

Germany won't grant entry visa to Zhirinovskiy

BONN, Dec 29: Germany said today it would not grant an entry visa to Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who had hoped to travel to Berlin after being asked to leave Bulgaria, reports AFP.

Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel has decided that the German embassy in Bulgaria should spurn Zhirinovskiy's visa request in line with legislation denying entry to foreigners whose visit might "harm" the country's interests, a Foreign

Ministry spokesman said. Zhirinovskiy filed an application Monday for an 18-day visa for himself and his seven-member entourage.

Early today the far-right leader was held up at Sofia airport by fog.

Tuesday, the Bulgarian Interior Ministry gave Zhirinovskiy 24 hours to leave the country following what it termed as "insults" towards president Zhelio Zhelev.

Zhirinovskiy's statement were an "inadmissible interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state," a communique issued by the Interior Minister said. They could also complicate relations between Bulgaria and its neighbours.

Zhirinovskiy, a 48-year-old lawyer who surged to international prominence in the wake of his far-right Liberal Democratic Party's success in the December 12 Russian general elections, made a brief visit to Germany before Christmas.

In Germany on his pre-Christmas visit he was invited to give an interview in Cologne on the private television station RTL, but abandoned the project.

Arafat awarded Indira Gandhi gold plaque

CALCUTTA, Dec 29: Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has been awarded the prestigious Indira Gandhi gold plaque by the Asiatic Society for his "untiring efforts notable contribution to the field of international understanding."

The general secretary of the society, Dr Chandan Roy-Chaudhuri told PTI here today that the endowment value of the award was Rs one lakh.

US to maintain sanctions against China, Pakistan

WASHINGTON, Dec 29: The United States said Tuesday it will maintain economic sanctions against China and Pakistan for transfers of sensitive missile technology despite calls from both countries for them to be lifted, reports AFP.

Washington's conditions for lifting the sanctions remain unchanged, a State Department spokesman said after China and Pakistan issued a joint call in Beijing for an end to what they said were unjustified sanctions.

"We are prepared to discuss with China how to go about lifting the sanctions in the context of addressing our concerns on non-proliferation issues," said the official, who asked not to be named.

The United States imposed the sanctions in August for Beijing's alleged sale of M-11 missiles to Islamabad in violation of the missile control technology regime.

China and Pakistan say that their bilateral trade is purely civilian in nature.

Pakistan premier Benazir Bhutto and her Chinese counterpart Li Peng issued the joint call for the sanctions to be lifted.

"The two sides believed that the sanctions the United States has imposed on China and Pakistan were entirely unjustified and should be lifted," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin quoted the leaders as saying in their two-and-a-half-hour meeting.

China has been a principal arms supplier to Pakistan, a link that became more important after the United States cut off economic and military assistance to the Islamic state in 1990 on suspicion it was developing a nuclear bomb.

"China always takes a prudent and responsible attitude to the export of weaponry," with all arms transferred solely for self-defence purposes, Li was quoted as saying.

On the second day of her three-day visit, Bhutto also briefed Li on Kashmir and on a planned meeting between the Indian and Pakistani Foreign Ministers in January to discuss their conflicting claims to the region, Wu said.

But she failed to gain commitments from China to assist in the negotiating process.

Bhutto, accompanied by her husband Asif Ali Zardari on her first trip here since her party's October election victory, also met Tuesday with President Jiang Zemin during which both called for further development of traditionally close relations.

"Sino-Pakistan friendship has a solid foundation and has passed the test of time," the evening television news quoted Jiang as saying.

Tibet, Taiwan and Hong Kong, while the two leaders said they shared "identical or similar" views on human rights and urged stronger cooperation on the issue in the international arena.

On the one area of possible tension — Islamabad's trade deficit with Beijing, which was 350 million dollars in 1992 — Li noted the need for China to buy more from its neighbour and pledged to encourage investment in Pakistan.

The delegations signed five agreements on technical cooperation, border trade, overland transport links, scientific and technical cooperation on water resources and establishing the sister provinces of Jiangsu and Punjab.

Bhutto, who is to leave today for North Korea, later attended a dinner hosted by Chinese people's political consultative conference chairman Li Ruihuan, who visited Islamabad recently.

Off the Record

Diana will no longer be guarded

LONDON: Princess Diana has struck another blow for personal freedom by dispensing with her official bodyguards, a British newspaper reported Wednesday, says AP.

"At her own request, she will no longer be guarded round the clock. Out shopping, visiting friends or just taking a drive, the princess plans to go it alone," the Today tabloid said in a front page story.

It quoted an unidentified royal source as saying: "She wants to be able to melt into the background. She has had no private life for 13 long years."

"Freedom from having every move watched means a lot to the princess."

Today said Diana had been forced to accept armed bodyguards on her current visit to Washington after US security chiefs and British Embassy officials insisted the streets of the American capital were too dangerous.

Tearful reunion

INGLEWOOD, California: A young man met Tuesday with a woman who believes he is the long lost son who disappeared 17 years ago, and police reopened an investigation into an unsolved missing child case, reports AP.

Henry Miller and Willie Mae Ruffin held a tearful reunion at Los Angeles International Airport that was followed by a raucous party at Ruffin's Inglewood home.

Ruffin believes Miller is her son Kevin Portis, who was 5 years old when he vanished in 1976.

"I always felt that he was alive," she said. "I'm angry that they've taken all those years away from my life, from his life. I missed his whole childhood."

