

NATO rules out military intervention in Albania

Govt accused of intimidating opposition

LONDON, Mar 5: Urging a diplomatic solution to the political crisis in Albania, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana on Tuesday ruled out military intervention, and the European Union said it would soon send ministers to the country, reports AP.

"In Albania at this moment, politics has to be done, diplomacy has to be done," Solana, the former Spanish foreign minister said after meeting with British leaders. "It's not for any military operation by NATO or anybody else."

The EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner, Hans van den Broek, said that a mission of EU ministers would soon leave for Albania, to counsel President Sali Berisha to form an interim government with opposition parties, and to call elections.

Van den Broek, who said more concrete details would emerge after an emergency meeting of the EU's political directors on Thursday, said the EU had little choice but to approach the increasingly discredited Berisha.

"The president of the nation, however he may be criticised, is now the first responsible to take the initiative for a broad political panel to be established," he told Britain's Channel 4 television news.

Albania's government moved to end weeks of unrest following the collapse of high-risk investment schemes by placing the country under a state of emergency Sunday. Its parliament on Monday rejected Berisha for a new five-year term.

Reuter adds: The United States on Tuesday accused Albania of intimidating opposition politicians and shutting down the Albanian press, but said it would not be in Washington's interest to end aid.

"We regret very much that the Albanian authorities are using the state of emergency to intimidate opposition politicians and to shut down the Albanian press and to shut down Voice of America," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said referring to the US funded radio network that broadcasts overseas.

Meanwhile, Europe's top security body, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), said on Tuesday it would send a fact-finding mission to Albania, where a state of emergency has been declared.

In a statement released at its Vienna headquarters, the OSCE said it had appointed former Austrian chancellor Franz Vranitzky to travel to Albania as soon as possible and assess the situation in the troubled Balkan nation.

Pak PM for close ties with Dhaka

ISLAMABAD, Mar 5: Prime Minister of Pakistan Mohammad Nawaz Sharif yesterday said that his country laid emphasis on the closest relationship with Bangladesh, reports BSS.

Sharif further said that his country would endeavour to strengthen the bilateral economic cooperation with Bangladesh and work together with close contact with the government of Sheikh Hasina.

He said this while Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad called on him at his secretariat in Islamabad last evening. Samad had handed over a special message to the Pakistani prime minister from Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Sharif assured all possible cooperation in all fields with Bangladesh adhering to the common tradition and culture of both the countries. He complimented Bangladesh for its recent socio-economic progress and lauded the recent signing of the Ganges water sharing treaty with India with a view to solving the longstanding water problem.

Samad briefed the prime minister about the economic measures undertaken by his government for the overall improvement of the fate of the commonmen.

He discussed with Sharif bilateral matters and stressed the need for working together for mutual benefit. He informed that Hasina would attend the extraordinary OIC summit to be held in Islamabad on March 23.

Sharif said that he is eagerly waiting to receive Bangladesh Prime Minister in Islamabad. The Bangladesh foreign minister invited Sharif on behalf of Bangladesh Prime Minister to visit Bangladesh at a convenient time. The prime minister accepted the invitation and hoped to visit Bangladesh at the earliest convenient time.

Earlier a two-hour long bilateral meeting was held between Bangladesh and Pakistan at the Foreign Ministry here.

India to develop long-range missiles: Gowda

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: India will pursue a long-range missile programme many Western nations want to see dismantled because of carrying nuclear warheads, a newspaper reported Wednesday, reports AP.

"We will give full support to the scientists working on this programme," Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda told parliament on Tuesday, according to The Times of India.

In December, a Defence Ministry report indicated such research was being suspended when it concluded the project had already achieved its aim of demonstrating that India had the technology to produce long-range missiles. Such missiles would give the military strike capability of up to 1,500 kilometres (930 miles).

The Defence Ministry report had said that India could resume the programme if its security is threatened.



NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana is ushered down a corridor in 10 Downing Street by Prime Minister John Major Tuesday. Solana said Wednesday he was confident NATO could forge a new partnership with Russia that would transform the strategic map of Europe in the 21st century. — AFP/UNB photo

Taliban renew warning against infringing norms of Shariat

KABUL, Mar 5: Afghanistan's Taliban today renewed warnings against infringing the Islamic militia's strict code of conduct, reports AFP.

"All foreign nationals as well as Afghans cannot take out of the country video machines or video tapes," the Taliban run Radio Kabul said.

The Taliban-controlled station also announced a set of Islamic guidelines for all Afghan civil servants.

Radio Shariat declared civil servants should not shave or trim their beards, or grow what described as "beard" (meaning Western-style) haircuts.

A turban was declared mandatory as headgear for these civil servants.

"Bribery and embezzlement are acts of vice which nobody should commit," the radio announcement added.

A reminder was also given that civil servants should take particular care to ensure that their behaviour strictly followed the norms of Shariat or Islamic law.

They should not neglect their daily prayers, or fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and should live a pious and righteous life.

These rules and reminders were declared on behalf of a special Taliban department called "Promoting Virtuous Behaviour and Suppressing Vice," commonly called the religious police.

The ultra-conservants Taliban who seized Kabul September 27, 1996 have enforced Islamic codes of behaviour much more strict than even their fundamentalist Muslim neighbours.

The Taliban, a militant religious movement that has captured about two-thirds of Afghanistan, have won the appreciation of the ordinary people for cleaning up the national highways of Brigands and local commanders who used to extort illegal "taxes" from travelers.

Arafat proposes Jerusalem as dual capital Netanyahu faces Arab anger over Jewish housing project

CAIRO, Mar 5: In his second visit to Egypt, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu again faces a cauldron of Arab anger as Israel moves to build housing for Jews in an Arab section of Jerusalem despite protests from Palestinians, reports AP.

Hours before his visit Wednesday, Netanyahu also ordered the closure of four Palestinian offices in Jerusalem, a move certain to inflame emotions already high over the decision to build 6,500 housing units for Israelis in east Jerusalem.

President Hosni Mubarak says he will try to talk Netanyahu out of the housing project at his meeting, and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa called the decision on Palestinian offices ill-timed and provocative.

"I believe that it will be another wrong move... to close the offices, Palestinian offices in Jerusalem, at this juncture. Why should you provoke the Arab public opinion?" Moussa said in an interview Wednesday with Israel's army radio.

But for the Egyptians — and other Arabs — the main issue is the Har Homa Jewish housing project, which is to be built on land seized by Israel after the 1967 Middle East war and then declared annexed.

Egypt's government daily Al-Akhar said Wednesday in an editorial that Israel "insists on closing all the roads to the peace process."

The strange thing is that this policy cannot be in the interest of the Israeli people in the long run.

Both Mubarak and Jordan's King Hussein, Israel's closest Arab ally, have said the housing project could tear apart the Mideast peace process. All Arab countries, and Muslim states as far away as Indonesia, have protested the move.

Even President Clinton said earlier this week that the housing project in Har Homa — known to Arabs as Jabal Abu Ghena'im — is building mistrust with Palestinians.

But Netanyahu, under pressure from members of his right-wing Cabinet to solidify Israel's hold on Jerusalem, shows no sign of backing down.

Yasser Arafat proposed Tuesday using Rome as a model for Jerusalem and establishing twin capitals there — one for Israel and the other for a Palestinian state.

"If there is a will there is a way," the Palestinian leader said. He also reaffirmed his support for negotiations with Israel and called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu his "partner" in peacemaking.

"We have no other choice but to keep on with the peace process," Arafat said at a news conference even as he described Israel's decision to put up a new Jewish neighborhood in Jerusalem as "a unique challenge" to the process.



