

### Manama to accept ICJ's arbitration 8 opposition leaders arrested in Bahrain

MANAMA, Jan 23 Bahrain has arrested eight opposition leaders including four Muslim Shiite clerics, accused of inciting anti-government protests in this Gulf Arab state, state-owned Bahrain television reported, reports Reuter.

It said the arrest of Sheikh Abdul-Amir al-Jamri, 58, and seven other leaders was aimed at foiling a foreign-backed plot to destabilise Bahrain's security and damage private and public properties.

The security forces have arrested element of the group who played a major role in inciting crimes of riot and sabotage and escalating them, the television quoted an official at the Interior Ministry as saying on Monday.

There is proof evidence and documents supported by pictures which prove the groups involvement in the incidents and would be submitted to the legal authorities the official said.

The arrest followed three nights of riots and sabotage last weekend in several Shiite villages prompting the 8,000 strong Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) to issue a warning it might step in to quell the unrest once and for all.

AFP adds from Doha, Bahrain has agreed to accept arbitration by the International Court of Justice in The Hague on its islands dispute with Qatar, the officials Qatari News Agency QNA said on Monday.

"Bahrain has gone back on its earlier position rejecting the ICJ's arbitration, proving the validity of Qatar's position," the agency said.

Qatar requested a court ruling in 1991 on the potentially oil-rich Hawar Islands in the Gulf and the demarcation of archipelago boundaries.

The dispute goes back to 1939 when Britain granted Bahrain ownership of small islands.

# Afghan govt declares truce during Ramadan

KABUL, Jan 23 The Afghan government has declared a unilateral ceasefire in its long-running battle against the Taliban militia besieging Kabul, a Defence Ministry source said today.

The ceasefire was called by Kabul to mark the month-long Muslim festival of Ramadan, the most holy holiday in the Islamic calendar, which began on Sunday, the official told AFP.

"Ramadan is the holy month for all Muslims and we hope all sides including the Taliban will respect this ceasefire in honour of Ramadan," the defence official said.

The move is effectively aimed at the Islamic warriors, who have been encamped around the war-torn capital for more than four months, as Kabul is not currently fighting with any other warring factions.

The spokesman, however, warned that Kabul military commanders would hit back at the enemy if their troops were attacked first by the Taliban.

"We are in defensive positions around Kabul at the moment and are not attacking anybody, but this does not mean we will sit quietly if we are attacked," he added.

Government commanders and civilians living near the frontlines south and southwest of Kabul said the ceasefire was generally holding, but added that minor artillery clashes were taking place at night.

They added that fighting around the city had in fact eased off more than a week ago, probably due to the biting winter which has seen temperatures drop to around minus 20 degrees Celsius in recent weeks.

"There is no fighting during the day, but at night there are artillery and rocket exchanges fired by both sides," Major Mohammed Nasir said from the frontlines near the village of Rishkhor, seven kilometres (four miles) from Kabul's southern suburbs.

He added that the night-time barrages were hitting only at the frontline positions of both warring groups, and that even second and third defence lines on each side were enjoying a rare period of calm.

Meanwhile, AFP adds: The Kabul authorities have shut down the city's butchers' shops, amid a chronic shortage of meat triggered by a blockade of the last major supply route into the beleaguered Afghan capital, butchers said today.

The municipality closed the city's 1,000 or so butchers down in punishment for profiteering after meat prices soared by 100 per cent following the closure of the eastern road artery by a warring faction nine days earlier, they said.

But the shut-down two days ago has ironically sent prices even higher at the handful of meat shops still trading, with lamb Tuesday posting a 130 per cent rise over a week ago, residents said.

The official clampdown came after lamb and beef prices controlled items which are the basis of many Afghan dishes — became so scarce that butchers more than doubled their prices.

However angry butchers, who are now forced to sit idly outside their sealed and deserted shops, say the move was grossly unfair as they only raised their prices to cover the increased cost.

"The people are already hungry and now even if they have the money they cannot buy meat," butcher Mohammed Ehsan said.

### Yeltsin vows fresh action against Chechens Russia accused of blatant violation of int'l law

GENEVA, Jan 23: The respected International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) accused Russia on Monday of blatant violation of international law in its recent actions against separatists in and around troubled Chechnya, reports Reuter.

