

Troops, Contra clash leaves 16 dead

MANAGUA, Feb 1: Rearmed Contra rebel clashes with government troops over the weekend left 16 people dead and several others wounded, military officials said Monday, reports AFP.

The violence came amid unconfirmed news reports that North Front-380 guerrilla leader Jose Angel Talavera, also known as the "The Jackal," had returned from Honduras seeking to regroup his disbanded rebel forces.

Talavera was believed to have fled the country last year after he led some 400 rearmed, right-wing Contra rebels in a hostage taking which nearly paralysed the government and sparked fears of renewed civil war.

An army official said that Talavera had not been spotted, but confirmed that he had reentered the country to meet with his rebel force which had been all but disbanded by government troops.

Soldiers were deployed to northern Nicaragua around the village of Quilali, where officials had heard Talavera intended to meet with the rebels.

Army officials said that 11 rebels and five soldiers were killed in eight separate clashes since Friday.

Two soldiers and an unknown number of rebels were also wounded, and press reports said Talavera's brother Esteban was injured in the fighting.

Last August, Talavera's group captured a 38-member government delegation — including the vice president and several Sandinista politicians — and held them hostage in Quilali where officials were travelling to negotiate with the guerrilla group.

Some 20 retired Sandinista soldiers retaliated by taking a group of conservative politicians hostage in Managua.

Conflicts in Balkans may lead to World War III: Zhirinovsky

VUKOVAR, Croatia, Feb 1: Russian hardliner Vladimir Zhirinovsky said yesterday nationalist conflicts and religious tension in the Balkans could lead to World War III, reports Reuters.

Visiting Serb strongholds in the former Yugoslav republics of Bosnia and Croatia, he blamed the West for fanning conflicts there with its double standards on democracy, human rights and national self-determination.

Just as the clash between communism and fascism ended with World War II, so attempts to provoke people into conflict through nationalism and religious divisions will lead Europe and the world to World War III, he told reporters.

If you take a historical parallel, we are now living in 1935, when just four years remained until World War II.

The ultra-nationalist was speaking in the devastated town of Vukovar, seized by Serbs and the Yugoslav army in a ferocious battle.

AFP adds: Zhirinovsky called Monday for the establishment of a Slav state from the port of Vladivostok on the sea of Japan to Knin on the Adriatic.

Speaking in Vukovar in the self-proclaimed Serb republic of Krajina, an area carved out of Croatia, the Russia legislator told a rally of several thousands that armed Russian volunteers and even military divisions would come to their aid if necessary.

"We have in common our orthodox faith, a language and a destiny. Together there are 300 million of us and nobody should forget it," he told and enthusiastic, applauding crowd gathered in the wreckage of Vukovar.

"It's terrible sight," Zhirinovsky said after viewing the town, taken from Croats by Serb forces in November 1991 after an 86-day siege that left the town in ruins and thousands dead.

Vukovar is "an heroic town, a symbol of the defence of the Slav world, a monument against the barbarians who destroyed it," he said.

Foreign observers say most of the damage of the town was in fact carried out by Yugoslav bombing runs and artillery on the side of the Serbs, and several former Yugoslav military officers have been critical of its destruction.

After viewing a military parade, the leaders of the Liberal Democratic Party said: Russian volunteers armed with sophisticated weapons will come to help you if you ask. If necessary, Russian divisions will come.

Zhirinovsky, has no real influence on Russian foreign or military policy, which are the prerogatives of President Boris Yeltsin under the new constitution.

In Zagreb, the exiled Croat mayor of Vukovar, Matej Jankovic, protested to the Russian ambassador about Zhirinovsky's visits, saying Russia should distance itself from his activities and calling on UN troops to arrest the Russian MP.

Several thousand people many in uniform, waited to greet Zhirinovsky earlier Monday in Bjeljina, northeastern Bosnia, in the self-declared Bosnian Serb Republic.



Irit Salomon Curator of the Yad Vashem (Holocaust memorial) in Jerusalem displays for the first time January 31 a carpet made of human hair. The carpet (97cm by 94), presented by Malvina Perata, was given to her father in 1942 by German soldiers in exchange for food. The hair could belong to prisoners from the Nazis concentration camps. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Kravchuk to visit US in March: Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk will visit Washington in March to discuss economic cooperation, foreign investment and other issues with President Clinton, and aide to Kravchuk said Tuesday, AP reports from Kiev.

