

## Stock &amp; International

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

BRUSSELS, Jan 10 : Yugoslavia is preparing to set up a South African-style "Truth Commission" 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 ambassadors.

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 bombing campaign against Belgrade, then led by Milosevic.

The minister also said Belgrade 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 anymore."

The five-km wide zone was set up to minimise the chances of clashes between Belgrade forces and NATO-led KFOR peacekeepers, 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 Albanian 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.

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 ongoing visit of Chinese leader Li Peng, burning his effigy and shouting Tibetan independence slogans, reports AFP.

Li is the second-highest ranking Chinese leader to arrive in New Delhi for a nine-day 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 hardline 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."

Rama said Congress party president Gandhi, who decimated Prasada last year in elections to choose the next party president, had visited the hospital.

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

The 62-year-old veteran Congress leader from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, had campaigned 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, witnesses 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 warnings 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 organised by a Christian forum to press for an amendment in the 1986 blasphemy law to provide safeguards against alleged abuse of the legislation by Muslim extremists 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.



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 (Islamic fighters) in response to a so-called Indian ceasefire," the Pakistan-based group's chief Hafez Mohammad Saeed said.

The All Party Hurriyat (Freedom) 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 political leadership," Saeed said.

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

Other military groups, including the most powerful group, the Hizbul Mujahideen, a predominantly Kashmiri outfit, have also rejected the Indian ceasefire.

Pakistan has, however, responded with a policy of "maximum restraint" along the Line of Control (LoC) that divides the disputed Himalayan state, backing 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 Kashmir. India is beating the ceasefire drum for propaganda and to hoodwink the international community."

Saeed said mujahideen could agree to a ceasefire provided

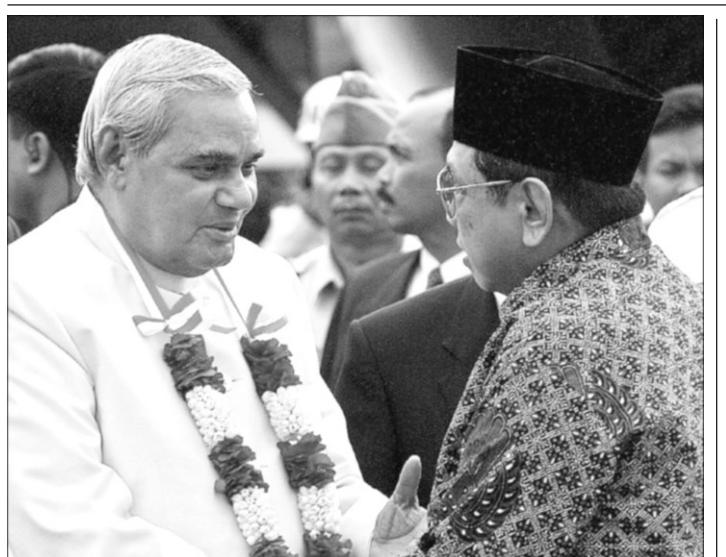
India ended its "repression" and pulled out its troops from Kashmir to create an atmosphere conducive to resolution of the Kashmir issue.

"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 separatist alliance will meet on Thursday to discuss delays in New Delhi in issuing travel documents 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 headquarters 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 executive member Abdul Gani Lone has extended his New Delhi trip for a medical check-up.



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 government 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.

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.

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

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

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

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