The Geneva-based body also called on the Council of Europe to freeze discussion of Russia's application for admission "as the behaviour of its agents in the Caucasus contravenes the rule of law and internationally-accepted standards."

The ICJ said it "unequivocally denounces" Chechen fighters for taking innocent hostages in Dagestan two weeks ago in an action it described as "a clear breach of international humanitarian law."

But it said Russian forces had been guilty of a "shocking, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force" against the Chechens in the Dagestan village of Pervomaiskoye in a siege that ended last week.

Russia's actions blatantly contravene the legal principle enshrined in provisions of international law according to which the use of force is only lawful if it is necessary and proportional to the attack," the ICJ said.

The assault on Pervomaiskoye — in which attack helicopters, artillery and ground-to-ground rockets were used — "resulted in the heavy loss of lives when the holding of negotiations could have avoided bloodshed."

The ICJ, which is composed of 31 distinguished jurists from around the globe and works to defend the rule of law, called on the international community "to seriously address the violations of human rights related to the Chechnya conflict."

AFP from Moscow adds: President Boris Yeltsin threatened reprisals against Chechen separatist strongholds would only lead to more civilian victims, representatives of the Russian Muslim movement "Nur" said on Monday.

## BRIEFLY

**Israel sets up ties with Tunisia:** In another expansion of Mideast peacemaking, Israel and Tunisia established low-level diplomatic ties Monday. AP reports from Washington.

The two nations will open so-called interest sections April 15 in the Belgian embassies in Tunis and Tel Aviv. US secretary of State Warren Christopher announced the move at a State Department ceremony with Foreign Minister Habib Ben Yahia of Tunisia and Ehud Barak, his Israeli counterpart. Israel has no peace treaty with Tunisia, but the North African country is participating in regional economic planning with Israel and a number of other Arab countries.

**Pak soldier killed in Haiti:** A Pakistani soldier apparently shot and killed himself. United Nations officials said Monday. AP reports from Port-Au-Prince.

It was the second death in a week of a UN peacekeeper in Haiti. The soldier, who was not identified, died Sunday near Cap-Haitien, a port city 165 miles (275 kilometres) north of Port-au-Prince.

**Czechs to seek EU membership:** Czech Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus will apply for full membership in the European Union this week, a report said Monday. AP reports from Prague.

Klaus is expected to submit the application Tuesday during talks in Rome with Italian Prime Minister Lamberto Dini, according to CTK, the official Czech news agency. The Czech Republic has been an associate member of the EU since October 1993. Like its east and central European neighbours, Czechoslovakia shucked off communism in 1989. The Czech Republic and Slovakia split in 1993.

**Curfew in Hebron:** Israeli troops imposed a partial curfew Monday night in the West Bank town of Hebron after shots were fired into the air in the town centre, a military spokesman said. AFP reports from Hebron.

Hebron is the only large West Bank town not to have been evacuated by Israeli soldiers. The troops have stayed to protect 415 Jewish settlers who have refused to budge. The town which is home to 120,000 Palestinians, will be partially evacuated by the army in March, under the terms of the Palestinians autonomy accords.

**4 killed in Philippines gunbattle:** Four people were killed in a gunbattle after unidentified gunmen opened fire on soldiers in the southern Philippines, police said yesterday. Reuter reports from Iligan.

Three soldiers aboard a jeep were ambushed on Monday by gunmen in Marawi, (510 miles) south of Manila on Mindanao island, the police said in a report. Two of the soldiers were killed and one was wounded while two of the attackers were slain. Police have no motive for the attack.

### Australia for global compact to rid of N-arms

CANBERRA, Jan 23: Australia on Tuesday called for a global compact to rid the world of nuclear weapons, reports AP.

Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans told an international panel of scientists, former military strategists and retired statesmen that current disarmament moves are too slow and do not go far enough.

"What is needed now is really a new global nuclear compact," Evans told an inaugural three-day meeting of Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

Australia has recruited the 17-member commission to devise a practical plan for abolishing nuclear weapons without endangering global stability.

The group has until August to produce its findings which will be presented to the UN General Assembly.

Evans admitted a nuclear weapons-free world might take years to achieve, but he stressed the urgent need to step up arms control and reduction.

