UN team finds evidence of mass killing in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: United Nations human rights investigators discovered hundreds of bodies dumped into wells and in shallow graves in northern Afghanistan giving credence to Taliban claims of a mass slaughter of its warriors, UN officials said on Saturday, reports AP.

A UN team spent the last two days in northern Afghanistan investigating claims by Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum that as many as 2,000 Taliban soldiers were massacred during a failed attempt to capture northern Afghanistan last May.

Some of the bodies were stuffed into deep wells. Other corpses showed signs of torture. although the investigators were

reluctant to release details.

The investigation was

headed by the UN's human rights envoy to Afghanistan Dr. Choong-Hyun Paik. He is to submit a report to the UN secre-

The investigators, who spoke to The Associated Press asked not to be identified, but they said they investigated several sites near Shebergan, Dostum's headquarters, some 400 kilometres (240 miles) northwest of the Afghan capital of

Dostum said has rival. Malik Pahlawan, who had a brief alliance with the Taliban, was responsible for the slaughter. Pahlawan currently is living

in exile in Iran after being forced out of the country by Dostum.

UN investigators said the rampant slaughter was commit-

ted by both sides in the conflict, claiming they also found evidence of mass killings of ethnic Uzbeks by Taliban troops, who mostly belong to Afghanistan's largest Pashtun ethnic group. UN officials said the killings

appeared to be ethnically moti-They also said that the death toll could be as high as 4,000 although no exact figure is yet

available. The opposition alliance, which controls about 15 per cent of northern Afghanistan is made up mostly of minority Tajiks, Uzbeks, Shi'ite and Is-

"It appears that everybody was butchering everybody up there," said one UN official, who wouldn't be identified.

maili Muslims.

The UN team interviewed

residents in villages around Mazar-e-Sharif who claimed Taliban soldiers massacred hundreds of Shi'ite Muslims during fierce fighting in May.

They also visited grave sites near the Uzbek border town of Hairatan, 70 kilometres (42 miles) north of Mazar-e-Sharif where dozens of bodies were scattered across the ground. They appeared to be Taliban

A Canadian forensic expert, Dr. Mark Skinner, will stay in northern Afghanistan until Tuesday to try to determine the causes of death.

The Taliban religious army controls roughly 85 per cent of the country, including the capi-tal of Kabul where it has imposed its strict brand of Islamic



Heads of State and Foreign Ministers pose for a group photograph following a lunch at the palace of the Duke and Duchess of Luxembourg on the occasion of the EU summit in Luxembourg on Friday. AP/UNB photo

Nusrat Fateh Ali was poisoned to death?

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: A writ seeking a probe into the death of celebrated Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was filed Friday at a High Court in the city of Lahore, a domestic news agency reported, says AFP.

The petitioner, Muhammad Farrakh, has alleged that the singer, who died in a London hospital in August after a heart attack, was poisoned to death, the official Associated Press of Pakistan said.

Farrakh, an admirer of Khan, has said the singer's wife also suspects her husband was murdered with a poisonous chemical, it added.

The agency did not say whether Farrakh has named

any suspects in his petitioner. The 49-year-old singer, who used a blend of Eastern and Western instruments, was the most popular musical figure in Pakistan and also had a large Western following.

EC asks Shiv Sena

Choose leadership in democratic manner

poll panel Friday rapped a powerful Hindu nationalist party for its autocratic style and virtually warned it would have to hold party elections if it wanted to continue in politics, reports

The Election Commission told the Shiv Sena (Shivaji's Army) Party, which rules India's most industrialised state of Maharashtra, that it would have to choose its leadership in a democratic manner, the Press Trust of India reported.

Officials said the poll panel rejected the party's argument that its constitution did not require party elections to choose

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: India's leaders. They said the Election Commission had written to the Sena's founder Bal Thackeray asking the party to explain its stand by December 24.

"If you fail to appear on that date it will be presumed that you have nothing to state and action will be taken without any further reference to you," the letter said.

