

International

Enemy jets drop bombs on 2 Afghan villages

KABUL, Jan 26: Four enemy jets pounded central Bamyan province, a region of this war-ravaged country already battered by food shortages and bitterly cold winter temperatures, an opposition leader said on Monday, reports AP.

The jets, apparently belonging to the Taliban militia, dropped several bombs on two villages, Haiderabad and Saeedabad, injuring nine people and destroying several homes, said Qasim Jafrey, a spokesman for the Shi'ite Muslim group, Hezb-e-Wahdat.

Jafrey said Sunday's bombing raids were the first attack in several weeks.

The United Nations was forced to suspend an emergency airlift of food to Bamyan last month after Taliban jets bombed the Bamyan runway, where a UN jet was parked.

The only casualty was the airlift that was eventually expected to bring in 5,000 tons of food to Bamyan.

UN officials went to the Taliban headquarters in southern

Afghanistan to try to negotiate a temporary truce, long enough to get food to an estimated 600,000 hungry people. The Taliban refused saying, they feared the food would be distributed to enemy soldiers.

The Taliban is waging bitter battles against its enemies on several fronts in Afghanistan. The anti-Taliban alliance, of which Hezb-e-Wahdat is a member, is trying to prevent the Taliban from consolidating its hold on the entire country.

Already the Taliban rule 85 per cent of Afghanistan where they have imposed their rigid brand of Islamic law.

The anti-Taliban opposition controls the remaining 15 per cent of the country, most of it in northern Afghanistan, and most of it inhabited by minority ethnic groups, like Shi'ite Muslims of Bamyan province.

"People are very hungry here and the stocks are running very low," said Jafrey in a satellite telephone interview with The Associated Press.



An angry resident of Karachi burns police check post as the others look on Sunday while protesting the kidnapping and killing of two youngsters from an ethnic political party. The protesters blamed police for not providing protection from militants of political parties.

— AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY**2 Palestinians arrested:**

Two Palestinians who were on their way to Jerusalem to carry out a terror attack were caught in an Israeli police dragnet before they reached the city, police said Monday, AP reports from Jerusalem.

On Sunday, police had received specific warnings about two cars including their make and color — that were en route to Jerusalem, driven by men plotting an attack. Police set up roadblocks on routes leading to the city and checked cars one by one, tying up traffic for hours Sunday evening.

Anti-Suharto protest staged:

About 70 protesters staged a noisy but peaceful demonstration outside Indonesia's parliament Monday, demanding President Suharto retire, AP reports from Jakarta.

Watched by about 50 plainclothes security personnel, the protesters reading poetry, made speeches and chanting: "please Mr. Suharto, you have to step down." Many of them called for opposition figure Megawati Sukarnoputri to be made head of state when a 1,000-member assembly elects a president in March.

India, France sign accords:

Visiting French President Jacques Chirac watched Sunday as France and India signed two agreements on cooperation in legal matters, AP reports from New Delhi.

The signing ceremony in New Delhi came on the second day of Chirac's three-day state visit to India.

4 killed in Philippines:

Army troops clashed with Muslim rebels in the southern Philippines on Sunday in fighting that killed at least four people and endangered peace talks between the government and the rebels, AP reports from Cotabato.

The military said the clashes in Datu Piang, a marshy town in Maguindanao province, killed an army officer and three rebels of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Military officials said the rebels first ambushed army soldiers on their way to assist farmers who complained they were being harassed by MILF rebels in three Datu Piang villages. Two soldiers were injured in the attack.

Pioneer of 'Suzuki Method' dies:

Shinichi Suzuki, who pioneered a method of teaching very young children to play instruments, died Monday at the age of 99, Japanese media report said. AP reports from Tokyo.

Suzuki, head of a world-renowned musical instruction institute, developed what became known as the "Suzuki method" of teaching in the 1950s.

EU FMs look for ways to end bloodshed in Algeria

BRUSSELS, Jan 26: As the bodies of innocent victims in Algeria's civil strife continued to pile up over the weekend, European Union foreign ministers searched for ways to help end the bloodshed. But ideas were few, reports AP.

Toppling the agenda of Monday's ministerial meeting under the EU's new British presidency was a report by Foreign Minister of State Derek Fatchett on the results of last week's fact-finding mission to Algeria.

The minister's agenda includes "an exchange of views on the situation in Algeria" and exploring "what actions could be undertaken." But a plan to back up Europe's sympathy with effective action, particularly in light of Algeria's reluctance to accept outside help, seemed remote.

Europeans are horrified by the continuing violence. Twenty more villagers died Sunday morning when armed attackers slit their throats, bringing to 94 the number of reported killings over four days.

According to the Algerian government, 26,536 people have been killed and 21,000 injured since an Islamic insurgency began six years ago. Press and hospital sources put the figure at 75,000. Others say it may be as high as 120,000.

The government blames Islamic militants. Others say at least some of it is the work of the military-backed government itself, determined to stamp out Islamic fundamentalism in the North African nation of 30 million people.

