

International

Egypt, Algeria for it move to provide asylum to Islamic activists

TUNIS, Jan 5: Egypt and Algeria called here Sunday for "joint action" by Arab nations to put pressure on countries providing asylum to Islamic activists, reports AFP.

The call was made in speeches by Egyptian Interior Minister Habib el-Adili and by his Algerian counterpart Mustapha ben Mansour, to a meeting of Arab ministers on terrorism and security.

"We are hoping for a joint Arab action in the direction of countries harbouring terrorist leaders to persuade them to co-operate seriously and efficiently in the extradition of these rebel elements," Adili said, according to a copy of his speech distributed to the press.

He emphasised the need for Arabs to adopt "a firm and decisive" position to thwart the actions of "the forces of evil and of terrorism."

"What can our police forces and security systems do in the

face of groups who conspire from a far and enjoy safe havens and obvious protection in countries which grant them asylum and freedom?" Adili said.

"Whatever efforts Arab countries make to eradicate terrorism they will be vain if the phenomenon continues to come in from the outside," he said.

Cairo bitterly criticised the asylum granted by some western countries, in particular Britain, to Egyptian Islamic activists, particularly after the attack which left 62 dead including 58 tourists on November 17 at Luxor in upper Egypt.

The meeting grouped interior ministers from 21 Arab member countries of the Arab League and the Palestinian Authority and is to adopt a common accord on anti-terrorist measures.

The meeting, the 15th of its kind, is due to last three days.

Migrants to Australia creating thousands of jobs, bringing dollars into local economy

SYDNEY, Jan 5: Business people migrating to Australia are creating thousands of jobs and bringing more than half a million Australian dollars each into the local economy, the government said today, reports AFP.

According to a government survey, almost four of every five people classified as business skills migrants had established businesses in Australia within three years of their arrival.

On average, each of the businesses started by the largely Asian migrants created six new jobs for a total of 3,600 new jobs, said immigration minister Philip Ruddock.

Ruddock said that disapproved claims that immigrants hurt Australia and that the survey proved immigrants provided a great benefit to the economy.

You can see that it has a very

positive spin-off for people who are interested in employment outcomes for people who are interested in seeing our economy grow, for people who are interested in seeing us being more export oriented," he said.

Australia's image has suffered in Asia recently, largely because of the loud anti-Asian stance of independent MP Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party. Hanson, a former fish and chips shop owner from the state of Queensland, has called for an end to immigration.

Australia is also conscious of its image in the region. Over the weekend, media reports that many Asians saw Australians as lazy and uncouth drew a quick rebuke from the government which pointed to rising Asian migration and tourism figures to counter the claims.

2nd trial of Bosnian war crimes suspects begins today

THE HAGUE, Jan 5: The UN tribunal judging war crimes suspects from the Bosnian conflict begins its second trial this week when a former officer of the Bosnian Croat HVO militia comes before the court on Tuesday, reports AP.

Zlatko Aleksovski, 37, is accused of mistreating Muslim prisoners held at a detention camp in central Bosnia in 1993 during Muslim Croat fighting at the height of the three and a half year war.

He is the first member of the HVO to face the UN criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia set up in 1993 to try those accused of crimes against humanity and genocide in Bosnia.

The first trial at The Hague was of Dusan Tadic, a Bosnian

Serb soldier found guilty of atrocities in northern Bosnia and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Another soldier in the Bosnian Serb army Dragan Erdemovic was given a 10 year sentence after admitting being in an execution squad that killed dozens of Muslim in 1995.

Aleksovski was extradited to The Hague in July after being arrested by Croatian police earlier in the year.

He pleaded not guilty to charges that he mistreated prisoners held in the Lasva Valley during 1993 when HVO forces expelled thousands of Muslims from their homes in a bloody blitz on villages and towns in the area that saw hundreds killed.

Laloo to lead new 5-party alliance

'Secular Front' to be set up to stop BJP's victory

A new alliance of centrist Indian political parties is to be set up here in a bid to stop Hindu nationalists from winning upcoming elections, a party official said, reports AFP.

Five parties, whose influence is limited to the country's north, east and west, will announce a 'Secular Front' and field joint candidates in the February-March polls, said spokesman Ranjan Yadav.

The front will be the fourth significant bloc in the balloting, which analysts expect to produce a hung parliament.

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), is being tipped to retain its position as the country's largest parliamentary party in the elections

beginning February 16 an ending March 7.

