

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 Awamoah 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 Reuter.

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 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,"

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.

Hekmatyar responds to Pak call for temporary truce

ISLAMABAD, Jan 7: Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has responded "positively" to a Pakistani appeal for a 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 Chara-slab base east of Kabul.



Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

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.

Most Muscovites don't believe promises of Zhirinovskiy

MOSCOW, Jan 7: Most Muscovites don't believe the campaign promises of ultranationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, 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, Zhirinovskiy 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 Zhirinovskiy's misleadingly named Liberal Democratic party than for any other party or coalition. But it was not clear whether they really believed Zhirinovskiy, 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 Zhirinovskiy 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 Zhirinovskiy should hold real power. More than 71 per cent said they would not want him to become prime minister. The poll had a statistical margin of

error of 3 per cent.

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

Zhirinovskiy'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 Zhirinovskiy was "a typical fascist, 25 per cent said 'yes,' 38 per cent said 'no,' and 37 per cent said they didn't know."

Tribal clash claims 30 in Guinea

CONAKRY, Jan 7: Police said on Thursday they believed at least 30 people had been killed and many wounded in tribal fighting in Southern Guinea, reports Reuter.

Trouble between Toma and Konlanke tribesmen in the Macenta region, near the border with Liberia, had been brewing for months, a senior police officer told Reuters.

"We received radio reports this morning (Thursday) informing us about ethnic clashes. At least 30 people may have been killed and very many wounded," he said.

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 Konlanke 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.

Most Toma back Conte while support for leading opposition candidate Alpha Conté was strong among the Konlanke.

Conté's victory was officially confirmed by Guinea's Supreme Court on Tuesday night.

Off the Record

Smoke from cremations fouls Bangkok air

BANGKOK: Bangkok officials accustomed to gripes about 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 would 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 mothir' (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 was sentenced on Thursday.

Lucky town

SPORT, Spain: A tiny Spanish town called luck lived up to its name on Wednesday when its people won nearly 66 million dollar in the state New Year lottery, reports Reuter.

It was the second bonanza within a month for small villages in Spain's end-year lotteries, the biggest in the world.

Just before Christmas, residents of Campello just north of Alicante on the Mediterranean coast danced in the streets after learning they had won at least 230 million dollars in the Christmas draw known as "el gordo" (the fat one).

That lottery was worth a staggering dollar 1.1 billion and it is new year offshoot, "el niño" (the son) paid out some 400 million dollar.

BRIEFLY

UN to send more troops to Bosnia:

The United Nations is to send an additional 2,800 peacekeepers to predominantly Muslim regions in Bosnia by the end of February, UN officials said Thursday. AFP reports from UN.

The troops are to begin leaving for Bosnia at the end of January or early February, according to the peacekeeping operations department.

The deployment of some 4,200 Pakistani and Bangladesh troops was still unsure because of equipment problems.

US, UK sign treaty to check crime:

The United States and Britain signed a treaty here Thursday aimed at making it easier to combat international crime from terrorism to drug trafficking, AFP reports from Washington.

The mutual legal assistance treaty will enable each side to ask the other to search for and seize the proceeds of serious crime, including drug trafficking, take witness statements, provide documents and records, and transfer prisoners temporarily to give evidence.

Storm kills 8 in Philippines:

Eight people were left dead, with another 10 missing and feared dead, after a storm sidwiped the already typhoon-wracked Philippine region of Bicol, press reports and relief agencies said here Friday. AFP reports from Manila.

Most of the casualties were either washed away by floods or buried under landslides, relief agencies said, adding that they were trying to confirm reports of others still buried beneath the mud.

Brunei's Sultan to visit Iran soon:

Sultan Sir Hassan Al Bolkhiah of Brunei, the world's richest man, plans to visit Iran soon, the Iranian news agency IRNA said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Moscow.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Alaeddin Boroujerdi told Brunei's Foreign Minister Prince Mohamed Bolkhiah in Brunei on Thursday that the Sultan's visit would be a big step in promoting relations between the two Muslim states, IRNA said.

Amnesty calls for protection of Children's rights

LONDON, Jan 17: Human rights group Amnesty International called today for greater protection of children's rights as "terrifying" violations continued four years after the United Nations drew up the convention of the rights of the child, reports AFP.

