

Hekmatyar chooses Masood as DPM

ISLAMABAD, Apr 2: Afghan Prime Minister designate Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has offered the post of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to his arch rival Ahmed Shah Masood, reports Xinhua.

According to a press report here today, Hekmatyar succeeded in forming a 29-member cabinet on Thursday.

A source close to Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami said the post of Interior Minister went to Qazi Muhammad Amin Qaqqad while the disputed portfolio of Defence Minister was given to prominent commander Jalaluddin Haqni.

Hezb-i-Islami's ustad Abdul Saboor Fareed, who used to hold the post of Prime Minister but was deposed by President Burhannudin Rabbani, will hold the office of the second deputy prime minister.

Naseem Mehd, representative of militia chief Rashid Dostum, will also be a member of the cabinet in which all major Afghan groups are represented.

Under the Islamabad accord signed by eight leading Mujahideen leaders here on March 7, the new cabinet has to be formed within two weeks of the signing of the accord. But the process of forming the cabinet was stalled due to the controversy over the portfolio of Defence Minister between Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami and Rabbani's Jamiat-i-Islami.

Rabbani insisted that his commander Ahmed Shah Masood should retain the post of Defence Minister while Hekmatyar argued that important posts such as president and Defence Minister should not go to one party.

It is not clear whether Masood will accept the portfolio of deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.



VIENNA: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) ruled that North Korea has violated accords on non-proliferation of nuclear arms and asked the UNSC to step in, IAEA Chairman Hans Blix (R) said in a press conference here Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

DPRK defiant over stand on N-inspection

TOKYO, Apr 2: North Korea remained defiant today despite the prospect of being dragged before the UN Security Council and hit by sanctions over its refusal to submit to inspections of suspected nuclear sites, reports AFP.

The communist North accused by the West of masterminding several terrorist acts in the past, past again threatened "strong" reprisal against the United States and other countries if they forced the sanctions.

The North Korean Workers' Party newspaper Rodong Sinmun reacted in a commentary carried by the Korean Central News Agency monitored here against Thursday's decision by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency to take the issue to the Security Council.

Off the Record

He will not criticise the man who defeated him



HOUSTON: Former US President George Bush said on Thursday that he plans to maintain his strong interest in foreign affairs but will not criticise the man who defeated him in last year's election, President Bill Clinton, reports Reuter.

"I will not be out criticising President Clinton," Bush told about 1,000 people in a speech in Houston.

The event — an unofficial welcome home for Bush — honoured him as Houston's distinguished citizen of 1993 and included tributes by three members of his cabinet including former Secretary of State James Baker, and his son, Neil Bush.

Wishing Clinton will, Bush stated: "I have differences with him. I would see some of them we all know from the poll (the November election) are rather major. But at this point let others be the spokespersons for the loyal opposition," Bush said.

They were falsely declared retarded

QUEBEC: Thousands of people who grew up in state-funded orphanages say they were falsely declared mentally retarded and abused by the nuns who ran the institutions between the 1940s and 1960s, reports AP.

A group representing about 4,000 people has taken the first step toward filing a 1.2 billion dollar class-action lawsuit against the Quebec government and several Catholic orders.

They are called the Duplessis orphans because they were in orphanages largely under the authoritarian government of Premier Maurice Duplessis. Most were children of illegitimacy.

The orphans allege they were beaten, forced to take ice-cold baths, kept in straitjackets for long periods and sexually abused.

They say they were incorrectly classified as mentally retarded and then taken out of school and put to work.



LECH, Austria: The Princess of Wales talks with her sons, Prince William (on background) and Prince Harry, as they set off on the slopes here on the last full day of their holiday Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

Doctors separate them

CAPE TOWN: A team of eight South African surgeons separated 10-month-old Stamese twin girls joined at the pelvis in a 14-hour operation on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Hospital officials said on Friday the girls, Catherine and Helena Kock, had a reasonable chance of being able to walk normally.

The girls had been able only to lie on their backs. They had separate but fused pelvic bones and lower spines, one kidney each and shared a colon and some sexual organs.

New kind of cholesterol

MORGANTOWN, West Virginia: Heart disease researchers said on Thursday they have identified a new kind of cholesterol that is an even better indication of risk for heart disease than levels of the blood components known as "good" and "bad" cholesterol, reports Reuter.

