

Security Council may join moves to end Afghan war

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 25: The UN Security Council has raised the possibility of UN involvement in a peace effort towards ending Afghanistan's bloody factional fighting, reports AFP.

In a statement late Monday, this month's Council President, Czech ambassador Karel Kovanda, welcomed a recent General Assembly resolution asking Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to send a special mission to Afghanistan.

The mission would consult Afghan leaders "on how the United Nations can best assist Afghanistan in facilitating national rapprochement and reconstruction," the statement said.

No date has been set for the UN mission.

Kovanda called for an immediate ceasefire in Afghanistan "and the beginning of a process to create a broad-based government acceptable to the Afghan people."

The Council commanded the efforts of the UN General

Assembly and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) "and a number of concerned states to promote peace in Afghanistan through a political dialogue."

It was the first time the Council focused on the Afghan crisis since the fall of Najibullah's Soviet-installed regime in April 1992.

According to figures released by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in the past three weeks of fighting between forces for and against President Burhanuddin Rabbani, there have been almost 10,000 casualties in Kabul, with a conservative estimate of 700 to 800 killed.

In a speech Sunday, Rabbani raised the possibility of holding elections to choose a new government, with UN and OIC assistance.

Five countries are directly implicated in the long-running Afghan conflict: states of the former Soviet Union, which occupied the country from 1979-1989, and the United

States, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which supplied weapons to different Islamic guerrilla groups in the country.

A recent Cable News Network television report implicated former Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a fundamentalist leader who received considerable military and financial support during the 1980s, in a terrorist plot to bomb New York city landmarks last year.

A Kabul report says: Defence forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani repulsed a rival Uzbek-Pashtun infantry assault on Kabul late Monday, that was launched under a blistering artillery bombardment against the eastern part of the capital.

For two hours rockets smashed into the eastern Kabul suburbs while ex-communist general Abdul Rashid Dostum's Uzbek fighters, together with their Pashtun Hezb-I-Islami faction allies, attempted to breakthrough the frontlines from two directions. The night attack focused on

the strategic Qalah Mahmud Khan bridge which guards access to the downtown Presidential Palace and Defence Ministry buildings, although another push was made downstream at a secondary bridge.

They attacked us just to prove they are still there, and have the ability to attack, said a Defence Ministry spokesman Tuesday.

The state guard commander defending Mahmud Khan bridge, who suffered only three men lightly injured, said the attackers left seven dead behind and carried off numerous wounded.

We ambushed their infantry before they even reached the bridge, said Commander Sayed Kamaruddin Hashemi.

He said two of the dead were Pashtun Mujahideen belonging to Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-I-Islami faction, which is demanding the resignation of Rabbani as a pre-condition to peace talks.



Residents of the new Microrayan housing estate in eastern Kabul, survey January 24 the crater of a 500-kilogram bomb dropped on them by a jet belonging to ex-communist General Abdul Rashid Dostum, in his fight to topple Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

— AFP photo

Amnesty for release of 3 Kashmiri leaders

BOMBAY, Jan 25: Amnesty International has demanded the release of three Kashmiri politicians jailed by Indian authorities, describing the detained men as "prisoners of conscience," reports AFP.

No specific charges have been brought against Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Abdul Gani Lone and Shabir Shah, detained in connection with a Muslim uprising in the troubled northern state, Amnesty said in a statement here Monday.

The London-based human rights organisation said the three men should be set free, calling them "prisoners of conscience."

Geelani, Lone and Shah are militant-leaning politicians opposed to Indian rule over Kashmir, where more than 8,000 people have died in violence related to a bloody, four-year-old Muslim secessionist revolt.

Amnesty International also demanded that it be allowed to send a team to Kashmir to investigate alleged human rights abuses by Indian troops in their battle against insurgency.

The Amnesty International statement came at the end of a visit by a two-member team it

sent to Bombay to probe the police role in Hindu-Muslim communal riots of December 1992 and January 1993.

Rod Morgan, Dean of the Faculty of Law at the Bristol University, and Yvonne Terlingen, acting head of Amnesty's Asia-Pacific unit, sought information on two main issues, the human rights group said.

Azeris reclaim entire N region of Kelabadzhar

MOSCOW, Jan 25: Azerbaidzhan troops have reclaimed the entire northern region of Kelabadzhar, northwest of the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaidzhan Defence Ministry reported Monday, says AFP.