"It is clear that all its office bearers are only to be nominated to their respective offices in the absence of periodical elections in your party as per your constitution this goes against the principle of inner party democracy."

Iran urged to stop executions, protect civil liberties

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 13: The UN General Assembly called on Iran to stop executions for non-violent crimes and protect the civil liberties of women and religious minorities in the Islamic republic, reports

The call Friday came despite the election last May of President Mohammed Khatami, a move widely seen in the West as an endorsement for liberalising the strict Islamic regime which has governed Iran since the overthrow of the late Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1979.

In a resolution, approved by a vote of 74-32 with 56 abstentions, the General Assembly expressed concern at the increas-

ing number of executions in Iran as well as "torture, degrading treatment or punishment.

The resolution endorsed a report by UN special investigator Maurice Danby Copithorne. who cast doubt on claims that respect for human rights was improving in Iran.

In a report in October, Copithorne, a Canadian, said executions doubled from 1995 to 1996 and could double again this year. He said 137 people had been executed between January and September but gave no figures for the other years.

Copithorne said much of his information on executions came from reports in the Iranian press.

Pak cabinet authorises Sharif to pick ruling party's candidate

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: Pakistan's cabinet has authorised Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to pick the ruling party's candidate in the presidential election this month, official sources

said today, reports AFP. Contenders include Finance Minister Sartai Aziz, education minister Syed Ghaus Ali Shah and National Assembly Speaker Ilahi Bux Soomro, the sources said.

Veteran politician Fida Mohamad Khan is also among the probables, the mass-circulation Daily Jang said.

Aziz has so far been rated as a leading contender but Jang said Khan had a good chance of getting the nomination.

The list of contenders from the Pakistan Muslim League indicates a desire to elect the next president from a smaller region of the country. Sharif is from the largest and politically dominant Punjab province.

Aziz and Khan both come from north west frontier province while the other two contenders are from southern

UN condemns Rwanda massacre

Annan renews int'l demand for security of vulnerable refugees

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 13: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Friday condemned the slaughter in Rwanda of almost 300 refugees, most of them women and children, his spokesman said, reports AFP.

Annan is "very concerned at the recent escalation of violence in the north and northwestern regions of Rwanda," his spokesman said in a statement, adding that the UN chief renewed "the international demand that the security of vulnerable refugees be respected."

The attack Thursday on the Mudende refugee camp in

Rwanda left at least 271 dead among 17,000 Tutsi refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), according to local officials.

Refugees began arriving in camps in Rwanda during fighting in the former Zaire late last year when Laurent Kabila's military alliance launched its successful rebellion. Kabila became DRC president in May.

"These killings are a brutal reminder of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and its devastating consequences for the (African) region of the great lakes," Annan's statement said.

BUILFILY

Sino-US naval pact signed: Senior US and Chinese defence officials on Friday initialled an agreement designed to minimise the risk of naval accidents in the Pacific, reports AP.

On the final day of the first-ever Defence Consultative Talks, the two sides also agreed to exchange information on their military's role in humanitarian relief missions. They stopped short, however, of agreeing to hold joint exercises for humanitarian assistance — a US idea the Chinese are wary of.

The talks at the Pentagon were led by Walter Solcumbe, the undersecretary of defence for policy, and Lt Gen Xiong Guangkai, deputy chief of the general staff for the People's Liberation Army.

UN worried at Nigeria's HR abuse: The UN General Assembly expressed concern over human rights violations in Nigeria and called on the government to release

By a vote of 81-18 with 64 abstentions, the General Assembly said Friday that the "absence of representative government in Nigeria" had led to systematic "violations of human rights."

all political prisoners. AP reports from United Nations.

The resolution urged the release of all those detained in connection with the 1993 elections, which were annulled by Gen Sani Abacha.

3 Tamils killed in Lankan jail: Three Tamil prisoners were hacked to death by fellow inmates during a riot at a remand jail in southern Sri Lanka, press reports said

yesterday, AFP says from Colombo. The rioting broke out on Friday afternoon after the Tamil detainees, who had been moved there from another prison in the capital, clashed with other prisoners, arguing over food, the papers said.

