

Two opposition parties merge to topple Mugabe

HARARE, Jan 28: The former head of the transitional Zimbabwe-Rhodesia government, Abel Muzorewa, on Thursday joined opposition leader Edgar Tekere in an ambitious bid to topple president Robert Mugabe's government, reports AFP.

Announcing the merger at a joint news conference here, Muzorewa, who was prime minister for six months but lost credibility among the blacks for co-operating with the whites, said: "We are not here to form an opposition. We are here to form a government-in-waiting."

Muzorewa, 67, a retired clergyman of the US-based united Methodist church and leader of the now small opposition party United African National Council (UANC), and the Maverick Tekere, leader of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), become co-presidents of the new party, which retained the name ZUM.

The retired bishop, has made a comeback after retiring from politics in 1985 following 10 months of detention by Mugabe's government for alleged subversive activities.

He was in the limelight in 1970s when the black nationalists like Mugabe and vice-President Joshua Nkomo were either exiled or detained by the former Rhodesian rebel leader, Ian Smith.

Muzorewa headed the transitional government to black majority rule set up by Smith, but lost to Mugabe in the 1980 elections because of his alignment to whites.

He said he considered returning to active politics after requests from parties and individuals.

Tekere, who at the time of the armed struggle for black rule, was one of Mugabe's righthand men, led the country's main opposition party.



Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (L) meets with Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller (R) January 27 during an unscheduled stop in Istanbul where the two leaders met for over an hour. A Foreign Ministry spokesperson said the two leaders discussed the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. — AFP photo

Sino-US talks on nuclear non-proliferation fail

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: The United States and China failed to reach agreement in three days of talks here on nuclear non-proliferation, a State Department spokesman said Thursday, reports AFP.

"I wouldn't say that there's any concrete agreements that are being finalised during these discussions," Michael McCurry said.

During the talks from Tuesday to Thursday, the United States focused on its proposal for a cutoff in the production of missile material for nuclear weapons, McCurry said.

The Chinese side meanwhile wanted to focus on its proposal for a treaty among the five nuclear powers for an agreement on no first use of nuclear weapons.

There was no agreement between the two sides on either of those subjects, McCurry said.

The two sides also discussed

the possibility of a bilateral agreement on missile non-proliferation.

Such an agreement would, among other things, "prevent the future export of certain missiles and missile technology to Pakistan," McCurry said.

"It is clear, I think, based on the meetings today, that negotiating the bilateral agreement will take time," he added.

Washington imposed restrictions on high technology exports to China in August, accusing Beijing of selling missile parts to Pakistan in violation of an existing international arms control system, the missile technology control regime.

AFP from London adds, China is replacing nuclear warheads on some of its medium range ballistic missiles with conventional loads, Jene's Defence Weekly said here today.

According to the specialist Defence Weekly, which quoted

military sources in the region, China was adapting some of its missiles, "so that they can be more effectively employed in local wars."

"The changeover is the result of the new strategic climate following the end of the cold war, and is part of a broader revision of Beijing doctrine," the weekly reported.

It said the weapons being adapted include Dong Feng 21 (DF-21) missiles, most of which are based in the northwest Qinghai and southwest Yunnan province.

"This would allow coverage of northern India, most of the newly-independent republics of central Asia, most of Vietnam and large areas of southeast Asia, Jene's says.

It also reported that China may have developed other types of medium range ballistic missiles for conventional use.

Congress MP demands apology from Rao

CHANDIGARH, Jan 28: The dissident Congress MP, Jagmeet Singh Brar, today demanded that the Prime Minister, P V Narasimha Rao, should appear before the Akal Takht and apologise for the "Operation Blue Star" of 1984, reports PTI.

Addressing a press conference here, Brar said the Sikh priests should have awarded the "tanka" (religious punishment) on former union minister, Buta Singh, after "wider consultations of the issue with various Sikh bodies and institutions."

He said, "I think Buta Singh appeared before the Akal Takht with the approval of Rao."

Since Buta Singh was a party to all decisions taken in 1984 and was one of the key advisors to Congress-I leader Indira Gandhi, it has "been proved that all the policies of the Congress and the centre vis-a-vis Punjab were wrong — strategically and priority-wise."

Strike paralyses Kashmir valley

SRINAGAR, Jan 28: Kashmir's biggest city was closed by a strike Friday called by Muslim separatists to protest the killing of 18 bystanders by army soldiers, reports AP.

Shops were closed and streets were empty in Srinagar, as a team of government officers went to the border town of Kupwara to investigate the shooting in which 15 civilians and three policemen were killed. Ten civilians also were injured.

