

Two top Khmer Rouge defectors won't face charges

PHNOM PENH, Dec 27: Two top Khmer Rouge leaders who quit their fading rebel group will not face charges in Cambodia for their role in the brutal killing fields regime, an official here confirmed today, reports AFP.

Deputy Army Chief of Staff Meas Sopea said there was "no talk" that nominal leader Khiem Samphan or Pol Pot's top ideologue Nuon Chea would face charges or a trial for their part in the regime that claimed the lives of up to two million.

"There is no talk of charges or a trial here for Khiem Samphan or Nuon Chea when we are talking about national reconciliation," the general said, confirming the pair had been "warmly welcomed" by Prime Minister Hun Sen.

However, he said that Pol Pot's brutal military chief Ta Mok, now the lone fugitive rebel leader, remained a target of government forces despite being accompanied by just a few bodyguards.

Most observers believe the Christmas Day deal allowing the duo to emerge from the jungle gives them immunity from prosecution inside Cambodia. In return Hun Sen wins distinction as the politician who brought about the end of the rebel group.

However the strongman — himself a former Khmer Rouge himself — has in the past promised UN experts full cooperation in tracking down

Chinese dissident sentenced to 10 yrs in jail

BEIJING, Dec 27: A Chinese dissident was sentenced Sunday to 10 years imprisonment for giving interviews to the US government-funded Radio Free Asia, a human rights group said, reports AP.

Zhang Shuguang was sentenced following a 2 hour 20 minute hearing from which his wife and other relatives were barred, Human Rights in China said.

Zhang, who earlier had spent seven years in jail for labour rights campaigning, was the fourth dissident given a lengthy jail term in a week as part of a decisive crackdown on dissident by the ruling Communist Party.

They were to travel to the capital, Phnom Penh, to meet Prime Minister Hun Sen on Tuesday, Keut Kan said.

Central government officials could not immediately confirm the meeting. Though Pailin is technically under government control, its leaders are all former high-ranking Khmer Rouge.

In New York, the group Human Rights Watch issued a statement urging that Khiem Samphan and Nuon Chea be tried and convicted before any talk of pardoning them.

King Norodom Sihanouk, who is receiving medical treatment in Beijing, has approved the defections.

Sihanouk expressed "Deep gratitude about this good news," echoing conciliatory language used by Hun Sen that indicated the pair had surrendered in exchange for guarantees they would not be harmed.

Demirel rules out snap polls

ANKARA, Dec 27: Turkish President Suleyman Demirel said on Saturday he would not call snap elections even if the new prime minister-designate failed to forge a government by mid-January, reports Reuters.

The president is empowered to appoint an administration — which would not require a confidence vote — and call earlier polls if prime minister-designate Yalim Erez is unable to set up a government within the next two weeks.

The Turkish constitution sets a 45-day deadline. Any new government is already expected to take the country to the polls, set for next April, 20 months ahead of when they are normally due.

"I will not make a decision to call (snap) elections if a government cannot be set up by January 10," Demirel told a news conference.

Netanyahu's rival won't contest polls

JERUSALEM, Dec 27: Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert today said he would not challenge Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to lead the right-wing Likud Party into the next elections, reports AFP.

Olmert announced his decision on Israeli radio only hours before the party's central committee was due to meet to fix the date of the party primary to choose the Likud's candidate for prime minister, expected to be January 25.

Olmert had been considered a potential leader of an anti-Netanyahu front.

According to the radio, Olmert had decided not to run because he had failed to win the support of Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who enjoys great popularity within the party.

Violence flares up on Xmas day in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Dec 27: An angry mob set fire to a discotheque and damaged shops selling liquor in Christmas violence on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, government officials and residents said today, reports Reuters.

And in a separate incident, dozens of people were injured in a religious dispute over a red-light district in the Sumatran city of Medan.

About 5,000 people stormed the red-light district demanding the closure of the area during Ramadan, the official Ananta news agency reported today.

Both incidents occurred on Christmas Day, although the violence in Sulawesi only ended on Saturday. Both areas have mixed populations of Christians and Muslims.

The violence in the town of Poso, in central Sulawesi province, followed reports that a drunken Christian had stabbed a Muslim man, residents said.

Hundreds flee fighting in northern Kosovo

LAPASTICA, Yugoslavia, Dec 27: Hundreds of refugees fleeing fighting in northern Kosovo crowded into a rebel stronghold and rummaged for firewood to help get through another subfreezing night, reports AP.

Most of the refugees in the area west of Podujevo made their way by foot Saturday to Lapastica, a village still held by the ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) after a two-day crackdown by Serb police and Yugoslav army units.

Several villages in the region were destroyed in the fierce fighting that threatened to unravel an already shaky truce reached Oct 12.

The province was reported to be largely calm Saturday, but a Serb farmer was killed west of Podujevo by the KLA, according to international peace monitors. Ethnic Albanian sources reported a police attack in the same region.

The farmer was killed by the KLA in his home in Obraanca, 32 kms north of the province's

capital Pristina. The rebel force controls much of the area.

The Kosovo Information Centre, close to ethnic Albanian pro-independence leaders, said shortly before noon, Serb police approached Obraanca and opened fire on nearby KLA positions.

In a typical scene in Lapastica, one room sheltered more than 60 refugees.

One 7-year-old boy, identified only as Agron, couldn't speak a word, his teeth chattering after hours walking in the cold, reports IANS.

His father lamented the family's situation.

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