

Indonesia must address increasing violence in E Timor: Albright

JAKARTA, Mar 5: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told Indonesian leaders Friday that she was encouraged by the nation's burgeoning democracy, but she also said they must "urgently and boldly" address growing violence in East Timor and social unrest, reports AP.

"This is a pivotal moment in the history of one of the world's great nations," Albright said at a news conference with Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. "Events here in Indonesia over the next year, especially over the next few months, will go far to determine the extent of democracy, the pace of recovery and the prospects for social tranquility for this country and, by extension, of all of southeast Asia."

Albright said she was encouraged by preparations for Indonesia's June 7 parliamentary elections. The voting will lead to selection of a new president by a special assembly, determining the fate of the nation experimenting with democracy since the ouster of President

Suharto last May.

After meeting Friday with President BJ Habibie, Albright said she understands the need for international monitors to assure the voting goes smoothly.

"He is obviously devoted to having this happen — a free, fair and open election," she said.

Albright also met with Defense Minister Gen. Wiranto before ending a week-long Asia trip.

Demonstrating US support for all groups participating in elections, Albright was meeting separately with leading members of opposition groups as well, including Gus Dur, Amien Rais and Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of the late Sukarno, Indonesia's first president after independence from the Dutch.

Alatas told Albright the government is seeking a peaceful solution in East Timor, where separatists and those seeking autonomy have clashed since Habibie offered to grant the territory independence if the majority of its 850,000 people re-

ject a self-rule plan.

Indonesia has not yet determined how to gauge public opinion on the plan. It rejected the idea of a referendum, saying it could lead to increased violence and would be difficult to conduct quickly.

Albright said the United States feels that whatever process emerges should be "acceptable to the people," be "deemed free and fair and open," and possess "the possibility of having a peaceful resolution."

"There are also grave concerns, which must be addressed urgently and boldly," she said, listing fighting and the availability of arms as well as the social and economic concerns of Indonesians still recovering from the Asian financial crisis.

Before Albright's arrival, East Timorese rebel leader Alexander "Xanana" Gusmao had urged the United States to suspend military cooperation with Indonesia until peaceful independence for East Timor is secured. He accused factions within Indonesia's military of arming and organising anti-in-

dependence militia groups in East Timor — a charge Alatas told Albright was "totally unfounded."

"It is necessary to stop military aid until it can be proven that (Indonesia's military) is committed with the Indonesian government to stop the problems in East Timor," Gusmao said Thursday in an interview with The Associated Press. "We are afraid of new attempts to divide the East Timorese people."

Alatas told Albright the Indonesian government has been training "auxiliary guards" to help police, who don't have enough forces to handle riots and demonstrations. But most of those guards are unarmed or carry only wooden sticks, he said.

"Why should we want a situation that is uncontrollable in East Timor?" he asked.

Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975 and annexed it in 1976. Years of human rights abuses and guerrilla warfare followed, but Jakarta began easing its policy toward the region after Suharto's ouster.

UNSC deplores fighting between Ethiopia, Eritrea

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 5: Security Council members on Thursday deplored continued fighting between Ethiopia and Eritrea, even though both have accepted a peace plan, and requested that Ethiopia was pressing ahead with military action, reports Reuter.

"Members of the council expressed their concern at the continuing fighting along the borders between Ethiopia and Eritrea," Council President Qin Huanon of China told reporters after closed-door consultations. Members noted that both countries had accepted a framework agreement proposed by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), he said.

Eritrea last weekend dropped its earlier opposition to the OAU plan, previously accepted by Ethiopia.

Women's rights trampled on globally: Hillary

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 5: First Lady Hillary Clinton said Thursday that women's rights continue to be trampled on throughout the world, and pointed to Afghanistan as one of the worst violators, reports AP.

"An estimated one to two million women and girls are trafficked every year around the world, forced into labour, domestic servitude or sexual exploitation," she said in an address delivered to the United Nations.

The First Lady said Afghanistan probably is unrivaled in its "egregious and systematic trampling of fundamental rights of women today."

