

Czech Rep welcomes US peace initiative

PRAGUE, Jan 12: Czech President Vaclav Havel on Tuesday welcomed the US partnership for peace initiative on increased western military cooperation with former Soviet satellites, after meeting US President Bill Clinton here, reports AFP.

Meanwhile Clinton himself stressed that the security of the Czech republic and other eastern European countries is vital for the interests of the United States.

"The partnership for peace is the beginning of a general security relationship which can lead to membership in NATO," Clinton said.

"I reaffirm that the security of this republic and of all the nations of central and eastern Europe is important for the security of the United States, and Europe and NATO," the president said.

Havel described the initiative as "good and fair," saying that the Czech republic was

ready to fulfil its terms. He was speaking after a meeting with Clinton in Prague's historic castle, the president's official residence.

Havel added that the partnership was "an open-door for all with each choosing their own speed to go through it."

Asked about the threat of nationalism from Russia, Havel said the development of the situation there was "complex, dramatic and saddening."

"But we believe that democracy and market economies will be victorious even in Russia despite all the difficulties," he said.

Clinton said it was possible that some countries may be able to enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation earlier than others after joining the partnership for peace initiative agreed at the NATO summit in Brussels.

The US president is to meet Kravchuk at Kiev airport briefly on Wednesday.



US President Bill Clinton clinches his fist as he is flanked by Czech President Vaclav Havel (C) and Mrs Fucukova in charge of the Charles Bridge as he paid a visit to Prague's historic district Jan 11 at the start of his two-day visit in Czech Republic. — AFP photo

CPI calls for stronger left unity

CALCUTTA, Jan 12: The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) yesterday called for closer co-operation with the CPI and the CPM to strengthen left unity in the Hindi belt in general and Bihar in particular, the party General Secretary, Vinod Mishra, here said, reports PTI.

Briefing newsmen at the end of the 4-day meeting of the CPI-ML central committee which concluded on Monday, Mishra said that this was necessary in view of the fact that the Janata Dal was in crisis everywhere and the SP-BSP government, headed by Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP, was dependent on the Congress-I support.

CPI-ML would however intensify the people's struggle against the anti-people policies of the left front government in West Bengal, he said.

CPI-ML shall prepare to contest elections under its own banner, he said.

Kashmiris gun down nine Indian troops

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: Muslim guerrillas gunned down nine Indian army soldiers in a weekend attack on a military base in Kashmir, press reports said today, reports AFP.

It was the first attack of its kind in the four-year-old Muslim insurgency raging in the strife-torn valley.

An unspecified number of armed militants entered the air force complex at Awantipora in South Kashmir late Sunday and opened fire on guards of the defence services corps, the Hindustan Times said, quoting delayed reports.

Nine soldiers were killed, the daily said, adding that the gunmen escaped with a light machine gun and other weapons.

Military authorities were investigating how the militants had gained entry into the sensitive complex, the Times added in a dispatch from Jammu, the Kashmiri winter capital.

ing for an end to Indian rule over Muslim-majority Kashmir in a violent campaign which has claimed more than 8,000 lives.

Militants frequently attack army pickets in the valley but it was the first time they had struck inside a military complex.

Newspapers reported meanwhile that three Indian soldiers and nine Pakistani troops had been wounded in a fierce gun battle in Kashmir.

The firing began Monday in the Nowshera area of the disputed state and continued all day Tuesday, they said.

Indian and Pakistani troops frequently exchange fire across the line of control which separates the forces in Kashmir, claimed by both countries.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over the Himalayan territory and New Delhi accuses Islamabad of providing arms and training to Muslim separatists.

Ghali warns UN may reduce its presence in Somalia

ABU DHABI, Jan 12: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has warned that the United Nations might have to drastically scale down its presence in Somalia if new troops and finances were not made available, reports Reuters.

Boutros-Ghali was speaking in an interview at his New York home with the United Arab Emirates newspaper Al-Itihad.

"If new forces are not sent and if the United Nations does not have the needed finances we might have to reduce our presence to a minimum level in Somalia," he said.

India developing pilotless craft

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: India is developing a pilotless aircraft as an aerial target system to impart training for surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles, reports Xinhua.

The pilotless target aircraft 'Lakshya', which is developed by India's Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE) and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), will be inducted into service in 12 to 18 months, according to Indian defence sources.

Boutros-Ghali said on Monday that he had asked some 40 countries to provide peacekeepers to Somalia to replace withdrawing US and European troops and vowed to do his best to ensure a continued UN presence.

He recommended last week that 16,000 to 20,000 soldiers — more than 10,000 less than in 1993 — stay in Somalia after Americans and Europeans leave by March 31.

About 9,100 troops, logistics and communications experts from the United States, Belgium, France, Sweden, Italy, Turkey, Germany and Norway have pulled out or will do so shortly.

The Security Council must undertake its first serious review of the new Somalia operation this week.

The UN Secretary General also told Al-Itihad that Angola's Foreign Minister Venancio de Moura asked him at a meeting in New York to send 10,000 peacekeepers to Angola where fighting has intensified and peace talks with UNITA rebels in Zambia made no progress.

