

**Ethiopia meet on Somalia fails**

**ADDIS ABABA, Dec 5:** Somalia's warring factions are expected to continue with informal talks today despite failure by the President of Ethiopia to revive reconciliation efforts, US special envoy Robert Oakley said, reports Reuter.

Oakley told reporters before heading back to the United States on Saturday that the 15 factions aligned to powerful warlords Mohamed Farah Aided and Ali Mahdi Mohamed would stay in Addis Ababa until some common ground was found.

"They had a lot of rumblings earlier in the day but they will now continue talking. They are now thinking of how to proceed. They are trying to work out something so they can continue talking," Oakley said.

The spoke hours after Ethiopian President Meles Zenawi walked abruptly out of a meeting with Ali Mahdi's faction and a participant said peace-making seemed to have collapsed.

"It appears you Somalis are not willing to reconcile — goodbye," Meles declared after the Ali Mahdi faction rejected his proposals, Ali Mahdi's chief adviser, Aways Haji Yusuf, said.

Somalia's main contenders for power are in the Ethiopian capital for a fresh attempt to settle the civil war which brought chaos, famine and foreign intervention to their horn of African country.

**Israeli negotiations in Cairo for secret talks with PLO**

**Arafat may accept a delay in implementing accord**

**AMMAN, Dec 5:** Palestinian officials said today PLO chairman Yasser Arafat was prepared for a two-week delay in implementing the PLO-Israeli accord because of Israeli terms for withdrawing from the West Bank town of Jericho, reports Reuter.

"Arafat told Fatah central committee members and his executive committee that they would have to accept a delay of two weeks in implementing the accord," a PLO official said in Amman a few hours before the PLO chief was due to arrive.

Under the September peace accord between Israel and the PLO, Israeli troops are to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and Jericho over a four-month period starting December 13.

The Palestinian officials, who attended the meetings in Tunis but requested anonymity, said Arafat was hoping during talks in Amman on Monday to persuade US Secretary of State Warren Christopher to pressure Israel to change its position.

Publicly PLO officials have demanded Israel stick to the original timetable. Israeli officials have expressed doubts it will happen.

The officials said Israel had refused to change from its original definition of the size of Jericho to fall under Palestinian administration — less than

seven per cent of the area sought by the PLO.

The PLO is also seeking control of border posts linking the Jericho area and Jordan. Israel has insisted these must remain manned by its troops.

A Cairo report says: With a deadline only eight days off, Israeli negotiators arrived in Cairo today for secret talks with the PLO on Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho.

The PLO says Israel must start withdrawing on time on December 13 but many Israelis doubt they can meet the deadline.

"We (the PLO) are going to negotiate on the basis that the withdrawal is on December 13 as agreed. We are sparing no efforts and no time but whether we finish on time or not, this has to do with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin," chief PLO negotiator Nabil Shaath told Reuters.

"I am not pessimistic. I am simply resigned to the fact that if we finish the negotiations we are ready but if they (Israelis) are not ready we will not finish. It takes two to decide. From our part we're doing our best to finish on time but the more I hear Rabin statements saying there might be a delay I start to believe there will be a delay," Shaath added.

Airports source said the

Israeli delegation had arrived in Cairo. The meetings are normally held at a secret location somewhere in the city to keep away from the press.

Israel's army chief Ehud Barak said on Saturday it was doubtful Israeli troops would start withdrawing on December 13.

Israel and the PLO are at loggerheads over the extent of the withdrawal, the size of the Jericho area and who should control the border crossing between Egypt and Gaza and between Jordan and Jericho.

Another issue is Israeli insistence on tough security measures for small, isolated Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip, which would eat up land and turn withdrawal into a re-employment, Shaath said.

In talks last week progress was reported on the release of Palestinian prisoners. Shaath said Israel presented a plan and a timetable under which it will free up to 10,000 prisoners.