The ministry report, cited by the Turnan news agency, said its troops reclaimed 12 villages seized last year and now hold several strategic "points that would allow it to control the main road leading from Kelabadzhar to Agdam," east of the enclave.

BRIEFLY

Ne Win in Singapore for treatment:

Myanmar strongman General Ne Win is in Singapore for medical treatment, a Myanmar Embassy spokesman said on Tuesday, AFP reports from Singapore.

Ne Win was seeking treatment for his eyes and teeth, the spokesman said, adding he did not know the health condition of the former head of state nor which hospital he was in.

"He is here on a private visit. We don't even know when he arrived," he said. A Singapore Foreign Ministry spokesman said he understood that Ne Win was on a private visit.

3 Thais held with heroin:

Thai police nabbed three people in the southern-most city of Hat Yai with 47 kilograms of heroin destined for Malaysia, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Narcotics Suppression Bureau officials said the Thai's two men and one woman, were charged with drug possession and trafficking after police found nearly 100 bags of refined white powder in their pick-up truck Sunday.

The three told police they had been given 10,000 baht (400 dollars) each to deliver the drugs to a Malaysian dealer named "Arkoo" in front of the hotel where they were caught. A Malaysian fled the scene of the arrest, police said.

Brundtland cancels Japan tour:

Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland has cancelled a trip to Japan because she is suffering from a high fever and a chest infection, a government official said Monday, AFP reports from Oslo.

The premier, who was due to leave for Japan yesterday for a three-day visit for a UN conference, may also be forced to cancel plans to attend the world economic forum in Davos next weekend unless her health improves, Cabinet Secretary Oystein Singaas said.

Ariane rocket crashes into sea:

An unmanned Ariane rocket crashed into the sea shortly after liftoff Monday with a Turkish and a European satellite aboard, space center officials said, AFP reports from French Guiana.

The third stage of the Ariane did not fire, and the rocket began losing altitude several minutes after its 2137 GMT liftoff, before crashing into the Atlantic off this French overseas department in northeast South America.

The third stage motor only fired for one minute of the 12 minutes and 31 seconds it was supposed to, an Ariane space spokesman said. "We do not know the exact cause of the failure at this time."

88 Cambodians die of malaria:

Malaria killed 88 Cambodian villagers last year in Kompong Speu province, 50 kilometers west of the capital Phnom Penh, with about 11,000 people, some 2.7 per cent of the total population of the province, affected by the disease, Xinhua reports from Phnom Penh.

In 1993, the provincial hospital treated more than 10,000 malaria suspects, and undertook blood tests for 24,000 others, according to the Khmer press agency.

SA forces keep watch on Lesotho:

South African security forces on the border with Lesotho are keeping watch on. Events that unfolded in the Kingdom's capital of Maseru, South African Foreign Minister Pk Botha said in Pretoria, Monday, Xinhua reports from Johannesburg.

Tension between warring Lesotho defence force factions flared into an armed clash on January 23, prompting the government of Prime Minister Ntse Mokhele to ask for South African military intervention. But so far South Africa has no intention of such move.

40,000 Vietnamese in Hong Kong:

The number of Vietnamese boat people who sought voluntary repatriation under a UN plan reached 40,000 with the return of 329 of them to Vietnam on Tuesday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The 40,000 milestone was reached after two groups, totalling 329 Vietnamese boat people who failed to be screened as refugees, left the British colony on two chartered flights to Hanoi.

Currently, there are 31,000 Vietnamese living in camps in Hong Kong waiting to go home through the voluntary programme conducted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or undergo forced repatriation carried out by Hong Kong government under the auspices of a pact reached with Hanoi in 1991. The government plans to close all refugee camps in the territory by the end of 1995.

ECO, UN plan to improve health care in C Asia

TEHRAN, Jan 24: Health Ministers from 10 Muslim countries and UN officials pledged on Monday to improve health care in central Asia, the official Iranian news agency reported, says AFP.

Concluding a three-day conference, health ministers from the 10-member Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) issued a "Tehran declaration" calling for closer cooperation in health care and the appointment of an ECO official to work with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) on health projects.

