

### We are in serious crisis: Gorbachev

BERLIN, Dec 30: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said improving living standards should be the "number one priority" of the new Commonwealth of Independent States, in a newspaper interview here, reports AFP.

"We need deep social changes because we are in a serious crisis," he said in the interview that appeared today in the Berliner Kurier Am Abend.

"We must now concentrate on setting up a market economy so that people see improvement in their personal lives. And that must happen as quickly as possible," Gorbachev said.

The former President continued to defend socialist ideals, but said the "model that failed before history was the Stalinist form of socialism. This had to be destroyed. It was against the most important principles of socialism."

Gorbachev also warned that his fellow citizens in the old Soviet Union should not worship capitalism, adding that the search for a true socialist

society would continue "one the basis of rapprochement rather than confrontation".

Reuters reports: Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet Union's last Foreign Minister, spoke of the danger of paramilitary groups seizing nuclear weapons in the former Soviet republics in an interview in an Italian newspaper today.

Shevardnadze told the Corriere Della Sera he would be worried by the threat posed by the break-up of the Soviet Union if he were Foreign Minister in a western nation.

"I don't rule out nuclear warheads and even complete tactical weapons falling into the hands of some paramilitary formations," Shevardnadze said.

"Many of the things which could happen here could result in trauma and disruption for the whole of Europe and the entire world."

Eleven former Soviet republics which formed a Commonwealth of Independent States earlier this month were meeting in Minsk today to discuss military and economic affairs.



Dr Reza Behnia (C), anaesthetist at Aban Hospital, Tehran, on Sunday tends to his newly-born patients, on the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad's daughter, which is also Iran's Women's Day and Mothers' Day. The 27-year-old mother from Azerbaijan of northwest Iran delivered the country's first invitro-fertilized twins after 13 childless years. -AFP/ photo

### US-Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan ends tomorrow

WASHINGTON, Dec 30: The 12-year conflict in Afghanistan enters a new phase Wednesday with the formal end of all US and Soviet military involvement after years of each side supporting rival factions, reports AP.

The deadline was set in September by the Bush administration and leaders of the former Soviet Union. US officials are confident that both sides will adhere to the agreement.

Nonetheless, there is no early end to the fighting in sight as the leftist government in Kabul and the anti-communist rebel movement have yet to open peace talks despite intensive United Nations mediation efforts.

An estimated 1.5 million have been killed in the war, with more than 3 million maimed or wounded and 5 million displaced to exile in Pakistan and Iran. One in every three refugees worldwide is an Afghan.

US officials, asking not to be identified, said the last of the US deliveries to the rebels arrived in Pakistan sometime in October. Under the agreement with the Soviets, the military aid pipeline between Pakistan and Afghanistan is to be cut off by January 1.

Pakistan has been the rebel headquarters and transit point for US aid deliveries for years. As for the Russian side, one official said, there has been a significant fall off in their assistance in the weeks preceding the deadline.

Leaders of the rebel movement have been told that Russian fuel deliveries to the leftist government in Kabul will also be suspended even though that step is not required under the September agreement.

The fate of Afghanistan was once a major security concern to Moscow but that has all changed now since the Soviet Union has been replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States.

### Zhao leading normal life

BEIJING, Dec 30: Deposed Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang is still a member of the party and is leading a "normal life" in Beijing, a top government spokesman said today, reports PTI.

Yuan Mu, spokesman of the State Council Premier Li Peng's Cabinet, was responding to questions regarding the fate of China's former leaders during a press conference this morning.

Yuan did not say whether investigations were still continuing into Zhao's involvement in the pro-democracy movement of Spring 1989.

### Germany urges Russia to extradite Honecker

BONN, Dec 30: German Justice Minister Klaus Kinkel called on Russia on Sunday to extradite former East German leader Erich Honecker, adding that his departure for exile in North Korea or Chile would be considered an "unfriendly act," reports AFP.

Honecker and his wife, Margot, a former education minister, have been held up in the Chilean Embassy in Moscow since December 10. North Korea has said it was ready to accept Honecker "for humanitarian reasons."

Honecker faces manslaughter charges in Germany in connection with the deaths of nearly 200 East Germans shot dead by border guards as they tried to escape to the West.

Honecker fled to the Soviet Union last March after Germany issued a warrant for his arrest.

Despite the arrest warrant, the Honecker were whisked off to Moscow by military plane from a Soviet Military Hospital south of Berlin on March 13 in what Kinkel termed "an undercover operation."

