

Funeral for Dissanayake tomorrow Security tightened in Colombo

COLOMBO, Oct 27: Police tightened security in the Sri Lankan capital today as funerals got underway for key opposition politicians and others killed in a massive bomb attack earlier in the week, officials here said, reports AFP.

The cremation of General Secretary Gamini Wijesekara was at the general cemetery here Wednesday, making it the first of five senior United National Party (UNP) men killed at a presidential campaign rally here Monday.

The remains of the opposition leader and presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake, who will be cremated at state funeral Saturday, were meanwhile being kept at a state institute he had initiated as a former minister.

Hundreds of mourners were lined up outside the building to pay their last respects.

Streets in the capital and the stately building of the UNP-controlled Colombo municipal council were decorated with white flags as a sign of mourning for Dissanayake and the 56 others killed by suspected Tamil Tiger rebels.

The Defence Ministry has cancelled all leave of security personnel and troops and police have been put on maximum alert ahead of Dissanayake's funeral.

"We will be having more policemen in Colombo to ensure everything goes off peacefully during the funerals," a police spokesman said, adding that Wijesekara's cremation had taken place without any incidents.

Feuding Kashmiri groups unite to oppose elections

SRINAGAR, India, Oct 27: Kashmir's feuding Muslim separatist groups have set aside their differences to jointly oppose the Indian government's plans to hold elections in the troubled northern state, reports AFP.

From the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which wants independence for the Himalayan region, to the Jamaat-I-Islami, which wants Kashmir to merge with Pakistan, the various secessionist groups have come out against the polls.

"Why should we take part in Indian-organised elections when we deny the authority of the accession of Kashmir to India?" said Abdul Gani Lone, the people's conference leader released from prison on September 30.

"Why should we accept an election under an occupying power?" he asked.

Lone said the Indian government was raising the possibility of elections in Kashmir, which has been under the direct rule of New Delhi for five years, to sway international opinion and deflect criticism of its human rights record.

"I don't know whether the Indian authorities are so naive as to undergo a useless process," Lone said. "If the people of the Kashmir valley don't take part in the electoral process, what are the Indians going to prove?"

He demanded a UN-supervised referendum on whether Kashmir, India's only state with a Muslim majority, should remain in the Indian union, merge with Muslim Pakistan

or become independent.

Sayed Ali Shah Geelani, the leader of the powerful Jamaat-I-Islami who was freed along with Lone in September after a year behind bars, also denounced the government attempt to organise state assembly elections.

"The question of elections does not arise at this stage," he said. "The whole Kashmiri nation has ruled out elections."

Geelani said Indian officials were deceiving themselves if they believed his and Lone's recent release and that of Shabir Shah, the most influential Muslim separatist leader, signalled the start of a political process in the state.

"We will not become tools in the hands of the Indian government," he said.

The 40-year-old Shah, who has been declared a "prisoner of conscience" by Amnesty International and was freed on October 14 after five years in prison, said in an interview that "elections would be an exercise in futility."

"This is not a fight for elections," said Shah, who has pledged to unite the fractured Muslim separatist movement. "We are fighting for freedom."

"The people of Kashmir have been promised the right of self-determination," he said. "We want round table talks. Let the Indians join us for unconditional talks."

A spokesman here for the JKLF, the leading pro-independence group, said elections "cannot be a substitute for a UN plebiscite."



UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (L) receives the Great Cross of the Legion of Honour, France's highest decoration, from President Francois Mitterrand at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Wednesday. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Kurdish leader held in London: Kani Yilmaz, a leader of the Kurdish guerilla movement PKK who is wanted by authorities in Turkey, was arrested by British immigration officers in London Wednesday night, AP reports from London.

His arrest sparked anger among Kurds living in London. Up to 200 gathered outside the capital's top security Paddington Green police station where he was being held to protest his detention.

Rare birds freed on court order: Pakistani wildlife authorities have freed 88 Houbara bustards on court orders, after three men were sent to jail pending trial for poaching the rare migratory birds, the official APP news agency said. Reuter report from Islamabad.

The birds were freed in a desert in the Punjab province district of Dera Ghazi Khan on Tuesday, a day after they were recovered from the poachers who wanted to take them to the port city of Karachi and later abroad, it said.

