

Tripura Tiger Force kills 25 villagers

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 13: Tribal separatists Friday shot dead at least 25 villagers sleeping at a market in the north-eastern Indian state of Tripura, officials said, reports AFP.

The gunmen belonging to the outlawed All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) stormed Kalyanpur village about 100 kilometres (62 miles) from Agartala, the state capital, and opened indiscriminate fire.

Tripura Home Minister Samar Choudhury said over the telephone that the attack took place around 3:00 am (2130 GMT Thursday).

As it was early morning most of the villagers could not react and the casualty was high, he said.

Police sources said the death toll could go up as many of the 15 injured were in serious condition. Some had been taken to hospitals in Agartala.

Choudhury said police and paramilitary forces had been rushed to the massacre site to track down the militants, who escaped after the attack.

It was the worst massacre in the region since tribal guerrillas clad in combat uniform in the nearby state of Nagaland

gunned down 30 bus passengers on December 9. That attack was blamed on Naga tribals.

The ATTF, which is campaigning to secede tiny Tripura from India, has been blamed for the death of more than 1,000 people in recent years. Most of its victims have been non-tribals.

Lankan PVT radio station starts broadcasting live on Internet

COLOMBO, Dec 13: A private radio station in Sri Lanka has started broadcasting live on the Internet to become the country's first network to go global, the company said today, reports AFP.

Telshan Network (private) Limited (TNL) said its full service is now available live on the worldwide web and was open to requests from listeners from any part of the world.

The response to our test transmissions from listeners on the web have been tremendous," TNL executive director Niraj Wickremesinghe said.

New US immigration law restricts student visas

WASHINGTON, Dec 13: A new amendment to the US immigration law which took effect recently will require foreign students who wish to attend public secondary schools in the United States to show proof of tuition payment before they can be granted a visa, reports USIS.

The new "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996," which took effect November 30, 1996, includes provisions affecting the issuance of F-1 visas to students coming to the US to attend elementary school (grades kindergarten through 8), public secondary school (grades 9 to 12), and publicly funded adult education programmes, such as foreign language classes.

In the US, schools which are subsidised at the state and local levels are called public schools.

The US consular officers overseas are no longer able to issue the F-1 visas for public elementary school studies or publicly funded adult education programmes. Officers may issue F-1 visas limited to no more than 12 months of public high school if the applicant demonstrates that he/she has reimbursed the school authority for the unsubsidised per capita cost

of education for the intended period of study.

However, these revisions do not apply to foreign students who wish to attend private schools or to any student participating in a J-1 exchange visitor programme. Also, the provisions do not affect dependents of other categories of visa holders visiting the US, such as E, H, J and L visa holders.

It is not yet clear what effect, if any, this legislation will have on students who were already in the US before November 30, 1996. But it will no longer be possible for foreign high school students to use the US residence of their relatives for the purpose of attending high school.

If an F-1 student in a private elementary school or publicly funded adult education transfers to a public school or programme, the visa is considered void unless requirements of the time limit (maximum 12 months) and cost conditions are met.

This student provision in Section 625 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, was passed by the US Congress and signed into law by President Clinton on September 30, 1996.

International Blockades around Yangon lifted

US urges Myanmar junta to respect human rights

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 13: Stepping up US pressure on Myanmar military government, US Ambassador Madeleine Albright called Thursday on the regime to respect human rights and permit UN inspectors to monitor civil liberties there, reports AP.

"The more time elapses before these steps are taken, the more the pressure will build, the more divided Burma will become, and the more difficult it will be for Myanmar to achieve a peaceful transition to democratic rule," Albright told the UN General Assembly.

Albright has been named by President Clinton to succeed Warren Christopher as US secretary of state. Her remarks, made after the General Assembly approved a non-binding resolution criticizing Burma for human rights abuses, signalled new pressure on the Burmese military regime.

The resolution was introduced by Sweden.

Albright's remarks were made as a senior Burmese general threatened to "annihilate" anyone who disrupts the military government's work. The remarks by Gen. Tin were published Thursday in state-run newspapers following six days of student protests in the cities of Rangoon and Mandalay.

Thousands of student demonstrators, demanding freedom, human rights, an end to police brutality and the right to form a student union have staged the most serious show of civil dissent since the nationwide democracy uprising of 1988, also sparked by student protests.