"I told him, we are ready, but after agreement is reached, I told him agree among yourselves first before you ask for peacekeepers."

APP interviews Benazir Pindi to help solve int'l crises

KARACHI, Jan 12: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said here Monday she will go to Bosnia to protest the killings there and that Pakistan wants to hold its foreign policy to help solve international crises, reports APP.

In an interview with the Associated Press, Benazir also said, she wanted to be helpful in keeping Pakistani forces in Somalia, despite discontent at home over the deaths of more than 30 Pakistani soldiers, the most suffered by any nation there.

But, she said, Pakistan needed assurances about the safety of its 5,000 soldiers, who are likely to become the backbone of the UN military effort after the withdrawal of US troops March 31.

She also said Pakistan deserved reciprocity for its commitment to helping in distant trouble spots, although it wasn't a precondition for renewing Pakistan's troops commitment.

In particular, she said, the United States should improve its relations with Pakistan and the world should back a

plebiscite in the held Jammu and Kashmir.

Most of the territory has remained occupied by India since the subcontinent received independence from Britain in 1947. But many Pakistanis believe the Muslim territory should belong to them. Pakistan is demanding India comply with a 1949 UN demand and hold a vote on the territory's future.

In an hour-long talk at her home in Karachi, Benazir sketched a vision of Muslim Pakistan using diplomacy and offering peacekeeping troops to become a vital part of the post-cold war world—a world based on common values of good governments, of human rights, of anti-narcotics, of anti-terrorism, and resolution of conflicts under the United Nations.

Such a rule would be a relief to Pakistanis who have expressed worry about precisely the opposite: the exile of Pakistan to a remote part of the world's agenda. Pakistan's location next to the former Soviet Union, China, India and

Afghanistan is now less strategically important, and Pakistan's role is over in helping armed anti-Soviet fighters in Afghanistan.

Since the cold war ended, the United States has imposed military sanctions against Pakistan over its nuclear programme. Pakistan says it has stopped short of building a nuclear bomb but argues that it needs the programme to guard against India, which is also considered capable of making atomic weapons.

Benazir said, she and Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller would travel to Bosnia in the first week of February to protest the war and to call for an end to the UN arms embargo against Bosnia.

Asked whether Pakistan was lining up with the Muslim-led Bosnian government against their Serb and Croat adversaries, she replied as mothers are concerned at the killings.

She said details of her trip had not been finalised, in another hint that the west should look to countries like Pakistan for help in world crises.

Benazir said President Clinton's efforts to help stop the Bosnian war didn't get the support that was necessary from Europe, and well, if that's not forthcoming from Europe, then perhaps the United States, too, should see where else that support can come from.

On Somalia, Benazir said Pakistan has committed no troops there beyond March 21. But, she said, Pakistan would like to continue to provide forces if there is logistical backup in case the troops get into trouble and if UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali provides a satisfactory report January 15 on the peacekeeping efforts.

She also made clear that Somalia was one instance in which Pakistan's aid to the United Nations could pay off for Pakistan's own interests.

We are being helpful in the world body and we are doing that to show our adherence to the United Nations resolutions and we would also like some reciprocity on that, on Jammu and Kashmir.



South African President Frederik de Klerk (L) and ANC President Nelson Mandela shake hands Jan 11 at the Union Building in Pretoria, after a four-hour meeting on how to deal with the violence sweeping across the country. In their first public appearance at home since Aug. 90, the two leaders told reporters that they had made major progress. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

French PM to visit China: French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur will make an official visit to China in the near future, according to a Sino-French joint communiqué issued in Beijing yesterday, reports AFP.

The communiqué carried by the Xinhua news agency did not set a date for the visit, but according to reliable sources in Beijing, Balladur will arrive on January 27, the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France.

Bush due in China today: Former US President George Bush will arrive on Thursday for a five-day visit at the invitation of Chinese government, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said yesterday, reports from Beijing.

But the ministry spokesman did not say whether Bush would visit other Chinese cities.

Bush will then pay a private visit to Thailand.

Mara appointed Fiji's president: Former Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was appointed Fiji's president Wednesday following the death from illness last month of the south Pacific island nation's first president, Reuters reports from Fiji.

Appointed by Fiji's great council of chiefs, Mara succeeds Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, 75, who died in a US hospital while undergoing treatment for leukaemia.

Mara, one of Fiji's deputy presidents, had been acting president during Ganilau's illness and after his death.

Kidnapped Briton freed: British Aid Consultant Calum Gardner, kidnapped in Mogadishu Monday, was freed unharmed early yesterday, correspondents said, reports from Mogadishu.

Mobile radio contacts between Gardner, his abductors and his employer, the World Food Programme, indicated that the 35-year-old financial consultant had arrived at WFP headquarters around 3.45 AM (0045 GMT).

Mubarak to meet Assad soon: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak will meet his Syrian counterpart Hafez Al-Assad shortly after the Syrian-US summit meeting due to be held in Geneva on Sunday, the Al-Ahram Daily reported here in its Wednesday edition, reports from Cairo.

