

# 'Truth Commission' to be set up on Y'slav war crimes

BRUSSELS, Jan 10 : Yugosla-  
via is preparing to set up a South  
African-style "Truth Commis-  
sion" to assist in the prosecution  
of war crimes suspects, Yugoslav  
Foreign Minister Goran  
Svilanovic said here today,  
reports AFP.

"We are preparing a truth  
commission that will provide the  
evidence on all the war crimes  
committed," Svilanovic told  
reporters after meeting with  
NATO Secretary General George  
Robertson and NATO ambassa-  
dors.

Svilanovic and Robertson also  
broached the thorny subject of  
the eventual trial of ousted hard-  
line Yugoslav president  
Slobodan Milosevic on war  
crimes charges.

The Yugoslav foreign minister  
pointed out that Belgrade was  
working with the International  
Criminal Tribunal for the former  
Yugoslavia.

"We already have a coopera-

tion with The Hague tribunal," he  
said, insisting it would continue.  
Carla del Ponte, the tribunal's  
top prosecutor, said Wednesday  
she would visit Belgrade later  
this month.

Svilanovic's visit to Brussels  
was the first by a top Yugoslav  
official since NATO's 1999 bomb-  
ing campaign against Belgrade,  
then led by Milosevic.

The minister also said Bel-  
grade was prepared to open  
discussions with NATO over the  
contentious demilitarised buffer  
zone running along Serbia's  
southern border with Kosovo.

"The ground safety zone is a  
key question," Svilanovic said.  
"The door is open for discussion."

Svilanovic noted that the  
buffer zone was created under a  
ceasefire accord between NATO  
and the Yugoslav army following  
the alliance's 1999 air campaign  
against Belgrade, but added: "We  
are not an enemy army any-  
more."

The five-km wide zone was set  
up to minimise the chances of  
clashes between Belgrade forces  
and NATO-led KFOR peacekeep-  
ers, but Svilanovic said: "We  
want to achieve the goal as we  
defined it, and this is to withdraw  
or change the scope and the  
regime of the zone."

The zone has become a safe  
haven for ethnic Albanian rebels,  
who control a 200 square-km  
enclave of Serbian territory.

The guerrillas want Serbian  
forces to leave the mainly Alba-  
nian Presevo valley and for the  
region to become a part of an  
independent Kosovo.

Only lightly-armed Serbian  
police units are allowed in the  
zone.

"Our intention is to reduce the  
level of violence and minimise  
the provocation" of the separatist  
Albanian guerrillas, Robertson  
told reporters.



A fireman pouring water on the remains of the 100-years-old Meghalaya Legislative Assembly building yesterday after it was gutted by a fire on Tuesday. Authorities have not ruled out sabotage by separatist militants as the cause of the blaze. --AFP photo

## Militants warn Kashmiris not to take Indian line

Hurriyat meets today

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan-  
controlled Kashmir, Jan 10 : The  
Lashkar-i-Taiba militant group  
on Wednesday warned Kashmiri  
separatist alliance leaders not to  
bring an "Indian agenda" with  
them when they visit Pakistan for  
talks, reports AFP.

"We will not hold talks with  
them if they bring an Indian  
agenda to ask for cessation of  
operations by Mujahideen (Is-  
lamic fighters) in response to a  
so-called Indian ceasefire," the  
Pakistan-based group's chief  
Hafez Mohammad Saeed said.

The All Party Hurriat (Free-  
dom) Conference (APHC), a  
separatist alliance of two dozen  
parties operating in the Indian-  
administered part of Kashmir,  
has planned a visit to Islamabad,  
expected this month.

Their talks in Pakistan are  
likely to focus on ways to start a  
dialogue between New Delhi,  
Islamabad and Kashmiris on  
finding a solution to the 53-year  
old Kashmir tangle.

"The APHC delegation should  
not come to Pakistan with Indian  
Prime Minister Atal Behari  
Vajpayee's agenda. Rather they

should come to build confidence  
between Mujahideen and politi-  
cal leadership," Saeed said.

Lashkar has claimed respon-  
sibility for some daring attacks  
since India announced a unilat-  
eral month-long ceasefire on  
November 27, which has since  
been extended until January 26.

