

BRIEFLY

3 Azeri coup-plotters sentenced:

Azerbaijan's Supreme Court Tuesday sentenced three men accused of attempting to overthrow the government to heavy jail terms, Interfax News Agency reported. AFP reports from Moscow.

The three Azerbaijanis, arrested a year ago, were alleged to have aided former Prime Minister Suret Huseinov in an abortive coup attempt in October 1994. One of the three, Ilgar Safikhanov, is the former head of the Interpol office in Azerbaijan, Interfax said. He was arrested in Russia and extradited to Baku.

Edn minister resigns in Ecuador:

Ecuador's education minister Sandra Correa resigned on Tuesday hours before congress was expected to impeach her for alleged plagiarism in compiling her law doctorate, Reuter reports from Quito.

Correa was one of the most unpopular ministers in the 6-month-old government of President Abdala Bucaram. Her position became untenable after the central university took away her doctorate because she could not disprove plagiarism. "I resign irrevocably and I will not go to congress this afternoon," she told a news conference at which she blasted the Ecuadorean media for "lending itself to political manipulation."

7 shot dead in Siberia:

Seven people, all dead from gunshot wounds to their heads, were found Tuesday in a country settlement near this western Siberian town, officials said. AP reports from Surout.

District administration officials described the shooting as the gravest crime in the region over the past 18 months, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. Police believe that some of those killed could have been involved in a violent clash between rival criminal groups. The victims also included three settlement guards, who were shot point-blank and apparently had nothing to do with the mob, the report said.

50,000 gather in Belgrade against Milosevic

BELGRADE, Jan 29: Hundreds of riot police blocked the streets of Belgrade as an estimated 50,000 people gathered in the city centre for a 70th straight day of protests against Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, reports AP.

But unlike recent days that have turned violent, police did not intervene in Tuesday night's gathering.

There is no cordon which can stop this Serbia becoming democratic," Vuk Draskovic, one of the leaders of the opposition coalition Zajedno, or Together, told a crowd led by enthusiastic drummers.

Draskovic said the opposition might call for a complete boycott of local government and establish parallel municipal governments unless Milosevic relents and recognises opposition victories in 14 cities, including Belgrade.

"Time is running out, and we can't wait forever.... The fear is great that confrontations might turn into major clashes," Draskovic said.

Over the past four days, police have intervened in the Belgrade protests, clubbing demonstrators and injuring at least 26 of them.

The protests began after Milosevic annulled opposition victories in 14 towns and cities in November 17 local elections. Milosevic has ignored international pressure and daily protests drawing tens of thousands in Belgrade and other towns.

He grudgingly recognised six opposition victories, but his Socialists claim Belgrade and seven other cities won by the opposition.

On Tuesday, riot police clubbed protesters and blocked opposition leaders from city hall in Smedrevska Palanka. Opposition candidates had won elections in the town, 50 miles (80 kms) south of Belgrade.

Police surrounded the town hall Tuesday, while Milosevic's Socialists held the town council's inaugural session.

Opposition deputies were kept outside. Cheered by hundreds of supporters, they held their own assembly in front of the building.

Clinton urges Syria, Israel to resume peace talks

WASHINGTON, Jan 29: President Bill Clinton Tuesday urged Israel and Syria to resume their negotiations and said this will be "a major focus" in his planned talks with Egyptian, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian leaders, reports AFP.

"There will never be a comprehensive peace in the Middle East until we receive this matter with Syria, between Syria and Israel," Clinton said in a White House press conference.

He stressed that it was up to the Israeli and Syrian governments to relaunch the negotiations, interrupted for over a year.

"When both parties want to make peace, no matter how far apart they seem, we find a way to get there," said Clinton. "If, they're not sure it's time to make peace, no matter how close it seems to an outsider, we don't seem to be able to bridge the gap," he continued.

"So you can be sure that will be a major focus of our discussion" he said in reference to talks he plans to hold with middle eastern leaders.

Clinton confirmed that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, King Hussein of Jordan and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak would be coming to Washington in the coming months.

The White House said that Clinton would hold bilateral talks and that there would be no summit involving all five leaders.

The dates of the visits have yet to be announced.

