

Pakistan offers to host Tajik-rebels talks

ISLAMABAD, Mar 31: Pakistan offered on Wednesday to host a round of peace talks between the Tajikistan government and Islamic rebels, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said, reports Reuter.

He said Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto made the offer during talks with acting Tajik head of state Imamali Rakhmonov, who told her his Central Asian Republics civil war had ended.

Tajik officials have said the first round of peace talks be-

UN missile experts arrive in Baghdad

BAGHDAD, Mar 31: Preparations for long-term monitoring of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction gathered pace on Wednesday as a team of UN ballistic missile experts arrived in Baghdad, reports Reuter.

"This is a rather quick-paced, intense mission to produce documentation that will be used during the ongoing monitoring and verification phase," team leader John Larrabee told reporters.

tween the government and rebel representatives are to be held soon in Moscow.

Benazir told Rakhmonov Islamabad was willing to host one of the rounds of talks, the spokesman said, adding: "I believe the Tajik side has no objection to this proposal."

He said there might be a second round in Tehran after the Moscow talks, and then a round in Islamabad.

The spokesman said Rakhmonov told Benazir there had been a qualitative change in Tajik and civil war was no longer being waged.

The Tajik leader said he hoped his country would soon emerge from its political and economic crisis and that a constitution would be adopted by year-end, followed by elections.

Tajikistan's suspicion that Pakistan supported the Islamic Tajik rebels during the 1992 civil war had soured ties between the two countries.

They also agreed their technical experts should further explore a power project for which Pakistan offered a 500 million dollar credit two years ago, the spokesman said.

China opposes UNSC resolution to open DPRK's N-sites

BEIJING, Mar 31: China today stressed its opposition to a proposed UN Security Council resolution urging North Korea to open its nuclear facilities to UN inspection, reports Reuter.

The Foreign Ministry said it was Beijing's "well-considered position" that any such move could only aggravate an already tense situation.

Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin said China's submission of a milder draft statement — urging acceptance of inspections but omitting any threat of follow-up action — for Security Council consideration on Wednesday was aimed at keeping the dialogue over North Korea's suspect nuclear programme alive.

There is no question of (China) being uncooperative," Wu said after Chinese diplomats threw the Security Council into disarray with their unbending opposition to the proposed resolution.

"China's stand for a presidential statement at the Security Council instead of a resolution is a well-considered

position", Wu told a regular news briefing.

"Exerting pressure will not contribute to settlement of the issue. It can only deteriorate the atmosphere and aggravate the situation. Therefore we do not accept a Security Council resolution."

The US drafted resolution — meant to pressure Pyongyang into accepting full UN inspections that would determine whether or not it was building a nuclear bomb — had been expected to come up for a vote today.

China, one of five veto-holding permanent Security Council members, tried to delay the vote by submitting its own draft of a presidential statement.

China fought alongside the north in the 1950-53 Korean war and, as Pyongyang's last major ally, is seen as having a certain amount of influence over the isolated Stalinist state.

Beijing has consistently urged patience in dealing with North Korea's nuclear programme. The North has de-

clined any intention of building bombs and says the United States is building a case for wiping it out.

South Korean President Kim Young-Sam visited Beijing this week to urge China to play a role in resolving the impasse, but was politely told that China still believed more negotiation was the only way out.

Wu said China and South Korea had reached agreement on the need for negotiation to avoid a further increase in tensions. Therefore, neither side hopes to see pressure exerted.

"If there is to be an increase in tension and an aggravation of contradictions, the Korean nation will be the first to suffer," he said.

An earlier report says: President Clinton appealed to China Wednesday to pressure North Korea to allow international inspections of its nuclear programme and said Pyongyang risks isolation by refusing.

Clinton made the appeal after talking to South Korean

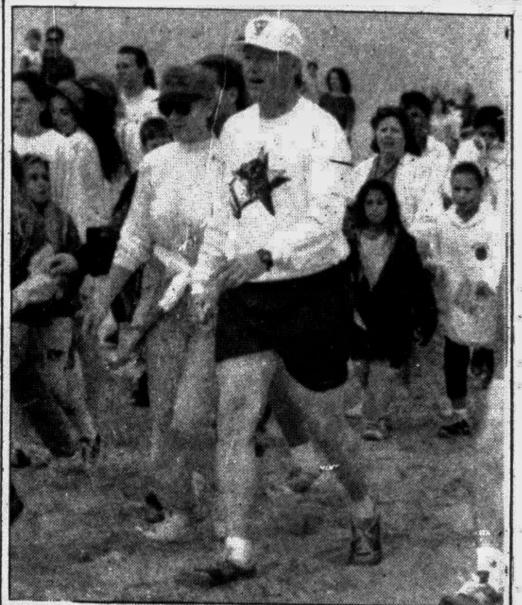
President Kim Young Sam and getting a briefing from him on his just-concluded visit to Beijing on the North Korean crisis. He was also briefed by his National Security Adviser, Anthony Lake.

