

US to resume high-level talks with DPRK Mar 21

WASHINGTON, Mar 4: The United States Thursday announced it would resume high-level talks with North Korea on March 21 in Geneva, in a bid for increased cooperation between the West and the isolated Stalinist state, reports Reuter.

The State Department said in a statement it was going forward with the official announcement after international experts arrived in Pyongyang to begin inspecting seven declared nuclear sites and after North Korea and South Korea resumed their dialogue on Korean issues.

The US team in Geneva will be headed by Assistant Secretary of State for Political and Military Affairs Robert Gallucci, who conducted two previous rounds before they were broken off last summer in a dispute over Pyongyang's obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

(NPT). "The talks will aim at a thorough and broad resolution of the nuclear and other issues that separate the DPRK (North Korea) from the US and the rest of the international community," State Department spokesman Mike McCurry said.

He renewed the US warning that the high-level talks and temporary cancellation of "team spirit" military exercises announced earlier by South Korea "are based on the premises that the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) inspections will be fully implemented and South-North nuclear dialogue will continue through the exchange of special envoy."

In an agreement reached last week in New York, North Korea agreed to allow the long-sought IAEA inspections to go forward and to resume the North-South dialogue.

US rejects fresh UN call for more peacekeepers in Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Mar 4: The United States Thursday rejected a new call by UN officials for more peacekeepers in Bosnia and backed a decision not to call NATO air strikes after renewed shelling in Sarajevo, reports Reuter.

"We have a very determined view about the role that we can play," State Department spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters.

I think the United Nations and other partners that we have in the world community are well aware of our views on the use of US ground forces. The president has been clear on that, the secretary has been clear on that, and the fact that we are more engaged in the diplomatic effort doesn't change those views," he said.

President Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher have said the United States will only consider sending US ground troops to Bosnia if there is a viable overall peace settlement there and certain other conditions are met, like approval of the US Congress.

Christopher told the Senate Wednesday the US-backed Bosnian Muslim-Croat unity accord signed in Washington on Monday neither meets this test nor alters the US view.

The UN commander in Bosnia, General Jean Cot, Thursday criticised Washington for avoiding a Bosnia peace-keeping role while new cease-fires were threatened with collapse for lack of UN reinforcements.

He said the US refusal to

send troops until Serb, Muslim and Croat factions signed and enforceable peace treaty was "a strange and not very courageous idea."

Cot, French commander of the UN protection force in former Yugoslavia, and UN special envoy Yasushi Akashi appealed for 10,650 more troops to save cease-fires in Sarajevo and central Bosnia.

A Canberra report says: NATO should use air strikes if necessary to prevent renewed military aggression in Bosnia. Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin said on Thursday.

Asked by reporters how aggression should be deterred, he replied: "In my opinion, if necessary, air strikes."

"Because decision without political will, decision without forces behind cannot work,"

Cetin said.

Cetin, on a visit to Australia, was speaking before the outbreak of renewed fighting which shattered a fragile truce which had been holding in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo for more than two weeks.

Cetin had said it appeared Bosnia was close to achieving lasting peace following a Muslim-Croat agreement to link their territories in a federation of ethnically-based cantons.

"Therefore NATO and the (UN) Security Council should give a clear ultimatum again to the sides that we will not tolerate any new aggression, any new action in those areas," he said.

Turkey is a member of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.



US actor Jack Nicholson addresses a crowd of some 1,000 people after receiving the American Film Institute's 22nd Life Achievement award March 3 at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills. The event celebrated the 35-year career of the Oscar winning actor.

— AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Ghali greets Mandela, Buthelezi:

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has written to congratulate African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela and Zulu chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi on moves toward national reconciliation in South Africa, UN spokesman said Thursday, Reuter reports from United Nations.

"I was delighted to learn yesterday of the outcome of your meeting," the UN Secretary-General wrote, referring to a meeting between Buthelezi and Mandela.

"This positive development should provide a framework for all political parties to participate in the transitional arrangements, including the electoral process," he added.

Arab assailant shot dead in Gaza:

An Arab assailant was shot dead after stabbing and wounding two Jewish settlers in the occupied Gaza Strip on Friday, army radio said, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

The radio report said one of the settlers was in critical condition and the condition of the second was not immediately known.

Israeli security forces have braced for revenge attacks on Jews for the massacre by a radical settler of about 40 Palestinians praying in a mosque in the West Bank town of Hebron one week ago.

US to keep sanctions on Iraq:

President Bill Clinton said Thursday the United States would keep economic sanctions on Iraq, charging Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's government operated with a "pattern of defiance," AFP reports from Washington.

