

Pinochet awaits ruling on release

LONDON, Jan 30: Former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet will learn Monday whether opponents have succeeded in blocking his release, reports AFP.

A High Court judge will give his ruling here after the Belgian government and six human rights organisations requested leave for a judicial review of British Home Secretary Jack Straw's proposal to free the 84-year-old general on health grounds.

A Spanish magistrate wants Pinochet extradited to stand trial on charges of torture and conspiracy to torture dating from the latter part of his 1973-1990 regime, during which some 3,000 people were killed or disappeared.

Kohl denies deals with Mitterrand in fund scandal

BERLIN, Jan 30: Former chancellor Helmut Kohl, fighting for his honour in Germany's slush fund scandal, denied today that late French president Francois Mitterrand sank money into his 1994 election bid at his behest, reports Reuters.

Kohl's reputation as a statesman, built by peacefully reunifying Germany, has crashed amid disclosures that he managed a web of secret cash gifts for his Christian Democrats (CDU) from financiers he refuses to name.

Lanka to buy military hardware from US

COLOMBO, Jan 30: The United States has agreed to sell military hardware worth millions of dollars to Sri Lanka, which is fighting a protracted separatist war, the local Sunday Times reported, say Reuters.

The independent newspaper said Sri Lanka would soon buy mortar-launching radars and helicopters from the United States in a deal that showed growing military cooperation between the countries.

The radar deal, worth \$22 million, needs US Congressional approval, but the newspaper quoted military sources as saying it would not be difficult as approval for two similar units was given in 1998.

S'pore Airlines plane skids off runway in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 30: Singapore Airlines Ltd has launched an investigation after an Airbus A310 skidded on landing in bad weather and overshot the runway at Kuching in Malaysia's eastern state of Sarawak, reports AFP.

None of the 142 passengers and 12 crew were hurt in the incident Saturday evening, the official Bernama news agency reported.

'Pakistan plans another Kargil type offensive'

Bid to cut off Indian forces in Jammu & Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Pakistan army has reportedly planned a major Kargil type offensive in the coming months aimed at cutting off large formations of Indian forces in Jammu and Kashmir, according to former aide of a top Taliban Commander, reports PTI.

The Pakistani military planners have directed big mercenary groups to attempt to cut off Jammu-Srinagar and Jammu-Poonch highways in a bid to isolate troops stationed on the Line of Control (LOC). They have asked large groups of mercenaries to concentrate on lightly held heights of Pir Panjal Range straddling the two highways.

The Harkat-ul-Mujaheddin run Khawar Zilli camps in Khost province of Afghanistan recently. ISI has or may be in the process of infiltrating regular Pakistani soldiers in Mulla to lead and direct these operations and Pakistani military planners might raise the stake by arming mercenaries with light artillery guns and 84 and 120 mm mortars for the offensive, the Taliban aide said on the condition of anonymity.

Self-styled commander in chief of major Kashmiri militant group, Hizbul Mujaheddin, Syed Salimullah alias Mohd Yusuf, who now is housed in Pak Kashmir capital of Muzaffarabad by the ISI, was recently quoted by Pakistani papers as threatening that mercenary groups on the Kargil pattern were ready to launch major attacks to cut off Indian border troops from their rear bases.

According to military strategists here, Pakistan's aim could be to attempt to bring the two national highways under artillery threat making movement of vehicles difficult if not impossible.

While the big mercenary groups have been told to occupy vital heights straddling the two highways of Pakistani military planners are plotting to pin down border troops on the LOC by heavy engagement from across the Line of Control.

The Afghan aide said large number of Harkat and Lashkar mercenaries, who infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir during the Kargil conflict, had been directed to build huge mountain cave defences on mountain heights overlooking the two highways to locate heavy mortars and light artillery guns.

Another report from Islamabad says: Pakistan has indigenously developed 120 mm

mortar ammunition having double the range of conventional ones, Pakistani scientists here have claimed.

The Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DESTO) developed the ammunition at a very low cost, official news agency APP said yesterday. Rawalpindi datedline despatch.

Scientists at DESTO have also developed and successfully fired base bleed technology ammunition. This will enhance the range of all artillery ammunition by 30 per cent, it said.