Clinton's unwavering support for Yeltsin comes under attack

WASHINGTON, Jan 25: President Clinton's unwavering support for Boris Yeltsin came under attack Monday in Congress. Senators said the Russian president had received a blank check while ordinary people suffer, reports AP.

Clinton's senior adviser on Russia, Strobe Talbott, defended US strategy. He said Yeltsin was true to the essence of democracy by consistently submitting his policies to the Russian voters, even his armed attack last October on the Russian parliament.

Talbott, nominated by Clinton to be deputy secretary of state, cautioned Yeltsin and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin that they must

stick to policies aimed at curbing inflation or risk the support of the US government, international banks and foreign investors.

"Gradual reform is a prescription for hyperinflation and economic collapse," he said in testimony to a Senate subcommittee.

Clinton had cautioned the Russia government last week that its will have to control inflation if it hopes to keep getting international aid.

Two key reformers, Yegor Gaidar and Boris Yefimov, who urged cuts in subsidies to inefficient enterprises as a way to combat inflation, are not in the new Russian cabinet. Chernomyrdin has declared an end to the period of market

romanticism. Ministers worried that closing inefficient plants would increase unemployment appear to have won out.

Talbott said controlling budget deficits and inflation should be the "first and foremost" task of the Russian government while at the same time it cushions the adverse impact of reform with temporary unemployment benefits and other social programmes.

"Inflation, if it gets out of control, threatens to destroy the economic life of individuals and states alike," he said. "It can topple governments, sometimes with the ugliest and most dangerous results."

Talbott has played a key role in steering Clinton, a

friend for 25 years, into backing Yeltsin through his dissolution last year of Russia's constitutional court, armed attack on hardliners in parliament and withdrawal of a promise to hold early presidential elections.

He called for patience. "This is a process that is going to take a generation or more," Talbott said of the conversion of a Communist system into one that has already put most enterprises into private hands.

Several members of the subcommittee challenged Clinton's unwavering support for the Russian leader.

Senator Arlen Specter said he was "very concerned how far we will let President Yeltsin go." Citing the disband-

ing of the court and the attack on the parliament building, Specter said Yeltsin had received "pretty much a blank check."

The subcommittee chairman, Senator Patrick J. Leahy, questioned the use of Russian troops in conflicts in Georgia and other "near abroad" areas, and the refusal to extended immediate membership in NATO to Eastern and Central European countries.

Leahy said Yeltsin comes out of a tradition of tsars and dictators. "I don't want to us acting toward him as we did to the Shah of Iran."

Senator Diane Feinstein questioned whether Yeltsin's policies had improved the lot of ordinary Russians. "What I



Former enemies light up together as they report for duty at the De Brug military training camp near Bloemfontein in South Africa for formation as the National Peace Keeping Force. Made up of South African Defence Force troops and the MK, the armed wing of the African National Congress, the NPKF is to police the elections on April 27.

— AFP photo

West Bengal municipalities pollute Ganges water

CALCUTTA, Jan 25: The West Bengal Minister for Municipal Affairs, Ashok Bhattacharjee today said that the Supreme Court had recently issued notices against three corporations and 70 municipalities in the state for polluting water of the Ganges, reports PTI.

Replying to a question in the state assembly here, Bhattacharjee said the court had also asked those corporations and municipalities to furnish a list of measures taken by them, in this regard by February 4.

Jayalalitha rules out INCC-I charges

MADRAS, Jan 25: The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalitha, today denied the state Congress-I allegation that the ruling AIADMK was planning to disturb the Republic Day flag hoisting function here tomorrow and was also plotting to make an attempt on the Governor, Dr M Channa Reddy's life, reports PTI.

In a telegram to the Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, today she referred to the INCC-I president K Ramamurthy's charge yesterday about the AIADMK's conspiracy and expressed the hope that Rao would not give the slightest importance to this outrageous and bizarre allegation.

She urged Rao to intervene immediately and control the INCC-I leaders who had been making the most irresponsible and inflammatory statements.

Joining issue with Ramamurthy, who had demanded that central forces be deployed to give security to Dr Reddy and take full control of tomorrow's function, she said, "the law and order situation in Tamil Nadu was under perfect control".

Parliament debate on Ukrain's N-accord postponed

KIEV, Jan 25: The Ukrainian parliament postponed a debate Tuesday on signing away Ukraine's nuclear stockpile in accordance with a treaty reached in Moscow, the parliament press office announced, reports AFP.

