

Togo blames Ghana for bloody raid on army base

LOME, Togo Jan 7: The military government Friday blamed neighbouring Ghana for a bloody raid on a Togolese army base that left a reported 40 people dead, reports AP.

In a harshly worded statement, the Foreign Ministry called the raid a "flagrant act of aggression, a breach of all international rights."

Dozens of armed guerrillas on Wednesday raided the huge military base in Lome, the Togolese capital that lies virtually on the Ghanaian border, in an apparent attempt to destabilise the brutal dictatorship of Gen. Gnassingbe Eyadema.

Togo contended that the raid was launched by "armed mercenaries coming from Ghana" who wanted to kill Eyadema. It also said Togolese troops investigating the raid

were fired upon at the Ghanaian border early Friday.

The harsh but vague statement did not say whether Togo believed the guerrillas were Ghanians, or rebel Togolese operating from Ghana.

Eyadema is opposed by numerous groups in Togo who have launched raids from Ghana in the past.

In Accra, the Ghanaian capital, Foreign Minister Obed Awamoa denied that Ghana had anything to do with the raid and said there was no evidence that it originated in his country.

Eyadema, who has killed hundreds of his opponents during his 26 years in power, ordered the border with Ghana sealed on Thursday and imposed a round-the-clock curfew in Lome, the capital.

Algeria at the start of civil war: Mitterrand

PARIS, Jan 7: French President Francois Mitterrand said on Thursday that Algeria was at the start of a civil war and there were good grounds to fear the spread of Muslim fundamentalism, reports Reuters.

Answering questions at a new year reception for the press, Mitterrand said France should support those in North Africa who wanted to make their countries into modern, tolerant states.

"As for the present situation in Algeria," it can be described as the beginnings of a civil war.

"A foreign state should remain very cautious. Nevertheless, we have the right to be worried about the campaign in favour of fundamentalism."

Nigeria sacks 700 policemen

LAGOS, Jan 7: Nigeria has sacked or forcibly retired nearly 700 officers and men from its 160,000-strong police force, state radio said today, reports Reuters.

It said 160 policemen were dismissed for criminal acts and 509 compulsorily retired. Many others were retired on disability grounds.

Nigeria's military ruler General Sani Abacha has earmarked the police force for reform. The Customs Department, the judiciary and the state oil firm are also under government security.

he said, adding that true Islam was a tolerant and generous religion.

Mitterrand said France owed a historical debt to the Algerian people and would maintain its aid despite the unrest in its former North African territory, which won independence in 1962 after a bitter war.

French officials said Algeria appeared to be sliding into a spiral of violence in which neither the outlawed Fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) nor the army-backed government had the means to control the country completely.

At least 1,800 people have been killed in two years of violence since the authorities cancelled a general election in which the FIS had taken a commanding lead.

French officials said the real casualty figures, the number of attacks by armed Muslim groups and the scale of reprisals by security forces were all larger than the Algerian government and media had reported.

Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said earlier this week that the situation in Algeria was "a source of almost daily anguish" to the French authorities.

France has advised its nationals to evacuate their families from Algeria following the murder of three Frenchmen and the kidnapping of three French consular officials who were freed unharmed last year.

Most Muscovites don't believe promises of Zhirinovsky

MOSCOW, Jan 7: Most Muscovites don't believe the campaign promises of ultranationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky, but they aren't sure whether he's a fascist, according to a poll released Friday, reports AP.

Before Russia's December 12 parliamentary elections, Zhirinovsky promised that if his party won power, Russian men would get cheaper vodka, Russian women get better lingerie, and the whole nation would rise up and rebuild its empire.

Voters responded by casting ballots for Zhirinovsky's misleadingly named Liberal Democratic party than for any other party or coalition. But it was not clear whether they really believed Zhirinovsky, or

voted for him to protest the painful economic policies — and colourless campaigning — of President Boris Yeltsin's supporters.

The poll released Friday by the Mnenie (Opinion) research service lends support to the protest vote theory.

Two-thirds of the 1,223 Moscow residents questioned by telephone last week said they did not believe Zhirinovsky could fulfill his promises. Just 10 percent said they thought he could, and 23 percent weren't sure.

Most Moscow residents apparently don't think Zhirinovsky should hold real power. More than 71 percent said they would not want him to become prime minister. The poll had a statistical margin of

error of 3 percent.

Top Russian officials, including Economics Minister Yegor Gaidar, have labeled Zhirinovsky a "fascist" and compared him to Hitler and Mussolini.

Zhirinovsky's views come close to the standard definition of fascism: belligerent nationalism combined with racism, militarism and central government control over private enterprise.