Another PLO-Israeli committee is due to convene on Tuesday in the Egyptian town of El-Arish, on the Egyptian coast west of Gaza, to discuss the transfer of authority for state services. On Saturday the PLO reiterated that it totally rejected any delay in implementing the self-rule agreement.

The PLO executive committee

also decided to end Chairman Yasser Arafat's monopoly in directing talks with Israel, PLO sources said.

Members trying to defuse a row over Arafat's leadership style agreed at a meeting in

Tunis to set up a committee to oversee the talks, they said.

The PLO has asked the United States, chief sponsor of Middle East peace talks, to intervene in the stalled autonomy negotiations but Rabin said he

did not want any outside help.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who is on a tour in the region, will meet Arafat in Amman on Monday but he said he would not mediate unless both sides wanted him to.



US Secretary of State Warren Christopher (R) and the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin fix their suits before shaking hands in Jerusalem on Saturday. — AFP photo

**Spanish officer killed in Bosnia**

**SARAJEVO, Dec 5:** United Nations peacekeeping troops have again found themselves in the firing line in Bosnia after a Spanish officer was killed by a land mine explosion while patrolling a planned aid route, reports Reuter.

Saturday's incident, in which a soldier was also wounded, occurred while Spanish troops were on patrol near the Salakovac dam on the Neretva river, 20 KM (12 miles) northeast of the southern city of Mostar.

"The area is contested by the Croats and Muslims. It is a confrontation line area so we do not know which side laid the mine," said a spokesman from the UN Protection Force headquarters in Zagreb.

The Spanish troops were surveying the area for a new ferry to be used for crossing the Neretva as a substitute for the Bijela bridge, blown up by Bosnian Croats months ago.

The Bijela bridge was a vital part of the so-called Mostar road, an all-weather route the UN wants to reopen in order to transport aid to central Bosnia and Sarajevo this winter.

The death of the Spanish captain brought to at least 65 the number of UN soldiers killed in 20 months of peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Croatia. About 750 have been wounded.

**Khartoum meet rejects PLO-Israeli accord**

**KHARTOUM, Dec 5:** Islamic leaders have rejected the PLO-Israeli accord on limited self-rule in Gaza and Jericho but called on rival Palestinian factions to avoid internal clashes, reports AFP.

The call came in a resolution read out to delegates late Saturday at the end of a three-day meeting of 400 Islamic figures in the Sudanese capital.

But some Palestinian hardliners, backed by the Muslim fundamentalist Hezbollah and other groups in Lebanon, criticised the resolution because they wanted a "clear condemnation" of the September 13 autonomy accord.

"We want a stronger resolution. We want to denounce those who signed the accord and call on our people to wreck the deal," said the head of the

Islamic Jihad in Palestine, Fathi Shakaki.

The resolution was not made public early Sunday.

Sudanese fundamentalist leader Hassan Turabi told journalists after the final session that the resolution was final and could not be modified. "We do not want an extremist stand," he explained.

But Nayef Hawatmeh, head of the radical Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said the resolution included in its final version a call for wrecking the accord.

"What is important is not the choice of words but the content," said Khaled Abou El-Omarin, a member of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) active in the occupied territories.

**Lanka to continue use of force against LTTE**

**COLOMBO, Dec 5:** The Sri Lankan government had no alternative but to resort to force in dealing with secessionist Tamil Tiger guerrillas, press reports here Sunday quoted Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe as saying, reports AFP.

The Prime Minister said the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had been invited for talks "over and over again" but the rebels resorted to armed action, the state-run Sunday Observer reported.

"The government had no alternative but to meet the LTTE terrorists with force as all attempts made to resolve democratically the issue of division of the country raised by the LTTE had failed," Wickremesinghe was quoted as saying at a pub-

lic function outside the capital on Saturday.

Security forces were doing their job despite two recent setbacks in the island's north where the LTTE has a stronghold, he said.

His remarks came as the army commander Lieutenant General Cecil Waidyaratne resigned five months ahead of his scheduled retirement in May next year and ahead of a possible shake up in the military command structure.

