway of an airport in Davao, 600 miles (960 kilometers) southeast of the capital. The blast caused no injuries or damage. But it delayed flights to and from the city.

The third explosion occurred at noon at the nursing building of the private Ateneo de Zamboanga University in Zamboanga, 550 miles (880 kilometers) south of Manila. It shattered windows but injured no one, police said.

Bombings, killings and other violent incidents have increased in the southern Philippines in the past weeks. Investigators said they did not know whether the blasts on Mindanao Island were related.

Seminar on UN peacekeeping opens

An international seminar on UN peacekeeping opened here Monday morning, with a senior Australian official urging the participants to develop ideas to make the job more effective, reports Xinhua from Canberra.

The four-day conference, attended by some 70 representatives from 30 nations, is focusing on the assessment of whether peacekeeping in its current format is working effectively.

Foreign Minister Gareth Evans told the participants that the seminar offered the opportunity to look at the relationship between peacekeeping and the broader collective security mandate of the international community.

As the world is not peaceful, he said, existing mechanism at the international, regional and national levels are simply not coping with the post-cold-war challenge to security.

He pointed out that there exists a new willingness to explore the extent of the security Council's mandate to ensure international security through peacekeeping operations.

Nigerian drug trafficker held

Police have arrested a Nigerian drug trafficker in Peshawar in northwest Pakistan and recovered from him 30 kilograms of heroin with a street value of 25,000 US dollars, reports Xinhua from Islamabad.

The accused A A Tatwo, disguised as a journalist and had hidden the heroin in three television sets, local press reported today.

The man, who was arrested from a local hotel in Peshawar on Saturday night, last visited the city in 1992 and had smuggled heroin valued at 50,000 US dollars out of Pakistan.

Somalis to set up interim govt

Somali political groups attending a National Reconciliation Conference (NRC) have agreed to establish an interim government as well as regional administrations in 18 regions, reports Xinhua from Addis Ababa.

The agreement was reached as the conference entered the preparation of final documentation Sunday.

The groups also agreed to draft a provisional charter for a transition period and establish a new police force based on the old one.

They also called on the international community to help Somalia establish the basic infrastructure in the near future.

Meanwhile, they proposed that the second conference on national reconciliation be held on the June 8. The place of the conference, however, has not yet been decided.

Danish tanker catches fire

AMSTERDAM, Mar 22: A Danish tanker caught fire off the northern Dutch coast today but the coastguard said the vessel was not carrying a cargo and the fire seemed to be under control, reports Reuter.

One of the 10-man-crew was slightly injured, the coastguard said.

There was no cargo on board and there is no cargo spilling into the sea. The fire seems to be under control, Dutch coastguard spokesman Cees Vandyk said.

The Danish built Maj Britt Terkol, a three-month old chemical carrier with capacity of about 4,500 tonnes, was on its way from Rotterdam to Hamburg.

'India, Pakistan were on brink of N-war over Kashmir in '90'

WASHINGTON, Mar 22: The world was on the edge of a nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan in early 1990 because of the tug-of-war over Kashmir, according to a new account by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour M Hersh, reports AP.

The detailed report, titled "On the Nuclear Edge," is in the March 29 issue of the New Yorker magazine, which appears on newsstands Monday.

Hersh, quoting senior US intelligence officials by name, termed the showdown in the spring of 1990 "the most dangerous nuclear confrontation of the postwar era." He said the Bush administration kept the conflict secret, falling even to disclose it to key members of Congress.

According to Hersh, the nuclear confrontation was defused by the intervention of President Bush's personal envoy, who was sent to India and Pakistan to negotiate a stand down between the two countries.

The administration continued to keep a tight security lid on the crisis, in part because officials feared exposing substantial sales of US nuclear arms to Pakistan during the 1980s, Hersh wrote.

In the late 1980s the US government "had permitted Pakistan to buy restricted items inside the United States for its nuclear arsenal" despite federal laws prohibiting such purchases, Hersh said.

