

GCC summit begins today Jt security issues to dominate talks

MANAMA, Dec 18: Leaders from the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are likely to tackle disputes over their joint security and borders in a summit beginning here Monday, officials said, reports AFP.

The 15th summit of the GCC-Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — will be dominated by ways of boosting collective security, GCC officials said.

The GCC wants to increase its joint Peninsula Shield Force from the current 4,000 troops to 25,000 men.

The symbolic Saudi-based force created in 1984 proved incapable of doing anything to prevent Iraqi forces invading Kuwait in August 1990.

Monarchs will also review the text of a joint security accord, signed by four of the six states at a meeting of interior ministers in November.

Kuwait refused to initial the accord until it had been approved by parliament, while Qatar boycotted the November meeting in Riyadh to protest Saudi attacks on its territory.

The accord has been under discussion for around 10 years. A Kuwaiti parliamentary advisor, Abdallah Nefissi, con-

9 states to disclose plutonium stocks

TOKYO, Dec 18: Nine countries, including the five recognised nuclear powers, have agreed in principle to regularly disclose the amount of plutonium they possess for civilian purposes, a Japanese newspaper reported today, says Reuter.

The accord was reached by Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States, which are all nuclear powers, along with Belgium, Germany, Japan and Switzerland. Asahi Shimbun reported.

Rao warns of purge to revitalise Congress

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao has warned of a purge to revitalise the ruling Congress Party, reeling under election losses inflicted by corruption charges, dissidence and infighting, news reports said today, says Reuter.

Those opportunists who want to use the Congress as a puppet to further their interests should quit the party," the United News of India (UNI) quoted Rao as telling party workers on Saturday at Pune in the western state of Maharashtra.

"The rot has to go and it will purify the Congress," the news agency quoted him as saying.

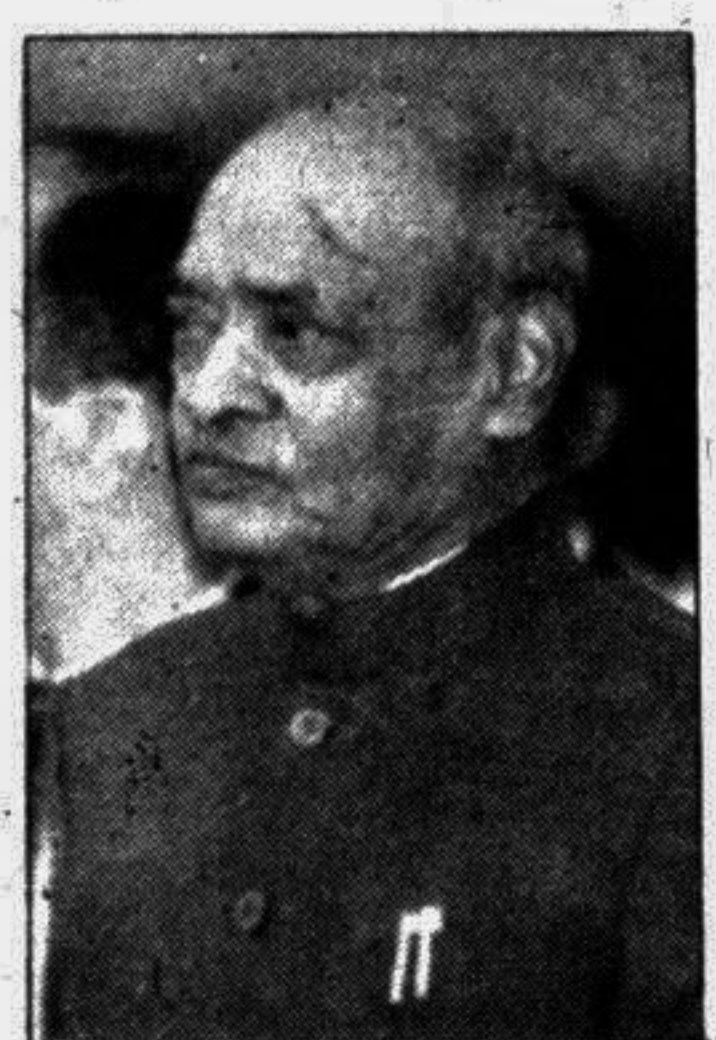
Maharashtra is one of the five states scheduled to vote in February. The Congress Party lost in three of the four states that elected new assemblies this month.

Rao, whose party lost crucial elections in the southern states of Karnataka and his native Andhra Pradesh, called upon party workers to learn from the defeat and criticised senior aides for their negative attitude.

Factional fighting and sabo-

tage in the Congress have been cited widely as a major reason for the southern debacle.

Congress deputies say Rao is waiting for the end of the current parliament session later this week before begin-



ning a purge because parliamentary custom demands that reshuffles are not made when a session is on.

