

UN plans to demilitarise Sarajevo still on track

SARAJEVO, Feb 14: The United Nations insisted that plans to demilitarise Sarajevo were still on track after a day of confusing on off signals over the surrender of the Serb siege guns which have pounded the Bosnian capital for 22 months, reports Reuters.

The Serbs said they had halted the handover of their weapons to UN peacekeepers because the United Nations had failed to neutralise rival infantry of the Muslim-led Bosnian governments.

But the United Nations said later that the Serbs, as well as their Muslim foes, had resumed handing in their guns under a UN-brokered truce, designed as the first step in a military disengagement plan for the city.

The Muslim led Bosnian government and army officials said they would not consider withdrawing their infantry to barracks and described the Serb demand as a transparent delaying tactic.

The Serbs, with hundreds of artillery pieces, mortars and tanks in the hills around Sarajevo, outgun the city's defenders but fear the superior numbers of the Muslim infantry.

A UN spokesman explained away the apparent discrepan-

cies for reporters. "You are hearing negotiating positions," he said.

The commander of UN forces in Bosnia, Lieutenant-General Sir Michael Rose,

Chile congress votes to shorten president's term

VALPARAISO, Chile, Feb 14: Chile's congress voted Sunday to shorten the president's term in office from eight to six years, starting with the term of president-elect Eduardo Frei, reports AFP.

The senate and chamber of deputies voted jointly, 120 to six, to approve the constitutional amendment trimming the presidential term, in this seaside city 100 kilometers (60 miles) west of Santiago, where congress is based.

President Patricio Aylwin, a Christian Democrat, struck an agreement on shortening the term with the right-wing opposition prior to the December presidential vote.

The 1973-1990 military government of general Augusto Pinochet adopted a constitution stipulating the president's terms would be eight years in length as of 1994.

ended the day on an optimistic note. "They (the Serbs) have agreed the procedures and principles for the withdrawal of Bosnian Serb army heavy weapons," he said.

Rose said the withdrawal agreement came at a productive meeting between a senior UN officer and General Manojlo Milovanovic, chief of staff of the Bosnian Serb army.

Milovanovic said earlier he had ordered a halt to the weapons handover, a defiant gesture that could bring closer the risk of NATO air attacks on his positions.

After a mortar bomb killed 68 people in a Sarajevo market, NATO said it would launch air strikes to neutralise the heavy Serb weapons unless they were withdrawn or placed under UN supervision by next weekend.

Both Serbs and Muslims turned some weapons over to UN control on Sunday. UN officials said the Serbs submitted 13 big guns and government troops five.

A handful of heavy weapons were turned over on Friday but the process ground to a halt on Saturday after the Serbs said any further weapons surrender would be linked to a Muslim infantry disengagement.



The Duchess of York holds a four-year-old-refugee child (name not available) from Bosnia-Herzegovina as she visits the Firule hospital in Split February 13 in Croatia. Sarah Ferguson arrived here Saturday for a visit to refugee camps in Croatia. — AFP photo

DPRK may accept nuclear inspections by IAEA

SEOUL, Feb 14: North Korea may reopen working-level talks with the United States this week and eventually accept required nuclear inspections, South Korea's foreign minister said in reports published Monday, reports AP.

Han Sung-joo, in Canada on an official visit, made the remarks Sunday, commenting on what he called a conciliatory North Korean report a day earlier. In that report, the Pyongyang government said it still wants to resolve the nuclear standoff through bilateral dialogue.

"There could possibly be a positive response from North Korea, sooner or later," Han told South Korean reporters accompanying him on the Canada trip. Local newspapers reported Han's remarks prominently.

Han said North Korea might reopen working-level talks with the United States in New York this week and announce its intention to resolve the issue by accepting full inspections required by the UN International Atomic Energy Agency.

North Korea, a hard-line Communist state, is under pressure to accept outside inspections of its secretive nu-

clear facilities to prove that it is not developing atomic bombs.

The United States and other major Western countries are threatening to seek UN sanctions unless the North changes its stance by a February 21 deadline.

The IAEA, a UN nuclear watchdog, is scheduled to convene a board meeting Feb 21-22 to review the status of the nuclear inspection issue, which arose nearly a year ago.

