

International

India extends Kashmir ceasefire by a month

NEW DELHI, Jan 23 : India today decided to extend its unilateral ceasefire in the restive state of Kashmir by another month, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said, reports AFP.

The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Emerging from the three-hour meeting, Foreign Minister Singh said that the peace initiative "has been welcomed by the people of Jammu and Kashmir" and "should be given every chance."

"The present phase of peace... is being extended, in that hope, by another month."

The present truce was to expire on India's Republic Day, on Friday.

According to government sources, there were different opinions within the cabinet in

recent days on the Kashmir ceasefire as several separatist Muslim groups were continuing their attacks during the truce.

"Today's decision was unanimous," Singh said.

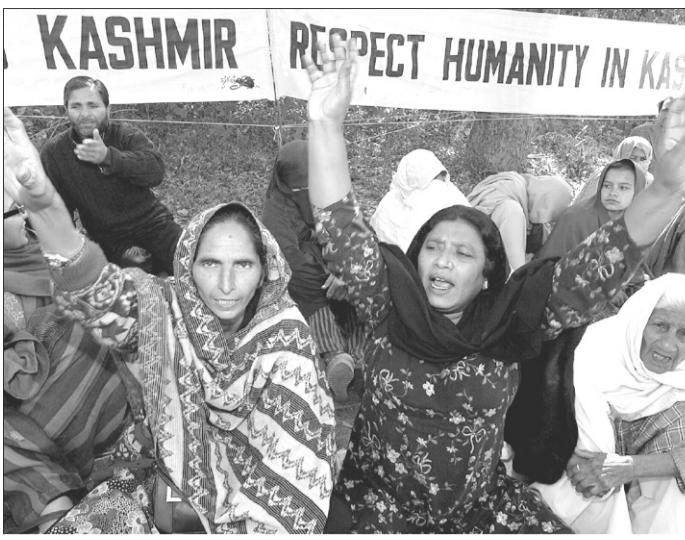
He said that Pakistan should rein in militant outfits like the Pan-Islamic Lashkar-e-Taiba that claimed responsibility for several suicide operations in recent weeks.

"It is regrettable that Pakistan has not recognised the demand of time for peace and continues to promote, encourage and abet cross border terrorism. This must cease and the activities of organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed curbed and controlled by Pakistan."

India blames Pakistan for fostering the separatist rebellion that has claimed more than 34,000 lives in the Indian zone of Kashmir since 1989.

Pakistan denies the charge but offers open moral and diplomatic support to the anti-Indian guerrillas based on its soil and in India's Kashmir.

India launched its ceasefire initiative on November 27 for the



Kashmiri women chant slogans against alleged atrocities by Indian forces inside India-held Kashmir, during a protest in the Pakistani capital city of Islamabad yesterday. Demonstrators staged a sit-in protest in front of Indian High Commission in Islamabad demanding the issuing of travel documents to the leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference for Pakistan.

--AFP photo

8 killed in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Jan 23 : At least eight people, including three separatist militants, were killed and two others critically wounded in separate incidents in India's troubled northeastern state of Assam, officials said today, reports AFP.

A police spokesman said a gang of heavily-armed gunmen attacked a group of woodcutters late on Monday night in the village of Sankuchi in western Assam's Nalbari district, 140 km from the state capital Guwahati, killing five and wounding two.

A group of 20 to 25 masked gunmen entered a house where the woodcutters were staying and fired indiscriminately with automatic weapons, a police official told AFP by telephone from Nalbari.

The attack could have either been carried out by the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) or the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), both of them are active in the area, a top police official in Guwahati said.

Koirala reelected president of ruling party

POKHARA, Jan 23 : Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala was re-elected president of the ruling Nepali Congress party with 64 per cent of the votes, defeating a rebellion within the party, officials said Tuesday, a top police official in

Koirala secured 936 votes against 507 for his competitor, Sher Bahadur Deuba, in voting on Monday, officials said. Counting was completed early Tuesday but the official results were not announced.

"I concede my defeat and I have already congratulated Prime Minister Koirala," Deuba told reporters about 2 am on Tuesday.

The third candidate for party president, Ramhari Joshi, received only 10 votes during the party's General Convention that began in this resort town, 200 kilometres west of the capital, Kathmandu.

Kostunica faces tough talks with UN official

BELGRADE, Jan 23 : Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica faces one of the toughest tasks of his first 100 days in power Tuesday when he meets the chief prosecutor of the UN war crimes court for the former Yugoslavia, Carla de Ponte, who arrives here for a three-day visit, reports AFP.

Del Ponte, a former Swiss judicial investigator, will have a hostile partner in the moderate nationalist president, who has often disparaged the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), branding it as a "political institution" and "biased" against the Serbs.

Moscow wants to work for ME peace : Putin

MOSCOW, Jan 23 : Russian President Vladimir Putin told his visiting Israeli counterpart Moshe Katsav on Tuesday that Moscow was willing to do all it could to help the Middle East peace process, reports AFP.

Russia wants to help the Israelis and Palestinians "to solve the difficult problems that currently stand in the way" of Middle East peace, Interfax quoted Putin as saying at the start of their Kremlin meeting.

Katsav was starting a three-day official visit during which he will also meet the head of the Russian Orthodox church Patriarch Alexy II on Wednesday and visit a Moscow synagogue.

The trip coincides with a resumption of intensive peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians in a push to reach an agreement ahead of Israeli elections on February 6.

In an interview published Tuesday in the daily Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Katsav said his talks with Putin would be devoted mainly to bilateral relations and the strenuous peace process.

He said troops lost two soldiers and six wounded in Mon-

day's fighting. The LTTE fired artillery and mortar shells towards the army's new positions at Muhamalai, the spokesman said.

There was no immediate reaction from the LTTE to the latest military campaign launched under the cover of darkness on Monday.

Following the Monday night drive, security forces recaptured an area of eight square km lost to the LTTE in November last year, the defence ministry said in a statement Monday night.

The sudden military action came as a unilateral one-month



India's main opposition leader and Congress (I) Party president Sonia Gandhi (C) takes a dip in the Ganges, considered sacred and purifying by Hindus, at the Maha Kumbh Mela in Allahabad on Monday. Sonia offered prayers and bathed in the river despite criticism of the timing of her visit to the world's largest Hindu pilgrimage.

--AFP photo

Pakistan in danger of becoming a failed state: Benazir

Saudi Arabia late last year.

Sharif, Benazir's political enemy throughout the 1990s, was deposed in a bloodless coup in October 1999 and military ruler General Pervez Musharraf has vowed to wipe out corruption and restore "genuine democracy" by October, 2002.

His coup was broadly welcomed by most Pakistanis who saw Sharif's government as hopelessly corrupt.

Given the challenges Pakistan faces, it's important for me to build a post-Cold War identity for Pakistan. It's a world of markets and the era of missiles has faded into the past," she said in an interview with AFP.

Hinting at stepped up efforts at detente with nuclear rival India, Benazir put "regional peace and stability" at the top of her agenda if she becomes prime minister for the third time.

She and her jailed husband, Asif Ali Zardari, were sentenced to five years and fined millions of dollars in a case concerning kickbacks on government contracts. Her appeal is pending in the supreme court.

Benazir has lived in self-imposed exile in London and the United Arab Emirates since shortly before her conviction on corruption charges in April 1998, when Sharif was in power.

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