Russia being the successor to the defunct Soviet Union it bears responsibility for past Soviet acts, Kinkel said in a radio interview.

### Protesters scale White House fence: 8 held

WASHINGTON, Dec 30: Six protesters Sunday scaled the White House fence and two others threw red ink onto the white columns of the entrance gate before they were all arrested, police said, reports AFP.

The eight arrested on nondemocracy charges, told authorities they were members of the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV), an advocacy group for the homeless, said Arnold Cole, a spokesman for the US Secret Service.

### Philippines to dismantle private armies

MANILA, Dec 30: The Philippine National Police announced a new campaign Sunday to dismantle the nation's 194 private armies to help ensure a violence-free election next May, reports AP.

### Off the Record

#### Love costs life

MANILA: A Jilted boyfriend used a grenade to blow himself up in front of his girlfriend, killing himself and injuring six other people including the girl, the Philippine news agency reported Sunday, says AFP.

The official news agency reported that Rolando Lastimado, distraught over rumours that the woman, Maricel Heniogo, was planning to marry a Japanese boyfriend, confronted her at her home in the central city of Cebu on Saturday.

Police reports said Lastimado set off a grenade, killing himself and blowing off Heniogo's arm as well as injuring two other people in the house and three children playing outside.

#### 'Gift of Maggi' for Gorbys

AREZZO, Italy: Mikhail Gorbachev's Christmas resignation drew only general indifference in Moscow, but in this medieval Tuscan town, he has many admirers, reports AFP.

So many, in fact, that a socialist municipal councillor, Roberto Maggi, on Saturday announced the creation of a committee with two aims: To confer on the former Soviet President the title of honorary citizen of Arezzo and to collect money to build him a house.

Maggi said he hoped the house would be financed and built within nine months.

#### Cake flies first class

PALM BEACH: A California baker decided only the best would do for his parents' 50th wedding anniversary — so he baked a cake and flew it first class to Florida, reports AP.

"I couldn't have my parents' cake fly coach," quipped Ron Shore, 31, who paid \$45 for the first-class ticket.

Shore, the youngest of Joseph and Beverly Shore's six children, baked the cake Thursday, placed it in a red canvas container and boarded a late-night flight from Los Angeles.

Changing planes in Atlanta, Shore borrowed a wheelchair to move the 2 1/2-foot-tall, 20 pound cake. "That aroused a lot of curiosity," he said.

The four-layer cake with raspberry-lemon filling was decorated with butter-cream figures with gold sprinkles. It would sell for about \$100 in West Hollywood, where Shore has his bakery, Sweet Lady Jane.

#### A planner indeed

DALLAS: Singer Ruben Blades spent last week planning his run for the Presidency of Panama, a newspaper reported Sunday, says AP.

The election is 2 and-half-years away and Blades has already formed a political party.

His father, Ruben Blades, a retired policeman living in Panama City, said, "The politicians here were taking this a joke, but now they're scared because the boy is rolling."

The singer spent Christmas week planning strategies with advisers, the Dallas Morning News reported.

Although Blades, 43, prides himself on being a nationalist, he has lived his adult life out of the country.

A lawyer in addition to being Panama's best-known entertainer, Blades helped create the salsa sound of the 1970s and 1980s, and many of his songs have an undercurrent of political protest.

### Vance starts 5th peace mission to Yugoslavia

BELGRADE, Dec 30: United Nations mediator Cyrus Vance began his fifth peace mission to Yugoslavia Sunday at a time fighting is escalating and the republics remain deeply divided over Yugoslavia's future structure, reports AFP.

Vance began his trip with a stopover in Lisbon to confer with Foreign Minister Joao Pinheiro before Portugal assumes on January 1 the presidency of the European Community.

In Lisbon, he will also confer with Lord Carrington, the EC mediator, and Foreign Minister Hans Van Den Broek of the Netherlands, the outgoing EC president. He is expected in Belgrade on Tuesday.

Serbian officials here said they hoped Vance would press the EC to delay its January 15 starting date for the recognition of Yugoslavia's four breakaway republics—Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia.

Tanjung News Agency, quoting unidentified sources in London, reported that Vance will be proposing to get all the republics to agree to a future

structure resembling what became of the Soviet Union: a confederation of independent states.

