

## LDF boycotts Kerala governor's speech

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Jan 21** - The opposition Left Democratic Front (LDF) today boycotted the governor's address to the Kerala Assembly protesting against "the distorted and undemocratic policies and programmes of the UDF government," reports PTI.

As soon as the governor, B Rachaiah, began his address, the opposition leader, V S Achuthanandan, was on his feet reading out a lengthy statement which enlisted the omissions and commissions of the government.

Achuthanandan trooped his colleagues out of the house, amidst slogan shoutings, stating that "the Karunakaran government has lost its right to remain in power."

Addressing newsmen after the boycott, the leaders of LDF

constituents said they had come out of the house to register their protest against the policies of the government which had stalled the development and progress of the state.

Achuthanandan said the government had little respect for democratic principles as was evident from its reluctance to take the house into confidence and the way it went about matters pertaining to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Now the assembly was being convened just to fulfill the constitutional obligation of meeting once in six months, the CPI-M leader said.

Achuthanandan then made a scathing attack on the government highlighting issues ranging from corruption to its failure to wrest the state's due share from the centre in the matter of development.



A crippled street urchin skates in the middle of a road in Bombay taking advantage of a general strike called by activists of the Hindu fundamentalist Shiv Sena (Shiva's Army) in India yesterday. —AFP photo

## Thailand rejects Karens' call to host talks with Yangon

**BANGKOK, Jan 21**: Thailand has rejected a call by the Myanmar opposition to host talks here with Yangon, a Thai Foreign Ministry official said today, reports AFP.

Thailand will consider hosting talks between the Myanmar government and the opposition only if the request comes from Yangon, the official quoted Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri as saying.

Any other course of action could be construed as interference in the affairs of a neighbouring state, he held.

The Karen National Union, representing one of Myanmar's ethnic minorities, said recently it was ready to open talks with the government this month as long as the meeting was held outside Myanmar to prevent harassment of KNU leaders.

Yangon's ruling junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), has said it is ready for talks in Myanmar.

The Thai official confirmed a suggestion by Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri on Thursday that the talks could

be held in Myanmar.

If the Myanmar government itself asks for talks in Thailand, "We will consider it," the official quoted Prasong as saying after a farewell call by the outgoing Japanese ambassador.

Prasong reportedly refused to comment directly on reports that Yangon might release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in July.

Aung San Suu Kyi, 49, has been under house arrest since July 1989. She led the National League for Democracy which handily won general elections in Myanmar in 1990. The SLORC did not allow the NLD to take power, however.

Meanwhile, Reuters from Manerplaw reports: Karen Christian rebels still want peace discussions with the ruling generals to include other ethnic minority groups, and accuse rebels who have held separate talks with Rangoon of surrender.

General Bo Mya, president of the KNU, scolded allies who had already begun talks with the junta, the SLORC.

"Some ethnic minority

rebels, or some revolutionary groups — such as the Kachin, the Wa, the Pa-o and the Shan State People's Party — who held talks with the SLORC without raising the basic principles of human rights, the political aspect and freedom, can only be regarded as having surrendered and put themselves under the control of the enemy," he said.

The stocky, 66-year-old general was addressing a gathering of 1,000 soldiers and civilians gathered for a parade to mark his birthday on Wednesday at the Karen's jungle headquarters of Manerplaw, accessible only by boat.

The Karen themselves, after four decades of fighting for autonomy from Yangon, reluctantly agreed to direct talks with SLORC officials after the united front they led dissolved under what hardliners call divide-and-conquer junta tactics.

"For the KNU," he said, "we will certainly hold talks with the SLORC, but the KNU will bring up the human-rights issue, the freedom of all ethnic nationalities and all aspects of the political problem."

## Russia-Georgia summit from February 3

**MOSCOW, Jan 21**: Russian President Boris Yeltsin will travel to Georgia early next month for a summit with President Eduard Shevardnadze at which a cooperation treaty will be signed, the Interfax news agency said Thursday, reports AFP.

The summit is tentatively scheduled for February 3 and 4, Interfax said.