The fundamentalist Taliban militia, which controls about 80 per cent of Afghanistan including its capital, Kabul, has imposed a strict interpretation of the Islamic Sharia law.

They have shunned western fashion and barred women from work and education, besides making it compulsory for them to cover themselves from head to toe outside the home.

"It is no longer acceptable to say the abuse of women and men is cultural, it should be called what it is: criminal," the First Lady said.

Shevardnadze slates Yeltsin's firing of CIS chief

TOKYO, Mar 5: Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze expressed displeasure Friday with Russian leader Boris Yeltsin's failure to inform him of plans to fire the controversial head of an alliance of former Soviet republics, reports AP.

Shevardnadze, speaking to reporters Friday during a five-day visit to Japan, also welcomed Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi's pledge to boost financial assistance to Georgia and strengthen bilateral economic ties.

On Thursday, Russian President Yeltsin reportedly dismissed business tycoon Boris Berezovsky as executive secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States, an unruly alliance of 12 former Soviet republics.

Shevardnadze, once foreign minister of the former Soviet Union, said he had not been briefed by Yeltsin before the firing of Berezovsky, a billionaire who was named to the CIS post a year ago.

MILF challenges govt to prevent execution of 3

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, Mar 5: Muslim separatist insurgents today challenged the government to prevent the execution of three captives accused of murdering a Christian trader, reports AP.

"We challenge them to stop us from carrying out the execution," said Ustad Shariff Julabbi, regional chairman of the Muslim Liberation Front (MLF).

The MILF on Wednesday threatened to execute three Muslims after they were found guilty by a Shariah (Islamic law) court of murdering and robbing the trader in South Cotabato province last year.

However, Philippine President Joseph Estrada's spokesman Fernando Barican said it would violate the Philippine constitution and truce signed last month between the military and the rebels in the southern island of Mindanao.

US govt urged to recognise China, not Pakistan as India's adversary

WASHINGTON, Mar 5: A senior US congressman has asked the Clinton administration to recognise China, and not Pakistan, as India's chief adversary, and said the Indo-Pak bus diplomacy was an effort pregnant with promise of possible rapprochement between the two neighbours, report AP.

"I believe the time has come for us to closely examine our basic premise in policy-making toward South Asia, especially toward India," Senator Gary Ackerman said on Wednesday, claiming he reached the conclusion about the China-threat through talks with Indian leaders.

"I have just returned from India, China and not Pakistan, is India's main adversary in the region, the Cochairman of the congressional caucus for India and Indian Americans told the Asia Pacific Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee.

On the need for a shift in US policy towards India, he said, no amount of attention from US in the US is too much atten-

tion or too much effort or too complicated a task when it comes to dealing with one of the world's great civilizations, one of the most important markets in the world, one of the richest reservoirs of highly talented and skilled human resources in the globe.

For the past 50 years, our relationship with India has been governed more by mistrust than by trust. This is a sad but blunt conclusion one comes to if one weighs dispassionately all the ups and downs in our on-again, off-again relationship.

I believe that the time has come to change the course of our mutual relations. This phenomenon of 'trust deficiency' syndrome, if I may call it so, must be overcome by both nations, for, absent trust, any relationship between two great nations, especially vibrant democracies such as ours, will end up being built on rather shaky foundations, he said.

Cambodia lobbying for full ASEAN membership

PHNOM PENH, Mar 5: Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong today lobbied for the country's full admission into ASEAN a day after parliament voted overwhelmingly to form a new Senate, reports AP.

In a meeting with eight ambassadors from the regional grouping's member states, Hor Namhong argued that concerns from some ASEAN states that the coalition between Hun Sen and Prince Norodom Ranariddh was incomplete should be put aside, a statement said.

At a December summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Hanoi, Cambodia failed to gain full membership amid concerns that its proposed Senate, a key element of November's coalition party, had not been formed.

However, on Thursday MPs finalised three days of debate to make the extensive constitutional changes and groundwork needed to form the upper house — designed as a counter balance to parliament's overwhelming power.

With the bill only needing the formal royal stamp of ap-

proval from King Norodom Sihamoni, officials have asserted the new 61-seat Senate will be up and running within weeks.

