

Inkatha to boycott South African all-race polls

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 13: The Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) resolved Saturday night to contest the country's first all-race election in April and said international mediation was needed to "pull South Africa from the brink of disaster", reports AFP.

The resolution, taken at a special meeting of the IFP central committee at Ulundi, in the heart of Zululand, also warned that failure to bring about a comprehensive multi-party settlement would result in increased violence.

Two other groups, KwaZulu tribal homeland -- the IFP's powerbase and the white right-wing Afrikaner Volks Front (AVF), have also vowed to resist the poll, with AVF supporters warning they will actively disrupt voting.

The three organisations, with Bophuthatswana tribal homeland, in October joined forces as the freedom alliance, united in their demand that federal guarantees be entrenched in the interim constitution that will come into

effect after the April 26-28 Palestinian poll.

Bophuthatswana is also expected to snub the election, with the IFP resolution stating it had already done so.

Alliance leaders claim the government and the ANC have not gone far enough to meet their federalist demands while the government and the ANC say that to make more concessions would be to create a confederal state.

After months of wrangling between the alliance, the government and the ANC, talks finally broke down on Tuesday when the alliance said it saw no future in negotiating unless its demands were met.

Addressing right-wing threats of violence, De Klerk said Saturday that the South African defence force had contingency plans to prevent any disruption of the poll.

"We can't allow any minority to disrupt the process", de Klerk told journalists in Bloemfontein, capital of orange free state province.

Bosnian Serb, govt forces stop surrendering big guns to UN

SARAJEVO, Feb 13: In a series of ominous signs, government and Serb fighters stopped surrendering their big guns to the United Nations, and peace talks among the warring sides made no progress, reports AP.

The US State Department, meanwhile, ordered the families of American diplomats and government employees to leave Yugoslavia immediately, embassy officials said in Belgrade.

Saturday's decision followed NATO's ultimatum to Bosnian Serbs to withdraw their heavy weapons from Sarajevo by midnight Feb. 20 or face air strikes.

Many in the Serb-dominated Yugoslav government and army support the Bosnian Serbs, the US government apparently is worried about the prospect of a backlash against Americans if the air strikes are carried out.

The Bosnian Serbs, while

chafing at the NATO ultimatum, agreed as part of Wednesday's cease-fire to pull back their guns and put them under UN supervision.

But after handing over several mortars and other big guns at Sarajevo-area barracks Friday, neither the Bosnian army nor the Serbs turned in any weapons on Saturday, said Maj. Jose Labandeira, a UN spokesman.

Whether it was a temporary display of the bluffing and brinkmanship that characterize war and peace in the Balkans -- or a more dangerous sign -- remained to be seen.

Bosnian Serb TV showed film on Saturday night of camouflage-clad fighters aiming shoulder-held ground-to-air missiles at imaginary NATO planes.

And despite US and Russian pressure on the warring sides, peace talks in Geneva broke up with no progress reported, raising further doubts about

the viability of the Sarajevo cease-fire.

The Bosnian army turned over five guns on Friday but decided to keep the rest for now, saying the Bosnian Serbs had 10 times as many but had turned in only 13.

"The imbalance in weaponry is enormous," said Gen. Jovan Divjak, the deputy Bosnian army commander. "They have many more weapons than we do, so they must hand in many more."

Divjak said the Serbs had withdrawn their big guns from the 12-mile (20-kilometer) zone around Sarajevo, but said some were being hidden or taken to other battle fronts.

Sarajevo was unusually peaceful. French peacekeepers have camped out at six flash-points of the Sarajevo fighting since Thursday, and Friday night was the quietest in months.

"Michael Rose, the new UN commander in Bosnia, had

peacekeepers spread thinly on the ground -- about 30 at each cease-fire line -- but 150 Malaysian reinforcements arrived in Sarajevo, and Rose said the blue helmets were there to stay.