Residents of Kupwara said the soldiers opened fire indiscriminately into a crowded market in response to what they thought was an ambush by guerrillas.

Some witnesses told the authorities that a car misfired and soldiers mistook the sound to be rebel gunfire, said Mehmoode-ur-Rehman, a state government official.

But others said soldiers opened fire after snipers hiding in a house shot at a convoy of army trucks passing through Kupwara, 80 kilometres north of capital Srinagar.

Akashi returns from Tuzla with military plans

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 28: Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's special representative to Bosnia-Herzegovina has returned with military plans, including possible air strikes, officials said here Thursday, reports AFP.

Yasushi Akashi returned from a visit to Tuzla and Srebrenica in the former Yugoslavia with detailed military recommendations for the Secretary General that could include air strikes against Bosnian Serbs.

Boutros-Ghali is examining the report and was expected to send a letter to the UN Security Council by the weekend about Akashi's recommendations, according to Ahmad Fawzi, the Secretary General's spokesman here in New York.

Somalis attack two UN convoys

MOGADISHU, Jan 28: In the first reported attack on UN soldiers in several months, Somali militiamen opened fire on a UN convoy, seriously injuring one soldier, the United Nations said Friday, reports AP.

The soldiers, from the United Arab Emirates, returned fire as their three vehicles passed through the Medina area of Mogadishu on Thursday afternoon, but no Somalis were injured, Maj. Chris Budge, a UN military spokesman, told reporters. The injured UAE soldier was shot in his back, one arm and one shoulder with an AK-47 assault rifle.

In another attack Thursday night, a group of Somali teenagers threw rocks at a UN convoy of US soldiers, driving out of the UN headquarters in the capital and tried to climb aboard the vehicles.

US may deploy Patriot missiles in ROK

SEOUL, Jan 28: Washington may deploy Patriot missiles at US bases in South Korea within three months to counter the threat of North Korea's Scud missiles, a press report said Friday, reports AFP.

"The missiles might be deployed at US bases here in March or in April," South Korea's national Yonhap news agency quoted an unnamed senior government official as saying.

South Korean officials declined to confirm the report, but a Foreign Ministry spokesman said details would be disclosed later because "consultations are still underway."

We have no reason to oppose the missiles early deployment in our country at a time when concerns are growing over North Korea nuclear programme, another ministry official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Washington officials said Wednesday, the United States

was preparing to send the missiles in response to a request from the senior commander of the 3,000 US troops in South Korea, General Gary E. Luck, but they mentioned no date.

Pyongyang is believed to have upgraded its Scud missiles with the nuclear-capable, 1,000 kilometre range Rodong-1 missile, which it test fired last summer.

Frank Wisner, a top-ranking

Pentagon official, told

reporters in Washington

Wednesday that the anti-missile

batteries would be part of

sensible, rational defence

preparations to protect the South

from an attack by the north.

However both American and

South Korean experts here

Wednesday said they believed

the Patriots would be technically

unable to help defend

Seoul in the event of an attack

from the Demilitarised Zone

(DMZ) dividing the two Koreas.

Off the Record

Madness of Di

LONDON: The backlash from a security scare involving Prince Charles in Australia has caught up with his estranged wife, reports AP.

Scotland Yard chiefs were said Friday to want Prince Diana to take back the police bodyguards she ditched following her decision last month to quit public life.

"Madness of Di — she's sitting target just 24 hours after Charles gun drama," wrote the London newspaper The Sun, which printed a picture of her getting alone into her chauffeur-driven car in a London street on Thursday.

Diana, 32, announced December 3 that she was quitting public life for the time being, with no more public engagements after December 16, and dismissed her four Scotland Yard bodyguards.

The Sun said Friday that the princess, who separated from Charles in December 1992 after 11 years of marriage and two sons, is showing amazing disregard for her own safety.

She was a sitting target for an assassin's bullet... Di seemed to ignore the peril highlighted by the previous day's scare when student David Kang, 23, fired two blank shots at Prince Charles in Sydney, it said.

It said Prime Minister John Major is considering a personal appeal to her to take her police bodyguards back.

Smouldering kiss creates steam in cold doorway

LONDON: A passionate couple created so much steam in a cold doorway that neighbours thought it was smoke and alerted the fire brigade, British newspapers reported on Thursday, says Reuter.

Two fire engines and a police car raced to the scene — only to find two young lovers in a sizzling clinch on the steps of a community centre at Caldicot in Wales, the Daily Star said.

The tabloid quoted local resident Bill Llewellyn, 65, as saying "They were certainly making a lot of steam — it looked just like the smoke from a fire."