"In Delhi, even some of those who sit beside us indulge in criticism out of considera-

tions of a personal nature," the daily Pioneer quoted Rao as saying at Baramati in Maharashtra.

His statement came after Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh, widely believed to be a challenger to Rao, and senior party leader Narain Dutt Tiwari, called for more populist, poor-oriented poll platforms.

The regional Telugu Desam Party (TDP) won in Andhra Pradesh by promising subsidised rice.

Rao, who launched a radical, free-market-oriented economic reform programme in 1991, says he will not do anything that will threaten the country's finances and fiscal stability.

The opposition says the reforms are elitist. Party dissidents echo the feelings.

Some 22 junior ministers offered to quit this week to give Rao, who also heads the party, a free hand for a clean-up.

"Unless responsibility is fixed and heads roll, the credibility of the government and the democratic system is at stake," Chandrajit Yadav of the

Socialist Samta Party told Reuters.

Rao is being embarrassed by his Food Minister Kalp Nath Rai after an investigation report blamed Rai and government agencies last week for mismanaging the nation's sugar buffer, resulting in a rise in home and world prices.

Rai swears loyalty and has offered to quit but simultaneously says he is innocent and will defend himself.

Two other aides, Health Minister B Shankaranand and Junior Rural Development Minister Rameshwar Thakur, received critical remarks from a parliamentary committee that probed a 1.2 billion dollars securities scandal that surfaced in 1992.

The opposition has been baying for their heads, and that of Rai.

Civil supplies Minister A K Antony resigned last week after a parliamentary statement identified him as having erred in the management of sugar prices.

His resignation has not been accepted officially, but Rao has been hinting that others follow suit.

Off the Record

Kris Aquino may face legal trouble

MANILA: The youngest daughter of former president Corason Aquino could face criminal charges over her relationship with a married actor whose child she claims to be carrying, says a lawyer close to the Aquino family, reports AP.

Kris Aquino, 23, said earlier this week through a family spokeswoman that she was three months pregnant by Philip Salvador, 45, who already has three children with his wife of 20 years and a fourth by a former starlet.

The lawyer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that under Philippine law Salvador's wife could file charges against her husband and Aquino for "concubinage."

He added that the former president is distraught over the incident, upon which many Manila columnists have seized as the nation's most recent major scandal. The actor and actress have been seen in public on several occasions, once shopping for household goods, and for real estate on another.

Salvador's wife told the nationally circulated Philippine Daily Inquirer that she would resist efforts by her estranged husband to annul their marriage so he can marry his pregnant new love.

"It is my right and the right of our children to affirm that the marriage was there. And it was once good," Asuncion Dabao told the publication's editor in chief from New York, where she lives.

Under Philippine law, divorce is not allowed, only annulment.

Dying girl's awesome wish

SEATTLE: Sixteen-year-old April Fleming was facing death within days, and she wasn't thinking of herself, reports AP. When the Make-A-Wish Foundation promised to grant the repeat runaway's dying desire, April didn't ask for food, travel, fancy clothes or exotic animals. She didn't even ask to meet a personal hero.

She asked for Christmas presents for homeless kids. "I've never had a child want to give to someone else," said Susan Houk, marketing director for the foundation that answers the wishes of dying children. "It was very, very touching."

Three years ago, April found she had polycythemia vera, a pre-leukemic disease that has led in her case to cirrhosis of the liver. Three months ago, doctors gave her a year to live. Three weeks ago, they said six months. Last week, they said she'd be lucky to see Christmas, Friday, she went home with an aunt.

"She decided she didn't want to die in the hospital," said Dean Forbes, spokesman at the Center.

April asked the hospital to tell well-wishers she needs nothing more and they should give to children who do. Two weeks ago, her nurse, Barbara Swenson, called Make-A-Wish and said, "If you want to do something for this girl, you've got to do it in the next 48 hours."

When April named her wish, foundation members immediately went out and bought toys and clothes for 12 children. The next morning, a board member suited up as Santa Claus delivered the goodies to a homeless shelter.

April cried in her hospital bed as she watched a video showing the children's delight.

"I've been there," she said. "I was homeless by choice, but I've been there."

Security tightened Threats to Thai PM's life

BANGKOK, Dec 18: Security around Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai has been tightened amid threats to his life and talk of conspiracy to topple his government, possibly through violent means, reports Xinhua.

Police teams armed with machine-guns were dispatched to Chuan's house on Friday night and a number of plainclothes officers have been added to his team of bodyguards. The Bangkok Post reports today.

Marksmen with high-power rifles have been sent to beef up the security in front of his house.

Two anonymous threats have been made over the past few days of telephone to the security booth outside the government house.

However, Chuan downplayed the security beef-up as "nothing special."