But Serbia and its ally Montenegro have rejected such proposals in the past, insisting that they should become the heirs of a Yugoslav state, however truncated.

The other four republics are insisting on full independence and have all applied for recognition with the EC.

Macedonia, which is one-third Serbian, one-third Muslim and one-third Croatian—a combination widely viewed as explosive today—has turned down and invitation from Serbia to attend a January 3 conference on creating a "new Yugoslavia."

Reuters from Zagreb says: The Yugoslav army kept up a relentless bombardment of the key Croatian town of Karlovac into the night, turning it into the main flashpoint of fighting in the breakaway republic.

"In the past few days, Karlovac has become the main battlefield in Croatia", Croatian radio said.

### FIS to respect int'l commitments

ALGIERS, Dec 30: The fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), poised to take control of parliament, called on Sunday for reconciliation with its opponents and told the world it would respect Algeria's international commitments, reports Reuters.

FIS interim leader Abdel Kader Hachani also told a news conference that the party would abide by the constitution and expected the armed forces to respect the will of the people.

He called on all Algerians to join hands in tackling the country's problems.

"We insist in these circumstances in the name of FIS and its top body, the Madjlis Echura, on the need for cooperation and for the sons of Algerian Muslims to put their shoulders to the wheel to work together in an atmosphere of fraternity," he said.

Although bloody clashes between FIS supporters and security forces last June led to a state of siege and a six-month delay in the country's first multi-party general election, Hachani did not foresee future conflict with the armed forces.

"There is no conflict between us and the armed forces. It is a supposition which has no foundation," he said. "We say to the army, it is God who has led us to power through the peoples, and it is the time for the army to protect the people's choice and we believe the army will not

hold back in doing this." Hachani said the FIS would give no ground on its goal of transforming Algeria into an Islamic state within a year but would stand by all international agreements and commitments.

"We are not going to question treaties and agreements with other countries... Algeria is not going to be isolated from the world," he said.

"We are going to fix our relations on the basis of Islamic law which does not ban links with others."

But he added: "We are not going to give concessions in applying our programme. This year will see the end of the misery of the Algerian people."

According to preliminary results issued on Friday by the caretaker government, the FIS won at least 167 of the 206 seats won outright in Thursday's poll. The second round of voting to complete the new 430-seat parliament will be on January 16, with the FIS represented in almost every constituency.

The FIS leader appeared to shy away from a demand for early presidential elections, saying: "If we have all the real guarantees to apply our programme, so as not to betray people who voted for us and our aim... The Madjlis Echoura may leave this for later."

President Chadli Benjedid's mandate runs until December 1993.

### Vietnam will curb Communist Party influence

HANOI, Dec 30: Vietnam today unveiled a new draft constitution that formalises free-market reforms but reaffirms one-party Communist rule, reports Reuters.

The 147-article document increases the power of the elected National Assembly and is designed to curb Communist Party influence-peddling, official and an assembly member said.

It is a substantial revision of the current 1980 constitution and is to be finalised in the new year and ratified by the national assembly in April.

"Over the last decade, the world has witnessed profound and all round changes," Nguyen Huy Thuoc, a law adviser and member of the constitution editing committee told a Hanoi news conference

announcing the new draft. "Many articles and provisions in the present constitution are no longer suitable and appropriate to renewal and reform of our party."

He said the revised constitution would be a basis for new laws that "will help us to get our country out of all crisis and difficulties and achieve our objective — namely socialism as our people have chosen."

He said the constitution aimed at achieving "political renewal."

"But we are not going to carry out political reform in a sweeping manner. We want to have firm steps and measures in order to ensure political stability," he said.

A National Assembly official told Reuters on Friday that the constitutional changes had



Abdel Kader Hachani, interim president of the Islamic Salvation Front, speaks to the press three days after his party swept the initial round of Algeria's first free parliamentary elections. -AFP photo

been prompted by events in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, where Communist regimes have tumbled.

"We have learned from the events so that we can avoid disorder and chaos in our country," Tran Xuan Anh said.

The draft was intended to reduce Communist Party interference in the administration of the country.

In future, Anh said, the party would continue to be responsible for the general political line but law-making would be the National Assembly's responsibility.

The assembly, although in theory the highest state body, has previously existed merely to rubber stamp party directives.

A clause in the new consti-

tution, after confirming the leadership role of the party, states: "All organisations of the party shall operate within the framework of the constitution and the law."

