

Sharif for reviving peace talks with India

ISLAMABAD, Feb 17: Prime Minister-elect Nawaz Sharif today said he wanted to revive long-stalled peace talks with Pakistan's arch-foe India, but said New Delhi must be willing to let Kashmiris decide their own future, reports Reuters.

"Through dialogue, we should resolve our problems and then move towards prosperity," Sharif told the newly elected National Assembly (lower house) after winning a 177-16 confidence vote.

President Farooq Leghari was due to swear in Sharif as prime minister later today.

"I hope that India will stop atrocities in Kashmir and play its role in giving the right of self-determination to Kashmiri people," he said.

"India will withdraw 500,000 to 600,000 troops from Kashmir that have been shedding the blood of unarmed Kashmiris," Sharif said.

"India should solve the

Kashmir problem through a UN-mandated plebiscite."

Successive Pakistani governments have insisted that the people of mainly Muslim Kashmir be allowed to vote whether to join Islamic Pakistan or Hindu-majority India.

India, which controls two-thirds of the Himalayan region, says Kashmir is an integral part of its territory. India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence in 1947, two of them sparked by tension over Kashmir.

Sharif said India must realise it had to discuss Kashmir if it wanted good neighbourly relations with Pakistan, which he said would be in the interests of both countries.

"Today as much as our economy relies on loans, India is in the same situation, and the problems of our cities, villages and the poor people are the same in India."

"We think that we should

spend most of our income on our people, our development and on our prosperity. India, too, must have the same wish," he said.

"I will take one step forward, and I am sure India will do the same and we can sit down to settle our issues, which are very important for both of us and for South Asia."

Sharif's victory in the February 3 general election has raised hopes that the two countries could soon resume high-level peace talks that were broken off in early 1994 after getting bogged down on the Kashmir dispute.

Indian Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda said on Thursday he favoured fresh talks, but would never relinquish Kashmir.

Pakistan said on Friday that Deve Gowda's offer of talks was pointless unless the subject of Kashmir was on the table.

Disciplinary action against 150 Lankan cops

COLOMBO, Feb 17: The Sri Lankan government has ordered disciplinary action against 150 policemen who opened fire and killed a mourner and wounded hundreds at the funeral of a government MP, officials said today, reports AFP.

The police were being transferred out of the district of Ratnapura, 100 kilometres (60 miles) south east of Colombo after Saturday's riot during the funeral of slain legislator Nalanda Ellawela.

"There are two assistant superintendents and about 10 to 15 inspectors among those who are being sent out of the Ratnapura division," a senior police officer in Ratnapura said.

He said the region's top police was sent out immediately after the killing of Ellawela by gunmen from the opposition United National Party (UNP).

Ellawela's call for police help when he was chased by UNP gunmen, went unheeded, officials said.

28 massacred, 80 arrested so far in Tripura Massive combing operation to track down rebels launched

CALCUTTA, Feb 17: Soldiers enforcing a curfew in the north-east Indian state of Tripura were given sweeping shoot-at-sight orders after at least 28 people died in ethnic violence on Sunday, reports Reuters.

Authorities in the state bordering Bangladesh said 28 Bengali settlers were killed when separatist tribesmen rampaged through three remote villages, setting fire to houses and shooting their inhabitants.

One tribal separatist was killed when police opened fire to control an angry crowd of attackers, they said.

"The situation is really terrible but we hope we can bring it under control in the next few days," Tripura's Chief Secretary V Tusliadas told Reuters by telephone from the state capital Agartala.

State police chief Dilip Deb Barma said: "The death toll may rise, a massive combing operation has been launched under army supervision to track down the militants."

At least 52 people have been killed over the past eight days as the militants of the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) pursued a 17-year campaign for a separate tribal state.

Police said orders had been issued banning gatherings of more than five people in Agartala and neighbouring areas.

The situation is extremely volatile, Tripura's Home Minister Samar Chowdhury told Reuters earlier. "shot-at-sight orders have been issued to contain the violence."

The army and paramilitary reinforcements had been given powers to arrest and detain sus-

pects indefinitely, he said, and the state had imposed an indefinite curfew on the Khowai region after Sunday's killings.

PTI adds: "The situation in Khowai sub-division of west Tripura district was today described as 'peaceful' with no untoward incident reported from any part of the curfew-bound areas, official sources said in Agartala.

The death toll in yesterday's killings by militants and subsequent police firing was officially stated to be 24 but the mouthpiece of the ruling CPI(M), "Daily Desher Katha" put it at 29.

