

Sanaa rejects Saudi call

SANAA, May 27: The authorities in Sanaa on Thursday said they had rejected a Saudi call for the UN Security Council to try to end the three-week conflict in Yemen through a ceasefire and arms embargo, reports AFP.

Planning Minister Abdelkari Al-Iryani told reporters here the Saudi proposal constituted "interference in Yemeni internal affairs."

He said Saudi Arabia had sent a proposal to the UN Security Council Chairman Wednesday calling for discussion of a series of points aimed at ending the civil war, which erupted on May 5 between forces loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh and those of his southern rival Ali Salem Al-Baid.

Saudi Arabia proposed a ceasefire, an arms embargo on Yemen, the sending of a fact finding mission to the country, continuation of the dialogue opened between Sanaa and some southern leaders and a pledge by the warring parties not to use force to resolve their disputes, Iryani said.

He warned that if the Saudi proposal was adopted the Arab countries will pay the price in the future.

"I hope the proposal fails, he said, adding that most members of the security Council were not interested in it."

Iryani said Saleh rejected the Saudi proposal during a meeting with the US ambassador Arthur Hughes on Wednesday.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Wednesday he hoped member countries would call for UN intervention in the conflict, noting that the Security Council could not act until requested.

Britain threatens to withdraw peacekeepers from Bosnia

SARAJEVO, May 27: Bosnia's warring factions made no apparent progress in their latest round of peace talks and Britain signalled it could pull its peacekeeping troops out, reports Reuter.

The newly-formed alliance between the Muslims the Croats indicated they were ready to modify their territorial demands. But the Serbs accused the Muslims of "megalomaniac demands."

British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, who discussed the conflict in former Yugoslavia with French leaders in Paris, gave vent to western frustrations at the failure of the warring factions to make any progress towards peace.

"We certainly have no desire to keep British troops indefinitely in Bosnia," he told reporters after meeting Prime Minister Eduard Balladur and Foreign Minister Alain Juppe.

France has said it will pull its peacekeepers out if the factions make no progress towards peace by next month.

With no substantive progress reported, the latest round of talks in the French lake-side resort of Talloires brought only agreement for Serbs, Croats and Muslims to meet again soon.

While the politicians squabbled over maps of their devastated country, their armies were reported to be battling for territory in northern Bosnia.

UN and Bosnian Serb reports said fighting was in progress between Muslim-led government troops backed by Croats against Rebel Serbs around Tesanj.

Clashes were also reported in the Muslim enclave of Bihać in northwestern Bosnia. The Serbs said they had captured a strategic hilltop in a counter-offensive against Muslim forces.

Bosnian Serb parliamentary speaker Momcilo Krajcinovic left the Talloires talks early and criticised the Muslims for demanding too much land.

"We are faced with megalomaniac demands by the Muslim side. We are rather surprised at the Muslims behaviour, because they behave like winners and constantly ask for this or that percentage," he told Reuters.

The mediators at that talks, representing the United States, Russia, France, Germany and Britain, have proposed awarding 49 per cent of Bosnia to the Serbs, who control 70 per cent, while the Muslims and the Croats would get 51 per cent.

Despite lack of progress on territory, military commanders from all three factions would begin negotiations at Sarajevo Airport in the coming days on a temporary truce.

Sources close to the talks said the parties would gather again in a week to 10 days, either in France or in Geneva.

Earlier the Croatian news agency Hina said Croats and Muslims had "partly accepted" 51 per cent and would give up a demand for 58 per cent "for the sake of peace."

In Bihać, French UN peacekeeping troops said calm had returned after a 12-hour assault by Serb forces, in which at least two people died and 27 were wounded.

Bosnian Muslim President Alija Izetbegovic sent a letter to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, urging him to take measures to protect Bihać, a UN-designated "safe area."

Gulf War victims to get compensation soon

GENEVA, May 27: The first compensation payments for victims of the Gulf War will be made within the next two weeks, an official said here Thursday, adding that the initial payout will total around three million dollars, reports AFP.

The money, from Iraqi funds frozen abroad, will be paid out mostly to citizens of Kuwait, Jordan, Britain, France, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the United States.

Carlos Alzamora, secretary of the UN-sponsored Compensation Commission, said the first compensation payments, averaging 2,500 to 3,000 dollars per person, would be made to those injured or having lost relatives during the course of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

Another 4,000 people among the priority cases are expected to receive compensation payments by the end of the year.

