

AI alleges killings, torture in Zaire

Canada discloses formation of multinational force for C Africa

OTTAWA, Nov 30: Canada on Friday announced the formal establishment of a multinational force that will bring humanitarian aid to Central Africa, reports AFP.

More than 20 countries have offered to supply personnel, finance or other assistance. But the coalition could not officially begin operations until its mandate was approved by a 14-nation steering committee, which met here Friday.

Paul Heinbecker, the senior Canadian official who chaired the steering committee, which is made up of the largest contributors to the multinational mission, said the group formally approved the establishment of a multinational force with headquarters in Entebbe, Uganda.

The steering board will now be responsible for making op-

erational decisions on the recommendation of Canadian lieutenant general Maurice Baril, who is the multinational force's commander.

That committee will in the future hold its meetings in New York and report to the UN Security Council, said Heinbecker.

While Heinbecker said no decision on airdrops or other methods for helping the refugees would be made until Baril had assessed the situation in the field planning for airdrops had already started.

"Today we are putting into place the capacity for airdrops," said Heinbecker.

Asked how the decision-making process will operate, Heinbecker replied: "The situation is that (Baril) will make his recommendations to us (the steering board)."

He said the decisions taken Friday meant that "now the multinational force is constituted... now the international force exists."

Technically, until now, the troops in Entebbe and other parts of the region were not part of a UN-sanctioned force and Baril had no formal command over them.

Friday's decision paves the way for the establishment of the military headquarters in Entebbe, he said, a task which should be completed "within a few days."

Members of the steering board, which Heinbecker described as the "major contributors, are: Belgium, Cameroon (as the current president of the Organisation for African Unity), France, Ireland (as current president of the European Union), Italy, Japan (which

Heinbecker said would be contributing money but no troops for the mission), Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Britain, the United States, Uganda and Canada.

AP adds, Zairian soldiers as well as rebels are killing, torturing and detaining civilians nationwide. Amnesty International said Friday.

Herve Berger of the London-based human rights group said abuses were taking place in eastern Zaire, throughout the interior and in the capital, Kinshasa. He accused foreign governments of indifference to the violence.

The report was the latest in a series of such allegations to emerge since rebels began fighting Zairian soldiers and Hutu militiamen in eastern Zaire this fall.



Cuban President Fidel Castro (C) is surrounded by French actor Gerard Depardieu (L) and the President of the French Federation of Managers and Businesses, Gerard Bourgoin (R) late on Friday in Havana, Cuba, during a ceremony that Castro offered his guests.

Sunnis demand dismissal of Sindh minister

KARACHI, Nov 30: Three vehicles were torched in stray incidents here today as Muslim fundamentalists protested against a member of the Ahmadi sect being made a provincial minister in Pakistan, witnesses said, reports AFP.

The city largely ignored a strike call by the Sunni Tehrik, an organisation of radical Sunni Muslims, but minor incidents of violence among groups of demonstrators were reported from some parts.

The Tehrik (movement) is demanding dismissal of Kanwar Idrees from a ministerial post in the southern province of Sindh because he belongs to the minority Ahmadi sect.

Ahmadiis in Pakistan lost their legal status as Muslims when the parliament in 1974 declared them a non-Muslim sect for not subscribing to the Muslim belief that Hazrat Mohammed (SM) was the last Prophet.

Several other religious bodies have also staged demonstrations in the city.

BRIEFLY

Mother Teresa's condition stable:

Mother Teresa was stable and cheerful Saturday morning, a day after artery surgery that doctors said saved her life, AP reports from Calcutta.

The pumping action of the 86-year-old Catholic nun's heart began to improve immediately after the angioplasty, which involved inflating tiny balloons in two major arteries to clear blockages, improving the flow of blood. Mother Teresa slept well Friday night following the two-hour surgery and was in stable condition Saturday morning, said S K Tewari, a spokesman for the BM Birla Heart Research Centre.

Jacques Chirac turns 64: President Jacques Chirac yesterday won a present of a 12th century terracotta statuette from his friends on his 64th birthday, reported Agence France Presse, Xinhua says from Paris.

The statuette, which is on the form of an animal, is originally from the bank of river Niger in Mali and was made during the time of Djenné Kingdom. The friends of the French President gave him on his birthday last year a statuette from Colombia, which was made by the Maya Indians before the arrival of European colonialists in South America.