Qatar hails Israel-Jordan deal: The Gulf Arab state of Qatar welcomed the peace treaty signed between Jordan and Israel on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Dubai.

The Qatari cabinet said in a statement after its weekly meeting that the signing was "an important step towards achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East."

US-Japan war games Nov 8-17: The United States and Japan will conduct a military exercise in the Pacific from November 8 to 17, Xinhua reports from Washington.

Some 14,000 Japanese troops with 20 vessels and nearly 150 aircraft and about 10,300 US troops with 10 ships and 170 aircraft will take part in the exercise, according to the latest Weekly Defence News.

Chinese vice PM to visit US: Vice Premier Li Lanqing will visit the United States for two weeks in November for talks on trade and China's bid to enter the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the Foreign Ministry said on Thursday, AP reports from Beijing.

Li will meet with government officials and US business people Nov. 1-15, ministry spokesman Chen Jian said at a weekly briefing.

US-Cuba talks end: Cuba and the United States wound up talks late on Wednesday with both sides saying that some aspects of implementing a September accord that halted a Cuban boat people exodus needed more work, Reuter reports from Havana.

Neither delegation to the talks, a follow-up to the Sept 9 agreement, gave details of what these aspects were.

US to test British missile: The Pentagon will test British Aerospace's advanced short-range air-to-air missile (ASRAAM) as a possible replacement for the Sidewinder missile. Jane's Defence Weekly reported on Wednesday, Reuter says from London.

It said the Pentagon could agree to a 1.5 billion pound (2.45 US dollar) contract if the trials under the comparative testing programme find that the ASRAAM can replace the AIM-9X Sidewinder.

China's oldest panda dies: China's oldest captive panda, Jingjing, has died at the age of 32, the official Xinhua News Agency reported on Thursday, AP says from Beijing.

An autopsy determined that Jingjing died of old age. He also suffered from senility and cataracts. He lived at a zoo in Changsha, capital of south China's Hunan province.

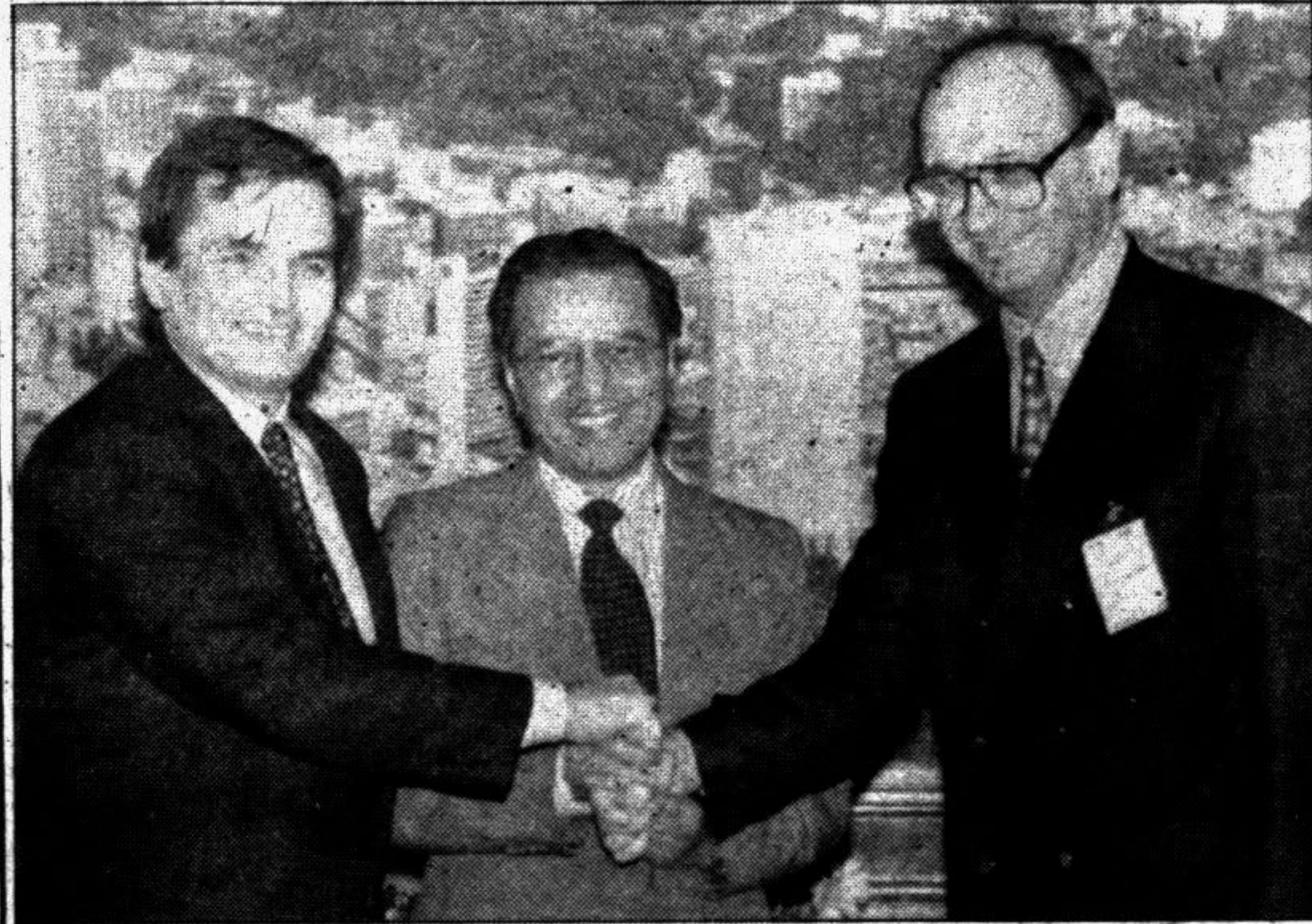
New chairman of Pak JCSC: Air Marshal Farooq Feroze Khan has been appointed chairman of Pakistan's Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC), replacing army General Shamim Alam Khan, whose tenure expires on November 9, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Islamabad.