The cases of some 50,000 people claiming compensation because of being forced out of Kuwait or Iraq during the conflict will be examined in September, when the first of some 450,000 claims for material losses of less than 100,000 dollars will also be assessed.

The commission, however, only has some 150 million dollars to deal with the main body of claims.

Meanwhile, a senior Kuwaiti official here said the Gulf War had cost the country 170 billion dollars — significantly more than previous estimates, based on lost oil revenues.

"Kuwait has lost in seven months money that it takes 20 years to collect. Really we are 20 years back in terms of our assets," said Abdulrahman Al-Houty, Kuwait's senior official dealing with Iraqi compensation.

The figure compares with about 100 billion given as the sum which Kuwait has been asking as reparations through the Geneva commission.

BRIEFLY

Heatwave kills 56 in India: A heatwave sweeping parts of India have left at least 56 people dead, news reports said Friday, reports AP from New Delhi.

The worst affected area was the desert state of Rajasthan, where temperature on Thursday rose to 46 degree Celsius (116 degree Fahrenheit), United News of India reported. Forty six people have died in Rajasthan in the past two weeks. The remaining fatalities occurred in Bihar state.

One executed in Texas: A man who killed a policeman after getting caught having sex in a car was executed by injection early Friday in Texas. In Washington state, the governor refused to halt the hanging of a man who slashed two women and a child to death, AP reports from Texas.

Stephen Nethery, 33, went to his death in Huntsville, Texas, just after midnight. In a final statement, he asked that others pray for his family and the family of his victim. He then recited a short prayer himself, concluding, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Amen."

Former defence official jailed: A former British Ministry of Defence (MOD) official was sentenced to four years for taking more than 1.5 million pounds (2.25 million US dollars) in bribes from foreign arms firms, BBC reported yesterday. Xinhua says from London.

A judge at Snaresbrook Crown Court told Gorkon Foxley, 69, that more than 1.5 million pounds of assets that he allegedly bought with the bribes would be confiscated.

Foxley, who retired as MOD's director of Ammunition Procurement in 1984 was convicted of accepting bribes last November in Britain's biggest cash corruption case. Sentence has been repeatedly postponed because of his poor health.

Khmers for neutral monitors: Cambodia's Khmer Rouge guerrilla group is proposing that five neutral countries be chosen to monitor a truce between the guerrillas and the government, AP reports from Phnom Penh.

The Khmer Rouge is expected to formally deliver the proposal at peace talks scheduled to start Friday in Pyongyang, North Korea.

In a statement, Khmer Rouge President Khieu Samphan said he supported Sihanou's efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.

7 Russian icons stolen: Seven valuable icons from the 16th and 17th centuries worth an estimated four million dollars were stolen from a museum in the village of Ustyukzhna, north of Moscow, the Russian newspaper Izvestia reported Thursday, AFP says from Moscow.

The icons were taken from a museum located in the Our Lady of the Nativity Cathedral which could not afford to pay for security guards, the report said without specifying when the theft occurred.

Cholera claims 24 Filipinos: An outbreak of cholera has struck three provinces in the eastern Philippines, infecting at least 320 people and killing 24 over the past five months, the Health Department said Thursday, AFP reports from Manila.

The disease initially struck coastal communities in Albay, Sorsogon and Camarines Sur, but recent surveys show that it has spread inland. Grace Viola, an official of the department's field epidemiology training programme said.

Dutch Justice Minister resigns: Dutch Justice Minister Ernst Hirsch Ballin resigned yesterday following a police scandal, the government announced, AFP reports from The Hague.

Right and left wing deputies had joined Wednesday to pass a motion of no-confidence on Ballin.

Ballin and Interior Minister Ed Van Thijn were accused of failing to set up safety measures after disbanding an inter-regional police team in 1993, and Ballin was also blamed for the disappearance of 36 tonnes of soft drugs from a 40-tonne consignment imported as 'bait' for underworld figures.

Alatas suffers heart attack: Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas was in a stable condition but remained under intensive care after suffering a mild heart attack, officials and friends said yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

Alatas, 61, was admitted to hospital on Wednesday after complaining of a stomach ache while playing golf. Officials said he had cancelled all appointments for the next two weeks.

"His condition is stable but he is still in the intensive care unit for continued observation," Foreign Ministry spokesman Lrawan Abidin said.