The sanctions which froze Iraqi assets in the United States and barred commercial transactions first came into effect when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. The sanctions come up for review every six months.

"We see a repeated pattern of defiance, repeated public claims to Kuwait, sponsorship of terrorism, incomplete declarations to weapons inspectors, and ongoing widespread human rights violations, among other things," Clinton said.

Kuwaiti health officials in India:

Kuwait has sent a team of health officials to India study the possibility of recruiting Indian specialist doctors to work in the Emirate, the official Kuwait news agency reported on Friday, Reuter reports from Kuwait.

The delegation of Kuwaiti academics, health care planners and specialist doctors was also discussing how India might help train doctors and para medical staff in the Emirate, it said.

The agency noted India has agreements with other Gulf states about recruitment of doctors and other health care workers from India but it had no such agreement with Kuwait. Kuwait mainly trains its doctors in the United States, Canada and Europe.

Qian Qichen arrives in Iran:

Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen arrived in Iran on Friday for a two-day visit aimed at boosting ties and bilateral cooperation, AFP reports from Tehran.

Qian, who is leading a 12-member delegation, was greeted at the airport by his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Velayati. He is here on the last leg of a tour of five Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

Qian told reporters that his country wanted to develop relations with Iran and expand cooperation. "Such a cooperation is important to regional peace and stability," he said.

Two cops killed in Thailand:

Two policemen were shot dead in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai on Friday by a young man who later killed himself to escape arrest, police said, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

The officers, patrolling the city centre on a motorbike were shot when they stopped to question the man.

Police said the unidentified gunman, who was in his early twenties, hid on a construction site and shot himself about an hour later after officers surrounded him.

Bosnian PM in Jakarta:

Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic arrived in Jakarta yesterday for a two-day visit to brief local leaders of developments in Bosnia, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Silajdzic arrives from Singapore where he made a brief stopover after attending talks in Washington on the Bosnian conflict.

He was at Jakarta's Sukarno Hatta Airport by Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. Silajdzic is scheduled to meet Indonesian President Suharto, current chairman of the 110-nation Non-Aligned Movement.

2000 Angolan children face food shortage

LUBANGO, Mar 4: At least 2,000 children aged five to 15 face critical food shortages in the Huila province of Southern Angola, a World Food Programme official warned Thursday, reports AFP.

He said the health of the children could deteriorate over the next few weeks because of drought in the region.

Efforts by international relief organisations to offset the effects of the drought have so far made little headway, he acknowledged, adding that people most at risk are in the north and east of the province.

Mexican rebels return to their remote forest villages

SAN MIGUEL, Mexico, Mar 4: Pursued by packs of reporters, the leaders of Mexico's Indian revolt have returned to their remote rain forest villages to decide whether to make peace in return for promises of aid and more democracy, reports AP.

Rebel soldiers wearing ski masks briefly formed a line and held their guns at attention as the insurgent military chief, known as Subcomandante Marcos, arrived at this little village Thursday with several other masked rebels.

Peace activists linked hands to form a line to hold back several dozen journalists

who had accompanied the convoy on its three-hour journey from San Cristobal de las Casas, where a first round of peace talks ended on Wednesday.

Hoping to end the revolt that started January 1, government peace negotiator Manuel Camacho Solis has promised a broad series of political and economic measures to grant Indian communities greater political rights, more aid and better public services.

At least 145 people, mostly rebels and civilians, died before a January 12 cease-fire, but the actual number may never be known.

"In great measure," the two sides are in agreement, Camacho told reporters at the dirt-road entrance to this dusty village of Clapboard shacks at the foot of mountain slopes sown with coffee and corn.

But the rebels of the Zapatista National Liberation Army say their supporters, long victims of racial discrimination and official neglect, must approve the peace pact — a process that could take weeks or even months.

Asked if he feared the rebels might wait for several months to see if the government begins to keep the

promises, Camacho said. Roman Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruiz, mediator of the talks, helped bring a tentative solution to the guerrilla war only two months after it began, cooling an explosive situation ahead of Mexico's August 21 presidential election.

But the rebels say there is no agreement, only promises by the government and that they will not lay down their arms until the country's leaders comply with promises.

One of the promises is to make elections credible. It would be the third major reform of electoral laws since President Carlos Salinas de

Gortari took office amid allegations of widespread fraud in 1988.

The two earlier efforts, like a series of others enacted by past presidents, failed to stop complaints that the Institutional Revolutionary Party was using unfair means to maintain its 65-year hold on power.