Fahd, Perry hold talks on security: US Defence Secretary William Perry held talks on Saturday with Saudi Arabia's King Fahd on Gulf security and protection for American troops as US forces remained on high alert for any attacks in the kingdom, Reuters reports from Riyadh.

"They met for about forty minutes. The focus of the discussion was force protection measures," a senior defence official told reporters. Two bombings have killed 24 American troops in Saudi Arabia in the past year. "They also reviewed the security situation in the region, including Iran and Iraq," said the official who asked not to be identified.

5 trapped in Turkish mine mishap: An underground explosion in a private coal mine trapped five miners Friday evening near the central Anatolian city of Cankiri, a municipality worker said early Saturday, AP reports from Cankiri.

"Rescue workers rushed to the scene," city employee Ahmet Ozbek told The Associated Press by telephone from Cankiri. Details were not immediately available. Ozbek suggested that methane gas leak might have caused the explosion in the mine 190 kilometres (118 miles) northeast of Ankara.

'Passion', 'Stanley' awarded in London: Stephen Sondheim's "Passion," a critically acclaimed Broadway flop that lost money in its British debut earlier this year, was named Best Musical Friday at the Evening Standard Drama Awards honouring the season's best theatre, AP reports from London.

"It's heartbreaking for a show to lose every penny," producer Bill Kenwright said of the Sondheim musical, which he had backed on the West End. But, Kenwright added jubilantly, "I'm one of those strange people who actually love awards." Pam Gems' "Stanley," a Royal National Theatre production about English painter Stanley Spencer, was cited as best play. An American production has been mooted for Broadway next year.

12 drowned in Vietnam: Twelve people, mostly women and children, were feared dead after a passenger and cargo river boat capsized in Vietnam's central province of Quang Nam da Nang, the Lao Dong newspaper said yesterday, Reuters reports from Hanoi.

Provincial officials were not available to comment on the report, which said the accident occurred on the Thanh river last Tuesday after the captain fell overboard with the vessel's rudder. "The people in the boat were scared and made the boat turn upside down," Lao Dong said.

EU to fight against child porno trade: The 15 European Union nations agreed Friday to jointly combat the sexual exploitation of children by pursuing producers, vendors, distributors and owners of pornographic materials that feature youngsters, AP reports from Brussels.

The initiative was proposed by Belgium, which has been shocked in recent months by revelations of a child sex ring believed responsible for the murders of four young girls and the disappearance of half a dozen others. The EU justice ministers agreed to step up the fight against trade in child porno materials by imposing minimum penalties across the EU.

Eggs thrown at Milosevic's office
Serbian opposition rises on popular discontent

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, Nov 30: Balancing in a fourth-floor window with a loudspeaker in one hand and waving to the crowd with the other, opposition leader Zoran Djindjic tells cheering supporters, "Dictatorship will end if we hang on."

But after 12 days of demonstrations against President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, many wonder if peaceful marches can topple the Balkan strongman.

Djindjic and other opposition leaders face a tough dilemma: allow protest to fizzle, or let it turn violent.

If violence does occur, "the blame won't be on us," said Djindjic, at 44 the youngest leader of Serbia's opposition coalition, Zajedno, or Together.

"One must be aware that this energy isn't generated only by anger over election fraud. It is generated by empty stomachs and people's general discontent," Djindjic said, referring to the protest and the ruin brought by years of funding war and mismanaging the state-owned economy.

Talk like that has won Djindjic support recently, particularly among young Serbs who thought they had elected him Belgrade's first non-Communist mayor since 1945 — until Milosevic's courts annulled the results of November 17 elections won by the opposition in the capital and several other

large towns.

Meanwhile gaining momentum from daily protests, demonstrators pelted the offices of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic with red paint and eggs, chanting: "Red Bandits and Thieves."

In what appeared to be the biggest of 12 straight days of rallies, more than 100,000 people jeered, booed and set off firecrackers every time.

UNIFIED NATIONS, Nov 30: The United States on Friday ruled out any compromise extending the tenure of UN chief Boutros Boutros-Ghali as pressure mounted on African leaders to submit new candidates or risk having the post go to a non-African, reports AP.

The Security Council met late Friday behind closed doors to discuss the election of a new secretary-general but no vote was taken. The council would like to forward a name to the 185-General Assembly by December 17.