It also says that "the National Assembly is the only body vested with constitutional and legislative powers" with responsibility for basic domestic and foreign policy.

Communist abuse of power and influence-peddling have been a source of widespread resentment in Vietnam and the party has purged thousands of members in recent years in an effort to clean up its act.

Under the new constitution, the National Assembly is to be convened three times a year instead of two. It will elect fewer, but better-qual-

### Samphan back home

PHNOM PENH, Dec 30: A month after a mob nearly lynched him, a hated Khmer Rouge leader returned to Cambodia under military guard Monday and joined a government and guerrilla meeting to carry out an accord to end their 13-year-old civil war, reports UNH.

Khieu Samphan flew in from Thailand and was driven directly from the airport to the Royal Palace. About 80 armed government soldiers in his motorcade guarded against any repeat of the previous attack on him.

He joined other members of the Supreme National Council for their first talks on Cambodian soil. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the council leader and national reconciliation leader, opened the session.

The meeting had been postponed twice — first after the attempt on Khieu Samphan's life, then after anti-corruption protests by students and civil servants erupted into riots two weeks ago.

### Switzerland closes embassy in Tehran

BERN, Dec 30: Switzerland on Sunday closed its embassy in Tehran — which also represents US and South African interests — in protest against harassment of its diplomatic staff following the arrest in Bern last week of an Iranian sought in connection with the murder of a former Iranian Premier, reports AFP.

The suspension of all Swiss diplomatic and consular affairs effectively breaks off contact between Iran and the United States, which has been represented by Switzerland since 1980, and between Iran and South Africa.

Washington broke relations with Iran after Islamic militants seized and held hostage the staff of the US embassy in Tehran.

### BRIEFLY

**Blast kills nine in China:** A huge explosion accidentally set off by a peasant family making firecrackers killed nine people and seriously injured 17 others, an official newspaper has reported, says AP.

The explosion in Xizhuang, a village in Licbei province, was equivalent to two tons of TNT going off and was heard nearly 50 kilometers (30 miles) away, the China Earthquake News reported on Dec 26. The issue was seen in Beijing on Sunday.

The force of the Nov 24 blast toppled 96 buildings, it said. The paper did not explain the delay in reporting, but it is not unusual for disasters in China to go unreported for weeks.

The report said the blast occurred in the home of a private firecracker manufacturer. It said everyone in his family was killed.

**Indonesia recognizes Russia:** Indonesia has recognized the Federation of Russia and the 10 other republics that form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Antara news agency said in Jakarta Monday, reports AFP.

Antara quoted a Foreign Ministry press release issued over the weekend that the recognition was contained a letter from Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas to his counterpart at the Federation, Andrei Kozyrev.

The former Indonesian ambassador to the Soviet Union was concurrently named as Jakarta's envoy to the Russian Federation on December 28, Antara said.

**Newsman shot dead in Andhra:** Journalists in the Southern Indian city of Hyderabad have asked the Andhra Pradesh state government to investigate the death of a colleague killed by police on the city's outskirts Sunday, reports AFP.

The employees' union of the Udayam Newspaper charged in a statement released by the Press Trust of India (PTI) here today that Gulam Rasool had been shot dead by police in a 'fake encounter' or staged shoot-out.

The union said Rasool, who had worked for the newspaper for the past two years, was on assignment to write about the city's 400th anniversary at the time of the shooting.

**Explosion rips west Beirut:** An explosion ripped through a bustling residential area of Muslim west Beirut Monday killing at least seven people and wounding 36, security sources said, reports Reuters.

Initial reports said it was a car bomb but there was no independent confirmation.

Rescue teams said women and children were trapped in a building which caught fire after the blast in the Al-Basta district.

The blast occurred only 50 metres from a Syrian checkpoint. The area is heavily populated by supporters of the pro-Iranian Hizbollah (Party of God) group.

**Filipino rebels ambush medical team:** Communist rebels ambushed a government medical team in the northern Philippines, killing two army doctors and two soldiers, the military said Sunday, reports AP from Manila.

Eight other government troopers were wounded in the ambush Saturday in Mountain Province, about 175 miles (280 kilometers) north of Manila.

A military statement said a truck carrying three officers and nine enlisted men was ambushed as the personnel were headed for their headquarters for the New Year's break.

The ambush was the second staged by New People's Army guerrillas against government medical teams this month.

On December 20, rebels ambushed a team on Mindoro Island, killing two doctors and five other personnel.