

Pakistan to keep its contingent in Somalia

ISLAMABAD, Dec 22: Pakistan has agreed to keep its contingent in Somalia after a positive response from President Bill Clinton's envoy on a request for heavy weapons, official sources said here Tuesday, reports AFP.

Clinton's coordinator on Somalia, James Dobbins, held detailed discussions with senior defence and Foreign Ministry officials on the UN peace-keeping operations in Somalia.

Sources said at the end of his two day stay that talks were "substantive and meaningful." Dobbins briefed the Pakistani officials on the peace talks held in the Ethiopian capital recently and the United Nations strategy for political reconciliation and economic reconstruction of Somalia, which has been ravaged by civil war.

The United States has decided to pull out its troops from operation restore hope, which attracted the participation of 29 nations.

The 29,000 strong UN force included some 5,000 Pakistani soldiers, who have suffered 32 fatalities in clashes with local warlords since taking up peace-keeping duties last year.

Dobbins' visit followed reports from Mogadishu that Washington was considering the possibility of replacing the American soldiers with additional Pakistani troops.

Local news agency PPI, quoting officials, said Pakistan reiterated its "commitment to the concept of the peacekeeping operation and its constant support to the noble cause."

They said the success of the UN effort was essential to preserve the credibility of the world body's endeavours for peace and stability in other parts of the world.

Sources said the Pakistani side raised all aspects considered essential for Pakistani troops to successfully carry out the peace operation in Somalia.

EC wants political settlement before X-mas Bosnian Muslims reject joint Serb-Croat offer to cede land

GENEVA, Dec 22: The Bosnian Muslim delegation at three-way talks here on carving up Bosnia rejected as "insufficient" Tuesday the territorial concessions offered by Bosnia's Serbs and Croats, a spokesman said, reports AFP.

"It is not something we can accept," he said. "We have got nothing of what we asked for in eastern and western Bosnia."

Neither had the Croats agreed to the Muslim demand for access to the Adriatic Sea at Neum, spokesman Mirza Hajric said, announcing "long discussions" to come.

Another reports says, The European Community wants an agreement to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina before Christmas. EC negotiator David

Owen said here Wednesday as he arrived for the latest round of Bosnia peace talks.

"We really want a political settlement before Christmas (three days away)," Owen said, adding that the latest territorial concessions by Serbians and Croats were "significant and important."

The Bosnian Muslim delegation at talks between Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Geneva on Tuesday rejected the concessions as "insufficient," Muslim spokesman Mirza Hajric said.

The talks shifted to Brussels Wednesday for a meeting between EC foreign ministers and the leaders of Serbia and Croatia as well as Bosnia's Muslim-led government and its sepa-

ratist Serb and Croat communities.

Owen said the Serb and Croat concession, which involved increasing the Bosnian Muslim territorial share of Bosnia from 30 to 33.33 per cent, or a full third, was "the minimum of the minimum" of Muslim demands.

"The main area of disagreement is access to the sea," he said. Hajric had confirmed this in Geneva, saying that "the Muslims had not been given the access to the Adriatic they had sought through the Croat-held port of Neum."

The Muslim spokesman added: "We didn't get anything of what we asked for in east and west Bosnia."

He predicted "long discussions to come." Owen said Wednesday that he and Thorvald Stoltenberg, his United Nations co-chairman of the peace talks, were ready to negotiate in Brussels through Wednesday and Thursday.

Meanwhile, the United Nations announced Tuesday it was immediately suspending its airlift into Sarajevo following an incident on Monday when a relief plane was hit by rifle fire from the ground.

Ron Redmond, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters the aid effort to the Bosnian capital would be resumed only when there were assurances there would be no more such incidents.



Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the leader of Russian ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), speaks to the media during his stop-over at Vienna's Schwechat airport Dec 21. Zhirinovskiy who is due to make a visit to Germany Dec 22, doubted the results of the 12 Dec legislative elections. — AFP photo

700 Myanmar nationals flee to Thailand

BANGKOK, Dec 22: More than 700 Myanmar citizens have fled fighting between minority and government forces in Myanmar into neighbouring Thailand, the governor of the northern Thai province of Chiang Mai said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The refugees, whom governor Virichai Naewboonien described as "men, women and children" will be provided with shelter and food until the week-long fighting ceases, he said.

"Then we will send them back," he said. He did not identify the minority group to which the people belonged, but Karen are the most populous ethnic minority along the Chiang Mai border, 553 kilometres (344 miles) northwest of Bangkok.