This will go a long way in enhancing the firepower of the Pakistan Army and enable the artillery to reach deeper enemy targets, the agency said.

It also said Pakistan would be able to earn handsome profits from export of this sophisticated ammunition developed indigenously.



New Delhi police (foreground) detain India's main opposition leader Sonia Gandhi (C) along with others from her Congress Party yesterday as they staged a protest in the capital against the government's plan to revise the Constitution. The Congress, the largest opposition party in parliament, has warned the ruling coalition government headed by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee against tinkering with the country's Constitution. — AFP photo

Dismissal of judges revives fear of martial law in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 30: The military government's decision to sack Pakistan's chief justice and other senior judges has triggered a sharp reaction from political parties, rights activists and bar associations across the country, reports IPS.

Critics have said the dismissal of Chief Justice Saeeduzzaman Siddiqui and 12 judges, on January 26, was an attack on the independence of the judiciary and a prelude to the declaration of martial law by the military rulers.

The judges, including five supreme court judges, had refused to take a fresh oath of allegiance to the new government which would have barred them from hearing cases against the military.

The government has jeopardised the independence of the judiciary by forcing the judges to take fresh oath under the Provisional Constitution Order-1 (PCO-1), said Afrasiab Khattak, president of the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). The PCO-1 issued by the military government has put the 1973 Constitution in abeyance and also bars judges from passing any judgment, decree, writ order or process "against the Chief Executive or any authority designated by the Chief Executive."

"I decided not to take a fresh oath as the Order is a clear deviation from the Constitution," Justice Siddiqui told a local newspaper, Wednesday. "At least it will help create an im-

pression that it is not possible to make the judiciary subservient."

Pakistan's judges have been put through loyalty tests by previous military regimes. In 1981, Gen Zia-ul-Haq had made the same demand, which was criticised by the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, led by Benazir Bhutto.

This week's confrontation with the judiciary has forestalled the Jan 31 hearing of petitions challenging the legitimacy of the military takeover by Gen Pervez Musharraf on Oct 12. The Supreme Court judges who refused to take the oath were part of the bench that was to hear the petitions.

A number of appeals, challenging actions taken by the military regime, especially its controversial accountability laws, are pending consideration of the court.

"If it was not considered necessary to bind judges into allegiance when the PCO-1 was promulgated, then what was the compulsion now," wonders Iqbal Haider, rights activist and a former law minister in a government led by Benazir.

Gen Musharraf insists the decision was taken in the "best interest of the country." "Whatever had been done was in the best interest of the country," was all that he had to tell reporters after the swearing in of new Supreme Court judges.

Leading lawyers and political parties are uneasy. "Now what we are seeing, whether one wants to call it or not, is really

martial law. We had always feared this," commented Asfandiyar Wali Khan, the president of the nationalist Awami National Party.

The decision has also created a wedge between the military government and the bar associations, which has so far been generally supportive of the military government and its reform agenda.

The powerful Sindh Bar Association moved a resolution. "The decision of the Chief Executive to take fresh oath under new dispensation from the members of the superior judiciary is appalling and deserves to be unequivocally condemned."

The military government has already started damage control. A number of stories in Pakistani papers Thursday quoting official sources seemed to suggest the ousted judges were corrupt.

The Islamabad-based "The News" reported that Justice Khalilur Rahman of the Supreme Court, one of the judges, who refused to be sworn in again, was the mastermind in a conspiracy to force the military regime to declare martial law, which would discredit it in the eyes of the international community.

The claims and counter claims have thrown the judiciary in turmoil, and further damaged an institution which had suffered under the government of ousted prime minister, Nawaz Sharif.

In November 1977 the

Supreme Court suffered a vertical split when the judges formed a front against the then Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah, who was accused by the prime minister of siding with the President Farooq Leghari in his attack on Sharif.

The confrontation ended with Shah's sacking and Leghari's resignation, but only at the expense of the credibility of the highest court.

"We must salute the judges who have refused to take new oath," commented leading constitutional expert Fakhruddin G Ibrahim, who was law minister in a caretaker government in 1996.