The United States and South Korea expressed confidence Wednesday on reaching a compromise with China over UN steps to persuade North Korea to open its nuclear facilities to international inspection. China could veto a Security Council resolution condemning North Korea if it did not like the wording.

"We'll have to see where China comes down on it in the end," Clinton told reporters outside the seaside manor where he is spending a week-long vacation.

He said he believes China genuinely did not want to provoke "some sort of crisis" and was being cautious because of its long-standing relationship with Pyongyang.

He also said the Chinese are doing much more business in South Korea than with North Korea.



US President Bill Clinton holds hands with his wife First Lady Hillary Clinton March 30 as they stroll along the beach followed by a large group of fellow beachgoers. The Clintons are vacationing on Coronado Island, which is located across the bay from San Diego. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Gabid to visit S Africa: The head of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Hamid Al Gabid, is to travel to South Africa on Friday for the first visit to the country by an OIC Secretary General, AFP reports from Jeddah.

The organisation based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, said Al Gabid and Nelson Mandela, leader of the African National Congress, would preside over festivities to mark the 300th anniversary of Islam in South Africa.

Palestinian shot dead in WB: Israeli settlers shot dead a Palestinian and troops wounded more than 25 others in clashes in the occupied territories Wednesday as Arabs marked "Land Day," Palestinian sources said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Wahel Galil Dib Nofel, 18, was killed near Nablus in the West Bank when Israeli settlers opened fire as their car was attacked by stone-throwers on the road to Tulikarm, the sources added.

Clashes erupted across the territories as Arab Israelis marked "Land Day," the anniversary of the 1976 killing of six demonstrators over the confiscation of Arab land.

Train mishap claims 18 in China: Eighteen people were killed and 55 injured when a train and a tram collided on a level crossing in the central Chinese city of Wuhan on Saturday night, the Legal Daily newspaper said yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

Quake shakes Iran: An earthquake which struck southern Iran today injured at least 20 people, the official Iranian news agency reported, AFP says from Tehran.

The tremor measuring 5.5 on the Richter scale had its epicentre 700 kilometres (430 miles) south of Tehran, hitting the town of Firuzabad and surrounding villages, the Tehran University Geophysics Institute reported.

There was "serious" damage, IRNA said. Many of those injured were hurt as they fled their homes in panic when the quake struck in the middle of the night. People spent the night outdoors fearing fresh tremors.

Gunmen kill 7 in S Africa: Gunmen killed seven people in South Africa as President F W de Klerk called for an end to the spiralling political violence which threatens to derail the country's first all-race election, Reuter reports from Johannesburg.

The country's leaders were still trying to set a date for a summit aimed at curbing the violence when gunmen shot dead seven people in a minibus taxi in the Johannesburg township of Kaitheong on Wednesday, police said.

The driver of a van with five occupants flashed its lights at the taxi near a migrant workers' hostel. When the taxi stopped, five men opened fire with AK47 automatic rifles.

Quake hits Mindanao Island: A strong earthquake measuring 6 on the Richter scale rocked eastern Mindanao Island, but officials said Thursday there were no reports of damage or casualties, AP reports from Iligan, Philippines.

Residents of the port city of Iligan scammed into the streets when the quake struck at 9:35 pm (1335 GMT) Wednesday and buildings swayed.

The quake also was felt in the provinces of Surigao, Agusan del Sur, Davao and in Cagayan de Oro, all on Mindanao, and on the island of Camiguin north of Mindanao. The area is about 500 miles (800 kilometres) south of Manila.

29 militants extradited to Egypt: Several countries have extradited 29 wanted Islamic militants to Egypt, Interior Minister Ha-san Al-Ali said Wednesday, AFP reports from Cairo.

Ali did not name the countries concerned, but said a list of suspects "wanted in connection with criminal and terrorist matters" would be handed to Pakistan after the two countries sign an extradition agreement within the next two days.

The agreement was drawn up in Cairo by the Egyptian and Pakistani justice ministers as part of a crackdown on extremists, but is still to be ratified by Islamabad.