But he denies that he is fascist, and the poll indicates that many Russians aren't sure.

Asked whether Zhirinovsky was a typical fascist, 25 percent said "yes," 38 percent said "no," and 37 percent said they didn't know.

He did not say exactly when the fighting took place. A government official said the authorities were trying to restore order in Macenta.

The Toma, mainly farmers, resent the Konianke traders and businessmen they say dominate the West African country's affairs.

Government officials say the trouble is not politically motivated. But analysts believe ill feeling came to head after last month's controversial presidential elections when incumbent Lansana Conte was declared outright winner amid opposition charges of vote-rigging.

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All had been convicted in military courts before the September 13 signing of the Israel-PLO autonomy accord. All were near the end of their sentences.

Israel frees 101 Palestinians

JERUSALEM, Jan 7: The Israeli army on Friday began releasing 101 Palestinian prisoners from the Gaza Strip and West Bank as part of a deal to resume peace negotiations with the PLO, reports AP.

The army said 47 prisoners were from the Gaza Strip and 54 were from the West Bank, and all of them were due to be released by the end of January.

"This is part of the deal," Education Minister Amnon Rubenstein said on Israel radio, noting that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had delayed the releases when there wasn't any movement in negotiations.

Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation announced Thursday that peace talks would resume next week. The talks, expected to resume

Sunday or Monday, were suspended for a week in a dispute over understandings reached in Cairo on key sticking points that are holding up implementation of Palestinian autonomy and an Israeli withdrawal.

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Kelley was Clinton's most fervent defender

HOT SPRINGS, Ark, Jan 7: The death of Bill Clinton's mother, Virginia Kelley, leaves the president without one of his most important role models, his most fervent defender and an unabashed promoter of his career, reports AP.

A working mother in a generation of housewives, Kelley raised two sons. She held the family together through the deaths of three husbands — including an abusive alcoholic — and a drug addiction that nearly killed Clinton's half-brother.

In a call from his stepfather sometime before 2:30 am Thursday, Clinton learned that his mother had died in her sleep in Hot Springs, Ark, of complications from breast cancer.

He flew home the same day, and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton planned to join him Friday. The funeral will be Saturday.

Kelley taught her oldest son how to deal with adversity, a lesson he has carried to the White House.

"Bill is so much like his mother," childhood friend Carolyn Staley said in 1992. "That tenacity and belief that right will prevail is really central to the core of who they are."

Clinton last saw his mother December 28, hugging her goodbye on the porch of her lakeside home before he headed to South Carolina.

"He's sad," said McLarty, who grew up with Clinton in Hope, Ark.



Files photo dated April 1992 showing Bill Clinton hugging his mother, Virginia Kelley in Little Rock, Arkansas. Virginia Kelley died early Jan 6 at her home in Hot Springs, Arkansas after battling cancer for some time.

— AFP photo

takes time, and we encounter problems that we didn't anticipate."

"It may take a month more a month less, it doesn't matter," he added.

Peres said the progress of the talks was determined by the Palestinians. "The timing is in the hands of the Palestinians. If they want to make it fast it's OK with us. If they want to go slow it is their business."

Arafat seeks more funds for Gaza, Jericho

TUNIS, Jan 7: PLO leader Yasser Arafat appealed to the international community late Thursday to pledge more funds to rebuilding the occupied territories, saying the money so far promised was not enough, reports AFP.

He told a conference of Palestinian engineers that the donations agreed so far for rebuilding the infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be "insufficient" to finance a variety of projects in such fields as water and electricity supplies, health, education, industry and agriculture.

He said here late Thursday that an agreement with the PLO on implementing the autonomy accord was unlikely within the next eight weeks, reports AFP.

But he told the independent television channel 4 in a live interview from Israel that he had no doubts that an agreement would be reached.

"I have not the slightest hesitation about our capacity and our determination. It may take weeks, it may take months. I wish it would take weeks, but how can I tell how long it will take if I don't know yet what sort of problems we will have to negotiate?" he said.

Earlier Thursday, Chief Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath said in Cairo that Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation would resume their autonomy talks on Sunday in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba.

Negotiations to try to implement the September 13 declaration on autonomy in the Gaza strip and Jericho broke down in the Egyptian capital a week ago amid wrangling over what had been decided.

Peres said, "We have still a long list of problems to be solved. We're doing something that is unprecedented. So it is."

He said his group was concerned particularly about two incidents: the execution-style killings of rebels in Ocosingo, and the deaths of about 17 people, whose bodies bore battered faces and bullet holes in the head.

