

International

Envoy from alliance nations continue talks

NATO ultimatum to Serbs likely

BRUSSELS, Feb 9: NATO allies met today to consider possible air strikes against Serb forces besieging Sarajevo unless they withdraw within a maximum of 10 days from around the Bosnian capital, reports Reuter.

Ambassadors from the 16 alliance nations began the crucial meeting, which could bring the first western military intervention in Bosnia, at 0940 GMT.

AP adds: The NATO allies appear to be moving closer to threatening Bosnian Serbs with air strikes within days unless they end their strangulation of Sarajevo.

"It is time to act," said NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner as he entered alliance headquarters Wednesday for a meeting to

consider delivering an ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs. There have been "enough words," he said.

The issue tops a meeting Wednesday of the NATO ambassadors, five days after a mortar attack on Sarajevo left 68 dead.

The attack highlighted western inability to take a forceful stance against the carnage on NATO's southern doorstep. It renewed both calls within the 16-nation alliance for a military intervention and expressions of caution that NATO must not be dragged into a war and endanger United Nations peacekeeping troops by staging a military intervention.

Yet on the meeting's eve, the United States and France jointly sought backing for a

demand that Bosnian Serbs withdraw their more than 500 heavy arms to at least 20 kilometers (13 miles) from the Bosnian capital.

Under the plan, a NATO source said, the Serbs would get seven to 10 days to comply, or face allied bombing runs. Officials in allied capitals also considered a similar British paper. "Both speak in terms of an ultimatum (to Bosnian Serbs) and a period of between seven and 10 days to comply," said the NATO source, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The allies were discussing proposals that Serb and Muslim forces put their arms in and around Sarajevo under UN control to guarantee safe passage in and out of the Bosnian capital.



Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (L) confers with PLO leader Yasser Arafat during a meeting held in Cairo on Tuesday.

— AFP photo

Opposition plans no-confidence motion against Lankan govt

COLOMBO, Feb 9: Sri Lanka's main opposition Freedom Party (SLFP) is planning to move a no-confidence motion in parliament against the government, party sources here said today, reports Xinhua.

The government's failure to find a solution to the ten-year old war in the north-east, economic burdens imposed on the masses and alleged corrupt practices are among the grounds on which the motion is likely to be based, according to chief opposition whip Richard Pathirana.

The SLFP is also in touch with other opposition parties with a view to enlisting support for the motion which is to be formally handed over to speaker Haniffa Mohamed next week, he added.

BRIEFLY

Amnesty demands probe: Amnesty International has called for an independent inquiry into claims that government forces in northern Ireland have colluded with loyalist paramilitary groups in unlawful killings. AFP reports from London.

The call accompanied the human rights' organisation's first major report on political killings by all sides in the civil conflict, published yesterday.

Warning that human rights must be given greater priority in northern Ireland, Amnesty stated: "There is also mounting evidence of collusion between government forces and groups like the Ulster Defence Association (UDA-illegal) that oppose any change in northern Ireland's status quo."

Bush criticises Clinton: Former President George Bush accused President Clinton Tuesday of a vacillating foreign policy that is harming US world leadership, Reuter reports from Cincinnati.

"We cannot have start and stop leadership," Bush told a Republican fund-raising breakfast.

If his administration had used the same hesitant policies during the Gulf War that Clinton has employed on Haiti and Bosnia "Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would be in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia today" instead of Baghdad, Bush said.

Afghan doctor denies killing: An Afghan doctor being tried in Pakistan for the murder of a New Zealand physician blamed on Tuesday a criminal gang for the killing of Dr Jock Sutherland, Reuter reports from Multan.

Dr Abdul Raheem Saeedee was charged with the January 12, 1993 murder of Sutherland, who was working for the International Committee of the Red Cross at the Kalabagh Referral Hospital in Pakistan's central province of Punjab.

Police alleged Saeedee killed Sutherland after the New Zealander, an administrator at the hospital for Afghan refugees, sacked Saeedee for incompetence.

Russian kids out of control: Russia's kids are out of control, turning to crime amid the ruins of the Communist economy and police state, AP reports from Moscow.

Vladimir Kotchko was only a few hundred yards (meters) from home when he was mugged by two teen-agers. They beat him, robbed him and left him unconscious in the snow.

"They got my money. They got my briefcase. What I don't understand is why they beat me so badly," the 47-year-old marketing executive said.

Latvia keeps Russian request: The Latvian government agreed Tuesday to a Russian request to retain strategic radar station for four years in exchange for the withdrawal of the 13,000 Russian troops still in Latvia before August 31, AP reports from Moscow.

The Russians had first sought to hold on to the Skrunda base until 2004, and then until the year 2000.

The news agency Interfax said Latvian Prime Minister Valdis Birkava presented the agreement in Riga after a government meeting to examine the latest Russian proposals, which were made on Monday.

