

International

Arafat opens self-rule council session
Israel deploys tanks along territory with West Bank

JERUSALEM, Mar 7: Israel has deployed tanks along the edge of its territory with the West Bank for the first time since the Middle East war in 1967, military officials told AFP today.

The tanks were mainly deployed on heights overlooking the Palestinian autonomous towns of Tulikarem and Qalqilya and their surroundings following a wave of Palestinian militant suicide bombings which have left 60 dead since February 25.

Some 2,000 extra troops and border guards were also deployed in the area to prevent any Palestinians infiltrating into the area from the West Bank which has been closed since the first bombing on February 25.

There is no question of launching an operation with these tanks but only to overlook the areas to prevent terrorists penetrating Israel to carry out further attacks, the official told AFP.

He added they were fitted with infra-red equipment to detect any night movements by Palestinians.

Meanwhile the first session of Palestinian Self-Rule Council opened in the presence of President Yasser Arafat here today in the midst of a crisis over Hamas suicide bombings.

Arafat arrived to the sounds of the Palestinian anthem blared at the council's Gaza City headquarters.

He was given a police salute as he arrived for the historic occasion, after the 88-strong council was elected in the first Palestinian elections in January in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and annexed east Jerusalem.

During the inaugural session the council will elect its first cabinet and Speaker.

Arafat was to address the session which was attended by about 60 guests from Arab and other countries, notably the United States, Egypt, Morocco, Qatar and Bahrain.

However, the event has been overshadowed by the crisis triggered by a wave of anti-Israeli suicide bombings

India accused of provoking clash along Kashmir border
Pakistan denies report on nuclear test plan

ISLAMABAD, Mar 7: Pakistan on Wednesday dismissed a newspaper report that it was planning to conduct its first nuclear test if India staged one, saying it was based on faulty intelligence, reports Reuter.

The Washington Post, in a report on Wednesday, quoted what it called evidence obtained by US intelligence officials.

A Pakistan Foreign Ministry spokesman described the report as part of an orchestrated media campaign based on intelligence reports in the US and world media.

The fuelling of such speculation through the deliberate leakage of distorted intelligence reports on Pakistan's alleged reaction must not be allowed to shift focus from the actual and planned actions of India, he said.

The Post quoted US government officials as saying the evidence about Pakistani preparations included spy satellite photographs.

These showed that engineers were finishing the excavation of a mountain in the southwestern province of Baluchistan, near the border with Afghanistan, where such a test could be conducted.

Washington does not expect Pakistan to carry out such a blast unless India goes forward with its first explosion since 1974.

This possibility was raised by reports late last year that India was excavating an underground shaft at its nuclear test site in the Rajasthan Desert, The Post said.

Washington has privately warned Pakistan and India that conducting such blasts would bring reprisals, the report quoted US officials as saying.

Measures envisaged under a 1994 law would include cutting off economic or military aid, voting against international bank loans and reject key export licenses, it said.

The Pakistani spokesman said India's suspected plans to carry out its first nuclear test after 1974 "are a real source of concern and a threat to the security of the region."

He said Pakistan had repeatedly drawn world attention to Indian preparations for a second nuclear test, which he said would constrain Islamabad to "remain vigilant and take measures to safeguard its security."

Rather than publishing speculative stories about Pakistan, the media would do well to focus on the undeniable actions of India, he said.

These included "the testing of nuclear-capable and Pakistan-specific Prithvi missile,

the preparations for conducting a second test and the roadblock now being erected in Geneva to frustrate the successful conclusion of the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty)," he added.

Pakistan has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty unless India does the same.

Another report says, Pakistan accused India of provoking another border clash on Wednesday along the disputed Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir, but there were no reports of casualties.

A Defence Minister spokesman, quoted by the official APP news agency, said the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) resorted to "unprovoked firing" in a bid to violate the status of what he called the "working boundary" between Pakistan's Punjab province and the Indian held Jammu area.