The Sinhalese-language Lankadeepa Daily said the military was called on to bring the situation at the Kalutara prison under control. Several inmates were also wounded.

5 kg uranium seized in Slovakia: Slovakian police seized more than five kilograms (11 pounds) of uranium when they stopped a car Thursday near Trnava in the west of the country, the Interior Ministry said, AFP reports from Bratislava.

The radioactive material, consisting of naturally-occurring uranium 238 with traces of uranium 235 was being transported in four plastic bottles in the boot (truck) of the vehicle. The three Czech citizens in the car were arrested, along with

four alleged Slovak accomplices. 2 prisoners die in Venezuela: Two

inmates died and another two received bullet and knife wounds in a row between rival gangs at the La Planta Prison in Caracas Friday, police and prison officials said, AFP reports from Caracas. National Guard Commander Rafael Damiani said an

explosion rocked one of the cell blocks where the fight broke

Day of attempt on Oday observed: Iraq on Friday marked the first anniversary of the attempted assassination of President Saddam Hussein's eldest son with the slaughter of 33 sheep at a holy shrine. AP reports from Baghdad.

Film taken by the Associated Press Television showed about 500 spectators holding their hands in prayer as butchers slaughtered the sheep - one for every year of Oday Hussein's life - at the shrine of Ali in Najaf, 180 kilometres (110 miles) south of Baghdad.

Kyoto protocol raises hopes for wind & solar power coal and natural gas.

PHOENIX, Dec 13: The small businesses banking on alternative energy are hoping an international agreement to fight global warming will provide the boost to their fortunes that oil embargoes and soaring energy prices in earlier decades failed to sustain, reports AP. "Anyone who says renewable

energy sources like solar and wind will never become commonplace either hasn't read a book on the subject lately or is not in the business." Andy Kruse, co-founder of Southwest Windpower Inc., said Friday. "Denmark already gets 7 per

cent of its power from winden Virtually 80 per cent of the power in Brazil comes from wind or hydroelectric sources," he said. "The list goes on and The phones haven't exactly

rung off the hook at Kruse's business since industrial nations agreed this week to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. But Kruse said that even if the pact is never enacted in the United States, alternative energy has been given its best shot ever for making inroads in a nation that's hooked on oil.

Southwest Windpower, based two hours north of Phoenix in Flagstaff, sold 3 million dollars worth of wind turbines last year in 40 countries and 1997 sales are way up, he said. The 13pound (6-kg) devices, which sell

for 500 dollars, rest on rooftops

and use breezes to generate 300 watts of power. Elections begin in Mauritania

NOUAKCHOTT, Dec 13: Voters went to the polls in Maurietania Friday in elections that President Maaoya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, in power for 13 years appeared set to win, reports AFP.

With sandstorms whipping the capital of the destitute northwest African country. Nouakchott, turnout was light and many polling stations were deserted, witnesses said. But officials said the turnout

was better in the rest of the country apart from a few strongholds of opposition parties who had called for a boycott of the poll.



the blood of slaughtered sheep covers the courtyard of Imam Ali shrine (cousin of Prophet Mohammed (SM). Journalists and Iraqi's joined in prayers to mark the first anniversary of the assassination attempt on the life of Uday Hussein, the eldest son of the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. AP/UNB photo

UN arms inspector in Iraq demands full access to suspected weapons sites

BAGHDAD, Dec 13: The chief UN weapons inspector went back to Iraq on Friday to push his demand for full access to suspected weapons sites, including buildings declared off-limits by Saddam Hussein, reports

"We should be able to go anywhere, anytime," Richard Butler said. Butler was back in Baghdad

for the first time since pulling out last month in protest of 'lead's expulsion of American members of his inspection

The expulsion order touched off a three-week international crisis, which eased only when Iraq allowed the Americans back in November 21 under a Russian-brokered deal. The inspections resumed the next day, and there have been no major confrontations since.

