

## Limited democracy in Saudi Arabia likely

RIYADH, Jan 1: Saudi Arabia will set up a consultative council in February, King Fahd announced in a move seen as a limited democratization of the regime, reports AFP.

The King told a cabinet meeting late Monday that the authorities would likewise announce in February the guidelines of what he described as a "fundamental law" based on Sharia (Islamic Law).

But he did not specify what powers the consultative council would have or how many members it would comprise.

The creation of a council has been promised by rulers of this conservative Sunni Muslim kingdom for more than 10 years. In 1980, the Interior Minister was asked to draw up a 200-article "System of Rule" based on Islamic principles.

During the Gulf crisis, King Fahd pledged he would speed up the introduction of a consultative council.

Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates—who along with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain form the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—have already introduced consultative councils.

Kuwait's ruler, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, has promised that parliament would be restored next October.

In Oman, the Consultative Body is made up of 60 members, 59 of whom are selected among the top representatives of provinces while its chairman is designated by the Government.

The Omani Council can call debates on draft laws before they are ratified and is entitled to propose changes. It can also question cabinet ministers on domestic affairs.



Fireworks break out over the Kremlin's Spassky gate and St. Basil's Cathedral. Hundreds of people turned up for the event which also marked the first year since 1917 without communist in power and without the Soviet Union. — AFP photo

## World welcomes new year amid joy and sorrow

UNDATED, Jan 1: Kremlin cannon gave a booming salute to 1992 and with it the official end of the Soviet Union. El Salvador began the year with a peace accord, but civil war still raged in Yugoslavia and former Soviet Georgia, reports AP.

The economic downturn in the West was noted by Pope John Paul II in his New Year's Eve homily. He focused it on Rome, saying the Catholic Church would intensify its efforts to ease the suffering of poor people in the city.

The 74-year-old Soviet Union ended its legal existence at midnight, the bells in Red Square ringing in 1992 as fireworks erupted in blue, white and red, the colours of Russia's flag.

In London, 75,000 revelers packed Trafalgar Square and surrounding streets to welcome the New Year to the chimes of nearby Big Ben.

In New York, 200,000 people watched the brilliant white ball drop above Times Square, marking the stroke of midnight.

Although much of Asia doesn't usher in the Year of the Monkey until the lunar new year, falling on February 4,

this year, millions of Japanese thronged shrines and temples for New Year's prayers.

New Year's revelry also had its victims. In the Philippines, officials said at least eight people died and nearly 1,000 were hurt by indiscriminate gunfire while fireworks caused at least 10 fires in the capital Manila.

At least 48 celebrants in Bombay died after drinking a fermented brew tainted with chemicals to increase its potency, Indian officials said.

The 74-year-old Soviet Union ended its legal existence at midnight, the bells in Red Square ringing in 1992 as fireworks erupted in blue, white and red, the colours of Russia's flag.

In Poland, President Lech Walesa appealed to Poles to take advantage of the freedom and possibilities he said are now available despite the country's troubled 2-year-old drive to a market economy.

Hopes rose for an end to El

Salvador's 12-year-old civil war when rebel and government negotiators at the United Nations announced moments after midnight that they have agreed to peace. A formal ceasefire is set for February 1.

It was a final dramatic victory for UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, who ended his decade-long tenure on New Year's Eve.

Resolving the Salvadoran conflict was a top priority for the Peruvian UN Chief, who was succeeded Wednesday by Egypt's Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

More fighting erupted Tuesday in Tbilisi, capital of the former Soviet republic of Georgia, after rebels and pro-government forces called up reinforcements and exchanged heavy machine gun and cannon fire along the city's main street.

Fighting also heralded the New Year in Yugoslavia. Zagreb Radio reported attacks Tuesday night by the Serb-dominated armed forces on

## India to fence border with Pakistan

BERNER, Jan 1: The country's entire border with Pakistan from Jammu and Kashmir to Gujarat would be fenced with barbed wire, the Prime Minister Narasimha Rao said here today, reports PTI.

The government planned to fence the country's border with Pakistan which touches Rajasthan and Gujarat as had been done in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, he told reporters during his one-day trip to Rajasthan.

He said the barbed wire fencing would be taken up in different stages in accordance with availability of resources.

Replying to a question, he said security would be beefed up in border areas of Rajasthan as militants were using the desert state to cross over to Pakistan in view of the mounting pressure on them in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab.

## Lankan minister plans to talk with Tamils

COLOMBO, Jan 1: A Sri Lankan minister is reconsidering proposed peace talks with Tamil rebels after an influential critic said his plan would divide the country and lead to perpetual civil war, reports Reuter.