Georgian Prime Minister Oscar Patsatsia was in Moscow earlier this week to prepare for Yeltsin's visit.

Moscow and Tbilisi have been holding talks for the past few months to finalize a cooperation and friendship agreement covering the economic, cultural and military fields.

The numerous attacks over the past two years against the 20,000 Russian troops still in Georgia had led Moscow to delay signing any accord.

## Canada won't authorise US missile tests

**OTTAWA, Jan 21**: Canada's new liberal government said Thursday it will not authorise US cruise missile test over Canadian territory until a controversial agreement with the United States has been debated in parliament, reports Reuters.

Defence Minister David Collette said the government will not make a decision on whether the tests can be conducted before hearing the views of parliament in a debate planned for next week.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corp reported that the first of this year's cruise missile tests scheduled for next Tuesday has been suspended.

A US embassy spokesman said he had no information about a test planned for next week.

The cruise missile, is designed to carry nuclear weapons and has been tested by the United States over the Tundra of Northern Canada under a 10-year agreement that expired last year.

## Fundamentalists form new party in Algeria

**ALGIERS, Jan 21**: Six leaders of the Islamic fundamentalist cause in Algeria founded a new political movement Thursday that they described as both Islamic and republican and could mediate between the government and armed Islamic militants, reports AFP.

The formation of the Republican Islamic Rally (RIR) was announced here by Sheikh Abou-Djarrar Soltani at the end of a conference of ulemas — doctors of the faith — and preachers.

He told a press conference that the RIR would group all ulema preachers and Muslim believers who wished to join, including leaders and militants of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).

Soltani said the RIR would probably take over from the Daawa Islamic League, founded and led by veteran Islamic fundamentalist leader Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun, "which has not achieved what it set out to do."

Fiske said it was virtually certain that he would question both the president and the first lady under oath as part of his investigation.

## BRIEFLY

**Sino-ROK air routes soon:** South Korea and China are near reaching an agreement to open direct air routes between the two countries, government sources said Friday, AP reports from Seoul.

Talks were underway in Beijing this week, and the details were to be finalised during South Korean President Kim Yunsam's visit to China in March, said the sources, who spoke anonymously.

The agreement, if concluded, would allow South Korea's Korean Air and Asiana Airlines to fly from Seoul to Beijing and Shanghai. South Korea is also expected to begin negotiations soon on reopening air routes to Taiwan, broken off when Seoul switched diplomatic recognition to China.

**262 Vietnamese leave Japan:** Japan on Friday repatriated 262 Vietnamese refugees aboard two charter planes with the help of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UNHCR said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The operation, the third of its kind, entailed only voluntary returnees, although the refugee decided against making the flight at the last minute, the agency's representative in Tokyo George Gordon-Lennox, said.

It leaves 440 refugees in Japan.

**Kenyan leader Oginaga dies:** Veteran Kenyan opposition leader Jaramogi Oginaga Odinga has died, his family said yesterday. Reuters reports from Nairobi.

Oginga, 82, was chairman of the opposition Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (Ford-Kenya) and official leader of Kenya's opposition in parliament.

Doctors at a hospital in Kisumu, a town 450 km (280 miles) northwest of the capital Nairobi said Odinga died after a heart attack.

**EC aid for Afghan war victims:** The European Commission decided Thursday to donate almost half a million dollars in emergency humanitarian aid for the victims of the latest round of fighting in Afghanistan, a spokesman said, AFP reports from Brussels.

The assistance, worth 450,000 euros (about 495,000 dollars), will be mainly in the form of medical aid and is to resupply Afghan hospitals with medicines and surgical material.

**13 die in Uzbek train mishap:** Thirteen people were killed and 46 injured in a collision between a passenger and a goods train in the North-East of Uzbekistan Thursday, Moscow television said, AFP reports from Moscow.

The accident happened around 130 kilometres (about 90 miles) west of Tashkent when the goods train ploughed into the back of a passenger train going from the provincial city of Nukous to Tashkent the passenger train had stopped to let a group of wild horses cross the lines.

The cargo train was unable to brake in time and crashed into the last six carriages of the passenger train, the television said.