Demirel okays Yilmaz's coalition cabinet

ANAKARA, Turkey, Mar 7: Premier Mesut Yilmaz won presidential approval on Wednesday for his Cabinet for a center-right coalition with his predecessor, Tansu Ciller, reports AP.

Under the coalition deal, which ended more than two months of haggling, Ciller gets the premiership back at year's end. The arrangement allowed the two rivals to shut out from power the anti-Islamic Welfare party, an Islamic movement which became parliament's biggest party in December 24 elections.

Even with Ciller's True Path and the Motherland Party of Yilmaz, the government comes up 15 seats short of a majority in parliament. But the center-left New Democratic Left of ex-premier Bulent Ecevit's New Democratic Left Party has pledged to abstain during next week's confidence vote to let the government win parliamentary approval.

However, the need to count on Ecevit could be a problem if his party persists in opposing privatisation and permission for a US-led Western air

force in Turkey to protect Iraq Kurds in northern Iraq from Baghdad.

The new government brought the country's first woman leader Tansu Ciller's almost three years of premiership to an end. She will hold no post in the Cabinet approved by President Suleyman Demirel. The presidential palace announcement of approval did not immediately list the ministers' names.

Motherland and True Path seek speedy privatisation and greater ties with the European Union.

The two leaders failed to put together a coalition initially when each refused to let the other be prime minister first. Yilmaz then tried to work out a deal with pro-Islamic regime Welfare, but called off talks under pressure from business circles, media and reportedly the army.

Some observers have said that pro-Islamic Welfare, with its base among the country's poor and lower-middle class, would be the big winner in the next elections if the new coalition fails to improve the living standards.

Demand for fresh truce rejected
IRA ready for another 25 yrs of war: Adams

BELFAST, Mar 7: The IRA wants unconditional negotiations but is ready for "another 25 years of war" with the British, Sinn Fein party leader Gerry Adams says, reports AP.

Adams, whose party supports the IRA but says it can't control the outlawed group, gave an account of his secret February 28 meeting with IRA commanders in his regular column to the Irish Voice, a news weekly published in New York. Sinn Fein released advance copies Wednesday.

Later, the IRA leaked excerpts of its latest policy statement to the Irish national broadcaster RTE in Dublin. That too suggested that the IRA was not willing to resume its truce despite the British and Irish governments' decision to set a June 10 date for

all-party talks, the longtime demand of the IRA - Sinn Fein movement.

Adams adds, the IRA rejected British demands for a new ceasefire today saying an Anglo-Irish attempt to revive the Northern Ireland peace process was inadequate.

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) guerrillas also ruled out any surrender of the 100-tonne stock of arms and explosives it has used in a 25-year war to end British rule of northern Ireland.

The IRA statement was seen as a major setback for British and Irish attempts to keep peace hopes alive by getting the IRA to restore the ceasefire it broke on February 9 with a London bombing campaign.

France, UK, US to sign treaty banning N-test in Pacific

SUVA, Fiji, Mar 7: France, Britain and the United States will sign a treaty banning the testing or stationing of nuclear weapons in the Pacific later this month, the South Pacific Forum said Thursday, reports AP.

Since France ended its final series of nuclear tests at its South Pacific sites of Mururoa and Fangataufa atolls in January, the way was cleared for the big three nuclear powers to add their names to the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty.

The 16-nation South Pacific Forum said it expected the signing ceremony to be March 21 or 25 in Suva.

France will be represented by Gaston Flosse, the president of French Polynesia. Britain ambassador to Fiji, Michael Peart, will represent his nation, and the US ambassador to

Fiji, Don Gervitz, is expected to sign on Washington's behalf.

However, signing the treaty may mean any change in the US policy of refusing to disclose which of its Navy ships are nuclear-powered or armed. The treaty does not cover shipboard weapons or power plants.

Russia and China are already signatories to the 1985 treaty.