In a separate incident, about 50 Myanmar civilians had crossed into Thailand, emaciated and apparently starving, the governor said.

Ghali arrives in Seoul

SEOUL, Dec 22: United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali arrived here today from Tokyo on the first leg of a landmark trip to the two Koreas, amid fears that the north is developing a nuclear bomb, reports AFP.

Boutros-Ghali and a party of 12, including his wife Lea Maria, were welcomed at Seoul airport by Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo, whom he met for talks focussing on the nuclear issue shortly after arrival.

Later in the evening he was scheduled to address the Korean council of foreign relations and a private South Korean organisation supporting the UN.

Boutros-Ghali is scheduled to meet with President Kim Young-Sam on Wednesday before crossing into the north via the heavily-fortified border truce village of Panmunjom.

Five killed in New York house fire

ROCHESTER (New York), Dec 22: Nearly two hours after a deadly mattress fire was extinguished, a 3-day-old baby was pulled from a heap of debris where she was inadvertently buried by firefighters battling the blaze, reports AP.

The Tuesday morning fire, which sent gobs of smoke billowing through the one story house, killed three children and two adults, including the baby's mother, Glenda Watkins. But the infant, Brealynn Albritton, survived.

The baby suffered smoke inhalation and was hospitalised in guarded condition, meaning her vital signs were unstable. Watkins, 22, died at a hospital late Tuesday.

The fire apparently was started by a carelessly discarded cigarette or a child playing with matches or a lighter.

Off the Record

World's first X-mas card was sent 150 yrs ago
LONDON: It is 150 years since Henry Cole, a young British civil servant, sent the world's first Christmas card, beginning a national tradition which has mushroomed into a multi-million-pound (dollar) industry, reports AFP.

Cole asked one of his friends, an artist called John Calcott Horsley, to design a card and then had 1,000 copies printed. The card, a hand-coloured lithograph, showed a middle-class family celebrating Christmas, drinks in hand, and giving aims to the poor.

Cole sent out all he needed and gave the remainder to a Bond Street shop which put them on sale at one shilling and five pence each — quite a price in a day when a shilling could secure a good meal in a London restaurant.

Fifteen examples of the first card have survived to this day and are now on show at the Victoria and Albert museum in London.

Cole's idea rapidly caught on among those who previously had sent their Christmas wishes just by letter. Today, Britons send 1.55 billion cards a year — a market estimated to be worth 234 million pounds (350 million dollars). In Britain, Christmas cards are also status symbols and image-makers for public figures and prominent firms as well. The royal family's cards are the object of particular attention in this respect.

Up to last year, the prince and princess of Wales sent a joint card bearing both their signatures and a photograph of the family.

Jackson to answer allegations via satellite
LOS ANGELES: After ducking the media for four months, Michael Jackson decided to answer the child-molestation allegations in a live satellite hookup from his Neverland ranch, reports AP.

The pop star was scheduled to make a statement Wednesday, said his lawyer Johnnie Cochran Jr.

Authorities have been investigating sex abuse allegations against Jackson for four months. No charges have been filed, and Jackson has said through representatives that he is innocent. In addition, a 13-year-old boy is suing Jackson, claiming the entertainer molested him.

Jackson, 35, hasn't made any public appearances, since he returned to Southern California this month after cancelling his "Dangerous" concert tour and seeking treatment in Europe for what he said was an addiction to painkillers.

In a tape-recorded message announcing his decision to seek treatment, Jackson referred to the pain the "false allegations" caused him. But that was the only time he spoke out on the accusations, which surfaced in August.

Meanwhile, a source close to the case said attorney Bertram Fields and investigator Anthony Pellicano had been fired for mishandling Jackson's defence.

Gay wins libel lawsuit against TV company

MOSCOW: A court awarded a gay man 500,000 rubles (dhs 400) in a libel lawsuit against Russia's main state-run television company, saying it had denigrated "his dignity and honour", a newspaper reported Wednesday, reports AP.

Although Russian courts often handle libel cases, it was believed to be the first time a homosexual had sued a government agency and won. Until last May, homosexuality was a crime, and gays could face years in prison.

The court in Moscow's Dzerzhinsky district ordered Ostankino TV to pay the man identified as Vladimir T for airing a 1992 interview without his permission, Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported.