Other military groups, includ-  
ing the most powerful group, the  
Hizbul Mujahideen, a predomi-  
nantly Kashmiri outfit, have also  
rejected the Indian ceasefire.

Pakistan has, however,  
responded with a policy of "maxi-  
mum restraint" along the Line of  
Control (LoC) that divides the  
disputed Himalayan state, back-  
ing up peace gesture with a  
partial troop pull-back.

But Saeed, talking to AFP in  
the group's office on the outskirts  
of Muzaffarabad, the capital of  
Pakistani Kashmir, said the  
Indian ceasefire was a "sham."

"There is no ceasefire in Kash-  
mir. India is beating the ceasefire  
drum for propaganda and to  
hoodwink the international  
community."

Saeed said mujahideen could  
agree to a ceasefire provided

India ended its "repression" and  
pulled out its troops from Kash-  
mir to create an atmosphere  
conducive to resolution of the  
Kashmir issue.

"If the Hurriyat leaders really  
want to lead the Kashmiris, then  
they should follow the  
Mujahideen agenda of liberation  
of Kashmir from India. Otherwise  
they will lose their following."

Meanwhile, the Executive  
Council of Kashmir's main sepa-  
ratist alliance will meet on  
Thursday to discuss delays by  
New Delhi in issuing travel docu-  
ments to its leaders for their  
planned trip to Pakistan.

Only five of the seven executive  
members are to take part in the  
meeting at the Srinagar head-  
quarters of the All Party Hurriyat  
Conference, which comprises  
nearly two dozen political, social  
and religious groups.

Syed Ali Geelani, the leader of  
the Jamaat-e-Islami outfit was  
admitted to Srinagar's main  
hospital on Monday with a heart  
ailment, while moderate execu-  
tive member Abdul Gani Lone  
has extended his New Delhi trip  
for a medical check-up.

## Tibetan exiles protest against Li Peng's visit to India

NEW DELHI, Jan 10 : Several  
hundred Tibetan activists protested  
in New Delhi today against the on-  
going visit of Chinese leader Li Peng,  
burning his effigy and shouting pro-  
Tibetan independence slogans,  
reports AFP.

Li, the second-highest ranking  
Chinese leader, arrived in Bombay on  
Tuesday for a nine-day India visit to  
cement the normalisation of ties after  
a rift caused by New Delhi's 1998  
nuclear tests.

In an open letter to the former  
Chinese premier, who is currently  
chairman of the national parliament,  
the Delhi-based Tibetan Freedom  
Movement accused Beijing of gross  
human rights violations in Tibet.

"We, the Tibetan people take this  
opportunity to strongly condemn and  
protest against your government for  
its continued headline policy on  
Tibet," the letter said.

"Tibetans inside Chinese illegally-  
occupied Tibet are living with great  
fear and have never had freedom of  
religion or expression."

About 300 Tibetan exiles took part  
in Wednesday's protest outside the

## Sonia Gandhi's challenger critically ill

NEW DELHI, Jan 10 : Jitendra  
Prasada, a leader of India's main  
opposition Congress Party who  
unsuccessfully challenged Sonia  
Gandhi for the party presidency,  
was in critical condition today in  
a New Delhi hospital, reports  
AFP.

"He is critical. He is in a coma  
and on ventilator support," said  
Indu Rana spokeswoman for  
New Delhi's Apollo Hospitals.

"Only his closest relatives are  
being allowed into the Intensive  
Care Unit."

Rana said Congress party  
president Gandhi, who deci-  
mated Prasada last year in elec-  
tions to choose the next party  
president, had visited the hospi-  
tal.

Prasada was admitted to  
Apollo early Tuesday after a  
massive brain haemorrhage.

The 62-year-old veteran Con-  
gress leader from the northern  
state of Uttar Pradesh, had  
campaigning on a platform of  
greater inner party democracy in  
the run up to the November  
polls, arguing that Gandhi was  
running the party like her  
fiefdom.