During her speech, Albright said the Myanmar government had failed to meet even the most minimum international standards for protecting civil liberties.

"It has subjected democratic

forces to a kind of rolling repression in which small step forward alternate with crack-downs and episodes of intimidation and violence," she said.

Albright said the student demonstrations had been harshly repressed, although they were "non-political in nature."

"The Myanmar authorities would like the world to believe that its harsh policies are necessary in light of Burma's turbulent history and the multi-ethnic nature of Burmese society," Albright said.

Albright said the General Assembly's approval of the resolution on Burma showed that "the world does not accept excuse."

"The right of peoples to participate freely in a democratic political process is an ally — not an enemy — to national unity and social peace," she said.

AFP adds: Myanmar mili-

tary authorities lifted blockades around Yangon yesterday following a week of student protests, but installed five tanks in a key downtown area in an apparent warning against any unrest.

Five tanks were placed overnight behind the gates of the Union Solidarity Development Association adjacent to Sule Pagoda in the center of town, while blockades set up earlier this week across were removed.

Security has been high in the past week in Yangon following a wave of student protests, with a heavy police and troop presence on the streets. However, yesterday the only troops seen downtown were manning the tanks.

Observers said the tanks appeared to have been installed in order to deter any further unrest while security was being relaxed in the capital.

Pressure mounts on France to accept Annan as next UN Secy Gen

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 13: Pressure mounted on France to accept the UN favorite for UN chief Friday after the 58-year-old Ghanaiyan won the support of the 14 other Security Council members as the next secretary-general, reports AP.

The 15-member council met Friday for a fourth day of informal balloting to choose among four Africans nominated as successors to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, an Egyptian vetoed by the United States.

One council ambassador and diplomats from another council member country said they expected the French to withdraw their opposition to UN Undersecretary-General Kofi Annan for the ballot Friday.

A formal vote could then be scheduled as early as Monday. There was no comment from the French. France is a permanent council member and therefore holds veto power along with the other permanent members: the United States, Britain, China and Russia.

The council must choose a new secretary-general and forward the name to the full 185-member General Assembly for ratification before Boutros-Ghali's term expires Dec 31.

Last month, the United States cast the lone veto against Boutros-Ghali, despite strong support from France and the African countries. After the US veto, the council agreed to give preference to African candidates so the continent would hold the post for two terms, as has been customary.

The US, in vetoing Boutros-Ghali, said he had not been aggressive enough in pursuing reform at the United Nations. On Thursday, a French diplomat said on condition of anonymity that France does not believe Annan has the "stature" needed to push through reforms of the world body.

France's favorite, Ivory Coast Foreign Minister Amara Essy, won seven votes Thursday with four opposed, including two permanent members, presumably the United States and Britain.

Milosevic invites OSCE to examine crisis in Belgrade

BELGRADE, Dec 13: Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic has invited a European security organisation to Belgrade to examine the crisis sparked by the government's annulment of opposition election wins, the news agency Tanjug said today, reports AFP.

Milosevic, facing massive daily street protests, extended the invitation to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in a letter to US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, the agency said.

But he insisted that "the claim that Serbian authorities cancelled the election results" was pure "invention".

Up to 100,000 demonstrators have taken to the streets for more than three weeks calling on authorities to recognise the November 17 polls, in which opposition candidates swept to victory over the ruling coalition.

Tanjung citing Milosevic's letter, said a partial rerun was ordered on the basis of "legitimate claims" and was a part of normal legal electoral procedure.

Also Friday, an Indonesian human rights group submitted a letter to OIC secretary-general Hamid Aligabid of Niger calling on the organization to look after the rights of migrant workers.

About 40 women from the



Vice President Al Gore announces on Thursday that US airline executives have voluntarily agreed to install fire detectors in the cargo area of planes. President Clinton (R), Carol Hallett (L), president of the Airline Transport Association, and some of the 15 airline executives who met the President and Vice President listen. Gore said that "with this announcement, virtually all the airlines are saying they're not going to wait for the regulatory process to catch up, they're moving forward on their own." A fire in the cargo area of a ValuJet airliner is believed to have caused the crash in Florida last May that killed 110 people.

UNSC authorises new Bosnian peacekeeping mission

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 13: The UN Security Council on Thursday approved a resolution authorising establishment of the new international peacekeeping force for Bosnia which will replace the mandate for the NATO-led mission, reports AP.