It is the first time that an air force officer has been appointed head of the JCSC, a ceremonial post traditionally held by top navy and army officers.

Georgian journalist shot dead: A Georgian journalist working for the state news agency Tshakinform was shot dead outside his home, the Interior Ministry said yesterday, Reuter reports from Tbilisi.

Zurab Ordzelskivi, 42, was gunned down by a young man as he returned home late on Wednesday night. No further details were immediately available.

Flood toll now 308 in Vietnam: The death toll in this month's floods in the Mekong Delta has risen to 308, most of them children, from 285 earlier this week, an official newspaper reported today, Reuter reports from Hanoi.



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (C) shakes hands with visiting Bosnia-Herzegovina PM Haris Siladjevic (L) and Croatian PM Nikica Valentic before their meeting on Wednesday in Kuala Lumpur. Siladjevic and Valentic are on a four-day working visit to Malaysia. — AFP photo

UN, NATO yet to agree on air strikes against Serbs

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 27: NATO and UN officials narrowed their differences Wednesday on how air strikes should be carried out in Bosnia but failed to come to complete agreement, UN sources said, reports AP.

The talks are to continue after each side confers with its leadership, another source said.

However, the two days of discussions held in UN headquarters yielded substantial agreement, the UN sources said on condition of anonymity.

The NATO representatives were expected to return to Brussels, Belgium, without further discussions.

The major areas of contention have been the range

and number of possible targets that NATO warplanes could strike and which side - the United Nations or NATO - is ultimately responsible for ordering the air strikes.

The lack of an agreement comes almost two weeks after UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali told the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation that he had problems with its proposal of more intense air strikes.

The NATO allies, worried about losing credibility, said last month that they want to strike faster, without warning and against a wider variety of targets.

But UN commanders, who must call in air strikes, fear retaliation by Bosnian Serb forces against the 23,000



Young Israeli members of the "Peace Now" movement hold Israeli and Jordanian flags on Wednesday during a demonstration in Jerusalem supporting the peace treaty signed earlier in the desert of Arabia between Israel and Jordan. — AFP photo

India seeks China's support to become UNSC member

SHANGHAI, Oct 27: India today sought China's support in its campaign to be a member of the United Nations Security Council when it is expanded to give adequate representation to countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, reports PTI.