Standoff with Iraq**Clinton scandal won't affect US decisions**

WASHINGTON, Jan 26: White House and congressional officials have insisted that the sex scandal engulfing President Bill Clinton won't hamper US decisions on the weapons standoff with Iraq — including whether to mount a military attack, reports AP.

"I don't think anyone overseas should presume that this president wouldn't have the capacity to act with Republican support," Republican Senator John Ashcroft, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said on Fox television Sunday.

At Clinton's direction, national security advisors were consulting with allies and other countries on the prospect of a military strike to take out sites where Saddam Hussein is suspected of hiding potential biological and chemical weapons.

After a Saturday meeting, Clinton's key aide reached consensus that UN weapons inspections cannot be carried out effectively because of Iraq's defiant resistance and were considering using force to end the standoff.

National security spokesman Eric Rubin would not reveal whether the White House would try a last round of diplomacy before ordering a military strike. "We have not ruled anything out," he said.

A White House official speaking on condition of

Desperate to show it is not standing by idly, the 15-nation EU sent a three-member delegation on a 24-hour visit to Algiers last week, a visit limited to the Algerian capital and to talks mostly with officials.

The Algerians, fearing foreign interference in their internal affairs, rejected EU offers of humanitarian aid to the victims of the violence. They did agree to an official visit by Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf to Europe and an exchange of parliamentary delegations. None of that, however, seemed destined to have any immediate effect on the bloodshed.

The Islamic insurgency was triggered by the Algerian army's cancellation of the January 1992 legislative elections to thwart what appeared to be a likely victory by the Islamic Salvation Front. The party was then banned.

The radical Armed Islamic Group has claimed responsibility for some of the massacres. The Islamic Salvation Army, called a cease-fire Oct. 1.

The Algerian government says if Europe is really interested in ending the violence it should crack down on Algerian opposition networks operating freely in the West, including in Germany, France, Britain and Italy. These networks say the

Algerians use the European safe havens not only as platforms for propaganda, but for procuring weapons.

Also on the minister's programme is the first EU-Russia Cooperation Council on Tues-

Militants kill 17 civilians in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India Jan 26: Suspected Muslim militants massacred 17 civilians in the troubled north Indian state of Kashmir, police said Monday, reports AP.

The attackers entered Wana village 20 kilometres (12 miles) north of Srinagar late Sunday night and opened fire killing 17 Hindu villagers, police in Srinagar said on condition of anonymity.

India accuses Pakistan of training and arming Muslim militants fighting an insurgency in Kashmir that has killed more than 15,000 people since 1989. Pakistan denies the charge, saying it lends only moral support.

Tutu summoned to Botha's trial

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 26: South Africa's former president PW Botha was summoned Truth Commission head Desmond Tutu to appear when the case against Botha resumes on February 23, Sunday newspaper report said, reports AFP.

The Afrikaans-language weekly, the only newspaper 82-year-old Botha is willing to speak to regularly, said that should Tutu fail to attend, he would be liable to a fine of 300 rand (60 dollars) a day for each term in prison.

Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of South Africa, is chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The fiery Botha, who led South Africa during the harshest years of apartheid in the 1980s, is being prosecuted for failing to appear in person before the TRC to testify on the apartheid-era State Security Council, which he headed.

Queen Mother hospitalised

LONDON, Jan 26: Britain's Queen Mother, 97, was taken to hospital Sunday after breaking her left hip at the royal residence at Sandringham, eastern England, Buckingham Palace announced, reports AP.

She was admitted to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital at nearby King's Lynn before being transferred to the King Edward VII Hospital in London, a spokesman said.

Iraq building world's largest mosque

BAGHDAD, Jan 26: Iraq started work here Sunday on a multi-million dollar Saddam Grand Mosque which it has billed as the largest in the world, state television announced, reports AFP.

It showed a main pillar being erected at the site near the Tigris River which flows through the capital.

The circular mosque, to be surrounded by an artificial lake and built on the site of an old airport bombed during the 1991 Gulf War, will have the capacity to accommodate 45,000 worshippers, it said.

The main dome will be 150 metres high and have a diameter of 172 m in the mosque will have eight slender minarets, four of them 200 m high while the complex will cover an area of 955,250 square metres.

Death toll in temple blast now 15**Lanka braces for anti-Tamil backlash**

COLOMBO, Jan 26: Tens of thousands of police officers and battle-ready troops kept a night-long vigil across Sri Lanka to prevent any anti-Tamil backlash, as the death toll in a truck bomb attack on Sri Lankan Buddhists' holiest shrine rose to 15 on Monday, reports AP.

Sunday's attack in Kandy, east of Colombo, was blamed on separatists who accuse the Sinhalese majority of sometimes brutal discrimination against the Tamil minority. Most Sinhalese are Buddhist and most Tamils Hindu, though religion has not been a central issue in the 15-year ethnic war.