Kravchuk's trip will be a return visit for President Clinton's stop in Kiev on January 12, while Clinton was on his way to Moscow for a summit with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Clinton invited Kravchuk at that time to come to Washington in a sign that US-Ukrainian relations are improving because of Kravchuk's renewed commitment to eliminate all the nuclear weapons that Ukraine inherited from the former Soviet Union.

Three killed in Pak violence: Three persons have been killed and six others injured in different firing incidents in Karachi of Pakistan's Sindh province, Xinhua reports from Islamabad.

The violence occurred Monday in the wake of the murder of a leader of Mauhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) Haqiqi group at Sunday night.

According to local press reports yesterday some unidentified masked men opened indiscriminate firing on moving vehicles in different parts of Karachi's eastern district where the leader of MQM Haqiqi group Zafar Abbas was killed. Some vehicles were also burnt or damaged.

Peru road mishap claims 17: A bus carrying members of anti-guerrilla peasant militias tumbled down a cliff in the central province of Concepcion Monday, killing 17 and wounding 30 others, police and witnesses said, Reuter reports from Lima.

The bus veered off the road and over the precipice near the town of Comas, 120 miles (200 kms) east of Lima, they said. The road was in poor condition because of torrential rains in the area. A civil defence team was working into the night to rescue the bodies, police said.

Landslide in Indonesia, 2 killed: A landslide triggered by heavy rains in the northern coast of central Java killed two teenagers and seriously injured another, Antara news agency said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The teenagers were bating Monday in a natural pool near their home village in Pemalang district, when the landslide occurred, reported Antara.

8 prisoners killed in Mexico: Eight inmates were killed and 10 injured in a fight that broke out early Monday at the Chetumal prison on the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, authorities said, AFP reports from Mexico.

Officials said about 60 prisoners were involved in the fight, and that inmates attacked others with home-made pipes, clubs and other weapons. There are no report on the reason for the violence.

Sikhs protest Clinton's remarks on their rights

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: Police fired tear gas and used water cannon here Tuesday to scatter thousands of Sikhs protesting against US President Bill Clinton's remarks on the rights of Sikhs in the Indian state of Punjab, reports AFP.

Steel-helmeted policemen lobbed 12 tear gas shells in quick succession after the estimated 10,000 demonstrators threw stones and almost broke through a security cordon in a bid to march on the US embassy.

The Sikhs, chanting slogans and waving placards denouncing Clinton, immediately scattered. A police officer was injured after being hit by a stone.

The demonstration was organised by the Punjab chapter of India's ruling Congress (I) party and the protestors arrived in the capital in buses from the northern state, where a Sikh separatist campaign is on its last legs.

It was the third and the biggest demonstration here since Clinton wrote a letter on December 27 to US representative Gary Condit saying he wanted a "peaceful solution that protected Sikh rights" in Punjab.

The letter was in reply to a letter seeking US intervention "to end the misery in Khalistan where over 110,000 Sikhs have been killed by Indian security forces since 1984 and 70,000 Sikhs are languishing in jails without being tried."

Khalistan, or land of the pure, is the name given to Punjab, India's only Sikh-majority state, by Sikh militants campaigning for an independent homeland.

"There is a lot of anger in Punjab over Clinton's remarks," said Ram Lubaya Chowdhury, a leader of the Punjab Congress chapter. "Sikh rights are perfectly safe in Punjab," added Gurumukh Singh, a Sikh farmer.



Russian ultra-nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky (L) and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic talk to the press after their meeting in the northeastern-Bosnian town of Bjeljina, January 31. Zhirinovsky is on an unofficial visit to Yugoslavia, Bosnia and the self-declared Republic of Krajina. — AFP photo

China can play decisive role in resolving DPRK's N-issue

SEOUL, Feb 1: China can play a decisive role in easing disputes over North Korea's nuclear programme which are expected to reach a turning point in three weeks, a South Korean official said Tuesday, reports AP.

National Unification Minister Lee Yung-duk noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency's board will meet February 21 to review progress in efforts to persuade the Communist North to accept full international inspections of its nuclear facilities.

South Korean officials say the issue would have to be taken to the UN Security Council for consideration of sanctions unless it is resolved before the February 21 meeting.

"China's influence would be a decisive factor in affecting North Korea's course of action," Lee said in a meeting with officials of the governing Democratic Liberal Party.

Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo told the same meeting that the IAEA is expected to declare safeguards discontinued in North Korea if it is unable to carry out thorough inspections there.