The disturbed area act was promulgated in six police stations' areas of west Tripura district yesterday following a series of violent incidents in the sub-division during the past ten days.

The disturbed area act was imposed for the second time in the state since 1986, an official notification said.

Indefinite curfew in the entire six police stations' areas will continue while army and paramilitary forces have launched massive combing operation in the affected area, sources added.

Police has so far arrested about 80 persons from different areas of Khowai sub-division and has taken 54 persons into preventive custody in Agartala.

About 5,000 people were rendered homeless in the attack and have taken shelter in various temporary camps in the sub-division. Several schools and government offices have been turned into temporary camps.

BRIEFLY

Liz Taylor turns 65: Elizabeth Taylor was honoured Sunday night at a star-studded bash celebrating her 65th birthday and benefiting an AIDS charity days before she was scheduled to undergo brain surgery. AP reports from Los Angeles.

Actor Hugh Grant opened the show, introducing a retrospective of Miss Taylor's career and life. "What a body of work — let's face it. What a body," the star of "Four Weddings and a Funeral" said, introducing the actress. Miss Taylor, dressed in a green gown and coat, walked on stage and sat down beside her long-time pal, Michael Jackson. Jackson, who escorted Miss Taylor along a violet carpet into the theatre, had written a song for her, "Elizabeth."

Wanted ex-mayor surrenders in Lanka: A former mayor wanted by police in the slaying of ruling party lawmaker surrendered before a magistrate, his lawyer said Monday. AP reports from Colombo.

The magistrate in Colombo ordered Mahinda Ratnatilleke to be kept in jail pending trial and ordered him to be produced in a court in the southern town of Ratnapura on Thursday, said lawyer Daya Perera. "Ratnatilleke appeared at my home late Sunday night and I took him to the magistrate's home where he surrendered," Perera said in a telephone interview.

17 killed in China bus plunge: At least 17 people mostly migrant workers were killed when a bus plunged into a river in southern China's Guangdong province a report said yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

A bus carrying 51 passengers swerved out of control on a turn in a highway in the hilly terrain of Qingxin country and plunged into the adjacent river Sunday, the Hong Kong branch of the China News Service said. Most of the victims were migrant workers who were going back to work in Guangdong following lunar new year holiday breaks.

Singapore, ROK sign agreement: South Korea and Singapore signed a five-year agreement over the weekend to cooperate in science and technology. AP reports from Singapore.

The agreement will deepen and strengthen the existing science and technology cooperation between Singapore and South Korea and allow the two countries to pursue science and technology initiatives in advanced technology fields. The government announced, Singapore previously signed similar agreements with India, Germany and China.

Suharto arrives in Cambodia: President Suharto of Indonesia received a royal welcome at Phnom Penh's airport Monday as he arrived for a three-day visit to bolster economic and political ties. AP reports from Phnom Penh.

The two countries are expected to sign agreements on oil exploration and economic and technical cooperation during the visit, according to the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

Japanese satellite placed in orbit: An unmanned Atlas rocket hoisted a Japanese communications satellite into orbit Sunday night. AP reports from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Once the satellite is moved to its final position over the equator, it will beam voice, data and TV signals to Japan and elsewhere in Asia, as well as to Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii. The spacecraft is the fourth of six made by Hughes Space and Communications for Tokyo's Japan Satellite Systems. It will replace an aging satellite that developed a fuel leak.

Indian, govt to stick to traditional city names of Bombay, Madras

NEW DELHI, Feb 17: The Indian government has decided to stick to the traditional city names of Bombay and Madras rather than adopt new local versions, a leading newspaper said today, reports AFP.

The Times of India said government departments would stick to the anglicised names in state and international dealings because Mumbai, Marathi for Bombay, and Chennai, Tamil for Madras, were creating confusion abroad and affecting business.

The daily quoted sources saying the new names had also been rejected in other parts of India.

Chennai had not been accepted in the southern state of Kerala, the newspaper pointed out, because it means "wolf" in the local language there.

Nepali Cong to prepare campaign for local polls

KATHMANDU, Feb 17: Nepal's main ruling party is to prepare its campaign for the upcoming local elections in order to maintain its control of most of local administration bodies across the country, reports Xinhua.

The Nepali Congress (NC) Party, which has led the three-party coalition governments since 1995, Sunday called a massive meeting of the party's central and local-level leaders for working out its candidate selection procedures and running strategies for the local polls.

All senior as well as local leaders of the NC Party are requested to compulsorily attend the meeting scheduled for February 27 and 28 in Kathmandu, according to a press release of the party central office here.