Vladimir T told the court he gave the interview to a Western television company, Pilot Productions on a gay-only beach in a Moscow suburb on condition it never be shown in Russia or any other former Soviet republic.

An Ostankino representative said the company did not know about the arrangement with the Australian-Anglo-Hungarian company. He said Ostankino would appeal the court decision, which also obliges it to pay 75,000 rubles (dhs 60) in legal fees.

Cambodian troops kill 25 Khmers, retake 9 villages

PHNOM PENH, Dec 22: Cambodian government forces have killed 25 Khmer Rouge guerrillas and recaptured nine northern villages lost to the insurgents in fighting last month, state-run radio said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

"The areas have been totally cleared of Khmer Rouge fighters enabling villagers to return to their homes," the radio report said.

Quoting Cambodia army headquarters, the report said 25 Khmer Rouge guerrillas were killed in last week's operation and 15 captured, while another 37 defected to the government.

The fighting was in the strife-torn provinces of Kompung Thom and Siem Reap in remote districts north of national route six, which connects the two strategic provincial capitals.

When U.N peacekeepers were deployed in Cambodia, the area was the scene of more ceasefire-violations than in any other part of the country as control of the villages seceded between the Phnom Penh army and the hardline, Maoist-inspired Khmer Rouge.

Following the signing of the 1991 Paris peace accords, a 22,000-strong U.N peacekeeping force was deployed to Cambodia and charged with supervising the running of the country until a new government could be formed.

The last of the peacekeepers left in Mid-November. The Khmer Rouge spurned the U.N-organised elections in May and have since continued to wage a low-level guerrilla war while demanding an advisory role in government.

Govt-Kurds clash leaves 4000 dead in Turkey

ANKARA, Dec 22: More than 4,000 people were killed in the conflict between the Turkish government and separatist Kurds in 1993, the bloodiest year since the revolt began in 1984, official figures showed on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The interior ministry figures showed that 4,180 people were killed in the violence in eastern and southeastern provinces between January 1 and December 17.

The toll included 1,944 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) fighters, 1,511 civilians and 725 members of the security forces, including state-paid village guards.

More than 10,500 people have been killed in Turkey since the PKK launched its guerrilla war.

BRIEFLY

Croats free 1575 Muslims: Bosnian Croats have unilaterally freed 1,575 Muslims out of 4,230 being held in camps in Rodoc and Gabcia in southern Bosnia-Herzegovina, the International Committee for the Red Cross said Tuesday, AFP reports from Zagreb.

The ICRC said the prisoners had been released in the past six days in line with ICRC criteria specifying that they should be transferred to the destinations of their choice.

Groatian authorities said last week that they had freed 2,718 Muslims on the orders of Bosnian Croat leader Mate Boban to close down the two camps.

Algeria intends to sign NPT: Algeria intends to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Foreign Minister Salah Dembri said on Tuesday, reports Reuter from Ain Oussera.

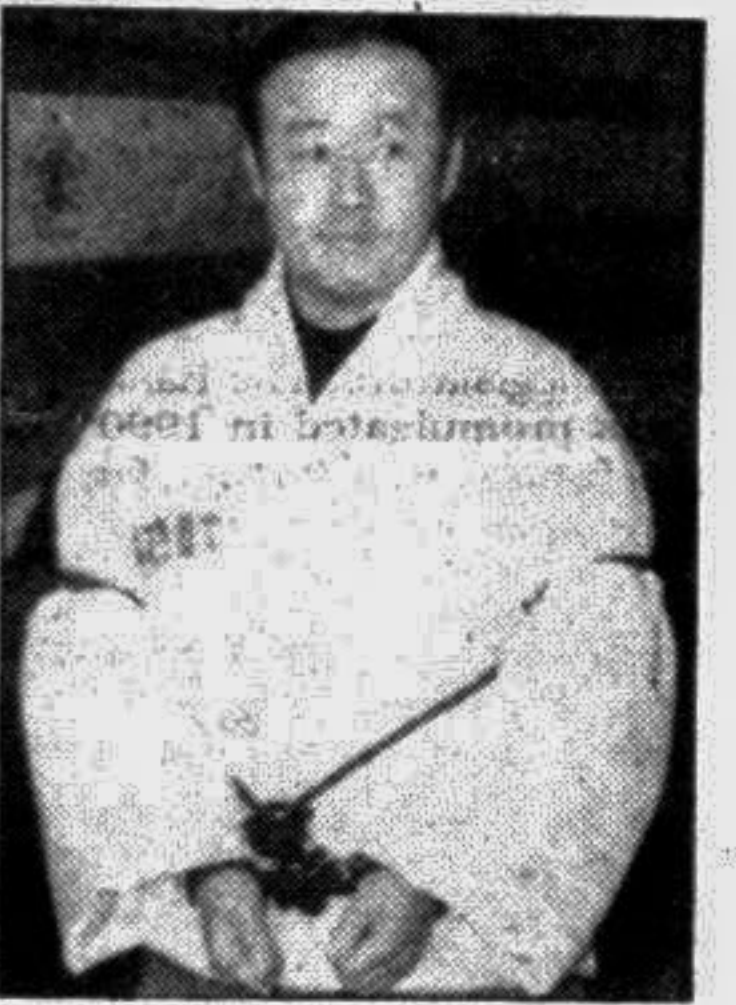
Dembri made the announcement while inaugurating Algeria's second nuclear reactor, which was built with Chinese assistance near Ain Oussera, about 145 KM (90 miles) south of Algiers.