Clinton once again praised the agreement reached last week between Netanyahu and Arafat on the withdrawal of the Israeli army from Hebron and on a timetable for the army's withdrawal from rural areas on the West Bank.

Prithvi-250 to be tested shortly

NEW DELHI, Jan 29: The sources said anti-tank 'Nag' and surface to air 'Akash' missiles were likely to be tested between February and April this year. 'Akash' and 'Nag' would undergo 'user trial' by armed forces after the test flights.

Rebels kill 6 cops in Colombia

BOGOTA, Jan 29: Leftist guerrillas overran a town in a remote region of northwest Colombia early on Tuesday, killing six policemen and taking three medical workers prisoner, a police spokesman said, reports Reuter.

Even though the window for the time frame of testing 'Prithvi-250' has not been finalised it may take place anytime in the next three months.

The authorities at the interim test range near Balasore are already issued a notification for eviction of about 600 people from villages near the test site.

International

Russian opposition hails Chechen elections

Maskhadov ready for talks with Moscow within reasonable limits

GROZNY, Jan 29: Chechnya's president-elect sounded a note of conciliation with Moscow after his victory, saying he is ready to negotiate over his republic's ultimate political status, reports AP.

But Aslan Maskhadov, a firm advocate of Chechen independence, cautioned that he will only compromise within reasonable limits.

Maskhadov, the separatist military chief who negotiated a triumphant end to the war with Russia, insist the Chechens already has won its freedom.

Moscow says it will not tolerate secession, and President Boris Yeltsin made clear Tuesday that Chechnya must remain part of Russia.

Russian newspapers took a wait-and-see attitude Wednesday to the election results, some expressing relief that a man seen as pragmatic and calm had won.

"Moscow is ready to recognise any president when it's not (Shamil) Basayev," wrote Moskovsky Komsomolets, referring to the guerrilla commander who finished a distant second in Monday's election.

Official results are expected later in the week.

Maskhadov in a news conference at his campaign headquarters in Grozny, welcomed his rivals into his administration. Basayev, whom Moscow considers a terrorist for his

Rossiskiye Vesti, the government's newspaper said in a front-page headline: "A new headache for politicians and old troubles and hopes for an ordinary man."

After a 20-month guerrilla war that led to the humiliating withdrawal of Russian troops, Chechens clearly feel they are in a strong negotiating position.

But Moscow is certain to place political, diplomatic and economic pressure on Chechnya, which can expect a struggle to win recognition from the international community.

If the Russians finally decide that they've tried every single method and that the only thing that's left is direct talks, then we are prepared for this," Maskhadov said.

The Russians pulled their last troops from Chechnya less than a month ago, and there is little they can do now to control internal affairs in the southern territory. Chechen separatists have been running the republic since a peace deal negotiated by Maskhadov ended the war in August but postponed a decision on its political status for five years.

1995 hostage-taking in a southern Russian town, was not planning to take a government post, an aide said.

Maskhadov, a former Soviet army officer, also said he wants to make Chechnya an Islamic state and plans to demand war compensation from Russia.

But he acknowledged that Chechnya, which had only 1.2 million people before the war and has fewer now, will need strong economic links with Russia regardless of whether it achieves independence.

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In Moscow, Yeltsin stood firm against Chechen independence. Presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky said the outcome provides hope for productive negotiations. "In determining the status of the Chechen Republic within the Russian federation."

