

ME peace talks suspended

WASHINGTON, Dec 9: Arab delegations to bilateral peace talks with Israel here decided Tuesday to suspend negotiations on Wednesday to mark the fifth anniversary of the uprising in the occupied territories, reports AP.

After meeting late Tuesday with the leaders of the Syrian, Lebanese, and Jordanian delegations, chief Palestinian negotiator Haidar Abdel Shafi said the decision was made "in solidarity with the Palestinians and in homage to the Intifada," which began December 9, 1987.

The head of the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with the Jordanians and Palestinians, Eliakim Rebenstein, warned earlier in the day that the suspension of the talks for a day would be "a mistake." He said that any commemoration should not interfere with vital negotiations.

3 parties to contest by-poll in Singapore

SINGAPORE, Dec 9: Three opposition parties nominated candidates for Parliament Wednesday to contest a by-election in Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's constituency, reports AP.

Goh's People's Action Party, which has been in power since 1959, was heavily favoured in the December 19 balloting, with the opposition vote split three ways. Voting is compulsory and 73,986 are eligible.

In the last two general elections, the governing party has won more votes in Goh's Marine Parade constituency than in any other constituency, 77.2 per cent last year and 73.8 per cent in 1988.

26 Pakistanis killed in backlash over Ayodhya incident

KARACHI, Dec 8: Muslims throughout the Indian subcontinent torched Hindu temples and burned and looted Hindu homes Tuesday to retaliate for the destruction of a centuries-old mosque in India, reports AP.

At least 26 people were killed in Pakistan, including five Hindu women and small child who were burned to death, police said. Nearly 200 demonstrators were injured in battles with riot police.

Dozens of Hindu temples were set ablaze by demonstrators in a dawn-to-dusk strike called by Pakistan's Islamic government to protest Sunday's destruction by Hindus

of the 16th century Babri Mosque in northern India by Hindu zealots.

India on Wednesday ordered the evacuation of an estimated 200 diplomats and their families back to New Delhi after the home of its consul-general in Karachi was ransacked and looted. The consul's family hid in a locked room to escape the frenzied mob of 500.

Businesses and offices shut their doors and traffic stopped across the country, created as a homeland for Indian Muslims in the 1947 partition of the subcontinent.

Riots continued between Muslims and Hindus across

India. News agencies said the death toll since Sunday had reached 298.

In Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, demonstrators cornered, trampled, then burned to death six Hindu women, said Sohail Humayun, the deputy police commissioner. They also killed a Hindu man as he worshipped at a temple, he said. Police killed one Muslim man who set fire to Hindu shops, he added.

In Peshawar, capital of the Northwest Frontier province, one man was killed and dozens were injured when police fired on a crowd trying to attack a movie theater.

The government called out the army to help restore order in Karachi, a southern port city where most of Pakistan's 800,000 Hindus live. Frenzied mobs raced through the Hindu community of Naran Pura, burning shops, ransacking and looting some 200 homes and kidnapping young women, witnesses said.

Rioters burned down one of the country's largest temples and set fire to a smaller one nearby. At least a dozen people were injured in Karachi, police said.

A mob of about 8,000 to 10,000 also tried to break through police barricades and storm the Indian Consulate

but were blocked by riot police.

In Islamabad, hundreds of young men battled with police as they tried to break through huge coils of barbed wire that blocked the streets around the Indian Embassy. Rescue workers said at least 100 people were hurt.

More than a dozen temples were set ablaze in areas bordering Afghanistan and at least 15 people were injured in clashes with police, witnesses said.

In the eastern city of Lahore, bordering India, demonstrators commandeered government bulldozers, razed

four temples, then burned the Indian flag.

Fire gutted a Hindu temple in central England and slightly damaged three other temples early Tuesday. On Monday, fire bomb attacks damaged two Hindu temples in northern England.

In Iran, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati summoned the Indian ambassador in Tehran and demanded that the Ayodhya mosque be rebuilt, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported in a dispatch monitored in Cyprus.

The Indian government already has said it will try to rebuild the Muslim holy site in Ayodhya.