The mandate for the NATO mission expires Dec 20. It was sent to Bosnia to replace the UN peacekeeping force after Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats signed the Dayton peace agreement which ended the three and one-half year war.

Under the resolution approved unanimously, the council authorised member states to establish the multinational

stabilization force, or SFOR, which will remain Bosnia-Herzegovina for 18 months.

The resolution also authorized a UN operation, which includes an international civil police force, to remain in Bosnia for one more year until Dec 21, 1997.

It also noted that the international community cannot continue to support the peace process "without compliance and active participation" by Bosnian leaders in "rebuilding a civil society."

It also underscored the link between financial assistance and the degree of compliance by Bosnian officials with the 1995

agreement which ended the Bosnian war.

Under the resolution, troops of the new stabilization force may "take all necessary measures to defend itself from attack or the threat of attack."

It also "demands" that the Bosnian parties "respect the security and freedom of movement" of the force and "other international personnel."

Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov told the council that the resolution gives preeminence to the civilian aspect of the Bosnian peace accords now that the threat of renewed conflict has diminished.



Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini (2nd R) poses with Serbian opposition leaders, Zoran Djindjic (L), Vesna Pesic (2nd L) and Vuk Draskovic, on Thursday following their meeting in Belgrade. Dini, who held talks earlier with President Slobodan Milosevic, is the first Western politician on an official visit to Yugoslavia since anti-government protests broke out three weeks ago.

Off the Record

Price for bid to marry forcibly

NEW DELHI: A postal employee in southern India had his hands severed by the parents of a girl he forcibly tried to marry, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported on Friday, reports AFP.

The girl's parents tied the man to a tree at a village in Tamil Nadu state Wednesday then severed his hands after warning neighbours to keep away, the news agency said.

The man remained tied to the tree till ... police rescued him and rushed him to a hospital, PTI said.

The parents had not been arrested at the time of the report.

Wheat harvest in space!

WASHINGTON: The first wheat harvest in space was carried out recently aboard the Russian space station Mir with the help of US astronaut John Blaha, NASA said Thursday, reports AFP.

The harvest was part of project greenhouse, an experiment using 32 grains of super-dwarf wheat growing under conditions of microgravity in space, the US space agency said.

"Successful growth of the wheat crop through all development phases, culminating in the harvest of seeds, demonstrates that the environment of space poses no obstacles to the biological components of a regenerative life support system," said NASA researcher David Bubenheim.

White doves in export list

HAIKOU: Some 20,000 pairs of white doves from the United States have made their nests in Hainan, China's largest special economic zone, and more are on the way, reports Xinhua.

The doves were imported by the Hainan Haiyang Industrial Corporation in its effort to build a large bird-breeding farm.

The 15-hectare farm is being built with a total investment of 19 million yuan.



Director Tim Burton waves as he arrives with friend Lisa Marie for the premiere of his new film, "Mars Attacks" on Thursday in Hollywood, California. The comedy, which stars Jack Nicholson and Glenn Close, is about a visit to Earth by creatures from Mars.

Congress (I) warns United Front govt won't be able to complete its term

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: India's Congress (I) party warned today that the country's minority United Front government would not be able to complete its five-year term expiring in 2001, reports AFP.

But the Congress, which props up the six-month-old coalition, admitted that it would not be able to form an alternative government as it lacks the necessary support in parliament.

"This government will not last its five years. That much we are certain," Congress spokesman Vithal Gadgil told AFP.

"It could fall under the weight of its own contradictions or we could withdraw our support to it," he said. "These are two possible scenarios that we can visualise."

But Gadgil said the 111-year-old Congress, the second largest group in the national parliament after Hindu nationalists, was in no position to take power if the present government fell.

"If we did, it would be unstable," he said. "Because we would need the support of about 100 members (of parliament) from other parties to form a government and run it. It won't work."

'Dostum ready to take part in truce talks with Taliban'

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: Northern Afghan leader General Abdul Rashid Dostum told a UN envoy on Thursday that his militia was ready to take part in proposed ceasefire talks with the radical Islamic Taliban Movement, reports Reuters.

A UN official said Dostum signalled willingness during talks with UN special envoy Norbert Holl in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif to nominate a representative to a proposed six-man commission to work out details of a truce.

No other details of the talks were immediately available.

