

International

Pakistan for ceasefire, in Afghanistan

Masood urges Taliban to withdraw from Kabul

JABEL-OS-SIRAJ, Afghanistan, Oct 18: Ousted government military commander Ahmad Shah Masood called today for Taliban fighters to withdraw from Kabul and turn the Afghan capital over to a UN-supervised force or face war.

"We want the Taliban to evacuate Kabul", he told Reuters in the strategic town of Jabal-OS-Siraj. "A limited international force under UN supervision should control Kabul and pave the way for all-party talks on a broad-based government."

Masood, who was standing in a street giving orders to his commanders, said the alternative would be war.

"If the Taliban are not ready to cooperate with us, we cannot avoid fighting," he said. Masood would not say if troops of his old rival northern Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum had entered the battle on his side against the radical Islamic Taliban movement.

"In our agreement with Dostum, the most important point is the formation of a broad-based government, which should avoid fighting in Kabul and prepare the ground for peace and elections in Afghanistan," the guerrilla commander said.

A third army has joined a tense power struggle on sun-baked plains north of Kabul that could determine the fate of the Taliban-ruled Afghan capital.

Powerful Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum on Thursday sent a dozen tanks and hundreds of troops to frontlines where the Taliban Islamic militia confronts the army of the government it ousted from the Afghan capital three weeks ago.

Afghan watchers regard Dostum as heading perhaps the most powerful single fighting force in Afghanistan. His troops deployed on the plains without joining the fighting.

Taliban has rejected an ultimatum from the previous government's military chief of quit Kabul or face bloodshed, saying it has enough fighters to defend the city.

But they might not be able to hold it against both Dostum and the forces of ex-defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood, whose spokesman billed Dostum's deployment as a victory.

Taliban has seized three quarters of Afghanistan but the Masood forces have counter-attacked north of the capital in recent days, recapturing some towns.

The arrival of Dostum forces on Thursday dramatically escalated the war between Taliban and the former government of Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Dostum's troops and armour poured out of the Salang Pass through the Hindu Kush Mountains even as he and Taliban were still talking peace.

Acting Information Minister Amir Khan Mutaqi told Reuter in Kabul that Taliban was satisfied with Pakistani-brokered talks in Dostum's northern stronghold and that the Uzbek leader had assured them he would not join the battle.

"Deployment and talks are not necessarily inconsistent. Dostum is clearly making himself the key to a deal and his deployment just strengthens the pressure on the Taliban," said one veteran Afghan watcher in Kabul.

"Even if the Uzbeks join the battle, the hope of successful talks is not dead."

The United States said it would be willing to support an international arms embargo on Afghanistan to end the civil war.

AP adds: Pakistan has called for an immediate ceasefire in Afghanistan and an arms embargo to prevent weapons from reaching warring factions there.

In a statement Wednesday, Pakistan's UN Ambassador Sahibzada Sultan said the Security Council should adopt a strong resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and an effective arms embargo.

"Any other course would be fraught with grave consequences for the region," he said.

The ousted Afghan government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani has accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban fighters who captured Kabul on Sept. 27.

The United States has also called for an arms embargo in Afghanistan. But other countries, including France, have expressed doubt whether such an embargo would be effective considering the formidable problem of policing the borders of the mountainous country.

BRIEFLY



Relatives help bury, on a hill top village near Sarajevo, the 25 Muslims, who were killed by Serbs in 1992 in the village of Ahatovici, west of Sarajevo. The remains of the victims were dug out of a mass grave last week.

2 SLA militiamen killed: A roadside charge blew up and killed two pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army (SLA) militiamen and wounded two others in the Jewish state's South Lebanon occupation zone yesterday, Israeli security sources said. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

They said the incident occurred in the eastern sector of Israel's self-declared security zone at approximately 0400 GMT but gave no further details. Israel carved out the 15 km (9 mile) wide occupation zone when it withdrew the bulk of its 1982 Lebanon invasion force in 1985.

Fire in restaurant in Vietnam kills 8: Eight people died and six others were injured when fire swept through a restaurant in Ho Chi Minh city, the worst blaze in Vietnam this year, a newspaper report said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

Around 100 people were at the restaurant for a birthday party on Thursday night when the fire broke out, police are looking into the causes of the blaze, the Lao Dong newspaper reported.