Council President Nugroho Wisnumurti of Indonesia said he asked the Organisation of African Unity to tell the council when it expected to finish its consultations on alternative candidates for the top UN post.

During the council meeting, diplomats said US Ambassador Madeleine Albright urged the Africans to "stop dilly-dallying" and submit new candidates to break the impasse caused when the United States cast the lone veto of the 74-year-old Egyptian incumbent.

"The United States position has been very clear from the very beginning," Albright said after the meeting. "We have said that we need a new secretary-general and it is our position that no compromise formula is acceptable."

The United States has accused Boutros-Ghali of not pursuing reform aggressively enough.

Govt-rebels to sign peace accord in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone, Nov 30: Sierra Leone's president and the rebel army leader will sign an accord Saturday to end a five-year civil war, government officials said, reports AP.

The accord was reached after months of talks between Sierra Leone President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah and rebel leader Foday Sankoh.

President Henri Konan Bedie of Ivory Coast, who hosted peace talks in Abidjan earlier this year, will oversee the signing there, a Bedie spokesman said. A UN official in Sierra Leone confirmed the plan.

Both sides have been under pressure to end the war, which has killed more than 10,000 people and derailed the country's once-lucrative mining industry.

Sankoh's ragtag Revolutionary United Front has been beset by defections and overpowered by foreign troops — particularly south African mercenaries from a company known as Executive Outcomes — who were aiding the government.

Kabbah has been under pressure to sign a peace accord and end the government's contract with Executive Outcomes, which was costing about \$1.8 million a month.

Romania's new president sworn in

BUCHAREST, Nov 30: Seven years after a bloody revolution, Romania completed its first democratic transfer of power when geology professor Emil Constantinescu was sworn in as president, reports AP.

Constantinescu promised Romania's 23 million people a future of peace and prosperity. But he cautioned that hard times lay ahead as the Balkan country shakes off its Communist legacy.

"We have the responsibility to build a state of law in the real sense of the word," he said. The institutions of our state have to learn a great lesson, that of serving our citizens."

The president, 57, who has never held elected office, beat former Communist Ion Iliescu comfortably in a Nov. 17 runoff.

Iliescu took over during the Christmas 1989 uprising when Nicolae Ceausescu was toppled and killed. Iliescu won free elections in 1990 and 1992, but approached change slowly.

Iliescu and his leftist Social Democracy Party were hurt by corruption, and by skepticism that they had never truly broken with Communist thinking.

Floods claim 13 in Philippines

MANILA, Nov 30: At least 13 people have died while 13 others were still missing and feared dead in flash floods and landslides caused heavy rains in southern Philippines in the past few days, local press reported today, says Xinhua.

The reports said 13 persons died and nine others were unaccounted for after several houses were buried by landslides in the town of Pandan in Catanduanes province.

The Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council has requested the national police and the air force to rush helicopters to the island province to ferry much-needed foodstuffs and medicine to the affected areas.

UN Secretary General warns Israel's settlement expansion plan threat to ME peace.

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 30: Israel's drive to expand settlements in the occupied territories poses a "serious threat" to the Middle East peace process, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali warned Friday, reports AFP.

In a speech here on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, the UN chief said that "the proposed construction of new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza poses a serious threat to the continuation of the peace process."

He called on both Israel and the Palestinians to abide by agreements reached, and for them to make "tangible progress" towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in line with UN resolutions.

Pointing to the results of the peace process so far, notably the establishment of an elected Palestinian administration in Gaza and parts of the West Bank, Boutros-Ghali said it is now of the utmost importance not to dissipate those achievements.

Boutros-Ghali's speech came

as the UN General Assembly was due to begin its annual debate on Palestinian issues later in the day. The debate annually produces a series of resolutions critical of Israel.

On Wednesday, 126 states in the UN committee responsible for transmitting the draft resolutions to the assembly voted to endorse a text calling for an end to the expansion of Israeli settlements.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's comments this week in favour of the continued expansion has triggered mounting criticism.

On Friday, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warned that the danger represented by the expansion of settlements in the occupied Arab territories is that such activities hinder the peace process and are against all efforts in that direction," according to the official newspaper Al-Ahram.

Reuters adds: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, in a message to a UN body, accused the Israeli government on Friday of "intransigence, procrastination and circumvention."