Cambodia has therefore requested that a ceremony for joining ASEAN should be organised "as soon as possible," the foreign ministry statement said.

FUNCINPEC leader Prince Ranariddh said Senate seats would be shared by each party in proportion to parliamentary seats won in last July's elections, giving Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) 31 seats, FUNCINPEC 21 and the opposition Sam Rainsy party seven.

Two seats in the Senate will be also filled by figures appointed by the king, while members from the three parties will be initially appointed by the respective party presidents, and the House will sit for five years.

Under the terms of the three month-old coalition pact, Hun Sen was placed as premier and former parliamentary Speaker and CPP president Chea Sim was shifted to president of a new Senate body.

Aspirin turns 100 today

FRANKFURT, Mar 5: It's been said to cure or prevent everything from headaches to heart attacks, report Reuters.

Some call it the "wonder drug" Felix Hoffmann, its German inventor, called it acetylsalicylic acid.

Most know it simply as aspirin.

Tomorrow, the German company Bayer will celebrate Hoffmann's discovery by marking the 100th anniversary of aspirin's launch.

Simple to make and even easier to administer, aspirin like Coca Cola and Levis, is one of only a handful of brands to have transcended cultures, borders and generations to enjoy almost universal recognition.

Mentioned in films and fiction the drug has become as en-

during an element of life in the 20th century as the car and television.

The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega Gasset summed up the remedy's influence in the 1930s saying modern man lived in the age of the aspirin.

One hundred years after its introduction, Bayer's annual sales total about one billion marks (\$55.6 million dollars) — a tidy sum for a product whose potential was at first doubted by the firm's management.

Despite Hoffmann's championing of his discovery, his bosses at Bayer were more interested in his laboratory's work on another compounds, diacetylmorphine, which they viewed as an alternative for patients given morphine to beat coughs.

Killing of opponents

Jyoti Basu declines to comment

CALCUTTA, Mar 5: West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu today declined to comment on the centre's decision to examine the Trinamool Congress' charges of 'large scale' killings of political opponents by the CPI (M) in the State, reports PTI.

"I have nothing to say", an angry Basu retorted when asked by newsmen for his comment on the union home minister L K Advani's instruction to the union Home Secretary to examine Mamata Banerjee's charges.

"This is a barbaric and uncivilised government", the chief minister added. Advani's instruction followed the Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee's meeting with him in Delhi on Wednesday where she briefed him about law and order situation in the state. Banerjee also submitted a list of her party activists killed by CPI (M) since last year's Panchayat elections.

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BRIEFLY



Chinese ethnic minorities walk out, along with fellow delegates from all over China, after the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. China has been hit harder than expected by the Asian financial crisis, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji said in his first annual work report to parliament. — AFP photo

Jaffna demining project delayed:

The long-overdue Jaffna land mine clearing operation has been further delayed after the Sri Lankan military objected to the United Nations Development Programme using civilians, Jaffna's top military general said Friday, AP reports from Jaffna.

"We have serious objections about using civilians in the sensitive work. We have suggested that the UNDP use our retired personnel," Major General Lohan Gunawardene told reporters. After the military's objection, UNDP's demining operations stopped a week ago.

Cracker blast kills 6 in India:

Six people were killed when a large quantity of fire crackers exploded near a Hindu temple in the southern Indian state of Kerala. The Times of India reported yesterday, AFP says from New Delhi.

Ten others were injured in the accidental blast Thursday at Alor. The crackers were being brought to the shrine for a festival.

Food poisoning affects 19 in UK:

Nineteen people were being treated Friday after an outbreak of food poisoning in northern England, health officials said, and a further six cases were suspected, AFP reports from London.

Most of those hospitalised over the e.coli outbreak in North Cumbria were children. Three including one believed to be 18 months old, were receiving kidney treatment. The food poisoning is thought to have come from a milk pasteurising unit at a farm in the area.

Belgrade deploys 10,000 troops north of Kosovo

WASHINGTON, Mar 5: Belgrade has positioned some 9,000 to 10,000 Serbian soldiers just north of Kosovo, a Pentagon spokesman said Thursday, reports AP.