France's population 57.8m: France's population reached 57.8 million last year, growing slightly more slowly than in 1992 but still faster than most of its European Union partners, the national statistics institute Insee said yesterday, Reuter reports from Paris.

Fewer births and more deaths than in 1992 reduced the growth rate to just over 0.3 per cent. There were 90,000 new immigrants, a figure similar to that of the previous year.

French women, with a life expectancy of 81.5 years, lived longer than in any other EU country. Men could hope to live 73.3 years, the EU's average.

Burundi clashes make 1300 homeless:

Some 1,300 people from the Tutsi tribe have been made homeless and 42 houses burned in new clashes with Burundi's majority Hutu, officials said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Bujumbura.

The attacks on Monday erupted in the southwest province of Bururi two days after Cyprien Ntaryamira was sworn in as president of the tiny Central African state where ethnic strife has raged since the last head of state was murdered in October.

The southwest is homeland to the Bahima Tutsi clan, viewed as a hardline and militaristic group which overthrew the former Tutsi aristocracy and ruled through presidents Jean-Baptiste Bagaza and Pierre Buyoya.

Benazir for self-reliance in defence technology

KARACHI, Feb 9: The People's government was committed to both self-reliance and indigenisation of defence production — "to break the shackles of dependence," Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said here yesterday, Reuter reports.

"A dependence that cost us cruelly in two wars. History teaches us that nations stumble who depend on others to fortify their defence," she added.

The Prime Minister said this while addressing as chief guest the colourful roll-out ceremony held to hand over the first Pakistani rebuilt F-7P fighter interceptor aircraft to the Pakistan Air Force (PAF).

F-7P, a Chinese aircraft, is the latest addition to PAF's inventory and the ceremony marked the beginning of a new

Some progress in PLO-Israeli talks

CAIRO, Feb 9: Israel and the PLO adjourned lengthy negotiations early today on issues holding up implementation of Palestinian self-rule and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said they had made some progress, reports Reuter.

"We will stay so long as necessary. We are staying to complete our work," Peres told reporters after his talks with Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat ended.

"We made some progress. We are going to make some progress tomorrow," he added.

Peres said the two sides were working on a text but declined comment on the chances of an agreement being signed in Cairo.

Peres, whose meeting with Arafat ended at 2.45 AM (0045 GMT), said the negotiating

teams would resume their talks at 10.00 AM (0800 GMT).

An Israeli official said Arafat would hold another round of talks with Peres.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak earlier brought Arafat and Peres together for a three-way meeting, while lower-level negotiating teams held rounds of talks throughout the day.

Asked if he was optimistic that an agreement could be reached in Cairo, Peres replied: "I was born optimistic... we shall try to reach an agreement."

But negotiators said Tuesday's talks accomplished little.

"We are still in the same place. We did not move," a Palestinian official said.

OIC Secy General in Pakistan to mediate Afghan ceasefire

ISLAMABAD, Feb 9: Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Hamid al Gabid arrived here today for a two-day visit to Pakistan aiming at mediating a ceasefire between warring Afghan groups, reports Xinhua.

"The purpose of my visit is to contact all Afghan factions and urge them to accept a ceasefire and halt the hostilities," he told newsmen on his arrival.

Gabid said that he will press upon all warring Afghan factions to accept ceasefire to enable OIC to launch meaningful efforts for restoration of peace

any appropriate manner, to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan.

"We are looking forward to a negotiated solution of the Afghan problem," he said.

Gabid will leave for Peshawar, capital of Pakistan's northwest frontier province bordering Afghanistan, today to meet some Afghan leaders.

About 13,000 people were wounded and some 900 killed in the 40 days of fighting between troops of president Bahauddin Rabbani and the combined forces of Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and militia warlord General Rashid Dostum.

Czech Republic to export defence spares to India

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Czech Republic President Vaclav Havel said on Tuesday his country will export defence spares and equipment to India, reports Reuter.

Havel, on a six-day state visit to India, told journalists that though the Czech Republic did not want to sell defence equipment to all countries, democratic India was different.

India, which bought most of its defence equipment from the former Soviet Union, has been looking for sources for spares.

The Czech leader said his country had no objection to providing defence spares and setting up defence joint ventures with democratic and peace-loving nations.

Havel said that the two countries had also discussed an agreement to avoid double taxation.

Earlier, the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of the Czech Republic Ivan Kocarnik told journalists that Havel had discussed an investment protection agreement with India.

Russia starts supplying military spares to India

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Russia has begun supplying spares for India's Soviet-manufactured military hardware for the first time since the collapse of the communist regime in Moscow, a newspaper reported today.

The Hindu report came five days after the Indian army chief, General BC Joshi, said that the Soviet-equipped Indian military had managed to overcome a supply crunch caused by the breakup of the former superpower.