Columnist Majum Mushtaq says the judiciary stands so disgraced that it is hard to take pride in the boldness of the judges. "The credibility of the judiciary — from top to bottom — is so low in the public eye that even such seemingly brave acts of defiance do little to repair its image," he wrote in "The News," Thursday, in a column titled, "Too late to repair the damage."

The military-led government insists "there is complete freedom for the judges to act according to their conscience, a government spokesman told News Network International, a domestic news agency.

Warns Qazi Anwar, a leading lawyer "I see dark days in the history of judiciary — now nobody will be able to challenge the black law of the National Accountability Bureau. All doors to justice have been shut."

Lanka beats war drums ahead of peace talks

COLOMBO, Jan 30: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels and government forces appeared set for a show down ahead of Norwegian-backed moves to bring them to the negotiating table, diplomatic sources said today, reports AFP.

Sri Lanka's top brass made a presentation to President Chandrika Kumaratunga Friday on plans to deal with the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the coming weeks.

The Sunday Times said Kumaratunga, who was wounded in a suicide bomb attack on December 18, made it clear to them that talks with the Tigers will not be at the expense of security forces.

"She said the LTTE will be welcome to enter the peace process but they would have to renounce violence and lay down arms," she was quoted as saying. "There would be no question of the government having to vacate military camps or yielding to similar demands."

Diplomats noted the LTTE also appeared to have escalated attacks against government forces, with more frequent bomb attacks and long-range artillery and mortar bomb strikes against the northern peninsula of Jaffna.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna Thomas Saundranayagam who travelled to the LTTE-held Wanni region, told a regional newspaper that the Tigers had declared 2000

as a "war year." The Bishop who met a few middle-level political leaders of the LTTE two weeks ago said there was no sign of any prospects for immediate talks.

"On the one hand the Wanni people are on the brink of starvation and suffering without food, medicine and hygienic facilities," the Bishop said. "On the other hand the LTTE is getting ready for a possible big war."

Fresh fighting kills 24

Meanwhile, at least 22 Tamil tiger guerrillas and two police constables were killed in fresh fighting in northern Sri Lanka, defence officials here said today.

Government forces killed 22 members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in five separate clashes in the northern peninsula of Jaffna on Saturday, the defence ministry said in a statement.

'UN should set up tribunal for E Timor atrocities'

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 30: UN investigators have recommended that the United Nations establish an international human rights tribunal to prosecute those responsible for atrocities in East Timor, the BBC and people familiar with the investigators' report said Saturday, says AP.

The tribunal should, however, be somewhat distinct from the United Nations' two other tribunals in that it should have participation from Indonesia and East Timor and be seated in both places and not a third country, such as The Hague, according to the sources.

Human rights experts said the United Nations should first conduct further investiga-

tions into the wave of violence that tore through the territory before and after its August 30 vote for independence to determine who was responsible, the BBC and the sources said.

East Timor's people voted overwhelmingly in a UN-organised ballot to separate from Indonesia, which invaded the former Portuguese colony in 1975 and annexed it a year later.

Indonesian-backed militias went on a weeks-long killing and looting rampage to protest the results, destroying large parts of the territory and driving tens of thousands of East Timorese into neighbouring Indonesian-controlled West Timor.

ME peace, US role in world under scrutiny World forum meet in Swiss Alps

DAVOS, Switzerland, Jan 30: Moves toward peace in the Middle East and the United States' role in the world take center stage today at a global gathering of business and political luminaries in the Swiss Alps, reports AP.

Jordan's King Abdullah and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat are expected to address the World Economic Forum meeting. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who — along with Arafat — was to tackle the subject of "creating a century of peace in the Middle East," canceled his visit last week.

President Bill Clinton held a 30-minute meeting with Arafat during a brief visit Saturday. Barak and Arafat will meet this week amid fading hopes for concluding the outline of a peace agreement by the deadline they set, February 13.

Clinton gave a renewed endorsement of free trade at a meeting that has been marked by concern over the public's re-

action to increasing "globalisation" following the violent demonstrations during December's World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle.

He urged the world not to "leave the little guys out" of the benefits of open markets.

Trade can no longer be the private province of politicians, CEOs and trade experts, Clinton told a capacity crowd. Hundreds of metres (yards) away, more than 1,000 environmentalists, anti-free traders and anarchists defied a ban on demonstrations and a heavy security presence to protest the gathering.