UN mission in Somalia to continue

UNITED NATIONS, May 27: Rejecting US pressure to wind up UN peacekeeping efforts in Somalia, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali recommended Thursday that the mission be continued for at least six more months, reports AP.

In a report to the Security Council, Boutros-Ghali said mass starvation has become a thing of the past in the Horn of Africa nation, thanks in part to a massive US-led military operation from December 1992 to May 1993.

But since all US forces and those from many other countries pulled out in March, Boutros-Ghali admitted that the situation has deteriorated.

Yeltsin alerts spy-catchers of possible coup attempts

MOSCOW, May 27: President Boris Yeltsin urged Russia's spy-catchers Thursday to be on the lookout for possible coup attempts and to be equally vigilant about the increasing threat of nuclear terrorism, reports AP.

"We need systematic, uncensored knowledge about the situation within the Russian Federation and outside its borders," Yeltsin said.

"Unfortunately, we don't have that today," he told leaders of the Federal Counterintelligence Service, Russia's chief spy-catching agency and a successor of the Soviet KGB.

He also urged them to step up their crime-fighting efforts.

Yeltsin said some political parties and leaders were ready to use illegal methods to seize power, and the counterintelligence service's preparations were inadequate.

"Every organised attempt aimed at toppling the existing constitutional order is a blow to Russian statehood, a failure in the work of the federal service," he was quoted as saying by the presidential press service.

Yeltsin's 30-minute address at the closed-door conference also carried a demand for loyalty, accompanied by a thinly veiled warning.

"There is only one policy for employees of a state-run organisation — the policy of the state. Being beyond this policy is a sure sign of professional inadequacy," Yeltsin told the officers.

Last December, after the defeat of reformers and the success of hard-liners and nationalists in parliamentary

elections, Yeltsin dissolved the agency's predecessor, the Security Ministry. Yeltsin said it had failed to warn him of dangerous political currents in the country.

Ministry officials were also ordered to pass special professional adequacy tests before being allowed to work with the counterintelligence service, known by its Russian acronym PSK.

Yeltsin has since made attempts to improve relations with the PSK and the Foreign Intelligence Service, another KGB successor. On Thursday, he told the officers each of them needed a careful, personal approach.

He said the agency should step up efforts to fight organised crime, smuggling, corruption, illegal arms sales and

drug trafficking.

Yeltsin also said counterintelligence agents must intensify their battle against increasingly aggressive foreign intelligence services.

Some foreign countries, he said, viewed Russia's integration into world economy as a threat to their national interests, while others wanted to lay their hands on Russia's natural resources and advanced technologies.

One of the main priorities was to prevent the spread of mass destruction weapons, and to provide proper protection to Russia's nuclear facilities, the President said.

"There must be no cases of 'nuclear terrorism' in Russia," Yeltsin said.

Russian and American intelligence officials agree that the

nuclear threat is a high priority, especially in view of the growth of Russian organised crime.

In Washington, FBI Director Louis J. Freeh said Wednesday that the growth of organised criminal groups and their interest in stealing nuclear weapons present "the greatest long-term threat to the security of the United States."

Freeh said the FBI would open an office in Moscow next month and seeks ways to cooperate with Russian authorities in the fight against crime.

The fight seems uneven. Russia's spy agencies have been in turmoil since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, with salaries lagging behind inflation and morale slumping amid a wave of defections to the West and to private business.

At the same time, criminal groups have been thriving and corruption has become rampant. Even some police and intelligence officers are on the take.

FSK head Sergei Stepashin complained in an interview published Thursday that his agents, who earn as little as 130,000 roubles (dhs 68) a month, are being asked to battle far better-paid criminals.

Increasingly sophisticated criminals use propaganda to discredit police agencies and spread around plenty of cash to stay out of jail. Some private companies had better technical devices than presidential guards, he told the daily Nezavisimaya Gazeta.

"Criminal structures have vast resources," Stepashin said.

Indonesia to show 'Schindler's List' with cuts

JAKARTA, May 27: Indonesian censors have approved the showing of the award-winning film "Schindler's List" with cuts, although director Steven Spielberg had said the film would have to be shown uncut or not at all, an official said today, reports AFP.

The censors were under pressure from Muslim organisations which wanted the film barred from the country, and approving the film with cuts will keep it out of the country unless Spielberg changes his mind.

