

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 Ali-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 Abdallah Saleh and those of his southern rival Ali Salem Al-Badri.

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-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 and 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.

Clashes were also reported in the Muslim enclave of Bihac in northwestern Bosnia. The Serbs said they had captured a

strategic hilltop in a counter-offensive against Muslim forces.

Bosnian Serb parliamentary speaker Momcilo Krajisnik 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 Bihac, French UN peace-keeping 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 Bihac, 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.

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-Houti, 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 Sihanouk'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 Ustyukhina, north of Moscow, the Russian newspaper Izvestia reported Thursday, AP 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. APP 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, APP 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 "ball" 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: Pressing US pressure to wind up UN peacekeeping efforts in Somalia, Secretary-General 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.



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 life and fines up to 250,000 dollars. — 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.

The statement was certain to inflame delicate relations between the two neighbours.

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."

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.

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

China expels some foreign correspondents

BEIJING, May 27: China said today it had expelled an unspecified number of foreign correspondents, including one from a South Korean broadcaster, reports Reuter.

The official Xinhua news agency said Kwon Heung-Soo of South Korea's MBC was being expelled because he had violated Chinese regulations governing the reporting activities of foreign correspondents in China.

Although Xinhua said "some foreign correspondents" had been expelled, it did not identify any others by name.

"It is learned that they admitted they violated such regulations and left China to-day," Xinhua said.

China is due to leave next

S Korea fears North's military provocation

SEOUL, May 27: South Korean President Kim Young Sam, painting a bleak picture of communist North Korea's economy, said today that a military provocation by Pyongyang could come at any time, reports Reuter.

Kim said North Korea at the focus of international concerns over its suspected nuclear programme, is facing a serious food and energy shortage.

"History gives us a lesson that an individual or a state easily resorts to irrational acts when faced with a difficult situation."

North Korea admitted last December that its economy was facing difficulties.

Currently, a large number of factories (in the North) halted operations, and electricity is supplied to the rural area for only about three hours a day.

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Clinton-Pope meet next week

WASHINGTON, May 27: President Clinton's meeting with Pope John Paul II next week comes at a time of strained relations with the Catholic Church because of Clinton's push to expand abortion rights at home and in international population control programmes, reports AP.

Clinton's signing Thursday of legislation guaranteeing women access to abortion clinics was a visible example of the differences between the White House and the Vatican over abortion, and some Catholics in the administration grumbled privately over the timing of the event.

But of greater concern to the pope and US Catholic bishops, according to administration and church officials, are Clinton's efforts to include more liberal abortion language in a United Nations plan aimed at slowing global population growth.

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 muzzling 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 Wijedasa, secretary to President Digni 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 killing.

Dulanjalee has said she was dragged away in handcuffs after minor scuffles. Demonstrations are illegal in the immediate vicinity of Parliament.

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

"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.

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