Ali said the security forces recently infiltrated "terrorist and extremist groups," following several attacks.

De Klerk declares state of emergency in Natal

PRETORIA, Mar 31: President F W de Klerk declared a state of emergency in Zulu-dominated Natal Province on Thursday to quell spiralling violence, setting up a confrontation with a Zulu nationalist leader who opposes the country's first all-race election, reports AP.

De Klerk made the announcement after notifying Zulu nationalist leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, whose opposition to the April 26-28 vote has been seen as a major factor in violence that has killed hundreds of blacks in politically motivated bloodshed in recent weeks.

"After being briefed by the security establishment and

advisors, I am of the opinion that circumstances have arisen in the province of Natal, including the self-governing area of KwaZulu, which seriously threaten the safety of the public and the maintenance of public order," de Klerk told a news conference.

"I have therefore decided to declare ... a state of emergency in the area mentioned."

The state of emergency in the eastern province, which has a population of some 6.5 million people, gives police and the military broad powers to control violence, including banning rallies and marches that have been blamed for fanning unrest.

It severely undercuts the

power of Buthelezi and of the KwaZulu police force under his command, who have been accused by the African National Congress and others of instigating political violence to disrupt the April election.

The ANC, the expected winner of the vote, had been pushing de Klerk to launch a security crackdown in Natal. Joe Slovo, a leading ANC member and the head of the allied South African Communist Party, welcomed de Klerk's announcement.

"As far as I'm concerned, this accords completely ... with what should be done in the situation," Slovo said on a radio talk programme on Radio 702, a Johannesburg station.

US criticises Israel for Gaza killings

WASHINGTON, Mar 31: The State Department criticised Israel on Wednesday in the fatal shooting of six Palestinians by Israeli soldiers in Gaza, reports AP.

"We truly believe that these incidents should not have happened," spokesman Michael McCurry said. "We expect the Israeli authorities to take proper actions regarding this incident and to prevent further incidents of this type."

The six slain Palestinians were uniforms identifying them as belonging to the Fatah Hawks, an armed faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation led by Yasser Arafat.

The Israeli Army said they were armed but said the soldiers, who were dressed as Palestinians, had fired first.

IRA declares 3-day unilateral Easter ceasefire

BELFAST, Mar 31: The Irish Republican Army (IRA) Wednesday called a three-day unilateral Easter ceasefire beginning next Tuesday, but British Prime Minister John Major dismissed it as inadequate to bring peace to Ulster, reports AP.

Major, who flew here to give a speech Wednesday night, said the IRA's political wings in feign "cannot enter the political process until it has renounced violence for good and demonstrated that fact."

"Temporary ceasefires are welcome for the peace of mind they bring for a period," he said, but added, "unless they become permanent and irrevocable," they will not end the conflict.

Curfew enforced in Uttar Pradesh city of Meerut

NEW DELHI, Mar 31: A curfew was enforced in the northern Indian city of Meerut today after two people were killed and 37 injured in clashes between police and members of the Hindu "untouchable" community, reports AP.

Police were patrolling tense areas of the city in Uttar Pradesh state after street battles Wednesday with Dalits, or "untouchables," who occupy the lowest rung of the Hindu caste ladder, the Press Trust of India news agency said.

The violence was sparked by an attempt by about 1,500 Dalits to erect a statue of Bhimrao Ambedkar, the framer of the Indian constitution and a hero of the "untouchable" community, in a public park.

Muslim insurgency leaves 31 more dead in Algeria

ALGIERS, Mar 31: Violence linked to a Muslim fundamentalist insurgency left 31 more people dead, officials said Wednesday, and France was shutting down several schools after the killings of foreigners, reports AP.

Two teenage women shot at a bus stop near Algiers were among the latest of the 31 people killed between Saturday and Tuesday, security forces said. The motive was unclear, but security forces sought a Muslim militant in the women's slayings.

The women were veiled when they were killed, witnesses said. Muslim fundamen-

talists have in recent weeks increasingly harassed women not wearing the religious headwear.

Also among the dead were 23 militants, two police and four other civilians, security forces said.

The French high school and primary school in the western port of Oran, along with three primary schools in Algiers, will not reopen as usual April 15 after Easter vacation, said French sources speaking on condition of anonymity.