US President Bill Clinton comforts Judy Sligh (L) during a tour of damage in Arkadelphia, Arkansas Tuesday after a series of tornadoes ruined hundreds of homes and killed at least 25 people Sunday. Sligh lost her business in the storms. — AFP/UNB photo

China condemns US as 'moneybag democracy'

BEIJING, Mar 5: Condemning the United States as a "moneybag democracy," Beijing launched a volley Tuesday in its annual battle of words with Washington over China's bleak human rights record, reports AP.

The United States responded that it was "the world's champion of human rights" and needed no lecture from an authoritarian state.

In a commentary by the official Xinhua News Agency, China criticized the United States for favouring the rich, breeding violence and poorly protecting its women, minorities and children.

"The United States... brags about being the model of democracy... although everyone knows that this 200-year-old American democracy remains a democracy for the rich," Xinhua said.

The commentary was China's response to a US State Department report in January that criticised China for using jailings and harassment to silence dissent.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said, "I don't think we need to listen to lectures from authoritarian countries about our human rights performance because we are the world's champion of human rights."

"We're very content about our policy and emphasis on human rights. We're not going to be deterred, especially by countries that are major violators of human rights."

Burns said millions of people around the world want to live in the United States.

US ready to deploy new bunker-busting N-bomb

WASHINGTON, Mar 5: The United States is ready to deploy a bunker-busting nuclear bomb that could strike targets hundreds of metres below the ground, The Defence News weekly reported in its latest edition, says Xinhua.

The bomb called B61-11, was designed to replace the B53 bomb which nuclear war planners use to target deeply buried Russian command and control facilities.

The B61-11 which was completed in development in December, directs the bulk of its energy downward, destroying everything buried beneath it to depth of 700 metres, the report said.

Prior to its development, the best US earth penetrating nuclear weapon was the B53, a nine megaton bomb with a force equal to 9 million tons of TNT, penetrates the earth by creating a massive crater, rather than the more precise blow the B61-11 is meant to deliver.

In addition, the B53 cannot be carried by the B-2 bomber, and offers less assurance that it will destroy its target than does the B61-11 arms experts said.

Villagers cheer rebel reinforcements Zaire orders expulsion of 40 UN relief workers

KINSHASA, Mar 5: Zaire has ordered the expulsion of 40 UN relief workers who withdrew from the eastern city of Kisangani last weekend, saying their departure triggered the alleged slaughter of Rwandan Hutus and displaced Zaireans, reports Reuter.

A government statement broadcast by state radio late on Tuesday said 25,000 civilians had been slaughtered since mainly Tutsi rebels overran the camp of Tingi Tingi on Friday. There has been no independent confirmation of such killings.

A total of 57 foreign UN and non-governmental organisation relief workers pulled out of Kisangani last Saturday, saying degrading security and harassment by local military authorities made it impossible for them to work.

The precipitous departure of these humanitarian workers from the Tingi Tingi camp and the town of Kisangani... is considered by the government to be directly responsible for the slaughter which took place in less than 48 hours of 25,000 displaced persons and refugees," the government statement said.

AP adds: All along the road to the rapidly advancing rebel front in eastern Zaire, villagers cheered young men off to join the fight against the army of President Mobutu Sese Seko.

While the overloaded opiar truck swayed around bumpy curbs, 100 tightly packed recruits sang the taunting threats of Laurent Kabila's rebel forces: "Mobutu don't joke with us — Kabila's men will chase you out!"

Off the Record

Ronald, Nancy share 45 yrs of love & care

LOS ANGELES: Former President Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Reagan, 86 and suffering from Alzheimer's disease was at his century city office during the day, his spokeswoman Joanne Drake said. "The president is eager to get home" for an anniversary dinner at their Bel-Air home, she added.

Drake quoted Mrs. Reagan, 73, as saying: "It doesn't seem like 45 years. I can't imagine life without him or before him."

In the dedication to his autobiography, Reagan wrote: "To Nancy: She will always be my first lady. I cannot imagine life without her."

Reagan, then AB-movie actor who had divorced his first wife Jane Wyman, married actress Nancy Davis on March 4, 1952, at the Little Brown church in the San Fernando valley.