He called on the international community to induce Israel to comply with agreements already signed. The object was to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right of self-determination and to "establish an independent state with its capital at Jerusalem."

Arafat's message was read by the Palestine Liberation Organisation's UN observer, Nasser al-Kidwa, at a meeting of the UN committee on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The day is observed annually on November 29, corresponding to the date in 1947 when the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, which Arab countries rejected at the time.

Also taking part in the meeting were Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council and representatives of other bodies and UN delegations.

Britain renews offer to help end LTTE conflict

COLOMBO, Nov 30: Britain has once again offered to help end Sri Lanka's bitter Tamil separatist war and has expressed concern over human rights abuses here, the British High Commission (embassy) said Friday, reports AFP.

The British minister responsible for relations with Sri Lanka, Liam Fox told Britain's Parliament on Wednesday that the government was willing to mediate in talks if both the Colombo government and the Tamil Tiger rebels asked for such a move, it said.

The British High Commissioner here in a statement said that Fox reiterated Britain's offer to play a facilitating role

in talks between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) if both sides request it.

The remark came as the Tiger supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran announced that they were rejecting conditional talks offered by the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"While issuing statements that she is prepared for talks with the LTTE through third party mediation, she also laid down ridiculous conditions that we should surrender arms before talks."

"No liberation movement with self-respect could accept such humiliating conditions,"

Prabhakaran said in his address to mark the end of ceremonies to commemorate thousands of LTTE cadres killed in action.

Prabhakaran, who is Sri Lanka's most wanted man, said he was not opposed to negotiations but did not expect success.

"History has not recorded any liberation struggle that has won without fighting, without bloodshed, without death and destruction, without sacrifices."

"Therefore let us struggle. Let us struggle with unfailing determination until we drive the occupation army from our soil, until we achieve the liberation of our nation," he said.



Iraqis hold a portrait of President Saddam Hussain in Baghdad Thursday celebrating the acceptance of the UN conditions for the implementation of the humanitarian arrangement, the oil-for-food deal, which was reached on Monday.

Off the Record

Clinton family featured in the greetings card

CLEVELAND: For the third year, artist Thomas McKnight has designed President and Mrs. Clinton's official Christmas card, featuring the Clinton cat, socks, resting on a chair in the Green Room of the White House, reports AP.

McKnight, known for his homespun, whimsical style, designed the Clintons' 1994 holiday card featuring the Red Room, and the 1995 card showing the Blue Room.

"I have to say there's not too much you can do differently," McKnight said, referring to similarities in style to past years.

Sending greeting cards is a common practice around Christmas time in the United States. The 300,000 presidential greeting cards are being produced by the Cleveland-based American Greetings Corp, which announced McKnight's selection as designer Friday. The Democratic National Committee is paying an undisclosed price for the cards.

Neither the president, nor First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, nor their daughter Chelsea, are depicted in the card. The family cat, socks, is shown resting on a chair, and in a flourish of artistic license, the artist's dog, shadow — not a White House resident — is shown among the presents under the Christmas tree.

'Baywatch' stars for saving of real-life ocean

LOS ANGELES: A couple of "Baywatch" beach adventurers turned up on the sand to support the saving of a real-life ocean, reports AP.

"The cast of 'Baywatch' is very in tune with coastal preservation," Traci Bingham said Wednesday at Will Rogers State Beach, where the show is often filmed.

"While it may look great on camera, sometimes the water is really filthy."

Actor Ted Danson's environmental group, American Oceans Campaign, recruited Bingham and fellow "Baywatch" player Jeremy Jackson to help promote new designer license plates. Proceeds for the plate sales will be used to underwrite coastal preservation efforts.

Fergie to host her own show

NEW YORK: America's crowded field of daytime talk show hosts may face some royal competition, reports AP.

The former Sarah Ferguson is fielding offers to be host of her own show, said her spokesman, Howard Rubenstein. The Duchess of York is also considering other opportunities in television and as a corporate spokeswoman, he said.

"She's had offers of all kinds," Rubenstein said Wednesday, adding that her show could begin in 1997.

Fergie, 37, who was divorced from Prince Andrew in May, toured the country this month to promote her autobiography. Her appearance with the popular nighttime host David Letterman, among other things, led to a surge of offers.