Milenko Blagojevic, a Serb machine gunner nearby, said that if NATO plans bombed his position, "the people here will kill those French with axes and knives."

A tank shell that landed northeast of downtown Saturday afternoon injured two people. About 200,000 people have been killed or reported missing since the war began in April 1992 when Bosnia left the Serb-dominated Yugoslav federation.

Saturday marked a week since a mortar shell explosion at Markale market that killed 68 people, injured 142 and led the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to issue its ultimatum.

Christopher Kozyrev talk Bosnia issue

MOSCOW, Feb 13: Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher had a "frank exchange of opinions" on Bosnia in a telephone conversation, Itar-Tass news agency said today, reports Reuters.

A brief Foreign Ministry statement published by Tass said the American side had initiated Saturday's call.

"A frank exchange of opinions was conducted on the latest turn of events in the Bosnian conflict and on the search for ways to unite efforts for a political settlement, both around Sarajevo and in Bosnia as a whole," the statement said.

Its diplomatic wording suggested the two men had differed on some issues.

Russia initially took a tough stance on threatened NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serbs besieging Sarajevo saying such a step would only fuel the 22-month civil war.

Kanpur calm

KANPUR, Feb 13: Complete calm and order prevailed in all the 15 riot-affected areas of this industrial city during relaxation of curfew here today, reports PTI.

According to the city province control from sources, no untoward incident was reported from any parts of the city till this noon.

The curfew was relaxed from 0600 hours in all the affected areas. Barring parts of Baupurwan, Cooli Bazar and Latouch road areas.

The army, paramilitary forces, and police JAWANS were patrolling the city.

The district authorities were keeping a strict vigil over the situation.

The city bus service, tempos, taxis and rickshaws were playing on the roads.

59 quakes shake Mount Pinatubo

MANILA, Feb 13: Fifty-nine small earthquakes shook Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in the past 24 hours in a further sign the volcano might be headed for a new eruption, scientists said today, reports Reuters.

The 1,700 metre (5,800-foot) mountain north of Manila last erupted violently in 1991, burying scores of villages under billions of tonnes of ash. More than 800 people died as a result of the eruption many from diseases in refugee centres.

"Israel would be mistaken if it believes that prolonging the talks would change (Syria's) position," one official said.

BRIEFLY

Pope to visit Sri Lanka

Pope John Paul II has accepted an invitation to visit Sri Lanka in 1995 to canonize Rev. Fr. Joseph Vaz as the country's first saint, local newspapers reported Sunday, exports AP from Colombo.

The invitation to the spiritual head of the world's 900 million Roman Catholics, was handed over last week by Sri Lanka's Attorney General Tilak Marapana who was sent as special emissary to the Vatican, the Sunday Island newspaper said.

Secretary to the Catholic Bishop's Conference, Rev. Placidus de Silva, confirmed an invitation had been accepted but said no dates had been finalized.

The Sunday Times newspaper reported the visit, the second by a Pope, is likely to be in mid-January. In 1970, Pope Paul VI was in Colombo for a few hours.

Venezuela frees 23 army officers

Venezuela's new President Rafael Caldera, in a move to shore up support in the armed forces, Saturday ordered the release of 23 officers jailed for two bloody coup attempts in 1992, Reuters reports from Caracas.

The presidential order freed half of those still held in the two putches that killed hundreds of people.

Most of those arrested in the February 4 and November 27, 1992, uprisings were pardoned or released by the previous government, which argued lower ranking officers were merely following orders by coup plotters.

293 Red Army men in Afghan jail

Some 293 Red Army soldiers are still being held prisoner in Afghanistan the years after Moscow withdrew from its southern neighbour country, Russian Deputy Defence Minister Boris Gromov said Saturday, AFP reports from Moscow.

Two thirds of the troops are Russian nationals, Gromov told a news conference marking the fifth anniversary of the end of the nine-year Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan on February 15, 1989.