In his 15,000-word account, Hersh quoted by name two senior US intelligence officials — Robert Gates and Richard Kerr — as well as other US crisis management officials. Gates was until recently director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Kerr was deputy CIA director.

"Pakistan and India seemed to be caught in a cycle that they couldn't break out of. I was convinced that if a war started, it would be nuclear," Gates, then deputy national security adviser at the White House, was quoted as saying.

It was Gates whom Bush

dispatched in May 1990 to negotiate with the Indians and Pakistanis.

At the time, Hersh wrote, US intelligence agents had concluded that Pakistan had put together "at least six and perhaps as many as 10 nuclear weapons."

He said senior US intelligence analysts "were convinced that some of those warheads had been deployed on Pakistan's American-made F-16 fighter planes" for use against India. India had massed 200,000 troops and its most sophisticated attack units in Kashmir and within 50 miles Pakistan (80 km) of the Pakistani border.

"There was little doubt that India, with its far more extensive nuclear arsenal, stood ready to retaliate in kind," Hersh wrote.

He quoted Kerr as describing the confrontation as "the most dangerous nuclear situation we have ever faced ... It was far more frightening than the Cuban missile crisis."

"There was no question in my mind that we were right on the edge (of a nuclear war)," said Kerr, who recently retired after more than three decades with the CIA.

Hersh said the crisis was especially ominous because Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had removed herself from the conflict, leaving

ing matters to President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who was pro-nuclear, and General Mirza Aslam Beg.

In face-to-face meetings, Gates told the Pakistani leaders bluntly that they had no chance of winning a nuclear confrontation with India and that the United States would not come to their aid, Hersh wrote. The Americans sought assurances from Pakistan that it would stop terrorist attacks in Kashmir, and from India that it would halt its infiltration across the Pakistani border.

The US efforts succeeded and both sides backed down, Hersh wrote.

DPRK, Iran have deal to develop N-weapons

WASHINGTON, Mar 22: The magazine US News and World Report said in its latest edition that North Korea and Iran have a deal to develop nuclear weapons, reports Reuter.

The magazine cited "western intelligence sources" as reporting that Iran is giving North Korea 500 million dollar to develop ballistic missiles that could hit targets in Japan.

In return, North Korea would sell Iran an unspecified number of nuclear bombs and designs for nuclear weapons plants, the magazine said.



TUZLA, Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Bosnian boy who was wounded by shrapnel shells in Srebrenica arrived here for treatment Saturday. — AFP/ UNB photo

NATO ready to back no-fly enforcement over Bosnia

BONN, Mar 22: NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner said Sunday he was ready to support the United Nations in using force to police the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports AP.

Separately Sunday, Germany said it was prepared to help enforce the UN trade embargo on Yugoslavia by helping to monitor river traffic on the Danube.

Woerner, speaking on German television, said, if the United Nations decide — which seems likely — to implement the no-fly zone by force and turns to NATO for support, we will be ready to apply it.

We have prepared plans to cover that eventually, they only need to be put into effect, he said, adding that it was possible that non-NATO members could take part.

The UN Security Council was due to vote today on the use of military force to back up the Bosnian no-fly zone.

Separately, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said in an interview published Sunday that Germany was ready to help police the UN trade embargo against Serbia and Montenegro on the river Danube.

German vessels and customs officials could be sent to the area under the auspices of the western European union and under the guidance of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Kinkel told the Frankfurter allgemeine Sonntagzeitung.

We want to offer concrete help in any way we legally can, he said, repeating a call for Germany's constitution to be amended to allow it to deploy its forces outside of NATO countries.

Several Serb oil convoys have breached the UN embargo this year by navigating along the Danube to Serbia from the Bulgarian and Romanian customs officials.

AP adds: The commander of UN forces in Bosnia said he had won agreement to let Serbs leave this government-held town, a Ser precondition for evacuating more Muslims from desperate Srebrenica.