Observers call the August 21 election the real hostage in government dealings with the rebels. The uprising could still trouble the voting to replace Salinas, who cannot run again.

Other poor groups throughout Mexico could also resort to violence. The reforms announced

Amnesty for rebels illegal, says Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Mar 4: President Boris Yeltsin to-day denounced last week's parliament amnesty for jailed rebels as illegal and unconstitutional but appealed for a new era of cooperation between parliament and the administration, reports Reuter.

In a Kremlin speech to the full cabinet and parliamentary leaders, Yeltsin said a new memorandum for civic peace in Russia being discussed between the branches of power could form a new basis for co-operation and political stability.

The Amnesty, passed overwhelmingly by parliament on February 23, was followed by the release of former Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi and other Yeltsin foes who tried to topple the President in a bloody uprising last October.

"I am fully aware how contradictory was the decision taken by the Duma (lower house), how hurriedly it was taken," Yeltsin said. "I considered and consider that this seriously violated the constitution, the law and moral standards."

But he continued that Russia could now resolve its internal disagreements peacefully.

Peace process has lost credibility: Arafat

BRUSSELS, Mar 4: Actions, not words, are needed by Israel and the United States to stop the Middle East peace talks collapsing in the wake of the Hebron massacre, PLO leader Yasser Arafat was quoted on Thursday as saying, reports Reuter.

"The peace process has lost its credibility. We need concrete steps to convince our people that more than massacres and more oppression can come out of the negotiations," he said in an interview published in Belgium's Le Soir newspaper.

Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein shot dead 33 Palestinians at prayer in a Hebron mosque

last Friday. Describing the settlements with their 120,000 Jewish occupants in the Israeli-occupied territories as a "time bomb," Arafat repeated his demands that they be dismantled.

"We are not asking for the moon. But we neither want to kill the peace or be killed by it," he said, calling for an international peacekeeping force to protect Palestinians.

In Amman, Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias, on a Middle East tour representing the European Union, expressed support for Arafat's calls.

"International presence is

a basic condition and disarming the Jewish settlers is another condition," Papoulias, Current President of the European Union Council of Ministers, told Reuters when asked what was needed to protect Palestinians.

"In addition, an atmosphere of tranquility and stability has to be created after the regretful incidents in Hebron," he said after talks with Jordanian officials.

Arafat said the Hebron massacre had changed the climate, but not the fundamentals of the peace process.

"We were on the point of making peace. Instead of that we have witnessed a mas-

sacre," he said, accusing the Israeli army of aggravating matters instead of restoring order.

He complained that the Israeli government had been dragging its feet over implementation of last September's peace accord, and accused the United States of continuing to favour Israel.

"Since we signed, they have given them money, better computers, aeroplanes, and loan guarantees. They have opened doors in Africa, Asia, everywhere," Arafat said.

"We claim our dues, the United States tells us to be patient until the definitive accord is signed."

Benazir asks Afghan factions to settle differences soon

PESHAWAR, Mar 4: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Thursday urged Afghanistan's warring factions to make peace and said Islamabad wanted only brotherly ties with its troubled neighbour, reports Reuter.

Bhutto appeared to be trying to ease recent strains in relations when she visited a camp for new refugees from the latest fighting in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul.

She told the refugees that Pakistan would continue to help our Afghan brothers and will not leave them alone in their hour of distress despite some unpleasant events."

Crowds of angry Afghans last week sacked the Pakistan embassy in Kabul and fired rockets on the Pakistan border after Pakistani commandos shot dead three Afghan gunmen who had hijacked a school bus and taken hostage a group of school boys.

Political analysts said the incidents could harm ties between Pakistan and Kabul's Islamic coalition government, set up in April 1992 when the Pakistan-backed Mujahideen took power from the former communist government.

Bhutto said she hoped the Afghan leaders, including President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his opponent prime minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, would settle their differences



at the earliest possible time so that their country could begin reconstruction after 15 years of civil war.

"Pakistan loves the Afghan people and we hope they will reciprocate our brotherly sen-

timents," she said.

Bhutto denied charges by some protesters in Kabul that Pakistan was interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

"Pakistan only desires to have cordial, friendly and brotherly relations with Afghanistan and to see restoration of a lasting peace there," she said.

Tens of thousands of residents have fled Kabul since the latest factional fighting for supremacy erupted between Rabbani and Hekmatyar on New Year's Day.

Pakistani officials told Bhutto that 18,000 Afghan refugees had arrived in Peshawar since the start of the year.