**Han reappointed WHO director:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) has appointed Han Sang Tae of South Korea to his second five-year term as regional director for the western Pacific, the Manila-based WHO regional office said yesterday, AFP reports from Manila.

A WHO statement said Han's appointment was approved in Geneva, Switzerland during the organisation's 44th annual session. His new term begins February 1, 1994.

Han, 66, a doctor first assumed the post in 1989, succeeding Hiroshi Nakajima of Japan who is now WHO Director-General.

## Death of Gamsakhurdia Shevardnadze calls for int'l inquiry

**PARIS, Jan 21**: Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze called Thursday for an international inquiry into the death of his predecessor and rival for power Zviad Gamsakhurdia, reports AFP.

Shevardnadze, in Paris for a two-day official visit, also accused members of ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of backing the Abkhazian separatist movement in western Georgia.

The republics of the former Soviet Union faced a double danger from "aggressive separatism... and a resurgence of fascism," Shevardnadze added.

Gamsakhurdia's family, who announced his suicide at the start of the year, has opposed

an inquiry. They are currently seeking to have the former president's body transferred from eastern Georgia to Abkhazia.

Shevardnadze, a former Soviet Foreign Minister, heaped praise on Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

In Russia there was "no alternative" to Yeltsin who displayed heroism in crushing last October's parliamentary rebellion and in withstanding the August 1991 coup during the last months of the Soviet Union, he told a press conference.

New Russian friendship and troops last year helped Shevardnadze defeat Gamsakhurdia's rebels as they staged an insurgency in western Georgia

## Clinton completes his first year in office

**WASHINGTON, Jan 21**: President Clinton marked the completion of his first year in office on Thursday with a planned appearance on an internationally broadcast TV call-in show, reports AP.

The anniversary was marred by an investigation of his financial dealings.

Frigid weather in Washington forced the cancellation of a speech at Georgetown University in which Clinton had planned to summarise his accomplishments. He'll do that more formally in next Tuesday's State of the Union address to Congress.

The only event on his public schedule related to Clinton's one-year mark was an hour-long interview on CNN's "Larry King Live," during which Clinton was to take calls from viewers. The programme is seen around the

world.

Clinton's television interviews was supposed to take place at the CNN studio. But early Thursday morning, the event was moved to the White House residence — apparently to keep the President from having to go out in the cold.

There was good news for Clinton in the polls. A New York Times-CBS News poll published Thursday showed that 54 per cent of Americans approve of the way he is handling the job — up eight percentage points from November and virtually even with the 55 per cent recorded last March. Clinton's highest level since taking office.

At the same point in their tenure, Ronald Reagan had a 49 per cent approval rating and Jimmy Carter had 51 per cent. George Bush was at 76 per cent, in part because the

country rallied behind him after the U.S. invasion of Panama and the collapse of communism.

The nationwide telephone survey, conducted Saturday through Monday, showed that 50 per cent approved of the way Clinton is handling foreign policy — up from 38 per cent in November.

Clinton's anniversary came on a day when Attorney General Janet Reno announced the appointment of former Republican U.S. attorney Robert B. Fiske Jr. as special counsel to investigate Clinton's land deals and financial transactions when he was governor of Arkansas.

Fiske said it was virtually certain that he would question both the president and the first lady under oath as part of his investigation.



A rescue worker searches through the remains of an Antonov-22 cargo plane that crashed January 19 some 200 kilometres north of Moscow. Six out of 11 people on board the plane were killed. —AFP photo

## Turkish-Cypriots to hold talks with Greek-Cypriots

**NICOSIA, Jan 21**: Turkish-Cypriots said Thursday that they had agreed to resume talks with the Greek-Cypriots on a package of confidence-building measures proposed by the United Nations, reports AFP.

The Turkish-Cypriot side agrees to return to the talks with no pre-conditions, after a break of several months, said their leader Rauf Denktaş. But he said they "insist on certain principles."

Denktaş, quoted by a Turkish-Cypriot news agency Tak, said the new ruling coalition set up in the north following elections on December 12 had given the go-ahead.

