

## Rabbani for national 'shoora' to end crisis

ISLAMABAD, Feb 4: Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani has proposed a national 'shoora' or meeting inside Afghanistan to resolve the current conflict, his special envoy said here Thursday, reports AFP.

The emissary, Ahmad Shah, Afghan Minister for Housing and Planning, told a news conference the proposed shoora should form the next government to step in after Rabbani's mandate expires in five months.

He said the United Nations as well as the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) could help organise the assembly of Afghan religious scholars, Mujahideen commanders, tribal elders, technocrats and other sections of the community.

The envoy, said he had meetings in Islamabad with diplomats of different countries and Pakistani government officials.

Shah bitterly attacked Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rasjid Dostum, saying he wanted to revive communist rule in Kabul, and accused neighbouring Uzbekistan of aiding his forces with food and ammunition.

He said during a meeting with Russia's ambassador here Wednesday, he had asked for Moscow's intervention to stop Uzbekistan's "interference."

Shah, however, held out an olive branch to Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, ally of Dostum in the five-week old fighting.

"We are ready to sit together with Hekmatyar to sort out our differences," he said, ruling out any dealing with Dostum.

The former communist general "has to be punished and his forces disarmed," he said.

## Geneva peace talks a waste of time, says Izetbegovic

SARAJEVO, Feb 4: Bosnia's Muslim President Alija Izetbegovic said on Thursday he probably would not attend another round of Geneva peace talks due to begin on February 10 which he called a waste of time, reports Reuter.

Izetbegovic said a government delegation under Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic would attend the talks out of a sense of obligation to a peace process and have negotiating authority, but he saw no reason for his own presence.

Speaking on state radio, the Muslim President said he had told mediator Lord Owen when the last talks deadlocked in January that he would probably avoid the next round.

"I reckoned that this is going to be another abortive session that wastes time. We of

course have to participate but most of us go there to waste time?" he said.

"I might join the talks if I see advances in the making. But I don't expect any... no miracle is going to happen. I have a lot of obligations here. Some of us have to stay, home and I think in this case I have to."

(But) Silajdzic will go with a delegation and have full negotiating rights, Izetbegovic said.

Last months talks floundered over the government's additional demand for the return of territories held by Serb and Croat forces from which Muslims were expelled early in the 22-month-old fratricidal war.

About 80 per cent of Bosnia is controlled by Serbs and Croats who have declared eth-

nically pure mini-states sponsored by neighbouring Serbian-led pump Yugoslavia and Croatia.

Serbs had agreed to roll back to 49 per cent giving the Muslims the 33.5 per cent of territory they had initially demanded in return for their signature on a peace deal.

Owen said gloomily that the factions had opted to "go home to fight" instead of negotiating seriously.

Since then, fighting has raged on, shooting attacks on UN humanitarian troops have proliferated and the United Nations has accused Croatia of sending thousands of troops into Bosnia to reinforce Croat militia's against a resurgent government army.

Izetbegovic said he expected the United States,

Britain, France and Germany to make an initiative, which he did not specify, to break the impasse in Geneva. If this proved promising, he would go to Geneva. But he was not hopeful.

Owen, the European Union envoy, and UN co-mediator Thorvald Stoltenberg, keen to end Europe's bloodiest conflict since World War II, are seeking an accord that would divide Bosnia roughly along current lines of confrontation.

The Bosnian government has accused western powers backing the mediators of trying to stampede Muslims into a peace treaty by openly debating whether to withdraw UN relief personnel who feed and protect mostly Muslim enclaves.

## Libya closing file on Lockerbie matter

LONDON, Feb 4: Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi said on Thursday that Libya had no part in the 1988 bomb attack on a U S airliner over Lockerbie in Scotland and was now closing its file on the matter, reports Reuter.

"We declare that we have nothing to do with Lockerbie and we have no interest in this issue," Gaddafi said in a speech in the town of Misratah, east of Tripoli, broadcast on Libyan television.