"What would make Fergie a good talk show host? She has a terrific sense of humour," Rubenstein said. "She's quick. Her spontaneity is amazing... She's demonstrated she's a very real person."

Holy water can harm rather than heal

LONDON: Holy Water can harm rather than heal, a British study has found, reports AP.

And at least two hospitals now sterilise the water — taken from Catholic religious shrines abroad and carried carefully home in small bottles — before letting relatives give it to patients, the hope is it will speed recovery.

"The problem is how people use it," said Linda Parsons, the nurse of charge of infectious control at Wiston Hospital in northwest England.

"They apply it to eyes, they anoint wounds, some drink it, and all those sort of things provide a serious risk to the patient," she told the AP.

Wiston, near Liverpool which has a large Catholic population, and another north England hospital, the Royal Preston, issued guidelines about Holy Water to staff at the beginning of the year.

NASA planning manned mission to Mars

LONDON, Nov 30: The US space agency NASA is working on plans to send astronauts to Mars within eight years of getting the political go-ahead for a manned mission, the head of the team was quoted as saying on Friday, reports Reuters.

Eric McHenry told the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) the agency assigned a secret team of three scientists to the project after announcing earlier this year there was evidence, traces of

primitive life had been found in a meteorite from Mars.

Team leader McHenry told the BBC's newsnight programme: "Our goal is to do enough technology work that when we are asked to initiate a human programme we could have humans on the surface of Mars within eight years or less."

The BBC said in a news release that the team was based at the Johnson Space Centre in Houston, Texas.

Officially, it said, NASA, claimed that manned flights were not on the agenda and was relying on robots to find out more about the earth's closest neighbour in the Solar system.

But NASA astronaut and moonshot veteran John Young told the programme: "Human beings are great explorers... and it's about time that we started looking around for better ways and making the progress we need to exploring the Solar system with human beings."

"That's our next goal... not because we want to really, but because we have to."

NASA is due to launch its Pathfinder mission on Monday, which is designed to take a Mars rover to the planet to look for signs of current or previous life.

A complementary mission to put a global surveyor satellite in orbit round the planet blasted off earlier this month.

Pressure mounting on Africans to submit new candidates for UN secy gen

three years, to avoid a leadership crisis in the financially troubled world organisation.

But Albright said the Clinton Administration wanted a change in UN leadership "for the United States to fully support the United Nations and get a United Nations that is ready for the 21st century."

African diplomats said the council should not bend to the will of a single member — meaning the United States. Diplomats speaking on condition of anonymity described the closed-door session as "Occasionally tense."

After the United States vetoed the Egyptian incumbent for a second term November 19, council members agreed to give African countries time to submit new candidates from their continent.

African leaders endorsed Boutros-Ghali at their summit last July in Yaounde, Cameroon. African ambassadors say they must stick by Boutros-Ghali until their governments tell them to do otherwise.

Botswana's ambassador, Legwaila J. Legwaila, said it takes time to consult 53 African presidents and reach a consensus on a new candidate.

"All we can tell you is we have been saying since the 19th of November that we are all engaged in electing a secretary-general," Legwaila said. "The most dangerous thing you can do is elect a secretary-general of the United Nations in a hurry."

But other council members are frustrated. Wisnumurti met Friday night with Cameroon's acting ambassador, Jean-

March Mpay, and told the him the members wanted to know when the chairman of the OAU, Cameroon President Paul Biya, expected to finish his consultations.

"I am very much concerned about the slow pace," Wisnumurti told reporters. "Pressure for opening the door to candidates from other regions is there. I can feel it."

To prod the council, General Assembly President Razali Ismail said last week that he plans to adjourn the body December 17 for the Christmas and New Years holidays.

That effectively gives the council little more than two weeks to find a candidate acceptable to such varied member governments as the United States, Russia, China and France.

Legwaila asked "why should Africa be asked to make up its mind on such-and-such a date or else? We are ready to live up to our responsibilities."

Wisnumurti said some undisclosed governments had told him they would like to see the door opened to candidates from other regions if the Africans cannot agree on a replacement for Boutros-Ghali.

But China is expected to veto any candidate who is unacceptable to the Africans. Apart from China and the United States, three other permanent council members — Britain, France, and Russia — hold veto powers.

Many UN diplomats suspect that French-speaking African countries are waiting until next week's summit of France and French-speaking African leaders in Burkina Faso.