IAEA officials say the issue would have to be sent to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions if no breakthrough is made by the deadline.

Meanwhile, the national Yonhap news agency said Monday the ambassadors of the two Koreas in Beijing are likely to meet soon for talks on easing nuclear tensions on their divided peninsula.

Yonhap quoted an unnamed Western official in Beijing as saying South Korean Ambassador to China Hwang Byung-tae has government permission to meet his North Korean counterpart, Ju Chang Jun, to discuss the nuclear dispute.

The two rival Korean states currently have no official

channel of dialogue. The North cut off all inter-Korea dialogue last year to protest annual US-South Korea military exercises.

In talks with the United States in December, the North agreed to open to nuclear facilities to outside inspections, but subsequent talks with the IAEA bogged down over inspection procedures.

In what appeared to be a conciliatory gesture, North Korea said Saturday that it still wants to resolve the nuclear dispute through dialogue, but said the United States must first stop a campaign to "isolate and stifle" the North.

"There is no change in our stand of resolving the nuclear issue through dialogue," said an unnamed Foreign Ministry official, quoted by the (North) Korea Central News Agency, monitored in Tokyo.

"If the United States really wants to resolve the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, it should no longer seek to isolate and stifle the DPRK (North Korea) with double-dealing tactics," it quoted the spokesman as saying.

Han said the KCNA report was conciliatory and may indicate that the Stalinist state is changing its hard-line stance on the nuclear issue.

BRIEFLY

Fire in China coal mine kills 14:

A fire in a coal mine in Xuzhou in eastern Jiangsu province last week left 14 people dead, the Wen Hui Bao newspaper reported yesterday, AFP says from Beijing.

The incident, the latest in a series of deadly accidents in China's mines, occurred when a leather mechanical-drive belt became too hot and caught fire while some 723 miners were digging for coal in the Yi'an mine, the Shanghai newspaper said.

Most miners were safely evacuated from the well, but the final group inhaled poisonous gases and died, the report said.

Floods claim 18 in Peru:

At least 18 people died as floods swept through several areas of Peru, washing out roads, destroying homes and inundating thousands of hectares (acres) of farmland, officials said Sunday, AFP reports from Lima.

Some of the worst flooding occurred along the Perene river in Junin department, in the country's central region, where 10 deaths were reported Friday and highways and homes were washed away.

Two youths and a police sergeant were killed in floodwaters along the Mantaro river near Hauncayo, also in Junin.

Opposition boycotts polls in Vanuatu:

Opposition parties boycotted the election of a new president yesterday claiming there had been no official notice of the vote and insufficient dialogue with the government, AFP reports from Port Vila.

The electoral college of all 46 members of parliament and 11 president of provincial councils failed to meet the minimum legal requirement of having 43 members present to choose a new head of state.

A new president must gain the votes of at least 38 members.

Mongolian president to visit Thailand:

Mongolian President Punsalmaagyn Ochirbat will pay an official visit to Thailand from February 25-28, a Foreign Ministry official said yesterday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

The Mongolian leader and his 40-strong delegation will focus on economic issues in talks with Thai leaders, including Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, the official said.

Details of the visit are still to be worked out, the official said, adding that the Mongolian leader would also visit India, Laos and Vietnam.

Doctors, students clash in Delhi:

Violence between doctors and students wielding homemade guns, bombs and clubs injured at least 24 people at an Indian university after a sick student's death, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said yesterday, Reuters reports from New Delhi.

Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to try to stop the fighting on Sunday at Benaras Hindu University in the North Indian town of Varanasi, PTI said.

PTI said Sunday's violence started when students attacked doctors from the campus hospital with homemade guns and bombs, iron rods and sticks, alleging a student suffering from malaria died because of medical negligence.

Taiwan president in Thailand:

Taiwan's President Lee Tung-hui arrived in Thailand Monday for a visit that has angered China. AP reports from Bangkok.

Lee arrived at the southern resort island of Phuket from Indonesia to start what Thai officials called a private three-day vacation.

Deputy Prime Minister Annuay Virawan and Deputy Labour and Social Welfare Minister Paitong Kaewthong flew down from Bangkok to play golf and hold discussions with Lee, Thai newspapers reported.