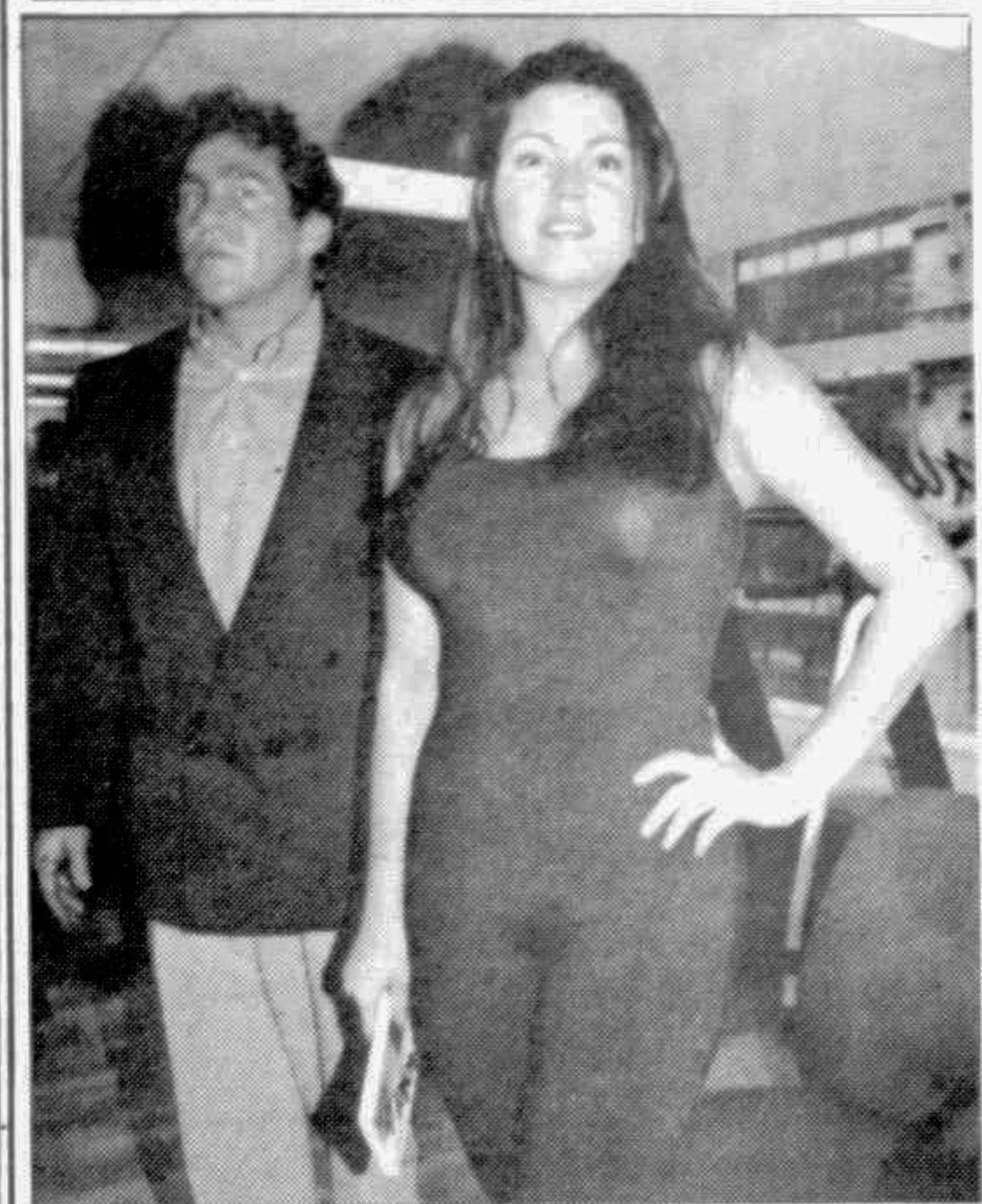
Russian officials and politicians, including the opposition Communists, also voiced hope for a constructive dialogue with Maskhadov.

AFP adds: Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov on Tuesday appeared satisfied by the election of Aslan Maskhadov as the new Chechen president.

The Russian opposition leader described the victor in Monday's Chechnya presidential elections as a moderate politician a soldier who knows the Russian situation well and understands that without Russia Chechnya would not be viable."

Referring to impending talks with the Chechen leadership Zyuganov added "We are going to support a dialogue with him."

Off the Record



Miss Universe, Venezuela's Alicia Machado, poses for photographers before beginning her daily workout routine with personal fitness trainer Edward Jackowski (L) Tuesday in New York. The 19-year-old Machado has come under pressure for gaining weight since winning the 1996 Miss Universe pageant. She claims to have lost five pounds in three days. — AFP/UNB photo

'Benazir's political wounds are deeper than when she lost power in '90'



Deposed prime minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto (R) chats with her mother Nusrat Bhutto during an election rally in her own constituency in Larkana, some 520 kilometers from Karachi, Tuesday. Nusrat appealed the people to vote for her daughter in her first public appearance since the death of her son Murtaza Bhutto.