Clinton resigns as Arkansas Governor Saturday

LITTLE ROCK (Arkansas), Dec 9: President-elect Bill Clinton will resign as Governor of Arkansas on Saturday afternoon, reports Reuter.

Lieutenant Governor Jim Guy Tucker will immediately be sworn in to succeed Clinton at a ceremony in the Arkansas capital.

Clinton, who takes office on January 20, has been governor for the past decade. He also served a single two-year term as governor before his present tenure began, bringing his time in office to 12 years.

Eagleburger sworn in as US Secy of States

WASHINGTON, Dec 9: President Bush had a little surprise for Lawrence Eagleburger when he walked into the President's office on Tuesday: Bush had him sworn in as secretary of state, reports AP.

The surprise ceremony conducted by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia took place without prior announcement and with only the President, his national security adviser, Eagleburger, members of his family and a few close aides present, said spokesman Marlin Fitzwater.

"The President kept it a secret (until) Larry walked in," Fitzwater said. "The pretext was to talk about Somalia."

Eagleburger, 62, has been serving as acting secretary since James A Baker III left the Cabinet last August to become the White House chief of staff.



WASHINGTON: Lawrence Eagleburger (2nd L) is sworn in December 8 as US Secretary of State by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia (R) in the White House Oval Office. The surprise ceremony, arranged by US President George Bush (L), was attended by Eagleburger's wife Marlene (2nd R). Eagleburger had served as acting Secretary of State since James Baker resigned to become White House Chief of Staff. — AFP/UNB photo

Ensure safety to Muslims, OIC asks Indian govt

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 9: Islamic UN envoys expressed "outrage and profound anguish" on Tuesday over the destruction of an ancient mosque in India by Hindu militants and condemned the killing of hundreds of people in other parts of the country, reports Reuter.

A statement issued after a special closed-door meeting of members of the 50-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) called on the Indian Government to ensure the safety and protection of Muslims and also of all Islamic holy sites throughout the country.

The meeting was prompted by the razing on Sunday of the 400-year-old Babri mosque in Ayodhya, which Hindus say was built on the birthplace of their fabled warrior-king, Lord Rama.

The current Chairman of the OIC at the United Nations, ambassador Mustafa Aksin of Turkey, read the statement at a news conference also attended by ambassador Jamsheed Marker of Pakistan, Saudi Arabian Charge D'affaires Gaafar Allagaany, and by the OIC's UN observer, ambassador Enging Ansay.

The meeting expressed its outrage and profound anguish at the destruction of a centuries-old mosque by a frenzied crowd of Hindu militants and expressed regret over the failure of the Indian authorities to take appropriate measures to protect this important Muslim holy site, the statement said.

The meeting expressed its outrage and profound anguish at the destruction of a centuries-old mosque by a frenzied crowd of Hindu militants and expressed regret over the failure of the Indian authorities to take appropriate measures to protect this important Muslim holy site, the statement said.

S Africa cancels talks on democracy

CAPE TOWN, Dec 9: The South African government cancelled democracy talks on Tuesday with a radical group until it clarified its ties with guerrillas who have attacked whites, reports Reuter.

Chief government negotiator Roelf Meyer told state television after a three-day cabinet meeting that the radical Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) could not negotiate and fight.

But he said talks about bringing the PAC into multi-party talks on a transition to democracy could resume if it gave a satisfactory explanation of its association with the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA).

Five people died and 38 were wounded in the gun and grenade attacks claimed by the APLA on whites at a wine-tasting dinner and in a restaurant in the eastern Cape district.

"We can keep the channel of contact open so that once they have clarified the position of APLA we can resume negotiations," Meyer said.

PAC spokesman Jaki Seroke said the government had called off talks scheduled for today and demanded clarification of the PAC's lines with the APLA.

"The PAC cannot abandon armed struggle until the objectives of the struggle have been realised...the PAC is not duty-bound to condemn the armed struggle conducted by APLA against the settler enemy structures."

"It is... unacceptable and ridiculous for the regime to expect us to clarify our position through the media before any meeting can take place," Seroke said in a statement.

The palace said privately-arranged newspaper and television pictures will be available after the service. But journalists and photographers will remain at a nearby parking lot where they may get glimpse of the wedding guests as they drive to the church.