They are already being challenged by the once-dominant Congress, the country's oldest party, and the outgoing centrist United Front coalition government, made up of more than a dozen disparate parties.

Ranjan Yadav told AFP the new alliance — which is likely to be in the running for around 150 of India's 545 parliamentary seats — would look to forge links with the Congress, which like the BJP is looking for pre-poll alliances nationwide.

Although badly fragmented among themselves, the three blocs challenging the BJP are bitterly opposed to the nationalist agenda, which they say is sectarian.

The main leaders of the proposed 'Secular Front' will be Laloo Prasad Yadav, a popular but corruption-tainted politician who broke away from Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's United Front last year, and Kashi Ram, who heads a party of Hindu 'untouchables'.

The alliance also includes Chandra Shekhar, India's prime minister from November 1990 to June 1991, and a break-away faction of Hindu nationalists.

"We are coming together to prevent Hindu communal forces from coming to power," Ranjan Yadav said. "Our number one enemy is BJP."

"We consider the Congress as a secular party, and naturally our sympathies lie with that

party. We will try our best to forge an electoral understanding with the Congress."

Some recent opinion polls have predicted a clear victory for the BJP and its growing allies.

Yadav, however, ridiculed the idea.

"The BJP myth is a creation of a section of the media," he said. "This is the usual propaganda tactic the BJP employs during every election."

In 1996, the BJP claimed 162 seats and won the support of around 30 allies, still leaving it well short of the 273 members needed for a majority. The Congress won around 140 seats, while the United Front commanded 180.

Diana's family launches advance ticket sales to her grave site

LONDON, Jan 5: Princess Diana's family launched advance ticket sales to her grave site today, publishing a telephone number for the public to call and announcing the entry price — 9.50 pounds (15.60 dollar) each, reports Reuters.

Would be visitors to the princess's grave at the Spencer Family's Althorp estate in central England were invited to call now to book tickets for the summer, when the site will be open for two months, a Spencer Family statement said.

All bookings must be made in advance and can only be made by calling the telephone number 01604 592020, the statement said, more than 220 telephone lines were set up to handle the expected deluge of callers after the opening of the line at 0900 GMT.

Visitors to the estate will be allowed up to the edge of the lake to look over at the island where Diana was buried after being killed in a Paris car crash on August 31, 1997.

Fergie denies any hint of romance with Italian count

LONDON, Jan 5: Sarah Ferguson, the former wife of Britain's Prince Andrew, Sunday strongly denied any hint of romance with a rich Italian count with whom she was seen in the New Year, reports AFP.

"They are very good friends — but there's no romance," said a spokesman for the Duchess of York.

Fergie as she is popularly known, spent the New Year in Tuscany with Caddo Della Gherardesca, who heads one of Italy's richest families. It was the third time in six weeks that they had seen each other.

The count is separated from his wife Michela and has two children.

Fergie's daughters, Princesses Beatrice, 9 and Eugenie, 7, spent the New Year with their father in England.

The Duchess was invited to spend a couple of days last week with the count and his family, the spokesman said.

Imelda returns home after eye treatment in US

MANILA, Jan 5: The widow of dictator Ferdinand Marcos returned home on Monday after undergoing eye treatment in the United States that she said will prevent her from going blind, reports AP.

Wearing dark glasses and clutching a bouquet of roses, Imelda Marcos thanked the Philippine Supreme Court for overturning a travel ban and allowing her to go to Boston for treatment of glaucoma despite a graft conviction.

"I'm very, very happy to be home," said Mrs Marcos. However, she said she may need to travel again to the United States so doctors can check the results of the treatment.

It was the first time the once jet-setting former first lady has been permitted to leave the country since a court convicted her of graft in 1993 and sentenced her to up to 24 years in jail.

Need for sub-regional grouping still doesn't convince all

KATHMANDU, Jan 5: Even as foreign secretaries of four South Asian countries meet in Kathmandu this week to finalise the modalities of sub-regional development, doubts are being expressed over the need for such a concept within a larger regional grouping, according to India Abroad News Service.

For chalking out of the modalities of the South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) comprising Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal, a foreign secretary level meeting is scheduled here tomorrow. Nepal is the overall coordinator of the new development concept.

The growth quadrangle was conceived and approved at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit at Male, Maldives, last year. Kathmandu is presently busy preparing the paperwork on the modalities and the share of responsibilities within the SAGQ for the take-off.