But the president of the divided island, Greek-Cypriot Glafkos Clerides, reacted with skepticism, insisting the Turkish-Cypriots clarify their stand

## Off the Record

**Row over 'sexy'**

**NEW DELHI:** A Hindi film song has upset movie censors who say the use of the word "sexy" is in bad taste although sales of 200,000 copies of the album containing the song have placed it near the top of the charts, reports AFP.

State-run All India Radio has banned the song, "mera pant bhi sexy... mera shirt bhi sexy," arguing that describing trousers and shirts as sexy could offend polite society, the Times of India newspaper said Friday.

The tune from the film "dulaara," or "darling," made it to the top 10 charts last week on national television, which broadcast the song despite the radio's decision to stay away from the controversial foot-tapper, it said.

India's film censor board, which oversees Bombay's huge movie industry, has suggested that composers replace the word "sexy" with "fancy" to tone down the eroticism of the successful number in the big-budget comedy.

The board, which annually reviews 150 "Bollywood" productions before release, will decide next week whether the offending song in "dulaara" is fit for public consumption, the Times said.

"I cannot understand why there should be any objection to the word sexy in this day and age... this sort of censorship will take us back to the Victorian era," said producer-director Vimal Kumar.

The latest row follows a ban last year on the Hindi film song "what is behind the blouse?" which was ultimately lifted by a court when judges were satisfied that the answer was the heart and nothing else.

**For refusing to trim nails**

**KUALA LUMPUR:** A bus driver who said he would rather lose his job than cut his fingernails has been fired for violating neatness and safety regulations, reports AP.

Bus driver Nordin Jaafar had his license revoked earlier this week after refusing to trim nails that had grown to a length of 15-centimeters (6 inches), according to a Road Transport Department official.

The official, enforcement officer Jasimi Zeinol Abidin, told reporters Thursday, that bus drivers must be clean and neatly dressed, and added that the long nails, presented a safety risk.

Nordin, meanwhile, said he hasn't trimmed his nails or chest hair since he accepted a challenge from a friend five years ago.

Nordin said he will continue working at a side job at a gas station, and will cut his fingernails when he gets married later this year.

**\$49m out-of-court settlement**

**LONDON:** Michael Jackson has tentatively agreed to pay up to 49 million dollars to the 14-year-old boy who accuses him of sex abuse" so that the boy will drop his lawsuit, a newspaper reported Friday, says AP.

The London tabloid Today, in what is billed as a world exclusive, said the boy had signed a confidential interim contract agreeing to the out-of-court settlement.

The Today newspaper said that lawyers for both sides, were drawing up paperwork to ensure that the civil trial will be dropped. It said the agreement could fall through unless there is agreement on all the terms.

The 35-year-old singer is accused in a civil lawsuit of molesting boy during a five-month relationship. Jackson denies any wrongdoing. Authorities have been investigating, but no criminal charges have been filed.

Jackson's civil trial is scheduled to begin March 21.

Jackson's attorney, Howard Weitzman, hung up on The Associated Press when reached at his home Friday. Repeated attempts to reach him throughout the day failed.

A message was left at the office of attorney Larry Feldman, who represents the boy.

The newspaper quoted what it described as one highly placed legal source involved in the case as saying the amount involved was between 40.5 million dollars and 49.5 million dollars "but no one is certain."

Today did not name that source or describe the sourcing for other aspects of its story.

The paper said it is believed the cash payments will be spread over about 10 years.



Kenneth Horn, curator of the Hollywood Wax Museum, holds the wax head of singer Michael Jackson January 20 broke off during the November 17 Northridge earthquake. The limbs of several other wax figures were broken in the earthquake. —AFP photo

**A malicious act of revenge**

**MANASSAS:** Lorena Bobbitt cut off her husband's penis in "a calculated and malicious act of revenge" for an abusive marriage, the prosecutor said Thursday in closing arguments, reports AP.

The defence countered that Lorena Bobbitt, was under extreme stress when she attacked John Bobbitt. "This girl was crumbling. She was falling apart. She was falling to pieces," said defence attorney Blair Howard.