Lightning strikes plane in Australia: Lightning struck an aircraft carrying Prime Minister John Howard on Thursday night but no one aboard was hurt and the jet returned safely in Canberra, officials said. AFP reports from Canberra.

"He was just a huge white flash that engulfed the plane," a spokesman for Howard said. Howard and about a dozen staff were flying to the southern island state of Tasmania on an air force falcon when a lightning bolt hit the jet about 15 minutes after take-off, the spokesman said.

4,500 tremors recorded in E Japan: More than 4,500 tremors have been recorded since the beginning of this week in eastern Japan around the Izu Peninsula, the meteorological agency said Friday, predicting more still to come. AFP reports from Tokyo.

As of 8:00 am Friday (2300 gmt Thursday), the agency had registered 4554 quakes including a moderate earthquake measuring 4.3 on the Richter Scale on Wednesday, the largest of all the quakes recorded the agency said.

Albanian jailed for sale of Marx's works: An Albanian woman was sentenced Thursday to 10 months in prison for selling the works of Marx, Lenin and former Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha on the streets of Tirana, court officials said. AFP reports from Tirana.

Nusret Recica, 37, a native of Kosovo, the Albanian majority Serbian province was convicted for having "disseminated anti-constitutional propaganda."

BJP vows to topple Gowda's coalition government

NEW DELHI, Oct 18: Hindu nationalists today vowed to topple Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's United Front coalition government after central rule was re-imposed in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, reports AFP.

"We will not rest until this government goes," vowed Sushma Swaraj, a spokeswoman for the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP).

New Delhi took over the running of the state on Thursday for another six months following deadlocked elections. The United Front decision

followed days of bickering between India's mainstream parties in Uttar Pradesh, with each renouncing to back the other as attempts to form a coalition government in India's most populous state.

The BJP also announced the launch of a state-wide campaign in Uttar Pradesh today to unseat the provincial government.

Nor Romesh Bhandari, who had thrown out their demands to be allowed to try and form a government.

Bhandari was accused by the BJP of being partisan and favouring the United Front, the arch-enemy of the Hindu party.

Somalia ceasefire in jeopardy as officials set conditions

NAIROBI, Kenya, Oct 18: The most powerful Somali faction on Thursday ruled out any retreat from its claims to hold the presidency, raising doubts there would be a rapid resolution of the six-year Somali conflict, reports AP.

The announcement by a spokesman for the faction led by Hussein Aidid came just two days after three rival Somali leaders agreed to a ceasefire and face-to-face talks.

Without a coalition government in the country of 8 million controlled by clan-based factions — many of them at war with each other since 1991 — there is little chance for permanent peace. And the question of who would lead such a government has stymied efforts towards reconciliation.

Aidid spokesman Jama Mohamed Ghalib said Thursday that although the Somali leaders pledged to conduct an open dialogue on a national reconciliation, Aidid would not agree to a coalition presidency.

"It is not negotiable," Ghalib said. Hussein Aidid assumed the post when his father, Gen. Mohammed Farrah Aidid, died of gunshot wounds in August. Followers of the elder Aidid acclaimed him president in June 1995, three months after a UN peacekeeping mission ended in failure.

There was been no serious fighting in the war-torn capital since Gen. Aidid's death on Aug. 1.

The younger Aidid and his two rivals — the allied Ali Mahdi Mohammed and Osman Hassan Ali, known as Atto — agreed at meetings in Nairobi on Tuesday to a ceasefire and an

end to their propaganda war during week-long talks.

The Nairobi accord called for an end to all fighting by midnight Thursday, and dismantling of the so-called "green line" that divides the Somali capital Mogadishu between the groups.

The roadblocks were still in place Thursday, with militiamen collecting money from passengers traveling across the dividing line.

Ghalib, a hardline police general under late dictator Mohamed Siad Barre, said the three leaders agreed in principle to open dialogue, but he admitted there was no agenda nor time frame for future talks.

The dialogue hasn't started yet. The (Nairobi) talks were to create an atmosphere for dialogue," he said.