UN officials estimate that 109,000 Kabul residents have fled to the eastern Afghan town of Jalalabad since January 1.

Kabul's population has fallen to 800,000 from 1.5 million when the Mujahideen took power as a result of the fighting.

Pakistan has closed its border to new refugees and says it will allow in only those carrying valid travel documents.

A six-truck United Nations food convoy left Peshawar.

Off the Record

Remote-controlled robot arm helps perform operations

LONDON: Canadian surgeons reported Friday that they has used a remote-controlled robot arm to help them to perform operations on people, reports Reuter.

The technique, described in the Lancet Medical Journal, could be extended to allow for help from experts miles away from the operation room.

Dr Michael Gagner of the Hotel-Dieu De Montreal Hospital said in the report that he and colleagues used the robot arm, fitted with a tiny camera, in three gall bladder operations last year.

"There were no complications or technical problems during surgery, and the patients were able to go home within two days," the Lancet said in a statement.

"This approach may offer economic benefits to smaller surgical teams and may lead to more sophisticated systems for the performance of complete robotic surgery."

Jury awards 3 women with leaking silicone implants

HOUSTON: A jury awarded three women with leaking Silicone breast implants 15 million dollars in punitive damages from three companies a day after it ordered same companies to pay 12.9 million dollars in actual damages, reports AP.

On Wednesday the jury found 3M Corp., based in Minnesota; McGhan Medical Co. of Goleta, Calif.; and Inamed of Las Vegas liable for the leaking implants and awarded the 12.9 million dollars.

An appeal will be considered, said Richard Rawls, an attorney for the companies.

"I think what happened here is unfortunate," Rawls said of the women's implant problems. "This jury decided that the breast implants were the cause of that. Like I say, the scientific community hasn't reached a consensus on that issue."

As Thursday's 15 million dollars damage award was announced, Darla Lawson, Judy McMurry and Susan Doss hugged each other, and people in the courtroom applauded.

"This is what we wanted," Ms. McMurry said. "The main thing is that we won. We needed a strong yes."

The verdict orders 3M to pay 4 million dollars to Ms. Lawson and 5 million dollars to Ms. McMurry and Ms. Doss.

McGhan Medical, the financial arm of Inamed, was ordered to pay an additional 1 million dollars to Ms. Lawson. All three women had the implants removed in 1992.

"I think I'm still in shock. There's just so many more behind us," Ms. Lawson said.

Clinton's health reform plan losing support

WASHINGTON, Mar 4: Two new opinion polls show that US President Bill Clinton's health reform plan is losing support on several fronts as US Congressional Committees begin work on it, reports Xinhua.

An ABC, Washington Post poll, which was conducted February 24, 27, found 44 per cent in favour of the plan and 48 per cent opposed. Three weeks earlier attitudes were almost reversed at 51-41 in favour.

A CNN USA Today/Gallup Survey conducted February 26-28 found only 46 per cent in favour of the Clinton plan and 48 per cent opposed. A month earlier, 57 per cent had backed it with only 38 per cent against.

Both polls had three-point margins of error. For the first time more Americans are beginning to disapprove of the plan than approve of it. The polls said, adding that the American public is showing increasing signs of wariness.

Some influential organizations have either voiced their opposition against or edged away from supporting the health reform plan since Clinton outlined it in his State of The Union address earlier

this year. The American Medical Association (AMA) said that the plan, if executed, is likely to build a big wall between doctors and patients and it insists that doctors should have the say.

The US chamber of commerce, which represents 220,000 small business, pulled back on Monday from supporting two key elements of the reform proposal: mandatory employer payments for all workers health insurance and extension of coverage to everyone.

Clinton yesterday dismissed the negative polls, saying they were the inevitable product of high-priced TV ads run by his critics. He blamed special interest groups for letting him down.

"How could it be otherwise?" he opined. "Look at the millions and millions of dollars that have been spent by interest groups to trash the plan...I don't have as much money to run television ads as the health insurance industry does," he said.

Critics in congress and outside of government charge that Clinton's plan is too bureaucratic.

585 AIDS cases in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 4: The number of full-blown AIDS cases in India rose to 585 in February 1994 from 237 in November 1992, showing an increase of 180 per cent, reports Xinhua.

Minister for Health and Family Welfare Be Shankarananda said in parliament in a written reply on Thursday that south Indian state of Maharashtra has the largest number of AIDS cases, totalling 231, followed by Tamil Nadu with 185, Kerala with 76, Punjab with 47 and New Delhi with 46.

He said that 5,482 HIV positive cases have been reported