In a statement released today the London-based organisation said that even countries which had signed the convention were guilty of violating their children's rights.

A 16-year-old notice Nun Tenzin Dekyong from Tibet was arrested in March 1993 while demonstrating against Chinese rule and was reportedly beaten. Amnesty said. She is still in prison, considered by Amnesty as a prisoner of conscience.

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."

Friends said Kelley, 70, a retired nurse who was a regular at the horse races, also provided grounding for her ambitious son. She was a middle-class woman who never let him forget his roots.

When Clinton's presidential campaign was buffeted by allegations of extramarital affairs and draft-dodging, the cheerful, colourful Kelley helped voters see the candidate as more than a political go-getter.

Always close, young Clinton and his mother used to chat in their kitchen in Hot Springs, Ark after she got off work — not just about school and sports, but about civil rights, the nuclear threat and Russia. Friends say those sessions — not just the now-famous handshake from President Kennedy — sparked Clinton's interest in public service.

They had a remarkable way of engaging each other in conversations. Chief of Staff Mack McLarty said, "She inspired all of us."

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 said," 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. Virginia Kelley died early Jan 6 at her home in Hot Springs, Arkansas after battling cancer for some time.

Mexican army launches fresh offensive against rebels

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS (Mexico), Jan 7: The military fired rockets into the mountains and set up mortars in a city square in a new offensive against Indian rebels in southern Mexico, reports AP.

The Indians surprised the government with their New Year's Day rebellion in Chiapas, a poor, predominantly Mayan region. The rebels said they were fighting for socialism and to improve the lot of Indians who lack food, education, housing and potable water.

The revolt also has surprised ordinary Mexicans, unaccustomed to guerrillas at home, and rattled other Central American countries, many of which are just emerging from years of civil wars.

President Carlos Salinas de

Gortari, speaking in a nationally broadcast address Thursday, defended the army's actions, while also taking steps to build support for the government in the poverty-stricken region.

The government flew in 20 tons of rice, beans, powdered milk and other foods Thursday to Chiapas, and promised to beef up programmes for building roads, schools, and hospitals.

The presidents of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua planned to meet in Mexico City today to discuss the crisis and show their solidarity with Salinas.

Salinas also has sent his top human rights official to the battle zones to investigate pos-

sible army abuses.

Thursday night, four military planes fired rockets near the community of Cerro Huitpec, three miles southwest of San Cristobal de las Casas, a city of 80,000 that has been occupied by the army since the peasants started their attacks against the government.

Rocket attacks also were launched in Tenejapa, 16 miles from San Cristobal de las Casas. There were no reports of casualties. The rockets apparently were aimed at a mountain a television transmission tower on its peak.

The rebels, from the previously unknown Zapatista National Liberation Army, were still active in some remote areas of Chiapas. Interior Ministry

spokesman Eloy Cantu Segovia said. The state is a lush mountainous region bordering Guatemala and the Pacific.

The military said 105 people had been killed since the uprising began.

The village of Chanal also was reported Thursday to be in rebel hands by seven villagers who fled on foot over the mountains Wednesday.

After the raids Thursday, heavily armed troops filled four plazas in San Cristobal's main square with mortars and sandbags. Earlier, soldiers sealed off highways.

Salinas denied the fighting was an Indian uprising, blaming it on outsiders, including foreigners.

The president also reiterated an offer to negotiate,

adding he was willing to consider pardoning some rebels, who can show they were pressured into joining the uprising, and defended the army's actions.

"The army and security forces are fulfilling their constitutional responsibility," he said in his TV and radio address.

But some worried that human rights abuses could occur without more access to the region by outside observers.

San Cristobal, 450 miles south of Mexico City, and Tuxtla Gutierrez, the state capital, were the only places in the region accessible to reporters and independent human rights observers.

"If security reasons make it necessary to seal off areas, it

Accord with PLO may take months: Peres

LONDON, Jan 7: Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres 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

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.

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 Iraq, 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 told the press in the Qatar capital.

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 disunity among the Arab countries in favour of reconciliation.