Troops in full combat gear guarded Tamil neighbourhoods in Colombo, Kandy and other towns. Despite a few angry Sinhalese protests, no violence against Tamils was reported overnight.

The director at Kandy Gen-

eral Hospital said two of the injured died overnight and police recovered two more bodies from a lake that adjoins the temple, bringing the death toll to 15 — including three rebel suicide bombers. Another 21 people remained hospitalised.

The attack on the 18th century shrine, which houses what the faithful believe is a tooth of the Buddha, came just ten days before it will host Sri Lanka's 50th independence anniversary celebrations. Officials said the Prince Charles as the chief guest will go ahead.

The temple's roof was damaged in the explosion, but the blasts did not harm the inner shrine where the tooth is kept.

The relic is an important symbol to Sinhalese nationalists. In ancient times, a ruler who failed to protect the tooth was seen as being unfit to be king.

Hours after the attack on the

temple a mob of enraged Sinhalese burned down a Hindu cultural centre in Kandy, but one was hurt. Police fired tear gas to disperse the mob. Protesters also set fire to three vehicles in Kandy on Sunday, but the rioting did not spread.

Government media broadcast repeated appeals for calm.

Anti-Tamil rioting in 1983 following a rebel attack that killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers forced many Tamils out of Colombo and created the impression in their minds that they could not be safe in areas controlled by the Sinhalese.

More than 51,000 people have been killed since Sri Lanka's separatist war broke out that year.

Sunday's audacious, attack could increase the ethnic divide, threatening the government's attempt to persuade both the Sinhalese and the Tamils that they can live together.

Arafat appeals for urgent Arab summit

TUNIS, Jan 26: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat called on Sunday for an urgent Arab summit as soon as possible, the aide said.

Apart from the Algerian president, the Palestinian leader also discussed the issue with Morocco's King Hassan in Rabat and Mauritanian President Maouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya in Nouakchott on Saturday.

"I must notice this good word from President Clinton who said he supports a free Palestinian people on his land. This has a deep political significance," Arafat added.

"In Washington, we faced difficulties because of the Israeli intransigence that was also experienced by the US administration. Netanyahua didn't present anything concrete that could help push forward the peace process," Arafat said.

said in Tunis.

"US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will continue her mission, visits, and meetings in an attempt to push things forward," he added in a statement after a meeting with Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

"I must notice this good word from President Clinton who said he supports a free Palestinian people on his land. This has a deep political significance," Arafat added.

Arafat was due to go to Britain today for talks with Prime Minister Tony Blair, a Blair spokesman in London said.

Britain currently holds the rotating European Union presidency.



Cuban leader Fidel Castro greets Pope John Paul II after the Pope's historic mass in Havana's Plaza of the Revolution Sunday. At the last and biggest Mass of his five-day pilgrimage to Cuba, Pope John Paul II called Sunday for the creation of a new society offering "peace, justice and freedom" but warned of the dangers of capitalism.

— AP/UNB photo

Israel to retaliate against any new Palestinian intifada'

JERUSALEM, Jan 26: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Sunday that Israel would retaliate against any new Palestinian "intifada," as both sides seemed as far apart as ever ahead of fresh US efforts to revive the peace process, reports AFP.

"Threats of violence are very serious and Israel will issue a tough response if the Palestinians are violent or issue threats to violence," Netanyahu told a Cabinet meeting.

"Israel will not agree to negotiate in the peace process under the threat of violence," Netanyahu said.

Arafat warned last week he would launch a new *intifada*, or uprising, if the peace process remained deadlocked.

"We are ready to return to where we left off and restart the seven years of *intifada*," he said.

Netanyahu also demanded that, before Israel agrees to the pullout, the Palestinians crack down on anti-Israeli groups and fulfil commitments he says

they made in past peace accords.

In particular, Netanyahu is unhappy with an April 1996 declaration by the Palestine National Council annulling all clauses in the Palestine Liberation Organisation Charter which contradicted the peace process.

Netanyahu says the blanket declaration accepted by then Prime Minister Shimon Peres is insufficient and wants the PNC, considered the PLO's parliament, to meet again to specify the sections of the Charter it is cancelling.

"We are not demanding the rewriting of a new Charter but that the PNC stipulates which articles are being annulled from its existing Charter," said Netanyahu's spokesman David Bar-Ilan.

Evidence that he placed calls to Lewinsky could be explained in the context of Clinton's concern for her well-being, the official said.

A key question is how Clinton will describe his relationship with Lewinsky?

Officials familiar with the president's thinking say he firmly denies participating in any sex act with Lewinsky. He won't deny a relationship, the officials say, not with evidence that Lewinsky visited the Oval Office area frequently and received gifts from Clinton.

"It was a relationship. It was sexually innocent," summarised one Clinton associate.

Senior officials outside the inner circle said Clinton was expected to say he was friendly with Lewinsky, forming a close bond that she might have misinterpreted.

The president is still surrounded by a loyal, hard-working staff that expects him to survive, but doubts are starting to creep in.

"More than one aide confided Sunday