— AFP/UNB photo.

keeping her chin up, drawing large crowds to turn to her rallies in cities and towns, urging people to back her "battle for democracy."

"People are with me. They have confidence in me," she said at a public meeting in Rawalpindi, Punjab.

She is constantly on the move, by road or by helicopter addressing four to five rallies a day.

Her speeches in Sindhi and Urdu languages are marked by fiery rhetoric and much waving of hands.

"Your sister has come before you. The biggest court is of the masses and I am before you. Be-

nazir told a gathering of farmers in Sindh.

"Leghari though he could keep me away from the electoral process, but come Leghari and see that people even today love Benazir," she said.

"I am not afraid of death. death is in God's hand."

She stood up to military dictator Muhammed Zia Ul Haq after he toppled her father Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in 1977 and sent him to the gallows two years later.

After the dismissal of her first government in 1990 Benazir kept her party intact, bouncing back in the 1993 elec-

tions when she defeated Nawaz Sharif.

Benazir is an iron lady, like Aung San Suu Kyi, said party activist Latif Mughal referring to the Burmese pro-democracy crusader.

However, observers do not rule out her chances highly.

"Everything depends on how many seats and votes she can get from Sindh and Punjab provinces," said political analyst M B Nagvi. "If her vote-bank declines in two provinces there would be no chance for her to come back to the centre no matter what strategy she adopts today," he added.

— AFP/UNB photo.

She is the only remnant of the Temple, the only remnant of the mosque toward the west.

Sheikh Raed Salah of the Islamic Movement in Israel said at a news conference, "This is very dangerous."

Similar accusations in September sparked Israeli-Palestinian clashes that killed 79 people. But those riots came amid widespread Palestinian anger at Israeli foot-dragging on peace.

There has been more trust in recent weeks since Israel withdrew troops from Hebron and committed to more West Bank pullouts.

Israeli officials said no excavations were underway near the mosque and that ancient water tunnels that do not go under the mosque compound were simply being cleaned in preparation for being opened to tourists.

Gidon Avni, chief Jerusalem archaeologist for the Israel Antiquities Authority, said the work had been going on since 1994 with the tacit approval of the Islamic Trust, which administers the mosque.

"They have been notified of every step in this project," he said. "Nothing has been done without their unofficial cooperation."

The Islamic Trust, which is funded by Jordan but reports to Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, did not join in the Islamic Movement's allegations.

The two groups have been jockeying for power over Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem.

Waaf director Adrian Husseini did say, however, that Israel had been making excavations near the mosque and "making unjustified changes."

"We asked them to stop, unfortunately they did not," he

Apple of discord

Because she gave birth to a 6th daughter

TEHRAN: An Iranian man has refused to admit his wife back to their house after learning that she gave birth to a sixth daughter in hospital, a newspaper reported Tuesday, reports AFP.

The man made good on threats he made before her delivery that he would not allow her to come back if the baby happened to be a girl, said the woman, identified by her first name Firuzeh.

She told a court in the northeastern city of Mashad where she filed a suit against her husband for breaking their marriage vow that he had refused to visit her at the hospital after learning about the newborn's sex.

My father had to pay the hospital bills and after being released I went straight to my father's house, she said quoted by Gods newspaper.

Islamic leaders renew claim Israel digging beneath Al Aqsa Mosque

JERUSALEM, Jan 29: Islamic leaders raised new accusations Tuesday that Israel is digging beneath the Al Aqsa mosque, undermining Islam's third holiest site, reports AP.

They are now digging a tunnel from the southeastern edge of the mosque toward the west. Sheikh Raed Salah of the Islamic Movement in Israel said at a news conference, "This is very dangerous."

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old post.

Kieran Prendergast of Britain was appointed head of the Department of Political Affairs. Prendergast succeeds another Briton, Marrack Goulding, and most recently served most recently as Britain's ambassador to Turkey. He was also British high commissioner to Kenya.

No woman was appointed to an undersecretary-general post.

Eckhard said Annan was considering choosing a woman as a deputy secretary-general. Angela King of Jamaica was named special adviser on women's affairs.

Among those reappointed were Nitin Desai of India and Jean Yonghian of China, both as undersecretaries-general. Yasushi Akashi of Japan was reappointed head of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.