Actor William Holden and his wife, Ardis, were best man and matron of honour. The couple spent their honeymoon night at a local hotel and went to Phoenix, Arizona, the next day to celebrate with the Davis family.

The couple have two children, Patti Davis and Ron Jr. the two-term Republican president, who served from 1981 to 1989, had a daughter, Maureen, by his first marriage and also adopted a son, Michael.

Mandela arrives in Singapore

South African President Nelson Mandela arrived in Singapore yesterday for a two-day visit as part of a four-nation Asian tour, Reuter reports from Singapore.

Mandela, accompanied by Graca Machel, the widow of former Mozambique President Samora Machel, was received at the airport by Singapore President Ong Teng Cheong. He is accompanied by a 50-member delegation, including ministers, senior officials and businessmen.

Algeria's legislative polls June 5

President Liamine Zeroual on Tuesday set legislative elections for June 5, the first such balloting since the army cancelled the 1992 vote, triggering a bloody insurgency by Muslim militants who claim their victory was stolen, AP reports from Algiers.

This time the Islamic Salvation Front, the party barred from imminent victory by the military-backed government, will not take part in the balloting.

The Salvation Front, whose leaders are jailed or in exile, was banned less than two months after the January 1992 balloting was cancelled. And last fall, Algeria's constitution was revised to forbid political parties from basing their platforms on religion, language or regional concerns.

Pamphlets seized in Indonesia

The military has seized at least 6,000 pamphlets asking Indonesians to boycott the May 29 general elections and is searching for those responsible for producing the material, Media Indonesia newspaper reported yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

The newspaper quoted Major-General Tayo Tarmadi, head of the Siliwangi military command which oversees West Java province, as saying on Tuesday that the pamphlets had been found at a boarding house in Bandung, the capital of West Java.

Arafat to meet Jimmy Carter

Yasser Arafat will meet with Jimmy Carter on Wednesday at the former president's home in Plains, Georgia, the Carter Centre said, AP reports from Atlanta.

The Palestinian leader is scheduled to arrive in America where Carter is to meet him before they drive to nearby Plains. The two men are scheduled to appear at Plains High School later in the day.

Floods kill 16 in Bolivia

The heaviest rains in nearly three decades are pounding Bolivia's tropical lowlands, with the Red Cross reporting that floods have killed at least 16 people and destroyed the crops of 100,000 farmers, AP reports from La Paz.

Road and air links between La Paz and the northern states of Pando and Beni have been cut, causing fuel and food shortages and a sharp rise in malaria and other diseases.

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Veerappan ready to surrender if gets amnesty

MADRAS, Mar 5: India's most wanted bandit, blamed for some 100 murders over 15 years, Tuesday offered to surrender if he was given an amnesty, a huge payment and a film made on his life, reports AFP.

Veerappan said in a videotape shot in his jungle hide-out on the border of the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka that if the offer was not accepted, he would break a ceasefire and attack forest officials and police again.

"I will wait for one more month," he said in the videotape, played to reporters in Madras, capital of Tamil Nadu, by a journalist from a Tamil-language magazine who had managed to win the brigand's confidence.

The 47-year-old poacher-turned-killer appeared desperate for a pardon, saying his demand for 143,000 dollars from the Tamil Nadu government and a film on his life, could be waived.

"The public pardon is first and foremost. The other things are secondary. Even if you don't give me money, at least my men should be rehabilitated."

Ill-fated mediator

HANOI: A good samaritan who intervened in a domestic dispute at his next door neighbour's house died after he drank a bottle of poisoned water intended for his neighbour's suicide threat, reports AP.

Police said a man in a southern Vietnamese village heard his neighbour fighting with his wife, the state-controlled Saigon Newsworld reported Wednesday.

The man, identified only as Thanh, broke up the fight and helped the couple reconcile their differences.

After his good deed, Thanh helped himself to a bottle of water in his neighbour's kitchen, but he immediately fell ill and within an hour was dead, said a police report cited by the newspaper.

