

International

Tamil leaders ready for talks without preconditions

COLOMBO, Feb 2: Sri Lankan Tamil rebel leaders have expressed willingness for peace talks with the government without precondition, church sources said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

They said the rebel leaders made the offer to a visiting church peace mission led by Roman Catholic Archbishop Nicholas Marcus Fernando.

The delegation visited the rebel-controlled Jaffna peninsula last week and met leaders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who are fighting for an independent state in the north and east for their minority community.

The mission, which called on Sunday for a ceasefire, held talks with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe on Monday about the meeting with the Tamil guerrillas.

Wickremasinghe last month asked the insurgents for fresh talks to end the 10-year civil war that has killed more than 30,000 people. But he wants them to lay down their arms or state their intention of doing

"What we have proposed is

so as a condition for the talks.

The rebels had previously rejected conditional discussions and have not responded to Wickremasinghe's invitation. The two sides last met in 1990.

Monday's church-government talks also raised the plight of residents of the Jaffna Peninsula, who have lived for years without electricity and other essentials and suffer constant bombing by the air force seeking guerrilla bases.

AFP adds: Sri Lankan President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga proposed electing the country's next executive head of state through a parliamentary vote rather than a direct nationwide election, a press report said Wednesday.

Wijetunga told a public rally in north-central Anuradhapura region Tuesday that he favoured a single poll for the parliament which in turn could elect a president, instead of holding two major elections, the state-owned Daily News said.

The president said there was inherent danger in the possibility of having a president from one party and a parliament from an opposing party with the current dual elections scheme.

Wijetunga's United National

Party (UNP), which has governed the country since 1977, will make its recommendations to amend the constitutions to a parliamentary committee headed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, the president said.

Any amendment to the constitution requires a two-thirds majority or a nationwide referendum. Wijetunga's UNP currently does not enjoy a two-thirds majority in parliament, with 125 seats in the 225-member assembly.

The president argued that under the present system the majority Sinhalese community was polarised, giving a decisive vote to the minorities.

The other deleterious feature is that each candidate from the two main (majority) parties vying for the presidency would find it necessary to woo the minorities, or the parties representing the minorities, for the marginal vote that tilt the results in his favour," Wijetunga was quoted as saying.

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Wijetunga's United National



Youth Congress (I) President Maninder Singh Bitta leans on crutches as he tells reporters on Wednesday of a planned march to the border with Pakistan to protest its alleged support for Muslim rebels in Kashmir.

— AFP photo

Youth Congress' march towards border with Pakistan tomorrow.

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: The youth wing of India's ruling party announced plans today to march to the border with Pakistan to protest its alleged support for Muslim rebels in Kashmir, reports AFP.

Youth Congress (I) president Maninder Singh Bitta said 50,000 party members would march to the borders on Friday, when a general strike has been called in Pakistan in solidarity with the Muslim population in Kashmir.

The marchers will neither cross the border nor will they try to provoke Pakistani troops deployed on the other side, he told a news conference.

"But Pakistan should know

that our youth are ready to fight for their country," Bitta said.

The party activists are scheduled to march from the Sikh holy city of Amritsar in Punjab state to the militarised sector of Atari on the Pakistan border, one of two land routes open between the two countries.

Bitta also said the march would kick off a month-long youth Congress campaign to protest Pakistani backing for the bloody Muslim secessionist struggle in the northern state, involving a month of anti-Pakistan rallies and demonstrations across India's 25 states beginning Friday.

Military tensions between the two countries reached a

flashpoint two years ago when thousands of Muslims from the Pakistani-administered portion of Kashmir tried to march on the Indian zone of the divided state.

"Our fight is to crush Pakistan-inspired terrorism, save India and defend Kashmir," said Bitta, Sikh who had survived several assassination attempts.

Eight people, including four of Bitta's security men, were killed in a car bomb explosion outside his party headquarters here on September 12.

The attacks on Bitta have been blamed on Sikh militants waging a decade-old separatist campaign in his home state of Punjab.