Fourteen months of talks between the LTTE and Colombo ended in failure in June 1990 leading to a fresh fighting that claims a daily death toll in the island's northern and eastern regions where the Tamil minority is concentrated.

**Final report on Iran-Contra scandal soon**

**WASHINGTON, Dec 5:** The prosecutor in charge of the Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal in his final report accuses former President Ronald Reagan of allowing his aides break the law, sources said, reports AFP.

The report by Lawrence Walsh, which is to be released soon, also charges then-Vice President George Bush of lying about his role in the deal with Iran which was exposed in 1986.

"Contrary to public pronouncements, Bush was fully aware of the Iran initiative," said notes obtained by a US news agency from sources quoting the report.

Bush has said he did not know the arms sales were linked to the release of American hostages held in Lebanon.

Walsh found "no credible evidence" that President Reagan violated any criminal statute. "Nevertheless, he set the stage for the illegal activities which ensued," said the notes.

The report also found that comments Reagan made to a top adviser gave White House aide Oliver North an "invitation to break the law."

North used some of the profits from the weapons deal to fund the right-wing Contra rebels in Nicaragua despite Congress' ban on military aid to the rebels.

Lawyers for Reagan and Bush who have read the report dismissed it as irresponsible.

**Off the Record**

**Clinton occasionally loses temper**

**NEW YORK:** President Clinton says he occasionally loses his temper when his staff is disorganised but adds that the trick to living in Washington is not to take criticism personally, reports Reuter.

"I don't think I should ever lose my temper but when I do it's because of some process screw-up he told Time Magazine in an interview in the upcoming edition to appear on news stands Monday."

He added: "If there's something wrong with the way we're organised or something that keeps us from doing our best, that's what drives me nuts."

Clinton said he urged his aides to never permit the criticism of others to diminish our self-image.

He stated: I think the trick (to being in public life in this day and age, when there is always going to be a lot of clamour and criticism, is to be able to take all this criticism seriously, but not personally.

Asked to comment on teenage pregnancies, Clinton said that he wanted to tell unmarried teenagers that it was wrong to have unwanted children.

"We ought to say that this would be a lot better off babies were born to intact families," he noted.

However, he said he did not want to see society send the message that it was better for pregnant women to have an abortion than to have the child.

**Survives miraculously**

**HONG KONG:** A toddler, left home alone, plunged 19 floors from a high rise apartment into a flower bed and miraculously survived, reports AP.

Three-year old Fong Kong-Hei was reaching out the bathroom window of his family flat on Saturday trying to take socks off a clothesline when he toppled out, the South China Sunday Morning Post reported.

The tot's fall was broken a number of times on the way down by other clotheslines before he landed in the flower garden, where he was found unconscious.

His mother told hospital staff the boy was asleep when she left the flat in heavily built-up shatin to walk her other son to school. He must have awoken and tried to dress himself thinking he, too, had to go to school, the newspaper said.

Hospital staff expect the boy to make a full recovery.

**Law to ensure Islamic haircuts**

The police have warned barbers against giving fashionable haircuts to young men, Tehran's police chief said on Sunday, reports AFP.

Jaber Ansari told Abar newspaper that the police had recently asked the guild of barbers to observe Islamic laws while styling the hair of young men, particularly high school students.

Barbers have vowed to avoid giving "decadent" haircuts, Ansari said. Inspectors would check to ensure the law is enforced and violators could have their shops closed.

The authorities are stepping up a campaign against "social corruption," a term used in the Islamic Republic of Iran to describe western influences.

**Fight over headscarves on**

**LYON (France):** The provisional suspension of four Muslim girls from a French state school last month for refusing to remove their headscarves was made definite on Saturday, the management of the school in the eastern town of Nantua said, reports Reuter.

Lawyers for the four — two Moroccan sisters aged 11 and 13 and two Turkish girls aged 14 — said they would appeal to provincial academic authorities.