"I formally announce today in the name of the country's high ruling authorities Algeria's intention to adhere to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," Dembri said.

"Algeria is against military uses of the atom."

Japanese reporter jailed in Seoul: A Seoul court Wednesday found a Japanese correspondent guilty of passing military secrets to Japanese officials and sentenced him to two years in prison, AP reports from Seoul.

The Seoul District Criminal Court said Masao Shinohara, the Seoul bureau chief of Japan's Fuji Television Network Inc, violated South Korea's military security law. Shinohara, 40, was accused of obtaining classified documents on South Korea's radar and army unit deployment from Koh Young-chul, a South Korean naval officer, and giving the documents to Japanese officials.



Palestinians kill 2 Israelis:

Palestinian gunmen yesterday shot and killed two Israeli civilians near the occupied West Bank village of Bytunia, Arab sources said, reports from Jerusalem.

The two died when Palestinians opened fire on their car which had Israeli license plates.

The latest deaths bring to 17 the number of Israelis killed by Palestinians since the PLO-Israeli autonomy accord was signed in Washington on September 13, and occurred as the two sides held talks in Paris to implement the deal.

Mudslides claim 6 in Brazil:

Mudslides buried two homes, killing a man and four children, early Tuesday after heavy rain in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte, police and rescue workers said, Reuter reports from Sao Paulo.

Four of the victims were from the same family. Stonemason Divino Do Carmo, 35, and his daughter Lilliane, six, and Laudilene, 11 months, were killed instantly when an earthen cliff behind their house collapsed on top of it. A son, Davison, 10, died on the way to a hospital, but Do Carmo's wife survived.

A second mudslide in the Primeiro De Maio district killed five-year-old Aline Matias Gomes.

24 more executed in China :

Twenty-four people were executed Tuesday in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou for murder, rape and robbery, it was reported yesterday, AFP says from Hong Kong.

Another 154 people were also sentenced to various jail terms for similar crimes at a public rally in the city, the Hong Kong China news service said.

The report said most of the 24 executed were "habitual criminals who posed threats to the lives and properties of residents," adding that their execution would "maintain social stability" in the coming new year and lunar new year holidays.

Support for Hosokawa falls

TOKYO, Dec 22: Support is falling and disapproval rising for Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa, who is seen as dragging his feet on steps to revive a flagging economy, a new opinion poll showed today, reports Reuter.

Backing for Hosokawa and his coalition cabinet declined to 60 per cent in December, down from a 70 per cent high when the government was first formed in August, said the nationwide survey by the Daily Asahi Shimbun.

Hosokawa's disapproval level almost doubled, rising to 21 per cent from 12 per cent over the same period, the daily said.

Hosokawa came to power pledging to pass reforms bills in the current session.

Zhirinovskiy calls for dissolution of NATO

VIENNA, Dec 22: Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the Russian ultra-nationalist whose party won the most votes in Russian elections last week, called Tuesday for the dissolution of NATO, reports AP.

Zhirinovskiy arrived in Vienna Tuesday evening on a brief private visit between stops in Germany, where he met with a right-wing extremist earlier in the day.

Ties between Zhirinovskiy, whose party triumphed in Russia's December 12 parliamentary elections, and German ultra-nationalists have raised fears of a dangerous pan-European extreme right.

At Vienna airport, Zhirinovskiy suggested to Austrian state TV that Russia could join

a broader European Community, but he called for the break up of the western alliance, NATO, and withdrawal of all foreign troops from Europe.