Censorship Board Executive Director Sukanto said that the board, at its plenary meeting, decided to cut scenes containing nudity and violence from the film about a group of Jews saved from a Nazi death camp by a war profiteer.



President Bill Clinton (C) reacts to applause on Thursday from invited guests in the Roosevelt Room at the White House after signing legislation which will make it a federal crime to block access to abortion clinics. Those convicted under the new law, which took effect immediately, face prison terms from six months to a year and fines up to 250,000 dollar. — AFP photo

Ukraine to seek UNSC help for Russian pullout

KIEV, May 27: Ukraine plans to appeal to the UN Security Council to seek the full withdrawal of the Russian-controlled Black Sea Fleet from its territory, a senior Kiev government official said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

A statement, issued a day after officials from both sides nearly reached agreement on dividing the fleet, said its deployment in Ukraine's Crimean peninsula was illegal. It was no more justified than the continued presence of Russian troops in the Baltic states.

"Ukraine will appeal to international organisations, above all to the UN Security Council, to raise the question of the illegal deployment of foreign forces on its territory and demand their full withdrawal," read the statement by the official, who asked not to be identified.

"We of course have in mind the Black Sea Fleet. The status of the Russian part of the Black Sea fleet is in no way different from the status of Russian troops in the Baltic states. Russian troops must leave the Baltic and Ukraine."

The statement was certain to inflame delicate relations between the two neighbours, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk this week accused Russian leader Boris Yeltsin of inflaming tensions by issuing groundless warning on the Crimea dispute.

Three days of talks in Moscow between Russia and Ukraine appeared to have de-

fused some tension over the fleet and Crimea, where majority ethnic Russians demand closer ties with Russia. But the two sides have yet to reach a concrete deal.

Both said they were willing to sign an agreement on the future of the fleet, a major bone of contention between the two most powerful former Soviet Republics. But they said minor issues forced them to delay the signing by 10 days.

Some 50,000 Russian troops remain in Ukraine, nearly all at the fleet's main base at Sevastopol. Russia keeps about 150,000 troops in other parts of the former Soviet Union.

Ukraine's acting Prime Minister Yefim Zvyagilsky described the Moscow meeting as "very tense and nervous."

Mandela offers diplomatic posts to defeated parties

CAPE TOWN, May 27: South African President Nelson Mandela, pursuing post-apartheid reconciliation, on Thursday offered civil service and diplomatic posts to parties that failed to win seats in his coalition Cabinet, reports Reuter.

He said after talks with minority party leaders he would do anything constitutional to promote unity.

"This dialogue between the leaders of the various political parties must go on as long as I am president of this country," he told reporters on the steps of his Tuynhuys office, once the workplace of white supremacist leaders.

"The majority must never be used for the purpose of oppressing the minority or of muzzleing their ability to express their views both inside and outside parliament."

New probe into Premadasa's murder rejected

COLOMBO, May 27: The Sri Lankan government has turned down a request by the daughter of former President Ranasinghe Premadasa for an independent probe into his murder, newspapers reported today, says Reuter.

K H J Wijedasa, secretary to President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, told Premadasa's daughter Dulanjalee, in a letter released to newspapers, that no further probe was necessary as police had found Tamil separatist rebels out the killing.

Dulanjalee has said she doubted the rebels killed her father and had asked for a presidential commission to inquire into the assassination.

Hindus in UK protest closure of temple

LONDON, May 27: Hundreds of Hindus, ringing brass bells and waving saffron banners, blocked the street outside the British Parliament on Thursday to protest at what they claim is a racist conspiracy to close one of their temples, reports Reuter.

About 2,500 people wrestled with hundreds of police as authorities fought to clear one of the busiest roads in London running past the Westminster seat of government.

A handful of people were dragged away in handcuffs after minor scuffles. Demonstrations are illegal in the immediate vicinity of Parliament.

"This is a peaceful protest. Can't you see we are peaceful people? If we were Christians you'd need more than a handful of police" one man shouted as his friend was dragged away.

The protest, organised by the Hari Krishna Temple Defence Movement, is the latest state of an eight-year campaign by Hindus to keep open a temple at Watford, north of London.

The local council reinforced by central government — has refused planning permission for the converted country house to be used for worship. Hindus say that smacks of racism.



US actress Olivia de Havilland smiles at French marine biologist Jacques-Yves Cousteau after they both received honorary doctorates on Thursday from the American University in Paris. — AFP photo