

# India, China may cut massive forces on Himalayan frontier

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: The world's two most populous nations, India and China, may reduce their massive forces on their Himalayan frontier which has been an arena of war and tension for decades, military officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

In the first visit in three decades by a Chinese military delegation, the deputy chief of the People's Liberation Army, Li Gen Xu Huzi, met Indian army chief Bipin Chandra Joshi to discuss confidence-building measures.

"This is surely an important visit," said Indian army spokesman Anil Bhatt.

"It is a very good beginning," said a Chinese embassy official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

## Pope to visit Lebanon

VATICAN CITY, Dec 21: Pope John Paul II said Tuesday he will visit Lebanon in the spring and hopes also to visit the Holy Land, reports AP.

John Paul announced his travel plans in a year-end message to cardinals.

The trip to Lebanon had already been reported by Lebanese officials.

The Pope has accepted in principle an invitation by Israeli officials, but such a trip is apparently linked to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.

The Vatican on Monday confirmed that an historic agreement to forge such links will be signed Dec. 30 in Jerusalem, although formal relations will still be several months away.

# Yeltsin's cabinet divided over future of economic reforms

MOSCOW, Dec 21: President Boris Yeltsin's Cabinet is deeply divided on the future of economic reforms following the defeat of reformers in parliamentary elections, a government newspaper reported Tuesday, reports AP.

Yeltsin's ministers have been unable to agree on a plan for further sale of state-owned industry to private investors, according to the daily Rossiiskie Vesti, which is published by the Cabinet.

Some ministers want to allow factories to "die quietly and peacefully" if they cannot adjust to a free market. Others want to continue government subsidies to keep the factories running, the newspaper said.

The front-page article, under the headline "United Team Is No More," said the debate over privatisation raged at last Friday's Cabinet meeting and "revealed serious disagreements among the Cabinet members."

Yeltsin has remained silent about the elections for more than a week, leaving the country wondering whether his commitment to reform is wavering. For days, newspapers have been speculating about a possible Cabinet shakeup or policy shift to address the public discontent expressed in the December 12 elections.

The defeat of reformers at the polls is widely viewed as a reflection of Russians' anger and disillusionment over falling living standards, rising crime and the humiliating loss of the empire.

Some Russian newspapers say anti-Yeltsin forces, led by ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, could end up with two-thirds of the seats in the new parliament, although the pro-reform bloc Russia's Choice could be the largest single group.

Zhirinovskiy is demanding a halt to Yeltsin's painful reforms and wants the resignation of top reformers, particularly Economics Minister Yegor Gaidar and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.

Conflicting signals have emerged within the Cabinet, with Gaidar saying reforms must be strengthened and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin ruling out any more economic shock therapy.

Finance Minister Boris Fyodorov warned Monday that he and other reformers might quit if the economic course were altered. Fyodorov and Gaidar were among the founders of Russia's Choice, the pro-reform coalition that was upset in the elections.

"If the reform course is disrupted, if we start giving money to everyone, if the 'Ukrainisation' of our economy starts, why should Russia's Choice be held responsible?" Izvestia quoted Fyodorov as saying.

Fyodorov was referring to Ukraine's policy of large subsidies to industry, which has caused hyperinflation and a huge drop in production.

Both the ultranationalists and the Communists favour restoring subsidies, which have been reduced in the past year.



The first Russian jury since tsarism listens during a criminal trial, as a Russian soldier watches the process in a Moscow Regional Court, Monday. The jury as part of the administration of justice was installed during tsarism, but was cancelled by Bolsheviks and came into effect again after communism failed in Russia. — AFP photo

# Off the Record

## "Give us a break"

LONDON: Prince Edward and his girlfriend Sophie Rhys-Jones are not planning to marry early next year and they have urged the press to leave them alone, the young woman's employer Brian MacLaurin said Monday, reports AP.

MacLaurin told reporters outside the London offices of his public relations firm: "I have spoken to Sophie and Prince Edward this morning and the key message from them is, 'Give us a break.'"

"Their relationship is just three months old in terms of good friends and there is presumably a long way to go," he said.

On Sunday, royal author Andrew Morton claimed in the news of the world weekly that the prince, the third son of Queen Elizabeth II, has become "inseparable" from the 28-year-old public relations executive.