The water had been tainted with poison by his neighbour, Nguyen Van Xuan, who intended to threaten to commit suicide during his quarrel with his wife.

Thanh was taken to a hospital, but doctors were unable to resuscitate him, the newspaper said.

The report did not elaborate on whether police had charged Xuan with a crime.

One term is enough, says Ramos

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: Philippines President Fidel Ramos said Tuesday one term is enough for him, but acknowledged some members of his party want him to have another six years in power, reports AP.

"Others want me to have it, but I don't," Ramos told reporters during a visit to India. "This is the thought of some in the party, but it is not the official party line."

Recent calls by Ramos to overhaul the Philippines constitution have led to speculation he wants to strike a clause limiting the president to a single six-year term — his expires next year.

But Ramos said Tuesday he is more interested in amendments providing for absentee voting and increasing the number of courts.

Ramos, who arrived Sunday on a four-day trip, held talks on economic and security issues with Indian leaders. Both the Philippines and India are in the midst of economic reform.

UN ready to invest \$16m to curb Afghan opium production

ISLAMABAD, Mar 5: In lawless Afghanistan, opium — the stuff heroin is made of — is growing wild and the United Nations said Tuesday that it is ready to invest 16 million dollars to try to curb its production, reports AP.

Beginning next month the UN will launch a four-year programme to try to reduce opium production in Afghanistan, considered one of the world's largest producers.

Most of the opium is converted into heroin in hundreds of makeshift laboratories strung along its border with neighbouring Pakistan.

"To our knowledge 96 per cent of the poppy growing area is under Taliban control," said Giovanni Quaglia, the south-west Asia director of the UN International Drug Control Programme.

Quaglia was addressing a news conference in the Pakistani federal capital to release the 1996 annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board.

The report says that both Afghanistan and Pakistan are big suppliers of cannabis resin or marijuana, most of which finds its way to Europe.

The heroin also is exported to Europe, with a small percentage finding its way to the streets in the United States.

With a growing heroin addiction problem in Pakistan an increasing amount of the locally produced product is staying at home to feed an estimated 2 million addicts.

Pakistan, however, has substantially reduced its opium production to where it now produces about 120 tons, compared to Afghanistan which is producing more than 2,000 tons.

Quaglia said the UN will work with Afghans in eastern Nangarhar province and southern Kandahar province to try to discover what it would take to get them to stop growing poppies.

The United Nations is ready to offer anything from new irrigation systems, to schools to health clinics, he said.

But poppies are a lucrative crop for Afghanistan's dirt-poor farmers and Quaglia says it won't be easy.

"This won't happen overnight," he said.

The heaviest poppy growing area is in southern Helmand province, also under Taliban control.

There have been reports that the Taliban religious army of former Islamic seminarians turned guerrilla fighters is ignoring the poppy production — at least for the time being.

But a foreign ministry spokesman in the Afghan capital of Kabul said Tuesday that without money it's difficult to stop poppy cultivation.

"Our policy is clear that we will stop the cultivation of opium and struggle against drug trafficking," Zahir Dudakhel told The Associated Press. "But we have economic problems and we cannot stop them from growing."

A delegation of US diplomats were in Kabul on Monday urging the Taliban to curb production as well as relax its restrictions on women, said Dudakhel.

"In the Taliban-run two-thirds of the country, the religious army has imposed its version of Islamic law that bans a variety of things, but not drugs. It also imposes harsh punishments for a variety of crimes, such as amputations for theft."

However so far there have been no arrests, convictions or punishments of any drug producer in Afghanistan, either under the Taliban control or its opponents.



Protesters flee as police forces advance after the demonstrators blocked a road near to Qickborn, Germany Tuesday in an attempt to halt a convoy of nuclear waste due to be temporarily stored in nearby Gorleben. Eight police officers were injured overnight during clashes with protesters over the controversial convoy. Several people were arrested, police said, without giving details. — AFP/UNB photo