

International

Wahid suspends Wiranto

JAKARTA, Feb 14: President Abdurrahman Wahid suspended General Wiranto from his cabinet post as security minister, a presidential spokesman said today, reports AFP.

"For the stability of the government, as well as for the sake of Wiranto's own interests, the president has decided to suspend General Wiranto as the co-ordinating minister for political and security affairs," spokesman Marsilam Simanjuntak said.

"He has replaced him with another minister as ad-interim Menkopolkam, (home minister) Surjadi Soedirja," Simanjuntak added, making the announcement at the presidential palace.

The announcement was a stunning reversal of an agreement reached between Wahid and Wiranto in two-hour talks on Sunday, just hours after the president returned from an extended tour of Europe and Asia.

Then it had been agreed that Wiranto would stay on as security minister pending an investi-

gation by Attorney General Marzuki Darusman into September's violence in East Timor.

Monday's move was the latest twist in a saga which began two weeks ago when Indonesian and UN inquiries implicated Wiranto in the destruction

which erupted after the East Timorese voted for independence from Indonesia.

The Indonesian inquiry found on January 31 that Wiranto as the then head of the armed forces was "morally responsible" for the violence.

Despite numerous calls from Wahid while abroad for Wiranto to resign, the tough general refused to quit saying he wanted to await the president's return.

Earlier Sunday Wahid had announced that he was retaining Wiranto in the cabinet pending a further inquiry into last year's human rights abuses in East Timor.

But the Kompas newspaper said several leading Indonesian journalists were informed of the president's change of mind at around midnight Sunday.

The state Antara news agency said Wahid had notified Wiranto late on Sunday night that he was temporarily suspended.

The new acting security min-

ister, Surjadi Soedirja, is a retired lieutenant general and a former Jakarta governor.

"I have taken this decision to facilitate the work of the attorney general's office in investigating alleged human rights violations," the daily Media Indonesia newspaper quoted Wahid as saying at midnight.

Asked if the dismissal was by presidential decree, the president replied "Yes," media said.

One of Wiranto's lawyers, Yan Juanda, told AFP he had heard the news of the about-face, but had not been officially notified.

"From what I have heard from (former justice minister) Mr. Muladi, who called me last night, he (Wiranto) has been replaced in an ad-interim way," Juanda said.

"We are going to hold a meeting and meet with Wiranto later on," he added.

Many Jakarta newspapers were caught by surprise by the sudden decision, and carried headlines saying Wiranto had been retained in his cabinet post.

Gen. Wiranto



Gen. Wiranto

Suharto fails to show up for corruption inquiry

JAKARTA, Feb 14: Indonesia's former president Suharto failed to show up Monday at an inquiry into high-level corruption because he is too ill to testify, his lawyers said, reports AP.

The attorney general's office has named the 78-year-old former dictator as a suspect in connection with allegations that he misused millions of dollars amassed by seven charitable foundations controlled by his family during his 32 years in power.

Suharto, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

The investigation is regarded as crucial to the new government's campaign to replace endemic corruption with democracy and the rule of law, along with economic reform based on greater foreign investment.

State prosecutors contend they have uncovered new evidence that Suharto abused power by granting his children control over the lucrative trade in products such as clove and fruits.

"We have explained that based on doctors' suggestions, Suharto could not come as requested," said Denny Kaillang, one of Suharto's lawyers, as he left the Attorney General's office.

Head of UN humanitarian programme in Iraq resigns

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah gave an extra push today to his campaign for greater state autonomy, warning the Indian government to ignore the aspirations of Kashmiris at its peril, reports AFP.

In an interview with the Press Trust of India in New Delhi, Abdullah voiced disappointment at the "unfortunate noises" emanating from government circles over a special report that recommends greater political autonomy for insurgency-ridden Kashmir.

Abdullah warned that dismissing the findings of the report, which was commissioned by his state government, would have an "adverse impact" on the

Kashmiri people.

"We have not asked for something that is going to alienate the state from India... We have only asked them to study the report within the Constitution confines," Abdullah said.

The report recommends Muslim-majority Kashmir be given full autonomy except in matters related to finance, defence and communications.

The proposal would return Kashmir to the status it enjoyed before 1953, when it also had its own constitution.