Quoting a Syrian official, the newspaper said Mubarak and Assad would hold talks "in the next few days," but did not give the exact date or location of their meeting.

They would discuss "the development of the peace process and the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Arab countries on all tracks."

Kuwait cancels royal decree that protects ministers

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 12: The Kuwaiti parliament on Tuesday revoked a royal decree that prevented Kuwaiti ministers accused of criminal offences from being tried in the same way as ordinary citizens, reports AFP.

Speaker Ahmad Al-Saadun told a full session on parliament that the decree, issued in 1990 by the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, "protected ministers instead of allowing them to be prosecuted."

Asia needs to check increasing military expenditure for peace

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 12: Asia, presently the biggest defence market, needs to check its ballooning military expenditure amid the threat of an arms race within the region, according to an experts report today, says AFP.

The report, compiled by 17 Asian experts in wide ranging fields, says "the impetus to wards arms control and limitations in Asia must start in Asia even though the issue was a global concern."

The experts from the Commission for a New Asia, set up a year ago as a regional effort to articulate a vision for Asia over the next generation,

said achieving cooperative peace and security was the main challenge facing the region.

"Obviously the Asian military capability must be brought down in consistent with cooperative security," Jasjit Singh, director of India's Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, said at a media conference in conjunction with the release of the report.

The 49-page report noted that the greatest concentration of arms in Asia was on the Korean peninsula but said the declared intention of the two Koreas for the demilitarisation of the peninsula was an encouraging development.

However, Singh told AFP that qualitatively, China's military capability was "increasing tremendously" and the most populous country had not emerged as the biggest military power in Asia.

"How China behaves in future will depend on how we interact with it today," Singh said, adding that Asian nations should "bind China in a cooperative security framework" to check its military growth.

He said India's recent arms control agreement with China was a landmark pact for Asia and an example of how two big military powers could work

together for common interest. To reduce tensions in the region, the report suggested the setting up of a United Nations arms register and more exchanges among security and defence officials and joint surveillance and maritime patrols in Asia.

It also proposed that the concept of a zone of peace, freedom and cooperation adopted by the six-member Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) be extended to the other neighbouring countries.

Non-Communist ASEAN comprises Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

"Vietnam already accepts this concept. I believe the Laotian and Cambodian sides are also acceptable to this. The question now is getting people on the ground to decide," said former Vietnamese deputy prime minister Nguyen Co Thach, among those who drafted the report.

The report noted that concerns over human rights, democracy, sustainable economic growth and competitiveness, and social justice were among the other challenges facing the region.

On political reforms, the report said they should proceed in parallel with the process of

Off the Record

150 wild monkeys take over public park

GUIYANG: More than 150 wild monkeys have taken over a public park in southwest China's Quizhou province, reports Xinhua.

The park is situated in the suburbs of this provincial capital. Every morning when zoo workers bring them food the monkeys rush peacefully to greet them.

Visitors, especially children, like to feed them in turn, the monkeys put on a show for the audience by swinging on tree branches, diving into ponds and shaking hands with visitors.

According to Lei Yuanlin, who is responsible for this successful tourism project, the monkeys were coaxed down from the nearby forested mountains six years ago.

Lei said that during the years she stayed in the mountains she developed a close friendship with the monkeys.

She said that the monkeys used to visit her in the evening by crawling through her window to watch TV. They liked football matches best, she said.

She said the current colony of monkeys had grown from four laboratory monkeys who escaped from the provincial epidemic prevention station in 1960 and a couple who eloped from the local zoo when a cage was damaged in 1975.

Because a white child may feel isolated

LONDON: A British hospital has refused a request from an Indian couple for the wife to be implanted with a white woman's eggs, a doctor said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Explaining the decision, top embryologist Simon Fishel said, "We felt being brought up by an Indian community with Indian parents would make a white child feel very isolated and different."

"I am all for mixing and matching as I believe colour is only skin deep," he told reporters. But we decided against going ahead in this case because we felt that in the long run the welfare of the child would possibly be affected."

The request was made at the nurture clinic in the central English city of Nottingham when no Indian donor eggs were available.

Rapid medical advances in the treatment of infertile women have sparked a major ethical debate in Britain.

Politicians, churchmen and doctors have expressed concern about the ethics of so-called "womb robbing" after a 59-year-old British woman gave birth to twins on Christmas day following implantation with a British egg.

Scottish researchers revealed they were close to culling eggs from aborted female foetuses but voluntarily stopped the research after the government expressed concern.

Turkish troops kill 25 Kurdish guerillas

ANKARA, Jan 12: About 25 guerrillas of the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) were killed yesterday in operations carried out by Turkish troops on mount Kato near the town of Hakkarli in Beytushap, reports Xinhua.

One soldier was killed and two others were wounded in the fighting, which broke out when the PKK militants planned to raid a Gendarme station in the village of Gecitli.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in the 10-year old Kurdish anti-government campaign.