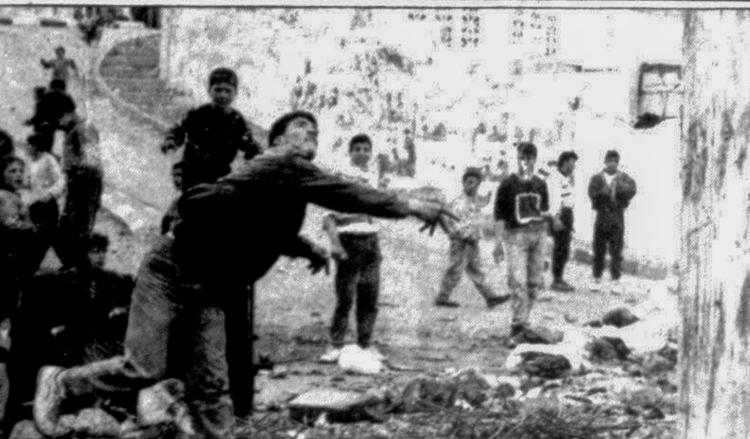
The Oran schools had 73 students, half the number registered when the school began in September. During the same

month, Muslim militants began killing foreigners, with two French surveyors the first victims.

The French high school in Algiers, with 200 students, was expected to reopen after vacation.

The 2-year-old fundamentalist insurgency has left more than 2,800 people dead, including 32 foreigners. The uprising began after the military-backed government canceled January 1992 legislative elections.

The fundamentalists were expected to win the balloting on anti-government sentiment over high unemployment, corruption and mismanagement.



Palestinian youths attack Israeli soldiers with sling-shots and stones in Hebron March 30 on "Land Day", which is observed with a general strike in the occupied territories and in the Israeli-Arab sector to commemorate a 1976 expropriation of Arab land by the Israelis. The Hebron massacre and the killing of six Fatah members in Gaza this week adds tension between Palestinians and Israelis. — AFP photo

ROK denies plans to unify divided peninsula

SEOUL, Mar 31: President Kim Young-sam said Thursday he has asked China to tell its communist neighbour North Korea that South Korea has no intentions to unify the divided peninsula under the German formula, reports AP.

Kim's remarks, made in a 33-minute telephone conversation with President Clinton, were seen as an effort to allay Pyongyang's fear that its communist system might be absorbed into the richer, capitalist South Korea.

"I think China would pass to North Korea that we have no intentions to unify the peninsula by absorption," Kim was quoted by officials as telling Clinton.

Beijing, Kim said he and Chinese leaders agreed to closely cooperate to defuse the Korean nuclear crisis through dialogue, presidential aides said.

Clinton and Kim agreed that China's help is essential for resolution of the communist North's nuclear problem that threatens peace and security in Northeast Asia, they said.

Kim also stressed the importance of help from Japan and Russia in concerted international efforts to resolve the problem, the officials said.

Kim's week-long trip to Japan and China, which ended Wednesday, was overshadowed by the unresolved dispute over North Korea's secretive nuclear programme.

Peace dividend turns into peace penalty

LONDON, Mar 31: Failure by Western countries to convert their military industries to civilian uses after the Cold War has turned the peace dividend into a "peace penalty," a report said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

"Major job losses, factory and base closures have all occurred without compensatory increases in employment and production in the civil sector," said the report by Prodem, a privately funded research group.

"Instead of a peace dividend the West has experienced a 'peace penalty'."

While the West had urged Russia and other former communist countries to convert their military industries, it had failed to follow the same policy itself, leading to suspicions it wanted to score military and

economic advantages, the report said.

The United States, which had 2.9 million defence workers in 1990, could see that figure decline by one third by 1995, it said, while Europe's defence employment could drop to 700,000 from 1.2 million over the same period.

President Bill Clinton administration in Washington had devoted modest resources to conversion but was attempting to leave much of the cold war military-industrial structure intact in line with a continued quest for power projection, the report said.

"With overall defence spending high, conversion will remain subordinate to the defence industries' preference for consolidation," said Prodem, a disarmament group

based at Leeds University in England.

European governments had done even less, leaving industries to make their own decisions on how to meet the defence downturn, although the European Union had set up an 85 million (ECU 97.5) million dollars pilot conversion project known as Konver.

In Britain, "What was required was recompensation for cuts in defence spending," said one of the report's authors, Steve Schofield. "It didn't happen. What happened was that the cuts dropped into the Black Hole of the public sector borrowing requirement."

Throughout the West, Schofield told a news conference, the failure to create new jobs to make up for those lost in defence industries was breeding hostility to arms re-

ductions. "People's perception of disarmament is unemployment," he said.

The report said major arms producing countries needed to switch from what it called "the perverse industrial structure of the cold war to a peacetime economy, with government aid to defence companies crucial in the transitional phase."