"We are not looking at this file and we are closing it because we know that we are not paying the price of Lockerbie," he added in the speech, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Libya is under United Nations sanctions for refusing to turn over two Libyans suspected of responsibility for the bombing for trial in the west. London and Washington insist on a trial in the United States

or in Britain, where the Pan Am airliner exploded in mid-air over the village of Lockerbie, killing 270 people.

"Libya is not paying the price of the Lockerbie incident, because no verdict has been passed saying that it should," Gaddafi said.

He said that as a result of UN resolutions imposing sanctions, Libya was, however, "paying the price of independence, liberation and emancipation, the price of being a free and sovereign country."

On Wednesday, a top Libyan official told Reuters that Tripoli would not set conditions for the trial in a neutral country of the two suspects.

But the official, Saad Mujber, deputy speaker in charge of foreign affairs in Libya's General People's Congress (parliament), repeated that it was out of the question for his country to hand over the men to the United States or Britain.

## BRIEFLY

**Japanese aid for Myanmar:** Japan will provide 8.77 million yen (about 79,727 US dollars) worth of emergency relief aid to Myanmar, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday Xinhua reports from Tokyo.

The ministry said Japan will send goods including blankets, sleeping mats, and soap to Myanmar through its international cooperation agency.

A large fire broke out in Yangon on January 24, damaging more than 900 houses and affecting over 6,500 people.

**China frees 3 more dissidents:** Hong Kong human rights activist John Kamm said yesterday that China had released three dissidents who had been jailed outside of Beijing, Reuter reports from Beijing.

In a statement faxed to journalists in Beijing, Kamm, who has close contact with Chinese officials, said he had been told by the government that Xiao Bin, Liao Yao Yiwu and Ding Zunzhe had been freed.

The three are not among China's most famous dissidents. China is under pressure to improve its human rights situation to keep its trades status with the United States.

**71 honoured in Lanka:** A top newspaper editor and four foreigners were among 71 people to be honoured on Sri Lanka's 46th anniversary of independence yesterday, the government announced, AFP reports from Colombo.

Manik De Silva, who is the editor of the largest circulating English daily, the Daily News, and Colombo correspondent for the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), was conferred the Kala Suri award for his contribution to journalism.

The foreigners honoured were UNICEF executive director James Grant, Sri Lankan-born Canadian author Michael Ondaatje, professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, Richard Francis Gombrich and US industrialist Martin Trust.

**Fire kills 7 in Seoul:** Seven persons were killed and five injured when a fire broke out in a basement cabaret in downtown Seoul while workmen were renovating the club, police and television reports said, AFP reports from Seoul.

The reports said most of the victims of the Washington cabaret blaze on Thursday were trapped and suffocated by fumes, as they were unable to find the exits due to a power failure.

Police said the blaze, which caused an estimated 12,500 dollars worth of damage, was started by sparks from welding equipment.

## 40 Burundian refugees dying a day in Tanzania

NAIROBI, Feb 4: Burundian refugees in camps in Tanzania are dying at a rate of 30 to 40 a day from disease and hunger, a doctor with the French charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Dr Serge Manoncourt told reporters in Kenya's capital Nairobi that there were an estimated 110,000 refugees still in Tanzania suffering from acute food and medicine shortages.

The mortality rate had reached an alarming three to four people per 10,000 people daily — a total of 33 to 44 every day. He said the rate in November and December had been less than one out of 10,000.

Manoncourt, an epidemiologist and senior MSF-France official at Kibondo camp in Tanzania, accused the United Nations of failing in its efforts to help the refugees.

"In my 13 years experience in this job, I have never seen so much poor assistance — little or no food, no medical facilities, little shelter, short-age of water," he said.

The UN and foreign donors

had responded to the refugee crisis with too little, too late, he said.

But UN World Food Programme (WFP) spokesman Francis Mwanza told Reuters by telephone from Rome that the agency had given out 4,600 tonnes of food to the refugees in Tanzania.

"WFP was very quick in responding to the emergency... but there are problems in reaching all the people because of the very poor state of the roads," Mwanza said.