'NATO deadline will not be extended'

PARIS, Feb 14: French Defence Minister Francois Leotard said on Sunday that a NATO deadline for the withdrawal of Bosnian Serb artillery from around Sarajevo would not be extended beyond February 20, reports Reuters.

Leotard was asked in an interview with France's TFI television if the ultimatum could be moved back.

"No, on the contrary, the NATO decision indicates very clearly, which is unusual in this type of decision, that there will be no extension," he said.

"Therefore on the evening of the 20th, everyone should know what can be expected to happen. No one should doubt our determination," he said.

Leotard said it was up to allied forces to decide, if necessary, when and how to use air strikes.

"Everyone must know, namely the Serbs, that our determination is total and we mean to succeed in this operation," he said.

The Defence Minister, noting that France has the largest peacekeeping contingent in former Yugoslavia, said other European countries needed to contribute more soldiers to support the effort.

US plans fresh tougher sanctions on Haiti

WASHINGTON, Feb 14: The United States and three other nations plan a new series of tougher sanctions to force democracy on the poor Caribbean nation, a Clinton administration official said Sunday, reports Reuters.

US ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright said on NBC's "Meet the press" programme that the United States, France, Canada and Venezuela were preparing this week to promote a package of tighter sanctions against Haiti.

"We are looking again at a tougher set of sanctions which really has three parts to it, has to do with air travel, targeted sanctions against certain parties there and an overall trade embargo," she said.

"We are in the process of negotiating it," she said.

Human rights activists last week urged President Clinton to raise pressure on Haiti's military regime to step down by barring US imports of all goods assembled in Haitian plants.

They told reporters that more than 50 US firms bring in to the United States a variety of goods assembled in Haiti, including baseballs, clothing, floor tiles and fishing

lures. They said a United Nations embargo on fuel and weapons shipments to Haiti was leaking badly, harming Haiti's poor but not the military leaders it was intended to force from office.

The national labour committee, a coalition of labour unions that works for human rights in Central America, also urged the United States to pressure the Dominican Republic to better police its border with Haiti to block fuel shipments.

They urged the Clinton administration to drop efforts to force exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to broaden his government to include opposition politicians in an effort to gain majority support in parliament.

Palestinians ambush Israeli vehicle, 1 killed

BETUNYA, Occupied West Bank, Feb 13: Several Palestinians sprayed automatic gun fire at a car carrying Israeli security agents in the occupied West Bank on Sunday, killing one and injuring two, officials said, reports AP.



A masked member of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas armed with a hatchet marches through the streets of Gaza City February 13. The armed wing of Hamas, Ezzedin al-Qassam, claimed responsibility for the attack on three Israelis in the West Bank town of Ramallah February 13. — AFP photo

US congressman, UN official meet Suu Kyi



RANGOON, Feb 14: Myanmar's military government Monday allowed a US congressman and a UN official to meet with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the first non-family visit permitted since the Nobel Peace Prize winner was put under house arrest nearly five years ago, reports AP.

Requests by human rights groups, visiting US congressmen, journalists and others to see Mrs Suu Kyi had in the past been brusquely turned down by Myanmar authorities.

Myanmar official said Rep. William Richardson, a Democrat from New Mexico, and Jehan Raheem, the ranking UN representative in Myanmar were allowed into her guarded lakeside home at about 10 am (0200 GMT).

41 killed in Myanmar boat capsizes

BANGKOK, Feb 14: Forty-one people were confirmed dead and at least 80 people were still missing today after an overcrowded Myanmar boat sank off the southwestern coast of Thailand at the weekend, police and rescue officials said, reports AP.

The officials added that some 30 survivors had received treatment following the accident off Ramong, some 565 kilometres (340 miles) southwest of Bangkok, near the border with Myanmar.

The 30-metre (100-foot) boat was believed to be carrying some 250 passengers when it sank late Saturday due to overloading, police said.

They said rescue workers were not alerted until several hours after the accident.

Off the Record

Valentine's Day in Valentine

VALENTINE, Nebraska: It's the place to be on Valentine's Day. Pin-up Cupids hover on just about every other front door in this town of 2,826. Heart-shaped pins and earrings and heart-studded ties are must-wears. They're stamping cards from across the country at the post office, which gets about 20,000 annually from people who want the town's postmark on February 14, reports AP.