Police inspector Clive Morgan said: its given everyone a laugh. It really was a smouldering kiss.

40pc Japanese wives think of divorce

TOKYO: About 40 per cent of Japanese wives in Tokyo think about getting a divorce even though most say they are satisfied with their marriages, according to a poll published Thursday, reports AFP.

The poll compiled by the Tokyo metropolitan government covered 3,000 men and women aged 20 or over, with a 71 per cent response rate.

Forty-two per cent of the wives said they had thought about divorce, against 23 per cent among their husbands.

The poll also found that divorce had been considered among more than 50 per cent of wives in their 40s and 50s, nearly double the ratio among wives in their 20s.

Reasons for considering divorce included a discrepancy in values, differences of views about child-rearing and education, and poor relations with in-laws.

Toilet paper sold as art

LONDON: A ton of toilet paper claiming to be art has gone on sale here for 10,000 pounds (15,000 dollars), or nearly 40 pounds a roll, reports AFP.

The work of sculptress Susan Stockwell, the untitled cascade of some 2,700 rolls 4.5 metres (15 feet) high is on show in a London gallery, whose owner Bernard Jacobson said such luminaries as advertiser Charles Saatchi and singer David Bowie had shown interest.

Stockwell was sponsored by a maker of paper tissues who supplied the raw material.

The phenomenon has reminded critics of the furor that greeted the pile of bricks displayed at the Tate gallery in the 1970s, the heap of disposable babies' nappies that went on show soon afterwards, and Anya Gallaccio's recent wall painting using 63 kilos (140 pound) of chocolate.

BRIEFLY

Briton shot dead in Croatia: A British aid worker was shot dead and two others were wounded Thursday as they tried to escape an ambush near Zenica central Bosnia. UN relief officials said Friday, AP reports from Zagreb.

They said the three aid workers were hired as drivers for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from the Overseas Development Agency, a British non-governmental aid agency. The UN officials who refused to be identified said that according to incomplete reports reaching Zagreb the three aid workers, who were ambushed, were shot as they tried to escape.

Ex-president of CBS awarded: Former CBS News President Fred Friendly was honoured Thursday at the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards for his five-decade career in journalism, AP reports from New York.

Columbia University President George Rupp presented the Gold Baton award to Friendly and praised him for "not only changing television news, but also holding all of the media to the highest standards of excellence and public service."

Describing the landmark "Media and Society" series that Friendly produced for public television, Rupp said: "Fred made public television his classroom and taught us about the great issues of our times and the great institutions of our nation."

One killed in Mostar: One person was killed and 13 injured in heavy Bosnian Croat shelling of the besieged Muslim enclave in the southern city of Mostar. Muslim-controlled Sarajevo radio reported yesterday, Reuter says from Sarajevo.

The radio said the government-held pockets of Maglaj, Tesanj and Doboj in northern Bosnia had been bombed and targeted by infantry probes while government positions in Brcko had been shelled.

Gornji Vakuf, scene of fierce fighting between Muslim forces and Bosnian Croat HVO militia in recent months, was being subjected to the "worst HVO offensive since the start of the war" said the radio.

1 lakh prostitutes in Thailand: The Thai government has put the number of prostitutes in the country at 100,000, according to government spokesman Abhisit Vejjajiva, Xinhua reports from Bangkok.

He said the figure of 2 million prostitutes given by the Thai center for protection of children's rights was an "overestimate" while the estimate by the public welfare department of 60,000 was too low.

The official estimate was worked out Wednesday at a meeting of the joint public/private consultative committee on social affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai.

Armed robbery in Puerto Rico:

Three masked men carrying automatic weapons burst into a Kmart on Thursday, taking hostages and 60,000 dollars before the store was surrounded by police, authorities said, AP reports from Puerto Rico.

The five hostages, including store supervisors and checkout clerks, were freed about an hour later, and the gunmen escaped, police said.

Scores of police, including a SWAT unit and an aircraft squad rushed to the store in Vega Baja, west of San Juan. The police, sweeping the store and searching air conditioning ducts and ceiling panels, did not find the gunmen, police Sgt. Juan Mangome said early Friday.

China executes 30 more: Chinese authorities Thursday executed 30 people convicted of robbery, murder and selling firearms, a Beijing-funded newspaper in Hong Kong said Friday, AP reports from Hong Kong.

The sentences were handed down at mass rallies in and around Canton, capital of Guangdong Province on the border with British-ruled Hong Kong, Wen Wei Po said.

It said the sentences were approved by a court and carried out shortly afterward, but it gave no details.