A spokesman of Saumiamorthy Thondaman, Minister of Rural Industrial Development and Tourism, confirmed a report in today's state-run daily news quoting the minister as saying he was reconsidering a trip to the rebel stronghold of Jaffna.

Thondaman, a Tamil, was due to travel to the North this month for talks with the rebels stronghold Jaffna.

Thondaman, a Tamil, was due to travel to the north this month for talks with the rebels on an end to their eight-year revolt, which has claimed thousands of lives.

"As a devoted Lankan citizen, I felt it my duty to try and persuade the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam guerrillas to enter the negotiating process. To do this I must have the backing of the Sinhalese people,"

the newspaper quoted him as saying.

The Tigers are fighting for a separate state in the north and east for Tamils, who account for 18 per cent of the 16.5 million population. Most Sri Lankans are Sinhalese.

Thondaman's plan involves granting greater autonomy to the Tamils through an elected provincial government in the north and east.

This government would control state land, run its own judiciary and establish a police force made up of former militants. It would also be able to negotiate foreign aid, collect taxes and run the region's ports.

A senior buddhist monk from the majority Sinhalese community has called for the plan to be rejected.

"The government has no right to negotiate with a terrorist group like the Tigers," Reverend Maeden Pannasecha said in a statement on Sunday. "Let them lay down their arms first and come to the negotiations table like any other peaceful Tamil group."

## Truce in Salvador from Feb 1

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 1: Combatants in El Salvador's 12-year civil war reached a cease-fire accord today to go into effect on February 1, the United Nations said, reports Reuter.

AP adds: Negotiations have agreed to end El Salvador's 12-year old civil war, the top US State Department official for Latin America said early Wednesday.

The formal cease-fire begin February 1, Bernard Aronson told reporters. "To the Salvadorian people, it's the best New Year's present they could have."

The talks continued into the afternoon but one delegate for the rebels said they had bogged down over land reform.

The leftist rebels are con-

cerned about establishing social programme to lift people out of staggering poverty.

Other unresolved issues have included rebuilding El Salvador's police, the rebels want their guerrillas to be included in the police force, but the government opposes this.

The negotiations have been going on for two weeks.

Thomas Pickering, the US ambassador to the United Nations, and Bernard Aronson, the top State Department official for Latin America, were on hand for the meetings Sunday and Monday, suggesting the Washington was pressuring the Salvadoran government to resolve the conflict.

El Salvador has received about \$1 billion in US aid over the past decade.

The US officials would not

comment on their role in the talks. Pickering formerly was US ambassador to El Salvador.

Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani arrived Saturday to take part in the talks after urging from Perez de Cuellar and the rebels.

Rebel spokesman Roberto Canas said Tuesday that the US role in the talks had been helpful. He said Cristiani was not talking directly with the rebels and likened the president's role to that of a businessman who sends his lawyers to negotiate with the unions.

The rebels unilaterally declared a cease-fire in November but said a permanent truce depended on settling substantial questions about postwar El Salvadoran.

## Burma recognises Russia

RANGOON, Jan 1: Burma has recognised Russia, saying relations between the two countries will be based on the principles of peaceful co-existence, a Foreign Ministry statement said, reports AP.

According to the statement, issued late Tuesday, Burma recognized Russia, "which has assumed the rights and obligations of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, both in bilateral relations and in the context of community of nations, including the seat and membership of the United Nations."

The State Law and Order Restoration Council, the official name of Burma's military junta, said relations between the two countries would continue "based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence," the statement said.

The government and the people of Myanmar (Burma) look forward to further promoting existing ties with the governments of the Russian Federation and the Russian people as well," the statement said.

## Int'l confce on reconstruction of Iran soon

NEW YORK, United Nations, Jan 1: The U.N. commission on the reconstruction of Iran following its eight-year war with Iraq has recommended holding an international conference on the subject as soon as possible, reports AP.

In a report made public Tuesday, U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar's last day in office, the head of the panel, Abdul Rahim Farah, said he favored a conference of the U.N. member states and specialized agencies to determine the best way to rebuild Iran following the war, which ended in 1988.

## BRIEFLY

**46 die after drinking alcohol:** At least 46 people died after drinking an alcoholic brew in the west Indian metropolis of Bombay, news reports said Wednesday, reports AP.

The victims, mostly poor labourers, were celebrating new year's eve in a state-owned bar, United News of India said. Some of them were found lying dead near the Chaaya Government Country Liquor Bar early Wednesday.

Police have arrested the man in charge of the bar and have sealed the cellar, the news agency said.