They take Valentine's Day seriously around here. "A lot of us don't send Christmas cards. We send Valentine cards instead," said lifelong resident Connie Rhoades.

Sweethearts can sigh across their heart-shaped steaks at the Peppermill, or make eyes at each other over strawberry-cheesecake and a free glass of champagne at Jordan's.

Four couples were to wed at the country courthouse, where Magistrate Mary Galloway looked forward to officiating in her red blouse dotted with satin hearts, white skirt and red shoes.

"It's kind of romantic," she explained.

Ferocious mouse mounts guerilla campaign

BEIJING: A Chinese farmer has come under violent physical attack from a ferocious mouse seeking vengeance for the poisoning of its babies, the official China daily said Monday, reports Reuters.

Xu Guihuai of Jiangsu province set traps and poison around his house after finding a female mouse and its three offspring in December. The younger rodents were soon killed, but the mother vanished — only to mount a guerilla campaign against Xu.

"The 300-gramme (about half a pound) devil attacked Xu in his sleep," the newspaper said. "One day Xu awoke to find his hand had been gnawed on."

Ignoring Xu's further attempts to kill it, the mouse had kept up its reign of terror.

Xu's ear became a target another night, sending the farmer to a local clinic for help," the China Daily said. "The mouse continues to wreak havoc in Xu's small household."

'News of Beatles reunion concert rubbish'

LONDON: Paul McCartney and George Harrison were quoted Monday as saying that a report that they and Ringo Starr plan a Beatles reunion concert in New York later this year is incorrect, reports AP.

"It's rubbish," the Daily Express quoted McCartney as saying Sunday night at his farmhouse home at Peasmarsh 50 miles (80 km) southeast of London.

The London daily quoted him as saying "There's as much chance of a Beatles reunion as reheating a soufflé. When John (Lennon) was alive there was a possibility. But without John it will never happen."

The Daily Express quoted Harrison as saying: "They will never be a Beatles reunion as long as John Lennon remains dead."

The weekly London paper The Mail on Sunday reported Sunday that the three surviving Beatles would get together for a concert in New York that would be shown on television worldwide. Quoting an unnamed source, it said they would perform in Central Park later this year and be joined on stage by Lennon's sons Julian and Sean.

The Daily Express said Monday that McCartney, Harrison and Starr were furious over the report that they had agreed to link up on stage in New York.

The Times of London reported Monday that New York entrepreneur Sidney Bernstein wants McCartney, Harrison and Starr to make a comeback in the United States at the 25th anniversary of Woodstock, the giant outdoor concert of 1969.

Book Critics Award announced

NEW YORK, Feb 14: "A Lesson Before Dying," Ernest Gaines' novel about black life in Louisiana before the civil rights era, won the National Book Critics Circle award Sunday for most distinguished fiction, reports AP.

The critics' other picks for the best new American books of 1993 were:

— Non-fiction: "The Land Where the Blues Began" (Pantheon) by Alan Lomax.

— Biography: "Genet" (Alfred A Knopf) by Edmund White.

— Poetry: "My Alexandria" (University of Illinois Press) by Mark Doty.

— Criticism: "Opera in America: A Cultural History" (Yale University Press) by John Ditzler.

Gaines' novel, published by Alfred A Knopf, portrays two black men, one unjustly convicted of murder and awaiting execution.

JERUSALEM, Feb 14: At age 11, Reem was raped at knifepoint by a teen-age cousin. When her family found out five years later, they punished her for shaming them and a brother broke her right foot with a cinder block, reports AP.

"My mother cursed me and told me, 'You are dirt and people are gossiping about you,'" recalled Reem, a 16-year-old Bedouin with a cherubic face framed by a pageboy haircut.

Still, Reem is lucky. Unlike many, she had a place to escape from her family's abuse and death threats: a shelter set up last fall by Arab feminists. They say it is the first such sanctuary in the Arab world, where violence against women is often hushed up.

Since September, 50 teenagers have found temporary refuge in the five-room apartment. Its location is kept secret.

