US seeks clarification of Russian policy

WASHINGTON, Jan 19: The State Department was seeking clarification Tuesday of a reported statement by Russia's top diplomat that a continued Russian military presence is needed in the Baltics and other former Soviet republics, reports AP.

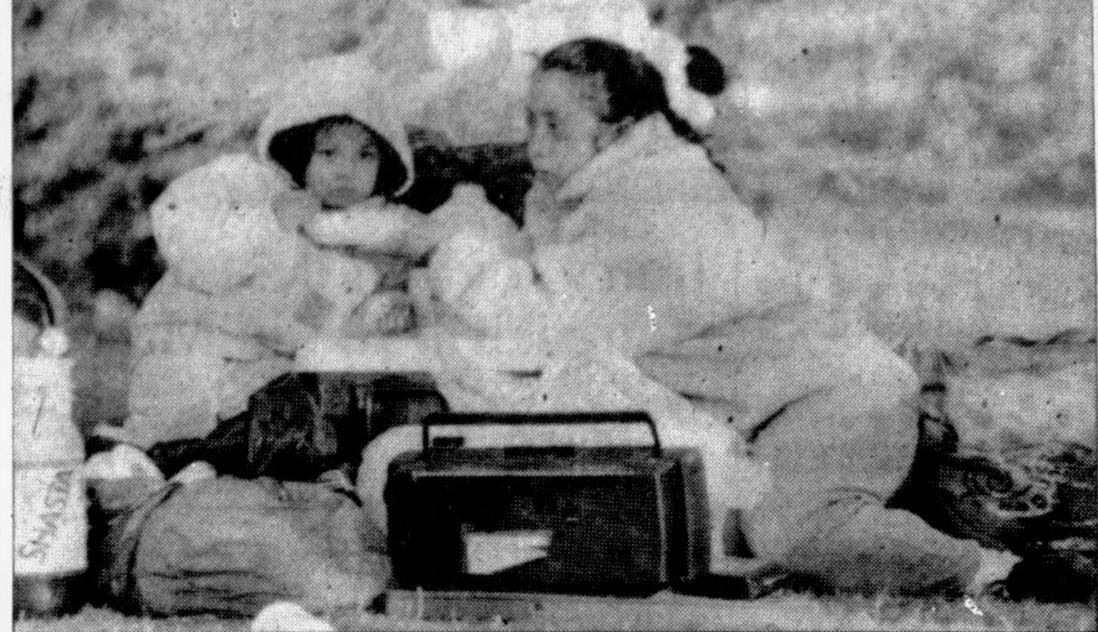
The reported comments by Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev were "certainly at odds" with what U.S officials were told during last week's summit meeting in Moscow, department spokesman Mike McCurry said.

Kozyrev is said to have told Russian ambassadors to the ex-Soviet republics that these areas "have been in the sphere of Russian interests for centuries" and that a Russian military presence is needed to prevent a "security vacuum."

McCurry said the U.S Embassy in Moscow is seeking a full transcript of Kozyrev's remarks. After they were reported by the Itar-Tass news agency, a spokesman for Kozyrev said they were misconstrued.

"We have have told the Russian government repeatedly that we expect prompt withdrawal of all Russian troops from Estonia and Latvia," McCurry said, limiting his comments to the two Baltic states where Russian troops remain.

"We don't accept any view that suggests Russia should assert or exercise a special role or prerogative ... inconsistent with the U.N charter, the principles of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and general principles, of international law.



Juadulupe Flores and her four-year-old daughter Yijan (L) share breakfast on January 18 after having camped in Dearborn Park, California overnight. Thousands of people slept outside fearing powerful aftershocks following the January 17 earthquake. Officials estimate — AFP photo that damage from the earthquake will reach seven million dollars.

Afghan war casualty toll

rises to 8000

President Burhanuddin

civilians crossed the Kabul

river frontline dividing the

new and old Microrayan hous-

ing estates in which pro-

Rabbani troops and rival Uzbek

forces of ex-communist gen-

eral Abdul Rashid Dostum are

fire and the people are acting

on their own initiative," said

Commander Kasim Khan of the

they want to cross the bridge

but the problem is the Uzbek

militia will not allow them to

children crossing both ways

across the bridge, but some

young men said it would be

more difficult for them to do

Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi

Trial opens in strict secrecy

Eelam (LTTE), which is fight-

ing for a separate state in

north and east Shri Lanka. The

Tiger leaders are being tried

Tigers plotted and organised

Gandhi's assassination by a

woman suicide bomber as he

The Tigers deny any in-

volvement in the murder of

Gandhi, who was blown apart

by a young Shri Lankan Tamil

who triggered plastic explo-

sives strapped around her

waist as she bowed to greet

Gandhi's assassination, 29 are

Shri Lankan Tamils. The rest

are from Tamil Nadu, home to

50 million Indian Tamils.

where there was considerable

sympathy for the separatist

struggle of their ethnic

Of the 41 people on trial for

him on arrival at the rally.

arrived at an election cam-

paign rally on May 21, 1991.