"This commission's mandate is not to draw a blueprint for utopia," Evans said. "It is to address what is unquestionably a clear and present danger."

Evans said stopping nuclear proliferation is primarily the responsibility of the five nuclear declared states — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China.

"The world still needs, if we are to achieve the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a reasonable time frame, a practical programme of nuclear reductions to which all five nuclear weapon states are committed," Evans said.

Countries must be persuaded to stop producing fissile material for weapons and the watchdog powers of International Atomic Energy Agency should be strengthened.



Six Iranians including a former Jew stand trial at a revolutionary court on Monday in Tehran accused of setting up a large spy network which plotted to overthrow Iran's Islamic regime. It was the first open trial to be staged in Tehran for alleged spies. The six, all former military officers or businessmen, are accused of forming a network during the 1980-1988 war against Iraq to defraud the country's nationalised banking system, traffic arms and spy for Israel and the United States. — AFP UNB photo

### Myanmar military govt accused of intimidating politicians

BANGKOK, Jan 23: Myanmar military government has attempted to intimidate 23 prominent politicians who signed a letter calling for a dialogue with democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi, a dissident group in Bangkok said Tuesday, reports AP.

The 23 included Bohmu Aung, who fought for Myanmar's freedom alongside Aung San, the father of Aung San Suu Kyi who is regarded as the founder of modern Myanmar. Aung San was assassinated in 1947. Myanmar was granted independence from Britain in 1948.

The 23 sent a letter on November 16, 1995 to the leaders of the military government asking them to begin a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and her political party the National League for Democracy.

Suu Kyi has repeatedly called for a dialogue on the political future of the nation, but has been rebuffed by the military government. She was freed from a six years of house arrest in July, 1995.

The politicians were summoned to a meeting on November 26, with Col. Tin Hlaing, deputy minister for home affairs, Col. Kyaw Win, deputy director of Myanmar's military intelligence, Soe Win, chief of police and Col. Ba Hein, head of the criminal investigation department.

According to an account of the meeting released by the All Myanmar Students' Democratic Front, a dissident group based in Bangkok, Tin Hlaing accused the politicians, Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy of being "stooges" of foreign governments.

"We cannot tolerate stooges meddling, Tin Hlaing was quoted as saying. People from the US, Britain and Australian embassies visit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi everyday and give her instructions. Her husband is also instigating the situation from abroad."

Suu Kyi's husband is Michael Aris, a British scholar of Tibetan studies at Oxford University.

Tin Hlaing warned the politicians to stay neutral, and hinted that violence was about to erupt in Myanmar.

"We are telling you this so that you can stay out of trouble when the situation becomes chaotic," Tin Hlaing was quoted as saying.

Suu Kyi and her party preach non-violence. Chroniclers of Myanmar democracy uprising in 1988 said military intelligence operatives mingled with demonstrators and provoked violent responses from soldiers.

### Japan recognises Bosnia

TOKYO, Jan 23: The Japanese government on Tuesday recognised Bosnia as a country following the conclusion of a comprehensive peace treaty last December, officials said, reports AFP.

The cabinet of Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto decided on the recognition of the civil war-torn country effective immediately.

"Following the close monitoring of the way the peace treaty has been implemented and the country manages itself under its new constitution, we have recognised that Bosnia achieved a status as an independent state," Foreign Ministry officials said.

More than 100 nations have already recognised Bosnia.

### Search on for missing Lankan helicopter

COLOMBO, Jan 23: Military planes and gunboats searched on Tuesday for an air force helicopter carrying 39 people that Tamil rebels claim to have shot down in the Indian Ocean, reports AP.

The aircraft disappeared off northern Sri Lanka mid-day Monday, and the military searched for the Ukrainian-built Mi-17 through the night but found nothing, officials said.

Air force planes searched until dusk Tuesday, then took off again Tuesday morning.

Tamil rebels radio first reported that the guerrillas shot the aircraft down, then said they saw two passengers jump from the downed helicopter into the ocean, the military said. The second radio report didn't say whether they were captured.

A military official said on condition of anonymity that a government cargo ship traveling in the area Monday said it saw a fire ball falling from the sky that probably was the aircraft.