The couple are waiting until March 10, his 30th birthday, to announce an engagement and will wed within the year at Westminster Abbey, Morton claimed.

MacLaurin tried to play down the reports, saying that Rhys-Jones, who has worked for his company for seven months, simply wanted for the moment to get on with daily life. "She's got a job to do and she wants to get on and do it," he said.

Buckingham Palace has refused to comment on the reports of the relationship. Morton said the Queen was delighted by the turn of events.

## Japanese women marrying later, divorcing more

TOKYO: Japanese women are marrying later, divorcing more, and having fewer children than ever, a government report said Tuesday, says AP.

The report by the Office for Women's Affairs said that in 1992, the average age of first marriages for women was 26 years, the highest post-war figure.

In 1990, 85 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were unmarried. That was a jump from 69.2 per cent of women in that age group who were single in 1975. In 1975, only 20.9 per cent of women aged 25-29 were single; that nearly doubled to 20.2 per cent in 1990.

The report also said the number of divorce cases last year was 179,191 — the highest figure since 1899.

And the report said the birth rate last year fell to 9.8 per cent 1,000 population; these figures were also the lowest since the turn of the century. Japanese women now give birth to an average 1.5 children each in their lifetimes, it said.

Those who do have children can count on taking the burnt of responsibility for child care. The report said as of last year, fewer than 1 per cent of male respondents said they helped out with infant care.

The report also said women do an average of nearly 4 hours of housework a day — compared with less than half an hour for men. Japanese women also bear most of the responsibility of caring for aged or ailing relatives, it said.



Donald Trump (L), US billionaire, and Marla Maples appear for the press after marrying in a private wedding ceremony at Trump's Plaza Hotel in New York Dec 20. The couple married after a six-year long relationship. — AFP photo

## Where's Ivana?

NEW YORK: Where's Ivana? Back at the scene of the clash — Aspen, Colorado, where she and Marla Maples faced off at a ski resort four years ago, reports AP.

Ivana, who was divorced from Trump in 1990, was not attending the wedding, nor were the former couple's three children, Donald, 16, Ivanka, 12, and Eric, 10.

Trump's affair with Maples burst into public view after Ivana and Marla confronted each other in Aspen in December 1989. "I love him," the other woman supposedly said.

A year later, the Trumps announced plans to divorce. Ivana's settlement has been estimated at 10 million dollars.

She recently completed a publicity tour for her second novel, "For Love Alone," and plans to publish an advice book next year.

She has a "House of Ivana" line of clothing, jewelry and cosmetics, which she advertises personally on the TV's Home Shopping Network.

# UN alliance in Somalia must stand on its own feet: Shalikhshvili

MOGADISHU, Dec 21: US military chief General John Shalikhshvili has told a nervous UN alliance in Somalia it must stand on its own feet after Washington withdraws all its troops by March 31, UN officials said on Monday, reports Reuter.

"He offered no promises, gave no assurances of any kind. The message is you're on your own after March 31," a UN official told Reuters.

Shalikhshvili is chairman of the US military joint chiefs of staff and since arriving on Sunday has met the UN commanders.

They fear that without the logistics, armour and equipment provided by the United States and other western nations, the 20-nation UN alliance could collapse and the broken

horn of Africa country plunge back to civil war.

Addressing US troops before he flew back to Washington on Monday, Shalikhshvili told them they had accomplished their mission and it was time to go back home.

"We are not cutting and running. This mission was about helping thousands and thousands of starving children, women and men. We came here to help a people in need and you fellows achieved that."

He added: "When we leave on March 31 and the UN mission doesn't turn out the way we pray it should, then so be it."

Peace talks this month failed to reconcile Somalia's rival warlords whose civil war induced famine in which 300,000 people died before the UN inter-

vened.

US, French, Belgian and Swedish contingents began leaving this Muslim nation last week. On Sunday, former colonial power Italy said it would definitely withdraw its 2,000 troops by the end of March. UN commanders said it was a major setback for the UN alliance.

The United Nations and the United States had been trying to persuade Italy to stay and help keep the alliance together. But officials said Italian Defence Minister Fabio Fabbri, who met Shalikhshvili in Mogadishu on Sunday, turned down the request.