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Ghali urges US, rich states not to play role of policeman

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 2: The United States and other industrialised countries must support the United Nations if they don't want to become global policemen in regional disputes, the Secretary General said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Secretary General Boutros Ghali made his comments to reporters in assessing the body's persistent financial crisis and the reluctance of member nations to contribute ground forces to areas in conflict.

"It is in the interest of the international community to solve the crisis. Public opinion in the US is not eager to play the role of the policeman of

the world, so the UN is there to do this job," Boutros-Ghali said.

Boutros-Ghali also warned Washington that hesitating over putting its forces into the UN peacekeeping operations will make other nations ask, "Why must I send my kids to be killed for a PKO (Peace Keeping Operation) in a very difficult place?"

The Egyptian diplomat insisted the only way to ensure global peace is for member nations to bolster the United Nations, which is increasingly being called upon to settle regional and ethnic disputes.

"In the next years, we may

have more and more ethnic wars and small confrontations, and they can spread like a disease all over the world," he said.

There is a consensus, he added, that in spite of the difficulties and the contradictions the United Nations remains the only forum that can meet the challenges to come.

We have tried to encourage certain regional organisations to replace or to cooperate with the United Nations," Boutros-Ghali said, but the result was that the member states said: "No, we want the United Nations."

In the next years, we may



Russian President Boris Yeltsin receives flowers and a handmade Jostovo tray as birthday presents from his assistants in the Kremlin, Moscow on Tuesday.

— AFP photo

Chinese experts in Delhi for border talks

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: A Chinese experts team comprising diplomatic and military personnel arrived here early this morning for border talks with India, reports Xinhua.

The Chinese delegation, which is led by Deputy Director in the Asia Department of the Foreign Ministry Fu Xuezhang, will discuss further confidence-building measures with their Indian counterparts led by Joint Secretary of External Affairs Ministry Shiv Shankar Menon.

The creation of such an experts team by each side was decided during Indian Prime minister Narasimha Rao's visit to China in September last year.

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Bosnian leaders want concessions

SARAJEVO, Feb 2: Bosnian Muslim leaders, their position bolstered by recent battlefield successes, Tuesday told a United Nations envoy they would not sign peace without concessions from their enemies, reports AP.

The hitherto abortive Bosnian peace talks in Geneva are scheduled to resume February 10, but reports of recent major troop movements and a general Bosnian Serb call-up have dimmed hopes for progress in the talks.

On Monday, Bosnian Serbs announced a new call-up to prepare for more fighting, reflecting their failure to force Bosnia's Muslim-led government to accept defeat after 21 months of war that has killed more than 200,000 people.

While the extent of mobilisation could not be determined, it seemed to stem from the stubborn resistance of increasingly aggressive Bosnian government troops and fears the West might intervene on behalf of the Muslims.

NATO has renewed threats to use air strikes against the Serbs, although it has failed to

follow through in the past.

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Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic accused foreign countries Tuesday of permitting Muslims to fight to victory, adding, "they will have to give us the same right."

In Sarajevo, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic said, "we are not for peace at any price, but ... for a just peace, and we have not offered a just peace." He spoke after a meeting with Yasushi Akashi, the head of the UN mission in former Yugoslavia.

"If a just peace is not offered ... we will not sign any papers..." Izetbegovic added. The Sarajevo government insists on more territory to link up isolated Muslim enclaves and acquire access to the Sava river and Adriatic sea.

That would require Bosnian Serbs and Croats to make territorial concessions.

Off the Record

Copycat of Lorena Bobbit case

ANKARA: Turkish police said on Tuesday they had caught, then freed, a woman who cut off her lover's penis in an apparent copycat of a U.S case in which a court acquitted a woman of malicious wounding for the same act.

"We tracked her down in a shanty house in Ankara on Tuesday night," a police officer, who declined to be named, told Reuters.

"But we let her free as the victim is not pressing charges — I personally think she was right to do what she did," he said.

The officer said the woman severed the penis on January 23 of Carpaly attendant, Abdullah Kavak, her lover of two years. She said he regularly forced her to have 'diverent' sex.