He added that much of the food had been bought locally — it takes three weeks to transport it by land from the Indian Ocean coast port of Dar es Salaam due to appalling roads and rail — but that a drought this year meant some stocks had to be imported.

Mwanza said most of the refugee deaths were due to disease and not starvation.

An estimated 250,000 refugees flooded into Tanzania from their troubled homeland after renegade soldiers murdered Burundi's President Melchior Ndadaye last October, sparking off waves of tribal warfare between the Tusi and Hutu peoples.



Riot police hold back a woman demonstrator from the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whose supporters broke security cordons and attempted to head towards Parliament house in New Delhi February 4 to protest a series of price hikes ordered by the government recent days. The demonstrators also protested overtures to foreign investors. — AFP photo

## Reagan accuses Clinton of stealing his ideas

WASHINGTON, Feb 4: Making a rare return to Washington to reify the flag of the Reagan Revolution, Ronald Reagan accused President Clinton and the Democrats of stealing his ideas while trying to discredit his record, reports AP.

The very sight of the Capital, "bulging with new tax revenues," made him instinctively reach for his veto pen, he said in a nostalgic speech to a huge audience of Reagan loyalists.

"What brought the former president back Thursday night was a 1,000 dollars-a-plate Republican Party dinner — attended by 2,300 and expected to raise 5 million dollars and a chance to observe "the 44th anniversary of my 39th birthday."

On Sunday, five years out of office, he turns 83. Reagan kidded about his age, but he showed it, too. He spoke more softly and slowly than when he was president, his voice cracked. He walked to the rostrum stiffly.

But he won his audience, speaking for 25 minutes. When he finished, he kissed his wife and saluted the crowd with an old familiar wave of the hand.

Celebrating with him were ideological soulmate Margaret Thatcher, the "iron lady" who is former prime minister of Britain, and wife Nancy Reagan. Reagan used his speech to protect his legacy. These days in Washington, his deficits are cited more often than his fights against the growth of communism abroad and the government at home.

Reagan remembered the glory days.

"Who can forget those so-called "experts" who said our military build-up threatened a

dangerous escalation of tensions?" he asked. "What kind of fool, they asked, would call the Soviet Union an "Evil Empire"?"

"But as events have shown, there was nothing foolish in my prediction that communism was destined for the ash heap of history."

Watching Clinton's State of the Union address last week,

he said, he thought about the correlation between imitation and flattery. "Only in this case, it's not flattery, but grand larceny — the intellectual theft of ideas that you and I recognise as our own."

But he said the Democrats were ignoring the lessons of history — "how swiftly storm clouds can gather on a peaceful horizon."

## WHO, IFPMA agree to fight AIDS

GENEVA, Feb 4: The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers (IFPMA) announced on Thursday they had agreed to work together to fight AIDS around the globe, reports Reuter.

A joint statement said the Geneva-based WHO, a United Nations agency, has committed itself to playing a coordinating role for international research into AIDS and the HIV virus most health experts say causes it.

IFPMA, the statement said, committed itself "to work as rapidly as possible towards the discovery and development of new, safe and effective drugs and vaccines against HIV/AIDS."

Research by federation member companies, the statement declared, "will be conducted with the same level of integrity, attention to detail and thoroughness with which it develops products for other diseases."

## Japan blasts off H-2 rocket

TOKYO, Feb 4: The first all-Japanese launcher rocket blasted off today after a three-day delay due to bad weather and technical snags, a spokesman for the National Space Development Agency (NASDA) said, reports Reuter.

The spokesman said the H-2 rocket lifted off from the agency's Tanegashima space centre in southern Japan at 7:20 am (2220 GMT Thursday).

## 18 NAM FMs to meet in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Feb 4: Some 18 Foreign Ministers of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries will begin a three-day meeting here on Wednesday to prepare for a mid-term conference in Cairo, officials said today, reports AFP.

Twenty-two ministers were invited and 18 have made reservations, the NAM chairman's executive assistant, Nana Sutresna, said. NAM has 110 members.