"We are in the draft phase of the preparation of the framework to be carried out," Nepali Foreign Secretary Murari Raj Sharma told India Abroad News Service.

"Since this is the first secretary-level meeting, we are not expecting all policies and programmes to be hammered out right now," he said, adding, "however, the beginning is positive and the response enthusiastic from all SAGQ countries."

But while sub-regional development efforts under the SAGQ banner are being promoted, there are still nations within the SAARC that are not pleased with the growth quadrangle concept. Although Colombo and Islamabad had agreed to allow quadrilateral cooperation at the SAARC Summit in Male, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, during her recent visit to Pakistan, criticised the concept. She ruled out the need for sub-regional efforts within the SAARC.

A section of Nepali politi-

cians and intelligentsia too are not entirely convinced of the need for the sub-regional development initiative. Former Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey told IANS: "I do not understand why any kind of sub-regional concept is being forwarded when there is SAARC. Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives too should have been taken into confidence for this initiative."

At a time when SAARC itself has not been showing effect for overall uplift of one billion plus people of the region, I do not think any sub-regional concept will work," economist and professor of Tribhuvan University Madhab Khadka said. "Yes, there is every possibility of success of the SAGQ if political leaders of the region show their commitment for the welfare of their people," he however added.

"In the background of the performance of SAARC so far, there is little hope that the sub-regional initiative can be effective for the betterment of the people of this poorest region in the world," Khadka said.

Meanwhile, Nepal is preparing a multi-model project on transportation and tourism. Foreign Secretary Sharma said. Kathmandu has taken the responsibility of preparing project papers for joint implementation of these two sectors.

The SAGQ has identified six areas for possible cooperation — joint utilisation of natural resources, energy, transportation, tourism, investment and environment.

Harnessing natural resources and energy is the sector which Bangladesh is preparing project papers for, while India's share is trade and investment and environment is Bhutan's job to prepare a project paper on.

Foreign Ministry officials here said that the forthcoming Kathmandu meeting will mainly discuss the modalities for broad cooperation.

Politicians gather in Brazzaville for start of a peace forum

KINSHASA, Jan 5: Hundreds of politicians from across the Republic of Congo gathered in the bombed out capital Brazzaville today for the start of a peace forum following a devastating civil war that ended in October, reports Reuters.

Former military ruler Denis Sassou Nguesso who returned to power as the civil war victor invited the country's various political groups to the week-long meeting to discuss the future of the Central African nation.

Organisers say the national peace and reconciliation forum will decide the length of the transition to presidential elections. It will also seek ways of cementing national unity in the country riven with deep regional and ethnic rivalries at the root of two civil wars since 1993.

The forum is the most important political gathering since Sassou's Cobra Militia backed by Angolan Army troops toppled elected President Pascal Lissouba, who fled to Burkina Faso.

"Obviously after a war like that they are not going to patch up everyone's differences overnight," a diplomat told Reuters in Kinshasa, capital of Democratic Republic of the Congo across the river from Brazzaville.

Organisers say the 800 invited participants will represent the whole spectrum of Congolese politics. But staunch supporters of Lissouba and his last prime minister, Bernard Kolelas, are likely to be thin on the ground.

Mir crew members start preparations for spacewalk

MOSCOW, Jan 5: The crew of the Mir orbiting station started to check their spacesuits on Monday to prepare for two spacewalks due to take place over the next nine days, reports AP.

Mir commander Anatoly Solovoyov and flight engineer Pavel Vinogradov were checking the suits and electronic systems and replacing some elements, the Mission Control Center said.

Vinogradov and Solovoyov, the most experienced spacewalker in history, are to venture into open space Thursday. Their spacewalk has been postponed many times because of more pressing work inside the station.

The two cosmonauts plan to install a new airtight rubber seal on the exit hatch of the Mir's Kvant-2 module that failed to close properly after their spacewalk last November.

The resulting partial loss of pressure has only affected Kvant's docking chamber,

which is sealed from the rest of the station.

Another spacewalk, by Solovoyov and NASA astronaut David Wolf, is scheduled for January 14. That effort is aimed at retrieving US scientific equipment on the outside of the station.

Meanwhile, Mission Control officials said 10 gyroscopes on the station were now in order, the Interfax news agency reported. The gyroscope system, which keeps the Mir's solar panels facing the sun, shut down Friday following a failure of the station's main computer.