The prosecution alleges the

Locals reported women and

"There is no official cease-

"We have no objection if

respectively dug-in.

state security forces.

return," Kasim said.

so themselves.

in absentia.

For three hours early today,

Rabbani, look premature.

KABUL, Jan 19: With no

ceasefire in sight, the casualty

toll in factional fighting in

Kabul has topped 8,000, ac-

cording to figures released by

the International Committee of

the Red Cross (ICRC) today.

The figures showed that for

the first 17 days of the 19-day

conflict, 8,251 casualties had

been treated in Red Cross-

supported hospitals, with a

conservative estimate of 610

as much as 30 per cent of out-

patients treated — about 1,900

of the total — could be victims

injured in clashes prior to the

Civilian expectations of a

MADRAS. Jan 19: The

long-delayed trial of 41 people

accused of plotting the assas-

sination of former Indian

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi

opened today in strict secrecy,

all press from the trial, which

is being held in Madras, capital

of the southern state of Tamil

Nadu and not far from where

trial inside the Poonamalee

High Security Prison in Madras

said Siddickk had ordered

national news agencies Press

Trust of India and United

News of India, the only organ-

isation allowed to send re-

porters to preliminary hear-

All the defendants are

Tamils and include leaders of

the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Siddickk barred even the

them not to talk to the media

Lawyers taking part in the

Judge S M Siddickk barred

reports Reuter.

Gandhi was killed.

ings, they said.

new year fighting, returning

ceasefire, due to a temporary

full in clashes between factions

fighting for and against

for additional treatment.

But ICRC officials said that

reports AFP.

LA quake 'wrath of God' for Gulf War?

BAGHDAD, Jan 19: The destructive Los Angeles earthquake was the "wrath of God" against the United States for the Gulf War launched exactly three years ago, Iraq said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The quake which struck Monday, killing 30 people and injuring more than 1,100 was "the wrath of God and the curse of the Iraqis," said Babel newspaper run by the president's son, Uday Hussein.

A television channel also owned by the eldest son of President Saddam Hussein, said it was God's fury at America," for the Gulf War, launched on January 17, 1991. Several viewers telephoned

the station to say the same thing, noting the quake struck on the anniversary, it reported.

Iraq was driven out of Kuwait in February 1991 by a coalition of 30 countries.

1.2 lakh HIV positive cases in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 19: An American doctor today claimed that there are about 120,000 known HIV positive cases in Pakistan, reports Xinhua

"I have been trying to cross

the river for a week now to

visit my brother. But I'm afraid

that if I do pass the Uzbeks

won't allow me back," said

Kasim said the pro-Rabbani

troops had not yet decided to

attack Dostum's base in old

Microrayan, but claimed they

had recently secured the Kabul

sports stadium, which is 90-

cated close to old Microrayan.

orders to advance," Kasim said.

'cially the frontline Wazir Akbar

was no morning artillery bom-

hostilities coincided with con-

tinued falling snow, but this

has not restricted inhabitants

of the new Microrayan from

The Tigers, armed and

trained in their early years by

New Delhi, long used Tamil

Nadu as a training base and

rest area until an Indian

crackdown following Gandhi's

on trial in absentia are secre-

tive leader Velupillai

Prabhakaran and his intelli-

the assassination, the one-eyed

Srinivasan, whom the prosecu-

tion alleges was a Tiger intelli-

gence agent, committed sui-

cide when his hideout was sur-

rounded by police a few weeks

ple will be produced in the

special courtroom inside the

prison, was delayed by legal

wranglings and the refusal of

some of the accused to attend

The trial, in which 26 peo-

after the assassination.

preliminary hearings.

The alleged mastermined of

gence chief Pottu Amman.

Among the Tiger separatists

murder.

fleeing their homes.

bardment and no jet activity.

Khan diplomatic enclave, there

Today's temporary lull in

"We are now awaiting

For the rest of Kabul, espe-

Replying to a question,

Abdul Hai, an engineer.