Officials from Abdullah's ruling National Conference party argue that the step is crucial to finding a lasting solution to the 10-year Muslim separatist insurgency in Kashmir.

Most of the rebel groups fighting in Kashmir favour accession to Pakistan.

that has claimed more than 25,000 lives.

"My government has always maintained that it wants autonomy, while the separatists are for independence. Now it is for the central government to decide between the two," Abdullah said.

After the partition of the subcontinent into Pakistan and India in 1947, Kashmir's Hindu ruler acceded to India as Pakistani troops began to move in.

India and Pakistan still dispute ownership of the divided state, which has triggered two wars between the South Asian rivals.

An opposition lawmaker has called for an investigation of whether Cook told the truth when he said in 1998 that charges of British involvement were "pure fantasy."

The Sunday Times reported that a supposed British intelligence document recently posted on the Internet purports to give details of contacts between Britain's secret services and the plotters.

Cook refused to say whether the document is genuine.

The Sunday Times quoted extracts that speak of contacts with plotters but not of an active British role.

Ten killed in Turkey shootout: Ten people including five police officers were slain in a shootout early Monday with Turkish Islamic militants in the eastern town of Van, security sources here said, AFP reports from Diyarbakir, Turkey.

Five members of the Turkish Hizbullah, an extreme Islamist underground group, were killed in two safe houses belonging to the group and another two militants arrested, the sources said. Five other police officers were injured in the clash. Interior Minister Saadettin Tantan, who is on a visit to China, later told Anatolia news agency that "there were losses among the police during the shootout, it's serious."

Six die in China blast: Six people were killed and another two injured in an explosion at a gasoline refilling station in eastern China, it was reported Monday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The blast demolished a two-story building in Jianshui in Jiangxi province on Friday, killing all five family members and a driver, and injuring two passers-by, the Ta Kung Pao daily said. The cause of the blast was not given, but the report said the building stored 10 tonnes of gasoline and five tonnes of diesel oil.

Quake rocks Philippines: A moderately strong earthquake struck a southern Philippine province early Monday but occurred too far from land to cause any damage, government seismologists said, AP reports from Manila.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said the quake, which it measured at a magnitude of 5, was centered at sea about 187 kilometers southeast of Mati town in Davao Oriental province. Mati is about 1,000 kilometers southeast of Manila. The earthquake was caused by a movement in the Philippine Trench, which runs along the eastern coast of the archipelago.

Practitioners stopped eating from Feb 4 to protest their detention and to demand that they be released for Chinese New Year, which began Feb. 5, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said.

Some refused food for just three to five days, it said. But at least two people who started their hunger strike later had by Monday not eaten for nine days, putting their lives at risk, said Lu Siqing, the center's director.

The 140 adherents are being held in the Daoguang detention centre in Changchun, capital of northeast Jilin province, the center said.

The government banned Falungong in July as a public menace and a threat to Communist Party authority.

140 Falungong members go on hunger strike

BEIJING, Feb 14: One hundred and forty members of the banned Falungong spiritual movement went on hunger strike in a northeast China detention centre, and at least two are already into their ninth day without food, a human rights group said, reports AP.

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US considering defence pact with Israel

JERUSALEM, Feb 14: US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk is considering a US-Israeli defence pact in which an attack on Israel would be viewed as an attack on the United States, a US official said Sunday, reports AP.

Indyk has given the idea "considerable thought," embassy spokesman Larry Schwartz said, but "it is not currently a US political initiative."

The issue is to be raised in Washington next week during talks on the future of Israeli-US defence relations.

Israel's army radio said that Indyk proposed the pact in private conversations with Israeli ministers, and that the idea was greeted with caution. The radio said that Indyk's proposal would likely reduce the amount of US military aid to Israel because it would give the United States more direct responsibility for Israel's defence.

Israel is the biggest recipient of US foreign aid, receiving \$13 billion annually, most of it for defence.

Israel and the United States also cooperate closely on strategic defence projects such as the Arrow surface-to-air missile.

500-yr-old Valentine's Day letter

LONDON, Feb 14: It has been more than 500 years since Margery Brews penned a Valentine's Day letter to her reluctant fiance John Paston, but her message still resonates today: if you really loved me, you'd marry me, reports AP.