Buckingham Palace did not release a guest list.

Clinton endorses US army presence in Somalia

WASHINGTON, Dec 9: President-elect Bill Clinton reiterated his strong support Tuesday for US military involvement in Somalia and said he could offer no "artificial timetable" for American withdrawal, reports AP.

Clinton also said he would not rule out the use of US military action in the former Yugoslavia and said only the United States is equipped to lead in alleviating human suffering in a post-Cold War world.

Clinton, answering questions from reporters at an appearance with Democratic members of Congress in the US Capitol, said he appreciated President Bush's desire to have the operation over by the time he leaves the White House.

However, he said no one can say whether that could be achieved.

"I have tried to make it clear... that this mission has merit and that an artificial timetable cannot be imposed upon it," Clinton said of the Somalia operation.

He said it may be possible to get US ground forces out by mid-January, as Bush hopes to do, but he said everyone agrees that a UN peacekeeping force will have to be in the country much longer than that.

US forces, he said, might remain in support offshore.

"They've got a plan and I hope it will work," Clinton said. "Give them a chance to see if it will work."

Clinton's position agreed with that of Defence Secretary Dick Cheney, who said last week that the United States should not be bound by any artificial deadlines dictated by politics.

On the bloodshed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Clinton said it was "a matter of grave concern to me" but he said he could not

say anything specific about his plans for what the United States should do.

Vajpayee warns against rebuilding Babri Mosque

NEW DELHI, Dec 9: The BJP Leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today cautioned the government that any attempt to rebuild the mosque in Ayodhya would only "further complicate the issue", reports PTI.

Any such unilateral action by the central government, he said, would be a "perverse act" in the light of the highly emotive value of Ayodhya. There was no question of BJP joining in such a proposition, Vajpayee addressing a crowded press conference said.

He also warned that in a "panic" reaction, if Government banned "nationalist and patriotic" organisations like RSS, the situation would only worsen and the Government would have to bear the responsibility.

He asserted that BJP was not responsible for the 200 deaths in riots in the last two days and said it was the Congress-I Party and the non-BJP opposition which were responsible for the Dec 6 Ayodhya incident and the subsequent riots.

The Government policy of procrastination had led to all the "unhappy development", he added.

To channelise "our anguish and our sense" of being wronged into peaceful forms of protest,

China, UK yet to resolve differences on Hong Kong

HONG KONG, Dec 9: Chinese and British negotiators concluded a second day of talks Wednesday without resolving their differences on Hong Kong's transfer to Communist rule in 1997, reports AP.

Anthony Galsworthy, Britain's top negotiator, declined to give details of Wednesday's meeting of the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group. But he said no progress was made.

"The general atmosphere between the two sides is visibly not very good, so I am not very hopeful that there will be concrete results from this meeting," he said.

Galsworthy said the two sides would meet again Thursday before holding a news conference.

The group regularly holds talks every few months to hammer out details of the transfer, but this week's meetings have taken on added significance because China and Britain are at loggerheads over the territory's future.

China has objected vehemently to Hong Kong Gov Chris Patten's plans to widen voter participation in the 1995 legislative elections.

China opposes those plans because it fears increased freedom for Hong Kong would spark dissent in the mainland.

39 die as boat capsizes in Mozambique

MAPUTO, Mozambique, Dec 9: The government said Wednesday 39 people were killed when a boat sank off the coast in unexplained circumstances, reports AP.

Officials said 51 people were saved when the boat sank Saturday near the provincial capital of Quelimane in central Mozambique. No further details were given.

BRIEFLY

ROK fighter jet crashes: A South Korean Air Force fighter jet crashed into a mountain Wednesday after developing engine trouble, but the two occupants ejected safely, reports AP from Seoul.

The US-made F-4D Phantom jet was on a routine training mission when it crashed near Kochang, 280 kilometres (175 miles) south of Seoul, 0300 GMT, the national Yonhap News Agency said.

Yonhap, quoting witnesses, said the two pilots parachuted safely moments before the plane went down.

Korean Air Force officials said they were investigating the accident.

Ramos creates energy deptt: President Fidel Ramos signed a bill Wednesday creating a department of energy to give impetus to the government's effort to cope with a critical electricity shortage, reports AP from Manila.