## Crackdown on Pak Christian minority protestors

KARACHI, Jan 10 : Pakistani  
police used batons and tear gas  
here today to disperse hundreds of  
Christian minority demonstrators  
demanding an amendment to the  
country's blasphemy law, wit-  
nesses said, reports AFP.

Several people received minor  
injuries and 50 protestors were  
detained by the police, they said.

The police swung into action  
after the protestors ignored warn-  
ings against the violation of a  
current ban on public gatherings  
imposed in Pakistan early last year  
by the military government, a  
police official said.

The demonstration was organ-  
ised by a Christian forum to press  
for an amendment in the 1985  
blasphemy law to provide safe-  
guards against alleged abuse of  
the legislation by Muslim extrem-  
ists to harass minorities.

The law, which has drawn  
frequent protests from minorities  
in the past, lays down the death  
penalty for insult to the prophet  
Mohammad.

## Indian, Nepalese officials begin probe into dam

KATHMANDU, Jan 10 :  
Officials today began investigat-  
ing floods in Nepal caused by an  
Indian dam just across the bor-  
der, which the Nepalese govern-  
ment claims has affected 15,000  
people, reports AFP.

A joint Indian and Nepalese  
technical team left for south-  
western Nepal to study problems  
caused by the Laxmanpur dam  
on the Indian side of the coun-  
tries' border, Water Resources  
Ministry officials said.

The Nepalese government  
claims the Indian dam, com-  
pleted in 1998, has caused  
flooding danger to 15,000 people  
in ten villages across Banke  
district, 340 km southwest of  
Kathmandu.

Nepal's main opposition

party, the Nepal Communist  
Party-United Marxist and Lenin-  
ist (NCP-UML), and other left-  
wing groups have waged protests  
against the dam, saying it con-  
travenes international laws.

The party has been demand-  
ing India demolish the dam or  
find solutions to the flooding  
caused to the Nepalese villages.

India had agreed to con-  
struct embankments to prevent  
floods from submerging the  
villages, especially during the  
monsoon season.

During a visit to India last  
year Nepalese Prime Minister  
Girija Prasad Koirala held talks  
with his India counterpart Atal  
Bihari Vajpayee about the issue.

## Iranians worried at Khatami's hesitation for second term

TEHRAN, Jan 10 : Iran's Presi-  
dent Mohammad Khatami's dally-  
ing over whether or not he will  
stand for a second term in six  
months' time has left many Irani-  
ans perplexed, whilst offering no  
solace to his conservative rivals,  
reports AFP.

In the past month a member of  
his closest entourage, parliament  
speaker Mehdi Karubi, has twice  
beseeched him to officially register  
his candidacy.

During recent rallies in Tehran,  
students, often bewildered and  
directionless, have called upon  
"their" president to commit him-  
self as soon as possible to the  
challenge.

They still await a response from  
Kahtami, who triumphed in the  
presidential elections of May 1997  
and received a further ringing  
endorsement in parliamentary  
elections early in 2000.



Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (R) greets Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee upon the premier's arrival at Halim Airport in Jakarta yesterday. Vajpayee's visit to Indonesia, the first by an Indian leader in 14-years, follows a three-day visit to Vietnam. --AFP photo

## Norway's envoy in Lanka to salvage peace process

COLOMBO, Jan 10 : Norway's  
special envoy, Erik Solheim,  
arrived here today in a bid to  
revive a fragile process aimed at  
bringing the Sri Lankan govern-  
ment and Tamil rebels to the  
negotiating table, officials said,  
reports AFP.

Solheim's visit comes amid a  
unilateral truce called by the  
separatist Liberation Tigers of  
Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but an  
impasse over conditions for the  
government to reciprocate it.

Press reports had said  
Solheim held talks with leaders  
in neighbouring India and also

with a London-based LTTE  
leader Anton Balasingham.

Peace hopes were raised when  
Solheim had a rare meeting with  
LTTE supremo Velupillai  
Prabhakaran on November 1  
and later announced the Tigers  
were serious about finding a  
peaceful solution to the conflict.

However, President  
Chandrika Kumaratunga has  
expressed doubts over the  
LTTE's willingness to end the  
drawn out separatist war which  
has claimed more than 60,000  
lives in the past two decades.