

Khasbulatov accuses Yeltsin of staging coup in Oct '93

MOSCOW, Mar 1: Former Russian Parliament Chairman Khasbulatov, unbowed by more than four months in jail, proclaimed his innocence in last October's bloody power struggle and accused President



Russian Khasbulatov
Boris Yeltsin of staging a coup, reports Reuter.

In an interview published in the right-wing newspaper Sovetskaya Rossiya Today, Khasbulatov confirmed that he planned to quit politics and devote himself to science and to writing a book.

In his first public comments since being freed by a parliamentary amnesty on Saturday, Khasbulatov said that the former parliament, the Supreme Soviet, had made mistakes, but insisted it had acted legitimately.

"Remember, the President had staged a coup d'état," he said. "What was the Supreme Soviet to do? It was to act in full accordance with the existing constitution. And that is what its leadership did."

Khasbulatov, in jail since Yeltsin won a bloody power struggle in Moscow on October 3 and 4, cast doubt on the validity of the new Russian con-

stitution, narrowly approved in a referendum on December 12.

"The constitution so furiously rejected by Yeltsin is a whole lot better and more democratic than its successor," he told Sovetskaya Rossiya.

At least 147 people were killed in two days of clashes, the culmination of a year of dispute between the Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet over which was the top power in the land.

Yeltsin sent in tanks and shelled the former parliament building, the White House, after Khasbulatov and the then Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi called on their supporters to storm the Moscow television centre and the Kremlin.

Masako's father made Japan's envoy to UN

TOKYO, Mar 1: The father of Crown Princess Masako was formally named Tuesday as Japan's ambassador to the United Nations, reports AP.

The appointment of Hisashi Owada, 61, had been expected since last year.

Owada's appointment is effective Thursday, though he will arrive in New York later, said a Foreign Ministry official. Owada succeeds Yoshiro Hatano, 62, who had held the post for four years.

Owada stepped down from the Foreign Ministry's top career post of administrative vice minister last August, two months after his daughter married Crown Prince Naruhito.

Since then, Owada has been an adviser to the ministry.

BRIEFLY

Qian Qichen in Sri Lanka: Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Affairs Minister Qian Qichen arrived in Sri Lanka on Monday night for a three-day visit, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said yesterday. Reuter reports from Colombo.

In an airport statement, Qian, who last visited the island in 1990 along with Prime Minister Li Peng, said he hoped his visit would promote cooperation between the countries.

Qian was accompanied by assistant foreign minister Wang Yingfan and a team of officials.

Blast claims one in Brussels: One person was killed and seven injured by an explosion in the early hours of Tuesday that wrecked the top floors of an eight-storey apartment block in northeast Brussels, the Belga news agency reported. Reuter says from Brussels.

The cause of the explosion in the building in the Berchem-Sainte-Agathe area of the city was not immediately known, but a photographer on the scene said rescue services believed it was due to a gas leak.

He said a number of people were still trapped in the building, the top four floors of which had collapsed.

Australian jailed in Thailand: An Australian man was sentenced to 40 years in prison for trying to smuggle heroin out of Thailand, an official said Tuesday. AP reports from Bangkok.

The Criminal Court on Monday originally gave a death sentence to Martin Anthony Garnett, but commuted the sentence because he had pleaded guilty.

Garnett, who is in his mid 20s, is a car salesman from Sydney.

Newsmen observe strike in Delhi: A one-day strike prevented newspapers from publishing here Tuesday, and people had to turn on their radios or TVs to find out about the government's new budget, AP reports from New Delhi.

Journalists and printers stayed home Monday to demand better salaries and benefits. They also want a government agency to raise the minimum wages that papers have to pay new employees.

They chose Monday because that was the day that Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao presented his new budget to Parliament.

Rao has been reforming India's closed, socialist economy since coming to power in 1991, and farm subsidies have been falling and the prices of food and gasoline rising in this poor nation.

Quake kills one in Iran: An earthquake shook southern Iran on Tuesday, killing at least one person and injuring 21. Tehran radio reported. AP reports from Nicosia.

The radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corp., said the earthquake registered 5.7 on the open-ended Richter scale. It was centered 435 miles (700 kms) south of Tehran in Fars province.

The earthquake at 7:38 am (0408 GMT) was the latest in a series of moderate quakes that have jolted the region in the past week.

The Richter scale is a gauge of the energy released by an earthquake, as measured by the ground motion recorded on a seismograph.

De Klerk asks rightists to avoid bloodshed

CAPE TOWN, Mar 1: President F W de Klerk opened what was almost certainly the final session of South Africa's white parliament on Monday appealing to rightists to avoid bloodshed and secession, reports Reuter.

"There is simply no future on the road of unconstitutional and violent activity. I appeal to any of those who might be considering this road to turn back before it is too late," he said.

De Klerk told legislators in the parliament, which excludes the country's black majority.