The meeting is expected to bring together all local administration chiefs on district, municipality and village level who were elected from the NC Party in the last local elections in 1991.

US urges DPRK to avoid provocative actions

BEIJING, Feb 17: The United States urged communist North Korea to avoid all provocative actions as a diplomatic stand-off continued over a high Pyongyang official hold up at South Korea's embassy in Beijing, reports Reuters.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson was speaking after the shooting of a North Korean defector outside his home near the South Korean capital Seoul, an attack the South has blamed on communist agents.

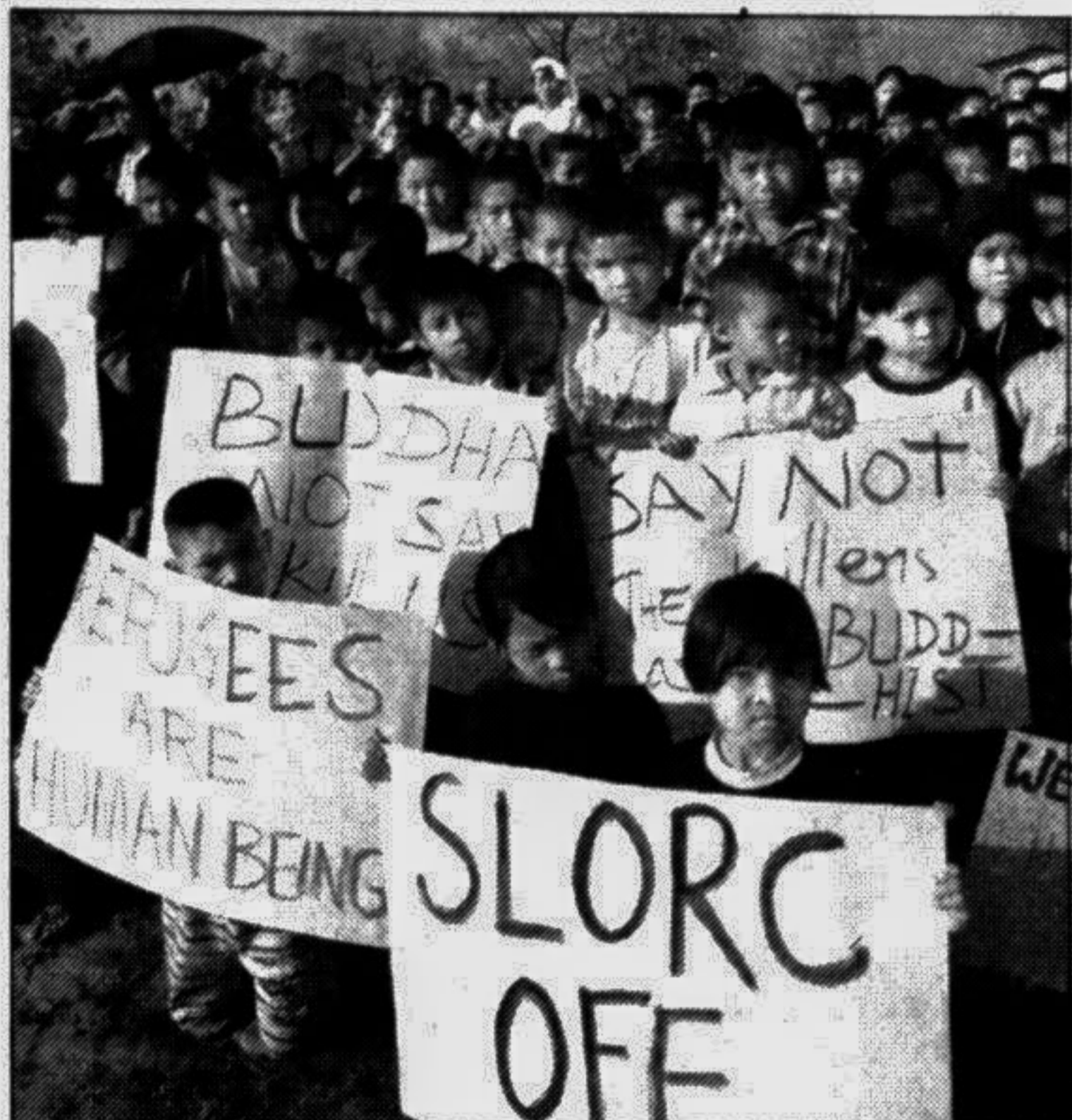
Richardson said the United States was closely watching developments after Saturday night's attack which left 32-year-old defector defector Li Li-Nam critically ill in hospital with a bullet still lodged in his skull.