**Iraq still holds 8,000 Iranian POWs'**

**TEHRAN, Dec 5:** Iraq still holds 8,000 Iranian POWs, including soldiers captured almost 20 years ago in border skirmishes, an official here charged today, reports AFP.

Mohammad Ali Nazran, the head of an Iranian committee on prisoners of war, gave no figure for the troops seized during the skirmishes in 1975.

Iran has previously said 5,000 of its troops were held in Iraq. But the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has only reported 1,000 Iranians in Iraqi jails.

Baghdad denies holding any Iranian prisoners and says 20,000 of its soldiers are being detained in Iran, a figure backed by the ICRO.

**BRIEFLY**

**Italian shot in Algeria:** An Italian businessman was shot and wounded by unknown assailants Saturday, apparently the latest victim of a terror campaign aimed at foreigners, AP reports from Algiers.

Agnello Caftaldo, 43, was leaving his home in Birkhadem, a southwestern suburb of Algiers, when a gunman fired at least three shots at him, police said.

**5 executed in Iran:** Five people convicted of kidnapping were hanged in public in the religious city of Qom in central Iran, the Jomhuri Islami newspaper reported yesterday, AFP reports from Tehran.

The five, accused of being the "corrupt of the earth" by a revolutionary court, were executed at dawn on Thursday, it said.

They were also accused of drinking alcohol, using drugs and committing "obscene acts" with their captives.

**Vietnam's NA session begins today:** Vietnam's National Assembly convenes Monday for its second annual session focusing on economic and social reform, topics at the Centre of Political Debate in Hanoi, AFP reports from Hanoi.

The parliamentary session heralds and extraordinary congress of the Communist Party, probably in January, called to report on progress of Vietnam's policy of "doi mo" or renewal.

**Tamil Nadu death toll now 32:** The death toll in Saturday's cyclonic storm which crossed the Tamil Nadu coast at Karaikal, near the union territory of Pondicherry, rose to 32 this morning with more deaths reported from the districts, according to official sources, PTI reports from Madras.

South Arcot Vallalar district with six death, Thanjavur two, Nagarattinam Qaid-e-Milleth 16 and Tiruchirapalli four accounted for 28 deaths.

Four more deaths were reported from Madras city and suburbs, taking the total toll to 32.

**8 escape from Philippines jail:** Eight prisoners escaped in the southern Philippines by sawing through the padlock of their cell in the fourth jail break in the country in two weeks, police said on Sunday, Reuter reports from Manila.

The rash of jail breaks angered President Fidel Ramos and prompted him to order an investigation into the incidents.

**Kashmiri cop averts explosion**

**NEW DELHI, Dec 5:** A policeman averted an explosion in a city in strife-torn Kashmir when he found powerful explosives packed in a motor scooter, a news agency reported Sunday, says AP.

Bomb squads Saturday defused the one kilogram (two pounds) of RDX, wired to go off when the vehicle's ignition was turned on, United News of India reported quoting unnamed official sources.

The same type of explosive

was packed in cars and motor scooters to trigger the 15 blasts in Bombay last March that killed more than 300 people, destroyed buses and trains and razed skyscrapers.

UNI said the police officer became suspicious when no one claimed the motor scooter in the night. It was parked at Vijay Chowk, a busy area of the Jammu city, the winter capital of Jammu-Kashmir state. The news agency did not give the officer's name or other details.

More than 7,500 people have been killed in the state, in fighting between Muslim separatist rebels and the government's forces in the last four years.

Police in the state are also searching for suspected Muslim militants who reportedly stole 3,000 gelatine sticks Saturday from an army road gang's warehouse in Sarthal, 65 kilometers (40 miles) south of Jammu, UNI said. Details were not immediately available.



A Muslim (R) with a traditional beard and prayer cap is seated beside a Hindu Sadhu (holy man, C) as they travel together on Saturday near the disputed religious site of the Babri Mosque, which was razed by the Hindu revivalists nearly one year ago. — AFP photo

**Megawati certain to become PDI chairman**

**SURABAYA, Dec 5:** A daughter of the late Indonesian president Sukarno is almost certain to be elected to head the country's smallest political party, party executives said here Sunday, reports AFP.