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Meanwhile, the Chiapas legislature voted to move up the date for state elections by more than a year. A new governor and state legislature will be elected August 21, rather than in November 1995 as planned.

His comments, made during a two-day visit as part of a tour of the Gulf Arab monarchies, followed a call from the Amir of Qatar, Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani, to end the dispute among the Arab countries in favour of reconciliation.

— AFP photo

Kuwait rejects attempts to reconcile Arabs

DOHA, Jan 7: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed said Thursday his country rejected all attempts to reconcile Arab countries, divided since the 1991 Gulf War, as long as UN resolutions were ignored, reports AFP.

There will be no reconciliation, no Arab summit as long as the UN Security Council resolutions relating to the Gulf crisis are not fully applied," Sabah said in a press conference in Doha.

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— AFP photo

International

Hekmatyar responds to Pak call for temporary truce

ISLAMABAD, Jan 7: Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has responded "positively" to a Pakistani appeal for temporary ceasefire in Kabul from today, his party announced here, reports AFP.

Pakistan, in a "fervent appeal," Thursday, urged all Afghan warring factions in Kabul to agree to a 24-hour truce starting at 1100 GMT today so that all diplomatic and UN personnel living in Kabul and civilians wounded since the New Year's day coup attempt could be "Evacuated on an emergency basis."

"There is no problem from our side; we can stop fighting to enable UN personnel and foreign nationals to leave Kabul," Hekmatyar said in a radio message conveyed to the

foreign office from his Charasib base east of Kabul.

Meanwhile: Heavy rain and fog silenced rival artillery in the Afghan capital Friday after six days of a bloody power struggle in Kabul which has left scores dead and more than 3,000 wounded.

Extremely poor visibility due to the bad weather silenced the artillery had no rockets had been fired, witnesses said.

It was not clear whether international appeals for a ceasefire had also had an impact on the fighting which pitted forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani against those of former communist General Abdul Rashid Dostum.

The lull on this seventh day allowed residents to come out of their homes and inspect the damage inflicted around them

by the intensive shelling.

In the diplomatic enclave of Wazir Akbar Khan, which had come under severe artillery bombardment from Dostum's forces since New Year's day, many private houses suffered direct hits and most had all their windows shattered.

Some homes had been made uninhabitable, in others residents were scrambling to cover broken windows and gaping doorways with plastic sheeting and blankets in a desperate attempt to keep out the biting cold and rain.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said some 3,300 people had been wounded in the fighting which began Saturday.

The exact number of people killed was not known.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

Off the Record

Smoke from cremations fouls Bangkok air

BANGKOK: Bangkok officials accustomed to smog in the traffic-jammed capital have been hearing about a new source of air pollution — traditional Buddhist cremations, reports AP.

The Bangkok Post reported Thursday that high-rise apartment dwellers have complained that acrid smoke from cremations at urban temples is fouling their air.

Worawit Lebnak of the city's health department said temples should be urged to switch from traditional wood-burning crematoria to more efficient methods. Temples also should build higher chimneys, he said.

The chimneys of rural temples carry cremation smoke high above one-story village houses. But rapid development in crowded Bangkok has led to an increasing number of high-rise condominiums and office buildings.

Temples in predominantly Buddhist Thailand provide services similar to Western funeral homes, preparing bodies for cremation and maintaining facilities for funeral ceremonies.

Sri Krishna idol for Rao

GURUVAYOOR: A ten-inch high gold plated idol of Lord Sri Krishna playing the flute would be presented to the Prime Minister, PV Narasimha Rao on Sunday next when he offers worship at the famous Sri Krishna temple here, reports PTI.

Rao, who is visiting the temple for the first time after he became Prime Minister, would also be presented with an idol of Gajalakshmi carved from wood, besides a "Pavithra mothiram" (ring made of silver) on the occasion.

The Sri Krishna idol is a gift by the Guruvayoor Devaswom Board while the other two are from well-wishers, according to P T Mohanakrishnan, Devaswom Board Chairman.

Fake doctor gave physicals to patients for 5 yrs

BOSTON: A woman who posed as a doctor and gave physicals to hundreds of truckers and bus drivers was sentenced to up to seven years in prison, reports AP.

Susan Sutherland, 45, performed exams, collected urine samples, charged companies for substance abuse tests and certified drivers for almost five years.

In many cases, she didn't perform the tests at all, but she obtained more than \$5,000 dollar from companies and more money from drivers, prosecutors said.

"This defendant endangered the public safety and wreaked havoc for a municipality, bus companies and individual drivers," said Attorney General Scott Harshbarger.

Sutherland pleaded guilty November 23 to charges including larceny and unauthorised practice of medicine. She