A reference to the issue was made today by Vice-President K C Narayanan while addressing the prestigious Fudan University, one of China's foremost institutions of higher learning, located in this eastern metropolis.

In his address Narayanan also observed that it was time the two countries put some "concrete and substantial economic, scientific and technological content" into their 2000-year-long historic relationship.

He recalled a letter to Chief Minister of states by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1955 which noted that "informally suggestions have been made that China would be taken into the United Nations but not in the Security Council and that India should take its place in the Security Council."

US troops in Gulf to return home by Xmas

WASHINGTON, Oct 27: American troops sent to the Gulf after Iraqi troops moved towards the Kuwaiti border should be back home within two months, Secretary of State William Perry said late Tuesday, reports AFP.

"I certainly hope to have all of those troops, that were newly deployed in the area, back home before Christmas," Perry said in a US television interview.

The United States has 27,872 troops in Kuwait including 7,761 combat forces and 270 aircraft, Pentagon spokesman Dennis Box said on Tuesday.

Although Iraq has confirmed that it has withdrawn its troops from the border, the Pentagon has said it would keep some of the troops there for military exercises.

Rebels boycott elections in Mozambique

MAPUTO, Mozambique, Oct 27: Voting began on schedule in Mozambique's first multi-party election Thursday despite a shock announcement by the country's former RENAMO rebels that they would not participate, reports AP.

Seeking to quell uncertainty caused by the announcement early Thursday, national election-commission Chairman Brazau Mazula said in a national broadcast that the two-day vote would proceed as planned.

People lined up at polling stations in Maputo, the capital, an hour before polls opened and reporters saw voting begin on time, with many voters initially unaware of the statement by RENAMO, the Mozambique National Resistance movement

Off the Record

An underwear-shy village

PADUA, Italy: A village mayor in northeast Italy has banned people living near the local church from hanging out their underwear to dry on balconies, saying it was time for some civic decency, reports Reuter.

A town hall spokesman said on Wednesday that Mario Bonin, mayor of the village of Pieve Di Curtarolo near Padua, had put the ban in place to save visitors and locals from embarrassment.

"Certain families, I won't say which, had no shame. They were hanging all sorts of things from their balconies and it wasn't fair on people walking past," the spokesman said.

Neil Diamond's wife seeks divorce after 25 yrs

LOS ANGELES: Neil Diamond's wife of nearly 25 years filed for divorce from the singer on Wednesday, reports AP.

In her divorce petition, filed in Superior Court, Marcia Diamond cites irreconcilable differences.

She asks for custody of the couple's 16-year-old son. They also have a 24-year-old son.

Her petition says the couple share property and assets of an unknown value.

She claims two homes as her own, including residences in Los Angeles and in Snowmass Village, Colorado. She claims to own half of another home in Basalt, Colorado, according to the divorce papers.

Diamond, 53, has released more than 35 albums. His first hit, "Solitary Man," was released in 1966.

He divorced his first wife, Jaye, in 1969. He married his second wife on December 5, 1969.

There was no answer at the office of Diamond's agent on Wednesday.

Irish censor says no to 'Natural Born Killers'

DUBLIN: Ireland on Wednesday banned a film by Oliver Stone that satirises the media for promoting violence, apparently because of the film's own portrayal of violence, reports AP.

Irish film censor Sheamus Smith did not publish his reasons for the outright ban on "Natural Born Killers," but Irish media have heavily played up alleged links between the film and ten recent killings overseas.

Warner Brothers, the film's distributor, said it would appeal the decision.

Ireland rarely bans films outright. The film, rated R in the United States — meaning parental guidance is recommended — tracks media glorification of a murderous couple as they slay close to 100 people.

The Norwegian film board provoked outrage this week by giving the film an equivalent rating to an R.

Some Norwegians still in shock from last week's slaying of a five-year-old girl by three six-year-old playmates said the film should be restricted to adult viewing.

In Britain, the director of the British Board of Film and Video Classification said the board was "discussing the film seriously."

But James Ferman noted that "very, very few films are refused a certificate for the cinema."