Country liquor is a low-priced, partly distilled alcoholic drink popular among poor who cannot afford other alcoholic drinks.

At least 33 people were hospitalised in serious condition.

**VOA to broadcast in Croatian:** Beginning New Year's Day, the Voice of America will broadcast news in the language of Croatian, which has declared its independence from Yugoslavia, reports AP from Washington.

VOA headquarters said Tuesday Croatian would be the 46th language used by the U.S. government sponsored overseas radio.

The new programme will last half an hour, Monday through Friday. Up to now, VOA has had a single Serbo-Croatian programme of 75 minutes daily with several items in Croatian and the rest in Serbian. Serbian and Croatian are closely related; educated Serbs and Croats can understand one another without a translator.

But Serbian is written and printed in Cyrillic characters like Russian while Croatian uses the Roman alphabet like west European languages.

**Ukraine seeks IMF membership:** Ukraine has become the first republic of the new Commonwealth of Independent States to request membership in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the lending organisation announced Tuesday, reports AP from Washington.

Russia, the largest of the former Soviet republics, has so far made no overtures to the IMF, a fund officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The three Baltic states, which do not belong to the commonwealth, already are members of the IMF.

Before its disintegration, the Soviet Union had asked to join the IMF but the republics must now apply individually. Membership in the IMF opens the way for membership in the World Bank, an important source of development financing.

**Rebels kill 10 in Colombia:** At least ten people were killed in year-end rebel attacks, including the wife of a police officer, officials said Tuesday, reports AP from Bogota.

The largest clash was reported in the central Colombian town of Chita, where almost 200 rebels attacked a police station late Monday, killing five police and one officer's wife, the defence ministry reported Tuesday.

The guerrillas, from the left-wing National Liberation Army, took control of the town and withdrew early Tuesday morning, leaving several buildings partially destroyed and the telephone lines cut. They suffered no casualties.

Four rebels were killed in other clashes with government troops, police reported Tuesday.

**Amnesty for 500 Lankan prisoners:** Five hundred convicts serving prison terms of up to six months will be granted an amnesty to mark President Ranasinghe Premadasa's third year in office, news reports said Wednesday, reports AP.

All other prisoners in the island nation will get a reprieve of one month from their sentences, the government-owned Daily News newspaper said. Premadasa completes three years as president Thursday.

## 'Koreas will move closer to reunification this year'

SEOUL, Jan 1: South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo said today that he believed the two Koreas would move closer to reunification this year, reports Reuter.

"The new year will open an era during which we will construct a national community for all our 70 million compatriots," Roh said in a new year message to the nation.

"All of us share the belief that in the new year we will witness an epochal change that will bring us closer to democracy, prosperity and unification."

The two neighbours, technically at war since the 1950-53 Korean conflict, initiated a five-point joint declaration on Tuesday to make the peninsula nuclear-free.

Roh has called for a meeting with North Korean leader

Kim Il-Sung to set the stage for eventual reunification of the peninsula.

Kim has never met a South Korean President.

"It is now high time that the South and the North began to march hand-in-hand toward unification," Roh said.

"The disconnected roads must be reconnected and the disrupted train service resumed."

Last month the prime ministers of the two sides signed a non-aggression accord easing four decades of enmity across the world's last cold war frontier.

In Pyongyang, Kim said in his new year address that an independent stance was needed to bring about reunification.

"People who want to contribute to national reunification should thoroughly reject the

dependence on foreign forces and hold on to the stand of national independence," he was quoted as saying by the official KCNA news agency, monitored in Tokyo.

"No one shall be permitted to put unjust pressure upon North Korea, arguing about the nuclear inspection," he added.

Under the draft pact signed on Tuesday the two sides agreed to use nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes and to submit their plants to inspection for nuclear weapons.

"The North and South Korea should make every effort to realise arms reduction, ease tension and turn the Korean peninsula into a nuclear arms-free peace zone in accordance with the spirit of the agreement," KCNA quoted Kim as saying.

## '91 leaves eastern Europe in shadow of crisis

BEIJING, Jan 1: China's Communist leaders unleashed a barrage of publicity at the weekend, telling their people of the problems and failures in Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism there, reports Reuter.

"Using western medicine not only could eliminate the contradictions and conflicts that already existed but also created new contradictions and conflicts," the official People's Daily Stated Sunday in a signed commentary entitled "Eastern Europe": The 1991 that disappointed people.

"People are losing their

confidence in this kind of "freedom" and "democracy," it added.

The New China News Agency on Saturday issued a signed analysis describing how 1991 leaves eastern Europe in shadow of crisis.