"Then the North's nuclear problem would have to be sent to the UN Security Council," Han said.

South Korean Ambassador to China Hwang Byung-tae said separately in Seoul Tuesday that Beijing is believed to be trying hard to persuade North Korea to accept full IAEA inspections.

"China knows that it would be thrown into a difficult situation if the North's nuclear issue is sent to the Security Council," Hwang told reporters.

On Monday, North Korea said that if the United States continues trying to pressure it to accept IAEA conditions for inspections, it would follow through on threats to withdraw from an international treaty to check the spread of nuclear weapons.

Cancer to claim more lives than AIDS, TB, Malaria by year 2015

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: Cancer will be the biggest killer disease by 2015, claiming more lives than AIDS, TB and Malaria put together, reports Xinhua.

This was stated here on Friday by Jan St Jernssward, chief of WHO (World Health Organisation) cancer control programme, who was recently in the country.

He said that there are at present an estimated five million new cases of cancer and three million deaths in the third world. By 2015 there would be 10 million new cases and six million deaths.

He said that contrary to public belief, more cases and deaths occur in the developing world.

He said that in the developed world, cancer was the second leading cause of death and in the developing countries, the third. By 2015 it would be number one killer world-wide.

ICRC reports 12,000 casualties in Kabul fighting

KABUL, Feb 1: Casualties in the Kabul factional fighting between forces for and against President Burhanuddin Rabbani have topped 12,000, with 800 to 900 killed, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said today, reports AFP.

But of the 12,200 casualties recorded for the first 28 days fighting in Kabul, as many as 3,000 treated may have been injured in previous clashes and had returned for fresh dressing of old wounds, the ICRC noted.

Threat to resume agitation for separate Bodoland

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: The All Bodo Students Union, the frontline organisation of the Bodo tribals, Monday reiterated its threat to resume the agitation for a separate-Bodoland state if more villages are not included in the Bodoland autonomous council area, reports PTI.

In a statement, the ABSU General Secretary, Maheswar Bnasulaty, said that the government must grant 3,085 villages, tea gardens, forest reserves, international and interstate boundary areas to the council. The government had granted 2,770 villages to the council in an unilateral notification after failing to persuade the opposition parties and the Bodo leaders for a consensus on the vexed issue.

Basul Atary, in his statement, also accused the government led by the Chief Minister, Hiteswar Saikia, "sabotaging" the Bodo accord signed in February last year.

"Saikia is taking a role against the Bodo tribals," he said.

Off the Record

Royal silence

TOKYO: Japan's imperial family is maintaining a royal silence on mounting speculation that Princess Masako, the brilliant diplomat who married the heir to the throne last year, is pregnant, reports AFP.

For weeks, gossip columnists have stocked rumours concerning Masako's condition, undaunted by the wall of stony silence from the imperial household.

In its latest edition, the weekly magazine Women claims to have identified a trend in royal cover-ups of pregnancies, drawing the inevitable conclusion that the princes will deliver an heir before the year is out.

"A cold or a pregnancy?" asked the magazine, referring to a health problem that has kept the princess out of the public eye so far this year.

The magazine was swift to point out that the imperial household stage-managed a cover-up in 1991 when princess Kiko, wife of Prince Aya, was pregnant.

Princess Kiko had a "cold," the household said, when she missed foreign trips and royal duties.



No condom policy unreasonable

SYDNEY: A group of Australian prisoners was given permission yesterday to sue the New South Wales state government for refusing them condoms while in jail, reports Reuter.

A court on Tuesday allowed the 52 prisoners to sue state prison authorities. The detainees say the "no condom" policy is unreasonable and an improper exercise of power.

New South Wales Supreme Court judge Alan Abadee also granted anonymity to prisoners giving evidence.

'Saddam committed to rebuild N-weapons'

WASHINGTON, Feb 1: President Bill Clinton expressed concern Monday that Iraq was still trying to stockpile weapons of mass destruction, and put tough conditions on removing international sanctions on Baghdad, reports AFP.

"Continued vigilance is necessary because we believe that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is committed to rebuilding his weapons of mass destruction capability, especially nuclear weapons. Clinton wrote in a letter to Congressional leaders.

The president pointed to Baghdad's refusal to respond to questions about its weapons and said that though Iraq had accepted the UN resolution on long-term monitoring of its military installations, it has a long way to go toward compliance.