There was no explanation given for the delay and one spokesman would only say that the debate could take place Wednesday.

The accord was signed on January 14 by President Leonid Kravchuk of the Ukraine along with Russian and US president Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton.

Off the Record

It's difficult to just say no

HARGEISA: Immigration procedures at Hargeisa International Airport are straightforward: You get off the plane and give 40 dollars to a kid whose buddies lounge in the background with AK-47s, reports AP.

He then hands your passport with the quasi-official Republic of Somaliland stamp. The money with his friends and politely inquires when you might be passing his way again.

It's difficult to just say no to a teenager with an assault rifle, and around northwestern Somalia, in the self-declared independent Republic of Somaliland, very few people dare to try.

Its survival of the fittest, says Somaliland presidential spokesman Abdi Idris. If everyone has a gun, the one with the biggest gun survives.

Somaliland is the only region of Somalia that has managed to set up a real government, establish a real peace and begin to build a real future. But the one thing Somaliland has not been able to do is separate 50,000 boys from their guns.

The United Nations and its peacekeepers tried — and largely failed — to disarm the clan militias of Mogadishu and southern Somalia. Somaliland, which was the first region to rise up against dictator Mohamed Said Barre, never wanted UN troops on its soil or UN solutions to its problems.

Chien less fortunate than Larena Bobbit

TAIPEI: Taiwan's version of the Lorena Bobbitt crime went almost unnoticed with a woman in the central city of Taichung being sentenced to two years in jail for cutting off her husband's penis, and killing him, the United Daily News said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Chien Liu Liang, 51, was less fortunate than her US counterpart who was convicted of cutting off the penis with a pair of scissors after learning that her husband was having affairs with other women, the paper said.

The judge said he sentenced the woman to two years in jail instead of death because she committed the crime when she was drunk and temporarily insane.

Bobbitt was found innocent by reason of insanity and sentenced to 45 days in a mental institution. Her husband's appendage was reattached.

Yao Kuan-Jung, however, died of excessive loss of blood after the intoxicated Chien dumped the organ into a toilet and flushed it away, the paper quoted Taichung prosecutors office as saying.

The paper said the crime took place in November 1992 and that the couple was drinking at the time. The woman later went to sleep, and the husband was found dead the next day.

Austrian president in marital trouble

VIENNA: President Thomas Klestil, whose image as a solid family man helped him win Austria's top office in 1992, is facing pressure to resign amid a public furor over his relationship with a female aide, reports AP.

Klestil admitted last week that his wife of 37 years had moved out of the presidential villa.

Widely published suggestion that his relationship with a top aide had caused the marital troubles have rocked Austria's normally staid political and social establishment.

They also may have dealt irreparable damage to the career diplomat who had restored Austria's respectability abroad following Kurt Waldheim's troubled rule. Waldheim's concealed past as a Nazi intelligence officer in World War II isolated the nation during his six-year term. Pressure is mounting for the 61-year-old to sort out his affairs or resign.

Many Chinese buy their wives

BEIJING: A quarter of the men in some villages in the central Chinese province of Anhui buy their wives from neighbouring villages specialising in the sale of women, the China Women's News reported on Tuesday, says AFP.

Miaoqian village, for example is a well known market for trading in women, according to the newspaper, which said that half of families there engage in the trade, the report said.

Traffickers make 115 dollars for each woman sold, which amounts to several months worth of income for a peasant, a woman can cost up to 250 dollars, according to several recent articles in the Chinese press.

The victims are primarily women looking for work in cities. The traffickers recruit in train stations, bus stops and ports, enticing them with promises of work using false recruitment documents.

Chinese gets life term for bid to hijack plane

BEIJING, Jan 25: A Chinese man who failed in his bid to hijack a passenger jet to Taiwan last year has been sentenced to life imprisonment, China's Supreme People's Court Vice President Liu Jiachen said today, reports AFP.

The sentence was actually handed down by a local court on January 13 and Friday's announcement by such a prominent legal official underlined China's desire to be seen to be dealing severely with hijackers after an embarrassing state of incidents last year.

Out of a total 12 attempts to hijack Chinese planes to Taiwan in 1993, 10 succeeded.