Reem, not her real name, has a chronic infection in her right foot and wears orthopedic sneakers. When police

Arab feminists set up sanctuaries

brought her to the shelter four months ago, she refused to speak.

"I didn't trust anyone," she said. "I dreamt all the time that my parents were chasing after me with a knife and I woke up screaming."

She proudly showed her drawings of flowers and a scrapbook of photos of soccer players. Starved for affection, she idolises her counselor Hanan and called her "my good mother" in a poem.

Rima Asay, director of the center, said she has space for 10 girls, but receives 30 placement requests a week and has to refuse most of them.

While the shelter is a good start, she said, there is no follow-up. Several girls had to return home with no protection beyond pledges signed by their families in the presence of police that they would not be harmed.

The shelter's founders are

pioneers in a region where violence against women is often condoned and victims are discouraged from seeking help.

"It is accepted as a private matter that concerns only the family," said Hadiyah Jaradat of the Democratic Women's Association in Tunisia. "The reigning mentality is that a woman can be corrected when she is on the wrong path."

Information is sketchy, but there is enough to suggest the depth of the problem.

— In Jordan, a country of 3.9 million people, about 60 women a year die in "honor killings," said Zuhra Sharabati, a criminal lawyer. About 500 women a year file assault complaints against their husbands, she added, but the vast majority of cases are not reported.

— In Tunisia, 85 per cent of the 480 female assault victims admitted in 1992 at Rabita Hospital in Tunis were beaten by their husbands, said the

Tunisian Democratic Women's Association.

— In the occupied territories, nearly all of the 107 Palestinian women reported slain by fellow Arabs as alleged collaborators during the uprising against Israel were in fact victims of honour killings, the Israeli human rights group B'tselem said last month.

— Nadera Kevorkian, a sociologist at Bethlehem University in the West Bank, cited the case of a Palestinian woman who was raped by a brother-in-law, got pregnant, gave birth last May and was critically beaten by relatives while in the maternity ward.

She was moved to another hospital, Kevorkian pleaded with officials not to release the woman to her family, but was ignored. The day after her release, the woman's body was found, hacked to pieces, in a plastic bag on the steps of the hospital, Kevorkian said.

In recent months, Palestinian women's groups have begun trying to help. With money from donations and Israel's Welfare Ministry, the Association of Women Against Violence set up two shelters in northern Israel. The organisation of Arab feminists focuses on the 450,000 Arab women in Israel.

One of the shelters helps teen-agers like Reem. The other, for married Arab women, is a gray two-story house in an Arab village, protected by a spike fence and alarm system. It housed seven women and 18 children during a recent visit.

The Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees, originally associated with the Communist Party, has established a counseling center and two hotlines for the West Bank's 500,000 women.

Amal Khreishe, who runs the hotlines, said she got 11 calls on the first day of operations in January, some from

women who had never dared to discuss their problem.

Among those seeking help was a university graduate who said she had been raped repeatedly by a relative and feared her secret would be discovered.

"She said her mother believes the family must kill any girl who has sexual relations outside the marriage institution," Khreishe said.

The caller said she was running out of excuses for rejecting suitors — marriage being out of the question because of her loss of virginity. As a result of the pressure, the woman said, she suffered frequent fevers and hysterical fits.

Kevorkian said Arab women often blame themselves instead of their attackers because they are taught to be subservient to men.

"We have a patriarchal society in which men control everything and women should act according to their expectations — being nice, being sweet, preparing food and staying at home," she said.

India plans to raise defence budget

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: India is planning to raise its defence budget for 1994-95 fiscal year by about 12 per cent for armed forces modernization and development, according to highly placed sources in the Defence Ministry today, reports Xinhua.

The sources said the coming defence budget is likely to be around 212.5 billion rupees or 6.75 billion US dollars comparing with last year's 6.09 billion US dollars.

According to India defence policy makers, a large amount of the coming budget would be allocated to research and development sectors which would consume 8 billion rupees or 254 million US dollars on the basis of last year's 4 billion rupees.

Now India's Air Force is confronted with the immediate need to modernise its main fighter planes, and the navy needs to start the production of new aircraft carrier ships soon, replacing the old Vikrant.