Five 1996 Nobel Laureates in physics and chemistry pose for photographs after discussing the future of scientific research in the face of monetary cuts, and the research that led to their discoveries at the National Press Club in Washington, DC on Thursday. In front are Robert Richardson (L), Cornell University and Douglas Osheroff (R) from Stanford University. In the rear are: David Lee (L) Cornell University; Richard Smalley (C), Rice University and Robert Curl (R) from Rice University.

Queen Elizabeth's bid to save money of taxpayers

LONDON, Oct 18: Queen Elizabeth II wants to take over managing travel expenses for members of the royal family in order to save taxpayers' money, Buckingham Palace announced on Thursday, reports AFP.

The proposal, backed by the Conservative government and the Labour opposition is expected to mean that the royal train and the Queen's flight of aircraft will be used less, the palace said.

If parliament approves the new arrangement, Buckingham Palace will take over responsibility next April for deciding how the annual allowance for royal travel will be spent.

A detailed report of the costs of royal trips is published every year.

Indian troops fire mortars in Kashmir, kill 2

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan, Oct 18: Indian troops fired mortars and artillery across a military control line in Kashmir on Thursday, killing two people on the Pakistani side of the disputed region, Pakistani officials said, reports Reuter.

A woman and a man were killed in two hours of shooting in the Neelum and Leepa valleys of Muzaffarabad district of Pakistan-controlled Azad (free) Kashmir, the officials in the state capital Muzaffarabad said.

Pakistani troops returned fire, they said. No more details were immediately available.