Gromov said no organisation had been tasked with tracking the prisoners and only 15 had been freed over the last two years.

Hosokawa returns home

Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa returned home today after holiday talks with US President Bill Clinton in Washington, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The two leaders failed to reach an agreement on bilateral trade and economic issues, with Hosokawa rejecting US demands to set numerical targets for cutting Japan's chronic trade surplus.

Manila fires 1000 police officers

The Philippines has sacked more than 1,000 police officers for corruption and other offences since President Fidel Ramos ordered a clean-up of the force in 1992, officials said yesterday, Reuters reports from Manila.

More than 1,500 others were subjected to disciplinary action, police personnel chief Ernesto Bualan said in a report.

The 1,071 officers dismissed since Ramos took office in June 1992 were involved in criminal activities, such as extortion and kidnapping for ransom, or were habitually absent, he said.

3 Chinese abducted in Yemen

Gunmen in Yemen have kidnapped three Chinese experts working on a road construction project and demanded that the project be stopped, the Xinhua news agency said yesterday, Reuters reports from Beijing.

In a report from Sanaa, it said three gunmen seized the three on Saturday at the work-site, 47 km (29 miles) from the city of Jaffa.

The three are the head of a technical team for the Jahaffa-Maareb construction project, the chief engineer and the assistant project manager, said.

55 fundamentalists go on trial in Algeria

ALGIERS, Feb 13: Fifty-five Islamic fundamentalists went on trial in western Algeria Saturday charged with "terrorist" offences and smuggling weapons into the country, judicial officials said, reports AFP.

The group, which officials said operated out of Maghnia on the border with Morocco and which includes 22 defendants being tried in their absence, is charged with smuggling arms into the country and helping repatriate via Morocco Algerians who fought for Afghan guerrilla groups against Soviet troops.

The trial is being heard in Qurban before one of Algeria's three special courts responsible for trying terrorism and subversion cases.

The group is charged with forming armed terrorist groups, holding and selling weapons and explosives, and threatening the security of the state.

Indian press divided over allowing foreign publishers

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: India's press, an enthusiastic backer of economic reform, is debating whether its own zealously guarded turf should be thrown open to foreign competition in the name of liberalisation, reports AFP.

The pros and cons of allowing entry to overseas publishers are being weighed in editorial columns, media talk-shows and courtrooms. Political parties are listening.

At the head of the debate is a high-profile bid by the Financial Times of London to put out an Indian edition in a joint venture with Apanda Bazaar Patrika of Calcutta, one of the country's biggest newspaper groups.

A London tabloid, The Sun, has also sought registration in India under the patents act, but has been blocked by a court order in response to a petition filed by publishers of New Delhi's The Weekly Sun, a youth magazine. And Time Warner Inc. of the United States is reportedly considering a tie-up with living Media

India Ltd., publishers of the fortnightly India Today, to bring out a local edition of Time Magazine.

Media baron Rupert Murdoch's visit here last week touched off speculation that he may be planning a newspaper venture, but he scotched the possibility saying he had enough newspapers for one man. Murdoch said he was more interested in television.

The controversy comes at a time when satellite television is expanding its reach in this country of 890 million people.

Led by the Hong Kong-based Star TV, in which Murdoch acquired a majority stake last year, foreign networks are beaming news and entertainment into more than 20 million Indian homes.

Critics have bemoaned its entry a "cultural invasion from the skies," but have been powerless to prevent its growing popularity.

Others say it is time for print media to be opened up by doing away with a 1956 law prohibiting foreign-owned pe-

riodicals from printing in India and foreign news agencies from reaching newspapers directly.

"If we are thinking in terms of globalisation, we cannot protect one sector and open up another," said Chandan Mitra, Executive Editor of New Delhi's best-selling daily, The Hindustan Times.

At a conference here Saturday, Mitra backed the entry of foreign publishers and argued that the Indian press could compete.