Seoul officials said the assassination attempt appeared to be a North Korean warning to Seoul and to potential asylum seekers. The government hiked security for public figures and installations.

This is an incident that is serious, Richardson said on ABC television's "This Week" programme.

"We urge North Korea to live up to the agreement that they made on the submarine incident, when they apologised, and part of that agreement with South Korea, was number one, that they not engage in provocative actions."

He was referring to North Korea's apology for sending a spy submarine to a South Korean beach last September and landing 26 armed commandos who were then captured.



Karen refugees hold placards Monday during a protest urging Thai authorities to protect them from cross-border raids from Myanmar. Hundreds of refugees staged the demonstration after their camp was looted and torched by Myanmar government agents on January 28. — AFP/UNB photo

Karens won't give up fight against Myanmar junta

BANGKOK, Feb 17: The leader of the Karen National Union (KNU) has vowed to battle against a Myanmar government offensive into rebel-held territory in eastern Myanmar. The Nation reported today, says AFP.

KNU Chairman Bo Mya said in an interview with The Nation that the ethnic-based rebel group would not give up the fight against the Myanmar government and that he did not believe peace could be reached between the two sides.

"We will continue to fight since they are attacking us. In fact we are defending ourselves," he said. "We are not going to give up."

Bo Mya said he believed Myanmar's military authorities wanted to crush the KNU, the only major ethnic insurgency which has not reached a ceasefire agreement with Yangon, rather than make peace.

"I don't think the military government wants peace," he said.

"What they want is a peace based on a master and slave relationship. What we want is a genuine peace based on justice and fairness."

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Diplomats bolster reports on Deng's health

BEIJING, Feb 17: Reports that Deng Xiaoping suffered a massive stroke last week were bolstered Sunday by diplomats who said they had received similar information from a variety of sources, reports AFP.

Western diplomats in China's capital said they had received information relating to the sudden deterioration of the 92-year-old paramount leader's health on Thursday.

This independent information was checked and considered credible, the diplomats said.

According to French businessmen quoting sources close to the paramount leader and a Saturday report in a Hong Kong newspaper, Deng's health had declined sharply on Thursday afternoon.

Off the Record

Gift bomb!

HANOI: A bomb disguised in gift wrapping was discovered in southern Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City after its recipient became suspicious and contacted police, a newspaper reported Monday, reports AP.

Inside the suspect package, police found two pieces of explosive, two fuses and a bottle of lighter fluid strapped together with six batteries.

The package had been sent to the captain of a fishing boat, the state-run newspaper, labour, reported.

The ship's captain, Yu Quoc Bang, a fisherman from suburban Ho Chi Minh City, said he became suspicious when the delivery man said the package was a gift for the lunar New Year from a company named Vitaco, the newspaper said.

Police have not disclosed any other details concerning suspects or motives.

Last year, there were several letter bombings in southern Vietnam. Police have not said whether any of the cases were related.

At least one person has been killed by a letter bomb.

Crazy!

DAR ES SALAAM: A man in northeastern Tanzania cut off his wife's ears and ate them when she refused to leave their bedroom so that he could sleep with another woman, a newspaper reported Sunday, says AFP.

Chacha Ngombe, a villager in Serengeti district, was angered by his wife's refusal to allow him sleep with his mistress. So he grabbed a machete and cut off her ears, the Kiswahili weekly Mzendo reported.

"He cooked the ears in the middle of the night and ate them," the newspaper added. The other woman fled after the incident.

Asteroid killed dinosaurs

WASHINGTON: Scientists who drilled core samples from the ocean said Sunday they have found strong evidence that a huge asteroid smashed into the Earth 65 million years ago and probably killed off the dinosaurs, reports AP.

"We've got the smoking gun," said Richard D Norris, leader of an international ocean drilling expedition that probed the Atlantic Ocean floor in search of asteroid evidence. "It is proof positive of the impact."

Norris said the expedition recovered three drill samples that have the unmistakable signature of an asteroid impact about 65 million years ago. The drill cores include a thin brownish section that the scientists called the "fireball layer" because it is thought to contain bits of the asteroid itself.

"These near layers of sediment bracketing the impact have never been found in the sea before," Norris said in a telephone interview.

The scientists, working on the drill ship Joides Resolution, spent five weeks off the east coast of Florida collecting cores from the ocean floor in about 8,500 feet (2,600 meters) of water. The team penetrated up to 300 feet (90 meters) beneath the sea bed, drilling past sediments laid down at the time of the dinosaur extinction.