Balladur proposes cut in election spending

PARIS, Oct 27: French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur proposed a series of measures Wednesday to fight corruption, including cuts in candidates' spending in presidential elections and an annual declaration of assets by MPs and ministers, reports AFP.

Speaking on state television, Balladur said he was proposing to cut election spending "by at least 30 per cent" and this would apply to candidates in the presidential elections due next April and May.

"We spend far too much money on politics in France," Balladur said. At the moment the ceiling for a candidate who runs in both rounds of the presidentials is 171 million francs (34 million US dollars). Balladur refused to break his silence on his presidential

ambitions before a self-imposed January deadline. But observers said the premier's comments on wanting to govern "for all French people, no matter which party they belong to," were a confirmation of his presidential ambitions.

The premier also said he wanted to retain above "day to day political problems" and refused to elaborate on criticism of his main right-wing rival for the presidency Jacques Chirac.

In an interview Monday with the Le Figaro daily, Balladur accused Chirac, mayor of Paris and leader of the rally for the republic, of taking refuge in the "citadel" of his party — of which Balladur is a member — and ignoring wider interests.

UN asks Russia to recall its Gen from Croatia

MOSCOW, Oct 27: The United Nations has asked Moscow to recall a general commanding Russian peacekeepers in Croatia, following allegations his troops were involved in corruption and trafficking with rebel Croatian Serbs, the Interfax news agency said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The UN secretariat had asked Moscow to order home General Alexander Perezhynkin, commander of Russian and Belgian UN forces in eastern Croatia, said the agency, quoting a Russian diplomat in Zagreb who asked not to be named.

Japanese move to check armed conflicts in Asia

TOKYO, Oct 27: Japan is widening contacts with other Asian countries to strengthen security dialogue and reduce the risks of armed conflict sparking in the region, reports AFP.

Regular defence dialogues promoting "confidence-building measures" will be taken a step further with a meeting in December of military officers from 13 Asia-Pacific nations to create a new venue for post-cold war security dialogue. Under the auspices of the National Institute for Defence Studies (NIDS), funded by the Japanese Defence Agency, the unprecedented conference follows the July ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Bangkok, also a precedent for regional dialogue.

ASEAN groups Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The ARF groups foreign ministers of ASEAN with counterparts from key trading partners and major regional players like China, the European Union, Japan, Russia and the United States.

Under the new Japanese initiative, middle-ranking officers — majors and lieutenant colonels — will come from Australia, Canada, China, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, the United States and the

ASEAN six. They will start three weeks in Japan to discuss regional security concerns. This year, Vietnam, a candidate for ASEAN membership, Myanmar and India have asked to join the 1995 meeting, and their prospects are good.

"We support the idea," Major General Hirotsugu Muroto, vice president of the NIDS, told AFP.

Japan has also organised for the past six years an annual seminar on security which groups senior officers from ASEAN countries.

"There is almost no day when we don't welcome for-

eign visitors, very often Asians, with whom we talk openly on security matters," Muroto stressed.

China, whose military development programme disturbs Tokyo, regularly sends military officials to Japan.

The Director-General of the Japanese Defence Agency, Tokuchiro Tamazawa, announced on Tuesday that he had invited his Chinese counterpart, Defence Minister Chi Haotian, to renew high-level defence contacts broken off after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre of pro-democracy protesters in Beijing.

Security dialogue are especially important for Japan because, unlike North America or western Europe, Asia's potential sources of conflict are numerous: China and Taiwan, multinational disputes over the Spratly and Paracel islands, the two Koreas, and the India-Pakistan rivalry.

"If we want to consolidate stability in the region, it is necessary for each country to feel free from any military threat. They first stage is, therefore, greater transparency and more dialogue," said Gotaro Ogawa, deputy director-general of the Foreign Ministry's Intelligence and

Oman to set up ties with Israel

JERUSALEM, Oct 27: Oman has decided to establish diplomatic ties with Israel but the two countries still have to agree on the level of relations, the Omani Foreign Minister said in an interview published here today, reports AFP.

"It is no longer a political question. What remains to be resolved is a technical point on defining the level of relations and we are currently discussing this," Yusef bin Alawi Abdullah told Haaretz newspaper.

The minister was interviewed at the signing ceremony of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty at the Araba border crossing on Wednesday.