## Off the Record

### Softening decree

BUENOS AIRES: President Carlos Menem might just be softening his stance towards Madonna, whose casting as former first lady Evita Peron he has called "an utter disgrace" an "blasphemous," reports AP.

"I don't know... if they ask for an interview I'll give some thought," Menem said Monday when asked if he would meet the cast of Alan Parker's film version of the Broadway musical "Evita."

Menem, leader of the Peronist Party, has been at the forefront of criticism of Parker's film.

Many Argentines who consider Evita nothing less than a saint are offended at the thought of Madonna, famed for her sex-drenched persona, playing the part of the second wife of former President Gen. Juan Domingo Peron.

Madonna arrived in Argentina Saturday, shortly after graffiti such as "Evita Lives! Get out Madonna" was scrawled upon the walls of the capital.



### A marijuana to make up his mind

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil Gov Marcelo Alencar says he'll smoke a marijuana cigarette if it will shed light on the debate over the drug's use, reports AP.

"Some say it's a medicine, others disagree; I'll smoke one if necessary to make up my mind," Rio's governor told the Rio daily Jornal do Brasil in a story published Monday.

A day earlier, a federal congressman and a state deputy defended smokers and their right to use whistles to warn of approaching police along the Posto Nine stretch of fashionable Ipanema Beach.

Police departed war on whistles last week when they arrested a couple for distributing 140 whistles and pamphlets urging smokers to toot when they spotted officers.

For years, Posto Nine has been known as a place where beach-goers who wanted to smoke grass could light up without fear, but the growing number of users at the beginning of Rio's high tourist season alarmed police.



An expert at Sothebys auction house in London displays one of the antique Valentine cards, on Monday, which are to be auctioned next week. This "Bank of True Love" note was issued in 1847 and is one of the only surviving of its kind as the bank notes became too convincing, resulting in the Bank of England recalling and destroying all the currency. The note is estimated to reach around 100 pounds (USD 150) — AFP/ UNB photo

### Rama Rao's son barred from entering home

HYDERABAD, India, Jan 23: A court in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh has banned the sons of former politician NT Rama Rao from entering his home after his widow won a court injunction against them, reports Reuter.

The state high court late on Monday prohibited police and Rama Rao's sons from entering Lakshmi Parvathi's home after she complained that Rama Rao's relatives were carrying away suitcases filled with his possessions.

Chief Justice Prabhakar Mishra also ordered state police to ensure Parvathi's safety as a family feud deepened.

The second wife of the film star-turned-politician was elected on Sunday to head the bitterly-divided Telugu Desam Party founded by Rama Rao, who died last week.

### US to destroy all chemical weapons by 2004

WASHINGTON, Jan 23: The US Defence Department announced for the first time on Monday the size of the US chemical weapons arsenal — 8.6 million weapons — and said all would be destroyed by 2004, reports Reuter.

It said the weapons include 3.3 million single-chemical bombs, rockets, artillery shells and cartridges and 315,682 binary weapons, in which chemicals are mixed in flight to produce deadly gas.

"As President Bill Clinton said in his state of the union message last year, the United States must lead the charge to eliminate chemical weapons," Defence Secretary William Perry said in a statement.

"Prompt ratification and entry into force of the multilateral chemical weapons convention is critical to achieving this objective," Perry said.

Defence officials said the number and tonnage of US chemical weapons was being announced partly because both Clinton and former President George Bush have pledged the United States will not use such weapons, so there is no longer a military reason to keep the numbers secret.

Army Major General George Friel, commander of the army's chemical biological defence command, said the United States had also agreed with Russia to disclose and destroy all its chemical weapons as an example in the effort to encourage all nations with chemical weapons to destroy them.

He said the United States has 31,000 tonnes of chemical weapons and Russia has 40,000 tonnes.

Senator Jesse Helms, a North Carolina Republican and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has held up Senate approval of the international chemical weapons convention.

### China rejects Thatcher's remarks

BEIJING, Jan 23: China firmly rejected today recent comments by former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher that a significant US presence in the Asia-Pacific region was crucial to harnessing China's military muscle, reports AFP.

Voicing disappointment that an "old friend" of China like Thatcher should not make such remarks, Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian said the speech she gave on Monday to business and political leaders in Manila was flawed in its reasoning.