International

PLO rejects major Israeli package of concessions

JERUSALEM, Mar 1: The PLO rejected major Israeli concessions aimed at coaxing them back to peace talks in the wake of the mosque massacre, saying early Tuesday the package did not go far enough in protecting Palestinians in the occupied lands, reports AP.

The major stumbling block was an offer announced hours earlier by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to allow unarmed international observers in the occupied territories.

"We still insist on military and armed peacekeeping forces to protect our people," PLO Executive Committee member Ali Ishak said in Tunis, Tunisia, after the committee rejected the offer early

Tuesday. "What has been proposed is insufficient."

Israel also offered to disarm settlers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho and expand the proposed Palestinian police force in those areas, according to PLO officials meeting in Tunis.

Rabin made the offer for international observers in Jerusalem Monday. Later, spokesmen for the Prime Minister and the Israeli Foreign Ministry said they had no information on a package of concessions, although they did not deny that one existed.

Such a package would mean that Israel had agreed to most demands put by the PLO following Friday's shooting of worshippers at a mosque in

Hebron. Two Palestinians were killed Monday in clashes with soldiers in the occupied territories, bringing the Arab death toll to 64 since a Jewish gunman opened fire at the Muslims, killing 39 men and boys.

In New York, diplomats from the United States, Russia, the PLO and Egypt said they were close to agreeing on a U.N. resolution condemning the massacre. Israel began cracking down on Jewish extremists Sunday and announced plans to release up to 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in the wake of the attack, which badly hurt the already faltering Middle East peace process.

But PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat said those measures were not enough. He demanded all Jewish settlements be removed from the West Bank and Gaza.

The PLO also has demanded armed foreign troops in the territories — a step Rabin says would compromise Israel's control there — as well as the disarming of settlers and an expanded police force.

Mideast peace talks in Washington were suspended Sunday after Syria, Lebanon and Jordan walked out in support of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.

In a speech Monday to Israel's parliament, Rabin entreated the PLO to be less adamant.

Ustad Amjad Ali honoured

LONDON, Mar 1: Sarod Maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan has been accorded the title of honourary visiting professor in Indian classical music by the University of York in Britain, reports PTI.

It is a rare honour by a university which has one of the most reputed faculties of music to one of the most charismatic exponents of classical Indian musical traditions.

Professor John Paynter, who heads the music faculty in the University of York, said the idea of a chair in classical India music at York University came from the High Commissioner for India, L M Singhvi, during one of his visits to the university.

He said it was an honour for the university to have Ustad Amjad Ali Khan as the first honourary visiting professor in Indian music.

Japan, US may hold high-level talks next week

TOKYO, Mar 1: Japan and the United States are considering holding a high-level meeting on foreign affairs and defence in Tokyo next week, Japan's defence agency director revealed today, says AP.

General Kazuo Aichi told a press conference a meeting could take place when US Secretary of State Warren Christopher visits Japan on March 9-11.

US under-secretary of defence Frank Wisner, accompanying Christopher, would also attend the meeting, he said.

Japan would be represented by Aichi and Foreign Minister Tsutomu Hata, Japanese officials said.

US to back Major in row over reforms in HK

WASHINGTON, Mar 1: British Prime Minister John Major won US support Monday in London's row with Beijing over democratic reforms in Hong Kong, British officials said, reports Reuter.

China reacted furiously last week to the approval by Hong Kong's legislature of the first stage of the reforms. It said Britain had slammed the door shut on any chance of resuming talks on how the colony should be ruled once Britain has handed it over to China in 1997.

Major, on a two-day US visit, told Vice-President Al Gore it would help if the United States kept making plain its support for more democracy in the colony, officials said. Gore, who said he was a great admirer of British Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten, said Washington would do just that, they added.

In an interview with Cable News Network, Major expressed confidence that the row with China could be over.

These discussions aren't always easy," Major said. "But they are progressing."

The response to the South Korean proposal, replayed by hot line at Panmunjom, came as an inspection team from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was scheduled to arrive in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang from Beijing.

The IAEA team is to resume inspections of the North's

Off the Record



German top model Claudia Schiffer wears a dress from the Gianni Versace Autumn/Winter 1994/95 "Instant" collection presented at a fashion preview in Milan, Italy Feb. 27. — AFP photo

Mother offers to sell unborn child for \$20,000

CLINTWOOD: On her 19th birthday, a woman pleaded guilty Monday to offering to sell her unborn child for 20,000 dollars. She showed no emotion when a judge gave her a suspended 12-month jail sentence, reports AP.

Stephanie Gail Owens admitted in a plea agreement that she and her husband, James, agreed to sell either the boy due to be born in a month for 20,000 dollars or their infant daughter for 25,000 dollars.

The couple placed a newspaper advertisement in December 1992 offering a baby for adoption. In a letter to his father, Owens said they were selling everything to move from this poor coal-mining area in central Appalachia to Alabama.