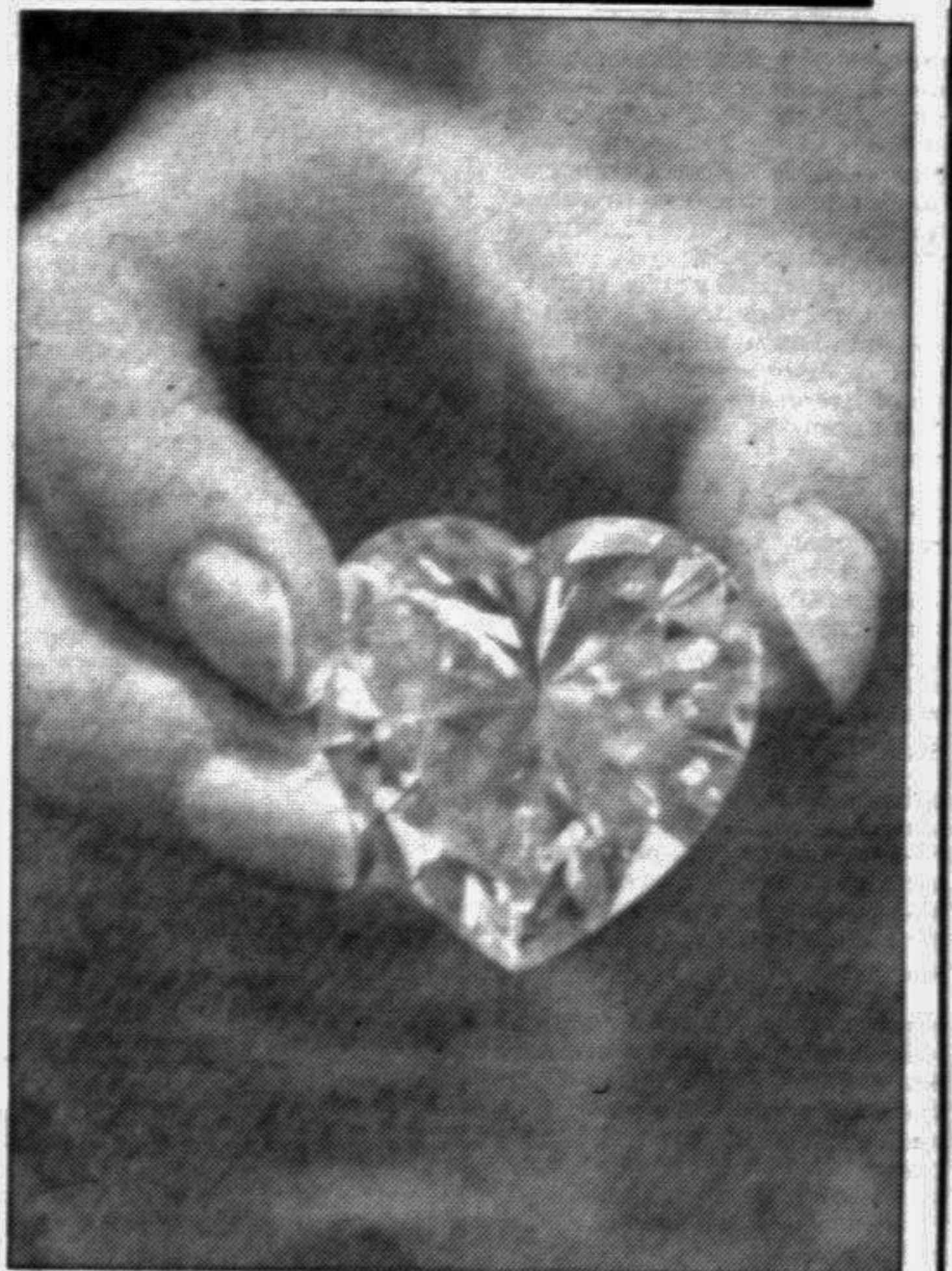
Pak attorney general resigns

ISLAMABAD, Oct 18: Pakistan's Attorney General, Qazi Jameel, has stepped down for "personal reasons" and President Farooq Ahmed Leghari accepted his resignation with immediate effect, officials said today, reports AFP.

Officials made no comment, while Jameel, who held the rank of a minister in Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's cabinet, also refused to elaborate beyond saying he decided to quit for "personal reasons."

Press reports said the Attorney General had developed differences with Leghari after he hired a leading lawyer, Shahid Hamid, as counsel for the President.

Off the Record



The largest heart-shaped diamond ever to come to auction is displayed Thursday at Christie's in New York. The 101.31 carat D-color internally flawless stone is estimated to go for 13 to 15 million USD at the October 24 auction.

Fondness for cat

CANBERRA: Caterwauls of protest from animal rights groups and pet lovers on Friday howled down a plan to wipe out every cat in Australia and so save its wildlife, reports AP.

Junior legislator Richard Evans wants Australia to be feline-free by 2020.

He said scientists should introduce a fatal disease to exterminate wild cats that roam the Outback and hunt defenseless birds along with small, furry marsupials.

Pet cats should also be nurtured by law. Unable to breed, they'll eventually die out, he told parliament.

Evans said while cats might be playful and affectionate around their owners, they're natural killing machines when out on the prowl in suburbia.

Millions of native animals are eaten by cats every year, he said. At least nine native species have been wiped out, largely because of predation by cats, which first came with European settlers two centuries ago.

"I am calling for the total eradication of cats in Australia," Evans said. In the meantime he wants compulsory cat registration and curfews put in place, he said.

The government hasn't directly supported Evans' plan, described by Nance Iredale of the Cat Protection Society as laughable.

"I find it very hard to believe anybody would take him seriously. He'd have to fight us all the way," she said. "Cats give so much pleasure to people."

Official estimates say Australia has about 18 million cats — almost matching its human population.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said about one-third of households own one or more cats. While it agrees that cat movements and breeding should be controlled, total eradication would be "outrageous and unnecessary."

Nevertheless, some wildlife workers have backed the eradication plan.

"I strongly support it," said Andrew Leys, of the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. "But I can never see it happening."

The solution is to manage the population rather than eradicate it," Leys told the Daily Telegraph.

Congressional objections defied US to proceed with jet sale to Indonesia

WASHINGTON, Oct 18: The Clinton administration plans to go ahead with a sale of nine F-16 fighter jets to Indonesia despite congressional objections over an alleged human rights abuses in that country, reports AP.

A top State Department official disclosed the sale in little-noticed testimony at a Senate hearing a few weeks before questions surfaced about potential improper influence by an Indonesian banking family whose members and associates

have given heavily to Democratic candidates. House Speaker Newt Gingrich questioned whether the sale should be postponed. He told reporters Thursday that he thinks the administration "should suspend any activities in regard to Indonesia until there's time for hearings" in Congress about the Indonesian contributions.

Gingrich said he expects several committees to investigate after Congress returns in January.

Lebed denied the allegations against him as nonsense, but the national security chief has the national security chief has the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include former Warsaw Pact members.

Mothers-to-be who smoke damage babies' breathing

LONDON, Oct 18: Mothers-to-be who smoke can damage their new born babies' breathing, research showed today, reports Reuter.