But Iraq remains unyielding in its refusal to allow the inspectors into about 60 key sites including about 40 presiden-

tial palaces — that it insists are vital to national security.

Butler told reporters the issue of access will top his agenda in talks with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Aziz on Monday.

He said he would seek a way to get the inspectors in without infringing Iraq's "legitimate concerns for national security, sovereignty and dignity."

"We have to work together to

afinda ways that we can do our

job," the inspections chief said. It's up to the UN Security Council to decide what to do next if Iraq does not back down. he said. The inspectors are in Iraq to

monitor compliance with Security Council orders that Iraq get rid of all long-range missiles and its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Until Iraq complies, UN sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait will

Jiang vows to continue efforts to ease tension in Korean Peninsula

TOKYO, Dec 13: Chinese President Jiang Zemin has vowed that his country will continue to play a constructive role in easing tension on the divided Korean Peninsula, a newspaper here said today, re-

ports AFP. In an interview in Beijing Friday with the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Jiang was also quoted as saying China would welcome eventual normalisation of North Korea's relations with the United States and Japan.

"As a country neighbouring the Korean Peninsula, the government of China wishes to continue playing a constructive role in further easing the situation on the peninsula." Jiang told the leading economic daily. Jiang hoped that the two Koreas would gradually build up mutual confidence through dialogue following the recent start of four-way Korean peace talks, also involving China and the United States, the newspaper

He added Beijing would welcome improved relations between North Korea and the United States and between North Korea and Japan. "We would ultimately welcome normalisation of the relations." he said.

agreement to resume negotiations on March 16.

The first round of four-way talks, involving the four main countries that fought in the 1950-53 Korean war, was held in Geneva this week with an

The talks are aimed at concluding a permanent peace

treaty to replace the armistice

that technically ended the war but left the peninsula divided and heavily armed. Jiang said Beijing had no

definite plans at present to resume top level exchanges with Pyongyang, which have been suspended since the death of North Korea's Stalinist ruler Kim Il-Sung in July 1994. Kim's reclusive eldest son,

Jong-II, took over as general secretary of the All-Powerful Workers Party in October following three years of mourning for his father who had held the post along with state presi-

Jiang said North Korea was still limiting exchanges of visits be leaders with other countries and that he had "no concrete ideas for now" to exchange visits with the top leader in Pyongyang.

Mandela begins descent from power this week

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 13: Nelson Mandela begins his descent from power this week, stepping down as head of the African National Congress at a convention that will set South Africa's course into the next century, reports AP.

Mandela will remain president of the country until 1999. But he and other longtime ANC leaders are starting to make way for the governing party's next generation, led by ANC president-in-waiting Thabo Mbeki.

gins Tuesday in the northern town of Mafikeng. Paid-up party membership stands at just under 135,000, believed to be well below the total

in 1994 at the height of the AN-

The ANC is picking leaders at a five-day meeting that be-

Heated interview with minister

Labour Party warns BBC of possible reprisals LONDON, Dec 13: Britain's

ruling Labour Party has warned the BBC of possible reprisals after a heated interview with a senior minister, provoking opposition claims Friday that it was trying to muzzle the press. reports AFP.

Labour officials wrote to the BBC Wednesday complaining over an interview on the flagship morning radio news programme earlier in the day with Harriet Harman, the Secretary of State for Social Security. They said she was con-

stantly interrupted by the interviewer and "frankly, none of us feels that this can go on. We can see no benefit to us." The letter, which was made

that Labour was "now seriously considering weather, as a party, we will suspend cooperation when you make bids through us for interviews with government ministers."

Wednesday's interview with

ernment's controversial move to cut benefits for single par-The issue has split the Labour Party in what has become the biggest revolt by its

backbenchers since it came to

power in May.