Whitney Houston nominated for 4 Grammy Awards

UNDATED: Whitney Houston says she isn't banking on winning all four Grammy Awards she's nominated for but if she makes a clean sweep, she could earn a big payoff, reports AP.

Eric Clapton, Natalie Cole and Bonnie Raitt have all cashed in with big Grammy Award nights.

"A lot of people are saying to me, 'Oh, Whitney, you got it in the bag,'" she told TV Guide recently. "But I'm like, hey, I'm just going to wait and see what happens. I don't build myself up for the big letdown."

The 36th annual ceremony will be held at 0100 GMT Wednesday at New York City's Radio City Music Hall.

Miss Houston has the chance to make it an even dozen trophies in a month at Tuesday's recording industry awards show.

ROK, DPRK to reopen border talks tomorrow

SEOUL, Mar 1: North Korea has agreed to hold a border meeting to discuss an exchange of presidential envoys with South Korea on Thursday, a spokesman of the National Unification Board (NUB) said here today, reports AP.

The spokesman said the North had agreed that the meeting on Thursday could be held on the southern side of the truce village of Panmunjom, as proposed Monday by Seoul.

"We propose to have the fourth working-level contact for the exchange of special envoys at the peace house on the southern side of Panmunjom at 10 O'clock on the 3rd of March," the spokesman quoted the North Korean message as saying.

Seoul had on Monday proposed that the meeting on the exchange of envoys be held early today, the day the IAEA inspectors arrived in Pyongyang.

Resolution of the nuclear impasse, and the holding of a third round of high-level talks between Washington and Pyongyang are tied to the North allowing the IAEA inspections and exchange of envoys with the South.

Kim Jong II makes public appearance

TOKYO, Mar 1: Kim Jong II, the son and heir apparent of North Korean strongman Kim Il Sung, has made his first public appearance in over two months, reports AP.

The official Korean Central News Agency said Kim Jong II met Monday with Ho Jong Man, a leading Korean resident of Japan, at Ho's request.

The report, monitored in Tokyo, said the two had an amicable conversation and that the North Korean leader arranged a dinner for Ho.

Officials of Ho's organization, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, were not immediately available to comment on the report.

Russia supports downing of 4 Serb planes over Bosnia

MOSCOW, Mar 1: Russia supported NATO's action in shooting down four planes on a bombing raid over Bosnia on Monday but did not join the western alliance in blaming Bosnian Serbs for the incident, reports AP.

NATO says the four planes were Serb and that it struck after they had carried out a bombing raid on Muslim-held territory.

Western governments are keenly watching Moscow, following its change of tack over the past two weeks to present itself as defender of the Serbs, Russia's historical allies.

Bosnians Serb leader

Radovan Karadzic arrived in Moscow on Monday evening for talks with Russia officials.

The Kremlin sharply criticised NATO's threat to bomb Bosnian Serb artillery positions around Sarajevo earlier this month, an issue which opened a rift between Moscow and the West.

An Adviser to President Boris Yeltsin, Andranik Migranyan, also reacted critically on hearing first reports of Monday's incident, saying they were meant as a demonstration to Russia.

Lorena Bobbitt waves to supporters in Prince William Circuit Court in Manassas, USA, Feb. 28 before her conditional release from custody. Bobbitt, who was found not guilty last month of maiming her husband, John Bobbitt, spent the last month undergoing psychiatric evaluation at Central State Hospital in Petersburg.

— AFP photo.



chief in Moscow.

State Department spokesman Michael McCurry initially declined to confirm that Morris was the expelled US Embassy officer; later when told that Russian news media had said it was Morris, McCurry said, "I don't have any reason to dispute that."

The expulsions are part of the fallout from the arrest last week of Ames and his wife, Rosario Ames, on charges of spying for Russia. The Ames were accused of selling some of America's most sensitive secrets to Moscow for 1.5 million dollars.

Vice President Al Gore did not explicitly rule out further diplomatic moves of Russia, but he stressed a desire to ease the strains arising from the arrests of the Ames.

The Ames are scheduled to appear before US Magistrate Barry R Poretz in suburban Alexandria, Va., on Tuesday at a hearing to determine whether they will continue to be held without bail and whether the case will be sent to a grand jury.

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John Russell, a Justice Department spokesman, said Monday that more than one government witness was scheduled to present "fairly colourful" testimony Tuesday supporting the government's contention that the Ames, if allowed out on bail, would be an unacceptable risk to flee the country.

In court papers filed Monday in response to the requests for bail, the prosecutors said newly uncovered evidence "suggests that their ill-gotten gains" are substantially greater and raise their take to well over 2.5 million dollars, the Post reported.

Poretz on Monday denied a motion by Ames' attorney, Plato Cacheris, to allow Ames to appear Tuesday