A survey of 500 babies by doctors in Perth, western Australia, found that smoking by mothers, a family history of asthma and maternal hypertension during pregnancy were associated with a reduced "respiratory function" in babies.

Breathing problems in early life could also lead to respiratory problems in later life, they said in an article in the lancet medical magazine.

"Our findings in newborn infants of significant in-utero effects on lung development have important implications for respiratory disease in older children and adults," they said.

Previously it had been difficult to separate potential effects of exposure to tobacco products in the womb from those of exposure after birth via passive smoking.

The Australian doctors studied new-born babies who would not have been exposed to smoke from their mothers or others at home.

It is already known that mothers who smoke during pregnancy give birth to lighter and shorter babies.

MOSCOW, Oct 18: The Clinton administration threw US support Thursday behind Russian President Boris Yeltsin's firing of his maverick security chief Alexander Lebed. It said allegations that the retired general was planning a coup appear unsupported, reports AP.

"I think those were overblown," visiting US Defence Secretary William Perry said of the accusations against Lebed.

Perry, who was in the Russian capital when Yeltsin dismissed Lebed, joined other top US officials in saying the Kremlin power struggle would not alter the relationship between Russia and the United States.

Yeltsin acted hours after an emergency government meeting of security chiefs, called because Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov, who runs the nation's police, had accused Lebed of plotting a mutiny.

"US-Russian relations are stable and, in fact, quite good," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said in Washington. He said that Perry was told "a couple of minutes ahead of time" that Yeltsin was about to fire Lebed.

The advance notice enabled Perry to cancel a meeting with Lebed that was scheduled for about the time Yeltsin announced his dismissal.

US on sacking of Alexander Lebed Kremlin power struggle won't alter ties between two states

would be kept on Kremlin developments.

"It will be very important to wait and see where the various pieces fall, and how and in what way the government will, if necessary, substitute for Mr. Lebed or otherwise deal with what may be a potential vacuum for a while with his absence," said Ambassador Thomas Pickering.

"He's been a considerable force in Russian internal politics, we'll have to wait and see what this particular event produces," Pickering added.

The surprise sacking of Lebed caught a delegation of US top defence officials and senators off guard. The announcement came as Perry met reporters to discuss his testimony earlier Thursday to Russia's lower house of Parliament.

Perry's eyebrow raised a bit as he was handed a note about Lebed resigning. President Boris Yeltsin had just made the announcement on Russian television, Perry was told.

Perry immediately asserted that the development would not change what he described as the "strong and growing" defence relationship between the United States and Russia. The defence secretary's mission in Russia was to continue a series of meetings with the new defence minister, Igor Rodionov, and urge Russian lawmakers to support ratification of the START II arms control treaty.

"I don't see any fundamental change in the US-Russia relationship as a result of this development," he said. Perry said he had not gone through with an expected meeting with Lebed. Given the troubles Lebed had encountered in recent days "it did not seem wise" to schedule such a session, the defence secretary said.

Subway gas attack Asahara bears all responsibility

TOKYO, Oct 18: The guru of a Japanese cult now on trial for masterminding last year's Tokyo subway gas attack said on Friday he bore all responsibility for the tragedy, reports Reuter.

"Regarding this case, I would like to shoulder all responsibility," Shoko Asahara suddenly told the judge at the Tokyo District Court during cross examination of one of his top disciples. "Please stop questioning him."

It was the first time Asahara, head of the Aumshinri Kyo (supreme truth sect), had publicly admitted to the March 20, 1995 attack, which killed 11 people and made some 6,000 ill.

Asahara was arrested in May 1995 and has been indicted on 17 charges ranging from murder and attempted murder in the subway attack to illegal production of drugs and weapons. He faces the death penalty if convicted.

Asahara made his surprise admission during questioning by his defence lawyers of Yoshihiro Inoue, the guru's top lieutenant in the subway attack. Since his arrest, Inoue has spoken out against Asahara, saying the guru directly ordered the attack.

Lebed denied the allegations against him as nonsense, but the national security chief has the national security chief has the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include former Warsaw Pact members.

Leberman, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, pointed out that the defence secretary had met earlier in the day with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. The prime minister gives every evidence that there is "a very stable