"China's economic growth is conducive to the stability of the Asia-Pacific region," Chen said, adding that the rate of China's economic growth, the country's defence spending was actually declining rather than growing.

# Corruption grips Indian society, not politics alone

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Arun Kumar suffers colour blindness and can't see a red traffic light. He pulls up his car only when he sees others halting at intersections, reports AP.

But Kumar, a business executive, had no trouble getting a driving licence. A bribe of 300 rupees (dhs nine) to the clerk at the license office was enough.

Businessman Deepak Sharma couldn't wait one year for a new telephone connection, the time it normally takes in overcrowded New Delhi. He paid 15,000 rupees (dhs 430) under the table and the line was quickly installed.

Corruption has become so common and standardised in India that one newspaper recently published a "bribe index." It catalogued how much it costs in each of four cities to circumvent the bureaucracy to get a connection to gas lines, a telephone and electricity.

Most Indians say the rot starts at the op.

On January 16, a four-year investigation culminated in formal accusations of accepting bribes against 10 prominent politicians, including three ministers in Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's Cabinet and the leader of the opposition.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India's FBI, accused the 10 of taking money from a wealthy business family in return for help in obtaining contracts.

Opposition leader LK Advani immediately resigned from parliament, and the scandal threatened to throw Indian politics into chaos as it heads into campaigning for a national election in April.

"Corruption is not confined to our politics. It has seeped through to all our society," said Mani Shankar Aiyer, a parliament member from the governing Congress Party.

Bribes don't always work.

When her husband was arrested on fraud charges, Gopika Nina Pillai paid prison wardens at Tihar Prison, India's largest penitentiary, 250,000 rupees (dhs 7,150) to ensure that he was treated well.

Rajan Pillai, known as the "Biscuit King" because of the food empire he owned, died in custody last July after four days in Tihar jail when he was denied medical treatment for a liver dysfunction.

Mrs. Pillai said that despite the extortion which she paid through intermediaries, her husband was kicked and beaten by his guards. "Though we paid, someone else paid much more to kill him," she told The Associated Press.

accusing unidentified businessmen.

In a court affidavit that was published in the Indian press, she admitted paying the money, but it elicited neither surprise nor comment from the public, nor any denials from jail or government officials.

"In India, right from the beggar on the street, everybody has to pay a price to get things done," said K J Alphonso, the land commissioner of the New Delhi city government.

Alphonso, who plans an early retirement this year from government service, recently launched Jana Shakti, a private organisation to fight corruption in high places.

"There is a clear link between politicians and criminals, and the bureaucracy and criminals. It's a web," he said in an interview.

In its most recent action, his group has filed a lawsuit with the Delhi High Court seeking the prosecution of a minister in Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's cabinet.

The minister is accused of trying to evade customs duty and engineering the transfer of an airport customs supervisor after she demanded that he pay duty on expensive crystal, silverware and liquor that he brought in his personal luggage.

In August, the government released a 1993 report by an inquiry commission that admitted criminals and organised mafias were pervasive in Indian politics.

Even before the latest scandal climaxed, opposition parties had promised to make corruption a major issue in their campaign for the next general election, likely to be held in April.

In 1989, the Congress Party lost an election for only the second time in India's history because it was tainted by alleged kickbacks in buying artillery from the Bofors, the Swedish arms maker.

"Bofors" entered India's lexicon as a synonym for corruption, and the word was on everyone's lips. A 26-year-old girl on a live program on state-owned radio once volunteered, "Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is a thief."

But Indians may be suffering from corruption fatigue, and it's not clear whether the issue can again ignite public fervor.

In 1993, Harshad Mehta, a stock broker at the center of a massive swindle of banks hares, claimed he gave Rao a "campaign donation."

Mehta said he delivered the cash stuffed into two suitcases. Rao denied the charge, and the issue quickly faded from the daily newspapers.

### UN fears food shortage in Somalia

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 23: The poor harvest and political chaos could lead to severe a food shortage in Somalia, where 350,000 people died from famine and war four years ago, the United Nations warned on Monday, reports AP.

International assistance is crucial, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said in a report.

"The most urgent humanitarian needs are food and essential health systems support, particularly immunization and measures to control the spread of epidemic diseases such as cholera, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said.

During the 1992 famine, aid organisations could not get food past looters and gangs until a US-led multinational force arrived