As a result, the Mir lost power and its crew turned off all non-essential systems outside the core module to save energy. The crew replaced a faulty computer block and regained full control of the station's orientation system on Saturday.

"On short, we had a merry (New Year's) holiday," Solovoyov told ground controllers Monday, according to the ITAR-Tass news agency.

BRIEFLY

Iran slates Jordanian plan: Iran condemned as "unacceptable" Sunday Jordanian plans to take part as an observer in a joint exercise between Israel, Turkey and the United States planned for later this week, AFP says from Tehran.

Participation of Jordan as an observer to the war game which has brought about opposition of all Muslim nations is an unwelcome measure to the world of Islamic foreign ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi told the official news agency IRNA. "From the viewpoint of the Islamic Republic of Iran it is unacceptable," he said.

3 killed in Peru violence: Three people including the widow and daughter for a former Peruvian legislator died early Sunday when attackers sprayed their car with automatic weapons police said, AFP reports from Lima.

The ambush in one of capitals exclusive residential neighbourhoods also left one policeman dead and injured the daughter of another legislator, they said. Witnesses said four heavily armed people opened fire, instantly killing 10-year-old Melissa Paredes, her mother Nora Ruiz De Paredes was taken to a nearby clinic and pronounced dead there.

Italian film director dead: Italian film director Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia who was noted for his comedies and epic costume dramas died Sunday, aged 103, his family said, AFP reports from Rome.

Bragaglia had been taken into hospital nearly three weeks ago for an operation on his leg after a fall. He began his career in the 1930 making more than 60 films before retiring in the 1960s. Hannibal, his 1959 film with Edgar George Ulmer, was considered one of his best.

5 die as ferry sinks in HK: Five people died and another 20 are missing presumed dead, after a ferry carrying guests home from a wedding banquet sank in a river in southeast China's Fujian province, reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Authorities are seeking the boat owner who fled following the sinking of the ferry in Minjiang river on Saturday the Tin Tin Daily news said. The ferry was believed to be unregistered and with capacity for only 15 passengers.

4 killed in Tajik train mishap: Four people were killed and 15 were wounded Monday when a passenger train went off its rails in Tajikistan, officials said, AP says from Moscow.

The accident in northern Tajikistan — a former Soviet republic in Central Asia — involved a train traveling between the towns of Andizhan and Urgench, the Tajik Emergency Situations Committee reported, according to the Interfax news agency.

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan sign deals: The Presidents of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan signed a series of cooperation agreements on Sunday as part of a one-day visit to Tashkent by Tajik leader Emomali Rakhmanov, Interfax reported, AFP says from Moscow.

The accords cover joint action in the fields of health, culture, humanitarian assistance, science, technology and information. Rakhmanov and his host Islam Karimov also signed an inter-governmental accord on mutual debt settlement Interfax said.



Taliban fighters ride their multiple rocket launcher near the front line north of Kabul, Sunday. Taliban Information Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi demanded Iran hand over an opposition general accused of massacring thousands of Taliban troops or become "a target" of relatives seeking revenge during a news conference in Kabul Sunday. —AP/UNB photo

Israel accepts UN resolution on pullout from S Lebanon

JERUSALEM, Jan 5: Israel publicly accepted for the first time on Sunday a 1978 UN resolution calling for its withdrawal from South Lebanon, but insisted any pullout must be accompanied by security guarantees, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a Cabinet meeting Sunday that statements by Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai to a Lebanese newspaper on Friday recognising the validity of UN Security Council Resolution 425 represented Israeli policy.

The defence minister's remarks express an Israeli government policy which has not changed, i.e. that Israel is ready to accept Resolution 425 provided that it is possible to reach an agreement with Lebanon which will ensure the security procedures required by Israel, Netanyahu said according to

minutes of the Cabinet meeting released by his office.

"Of course, a unilateral withdrawal is out of question," Netanyahu said.

Earlier a Defence Ministry spokesman said Mordechai's statements in his interview with the Lebanese weekly Al-Watan Al-Arabi was "a political gesture aimed at better explaining our position."

In the interview, Mordechai insisted that Resolution 425 "Does not demand an unconditional IDF (Israeli defence force) withdrawal and whoever reads it will see that it is a balanced solution."