A series of French nuclear test blast that began in May 1984 gave South Pacific countries the impetus to adopt the treaty, also known as the Treaty of Rarotonga, since it was signed there in 1985.

Britain, under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and the US administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush declined to endorse the treaty at the time.

BRIEFLY

Blast kills 1 in Bahrain: One person was killed and two other people were hurt in an explosion at a cash dispenser of a bank south of the Bahraini capital, the Gulf Daily News reported yesterday, AFP reports from Manama.

It was the first such fatality since a wave of political unrest erupted in December 1994. Security forces rushed to the scene after the explosion late Wednesday at an automatic teller machine in Issa Town, just south of the capital Manama, an official source was quoted as saying.

US to send 34 jets to Jordan: The United States will send 34 fighter jets to Jordan in mid-April for about two months to work and train with friendly forces in the region, the Defence Department announced on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Washington.

Defence officials said the deployment of Air Force F-15s and F-16s with tanker aircraft was not connected to a series of suicide bombings in Israel, but was similar to a brief fighter deployment to Bahrain last year.

6 Thai female to get general rank: Thailand's six female officers will be promoted to the rank of general in the three services of the armed forces, the Supreme Command headquarters and the office of the Permanent Secretary for Defence in the mid-year reshuffle next month, Xinhua reports from Bangkok.

The decision was made after the Defence Council meeting approved the promotions.

20 Indians held in Argentina: Authorities in Buenos Aires arrested a group of 20 Indian nationals accused of holding forged passports, they hoped to use to travel to the United States or Canada, police said Wednesday, AFP reports from Buenos Aires.

Police arrested the men at a hotel, after being alerted by Interpol. The Indians had apparently traveled to Argentina from Peru and Bolivia.

7 Indonesian students drown: At least seven Indonesian students were swept to their deaths and five are missing after a large wave crashed into a group of students on a beach at Parangtrus near Yogyakarta, the official Antara news agency said yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

It quoted search and rescue officials as saying the accident happened on Wednesday afternoon and as of this morning five people were still missing.



The file picture dated January 11, 1996 shows Chechen commander Salman Raduyev, who spearheaded the hostage-taking in Dagestan in January. Raduyev died in the town of Urus-Martan, 40 km (25 miles) west of Grozny on Wednesday, from head injuries he received overnight Sunday in an ambush on his car, a Russian official was quoted as saying by Interfax. — AFP/UNB photo

3 US servicemen jailed for raping Japanese girl

TOKYO, Mar 7: The US Embassy here declined to comment on Thursday's ruling by Okinawa's Naha District Court, which sentenced three American servicemen to up to seven years' prison for the rape of a 12-year-old girl, reports AP.

"We will neither comment on nor characterise the court's ruling, and do not wish to prejudice any future legal actions the defendants may take," the embassy said in a statement issued shortly after the court handed down its verdict and sentence.

The sentence handed down by the Naha District Court reflects the result of the Japanese judicial process, regarding the reprehensible crime that took place on September 4, 1995, the embassy said.

Navy seaman Marcus Gill, 23, and marine private Rodrick Harp, 21, were sentenced to seven years imprisonment, while marine private Kendrick Ledet, 20, received a six-and-a-half-year sentence, for abduction and rape resulting in injury on the night of September 4. They have been on trial since November.

House body meets to discuss peace plan in Lanka

COLOMBO, Mar 7: A parliament committee met for the first time Thursday morning to discuss a proposal aimed at ending Sri Lanka's 12-year civil war, officials said, reports AP.

Hoping to address the demands of Tamil separatists fighting for a homeland in the north and east, the government has proposed making Sri Lanka a federation of regions. Each would have wide self-rule powers, and one would be controlled by minority Tamils.

The select committee focus will be on achieving a consensus on the devolution of powers... Such a consensus appears achievable, Justice Minister Lakshman Peiris was quoted as saying in Thursday's Daily Newspaper.