Researchers at West Virginia University studied 59 men, all under age 55, who had undergone therapy for narrowing of their heart vessels.

They found that levels of a genetically determined blood component known as lipoprotein (A), or LP (A), indicated the narrowing of coronary heart arteries that leads to heart attacks more closely than measures of high-density lipoprotein (HDL), or "good" cholesterol, and low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or "bad" cholesterol.

Kim sacks 2 generals

SEOUL, Apr 2: President Kim Young-sam on Friday fired two key generals considered loyal to past military-dominated regimes in a move to consolidate civilian control of the military, reports AP.

The move was part of Kim's bid to bring changes after 32 years of military intervention in politics and push ahead with broad political and economic reforms.

As the first civilian president since 1961, Kim has tried to curb the power of the military and security organizations. The 65-year-old former dissident was persecuted by military-dominated regimes.

In a surprise move March 8, Kim replaced the head of the powerful military intelligence agency and the army chief of staff.

On Friday Lt. Gen. Ahn

Byong-ho was dismissed as head of the Capital Defence Command and Lt. Gen Kim Hyong-sun as commander of the Army Special Warfare command.

The two are to be resigned, but their new posts have not been announced.

Kim's predecessors had used the two army commands, positioned near Seoul, to prevent a coup.

Today's personnel changes were ordered by President Kim Young-sam who exercised the prerogative of supreme command, said Park Jae-uk, a Defense Ministry spokesman.

Defense Minister Kwon Yong-hae was called in to Kim's office in the middle of talks with commanders on military reforms and informed of the changes, said Yonhap, South Korea's news agency.

Pindi to block PPP's Sunday march towards Line of Control

ISLAMABAD, Apr 2: Pakistan said on Thursday it would block a march planned for Sunday across an Indian-defended ceasefire line in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, reports Reuter.

The Kashmir branch of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has planned to cross the line to demonstrate support for a three-year-old separatist rebellion in Indian-ruled Kashmir.

But Pakistan's Kashmir Affairs Minister Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan said in a statement authorities in Pakistan-ruled Azad (Free) Kashmir and other agencies had been put on alert to respond to the PPP call.

"All arrangements have been made to meet any eventuality and the Pakistan government will not allow anyone to cross the line of control, he said in a statement quoted by the official APP news agency.

Pakistani authorities used force to block three similar attempts last year to cross 1,400-km (870-mile) UN-monitored line that separates the Indian and Pakistani armies.

India rules two-thirds and Pakistan the remaining third of Kashmir, over which the two countries have fought two of their three since independence from Britain in 1947.

Azad Kashmir PPP Chief

Murtaz Hussain Rathore has asked Islamabad not to use force against Sunday's march on the main Chakothi border point.

"The march ... will be peaceful and unarmed. It will be a disciplined protest against massive Indian atrocities and human killings, he said in a letter sent to Pakistani President Ghulam Ishaq Khan on Tuesday.

More than 9,000 people have been killed in the revolt by militants seeking independence or union with Pakistan.

Sardar Mehtab urged Rathore and his opposition colleagues to postpone the march or the government "will be forced to take severe action against them."

There is no doubt that the liberation of Kashmir and the exercise of the right of self-determination by Kashmiris are a sacred cause," he said. "But it is also the collective responsibility of the United Nations and the parties concerned to observe agreements. All are bound to respect the line of control.

But the minister said a time might come when it would not be possible to stop Kashmiris from crossing the control line.

"Time may come when Kashmiris from both sides ... may cross the line of control in hundreds of thousands. Then it will not be possible for India to stop them."

BRIEFLY

Bush goes to Kuwait this month:

Former President George Bush will visit Kuwait this month, taking up an invitation extended after US-led troops freed that country from Iraqi occupation two years ago, Bush's office said on Thursday, Reuter reports from Houston.

Bush spokesman Andy Maner said Bush planned to spend two days in Kuwait sometime between April 12 and 16. The former president, who now lives in Houston, has no plans to visit other Middle Eastern countries, Maner said.

"He was invited while he was in office," said Maner, "and he has always wanted to travel there."

The 1991 Gulf War liberation of Kuwait is considered Bush's greatest foreign policy triumph as president.