Roof collapse in France, 2 die: At least two people were killed and 94 injured Wednesday when the concrete roof of a supermarket here collapsed, rescue services said as firemen battled to locate an unknown number still trapped under the rubble, AFP reports from France.

Rescue officials earlier reported that at least 10 people had died. They confirmed at least 15 people were still trapped in the wreckage and warned that the death toll could rise.

Six of the injured were seriously hurt, rescuers said, at an operation to free the rest using heavy lifting gear got under way.

Five killed in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Jan 28: Five people were killed when a policeman fired a rocket into a car in the eastern province of Kompong Cham this week, a Cambodian newspaper said today, reports Reuter.

The Koh Santepheap newspaper said the incident occurred on January 24 when seven men, drunk from a morning of partying, began firing pistols into the air in Kompong Seng district.

The newspaper said a local deputy police chief, startled by the gunfire, attempted to arrest the youths but was wounded in the leg.

Row intensifies between France and US over Bosnia strategy

PARIS, Jan 28: A row between France and the United States on Bosnia strategy intensified Thursday with the French Foreign Ministry accusing US officials of being ill-informed and standing back on the sidelines as war raged, reports AFP.

French Foreign Ministry spokesman Richard Duque dropped diplomatic niceties on Thursday to accuse the State Department of being "ill-informed" about France's stance after Paris urged the US to take an active part in pressuring the belligerents to agree to a peace treaty.

In an allusion to the US, he said: "If we take this from a moral point of view, the choice is between being happy to observe the fighting or to try ev-

erything to stop it."

He was reacting to equally sharp criticisms by the State Department that French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe had engaged in "a strange moral calculus" by urging a peace settlement on the "aggrieved party" — the Bosnia Muslims — although they have suffered the most from Serbian aggression.

State Department spokesman Mike McCurry also said French positions seemed to be dictated by internal politics.

Of Secretary of State Warren Christopher's visit to Paris last Monday, he said: "I did observe in Paris that it seems to be a season of politics, but I don't want to comment on their domestic international politics."

In London, British officials

said Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd hoped to defuse the conflict when he visits Washington next week.

The Foreign office said that Hurd would meet in New York on Monday with UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then go to Washington for talks with Vice President Al Gore, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and Deputy Defence Secretary William Perry.

The foreign office said Hurd's talks would centre on the future role of the UN peacekeeping force in the former Yugoslavia, and that would also be meeting with senior legislators and Pentagon officials.

France is the biggest contributor with 6,000 men to the United Nations peacekeeping

force in former Yugoslavia and there have been increasing calls for a pullout in the spring, after the failure of Geneva peace talks.

Duque said the 11 other states of the European union shared the French view on the Bosnian situation and that consultations among Europeans would intensify in the coming days.

Juppe told the New York Times Tuesday that if the US did not join in European efforts to force through a peace plan dividing Bosnia into three ethnically based mini states, they would be responsible for a "catastrophe."

He said, "If the Americans do not convince the Bosnian Muslims that they must stop fighting and that there is no

chance that the US would come to their rescue, then the United States will give them incentives to pursue the fighting on the ground."

On Wednesday, France called for the implementation of "if necessary with the use of force" of recent NATO decisions on Bosnia-Herzegovina to use air strikes if necessary to relieve UN forces in the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica and open up Tuzla airport for relief supplies.

In a joint communique issued by President Francois Mitterrand and Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, France urged the United Nations to "secure the necessary means as soon as possible" to achieve these objectives.

The North Atlantic Treaty

Organisation resolved at a summit in Brussels earlier this month to authorise the use of strikes by NATO warplanes to open up the two besieged Muslim-controlled centres.

The announcement of Hurd's trip followed his warning the night before that the international community should think hard on how long after spring it could expect to continue its involvement in the former Yugoslavia.

"We have to consider carefully, and with the others who contribute troops, how long we can reasonably be expected to sustain this involvement," he said in a speech.

He said no decisions had yet been taken, and that Britain would not act "hastily or alone" to withdraw its troops.

Fundamentalists kill 117 in Algeria

BONN, Jan 28: Muslim fundamentalists in Algeria killed at least 117 security force members and civilians from January 9 to 25 alone, the exiled leadership of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) charged here, reports AFP.

In a statement Thursday, the FIS said it was not claiming responsibility for the killings, but wanted to draw the public's attention to the bloodshed.

The heaviest of the latest attacks, the "mujahadeen" killed 60 soldiers in a raid on the barracks at Sidi Bel Abbas in western Algeria, the statement said.

Fundamentalist guerrillas also killed 12 paramilitary policemen in an ambush outside Sif, some 400 kilometres from Algiers on January 18.