Uproar in Indian parliament continues

NEW DELHI, Mar 7: For the second day, opposition parties threw parliament into an uproar on Thursday with raucous demands for Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's resignation over his handling of a dirrs 19 million bribery scandal, reports AP.

Noisy protests forced the speakers of both houses of parliament to adjourn their sessions for several hours, in the Raja Sabha, the upper chamber, the prime minister sat through the din, smiling occasionally and reading office files.

The ruckus again prevented debate on the government's interim budget presented last week, and could force and extension of the session, due to end Tuesday.



A group of Muslim teenagers celebrates the return of Hadzici, a formerly Serb-held suburb of Sarajevo, to government control on Wednesday. At the beginning of the war, rebel Serbs seized Hadzici and chased out most of its Muslim majority population. — AFP/UNB photo

30 soldiers killed in ongoing fighting
Chechens take 48 Russians hostage in Grozny

MOSCOW, Mar 7: Chechen rebels, who have seized parts of the regional capital Grozny, are holding 84 civilian Russian soldiers hostage in the centre of the city, ITAR-Tass news agency said today, reports Reuter.

The agency, quoting Abdula Bugayev, deputy prime minister of the pro-Moscow Chechen government, also said the rebels had blown up a heavy fuel oil pipeline in the city causing a blaze.

Bugayev did not say if the rebels had put forward any demands for the release of the hostages.

There was no independent confirmation of the report. Separatist guerrillas made

two daring hostage-taking raids outside Chechnya into southern Russia last June and in January, humiliating the Kremlin.

Meanwhile, intensive fighting raged overnight between Russian troops and rebels who have seized parts of the Chechen capital Grozny, Russian news agencies said today.

Sporadic automatic rifle fire and firing from armoured vehicles echoed across the city, ITAR-Tass news agency said.

Fighters of the separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev launched a bold offensive against the pro-Moscow Chechen government in Grozny on Wednesday, winning control of parts of the city from Russian

troops.

Another AFP report says, Russian military officials said today that 30 Russian soldiers had died and some 70 were injured in ongoing battles with separatist Chechen rebels in Grozny, the ORT television station reported here.

Earlier, the Russian military command had said that the rebels suffered "heavy losses" during their Wednesday offensive on Grozny while 26 Russian soldiers had died and some 50 were wounded.

According to an ORT correspondent in Grozny, the rebels were also holding hostage some 84 construction workers.



Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (L) and Indonesian President Suharto (R) make their way to the Wisma Negara, following a welcoming ceremony at the Presidential palace on Thursday. Benazir is on a three-day official visit to Indonesia in order to promote cooperation in economy, trade, investment and agriculture between both nations. — AFP/UNB photo

DPRK rejects ROK's call for dialogue

SEOUL, March 7: North Korea today rejected a South Korean call for dialogue, citing what it called "traitor" president Kim Young-sam's recent remarks calling the North fragile and liable to collapse, reports AP.

"There is no need to sit face to face with such anti-national, anti-renaissance elements as the Kim Young-sam group and trash out rights and wrongs," said Pyongyang's mouthpiece news agency, KCNA.

"If the nation is to be free from disasters, they should be removed," it added.

It quoted the South Korean President as saying during a visit to Singapore last week that the North poses a threat to the region and calling its government as fragile as a disabled plane that could collapse,

US blames many countries for widespread HR violations in '95

WASHINGTON, Mar 7: The United States on Wednesday accused many countries of committing "widespread abuses of human rights" in 1995. But remained tongue-tied about its own problems in this area, reports Xinhua.

A lengthy annual report released by the US State Department on human rights practices in 194 countries listed instances such as extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention as well as discrimination based on race, sex, religion, disability and language.

It singled out some 25 countries, including Myanmar, China, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, India, Mexico, Syria and Russia, as the major target of attack, charging them with "continuing systematically to deny basic rights to their citizens."