Spokesman Kenneth Bacon said the Pentagon does not know why Serbians have beelined up their military presence in the region.

Serb forces have brought with them some 100 tanks, slightly fewer than 100 armoured vehicles and some 100 pieces of artillery, Bacon said at a press briefing.

"We don't know exactly why they're there," he said.

The spokesman said that the soldiers may be part of a reserve force in case of an attack against the forces of the Kosovo Liberation Army, or an effort

by Belgrade "to oppose the entry of NATO troops" in Kosovo.

Bacon said a move to block NATO makes no sense because a NATO-led force would enter Kosovo only after the signing of a peace accord that requires Serbian approval.

"NATO policy is that NATO troops would not go in until there is a peace agreement," he said.

Troop presence also has increased within Kosovo at the frontier with Macedonia, Bacon said.

After 17 days of talks in Rambouillet, France, Serbians and Kosovar Albanians agreed February 23 to reconvene on March 15 to try and finalise a tentative peace settlement for peace in the embattled province.



Indian film star Sunil Dutt, waves from his vehicle yesterday in Colombo, Sri Lanka, while launching a "peace drive" that will also pass through India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan. Dutt said he expected to raise awareness about the problems of poverty in South Asia, the world's poorest region. — AFP photo



King Abdullah II of Jordan (R) shakes hands with his new Prime Minister Adel Rauf Rawabdeh Thursday in Amman. Naming Rawabdeh as premier was the monarch's first significant political move since taking the throne February 7 following the death of his father King Hussein.

— AFP photo

DPRK deploys missiles near its border with China

TOKYO, Mar 5: North Korea has deployed several medium-range Rodong missiles at a launch site near its border with China, a newspaper said Friday, quoting US and Japanese military officials, reports AP.

The report — which Japanese officials refused to confirm or deny to The Associated Press — came about seven months after North Korea fired a missile over Japan that landed in the Pacific Ocean.

It was believed to be a Taepodong missile with a range long enough to strike any part of the Japanese archipelago, and Japan, the United States and South Korea criticized North Korea and used the testing to study their defense systems.

The national Sankei newspaper also reported that a major North Korean missile factory is located near the Rodong missile site in Yongdong, an area north of Pyongyang near the Chinese border.

Japan's Self-Defense Agency refused to comment about the

report, which also said a total of about 30 Rodong missiles have been deployed in several unidentified sites in North Korea. The paper did not identify the US and Japanese officials that it quoted.

Since the August test-firing, Japan, the United States and South Korea have expressed concerns about Pyongyang's missile development programme and discussed their own military defense systems.

In January, Japanese media reported that North Korea is building at least five underground launch sites for long-range Taepodong missiles near its borders with China and South Korea.

North Korea has said the rocket it fired in August launched a satellite, but Japan has dismissed that claim. Recently, Pyongyang said that it is preparing to launch another satellite.

The Rodong was last test-launched in 1993. The single-stage, liquid-fuel missile can fire a 450-pound warhead up to 620 miles (1,000 kilometers).

Myriad of challenges facing Vietnam's communist leaders

HANOI, Mar 5: Vietnam's elderly former prime minister Phan Van Dong once said fighting a war for independence was easier than running a country, reports Reuters.

The current generation of communist leaders might agree. Myriad challenges hover over the Communist Party — a slowing economy, disheartened foreign investors, rising unemployment, widespread discontent over corruption and a massive population of young people expecting a better life than their parents.

Moreover, there is a danger that the party's indecisive leadership might dash the growing expectations among 79 million people eager to tap economic reforms adopted a decade ago.

All of this adds up to a rather uncertain future, political analysts say.

A nation that has known little but conflict and deprivation this century risked slipping off the world's radar screen, said Robert Temple, author of "Shadows and Wind," a book on contemporary Vietnam.

Vietnam is not really in a crisis, more a slow-burning de-

scend into international irrelevance," he said.

Those who control international capital are sceptical of (economic) reforms and don't see significant prospects. The government is also unwilling to address political reform which is essential for real economic change and development."