The jury of seven women and five men began deliberating Thursday afternoon after seven days of testimony. It had to decide whether Lorena Bobbitt acted in willful malicious anger when she mutilated her husband, or whether she snapped under the pressure of years of physical and sexual abuse.

During his instructions, Judge Herman A. Whisenant Jr. told jurors they also could consider a lesser charge of unlawful wounding which has a maximum penalty of five years in prison, or find Lorena Bobbitt innocent.

In her closing arguments, prosecutor Mary Grace O'Brien conceded that the Bobbitts had a violent marriage, but said it was not the reign of terror, depicted by the defence during Lorena Bobbitt's malicious wounding trial.

## UN soldiers go to Liberia to monitor disarmament

**MONROVIA, Jan 21**: Some 300 military observers sent to monitor the disarmament of Liberia's rival factions on Thursday began to deploy across the West African country, UN statement issued here said, reports AFP.

The United Nations sent the soldiers of the UN observer mission in Liberia here after Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia, which began a bloody insurrection in December 1989, signed a peace pact with the interim government.

## Aid officials suggest UN to get tough or get out of Bosnia

**SARAJEVO, Jan 21**: The United Nations has largely failed in its relief effort in war-torn Bosnia and should either get tough by bringing in more troops or get out, a senior aid official said Thursday, reports AP.

"How much of the population are we keeping alive if we are only bringing 20 per cent of the minimum" amount of food needed each month per person, said Larry Hollingworth, head of mission for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Zenica in central Bosnia.

Apparently frustrated by delays and harassment of relief

convoys by the warring parties in Bosnia, Hollingworth suggested on Thursday that the United Nations should either "get more troops and get tough one day or get out."

He was the latest UN official on the front lines to criticise UN strategy.

The outgoing head of UN troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lt Gen Francis Briquemont, recently faulted the Security Council for being too lofty in its goals and too sparing in sending troops. He said he needed at least 10,000 more troops to carry out UN resolutions.

In Brussels, Belgium, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic called on NATO to follow through on its threats to launch air strikes against Bosnian Serbs and said the alliance did not need UN approval to do so.

At a summit last week, President Clinton and the leaders of the 15 other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries warned the Serbs of a new determination to order air strikes if needed to relieve embattled Muslim enclaves in Bosnia.

However, NATO officials say UN Secretary General Boutros-

Ghali must authorise the first strike.

A senior aide to Boutros-Ghali in New York, Alvaro DeSoto, said the secretary-general would not oppose ordering such a strike "if the need arises."

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe on Thursday called for new talks among the allies to decide what to do next in Bosnia.

"We can't see on one hand the different parties negotiating in Geneva, and on the ground witness an escalation of the conflict," Juppe told the French National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee.

UN aid officials have repeatedly accused all three warring factions — Serbs, Croats and Muslims of blocking aid convoys for an estimated 2.7 million Bosnians dependent on outside help to survive this winter.

The UN airlift to Sarajevo, suspended for a day after shots were fired at an American relief plane, will resume Friday, said Kris Janowski, Sarajevo spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

But overall, Hollingworth told reporters the UN effort to get a minimum 42 pounds (19 kgs) of food per person a month

to civilians is not proving itself to be successful.

However, Hollingworth warned there would be a lot of suffering if UN peacekeepers indeed left the war-torn republic.

Another round of peace talks failed in Geneva on Wednesday, raising fears of a new round of slaughter and starvation in a war that has killed more than 200,000 people since it erupted in April 1992.

Bosnian Serbs rebelled against the decision by Muslims and Croats to secede from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia, and now hold about 70 per cent of Bosnia.

## NATO SG undergoes surgery

**BRUSSELS, Jan 21**: NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner underwent surgery last week for an acute intestinal blockage, a NATO spokesman said Thursday, reports AFP.

It was Woerner's fourth operation in less than two years. The operation took place on January 14 at the university hospital in Aix La Chapelle, Germany.

The surgeon who carried out the operation said it was successful with no complications. Woerner recently acknowledged that he was suffering from bowel cancer.