"For the IDF to get out of Lebanon, peace and security have to be restored as (the resolution) states, and I know of only one way to do so: By halting terror and violence, preventing attacks against Israel from Lebanese territory, creat-

ing normalised, good relations on both sides of the border, and cooperation between the IDF and the Lebanese Army."

Israel has occupied a buffer zone in South Lebanon since 1978 to protect its northern territory from attacks by anti-Israeli guerrillas, notably the Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

It has frequently linked any withdrawal to the Lebanese government ensuring that no attacks are launched from the territory against northern Israel.

Yossi Beilin, a member of the opposition Labour Party who is campaigning for an unconditional withdrawal, described Mordechai's comments as "an important step," but criticised him for linking the pullout to security.

"The (UN) resolution speaks of an unconditional retreat," he said.



Kenya's President Daniel Arap Moi, second right, greets church goers after services at the Nairobi Pentecostal Church Sunday. Moi will be sworn-in Monday for his fifth five-year term as Kenya's head of state after winning the presidential elections. —AP/UNB photo

Levy's resignation sends Netanyahu govt into a tailspin

TEL AVIV, Jan 5: The resignation of Israel's foreign minister has sent Benjamin Netanyahu's government into a tailspin and cast doubts on the prime minister's latest effort to revive peace talks with the Palestinians, reports AP.

Announcing his resignation Sunday, David Levy, the Cabinet's main supporter of the peace talks, bitterly denounced Netanyahu's government for abandoning the peace process and ignoring the mounting problems of Israel's poor and unemployed.

The resignation left the government on the brink of collapse, and Israel's TV and radio stations broadcast special all-evening talk shows discussing the chances of early elections and the possibility that the dovish Labour party would return to power.

By law, Levy's resignation doesn't take effect until Tuesday, meaning he could still back down. His recent threats to leave the government had been viewed with some skepticism; Levy had made similar threats at least six times since the current coalition was formed in June 1996.

Netanyahu, who will act as foreign minister for the time being, issued a statement saying he regretted Levy's decision and hoped "he will change his mind."

But Levy's supporters gathered outside his home Sunday and threatened to leave the government in recent days over his dissatisfaction with an austere 1998 budget.

Netanyahu responded last week by delaying a vote on the budget — which he can do for three more months before his

members of the 120-member Parliament — and he could face more defections from other supporters of the peace process, those within his party as well as other members of the coalition.

At a news conference, the prime minister said he believed his coalition would prevail, and added that the government was on the brink of resuming the peace process and "doing the right thing to bring about a secure peace — not just a peace on paper."

Levy, a champion of the country's working class, had threatened to leave the government in recent days over his dissatisfaction with an austere 1998 budget.

Netanyahu responded last week by delaying a vote on the budget — which he can do for three more months before his

government falls — and figuring out how to come up with a reported 100 million dollars in social subsidies for lower-income Israelis.

But Levy said Sunday that despite Netanyahu's efforts, he had decided "the partnership had failed."

Hanan Ashrawi, a senior member in the Palestinian Cabinet, said the internal chaos in Israel's government would likely to delay the peace process even as the United States is pushing for progress.

Without Levy, Netanyahu would be more dependent on Cabinet hard-liners for support, which would give him a ready-made excuse not to implement agreements' Ashrawi said.

The opposition Labour Party announced it would bring a motion of no-confidence in Par-

liament next week. If it wins an absolute majority, elections could be held within two months.

"This government has shamed its voters," Labour Party leader Ehud Barak said in Tel Aviv. "The gap between what Netanyahu promised and what is happening... is so grave that we cannot go on."

Hard-line Agriculture Minister Rafael Eytan admitted Sunday that "The government in its present form is hanging by a thread" and called on Netanyahu to initiate new elections himself.

Such elections, Ashrawi said, could "be used as a pretext to put the peace process on hold."

Still, Netanyahu is well behind Barak in the polls, and a return of the dovish Labour

Party to power would certainly speed up the peace process.

Despite the political crisis, the United States is not relieving pressure on Netanyahu to deliver on Israel's promise of a troop pullback in the West Bank.

President Bill Clinton's special Middle East envoy, Dennis Ross, is due to visit the region this week. On January 20, Netanyahu is expected to present a concrete pullback plan at the White House, and Clinton is to meet with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat two days later, Israeli and Palestinian officials confirmed Sunday.

Levy appeared unlikely to change his mind about his resignation, especially after his condemnation of the government's half-hearted peace moves.