He dismissed "protectionist arguments" as "nothing but excuses to justify inefficiency (and) low wages."

Foreign brands once shunned as items of elitist consumption -- from Ray Ban sunglasses to a host of home appliances -- have appeared in Indian showrooms since the government relaxed restrictions in 1991.

But Vishwa Bandhu Gupta, publisher, Weekly Sun said foreign competitors on Indian soil would only damage domestic business growth

Deployment of missile US, ROK agree to take final decision after IAEA report

SEOUL, Feb 13: The United States and South Korea will postpone a final decision on the deployment of Patriot anti-missile batteries in South Korea until after a report next week on North Korea's nuclear programme, South Korean news reports said today, reports Reuters.

The reports quoted South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sang-joo as saying in Washington that he and US Defence Secretary William Perry agreed to take "a final decision" on the deployment after the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) planned report on North Korean nuclear sites.

Han has been in Washington to discuss the long running impasse over North Korea's nuclear programme. The United States and its allies suspect Pyongyang is developing nuclear weapons, but North Korea insists its programme is peaceful.

North Korea, nonetheless, has denied IAEA inspectors access to suspect sites north of the capital Pyongyang.

South Korean Foreign Ministry officials were unavailable for comment on the newspaper reports.

Seoul officials expect the IAEA to declare Pyongyang in breach of the Nuclear non-

Proliferation Treaty unless it agrees to inspections by February 21, when the IAEA's board of governors is due to meet.

The IAEA could then refer the North Korean affair to the Security Council, which could impose sanctions against Pyongyang.

The Chosun Ilbo, another leading South Korean daily newspaper, said officials from Washington and Seoul were due to meet over the deployment of Patriot missiles once the IAEA governors decided a course of action.

Syria won't give up claim to Golan

DAMASCUS, Feb 13: Syria vowed today not to give up its claim to even an inch of the Golan Heights and to resist Israel's "game of blackmail" in Middle East peace talks, reports Reuters.

The official daily Al-Thawra said Israel was trying to make the PLO-Israeli peace agreement a model for settlements with other Arab states but Syria would never accept such a deal.

"Israel's game of blackmail could not succeed on the Syrian track because Syria had

made its position clear on the full withdrawal from the Golan when President Hafez Al-Assad affirmed that there would be no abandonment even of an atom of the Golan soil," the newspaper said.

Syria's official press condemned the agreement signed by PLO and Israel in Cairo on Wednesday to pave the way for implementation of the Gaza-Jericho Palestinian self-rule deal.