It vilified China for alleged

"widespread and well-documented human rights abuses in violation of international norms." The United States will again co-sponsor an anti-China resolution at the UN human rights commission conference in Geneva this year, Assistant Secretary of State John Shattuck told a news briefing this afternoon.

Shattuck described 1995 as a year of US leadership on human rights around the world and said that the Clinton administration has made human rights issue a very high priority in US relations with other countries. The report itself acknowledged that it will be used as a resource for shaping policy, conducting diplomacy, and making resource allocations.

Washington's practice of using human rights issues as an excuse for increasing pressure

on other countries and interfering in their internal affairs has strained its ties with more and more countries. But this self-proclaimed human rights champion is not likely to do anything to restrain itself.

Earlier another AP reports says Russia's human rights record in 1995 was "uneven" due to abuses resulting from the conflict in the breakaway region of Chechnya, a State Department report said Wednesday.

Russian troops stormed into the southern republic — which had unilaterally proclaimed its independence — in December 1994.

The document praised the Russian media, which it said continued to function unhindered and represent a wide range of opinions. It operated freely in reporting the Chechen crisis, despite gov-

ernment pressure.

Non-governmental groups successfully documented human rights abuses, the report said. But the dismissal of Sergei Kovalev, the government's human rights commissioner, for his criticism of the war in Chechnya, undermined official human rights monitoring.

Meanwhile human rights abuses decreased significantly in Israel and Turkey in 1995, and — to a lesser degree — in Egypt and Syria, a US government report said Wednesday.

In other Middle Eastern nations, including Algeria, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, the situation remained largely unchanged, said the State Department's annual global survey of human rights.

In the past, Israel's human rights problems stemmed mainly from its repressive

policies and practices against Palestinians in territories occupied since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

But the redeployment last year of Israeli forces from most Palestinian population areas in the West Bank and their withdrawal from Gaza have significantly reduced those problems, said the report.

Detention centres were closed down and some 1,100 Palestinian prisoners were released in accordance with the agreement between the government and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.

Consequently, "the number of confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli security forces... dropped significantly in the past two years," the report said.

In Turkey, "the human rights situation improved in a number of areas, but very serious problems remain," the sur-

Off the Record

All he did to please his beloved

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia: Russian florists beware. International Women's Day arrives Friday and at least one greenhouse has been plucked clean in anticipation of the annual orgy of flower-giving, a report said Thursday, reports AP.

The day is celebrated as a major holiday in Russia, but the price of stems has risen dramatically in recent years.

One man trying to please his beloved was arrested and charged with stealing several hundred dollars worth of flowers from a greenhouse in Serzhantovo, a village near the Far Eastern city of Vladivostok, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.

French women's safety measures

PARIS: Thirty-nine per cent of French women keep a condom handy in their purses or on their night tables at all times, according to a survey published Wednesday, reports AP.

The poll, published by the weekly newsmagazine L'Express, said that nine out of 10 women who always carry a condom and have at least two sexual partners per year actually put it to use.

Sixty-two per cent of women between 15 and 19 years old use condoms, compared with only 25 per cent among women between 20 and 24 years old, according to the poll.

The poll of over 1,000 women did not give a margin of error, but such surveys usually carry an error margin of plus or minus 2 to 3 per cent.

Di demands \$45m in settlement with Charles

LONDON, Mar 7: Princess Diana, who last week gave the long-awaited green light for ending her stormy 14-year marriage to Prince Charles, is demanding 30 million pounds (45 million dollars) in settlement, the Sun reported today, says AP.

The mass-circulation tabloid quoted friends of the princess who said Diana has already rejected an offer of 15 million pounds.

The price of a deal with me is a lot higher," the 34-year-old estranged wife of the heir to the British throne reportedly told them.

Diana, separated from Charles for three years, announced last week that she would retain the title "Diana, Princess of Wales" after the divorce went through.