Ramos' predecessor, Corason Aquino, abolished the ministry of energy after taking office in the 1986 uprising that toppled the late Ferdinand Marcos.

Mrs Aquino failed to develop an effective energy policy, mothballed a nuclear power plant and did not open a single new major generating facility during her six-year term, which ended June 30.

As a result, most of the country is without electricity for long periods each day.

Bosnian editor awarded: The international press freedom group reporters San Frontiers awarded its first annual prize on Tuesday to Zlatko Dizdarevic, an editor on the Sarajevo newspaper Oslobođenje, reports Reuter from Paris.

The French-based group said the Bosnian daily, with a mixed Serb, Croat and Muslim staff, has maintained an independent line through the conflict in former Yugoslavia while most Serbian and Croatian media had become propaganda tools.

It said four reporters on Oslobođenje have been killed in the fighting in Bosnia and the prize was dedicated to them.

New UN environment chief: The General Assembly on Tuesday unanimously elected Canadian environment official Elizabeth Dowdeswell as executive director of the UN Environment Programme, reports AP from UN.

Dowdeswell, whose 4-year term begins January 1, is Assistant Deputy Minister of Environment, Canada and head of Canada's Atmospheric Environment Service. She will replace Mostafa Tolba, who is leaving after 16 years as head of the major UN department dealing with the environment.

Dowdeswell was the only candidate nominated by Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali and she was approved by acclamation in the 179 nation assembly.

She will be cooperative with a new UN commission set up to monitor governmental compliance with their obligations from the first Earth Summit in June in Rio de Janeiro.

4.3m migrated to Canada: There were 4.3 million immigrants living in Canada last year, representing 16.1 per cent of the nation's total population, a government agency said Tuesday, reports AP from Ottawa.

An increasing proportion of new immigrants is arriving from Asia, rather than from Canada's traditional supplier of new residents — Europe, said Statistics Canada.

But even with the new influx of Asian immigrants, the tendency for all immigrants to settle in major cities continues.

The agency said Canada's 1991 census found that 94 per cent of all immigrants lived in just four provinces: Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta.

Queen Mother hasn't decided yet to attend Anne's wedding

LONDON, Dec 9: The 92-year-old Queen Mother Elizabeth has not decided if she will attend the second marriage of her divorced granddaughter Princess Anne in Scotland this weekend, her spokeswoman said Tuesday, reports AP.

Tabloid newspaper reports said Elizabeth, mother of the sovereign Queen Elizabeth II, was not going to Anne's wedding to navy Cmdr Timothy Laurence and that she appeared to disapprove of the match.

The spokeswoman at Clarence House, the queen mother's London residence, said, "At the moment she still has no plans to travel to Scotland, but she has not made a final decision. She is undertaking a full programme of long-standing private engagements at the weekend which she is reluctant to break."

"Queen Mum snubs Anne's wedding," shouted the Daily Mirror.

"Gran snubs Anne," yelled the Daily Star.

The Evening Standard quoted unidentified "observers" as saying the queen mother's "unwavering belief in the sanctity of marriage" would

prevent her from attending the wedding of a divorced person.

The Daily Mirror said she is believed to be angry that her granddaughter is marrying a man who used to be a servant of the queen. Laurence, was an equerry, or aide, to the queen from 1986 to 1989.

The couple will be married during a small, family service on Saturday in a tiny Presbyterian Church in northern Scotland, Buckingham Palace announced Monday.

The Church of England frowns on remarrying divorced people, which is believed to be

the reason the marriage is taking place in Scotland. Princess Anne was divorced earlier this year from Capt Mark Phillips.

Anne, 42, and Laurence, a 37-year-old bachelor, came close to tying the knot in virtual privacy. But with days to go before the royal wedding, news leaks forced Buckingham Palace to confirm the marriage Monday and now the palace staff is making preparations to keep the media at bay.

Laurence ordered few detail of his family to be released, according to Press Association, the British national news agency.

His mother, Barbara, told British Broadcasting Corp, television: "I am very happy for both of them. I think it is going to mean great happiness for the queen — she has had a very bad year."