"It is now nearly certain that Megawati will become the next chairman," said Kwik Kian Gie, a member of the caretaker board of the Indonesian Party of Democracy (PDI).

He was referring to Megawati Sukarnoputri-Kiemas, a 46-year PDI parliamentarian who is Sukarno's second daughter. A plenary sessions Saturday gave overwhelming support for her candidacy.

By midnight Saturday, more than 250 of the party's 304 district chapters had expressed their wish for Megawati to lead the party.

Megawati's strongest challenger, Budi Harjone, trailed far behind.

**Fire claims 26 in China**

**BEIJING, Dec 5:** A huge fireball engulfed a private fireworks factory in north China, killing 26 people and leveling much of the surrounding village, the official People's Daily reported today, says Reuter.

The November 25 inferno, in which more than 800 tonnes of gunpowder erupted, was the latest in a string of fireworks factory disasters in Hebei province alone that have killed 63 people since the onset of winter, the report said.

The cause of this latest blast was not known.

There was no explanation for the 10-day delay in reporting the incident, which occurred a day before an explosives plant in southern Hunan province exploded and killed at least 61 people.

**Boris Yeltsin tries to become 'father of the nation'**

**MOSCOW, Dec 5:** Four years ago Boris Yeltsin brought zest to Russia's parliamentary elections, plunging into crowds, pressing flesh and promising change, reports AP.

This time around, Yeltsin has remained closeted in the Kremlin. He has attended no campaign rallies and endorsed no candidates. He even plans to leave Russia before next Sunday's elections for talks in Brussels with European leaders.

The March 1990 parliamentary election was a turning point for Yeltsin, a springboard to the presidency. The Dec 12 elections may prove to be a turning point for the entire nation, a decisive moment in Russia's democratic develop-

ment.

Yeltsin, however, has tried to remain above the political fray, cultivating a new and powerful image as "father of the nation".

Although he is not a candidate, he has a lot at stake, whether Russians will approve his proposed constitution, whether the new parliament will be more reform-minded than the one he disbanded in September, whether his reputation as a democrat will remain intact.

Yeltsin's democratic image — which hit its zenith during the failed hard-line coup in August 1991 — was battered in the autumn political storm that led to the early elections.

out of the Russian White House. Then he banned some hard-line parties, shut down opposition newspapers and threatened to withdraw TV air time from candidates who criticised his constitution.

Unless the balloting is perceived as free and fair, Yeltsin could lose the support of democrats both at home and abroad.

The main political bloc supporting Yeltsin, Russia's Choice, uses a picture of Peter the Great in its campaign logo, and political commentators have noted that Yeltsin likes to identify himself with the Czar whose name is synonymous with reform.

Peter the Great, who ruled from 1682-1725, wrenched Russia from the Middle Ages

and made it a European power. Yeltsin is hoping the new elections will restore a pro-reform majority to parliament. But the relatively weak legislative branch envisioned by his constitution may be unable to act as a check against presidential power, and frustrated lawmakers could push for more authority, leading to a new struggle.

Reluctance to compromise and failure to reach out to the political centre are two of Yeltsin's greatest weaknesses, and they will come into play again if the president does not gain a loyal majority in parliament.

Yeltsin also has stressed the necessity of a new constitution to replace the Soviet-era charter, which was amended so many times by the previous parliament that it lost virtually all meaning.

However, polls show most Russians have not read the new document, and Yeltsin's opponents have been urging voters to reject it on the grounds it concentrates too much power in the president's hands.

In recent weeks Yeltsin has visited some army bases and military factories — key constituencies that delivered his latest victory and might help him out again.

But his effort to remain largely above the political fray carries a high risk: failure to adopt a new constitution or elect a reformist parliament could plunge Russia into crisis all over again.

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