Defence savings should be spent on public sector investment such as infrastructure, public transport and environmental technologies.

International agreement was needed to limit military deployments to those strictly needed for domestic defence, and an international agency should be set up to promote and coordinate conversion programmes, the report said.

Off the Record

'Humanity descended from Eve'

LONDON: Two separate reports published on Thursday support theories that humanity is descended from an "Eve," an early female human who lived in Africa about 2,000,000 years ago, reports Reuter.

The theory has been challenged by scientists who say they have evidence that humans evolved independently at several sites around the world, including Africa, China and Indonesia. But two reports in the science journal Nature, one based on statistical research and the other on genetic evidence, both conclude that humanity arose from one source.

Scientists working with DNA, the basic building blocks of life, had theorised in 1987 that humans could be traced back to a single population in Africa.

They used mitochondrial DNA, which is found in the cell body as opposed to the nucleus. Mitochondrial DNA is inherited from the mother and thus the researchers concluded that humanity was descended from an Eve who lived in Africa between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago.

Diane Waddle, an anthropologist at the State University of New York, used a statistical method known as matrix correlation to compare differences among various human skulls.

Waddle did various calculations based on theories that humans could have originated in Africa, in southwest Asia or in several places independently.

In fear of mystery fumes ...

RIVERSIDE: A woman's body whose mysterious fumes knocked out emergency room workers can be released only if it is kept in an airtight coffin to guard against possible contamination, reports AP.

Relatives of Gloria Ramirez rejected the conditions from the Riverside County coroner's office. A lawyer said the family wants and open casket service before burial.

We don't even know if that's really the body in that casket, family lawyer Ron Schwartz said Wednesday. We're going to keep asking them to do the right thing."

He said there is no evidence that Ramirez's body poses a risk. The family believes the problem came from the hospital, not Ramirez.

Ramirez 31, who suffered from cancer, was taken to Riverside County Hospital on February 19 with "breathing problems. Six people — nurses, doctors and technicians — passed out. Some said they smelled ammonia-like fumes.

One doctor was hospitalised for three weeks with breathing trouble.

Officials said Tuesday that tests on tissue and fluid from the body may be concluded within about 30 days. The tests would determine the cause of the fumes and what felled the workers.

Ramirez's body has been in an airtight coffin since a February 25 autopsy, when pathologists and technicians wore airtight suits in a specially sealed autopsy chamber.

Half of pregnant women unmarried in UK

LONDON: Almost half of all women in England and Wales who fall pregnant are unmarried, but nearly a fifth of those conceptions end in legal abortions, official statistics published for the first time said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Britain's office of population censuses and surveys collated figures for conceptions, abortions and marital status across England and Wales for 1991, comparing them with data gathered over the previous decade.

It found that 44 per cent of all 1991 conceptions occurred outside marriage compared with 29 per cent 10 years earlier. Of the 44 per cent of unmarried pregnancies, 19 per cent ended in legal abortions, an increase of two per cent on 1981.

The office said an estimated 854,000 women in England and Wales became pregnant in 1991.

No estimates were available for the number of illegal abortions. Abortion became legal in England and Wales in 1967.

The figures also showed the first fall in teenage conceptions in seven years, with 103,000 women under 20 falling pregnant in 1991 compared with 115,000 the previous year.

The conception rate for women under 16 also decreased between 1990 and 1991, slipping to 9.3 per thousand women from 10.1 per thousand.

India signs fresh deal to buy rockets from Russia

BANGALORE, India, Mar 31: India has signed a new agreement to buy rocket engines from Russia's commercial space organisation after an earlier deal fell through under US pressure, the head of India's space programme said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The original 350 million dollar deal with Russia's Glavkosmos, to buy two engines plus rocket technology, was suspended last September after the United States threatened sanctions against Russia saying the deal breached arms technology controls.

"We will get seven engines including two engines in lieu of the technology, which the Russians declined to part with," U R Rao, outgoing head

of the Indian Space Research Organisation, told reporters in this south Indian city.

Rao said the new deal was signed recently with Glavkosmos chief Alexander Dunayev, and also included two mock-up model engines.

"The first engine will be delivered in 1996 and the rest spread over a three-year period," he said.

Rao said the engines would be used from 1996 to launch Indian satellites into orbit.

Indian media reported in January that Russia had agreed to provide seven engines in a compensation deal.

Glavkosmos officials were unable to confirm the deal at the time, saying they did not know if the Russian government had given its approval.