

International

China votes in favour

UNSC to send troops to Guatemala

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 21: The UN Security Council voted unanimously Monday to send a UN force to oversee Guatemala's moves toward peace, hours after China dropped its opposition to the mission, reports AP.

The resolution dispatches 155 military observers to verify the disarmament and demobilisation of Marxist rebels under the peace pact signed last month.

The mission is "one of the most crucial elements of Guatemala's transition to peace and reconciliation," Secretary-General Kofi Annan said after the vote.

China vetoed the mission Jan. 10 because Guatemala strongly supports Taiwanese membership in the United Nations and invited a Taiwanese delegation to the treaty signing ceremony. China regards Taiwan as a renegade province.

It was not immediately known what concessions each side may have made in reaching agreement early Monday.

The dispute between China and Guatemala underscored the depths of China's feelings about Taiwan, and showed Beijing's willingness to flex its muscle to isole it.

Guatemalan and Chinese officials, along with representatives from nations that helped broker the peace — the United States, Venezuela, Norway, Colombia, Mexico and Spain — had been meeting for the past week to salvage the mission to monitor the Dec. 29 Guatemalan accord ending 36 years of civil war.

The Chinese had said they would reconsider their objections to the mission only if Guatemala stopped pushing for a Taiwanese seat at the United Nations and cooled relations with Taiwan.

Guatemala receives considerable investment from Taiwan and has maintained diplomatic relations with Taipei for more than 40 years.

Addressing the council before the vote, China's ambassador, Qin Huasun, welcomed the "constructive move taken by Guatemala" to resolve the impasse, but gave no details.

Guatemala's UN ambassador, Julio Armando Martínez, denied that his country made any concessions to the Chinese but did imply a change in Guatemala's position.

"We recognise that Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations. We will recognise this," he told The Associated Press. "The Chinese recognise that we have the right to follow as close as we decide in our relations with Taiwan. So this will not affect in any sense our relations with Taiwan."

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India eases visa restrictions on Lankan academics, traders

COLOMBO, Jan 21: India has eased visa restrictions on Sri Lankan academics, intellectuals and businessmen with immediate effect, officials here said today, reports AFP.

The announcement was made to coincide with the visit here by India's External Affairs Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, officials said adding that three categories will now qualify for five-year multi-entry visas.

Earlier India adopted strict control over the issue of visas to Sri Lankans and a few categories qualified for six month multi-entry permits.

Officials said that Gujral had also initiated the formation of a Indo-Sri Lanka foundation to foster informal contacts between the two South Asian neighbours.

The Indian minister is due to leave Wednesday at the end of a four day visit during which he co-chaired the third session of the joint commission which is aimed at boosting bilateral trade and cultural ties.

India on Monday announced lifting tariff and quota restrictions on 80 commodities exported from Sri Lanka and invited a delegation from Colombo to work out the details before formalising the deal in April.

Reuter adds, the Sri Lankan military spotted unidentified debris in waters of the Jaffna Peninsula while searching for a missing air force surveillance plane a senior air force official said Tuesday.

But the debris could not be retrieved and the navy and air force resumed their joint search for the Chinese-built Y-12 air-

plane, missing off northern Sri Lanka since early Monday, the official said, the twin propeller aircraft had a crew of four.

They have spied some wreckage, but the light was fast fading at that time (Monday evening) and they were forced to come in. They resumed their search at first light on Tuesday, the officials said.

Air force planes and helicopters joined by navy patrol boats were to continue their search for the plane, last seen about 75 miles (120 km) east of the military's northern Palay Air Base the official added.

The 14-seat aircraft was looking for a suspected Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ship when it lost radio contact with the ground around 5.15 am (2315 GMT) on Monday.

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