Speaking at a seminar entitled epidemiology of AIDS and Hepatitis in Pakistan organised by Karachi University today in Karachi, capital of Sind province, Doctor Ali Imran, President of International AIDS Foundation of the US, said the precise number will be even more.

He said the Pakistan government should declare HIV status compulsory at the air-

Of 100,000 HIV tests carried out so far in Pakistan, about 800 people were detected HIV positive, he said.

He estimated that there will be over 10,000 HIV positive cases in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province alone.

US for tougher sanctions against Haiti WASHINGTON, Jan 19: The

United States will urge countries pressing for a settlement to Haiti's political crisis to push for tighter sanctions to drive the army from power, a State Department spokesman said Tuesday, reports AFP.

"We have indicated and will certainly now be moving ahead with tougher sanctions.., in connection with the other socalled friends of Haiti -Venezuela, Canada and France," said State Department spokesman Michael Mccurry.

The group is trying to wring a diplomatic settlement from Haiti's military rulers, who ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in a September 1991 coup.

The four countries had given the army until January 15 to take steps to allow for Aristide's return.

Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected President, was supposed to be reinstated in October

Arafat may meet King Fahd

AMMAN, Jan 19: PLO chief Yasser Arafat is likely to make a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia and meet King Fahd this week - his first visit since the Gulf crisis ruptured ties, a senior PLO official said, reports

"Chairman Arafat will hopefully visit Saudi Arabia this week after receiving an officials written acceptance on Monday to his request to perform the Umra (minor haj) and meet King Fahd," a senior PLO official, who asked not to be named, told Reuters on Tuesday.

The visit will be the first by the Palestine Liberation Organisation chief to any Gulf state since PLO sympathy with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait caused a rift with his former allies.

Off the Record

To protect his back

LONDON: Britain's Prince Charles is to give up competitive polo to project his back, which he injured playing the game last year, his spokesman said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The announcement came a day after Buckingham Palace said his mother, Queen Elizabeth, had fractured her wrist in a weekend fall from her horse on her country es-

A spokesman at Charles' London residence, St James palace, said the prince would cut his regular 20 to 30 matches a season to play just a few exhibition and charity matches of polo, a popular sport among aristocrats.

"He will play considerably less polo this year. He is simply not prepared to take the risk of his back letting him and

everyone else down, the spokesman said. The 45-year-old prince severely strained his back last year while playing polo, his favourite game. In 1990, the prince broke his arm while playing polo, which is similar to hockey but played on horseback with a long-handled mallet.

Last season he dropped down a division from the high-goal polo league to one which had a slower and less demanding pace. Charles, with a hectic round of public engagements coming up to mark his 25 years as Prince of Wales, is said to be anxious not to have to cancel engagements through injury.

Corpse of sixth century BC unearthed intact

NICOSIA: The upper part of body of a man who lived 2,600 years ago has been unearthed intact at a salt quarry in the Zanjan province of northwest Iran, the Iranian news agency IRNA reported Tuesday, reports AP.

The corpse, found at Chehrabad village, 35 kilometers (22 miles) west of Zanjan city, had been preserved by thick layers of salt, according to the news agency report monitored in Cyprus.

Even the eyebrows, moustache and beard were intact, and a gold earring still adorned the body's left year, according to IRNA. The man apparently died in a partial collapse of the quarry workings and evidence indicated he lived 26 centuries ago,

organisation, told IRNA. The IRNA report did not specify the evidence indicating the age of the corpse, nor did it say when it was found.

Houshang Sobuti, a senior expert with Iran's cultural heritage

Also unearthed were fragmented parts of pottery used in 6th or 7th century BC, according to the report.

Special court to try bandit queen Phoolan NEW DELHI: A special court to try cases of armed dacoity

and murder against bandit queen Phoolan Devi is likely to be set up by the Supreme Court soon, reports PTI.

This was indicated by a three judge bench, comprising Justice S R Pandian, Justice J S Verma and Justice P B Sawant, during the hearing of a petition by the bandit queen seeking quashing of all criminal cases against her on the ground of inordinate delay in trial.

The trial of Phoolan Devi in several cases has not proceeded for the past eleven years and she has been languishing in high security jails since her surrender.

The court adjourned hearing on the petition till Friday when a formal order would be made.



A model displays a long full bustier dress in beige organza printed with black broken lines for the 1994 Spring/Summer High Fashion collection by Louis Fearud on January 18, in - AFP photo

Christopher goes to Oslo Saturday: Secretary of State Warren Christopher will be in Oslo Saturday for the funeral of Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Joergan Holst, who died earlier this month, AFP reports from Washington.