US Senate panel okays Lord:

A US Senate panel on Thursday approved the nomination of Winston Lord, the former Ambassador to China, as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, AFP reports from Washington.

Lord, who President Bill Clinton tapped to be his top man in the region, said Wednesday that the United States must build a "New Pacific Community," noting that the previous focus had been on Europe and the Middle East.

"Our Asian partners have noticed. Some are apprehensive," said Lord, a career diplomat who was US Ambassador to China from 1985 until the 1989 crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square.

Ben Ali meets Gaddafi:

Tunisian President Zine Elabidine Ben Ali met Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi on Thursday for talks expected to focus on the 1988 bombing of a Panam jetliner over Scotland, AFP reports from Tripoli.

The officials news agency JANA said two leaders met in private but it has no details.

Ben Ali, arrived here earlier Thursday for a 24-hour visit, amid mounting US pressure on Libya and two weeks ahead of a UN review of sanctions against Tripoli.

Mount Etna calm:

After spewing lava for 473 days, Mount Etna is finally calm, according to news reports, AP says from Catania.

The volcano in eastern Sicily first began to erupt on December 14, 1991, and threatened to bury a town of 7,000 people on one of its slopes.

Soldiers and local volunteers worked for months outside of Zafferana Etna digging trenches and constructing barriers to avert the lava flow.

Success came last May when US Navy helicopters from nearby Sigonella air base dropped 31 giant blocks in the lava's path and diverted its path.

2 Salvadoran army officers freed:

A Salvadoran judge Thursday ordered the release of two military officers convicted in the 1989 murder of six Jesuit priests, AP reports from San Salvador.

The release orders for Col. Guillermo Benevides and Lt Yussay Rene Mendoza came a day after a general amnesty for human rights violators became effective.

The amnesty was proposed by President Alfredo Cristiani and approved by the National Assembly, which his rightist ARENA party controls.

Both officers were serving 30-year terms in the western city of Santa Ana and were expected to be freed later Thursday.

Landslide kills 10 in Ecuador

CUENCA, Ecuador, Apr 2: At least 10 people died and 20 were injured in a landslide in the southern Andes, the civil defence said Thursday, reports AP.

The landslide occurred when heavy rains Tuesday loosened tons of rocks and mud which fell into the Paute River near this town, 195 miles (310 kilometers) south of Quito, it reported.

Dozens of homes were swept away by the landslide. Unconfirmed news reports put the death toll as high as 60.

The landslide formed a 400-foot high (120-meter) natural dam within the next five days and flood inhabited areas.

Rebuff interference from major powers: Mahathir

TASKENT (Uzbekistan), Apr 2: Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad, visiting the central Asian state of Uzbekistan, said on Thursday that Islam had drawn the two countries together, reports Reuter.

Mahathir also told a news conference on his first visit to the former Soviet republic that weak nations of the world should ally themselves to rebuff interference from major powers.

"Islam is very important to us," Mahathir said on the second day of a four-day trip to this nation of 22 million people bordering Afghanistan.

"Our belief in the same religion and the same set of values has naturally drawn us together," he added.

Uzbek President Islam Karimov, speaking at the same news conference, agreed with Mahathir but cautioned that although Islam was important,

fundamentalism would never be permitted in his country.

Uzbekistan, which won independence in 1991, has witnessed a strong Muslim revival since community controls on religion were lifted.

The West has been anxious that volatile central Asia might become a spawning ground for Iranian-style fundamentalism, despite reassurances of the contrary by Karimov and leaders of neighbouring states.

Karimov, an authoritarian leader who has tried opposition politicians on charges of

Fresh fighting in Abkhazia

MOSCOW, Apr 2: Fierce fighting flared in Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia on Thursday, with five people killed and as many wounded, the Russian news agency Itar-Tass said, reports Reuter.



BAGUIO, Philippines: Female cadets stand at attention while waiting for a haircut on their first day at the elite Philippine Military Academy (PMA) here Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

Sikh author ordered to clean shoes

AMRITSAR, India, Apr 2: A Sikh author whose blasphemy case sparked comparisons with that of British writer Salman Rushdie was ordered by a panel of Sikh priests Thursday to clean shoes and sweep the floor of a temple, reports AFP.

Piar Singh, 75, a Sikh scholar, was found guilty by the Akal Takht, Sikhdom's highest temporal body of religious misconduct because of "objectionable references" to the Sikh scriptures in his latest book.