Since Thursday at the United States has pulled out a total of 1,450 troops, including 450 combat troops. Another 380 left on Monday.

The officials said Shalikhshvili gave no promises for military logistical support, let alone equipment and armour.

Said one official: "The US line is very much like some other nations will come in and take over our role. But which countries can come here and provide the same level of logistical support and firepower the US have?"

A battle in October in which 18 army rangers were killed by warlord Mohamed Farah Aided's militiamen, shattered US public support for the intervention launched last December to halt civil war and looting of famine relief supplies.

President Bill Clinton later said all US troops would leave by March 31.

# White House denies Clinton's extra-marital affairs

WASHINGTON, Dec 21: The White House Monday denied allegations by two Arkansas state policemen that they arranged extra-marital affairs for President Clinton when he was governor of Arkansas, reports Reuter.

Spokeswoman Dee Dee Myers released a statement by senior presidential adviser Bruce Lindsey flatly denying the charges and saying they were part of an old campaign to discredit the president.

"These allegations are ridiculous," Lindsey said in the statement. "Similar charges were made, investigated, and responded to during the presidential campaign. There is nothing that dignifies a further response."

The two Arkansas policemen, Roger Perry and Larry Patterson, told Cable News Network that they were part of then-governor Clinton's security detail when they arranged late-night and early-morning sexual liaisons for him.

The two policemen told the

network they had been under pressure to keep silent. They said another Arkansas state trooper had been called by the president himself and offered a promotion if he would keep the White House informed on the

troopers' intentions to go public with what they knew.

Lindsey acknowledged Clinton had several "conversations" with people about the "false stories" but denied that the president had sought silence

from anyone. "Any suggestion that the president offered anyone a job in return for silence is a lie."

The charges were also detailed by a conservative magazine, the American Spectator, which said the policemen intended to write a book about Clinton's life in Little Rock.

Lindsey said in his statement that the charges were "part of an orchestrated campaign to discredit" Clinton.

Myers said she had nothing to add to Lindsey's statement.

White House spokesmen also said they had no information on fresh questions that are being raised about Clinton's financial dealings with a failed Arkansas thrift while he was governor.

The New York Times reported Sunday that federal investigators were seeking a file that deputy White House counsel Vincent Foster is believed to have kept on Clinton and his wife's dealings with the owner of the whitewater development corporation. Foster killed himself in July.



# Tamil Tigers kill 4 soldiers

Tamil separatist guerrillas Tuesday killed four government soldiers in eastern Sri Lanka and lost one of their own in a separate incident in the region, a military spokesman here said, AFP reports from Colombo.

Gunmen from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ambushed the soldiers in Kadiraveli in coastal Batticaloa district, the spokesman said. No further details were immediately available.

# Japan recognises Macedonia

Japan on Tuesday recognised Macedonia, one of the six republics that once constituted Yugoslavia, AP reports from Tokyo.

A Foreign Ministry official said Macedonia is the third former Yugoslav republic and the 187th nation recognised by Japan.

Macedonia, with a population of about two million, declared independence on September 18, 1991 and joined the United Nations in April this year.

# Receptionist shot dead in US

A gunman barged into a law office, argued with the receptionist, stalked her into a rear office and shot her to death, police said. The woman had sought a protective order against an ex-boyfriend, AP reports from Philadelphia.

Tressa Clark, 25, was shot "multiple times" in the chest and the head Monday after a gunman and an accomplice barged into the Center City law office, said Capt John Apeldorn, chief of the homicide division.

# 7 rebels held in Tripura

Seven suspected insurgents of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) were nabbed during a joint combing operation by BSF and Tripura police from Samrehdra Ganj, a border village under Sabrom subdivision in South Tripura last night, BSF sources said here yesterday, PTI reports from Agartala.

The Ultras were nabbed in connection with the snatching of two Self-Loading Rifles (SLR) from BSF Jawans on Monday.

# France deports 26 Algerians

France on Monday deported 26 Algerian illegal residents rounded up in a raid on a crime-ridden Paris neighbourhood last week, Reuter reports from Paris.

The interior ministry said in a statement the Algerian nationals were flown home under police escort, bringing to 2,219 the number expelled to the north African country this year.

The 26 were arrested on December 13 during a police swoop on a neighbourhood in northern Paris nicknamed "thieves market", the ministry said.