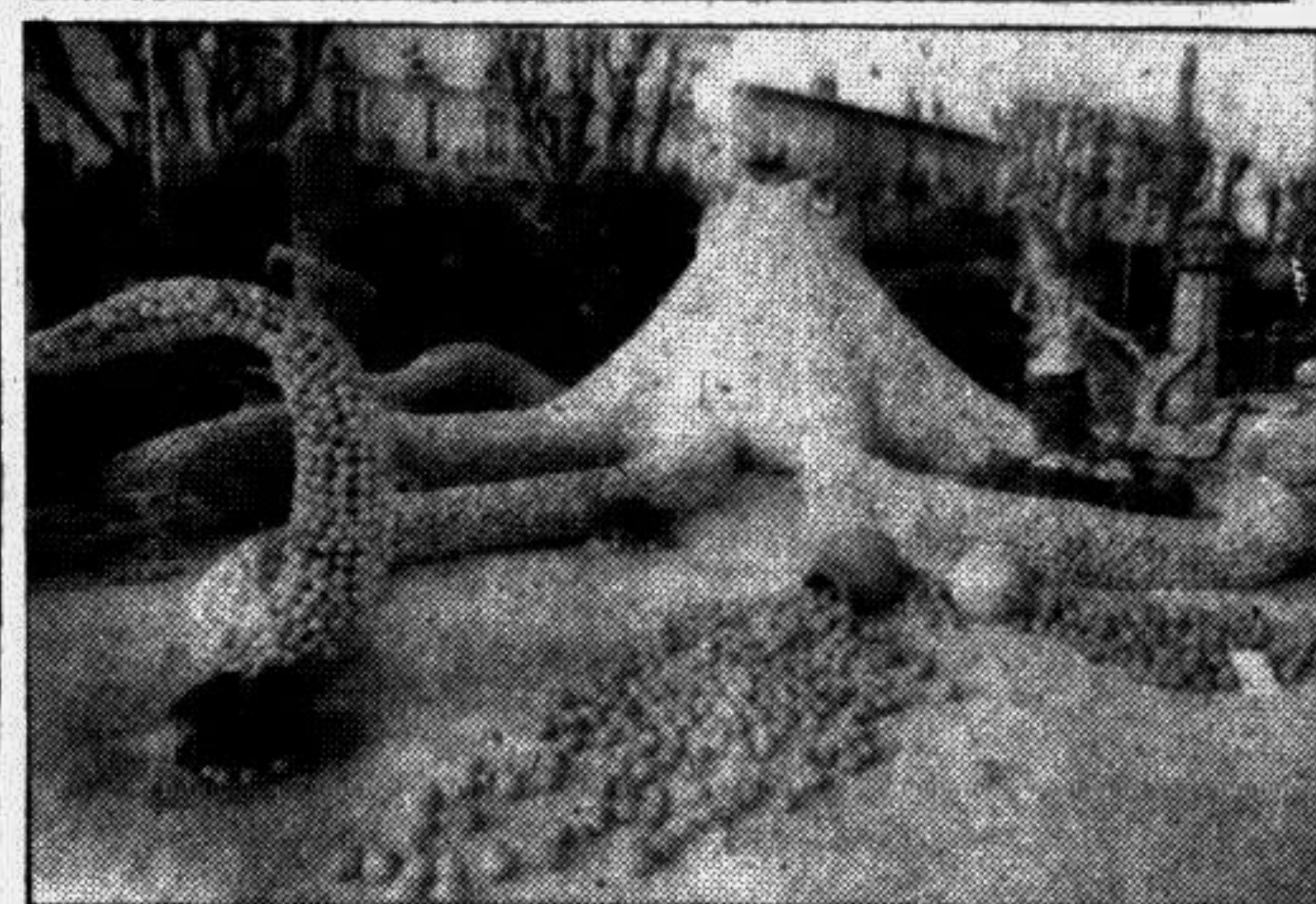
Damascus has consistently demanded in US-sponsored Middle East peace talks

launched in 1991 that Israel fully withdraw from Golan, a strategic plateau it seized in 1967. Israel has said it is ready only for a partial, conditional pullout.

Syrian officials said Israel should change its concept of peace if there was to be any progress in peace talks due to resume in Washington on Tuesday.

"Israel would be mistaken if it believes that prolonging the talks would change (Syria's) position," one official said.

Off the Record



A giant octopus, made completely from citrus fruit, is displayed Feb 12, as part of the traditional annual citrus festival in France. — AFP photo

Woman bites driver's arm

SYDNEY: A 20-year woman bit a taxi driver's arm during an argument early Sunday causing the taxi to veer off the road and crash into a police station, police said, reports Reuters.

The two argued shortly after the woman entered the cab, and as the cabbie tried to drive to a police station, he apparently lost control of the taxi when the woman bit him and grabbed the steering wheel, police said.

"The taxi then crashed into the police station, causing major structural damage. One wall was knocked down," the police spokesman said.

The woman, whose name was not released, has been charged with assault and is due to appear in court next month.

The taxi driver was taken to hospital for treatment for a substantial bite wound to his forearm, police said.

Murderer wants to be called 'Hi Hitler'

FORT LAUDERDALE: A white supremacist wants permission to wear a Ku Klux Klan robe and be called "Hi Hitler" at his murder trial, reports AP.