The ministers will discuss preparations for the Cairo meeting in June to select the next NAM chairman for 1995 through 1998. Indonesia currently chairs the organisation.

Indonesia hosted NAM's 10th summit in September 1992, and its three-year term as the organisation's head expires in September 1995.

The Cairo meeting is also expected to seek ways of increasing cooperations between NAM and the group of 77. The group represents third world countries which are not necessarily NAM members but wish to work with NAM on economic matters.

Sutresna said that officially, Nicaragua was the sole candidate for Chairman.

## Off the Record

### Neglected children have risk of adult obesity

LONDON: Children who are neglected by their parents often grow up to become overweight adults, Danish researchers reported Friday, says Reuter.

The researchers, working at the university of Copenhagen, followed more than 700 Copenhagen children from the age of nine into adulthood.

"Dirty and neglected children had a much greater risk of adult obesity than averagely groomed children," they wrote in the Lancet medical journal.

"However being an only child, receiving overprotective parental support, or being well groomed had no effect." Social background and family structure also had no effect, they said.

Of the 756 children, 28 were considered by their teachers to be "dirty and neglected." Eight of them, or 29 per cent, became clinically obese in adulthood.

Of those who were considered well or averagely groomed, 29, or seven per cent, became obese.

Ten, or 18 per cent, of those seen to have had no parental support became obese but three per cent of those from harmonious families did.

The study was important because obesity can lead to cardiovascular disease, the researchers said.

"For preventive purposes, it may be important to identify children suffering from parental neglect," they said.

"We suggest that parental neglect may cause a psychological state that affects energy balance by altering behaviour (overeating and physical inactivity) over hormone balances, influencing fat storage."

### Fitness mania in Bihar police

NEW DELHI: Policemen in the northern state of Bihar are literally sweating it out: The government has given them two months to get in shape or they will be fired, reports AP.

Health clubs in the state are now crowded with policemen pumping iron in an attempt to trim their paunches.

The fitness mania came about after police chief V P Jain ordered them to shed the extra adipose, the Statesman newspaper reported Friday.

In March, the policemen will be put to test: they will have to jog a mile, do several push-ups and sit-ups in a given time to prove they are in shape. Those who fail will be forced to retire, the newspaper said.

## Vietnam to open liaison office in Washington

HANOI, Feb 4: Vietnam will open a liaison office in Washington as a "transitional step toward full diplomatic relations" with the United States, Deputy Foreign Minister Le Mai said Friday, reports AP.

His statement came after President Clinton lifted a 19-year trade embargo against Vietnam and said the United States was opening a liaison office in Hanoi.

In an apparent effort to reassure US veterans groups and families of Americans unaccounted for from the Vietnam War, who opposed ending the embargo, Le Mai pledged that Vietnam would continue to cooperate in trying to resolve their cases.

"The Vietnamese government reiterates its policy of consistently regarding the questions of Americans missing from the war as a humanitarian concern not linked with political issues," he said in a statement at a news conference.

The government and people of Vietnam have been, are, and will be cooperating in a constructive spirit with the American people to solve this

issue to the fullest possible extent" he said.

Le Mai said Clinton had proposed mutual establishment of the liaison offices in Washington and Hanoi.

"This is a positive and significant decision, which contributes to opening a new page in US-Vietnam relations in the interest of the two peoples," he said.

"This decision meets the desire of the American and the Vietnamese peoples as well as of many other countries, it is in line with the trend toward peace, development in Asia-Pacific and in the world"

Le Mai said the improvement in US-Vietnamese relations would make a significant contribution "to the common endeavour of the countries of the world for the sake of peace, friendship and cooperation among nations."

Clinton had only announced that he would establish a US liaison office in Vietnam to handle trade, human rights and other issues, and left it to Le Mai to announce the opening of a Vietnamese office in Washington.

## Protest against US plan to deploy missiles in ROK

SEOUL, Feb 4: Some 20 activists, shouting anti-US slogans, demonstrated near the US Embassy Friday to protest Washington's plan to deploy Patriot missiles in South Korea, reports AP.