Holl, who received a similar assurance of cooperation from ousted government military Chief Ahmad Shah Masood on Sunday, hopes to meet Taliban leaders in the southern city of Kandahar in the next few days, a UN source said.

Holl is trying to convene a ceasefire working group comprising with three Taliban representatives and three from an alliance composed of factions loyal to Masood, Dostum and

Shi'ite Muslim leader Karim Khalili.

It would discuss details of a ceasefire, demilitarisation of Kabul and formation of a neutral Afghan security force to control the capital after rival forces pulled back.

Holl has said in the past that all factions agree in principle to a ceasefire, but not on the details.

The forces of Masood and Dostum are battling the Taliban militia north of Kabul and in the northwestern province of Badkhis, but neither side has gained a clear military advantage.

The Taliban captured Kabul on September 27, forcing the former government led by President Burhanuddin Rabbani to flee and prompting Masood and Dostum to drop their old enemy and form an anti-Taliban alliance.

The Taliban wants to extend its strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law throughout Afghanistan.

Jamaat threatens to boycott coming polls in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: The chief of Pakistan's main fundamentalist party on Thursday threatened to boycott the coming election if corrupt politicians were allowed to contest the polls, reports AFP.

"We will not take part in the election if the same corrupt people come forward," Qazi Hussain Ahmed of the Jamaat-i-Islami Party told a news conference.

Ahmed said his party's top council would meet on December 26 to decide whether it should participate in the February 3 election in the prevailing circumstances.

OIC calls for pressure on Israel to end ME peace process

JAKARTA, Dec 13: Declaring Palestinian self-rule "the prime cause of all Muslims," a meeting of Islamic governments called Friday for international pressure on Israel to take further steps toward a Mideast peace settlement, reports AP.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference said that if the peace process breaks down, its 54 member nations should reconsider any plans to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel.

A statement issued at the end of a five-day conference of OIC foreign ministers criticized Israel for failing to complete its promised pullout from the city of Hebron, the last step in turning over control of the West

Bank to Palestinians.

The OIC, founded in 1972 to press for Israel to return occupied Arab territories, includes Egypt and other governments that have relations with Israel, as well as countries such as Malaysia that don't.

The Israeli government of hardline Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has delayed the return of Hebron, which was to occur last March, out of concern for the safety of 500 Jewish settlers who live among the city's 130,000 Palestinians.

The conference reaffirmed that the Palestinian cause is the prime cause of all Muslims, said a draft copy of the statement distributed to reporters before the conference's closing session.

It called for US and European pressure to "compel Israel to implement the agreements on the withdrawal of its troops ... (and) enter into serious negotiations on the final status of the Palestinian territories."

The OIC called for pressure on Israel to give up east Jerusalem, claimed by the Palestinians as their capital, and make progress in talks on returning Lebanese and Syrian territories captured in war.

Israel has occupied Syria's Golan Heights since the 1970s and a swath of southern Lebanon since the 1980s to ward off attacks on its northern border.

Israeli-Syrian peace talks stalled in February. Tensions have escalated since Netanyahu's election in May. Israel's deputy military chief warned this week that its army was ready to repel any attack.

The conference reaffirmed that the continued occupation by Israel of the Syrian Golan constitutes a constant threat to peace and security in the region, the OIC statement said.

The OIC also appealed for an end to fighting in Afghanistan and Somalia and between the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, an OIC member, and Armenia in a dispute over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

It called for an arms embargo on Afghanistan, where 20

peace missions sent by the group have failed to end a civil war that erupted between Islamic factions after a Communist regime was overthrown in 1992. The group said its diplomatic efforts would continue.

Afghanistan is an OIC member, but its seat at the conference was left empty after the group refused to choose between two rival factions claiming to represent the country.

Also Friday, an Indonesian human rights group submitted a letter to OIC secretary-general Hamid Aligabid of Niger calling on the organization to look after the rights of migrant workers.

About 40 women from the

Western hostages Kashmir admin announces reward for information

SRINAGAR, India, Dec 13: The Kashmir administration today announced a reward of one million Rupees (28,500 dollars) for information on four Western tourists abducted by Muslim separatists last year, reports AFP.

The state government said any one providing information which leads to the whereabouts of all or any of the four would be eligible for the reward.

Hutchings, Britons Paul Wells and Keith Mangan and German Dirk Hasert were kidnapped by Muslim militants while trekking in the Pahalgam district of Kashmir.