Written on Feb 14, 1477 in Norfolk, central England, Brews' letter was discovered in the British Library archives. It is to be displayed for the first time in March.

It seems some things remain the same... Men still shy away from commitment, women still take care of the nitty-gritty of wedding arrangements," said Dr Chris Fletcher, who found the letter in a 1930's collection of papers bought from the Paston family.

Brews' note begins pleasantly: "Right reverent and worshipful and my right well-beloved valentine, I recommend me unto you full heartedly, desiring to hear of your welfare, long for to preserve unto his pleasure and your hearts desire."

She explains that her mother is pressuring her father to increase her dowry. But with pleasantries aside, Brews then resorts to old-fashioned emotional blackmail.

It would seem Brews' message did the trick. She and Paston went on to marry and had two sons, said Fletcher.

NY tycoon won't run for president

WASHINGTON, Feb 14: New York tycoon Donald Trump has decided against running for president, ending a lengthy flirtation with the notion that he could tap his political fortune to capture the White House as a third-party candidate, the Associated Press has learned.

Sources connected with New York's Independence Party movement, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Trump has told associates he will announce Monday that he is not mounting a presidential bid.

Plot to kill Gaddafi

UK denies involvement

LONDON, Feb 14: Foreign Secretary Robin Cook denied Monday that Britain was involved in a plot to kill Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi in 1996, reports AP.

The Sunday Times reported that a supposed British intelligence document recently posted on the Internet purports to give details of contacts between Britain's secret services and the plotters.

An opposition lawmaker has called for an investigation of whether Cook told the truth when he said in 1998 that charges of British involvement were "pure fantasy."

The foreign secretary, who took office in 1997, said he had found no evidence that Britain was involved in such a plot.

"There is absolutely nothing in this supposed intelligence document that would suggest otherwise," he said.

Cook refused to say whether the document is genuine.

The Sunday Times quoted extracts that speak of contacts with plotters but not of an active British role.

US considering defence pact with Israel

JERUSALEM, Feb 14: US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk is considering a US-Israeli defence pact in which an attack on Israel would be viewed as an attack on the United States, a US official said Sunday, reports AP.

The notion of an Israeli-US defence treaty dates back to the 1970's, when former US Senator William Fulbright suggested that the US deepen its commitment to the Jewish state in exchange for Israel withdrawing from territories conquered in the 1967 Mideast War. It was revived in 1996 under former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' brief tenure, but no concrete steps were taken.

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Devi had been named among the world's 10 most beautiful women in her prime and photographed by celebrity photographers such as Cecil Beaton and Lord Snowdon.

Rai, who entered films after winning the Miss World title in 1994, was followed by actress Madhuri Dixit, late film star

Russian troops kill 600 Chechen rebels in a week

DUBA-YURT, Russia, Feb 14: Russian forces killed some 600 Chechen rebels in the breakaway republic over the past week, Russia's North Caucasus headquarters told the Russian AVN military news agency today, reports AP.

The landing of Russian paratroopers, rocket launchers and other heavy equipment in the southern mountains caught the rebels by surprise and resulted in heavy losses on their side, a spokesman at the headquarters told AVN.

The Russians are mounting a pincer movement against the 7,000-8,000 Chechen fighters who retreated into the mountain strongholds after the fall of Grozny on February 6 and are centered in the Shatoy region.

Moscow is said to have poured 50,000 men into the battle for the mountains.

Russia strengthened its positions near Itum-Kale, a rebel stronghold which federal paratroopers captured on Thursday, and Duba-Yurt, a Russian military spokesman said.

On Saturday, Maskhadov said the Chechens would fight a "regular war" against the Russians.

Russian headquarters meanwhile denied having used

1.5-tonne bombs in their bombing campaign in the mountainous southern region.

On Wednesday, Russian military officials said they had used the heavier bombs for the first time since the air raids started against Chechnya on September 26.

Russian headquarters told AVN they may use the 1.5-tonne bombs in the future. Russian had previously used bombs of up to 500 kilogram (1,100 pounds).

The heavier bombs were thought to be especially effective in destroying tunnels, caves and other places where rebel bases are located.

Russian warplanes on Monday bombed the key Argun and Vodeno gorges, flying some 100 sorties in a 24-hour period, AVN quoted the Russian spokesman as saying.

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