The commander, French Gen. Philippe Morill held up for more than a week in Srebrenica in a show of support for the tens of thousands of refugees stranded there under Serb shelling.

Also Sunday, France said it would join the US airdrop to Srebrenica and other parts of beleaguered eastern Bosnia.

On Friday, UN trucks brought the first overland shipment of aid to the town in more than three months. The same trucks evacuated almost 700 Muslim refugees to Tuzla on Sunday.

US Congressmen back Yeltsin

WASHINGTON, Mar 22: Congressional leaders voiced cautious support Sunday for Boris Yeltsin, echoing administration arguments that he remains, for now, the best hope for reform in Russia, reports AP.

Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole, a Republican conservative, urged President Clinton to show US backing for the embattled Russian president by moving their early April summit from Vancouver, Canada, to Moscow.

"I think President Clinton has a real opportunity here to go down in history as someone who may have saved democracy in that part of the world," Dole said on CNN's "Newsmaker Sunday."

Dole also questioned whether Yeltsin would be able to get back safely to Russia if he goes to Canada.

UN Ambassador Madeleine K Albright, speaking on ABC's "This Week with David Brinkley" on Sunday, repeated the administration position that Yeltsin's action was "the appropriate thing to do as you're evolving a democratic institution."

Albright said Yeltsin deserved US support because he is the only one in 1,000 years of Russian history that has been elected by all the Russian people.

Sen. Sam Nunn, a Democrat who is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Clinton's stance toward Yeltsin was about right.

"We certainly support him as the president and as the only nationally elected leader," he said.

But Nunn, speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," said the United States should be talking to other "key players" in Russia.

"It's not Yeltsin exclusively," he said.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee Hamilton, a Democrat speaking on the same programme, agreed that while it is in the US national interest to support Yeltsin now, "there are many other democrats in Russia, and we must be prepared to support them."

The lawmakers also agreed that the Russian military, which has largely stayed out of the political crisis so far, must be watched closely.

Another Democrat, Sen. Bill Bradley, noted that there is an element of the army that opposes the START II nuclear disarmament treaty. Nunn warned of a worst-case scenario where the military and the regions split a part.

Gorbachev ready to serve Russia

ROME, Mar 22: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev told Italian radio on Sunday that he was ready to serve Russia if the people demanded it, reports Reuter.

"If things were to get worse, if the desire of the people is for Gorbachev to leave everything to deal again with the problems of Russia, then I am ready to do my duty," the Rome-based Ansa News Agency quoted Gorbachev as telling Italian state radio.



TROISVAUX, France: French nuns vote Sunday in the first round of the legislative elections at the city hall here. — AFP/ UNB photo

Israel to deploy more police in Gaza, WB

JERUSALEM, Mar 22: Israel decided Sunday to deploy 2,000 more police to try to contain a wave of unrest that claimed the lives of four Palestinians and two soldiers this weekend, reports AP.

At the same time, ministers rebuffed calls from right-wingers for a further crackdown against Palestinians, saying the Middle East peace talks offered the best route to ending the violence.

Fresh fighting in Kabul: 20 killed

ISLAMABAD, Mar 22: At least 20 persons were killed and dozens wounded Sunday in fresh factional fighting in Kabul on the Islamic New Year's Day of Nawroz, reports Xinhua.

During the fighting between itchedad-I-Islami led by Rasool Sayyaf and rival Shia Hizbe Wahdat in the western part of the Afghan capital, the Russian embassy and two hospitals were hit by some rockets and missiles, reported the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP).

The fighting started on Friday when leaders of Afghan Mujahideen groups gathered in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan to have talks on the formation of a new cabinet and the implementation of Islamabad accord.

These confrontations erupted a day after two Israeli soldiers were fatally shot in ambushes in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Six other Israelis have been shot or knifed to death in the past month.

The persisting violence was debated at the weekly Cabinet meeting, where some ministers counseled restraint, including Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Israeli reports said.

Cabinet Secretary Eliakin Rubinstein said that the government was committed to the peace talks.