Pope John Paul Time's man of the year

NEW YORK, Dec 17: Pope John Paul II was named Time magazine's 1994 man of the year, with the publication applauding his influence in promoting the betterment of the human condition, reports AFP.



"In a year when so many people lamented the decline in moral values or made excuses for bad behaviour, Pope John Paul II forcefully set forth his vision of the good life and urged the world to follow it," Time wrote in its December 26 issue.

3 killed, 10 hurt during strike in Karachi

KARACHI, Dec 18: Pakistan's troubled commercial capital of Karachi was crippled today by strikes by a militant sectarian party and a transport group, reports AFP.

Three people were killed and at least ten were injured when gunmen opened fire from moving cars to force people off the roads, witnesses said.

All major markets and bazaars remained closed and traffic on the streets was negligible.

The strike was called by the Sunni Muslim group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) to protest the failure by police to arrest the killers of eight people who died in a mosque attack on December 7. The city chief of SSP was among the victims.

The transporters associations also went on strike to protest the burning of more than three dozen vehicles during a wave of violence over the past few days.

A few state-owned buses were on the streets, but most offices reported low attendance. Today is a working day in Karachi.

The Karachi Stock Exchange closed early as there was no trading on the floor, brokers said.

Port activity was also af-

Kim Jong suffers from kidney ailment

SEOUL, Dec 18: North Korea's mysterious leader Kim Jong Il suffers from a chronic kidney ailment that prevents him from formally taking the helm of the communist country, a published report said on Sunday, reports AP.

More than five months have elapsed since Kim's groomed as heir-apparent for decades, still has not assumed full power of the reclusive country, fanning rumours of ill health and political dissent.

Rarely seen in public since his father's July 8 death, he had looked ill in mid-October at the end of the official 100-day mourning period for his father and had lost considerable weight since his last previous appearance.

Two US senators who visited the North last week had hoped to meet with Kim but were told he still is in mourning for his father.

BRIEFLY

Blast leaves 6 dead in China: Six people were killed and five others were seriously injured in an explosion at an illegal fireworks factory in southwest China, the Sichuan daily, received in Beijing on Sunday reported, AFP reports from Beijing.

The blast happened in Yangan in Sichuan Province on Wednesday in a workshop where fire crackers were produced in defiance of safety rules, the paper said, without saying what triggered the explosion.

5 die in Nicaraguan shooting: An ambush shooting on Friday in the north of Nicaragua killed five people, including an army officer and a local official who were on a peace mission, the army said. Reuter reports from Managua.

The two peace negotiators, who were seeking the disarmament of a group led by a rebel commander known as "El Mico," died in the ambush. Three gunmen were killed in the subsequent army pursuit near the remote mountain town of Bocayito.

Rebels kill farmer in Egypt: Suspected Muslim extremists killed a Coptic Christian farmer in his house in southern Egypt and wounded his son, police sources said on Sunday, AP reports from Cairo.

The Saturday night attack took place in Mallawi. The police sources, who declined to be further identified, said Nashed Sadek Ibrahim was shot and killed by two assailants who fired when he answered their knock on his front door. Ibrahim's son, Ashraf, who tried to run after the two men, was shot and wounded.

Nancy Kissinger hospitalised: Nancy Kissinger, wife of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, was being treated on Saturday at a hospital for an intestinal ailment, AP reports from New York.

Mrs Kissinger was in stable condition late Saturday, said Myrna Manners, a spokeswoman for New York Hospital. Manners would only say that Mrs Kissinger was suffering from "routine intestinal problems."

AIDS victim dies in US: The fourth of six people infected with the AIDS virus by a dentist has died, AP reports from Stuart, Florida.

Barbara Webb, 68, slipped into a semi-coma earlier in the week, according to Hospice of Martin. She died on Saturday on her 45th wedding anniversary. Webb is survived by her husband, Robert and three grown children.

Mugabe denies press report: Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, 70, returned home late Saturday night, denying a press report that he was in South Africa for treatment of a bladder ailment. Reuter reports from Harare.

Castro may visit China: President Fidel Castro of Cuba is expected to pay his first visit to China in 1995, Cuban Ambassador Jose Armando Guerra Menchero said yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

He said Castro had accepted the repeated invitations extended to him by China, most recently by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Havana in November. "1995 seems to be the time. No date has been fixed. The visit is probable. I believe it will take place," he said.

Bus mishap kills 11 in Brazil: Eleven people died and 30 suffered injuries when a tourist bus collided with two trucks, local police said on Saturday, AFP reports from Fox do Zaguazu, Brazil.

The bus was carrying 40 people on a trip from Sao Jose dos Campos to Puerto Stroessner in Paraguay, when it struck the oncoming vehicles. Ten of the dead were bus passengers and the eleventh was in one of the trucks.