Harman centred on the gov-

Three members of the government — a junior minister and two parliamentary private secretaries - have resigned, and 47 MPs voted against the cuts in

290,000 children working illegally in US

sey. Dec 13: No one has tried to study makes a strong case for of the law has stabilized in the count them all. Not even the developing better data on the most recent period measured. federal government, which is responsible for their well-be-

ing, reports AP. So how many children are working illegally in America? On behalf of The Associated Press, a Rutgers University labor economist analyzed data from census surveys and other sources to estimate their number. The result: 290,200 children — two-thirds of them 15 years or younger - worked unlawfully in America last year.

Not all those children, more

than two boys to every girl, are

living a Dickensian nightmare.

Some are teen-agers selling

burgers and fries at the mall for more hours than the law al-Others, though, toil in jobs too dangerous for their years, or work during the very school

hours designed to give them a chance at a future. The study by Douglas L Kruse, a labor economist at the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, represents the only comprehensive estimate of illegal child labor in the nation now available. If

nothing else. Kruse said, the and girls working in violation employment of children. Because migrant laborers

and very young child workers

are particularly difficult for government surveys to pick up. the study may well leave thousands of child workers uncounted. Nevertheless, it estimates

Of the 290,200 children ille-

gally employed last year.

129,700 were 14 or 15 years old.

and 59,600 were younger than

that. 147,700 children work il-

legally in America in an aver-Employers saved dirs 155 million last year employing children illegally, rather than paying more to hire legal work-

Children working in jobs the law declares too hazardous for their age were paid dlrs 1.38 an hour less on average than those who could be employed in compliance with the law. Children working illegally averaged dirs 5 an hour.

While illegal child labor appears to have decreased since the 1970s, the number of boys

1995-97.

To put the estimates in con-

text, the number of children working illegally is close to 4 per cent of the 4.1 million children aged 12 to 17 who work in America during any given week. Some industries were harder for Kruse to measure than others. Illegal home-based work. like sewing dresses outside the

how many kids were involved. The study did estimate 13,100 children were working illegally last year in garment industry sweatshops, defined as business with a pattern of violating wage, safety and child labor regulations.

workplace, was not included in

the illegal count since there was

no accurate way to calculate

Agriculture, which relies heavily in some areas of the country on migrant workers, is also hard to examine. To make an estimate, Kruse took the number of child labor

violations the US Department

of Labor actually found in agri-

culture and extrapolated a fig-

ure for the number of children

working illegally in that indus-

that the department polices and the Census Bureau. He then agriculture as thoroughly as compared the responses with other areas of the economy. However, the AP has found that it does not, which makes Kruse's estimate conservative. "Child labor laws for agri-

cultural employment are much less stringent than for nonagricultural employment," Kruse noted. In some cases, kids under age 12 can work legally for commercial farms. With those caveats, Kruse estimated 4,900 children worked illegally last year in agricul-

ture, which includes both crop

and livestock work. To put that

in context, he figured 229,600

children aged 14 to 17, for

which data are the most complete, were employed in the industry last year. A figure for younger children in agriculture could not be calculated due to a lack of good data. AP reporters who visited farms saw scores of children

To make his overall calcula-

tions, Kruse first examined

employment data about 15-16-

and 17-year-olds in the Current

Population Survey, compiled by

under 14 at work.

try. This calculation assumes the Bureau of Labor Statistics federal and state labor laws to identify violations. Kruse combined 33 monthly surveys from January 1995 to September 1997 to get a large enough sample. Each survey looked at about 60,000 households.

To calculate how many younger children work illegally. Kruse used other data including the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, and statistics on adolescent workrelated injuries and death. Examining data over time,

Kruse estimated that illegal child labor decreased since the 1970s. However, in recent years, the decline has stopped. He found the number of 15-to 17year-olds working in violation of federal law during an average school week has varied over the past 26 years: 156,000 in 1971-75, 169,000 in 1976-80, 100,000 in 1991-94.

For the most recent period 1995-97, the number increased to 114,000. However, the statistical limitations of the study make it difficult to know if the increase is real.



space station Mir with his Russian hosts, cosmonauts Pavel Vinogradov, left, and Anatoly Solovyev, Friday, in this image from television. Wolf and Solovyev are hoping to make a spacewalk in early January. . - AP/UNB photo