She got him drunk on four bottles of wine, tied him up with a pair of tights and a scarf, and lopped it off with a bread knife," he said. "She ran away, and he was stitched up in hospital."

He said Konak was not pressing charges.

The officer said police were still searching in the Aegean town of Denizli for three of five men who severed the penis of another man. The officer said they attacked shopkeeper Yasar Cevik as they opposed him marrying his girlfriend, a relation of the five.

"Unfortunately his could not be found," he said.

"Two weeks ago a U.S court, on the ground of temporary insanity, acquitted Ecuador-born manicurist Lorena Bobbit after she cut off her husband's penis in a case that captured worldwide attention.

Honorary golden bear for Sophia Loren



Italian actress Sophia Loren, 61, sits next to her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Tuesday as an honour for her film career.

— AFP photo

BERLIN, Feb 2: Italian screen star Sophia Loren will be honoured for her life's work with the highest award of the Berlin film festival when the 44th "Berlinale" opens on February 10, reports Reuter.

Festival head Miroslav de Hadelen said on Tuesday that Loren would be awarded an honorary golden bear during the 11-day festival, which will feature 30 movies vying for the real golden bear for best film, and scores of others in parallel showings.

Loren, 60, this year, has starred in more than 50 films made in Italy, the United States, France, Canada and Britain.

Her most famous films include the award-winning "La Ciociara" (Two Women) in 1961, directed by Italian Vittorio de Sica's, and "The Millionaires" (1961), where she starred with the late Peter Sellers.

About two-thirds of the competition films at Berlin this year are European. U.S. entries include "Philadelphia", from director Jonathan Demme and starring Tom Hanks.

The film "Form 13" Star, which tells the fictional tale of a gay lawyer who sues his former employers for firing him because he has AIDS, is the first production from a major Hollywood studio to focus on the fatal disease.

Four competition films come from East Europe or Russia and two each from East Asia and Latin America.

275 Chinese police officers killed in '93

BEIJING, Feb 2: Some 275 Chinese police officers were killed on duty in 1993 and more than 8,120 were injured, an official newspaper reported Wednesday in the latest sign of a worsening crime problem, reports AP.

Police are at increasing risk because more and more criminals are carrying weapons, the China Daily said. Crimes involving weapons were up 52.6 per cent in 1993's first 11 months compared to January-November 1992, the paper said, without giving an actual figure.

The paper said the police deaths and injuries were disclosed Tuesday by Public Security Minister Tao Sijun at an award ceremony for outstanding police officers.

Mexican rebels agree to open face-to-face talks

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, Mexico, Feb 2: Rebels in southern Mexico have agreed to open face-to-face talks with the government on ending their uprising, a rebel statement said Tuesday, reports AP.

A communiqué from the Zapatista National Liberation Army said talks were imminent. It said a basic agreement had been worked out with the government on holding the talks and only some details remain to be worked out.

It was the first concrete word from the rebels they are serious about negotiating an end to the uprising that has been smoldering since New Year's Day. Previous rebel statements were vague.

particularly in South Asia, suffer abuses on an appalling scale.

But of all the risks to individual rights, it said, none posed a greater threat than armed conflict.

In Bosnia, Sudan, Burundi, Somalia, Angola, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Georgia and elsewhere, armed conflict led to massive numbers of civilian deaths, refugees, flows and human rights abuses," according to the report.

It said Bosnian Serb forces persisted in their practice of ethnic cleansing, including "laying siege to cities, indiscriminately shelling civilian inhabitants, raping and executing non-combatants and interfering with humanitarian aid deliveries."

The report, which covers events in 1993, found that slavery still exists in some countries and that women

in terms of bilateral relations, the most important of all the country reports was on China. President Clinton has said significant progress in the protection of human rights in China must be made by June if China is to continue receiving the low tariff rates enjoyed by most other countries. China has said that trade and rights issues should not be linked.

In general, the report did not draw comparisons but Iraq and North Korea appeared to be among the worst violators.

It called North Korea "One of the most repressive countries in the world."

In Iraq, it said, "Saddam Hussein's regime continued its flagrant abuses of human rights by conducting military operations against civilians, including burning and razing of vil