Cat problem

ROME: Italy's Alitalia Airline had to delay for 24 hours a flight from Rome to Nairobi this week because a cat managed to get aboard the Boeing 767 before it took off, reports AFP.

Engineers who had to tear up the whole floor of the aircraft to get at the animal, at a total cost to the airline of some 250 million lire (167,000 dollars), were publicly thanked Friday by a publishing house specialising in works on cats.

Newspaper outlines military plan to free hostages in Lima

LIMA, Feb 17: Leftist rebels holding 72 hostages denounced a reported government plan to free them, saying all could die if authorities carried it out, reports AP.

A major newspaper gave details Sunday of the supposed military plan to use Peruvian and US troops to liberate the hostages at the Japanese ambassador's residence if the standoff cannot be resolved peacefully.

"An assault on the residence could bring with it the deaths of everyone who is in there," a Tupac Amaru rebel spokesman, Isaac Velazco, told The Associated Press on Sunday.

Under the plan, the troops would plunge into the compound from helicopters, plant explosives at six points around the diplomatic mansion and storm the building, Diario La Republica said.

In a nighttime operation that would take only seven minutes, soldiers would seize the Tupac Amaru rebels and try to rescue the hostages.

But Diario La Republica reported that the army, fearing high casualties, wants to leave the raid as a last resort.

The newspaper quoted a February 5 "Intervention Plan" by the Army Intelligence Agency as saying "it cannot be assured that a military action will be clean; there could be numerous... losses."

The rebels accused President Alberto Fujimori's government of pursuing a military end to the hostage standoff.

"The government wants to change the situation and prepare conditions for a violent end to the crisis," they said in a faxed statement from the rebel group's office in Hamburg, Germany.

The military contingency plan noted that the political atmosphere, both in Peru and internationally, "favours a peaceful solution to the crisis," La Republica said.

Fujimori has received the proposal the newspaper said. No one was available for comment at his office Sunday.

A spokesman for the US Southern Command, reached by telephone in Panama, denied any US military planning to free the hostages.

"We are not involved in the situation down there," said the spokesman, who would not give his name.

AFP adds: As international mediators worked to get talks between Peru's government and leftist holding 72 hostages, a rebel spokesman said a demand for the release of the group's jailed comrades is "non-negotiable."



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's eldest son Uday (R), still confined to a wheelchair after he was struck by 14 bullets in an attack last December, is visited by Ali bin Jabr bin Muslim (L) and Mohammad Hassan Kamaledin who are members of the Bahraini Consultative Council. — Reuters/UNB photo

Kabila agrees to delay attack on refugee camp

KALEMIE, Zaire, Feb 17: Rebel leader Laurent Kabila, responding to a plea from the United Nations, has agreed to delay a threatened attack on Zaire's largest refugee camp, reports AP.

Kabila had threatened to attack the Tingi-Tingi camp, which is on the rebels' northern front, this week unless the UN High Commissioner for Refugees drove out Rwandans he says are armed by the Zairian government.

The rebel leader said Sunday he granted the reprieve to give the agency time to figure out how to separate the armed men from bonafide refugees in the camp of 150,000 people.

"As we are Christians, we shall give more time to UN-HCR," Kabila told The Associated Press in the southeastern town of Kalemie. "We shall see what we come up with."

Kabila didn't set a new deadline, but said he would stay in touch with UN officials.

Twice in the past week, Kabila has vowed to attack Tingi-Tingi within days to clean out former Rwandan soldiers and Hutu militiamen, who have received plane loads of arms in recent days.

The United Nations sent representatives to Kalemie, a port on Lake Tanganyika, to plead for a reprieve. Kabila granted it, but insisted it would be temporary.

"We talked a little bit of my ultimatum there, which is very serious. I hope they understood my position," he said.

The UN representatives quickly flew back to Nairobi, Kenya, without speaking to reporters. In the past, the refugee agency has said it does not have the power to disarm refugees.

British bluebloods face fight to stay in House of Lords

LONDON, Feb 17: From the days of Queen Elizabeth I, power, honours and titles have flowed smoothly down the generations of the Cecil family for skillful and loyal service to crown and country, reports AP.

William Cecil, the first Earl of Burghley, engineered the execution of Elizabeth's cousin, the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots in 1587. His son, the 1st Earl of Salisbury, paved the way for James I to succeed Elizabeth.