The articles painted stark pictures of political upheavals and economic chaos in Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Albania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, with falling standards of living, rising crime and political unrest.

China's Premier Li Peng said last week his country's economy would grow by a real

5.5 per cent in 1992 after a seven per cent rise in gross national product this year.

Shops are full of food and inflation is under control.

"1991 was the second year after the sharp change in eastern Europe," the People's Daily said.

"The political situation is unstable, the economy is in recession, people's standards of living have declined greatly and they feel their futures are uncertain. This is the real situation in Eastern European countries this year."

Under the headings of "unstable politics," grim economic situation" and "at a loss

about the future," the newspaper presented a list of woes facing the countries that rejected communism.

Right now in all the eastern European countries there isn't one political party that can form a nucleus [of power]. Multi-party assemblies have become social clubs with endless fighting," it said.

China's Communist leaders, who crushed pro-democracy demonstrations in 1989, have made it clear they will not tolerate political pluralism.

The People's Daily said that in Poland "people have already started to feel sick of these "democratic activities."

## Off the Record

### Cody one in a million

HOUSTON: A local celebrity has parlayed an appearance in "Dances with Wolves" into a lucrative movie career. He might be a bit player to some, but to his owner, Cody the buffalo is "one in a million," reports AP.

The burly bison has completed his second full-length movie, "Radio Flyer," which also stars John Hurt and Ben Johnson.

Walt Disney Company even wants to buy Cody for a Wild West show at its new Euro Disney theme park in France. But owner Mike Fogel, who earned \$100,000 for "Radio Flyer," says Cody is not for sale.

### Toys instead of cup

SAN DIEGO: A plane that carried the yacht of a Russian group hoping to crash that America's Cup competition returned home carrying tons of Children's toys and much-needed food and medicine, reports AP.

The Antonov 124, the world's largest transport plane, left San Diego's International Airport on Sunday evening for Moscow with about 70 tons relief aid and supplies, organisers said.

The items included toys for Russia's children, which had been requested with the food and medicine by Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin. The mercy mission was organized by US charities and missions, which loaded the supplies onto the plane over the weekend.

### "Dreams often come true"

During his years as a hostage in Lebanon, Joseph Cicippio dreamed of taking his wife to the Rose Parade on New Year's Day, reports AP.

The dream finally came true. "It came into my mind in my first year of my captivity, right after Christmas," Cicippio, 61, said Tuesday as he prepared to view Pasadena's 103rd Tournament of Roses and the 78th Rose Bowl football classic.

"I had thought that if I ever got out of this thing the first thing I was going to do was take my wife to this Rose Bowl to introduce her to the USA with this spectacular display of flowers," he said.



Miss India Ritu Singh waits to be interviewed during the Miss World 1991 contest. Ritu, 20, finished in the top ten to winner Ninibeth Beatriz Leal Jimenez of Venezuela. — AFP photo

## China accuses UK of destabilising H K

HONG KONG, Jan 1: China tacitly accused Britain today of trying to destabilise Hong Kong by announcing the retirement of the governor, Sir David Wilson, without naming a successor, reports AP.

In a signed letter, the pro-Beijing daily Wen Wei Po said London's announcement this week that Wilson would retire after British general elections, due by July, would make continuity of contact impossible in the 1997, when the territory reverts to Chinese sovereignty.

The move is part of a British plot to retain influence in the territory after 1997, when the territory reverts to Chinese sovereignty.

The move is part of a British plot to retain influence in the territory after 1997, it said. Wen Wei Po and another pro-Beijing newspaper, Ta Kung Pao, urged Hong Kong

people in editorials to contribute to the smooth transfer of power.

Analysts said the two papers, which are largely funded by Beijing, unofficially represent the views of the Chinese government in Hong Kong.

The letter in Wen Wei Po said Britain's announcing that Wilson was to retire without naming his successor was "a political move".

Britain has given tacit support to the growing self-rule sentiment here, it said, and this has expanded the power of the legislative council (Legco).

Another report says: Hundreds of Hong Kong demonstrators, waving banners and singing songs, marched to Beijing De Facto Embassy today demanding the release of political prisoners in China.

## Foreign students in UAE exempted from school fees

ABU DHABI, Jan 1: President Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan has ordered that all expatriate students in government schools be exempted from school fees with effect from December 23, 1991, according to Education Minister Hamad Abdul Rahman Al Madfa, reports WAM.

In a statement, Madfa said, "The President's order emanates from his belief that education opportunities be made available for the children of the expatriate community residing in the UAE."

"It is widely believed that the switchover process in East European countries will be a long and painful one."