The verdict was delivered after a closed-door hearing during which Piar Singh appeared alone before the panel of the highest priests.

They ordered him to clean shoes of visiting Sikh devotees and sweep the floor of temple in this northern Indian city for 40 days.

The religious fiat was handed down in Amritsar's Golden Temple, the holiest shrine in Sikhdom.

The respected author was also directed not to discuss the book, "The story of Guru Granth Sahib", in the press

Admiral Larson arrives in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD, Apr 2: Admiral Charles R Larson, Commander-in-Chief of the United States Pacific Command, arrived here Thursday for a week-long official visit, a government statement said, AFP reports.

He is due to meet with Pakistani Naval Chief Admiral Saeed M Khan an Army Chief General Abdul Wadheed, the statement said without giving details.

The two countries held in conclusive talks here early March on a US demand for the return of nine leased vessels including eight frigates.

Relations between the traditional allies have been under strain since Washington suspended economic and military aid to Pakistan in October 1990 because of differences over Islamabad's nuclear programme.

Yeltsin heading for summit leaving behind a challenge

MOSCOW, Apr 2: President Boris Yeltsin is heading for a weekend summit with President Clinton in Canada, leaving behind a court challenge to his decrees, reports AP. Lawmakers launched a new fight against Yeltsin on Thursday, asking the Constitutional Court to throw out his order for a March 20 referendum on whether he or the parliament should be more powerful. Yeltsin wants to use the April 25 referendum to gather support in his campaign for painful economic reforms.

But the 1,033-member Congress of People's Deputies hijacked the idea, adding questions intended to embarrass Yeltsin and demanding a vote majority that will be nearly impossible for him to win. Yeltsin threatened to set up a competing ballot with different questions, but one aide said Thursday the President had backed away from that position.

The Congress has vetoed Yeltsin's decree and the court previously ruled 9-3 that it was partially unconstitutional. The 247-member Supreme Soviet, the standing legislature, is asking for additional rulings that could provide legal ground for blocking Yeltsin's competing ballot. Federal Information Center Chief Mikhail Poltoranin said Yeltsin would seek a court ruling against the Congress' referendum, but probably would not call a competing ballot.

"The president does not intend to organize an alternative referendum," said Poltoranin, a Yeltsin aide. "Whatever the Constitutional Court's verdict will be, we will take part in that."

The Supreme Soviet also asked the court to overturn earlier Yeltsin decrees granting autonomy to Cossacks in southern Russia and creating influential presidential

"representatives" across the country. The Congress voted to ask whether voters trust Yeltsin, support his reforms and favour early elections for president and for president.

The president remains popular in Russia, but his reforms are widely criticized for causing a sharp drop in living standards.

It also said questions must be approved by 50 percent of Russia's 105 million eligible voters, instead of just a majority of those who cast ballots.

Yeltsin did not achieve that level of support even when he won 60 per cent of the ballots cast in Russia's latest election.

The president leaves Friday to meet Clinton over the weekend in Vancouver.

In a speech Thursday, President Clinton promised people-to-people aid to Russia. He did not set a price for the aid package, but it is expected to total about 1 billion dollar.

Clinton also said the two leaders would discuss arms control issues.

Meanwhile, Russia's Soviet-era parliament has ordered the reinstatement of a popular nationalist TV anchorman, moving to assert control over the broadcast media, a presidential aide said Thursday.

But St Petersburg television officials refused to put Alexander Nevzorov back on the air Wednesday night when the order was issued, said Mikhail Poltoranin, head of Russia's Federal Information Center.

It was the latest twist in the dispute over Nevzorov's controversial docu-drama "Programme '600 Seconds'". He was fired last week after calling President Yeltsin a fascist on the air and urging viewers to take up arms.

His nationalist and pro-Communist fans have displayed their outrage with almost daily demonstrations outside the station.

BBC asked not to promote violence

LONDON, Apr 2: BBC programmes must not promote the culture of cruelty and violence, said John Birth, the new director general of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), reports Xinhua.

In his first public statement last night since his appointment, Birth outlined his vision for the future of his corporation, according to press reports here Wednesday.

"We can not by ourselves solve problems, but we can help those who can," he added.