"There must be a sustained period of unquestionable, complete compliance with the monitoring plans he said, adding that Iraq had violated its agreements in other instances, notably the December 22 attack on an allied military convoy.

Iraq's decision not to use limited oil revenues to buy food and medicine is the cause of much suffering in Iraq's civilian population, Clinton said.

The United States is moving to transfer 200 million dollars in frozen Iraqi assets to a special UN fund for humanitarian aid, Clinton said in the letter.

The president's letter also said the United States has turned over some 3,000 files on victims of the invasion of Kuwait to the UN compensation committee, which has received more than two million requests to date.

The UN Security Council agreed on January 18 to continue the embargo against Iraq.

Women seek military career in South Korea

SEOUL, Feb 1: A record number of women are applying to serve in South Korea's Army, reflecting an interest in long-term careers by college-educated women, reports AFP.

The army said Tuesday that 1,100 college-educated women applied for only 45 slots open to women interested in officer training. This doubles the number of applicants from 1993.

In this deeply patriarchal society, employment opportunities for educated women are limited and an army offer of equal pay is appealing, officials said.

'Rich nations dump toxic waste in Asia under guise of recycling'

SINGAPORE, Feb 1: Rich western nations and Japan are dumping toxic waste in Asian countries under the guise of recycling, the international environmental group Greenpeace said Tuesday, urging a total ban on such shipments, reports AFP.

In a report released here Greenpeace said that it had documented schemes that could have resulted in the shipment of up to 10.4 million tonnes of hazardous wastes to Asian countries over the past four years.

"Popular and government opposition have prevented many of these shipments, but a flood of waste is pouring into Asia nonetheless," the group said in its report. "The waste invasion of Asia."

Greenpeace said that, locked out of the rest of the world, western waste traffickers were making a last-ditch effort to keep Asia as a welcome home for their pollutants and were taking "a devastating toll from people and the environment."

Greenpeace toxic-trade campaigner Simon Divecha said that the 24 members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the so-called rich man's club, were the major generators and exporters of toxic waste sent to Asian countries.

"They used to send their wastes to Africa, South America and the Caribbean but these countries have now been closed off," he said.

Divecha said that the chief culprits, dubbed by Greenpeace the "sinister seven," were Australia, Canada, Finland, Japan, Germany, Britain and the United States.

He said that between 1990 and 1993, Australia, Canada, Germany, Britain and the United States shipped more than 5.4 million tonnes of toxic waste to Asian countries.

Greenpeace officials said that they were releasing the report here to coincide with the first tour by the organisation's ship, MV Greenpeace of Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines to draw attention to the problem.

While on a similar trip in October last year, MV Greenpeace filmed a Russian ship dumping tonnes of liquid radioactive waste into the seas off Japan.

The report said that the hazardous material shipped to Asian countries included scrap lead, contaminated plastics, aluminium, copper, nickel, cadmium, incinerator ash and medical waste.

"There are currently plans awaiting approval to send household garbage, plastic and lead battery wastes and hospital wastes from the United States, Europe and Japan to Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India and Vietnam."

Divecha said that Asia was providing "a cheap disposal option for OECD countries," adding: "But for a growing number of Asian countries it means a contaminated environment and untold damage to human health."

The report said that plastic waste was landing in Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Thailand, the Philippines, China and Hong Kong where it was melted down through a process that released cancer-causing gases.

It said that scrap metal from OECD countries was being reprocessed tonnes of computer waste called "technojunk" to Asia where wires are stripped for copper and computer keyboards and other waste burned producing by-products linked to cancer.

Divecha said Greenpeace hoped a meeting of signatory countries to the base convention on hazardous wastes scheduled for Geneva in March would agree to ban shipments of all toxic waste material to Asia.

"I think we have a very good chance of this happening because 103 countries are calling for such a ban, and the United States, the biggest generator of wastes, has said it may support a ban," he said.

ROK repatriates 2 DPRK soldiers

PANMUNJOM, Korea, Feb 1: Two young North Korean soldiers walked home from the South Tuesday in the first repatriation across the heavily fortified 38th parallel since the Korean war, reports AFP.

Watched by about 50 North Korean and US soldiers the two, Kim Kyung-Chul, 19, and Kim Chul Jin, 23, were handed over to the North Korean side by the United Nations command after a brief ceremony on the demarcation line.

The South Korean Defence Ministry said it was the first repatriation allowed across the 38th parallel since the 1953 armistice.