Two policemen were slightly injured during clashes with protesters and windows at a McDonald's restaurant and several cars were vandalised during the demonstration.

But "at least Davos didn't become a second Seattle," local government president Peter Alesch said.



Cuban-American women carry white roses and posters in the streets of Miami Saturday during a peaceful march for human rights in memory of six-year-old Elian Gonzalez's mother Elizabeth Brotons, who drowned off the coast of Florida while trying to reach the US on November 25, 1999. Elian is currently in a custody dispute between his father who lives in Cuba and his Miami relatives who want him to stay in the United States. — AFP photo

Shuttle's map mission to rediscover Earth

CAPE CANAVERAL, Jan 30: To produce the consummate map of Earth, NASA will attempt a new feat: Extending a boom from the space shuttle that's longer than the shuttle itself, reports AP.

If the 59-meter (197-foot) radar antenna boom makes it out all the way following Monday's scheduled liftoff of Endeavour, it will be the longest rigid structure ever deployed in space. And it will allow scientists to measure the highs and lows of most of the Earth's terrain with stunning accuracy for environmental and military purposes.

It will be like rediscovering our own planet," said Diane Evans, a scientist at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. Because of last-minute jitters over the safety of the mast, however, NASA has cut a day of mapping from the mission — to scientists' dismay.

"There are a lot of upset people out there right now," payload manager Scott Higginbotham said Saturday. "They're extremely frustrated because they feel like they've kind of been dealt a dirty deal."

Even with one less day, scientists still will be able to map more than 70 per cent of the Earth's terrain. They expect to collect enough data to fill 13,500 compact discs and take one to two years to analyze.

A smaller, simpler version of the radar system flew twice on Endeavour in 1994. To get a fuller global snapshot, NASA teamed up with the National Imagery and Mapping Agency and added a fold-up boom with an antenna on the end. The larger, billboard-like antenna that flew before was anchored once again in Endeavour's cargo bay.

The signals that bounce off the planet's surface will be received not only by the antenna in Endeavour's cargo bay but by the one on the end of the mast.

By combining images acquired simultaneously 59 meters (197 feet) apart in space, scientists hope to obtain 3-D snapshots of the Earth's terrain. They expect to gather nine times more topographic data than what's currently available, and they expect that data to be twice as good.

If all goes well, a topographic measurement will be made every 29.4 meters (98 feet), with an elevation reading accurate to about 15.6 meters (52 feet).

With that kind of detail, the Defense Department will have a better idea where to deploy troops, launch fighter jets and fire missiles.

On the civilian side, airline pilots will have a better grasp of landing sites.

BRIEFLY

Road mishap claims 18 in India: A truck loaded with sugar overturned on a busy highway yesterday, crushing two vehicles and killing 18 people, the Press Trust of India said, Reuters reports from New Delhi. The accident happened in the northern state of Punjab, about 30 km (20 miles) from the town of Ludhiana. The victims, all from the crushed two vehicles, included seven women and four children. No other details were immediately available.

Blast kills 6 in Nepal: Six people, most of them teenagers, were killed and two others injured in a bomb blast in a central Nepal village, police said yesterday, Reuters reports from Kathmandu.

A police spokesman said the incident took place on Saturday at Kalyanitar village about 65 km (40 miles) west of Kathmandu when village teenagers tried to break open an object near a firing range of the Royal Nepal Army. The boys were in the area looking for firewood.

1 die as Dutch tourist bus crashes: One person was killed and six others injured, one seriously, when a coach carrying 54 skiers crashed off a mountain road Saturday and fell 30 metres (100 feet) into a ravine, French police said, AFP reports from Chambéry.

Forty-five other passengers suffered "very slight injuries." The dead person was one of two trapped in the wreckage, the other was freed alive, police said. The passengers were apparently all Dutch, 48 skiers and six guides, the police added.

Advertisement for the Bangladesh Standard Book Fair 2000-2001. It includes details about the fair's location at the Rajshahi University, dates from January 29 to February 2, and a list of 8 categories of books for sale at various discounts. The fair is organized by the Bangladesh Standard Book Fair Committee.