"No missile deployment! We oppose America!" They shouted with clenched fists, as 40 police, armed with truncheons and helmets, stood guard.

The protesters, all from the National Union for Democratic Unification, were stopped by police about a block from the embassy compound in central Seoul.

The activists ended the protests in 40 minutes. No arrests were made.

## Indian CEC on one-man crusade to clean up politics

NEW DELHI, Feb 4: The India Who's Who lists T N Seshan under the category of Civil Servant. But not only isn't he the government's servant, he often isn't even very civil, reports AP.

Seshan is on a one-man crusade to clean up Indian politics. As Chief Election Commissioner, a job appointed by the nation's nonpartisan president and free of political baggage, he is in a unique position to try.

Seshan admits the task is awesome.

"There is not one square foot of dry ground left in this country without corruption," he said in a lecture this week. "Cash criminality and corruption" are the grease for the wheels of Indian politics.

With such barbs, Seshan has turned an obscure position once barely noticed at election time into a job with high visibility. His egg-shaped face and bald head add to his popularity with newspaper cartoonists.

He employs his eloquent baritone, a thundering temper, and irreverence of power and a knife-sharp wit to bring into focus the flaws in India's 44-year-old democracy.

Elections are often violent. About 150 people were killed in fighting between supporters of rival parties before the last nationwide election in 1991.

Impersonation and intimidation of voters are common, Seshan said, bringing nods from his audience of academics, politicians and journalists.

On voting day, gangs of politically paid thugs walk into polling stations where the rival party is expected to win and literally walk off with the ballot box. It's commonly called "booth capturing."

In many districts where literacy is low, women are treated with extraordinary contempt, and instructed how to vote by their menfolk, he said.

Candidates with criminal links are routinely elected to state and national positions, he said.

Midway through his six-year term, Seshan's vigilance as chief watchdog is finally having an effect. In by-elections, he increased police protection at polling stations and invalidated suspicious results.

Last November, less than a handful of people were reported killed during state assembly elections in six states, and voters turned out in record numbers.

"I have tried to hold up a mirror to the country," he said. The reflection shows a nation "rigged with illegality, immorality, corruption and no character."

He bemoaned the absence of men of integrity in public life.

"Gandhi is as dead as the marble in Rajghat," he said, referring to the mausoleum of India's independence leader, Mohandas K Gandhi.

Every public servant is a law unto himself. There are no civil servants left in this country," he said.

Seshan's enemies are legion. He is berated as a tyrant and a hypocrite.

When he "borrowed" a private plane from a Bombay tycoon to rush to the funeral of a Hindu man, he was accused of the same corrupt practices that he condemns. Seshan's reply: He paid the businessman 3,000 dollars for the flight.

In his latest battle with the government, Seshan issued an ordinance demanding that all voters be given identification cards before the end of year. No election will be allowed after next January 1 without them, he warned.

The order raised a howl of protest from the federal administration and the governments of India's 25 states, which argued that it will be too

expensive to issue cards to 500 million potential voters in 12 months.

Seshan has refused to budge.

He committed another act of political heresy when he told political parties they will be fined if they don't clean up the election posters plastered to walls, lamp-posts and street signs.

He also limited the use of jeep-mounted loud speakers to daylight hours.

Late last year, the government tried to crimp his style by appointing two more election commissioners who were supposed to have equal rank.

Seshan refused to speak to them and locked his office door.

## Cambodia plans to restore ties with Myanmar

PHNOM PENH, Feb 4: Cambodia plans to restore diplomatic relations with Myanmar, Prince Norodom Sirivudh, also Foreign Minister, said today, reports AFP.

"I think that our two governments intend to make an announcement about the re-establishment of diplomatic relations," the prince said on his return from an official visit to Laos.

"We had diplomatic relations in the sixties and I think that it is good now to begin to meet our Myanmar friends."

Prince Sirivudh said that during his visit to Vientiane he spoke with the Myanmar ambassador there.