He had said that while much of what India was getting from the Soviet Union could now be obtained locally, the situation in Russia is slightly better than it was two years ago.

"They don't need the degree of preparedness which they needed before the Soviet Union was dismantled," Gen Joshi had said. "Russia today really has no threat. So a lot of inventory today is lying idle. That is available."

The Hindu said Gen Joshi would go to the Soviet Union this month. Russian ships would call at Bombay in the near future, while the plans for joint naval exercises are under way.

Iran-Pak accord to combat drug trafficking

ISLAMABAD, Feb 9: Pakistan and Iran Tuesday agreed to launch a campaign against trafficking of illicit drugs and psychotropic substances to eliminate the menace of narcotics, official sources here said, reports AFP.

The agreement on "closer cooperation" to check the drug trafficking was concluded here at the end of a three-day meeting of the Pakistan-Iran Special Committee on Interior and Security.

An official statement said the committee deliberations were aimed at consolidation and further expansion of their friendly relations based on non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

Nepali Congress president defeated

KATHMANDU, Feb 9: The governing Nepali Congress Party contender has been defeated in a by-election by a communist candidate by 1,829 votes, officials said today, reports AFP.

The Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (CP-UMI) candidate Bidhya Bhandari bagged 43,319 votes against ruling party president, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's 41,490 votes.

The rightist National Democratic Party (NDP) candidate, Jog Mehar Shrestha drew only 7,537 votes.

It was Bhattarai's third electoral defeat in his 50-year political career, a Nepali Congress source said.

Throughout the night-long vote counting, Bidhya Bhandari, widow of former CP-UMI General Secretary and parliamentarian Madan Kumar Bhandari, killed in a jeep accident last May, lead comfortably.

Results from Jhapa: 390 kilometres (230 miles) south-east of here are yet to be announced.

Shumeiko replaces Khasbulatov

MOSCOW, Feb 9: Vladimir Shumeiko, President of the Russian parliament's upper house, was elected head of a key consultative body of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the agency Itar-Tass reported Tuesday, says AFP.

Shumeiko was chosen unanimously as President of the CIS inter-parliamentary assembly a consultative body for the grouping of former Soviet republics, is a closed doors meeting in Saint Petersburg on Tuesday, the agency said.

He replaces Russian Khasbulatov, former Speaker of the dissolved Soviet parliament, who is now in Lefortovo prison following last October's failed coup.

Off the Record

Blood sucking husband

NEW DELHI: A woman in southern India has complained to the police that her husband has been drinking her blood mixed with alcohol, the Press Trust of India reported Tuesday, says AFP.

The woman told police in the Tamil Nadu state town of Vannarapettai on Monday that her husband would regularly remove blood from her arm with a syringe and pour it into his drink, the news agency said.

She charged that she had been repeatedly abused by her husband, an alcoholic, since their marriage three years ago.

World record price for a doll

LONDON: A German porcelain doll was sold for a world record 188,500 pounds (277,500 dollar) on Tuesday to a private collector in Germany. Sotheby's auctioneers said, reports Reuter.

The doll, made by the German firm of Kammer and Reinhardt in 1909, is thought to have been made from an experimental mould which was later destroyed and never used in production. She wears a white cotton dress, bloomers and a straw hat and has pierced ears.

Sotheby's said she went to an anonymous private collector in Germany who has all the other known dolls made by the firm.

The London auction house sold a similar Kammer and Reinhardt doll in 1989 for 90,200 pounds (now 132,800 dollar) — the previous world record.

Masako not expecting

Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito and his wife Crown Princess Masako hold a press conference at Togu Palace on Wednesday. The Crown Prince avoided a direct response to a query over speculation that his wife is pregnant.

— AFP photo

TOKYO: Crown Princess Masako, who wed the heir to Japan's ancient Chrysanthemum Throne last summer, on Wednesday denied rumours that she is expecting a baby, ending three weeks of frenzied speculation, reports AP.

The princess, making her first public appearance since the middle of last month, said that she has been resting because of a bad cold, not because she is expecting.

"I'm getting better," she told reporters gathered at the Crown Prince Naruhito. "I'm sorry for all the worry I caused."

"Frankly, we are quite surprised by all of the fuss created by her catching a cold," said her husband, who sat next to her. "I wonder if all the ruckus around us might not have angered the stork."

Despite palace denials, the popular princess' sudden disappearance from the public eye led to immediate speculation in the tabloid press that a royal baby could be on the way.

The palace, which is notoriously close-mouthed, had also initially told the press that Empress Michiko was sick with a cold when in fact she was pregnant with Naruhito in 1959.

Though Masako's friendly manner at a news conference to announce the engagement that day won her many fans among the general public, some of the more picky palace conservatives criticised her for