"We dissolved the Warsaw Pact, but NATO is still there," Zhirinovskiy said. The Warsaw Pact was the Soviet-dominated Communist bloc's military alliance that crumbled after the fall of communism.

He said he came to Austria to meet with Russian industrialists, saying that solving Russia's economic problems was his most important task. The Russian said he did not plan to meet any Austrian politicians.

Zhirinovskiy was to return to Germany on Wednesday for an interview with Stern TV in Cologne.



Kuniaki Shimada, 19, (C in goggles and traditional Australian life-savers cap) and some of his 220 colleagues from Tokyo's Nippon College of Physical Education await their turn to enter the water on Sydney's Manly beach Dec 21. The Japanese are on an exchange visit to learn life-saving skills, but they admit that pollution and overcrowding are dangers than surf on Japanese beaches. — AFP photo

Rabbani for ties with Russia

MOSCOW, Dec 22: Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani said today that Afghanistan "is always ready to cooperate" with Russia at a meeting in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, the Itar-Tass news agency said, reports AFP.

He said the changes in Moscow "allow an optimistic view of democratic Russia," and "Afghanistan plans in the future to maintain multiple ties" with Russia.

The Afghan president has been in the former Soviet central Asian state of Tajikistan since Sunday on an official visit to conclude a friendship and economic cooperation accord, as well as settle the question of Tajik refugees in Afghanistan.

Yeltsin dissolves Security Ministry, creates new unit

MOSCOW, Dec 22: President Boris Yeltsin abruptly dissolved the powerful Security Ministry on Tuesday, saying the successor to the KGB secret police had failed to warn him of dangerous political currents in Russia, reports AP.

Yeltsin's harshly worded decree establishing a new internal security agency was his first major move in response to the surprise victory of extreme nationalists in parliamentary elections December 12.

The action, combined with Yeltsin's expanded powers under Russia's new constitution, greatly strengthens his hand as he faces a potent political challenge when parliament convenes January 11.

In a move aimed at lawmakers, Yeltsin said the head of the new domestic intelligence agency will answer directly to

him rather than parliament. The decree also will allow Yeltsin for the first time to put his stamp on the agency through staff cuts. The old agency was filled with Soviet-era holdovers opposed to his policies.

Breaking a nine-day silence since the election, Yeltsin appeared angered by the defeat of reformers. The shakeup could be a sign more changes are in store.

But he did not attack the extremists directly. Visiting an architectural exhibit, Yeltsin declared the strong vote for ultra-nationalists a "protest against poverty" and sternly reminded city officials not to "forget the poor."

The president's supporters suffered a major setback Tuesday when the Communist Party said it would be willing to form

an alliance in parliament with the party led by extremist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Such an anti-Yeltsin coalition could dominate parliament.

Reformers had urged Communists and other factions to join them in opposing Zhirinovskiy.

The new security agency will be headed by Nikolai Golushko, who had been in charge of the Security Ministry. He was given two weeks to form the new Federal Service of counterintelligence.

Unlike intelligence agencies in most Western countries, which are supposed to keep out of politics, the Russian Security Ministry's responsibility included giving Yeltsin detailed analyses of Russia's political situation that would be useful to him politically and help him guide the reform process. The

ministry was accused of being caught off guard by bloody attacks by Yeltsin's hard-line foes in October and by Zhirinovskiy's spectacular rise in popularity.

"At the present time there is a lack of a strategic concept for the state security of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Security," Yeltsin's decree said. "Counterintelligence activity was weakened."

The exact changes to be made in the agency were not fully known, but the decree indicated that there were to be staff cuts and a completely new mission.

"The system of assuring the security of the Russian Federation is obsolete, ineffective, onerous for the state budget and has become a hindrance to carrying out economic and political reform," the decree said.

The agency had been in tur-

All employees of the agency will have to get new security clearances before they can be hired by the new organisation.

The KGB, which was virtually unrestricted during Soviet rule, carried out the Communist party's mass repression, spied on opponents at home and abroad and operated a vast network of labour camps.

After the failed coup by hard-liners in August 1991, the KGB was split into foreign and domestic units, its powers were reduced and many agents became demoralised.

The domestic arm, the Security Ministry, was responsible for internal security and counterintelligence. Yeltsin's government forbid it from spying on Russian political parties, a move some officers said hindered their work.

The agency had been in tur-