"It is marvellous news, really good news. I think we all need some good news in these recessionary times," said Mrs Laurence, whose husband died in 1982.

Press Association reported that the 3 pm wedding at Crathie Church, opposite the queen's Balmoral Castle estate, would be preceded by a small family lunch at Balmoral. But it

was not known if Laurence would join the pre-wedding party.

The post-marriage celebrations will also take place at Balmoral, Press Association reported.

The palace said privately-arranged newspaper and television pictures will be available after the service. But journalists and photographers will remain at a nearby parking lot where they may get glimpse of the wedding guests as they drive to the church.

Buckingham Palace did not release a guest list.

Off the Record

Black women prefer to stay unmarried

WASHINGTON: American black women are far less likely to marry than white women, the government said Tuesday, reports AP.

At age 40, one in four black women have never married, compared with one in 10 white women, a Census Bureau study said.

A lack of jobs for black men discourages marriage because couples can't afford to start families.

"The economic opportunities available to men are greater for white men than black men," said Reynolds Farley, research scientist at the University of Michigan's Population Studies Center. "Black women are forced to assume more economic roles than white women are because fewer men can support them."

Marriage has been declining in America for half a century. Among blacks, the decline has been particularly steep since the early 1980s, when a recession left one black worker in five without a job.

In 1975, 90 per cent of black women had married by age 40. By 1985, the marriage among that group had declined to 81 per cent, and by 1990, to 75 per cent.

Among white women age 40, the marriage rate has held steady above 90 per cent during that period.

Black unemployment now stands at nearly 14 per cent, double that of whites.

Economic necessity may also have given black women more role models of successful single women, and "it could be that the general liberation movement is more accepted by black women than by white women," Farley said.

Black women of all ages stay unmarried more than white women, the study said.

Good looks obviously aren't every thing

PITTSBURGH: Tarah Foster knows what she wants for Christmas, and it's not pretty. It's one of those wide-eyed, stumpy dolls with a big nose, big ears and colourful hair that stands straight up — a troll, reports AP.

"They're neat because some of them are wearded, but in a different way they're cute," said 11-year-old Tarah.

An ugly but endearing face and a modest price have made the troll a megastar in the toy world, where good looks obviously aren't everything.

Toy watchers say nostalgia did for the troll what movies and television cartoons do for toys like Batman and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Trolls were introduced to the United States about 1960, and were playthings for children who are parents today.

In her bedroom in the Pittsburgh suburb of Plum, Tarah has about 60 trolls, some of them attached to earrings and hair bands. Her mother Maria, 36, had a few trolls herself as a child.



SUN CITY, South Africa: Judges for the Miss World Contest pictured December 7 at Sun City. They are from left, Ivana Trump, Sol Kerzner, Joan Collins and Jerry Hall. — AFP/UNB photo

\$6.9m lottery ticket unclaimed

HARRISBURG: With the holiday shopping season in full swing, You'd think a few million bucks would come in handy. But the Pennsylvania State Lottery can't seem to give the stuff away, reports AP.

For the second time in little more than a month, officials are searching for the holder of a missing multimillion-dollar lottery ticket.

The holder of the Super 7 jackpot ticket stands to miss out on 6.9 million dollar the ticket is no good if the prize isn't claimed by end of business on Friday.

Tickets are good for a year after the winning numbers are announced.

Last month, a 6.5 million dollar ticket went unclaimed and expired. A good chunk of that went back into the Lottery Fund, which finances programmes for senior citizens.

Twenty-four jackpot tickets have gone unclaimed since 1982, said lottery spokesman Mark Schreiber. A Super 7 ticket worth 9.2 million dollar expired in February 1987.

Canadian help for Rushdie

OTTAWA: British author Salman Rushdie made a surprise appearance Tuesday to ask Canadian legislators to help him lift the death sentence imposed by the late Ayatollah Khomeini for his novel "The Satanic Verses," reports AP.

Rushdie, who has been in hiding since Khomeini put a price on his head four years ago, said the international community should use economic pressure against Iran.

"Silence allows this issue to slip away from the international agenda and allows Iran to feel that it can do its work with impunity because nobody is looking," Rushdie said.