Many foreign businessmen fed up with bureaucracy and high costs have already written Vietnam off as an investment destination in the short term.

Hanoi has made clear the government will reform the economy at its own pace, focus on mobilising internal resources and keep a tight lid on political controls.

Alluding to internal ills, Communist Party general secretary Le Kha Phieu early in February listed a catalogue of woes such as graft and disunity afflicting the party and said conditions were ripe for attempts to sabotage the regime.

But political analysts said the party was not about to split — or the population rebel — anytime soon despite the economic difficulties in one of the world's poorest nations.

Japan urged to open archives on WW II human experiments

LOS ANGELES, Mar 5: Japan must open its archives on ghastly human experiments during World War II, and Washington should rescind amnesty granted to those who conducted the tests, the Simon Wiesenthal Center said here Thursday, reports AP.

Japan has ignored requests for the release of files — seized by Washington after the war and not returned to Tokyo until 1958 — that would help identify people responsible for the deaths of thousands, officials said.

The US Justice Department wants to add the names of those involved in the human experiments and germ warfare testing of suspected war criminals barred from entering the United

States. "This has been frustrating," said Eli Rosenbaum, director of the Justice Department's office of special investigations. "We are dismayed that the Japanese government has not provided any assistance in this matter."

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Dean of the Wiesenthal Center, has called for a congressional probe of Japanese war crimes and urged the Japanese government to convene a panel of experts to investigate the allegation.

Japan has come under criticism from international historians, as well as intellectuals there, who have charged that even 50 years later Japan has refused to acknowledge atrocities it committed during World War II.

Tale of a survivor of recent Ugandan rebel attack on tourists

KAMPALA, Mar 5: After surviving a rebel attack that killed eight foreign tourists, Elizabeth Garland left the remote jungle of southwest Uganda with a sinking heart rather than a sense of relief, reports AP.

The other 15 tourists who had escaped captured by Rwandan rebels Monday couldn't wait to get away.

But the American anthropology student, who was living in the Bushong region to study the effects of wildlife tourism on local communities, was leaving behind her friends, knowing they face a bleak future without tourist revenue.

"My heart was sinking," Garland, a Fulbright scholar from the University of Chicago, told The Associated Press Thursday. "I knew it was going to be the

last time that any Bazungu (white people) were going to be in Bushong for a really long time and how heartbreaking that was to people already trying to deal with this incredibly traumatizing thing that has happened to them," she said.

Garland hid in her tent when rebels stormed several camps in Bwindi National Park on Monday, firing guns and throwing grenades.

She knew that she was lucky. Fourteen tourists were abducted and marched through Uganda's Impenetrable Forest on the border with Congo. Eight would be killed with machetes and axes; six were released. Garland said she was shocked by the world interest, since Africans in the region have been suffering similar attacks for years.

Opposition leader demands AG's resignation in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 5: Malaysia's top opposition leader demanded Friday the resignation of the attorney general for not acting against the former police chief who assaulted ousted Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, reports AP.

Mohtar Abdullah should resign for "failing to take effective action in the past five months over Anwar's black eye while under police custody," said Lim Kit Siang, leader of the Democratic Action Party.

The statement by Lim, the leader of the opposition in Parliament, came one day after an independent commission of inquiry concluded its hearings, during which ex-inspector General of Police Abdul Rahim Noor confessed to beating Anwar in a police cell.

Former Mumbai mayor survives murder attempt

MUMBAI, Mar 5: Former Mumbai mayor Milind Vaidya was in hospital today after suffering gunshot wounds during an assassination attempt which left two people dead, police said, reports AP.

Suspected underworld gunmen opened fire from a car on Vaidya and his companions near the former mayor's residence overnight Thursday. Two members of Vaidya's entourage were killed instantly.

Vaidya was hit and rushed to a hospital, where doctors said he was out of danger.

"He is all right and talking," Police Commissioner Ronald Mendonca said.

Vaidya is a member of the Hindu militant Shiv Sena party which rules Maharashtra. He had survived an assassination attempt two months ago.