The State Department said Tuesday that Christopher would pay homage to the official who helped forge the secret peace agreement last year between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Filipino general sacked: Defence Secretary Renato de Villa relieved an army general Wednesday after investigators linked him to the failed ambush of a special prosecutor looking into a graft case filed against him, AP reports from Manila.

On Tuesday, the National Bureau of Investigation said Brig Gen Raymudo Jarque, commander of the military's Southern Command, ordered surveillance of prosecutor Aniano Desigrto before he was ambushed and wounded November 24 in a Manila suburb.

US repatriates 118 Chinese: one hundred and eighteen Chinese repatriated from the United States arrived in China by plane Tuesday, Xinhua reports from Xiamen.

They would be sent back to their native places after handover procedures between China and the US were completed. According to informed sources, these repatriates are people who had tried to enter the US illegally during the past few years.

Fiji holds polls from Feb 18: Fiji will hold national elections from February 18-25, the president announced Wednesday, AP reports from Suva.

Polling in Fiji is spread over a week to allow for voting on outlying islands. The announcement followed Wednesday's formal dissolution of Parliament.

Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka called the election in late November following the defeat of his government's 1994

Quake rocks Indonesian province A major earthquake rocked Indonesia's remote, easternmost

province of Irian Jaya Wednesday, but there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, an official of the meteorology office said. AP reports from Jakarta.

Lilies Pribadi said the quake hit at 8:53 am (0153 GMT). centered in a coastal area at a depth of 100 kilometers (62

The area is 60 kilometers (37 miles) northeast of Nabire. or around 3.200 kilometers (2,000 miles) northeast of Jakarta.

23 die in Thai bus crash: Twenty-three bus passengers died yesterday after their bus crashed into an oncoming truck, police said, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Twenty-one of the passengers were found dead in the wrecked bus, which had been abandoned by both the bus and the truck driver, and two other passengers died later in hospital, they said. The accident occurred in Chayaphum province, 330 kilo-

meters (170 miles) northeast of Bangkok. It is common for drivers in Thailand to leave the scene of their accidents.

Karens detain Myanmar | Thatcher's secret arms deal student assoc chief

BANGKOK, Jan 19: The head of the main association of Myanmar students in exile. Moe Thee Zun, has been arrested along with 11 comrades by their allies in the Karen National Union (KNU), a communique received here today said, reports AFP. The communique, issued by

the Al Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), said the 12 had been detained Sunday in Mannerplaw, the headquarters of the ethnic Karen insurrection, located on the Thai border.

It iso accused the KNU of handing down an ultimatum to all students in the area to hand over their weapons to the KNU. The ultimatum reportedly expired at dawn Monday.

Yemen factions

reach accord

The ABSDF said the 12 had apparent reason" and demanded their release.

most powerful opposition Restoration Council (SLORC) which holds power in Yangon. talks with the SLORC.

The BCP disbanded in 1988 after an internal squabble.

An official with the KNU said he was unable to confirm or deny the report.

been detained "without any The KNU is the oldest and

group battling the ruling junta. or State Law and Order Other opposition groups came together last week to support the KNU in opening peace

The KNU has around 1.500 and 1,700 students in its

with Malaysia unearthed LONDON, Jan 19: Written

evidence suggesting Margaret Thatcher's government secretly linked a large aid package to Malaysia with the sale of British arms has been unearthed in Whitehall, the Financial Times reported Wednesday, says AFP.

The evidence, which is not quoted by the paper, comes in the wake of a political row over British aid to the Pergau River Hydro-Electric Power Plant Project in Malaysia.

British Prime Minister John Major Tuesday defended his approval of 234 million pounds (351 million dollars) in aid to the power plant project, saying he did it to protect British

The public spending watchdog the National Audit Office (NAO) had condemned the project, saying it was

uneconomical for Malaysia and would cost British taxpavers 56 million pounds (84 million dollars) more than estimated. Opposition MPs claim the aid package was granted as part of a 1 billion pound arms

deal negotiated by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1988. The Foreign Office has consistently denied that the two deals were linked. British government policy prohibits any link between aid offers and

The paper alleged that "while the denials have been accurate in a strict sense, the government did in early 1988 tie the offer of a large aid package to the prospective arms deal.

The paper said the Pergau Project, "though not mentioned specifically at the time, was eventually financed from this package. "It said documents detailing the link had been uncovered in the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office.