Donald Leroy Evans is accused of strangling Ira Jean Smith, a Fort Lauderdale prostitute, in 1985.

In motions filed Friday, Evans asked to be allowed to wear the KKK robe, and for his name to be changed on all court documents to "the honourable and respected name of Hi Hitler."

According to courthouse employees, Evans thought Adolf Hitler's followers said "Hi Hitler" rather than "Heil Hitler."

Beatles coming back

LONDON: The three surviving members of the Beatles will get back together for a concert in New York that will be broadcast worldwide, a newspaper reported Sunday, says AP.

The Mail on Sunday, quoting an unnamed source, said Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr will perform in Central Park later this year. They will be joined on stage by the late John Lennon's sons, Julian and Sean.

Publists for the musicians could not be reached for comment.

Russia, Iran vow to settle Nagorno-Karabakh issue

MOSCOW, Feb 13: Russia and Iran have voiced "deep concern" over the escalating fighting in the Azerbaijani break-away enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh and pledged to work together to settle the Azerbaijan-Armenian conflict, reports AP.

ITAR-Tass news agency quoted the Russian Foreign Ministry as saying Saturday that "the growing internationalisation of the conflict harms a peaceful settlement and threatens regional stability."

The six-year conflict in the Armenian-dominated territory was discussed in talks here Saturday between Russian President Boris Yeltsin's special envoy in charge of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Vladimir Kazimirov, and Muratov Banq, the director general of the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

The fighting, which has claimed 20,000 lives since 1988, has intensified since the start of a major Azerbaijani counter offensive in mid-December to roll back territorial gains made by the Armenians last year.

Russia and Iran agreed that "a solid and lasting settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh can only be achieved through peaceful means," which includes the liberation of occupied territories, restoration of energy and transport links and the return of refugees.

ITAR-Tass said Moscow viewed the establishment of a ceasefire as "a key priority."

The agency gave no details on Iran's stance.

Moscow has been lobbying hard for a ceasefire while seeking to arrange a summit meeting between Yeltsin, Azerbaijani President Geidar Aliev and his Armenian counterpart Levon Terpetrossian.

Banq met the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Yerevan and Baku last month.

Freed French tourists return home

PARIS, Feb 13: Three French tourists held hostage by tribesmen for three weeks in Yemen over a road dispute returned home Sunday and said they were well-treated by their abductors, reports AP.

The trio, released Saturday, were greeted by Foreign Ministry officials at Charles de Gaulle airport after a regular Air France flight from the Yemen capital, Sanaa.

"Yes, they treated us fine," Brigitte Fontaine, 42, a cardiologist, told reporters before the trio were whisked away. "They didn't harm us in any way."

The ex-captives appeared to be in good health.

Ms Fontaine, retired agriculture teacher Henri Neslot and his wife, Jeanne, both 72, were kidnapped Jan. 23 while on a group-tour of the Arabian peninsula country.

Lankan navy attack Tamil boat, 1 killed

COLOMBO, Feb 13: Sri Lankan navy craft attacked and destroyed a Tamil guerilla boat off the island's northeastern coast, killing one rebel and capturing another, a military spokesman said today, reports AP.

Navy boats opened fire after intercepting the small vessel belonging to the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) close to the Mullaitivu coast Saturday, the spokesman said.

It was not known how many travelled in the LTTE craft but one Tiger guerilla was confirmed killed and another rebel was taken prisoner after he survived the naval fire, the spokesman said, adding the LTTE boat was a wreck.

The navy has frequently attacked LTTE boats operating off the northeastern coast and has stepped up surveillance in the area following a spate of LTTE attacks on navy craft late last year.



A newsstand owner displays foreign newspapers Feb 12 in New Delhi amid a raging debate in the press over whether overseas publishers should be allowed to bring out Indian editions in line with economic openness. The debate has divided the press. — AFP photo