In the 19th century, the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury served 14 years as prime minister, presiding over the expansion of a global empire.

Now, the Cecils and their fellow aristocrats are facing a fight for political life.

The Labour Party, long a critic of aristocrats' role in government, are widely expected to oust the governing Conservatives in national elections that must be held by May and prob-

ably will come sooner.

Labour leaders are pledging to restrict voting in the unelected House of Lords to "life peers" — people who are given titles that carry membership in parliament's upper house but cannot be passed along to children.

Most bluebloods are not happy at the prospect of being banned from a chamber with roots that go back a thousand years, although they would keep their titles and estates.

"Hereditary peers who are active in the House of Lords are not obviously less virtuous than members of the House of Commons... neither are they obviously less able," says Lord Cranborne, heir to the 80-year-old 6th Marquess of Salisbury.

Cranborne, 50, a former banker and government minister who heads the solid Tory majority in the upper chamber, is leading the campaign against

change.

The Labour Party has tried to push through this reform before and failed. Like honours, titles, upper-class accents and the monarchy, the Lords appear to many Britons as just a part of life and their political role seldom registers among voters' concerns.

That could be because the House of Lords has far less power than the elected Commons. The Lords are restricted to delaying legislation, except finance bills, for six months.

Cranborne plans to go a little further by offering to formalise a convention devised by his grandfather in 1945 that the Lords never oppose legislation stemming from the governing party's election platform therefore directly approved by voters.

That is unlikely to impress Labour's leaders. And the party has an easy-to-argue case:

There's just nothing like the ermine-robed Lords left anywhere else in the democratic world.

Conservative Prime Minister John Major, a commoner of humble beginnings, has the more difficult job of defending the right to inherit power. But Major's party has an obvious interest in the status quo.

Conservatives dominate the 1,200-member House of Lords. There are 756 hereditary peers, and among those who declare a political affiliation there are 317 Conservatives and just 14 Labourites.

The rest are life peers. Among them are the top judges and archbishops of the Church of England and a few actors and sportsmen, but most are retired politicians from the Houses of Commons nominated by party leaders.

"Anyone can see the obvious argument against the heredi-

tary system," Major said recently. "But I am not sure the hereditary principle is any more obvious than the principle that has large numbers of peers appointed by the prime minister of the day."

To the Labour Party, inheriting a legislative seat is anathema.

"How can the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, the largest private landowner in Britain, who owes his title to the fact that one of his ancestors was the bastard son of Charles II, represent the common man?" Labour spokesman Jack Straw declared.

Retorted the duke in a BBC interview. "As for the common man, I could tell Jack Straw a thing or two about life with a capital L."

The duke, 73, served in the Royal Navy in World War II and was a member of the Commons before inheriting his 17th century title — deriving from

Charles II's son by mistress Lucy Walters — and vast estates in Scotland and England.

Labour's complaint about the hereditary principle doesn't stretch to the biggest hereditary title of all, the monarch. No mainstream political party dares touch an institution that, however troubled, most Britons still want. With its powers severely restricted.

Labour argues, however, that the Lords make a difference — for the Tories. The party cites six votes last year when peers who seldom attend sessions of the House of Lords were brought in to defeat Labour amendments.

In 1974-79, when Labour was last in power, the Lords delayed government measures from the Commons 343 times. During the succeeding 18 years of Conservative rule, the Lords voted against the government 231 times.

'Turkey won't block NATO's eastward expansion'

BONN, Feb 17: NATO's eastward expansion, the top issue on new US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's tour of European allies, will not be blocked by a Turkish veto stemming from its disputes with Brussels, her spokesman said, reports Reuters.

Spokesman Nicholas Burns said Washington was sure all 16 members of the Atlantic alliance would agree at their Madrid Summit in July to invite some former Warsaw pact states to negotiate NATO membership.

Burns spoke shortly after Albright arrived in Bonn from Rome on the second stop of a whirlwind 11-day tour to nine countries in Europe and Asia. Her first since taking over as America's first female chief diplomat.

Finding ways to make a

larger NATO platable to Moscow is high on the agenda for her talks with Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel today, he said.

It will also figure at her meetings over the next few days in Bonn, Paris, Brussels, London and Moscow, she also plans to visit Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing.

We believe NATO enlargement will go ahead on the 7th and 8th of July and that is the will of all the NATO countries, he said yesterday when asked about Turkish threats to block it if Ankara did not get more European Union aid.

Turkey had long supported NATO expansion and recent threats by Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller were not welcome. Burns told journalists, we don't agree with them.