The Commons Public Accounts Committee is cur rently conducting an inquiry into the aid deal.

weapons contracts. Israelis oppose Rabin's plans for referendum on Golan and I am one of those minis-

to end crisis JERUSALEM, Jan 19: Israe-SANAA, Jan 19: Yemen's ri val factions reached agreement Tuesday on a range of reforms aimed at ending a five-month political crisis which threat with Syria, reports AP. ened to split the country apart the official Saba news agency

reported, says AFP. The announcement came only hours after Président Ali Abdallah Saleh's ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party charged that a southern Yemeni warplane had bombed

Saleh, a northerner, and Vice President Ali Salem Al-Baid, a southerner and leader of the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP), have been embroiled in a dispute over the running of the country since August.

a northern army brigade.

lis on both the left and right objected on Tuesday to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's plans for a referendum on a possible "painful" land-for-peace deal

"A significant withdrawal might also include dismantling of (Jewis) settlements, and I want the decision on this to be made by the entire people." Rabin told reporters.

But some members of Rabin's centre-left government and the conservative opposition said any accord on the Golan Heights should be decided by calling early elections and putting the governing coalition's fate in the hands of

The evolving deal was also felt in the Egyptian resort of Taba, where Israeli and PLO

negotiators resumed talks on beginning Palestinian selfrule, with little progress re-

PLO officials fear Syrian-Israeli accommodation might lead to Israeli pressure on them to make more conces-

"We will not be blackmailed by different tracks because we see it as one integrated negotiation process," said Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian official speaking in Jerusalem.

But chief Plestinian delegate Nabil Shaath said progress on any front helped the goal of a comprehensive settlement. Syrian President Hafez

Assad recommitted Syria to the peace process after a meeting in Geneva on Sunday with US President Clinton Press reports in Israel said

Assad mentioned a yearend deadline for an agreement.

Although the Geneva meeting appeared to increase chances for such a deal. Assad's somewhat vague statements drew criticism and unflattering comparisons to the ebullience of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's peace initiative in 1977

"I am not giving grades to anyone, (but) I expected more," Rabin said. "I am prepared to make do because of the need to continue negotiations.

Rabin said the price of peace with Syria might be higher than expected by Israelis hoping for something less than full withdrawal from Golan, a key highlands captured by Israel in 1967.

"If and when we come to a

draft agreement between Syria and Israel and it demands a painful price - perhaps more than the residents of Israel expected — then we will need to bring it a referendum," said

The plan for a plebiscite, announced in parliament Monday is not binding and must be approved by the Cabinet and lawmakers. Israel has never held one

Rabin.

Both the right wing Likud bloc and top members of Rabin's coalition opposed the idea Israel television said a majority in the Cabinet was against the idea **Environment Minister Yossi**

Sarid said the Cabinet had yet to decide on a referendum. I know there are many ministers who would prefer elections over a referendum.

ters. Sarid said on Israel radio. The Likud bloc, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, issued a statement saying that "the best

> Elections are not scheduled before 1996. Jewish settlement leaders in the Golan welcomed a referendum and asked opposition parties to cancel plans for a parliament motion reaffirming

referendum for the policy of

this government is early elec-

Israeli commentators suggested a referendum would put Assad on notice that he would have to convince the Israeli public of his sincerity about

peace

Israel's 1981 annexation of the

Yoel Marcus, a columnist for the newspaper Haaretz, said

Assad failed to fulfill expectations by specifying Syria would welcome diplomatic and economic relations and open borders with Israel in return for the return of Golan. "He has yet to learn what

Sadat knew 17 years ago, that for a return of territories he must win the hearts of Iraelis, Marcus wrote

In Taba, both the Israeli and PLO sides reported progress on the details of handing over civilian authority in the Gaza Strip and Jericho on the West Bank.

But there were no reports of progress on control of border crossings and the size of Jericho, issues that forced a suspension of the talks in December and delayed the beginning of the Israeli troop withdrawal

Mandela prefers non-ANC president PRETORIA, Jan 19: Nelson

Mandela on Tuesday said that even if his African National Congress won South Africa's first democratic elections in April, it could be in the "national interest" to have a non-ANC head of state, reports

AFP. Speaking at a press briefing after talks with visiting French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe, Mandela said it was not up to him to suggest who should be the next president of South "In our organisation we

caliber and integrity who could fill the position," the ANC president said. "It may be of national inter-

have men and women of real

est to have a president outside the ANC." Mandela added.