# Sharif visits Bosnia from Dec 23

Pakistan opposition leader Nawaz Sharif will pay a three-day visit to Bosnia from December 23 with the aim to express solidarity with the Bosnians who hold Nawaz Sharif in high esteem, his spokesman said yesterday, Xinhua reports from Islamabad.

Nawaz Sharif, former Pakistan Prime Minister and President of Pakistan Muslim League, will also visit London on way back home and meet British Prime Minister John Major, the spokesman said.

# Conservatives resume talks with ANC, govt on constitution

CAPE TOWN, Dec 21: An alliance of conservative whites and blacks resumed discussions Tuesday with the African National Congress and the government, with little time remaining to help shape the country's new constitution, reports AP.

Parliament was due to enact the constitution on Wednesday, and the ANC and government have said they will not be swayed from that timetable.

Eleventh-hour talks to persuade the right-wing Freedom Alliance to recognise the proposed new charter in exchange for making changes in it failed after 10 hours Monday.

But the three sides agreed to make one last attempt Tuesday morning for the elusive goal of an "all-inclusive" agreement.

Freedom Alliance Chairman Rowan Cronje said before enter-

ing the renewed discussions that the ANC was "making it as difficult as possible" for his side.

He said that the ANC wanted the Freedom Alliance to eat "humble pie" by promising that its leaders would recognise the country's multi-racial Transitional Executive Council, even though some of them have strongly criticised it in the past.

The right-wing whites and conservative blacks in the Freedom Alliance have demanded greater guarantees of regional autonomy in the constitution and have threatened civil war if their proposals were not granted.

"At stake was whether they would rejoin the democratic process, which culminates with South Africa's first, multiracial elections on April 27."

The deadlock revolved around the ANC and the gov-

ernment insistence that the Freedom Alliance promise to take part in the elections and the transitional council assuming its other demands for constitutional changes are met.

Cronje said his group could not make any such commitment until the negotiations were completed.

"I have never been as disillusioned and as sad as I have been now," he said Monday night.

The ANC delegation led by Cyril Ramaphosa entered the talks Tuesday stoically. One representative said the renewed rounds of talks was just a matter of "keeping the door open."

"It doesn't look good, but at the same time, the train must move on," said Ramaphosa earlier. "We have said repeatedly that we are not going to stop this process because there happens to be those who want to

spoil the process for the entire population."

The leader of the government delegation, Dawie de Villiers, said time was running out for the Freedom Alliance. He criticised the group for not accepting the "very fair demand" of the government and the ANC.

"If there is really a will there is a way," he said. "At times I was wondering whether there is a will."

The Freedom Alliance is a diverse group ranging from the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Resistance Movement to the conservative Inkatha Freedom Party, whose only link is their opposition to living under ANC rule.

They formed the Alliance in July after negotiating groups led by the ANC and government announced the April election date.

In a separate development, white right-wing leaders and the ANC were to sign an agreement Tuesday to jointly explore ways to create a homeland for whites without infringing on the rights of other groups living there.

The ANC, which is committed to a non-racial democracy, has long rejected the idea of setting aside a portion of South Africa in which whites, or any group, would have special privileges. But it has said it could consider setting up an area in which whites happen to form a voting majority.

Conservative Afrikaners, descendants of early Dutch settlers, have pressed hard for a so-called "volkstaat" as apartheid is dismantled.

ANC spokesman Carl Niehaus said an agreement that provides for "discussing further the concept of a volkstaat" would be signed Tuesday between the ANC and the Afrikaner Volksfront.

Niehaus said the ANC had not reversed any policy with the agreement.

# Syria asks Arafat to pull out of talks with Israel

DAMASCUS, Dec 21: A government newspaper Tuesday called on Yasser Arafat to pull out of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's talks with Israel, reports AP.

The appeal by the official Al-Thawra newspaper came as Israeli and PLO leaders were scheduled to meet in Paris in an attempt to overcome differences over how to initiate Palestinian self-rule in the occupied territories.

"Retreat is not a formidable task," the newspaper's front-page lead item said, "but it is easier than persisting in futile negotiations."

The newspaper said Israel's "only objective is to undermine the whole peace process, to circumvent Arab demands and to evade full withdrawal from the occupied Arab lands."