Lanka to resume talks with LTTE

COLOMBO, Dec 18: The government will be sending a team of negotiators to the Tamil rebel stronghold in northern Sri Lanka before Christmas to resume peace talks to end the decade-old ethnic war, a member of the delegation said Sunday, reports AP.

"There are several dates tentatively fixed but I am sure talks will resume before Christmas," said Rajan Asirvatham.

The decision to resume peace talks was taken when Tamil rebels earlier this week accepted a government proposal for a cease-fire before Christmas.

Last month Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran ordered his cadres to observe a week-long unilateral cease-fire immediately after the new government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga was sworn in.



A few comrades and relatives of a Bosnian soldier killed recently on the Bjelasnica mountain near Sarajevo attend the burial in the military Kovaci cemetery in Sarajevo on Saturday. —AFP photo

N Korea downs chopper US calls for meeting to discuss return of pilots

SEOUL, Dec 18: The United States has asked North Korea for a meeting at the border village of Panmunjom to discuss the return of two US pilots and a helicopter forced down in the North, a spokesman for the United Nations Command (UNC) said today, reports Reuter.

He said the command had called for a meeting of the Military Armistice Commission (MAC), which operates from the truce village of Panmunjom.

This is one of the different channels that we are going through. But as far as I am concerned, the North Koreans have not yet sent a reply," the spokesman said.

The commission is charged with supervising the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War between North and South Korea.

A spokesman for the MAC, the UNC spokesman said.

But it would be unlikely North Korea would come to the table at Panmunjom as it has boycotted the MAC since the US-led UNC appointed a

South Korean general to head it in March 1991.

The United States has expressed "very serious concerns" to North Korea about the fate of the two US pilots, identified by the Pentagon as army chief warrant officers David Hilemon of Clarksville, Tennessee, and Bobby Hall of Brooksville, Florida.

The Pentagon said the Oh-58 helicopter was unarmed and on a routine training mission when it strayed over the border with North Korea and went down on Saturday three to four miles (four to seven km) north of the demilitarised zone (DMZ).

North Korea said it shot down the helicopter and the pilots were being questioned about the intrusion. The US Defence Department said it was unclear whether the Oh-58 was shot down or made an emergency landing.

The UNC spokesman said the fate of the two pilots was unknown.

"It's tough. Information is so controlled up there," he said. In Washington, White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta said

on Saturday that Secretary of State Warren Christopher had contacted the North Korean mission to the United Nations in New York to express concern for the safety of the pilots.

"We have indicated very serious concerns to the North Koreans about the welfare of these pilots. We want them returned," Panetta said in a television interview.

Democratic representative Bill Richardson, who arrived in Pyongyang shortly after the incident on a previously scheduled trip is acting as a conduit between Washington and Pyongyang.

A spokesman for Richardson, who is a personal friend of President Bill Clinton, said in Washington that the Congressman had asked for "immediate access" to the two pilots and stressed that failure to return them "would have a serious impact on US North Korean relations."

North Korea keeps about one million men under arms, some 60 per cent of them deployed near the border with the South.

Bosnian Serbs begin new wave of 'ethnic cleansing'

ZAGREB, Dec 18: Bosnian Serbs have forced more than 100 Bosnian Muslims from their homes in a new wave of "ethnic cleansing," an official for the medical aid charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF-doctors without borders) said here Saturday, reports AFP.

Eric Stobbaert said the refugees from the town of Bjeljina had to cross front lines Friday to reach the northern industrial town of Tuzla, which remains under the control of Bosnian government forces.

Some of the refugees told MSF workers in Tuzla another flood of people would arrive over the weekend.

Witnesses told MSF that before leaving Bjeljina, they had been locked in unlit rooms and subjected to various forms of abuse.

They also said raids had been carried out on the remainder of the population with men picked up and forced to dig trenches at the front, adding many of them had disappeared without trace. Stobbaert said.

He said the new arrivals in Tuzla had been received by MSF, as well as UN High Commissioner for Refugees officials and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Over the summer humanitarian organisations had to deal with expulsions of other refugees from the same region. The influx of refugees since the start of the war has virtually doubled the Muslim population of Tuzla and the surrounding area.

Tuzla had a pre-war population of some 100,000 of whom 48 per cent were

Muslims, with Roman Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs each accounting for 15 per cent.

Bjeljina — where before the war the Muslims were in the majority — along with the northwestern town of Banja Luka, along with much of eastern Bosnia have suffered the worst bouts of ethnic cleansing.

The Serbs have flattened all the mosques in the town and in Banja Luka, where even the 16th century Banja Luka mosque of ferhadija, which had UNESCO world heritage status, has been demolished.

Meanwhile troops loyal to dissident Muslim leader Fikret Abdic Saturday captured the northwestern Bosnian town of Velika Kladusa from Bosnian government forces, a UN source said here.

Port activity was also af-