At the Ruffin household Tuesday night, dozens of people crowded around the Christmas tree in the living room and dozens more watched from outside in the yard. Cabbage simmered, chicken fried and roast turkey was laid out on a table as family and friends toasted with champagne.

"We're the happiest family you have ever seen in your life," said Charles Ruffin, Portis' uncle. "This is the best Christmas present I ever had."

Miller, 22, said he didn't want to discuss his life with the Northern California family that raised him. But he said he'd been suspicious for years about his situation because he felt a lack of love in the house where he grew up.

"You just know how people treat you," he said. "It's just not the kind of love your family gives you."

3000 yrs old young woman's skeleton unearthed

SHARROUDI, Iran: A young woman's skeleton, believed to date back 3,000 years, have been unearthed during excavation on a mound near Sharroodi, 407 kms east of Tehran, an archaeologist of the Semnan cultural heritage organisation said Tuesday, reports Irna.

The skeleton, found in a 50 cm deep grave, had all the teeth intact, and possibly belonged to a woman of a Nomadic tribe which inhabited the area about 1,000 BC.

He added that pre-Islamic Nomads buried utensils with their dead in the mistaken belief that they would be useful after life.

Excavations over the past three years in the area have yielded some 150 pieces of pottery from 20 graves.

Woman spends 16 years without sleeping

BEIJING: A 53-year-old Chinese woman has elevated the condition of insomnia to new heights by not sleeping a wink during the past 16 years, the Beijing Daily said Wednesday, reports AP.

Wang Suyin from the southeastern province of Fujian fell victim to a mysterious illness at the age of 37, during which she suffered from palpitations and a high fever, the newspaper said.

Having recovered from the illness, Wang found she was increasingly unable to sleep at night and eventually resigned herself to staying awake 24-hours a day — a condition that has lasted for the past 16 years.

According to the newspaper Wang is comparatively healthy, although rather thin, and refuses to take sleeping pills, preferring instead to rest on her bed for several hours each night — wide awake.

Jackson sued for \$20m

LOS ANGELES: Promoters for Michael Jackson's cancelled "Dangerous" tour sued the entertainer Tuesday for more than 20 million dollars, claiming he was addicted to morphine and Demerol long before he sought treatment, reports AP.

Jackson bowed out of the tour during its Mexico City leg in November when he admitted an addiction to prescription painkillers and sought treatment at an undisclosed location, apparently in Europe.

Jackson said at the time he was taking prescription painkillers after undergoing painful scalp surgery. He said his depression after a 13-year-old boy accused him of sexual abuse helped cause his drug addiction.

Mama Concerts, a German corporation; Pebbles Music Inc, a California company; and promoter Marcel Avram of Munich, Germany filed the lawsuit in Superior Court, said attorney Donald S. Engel.

"Michael Jackson became addicted to and dependent upon drugs well before the time when the World Tour Contract was negotiated and signed," the lawsuit stated.

"Plaintiffs are informed that Jackson was and is addicted to certain prescription and non-prescription drugs including morphine and Demerol. Prior to June 4, 1993, because of Michael Jackson's addiction to these drugs, he was unable to function in a normal manner for substantial periods of time and was clearly unable to rehearse for, or perform, a series of first-class concerts consistent with the schedule of shows required by the World Tour Contract."

The lawsuit claims breach of contract, fraud, fraudulent concealment, negligent misrepresentation and conspiracy to defraud. It seeks actual damages of more than 20 million dollars and unspecified punitive damages.

"The reason we brought suit was a last resort," Engel said. "Our client was not anxious to add to Michael Jackson's problems. Within a week after he cancelled, meetings began. But we seem to be getting nowhere and we have received no relief. My client has given Jackson more than 2 million dollars in advances, 900,000 dollars alone for the days he cancelled."

BRIEFLY

13 Georgian rebels surrender:

Around 130 armed supporters of ousted Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia have surrendered to government troops over the past two days, Itar-Tass news agency reported Tuesday, AFP reports from Moscow.

Thirty rebels laid down automatic weapons, mortars and rocket launchers Tuesday, the agency quoted the Georgian Defence Ministry as saying.

The other rebels surrendered Monday and Tuesday in the northwest of the country.

Blasts kill two in Lima:

Three bombs exploded here Tuesday at national police headquarters and in an air force building, leaving two people dead and more than 30 injured, authorities said, AFP reports from Lima.

An attempt to detonate a fourth car bomb outside the US embassy in Lima was foiled when police guarding the complex opened fire on a minibus heading for the embassy gates. The attackers fired back before fleeing, but no injuries were reported.

Iraq to repatriate Iranians:

Iraq is prepared to repatriate thousands of Iranian civilians still in the country since the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and urges Tehran to receive them, the official Iraqi News Agency (INA) reported Tuesday, AFP reports from Baghdad.

A foreign ministry statement cited by INA said Iraq was "prepared to repatriate all the Iranian refugees still on its territory and calls on the Iranian government to announce its readiness to receive the refugees who wish to go home."

INA said the refugees had fled Iran during the war, adding that Baghdad had received them "in keeping with its international humanitarian commitments."

Assailants kill 10 in El Salvador:

A former national guard officer led a gang that murdered 10 people in a small farming town, shooting them and hacking them with machetes, a survivor charged Tuesday, AFP reports from San Salvador.

Jose Alfredo Cortez, who survived the attack by pretending he had been killed, accused Otoniel Rojas of leading the band of assailants who killed 10 people Monday in San Antonio Panchimilama, southeast of San Salvador.

Israeli stabbed in West Bank:

A Palestinian stabbed and wounded an Israeli man in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, Israeli radio reported, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The knifing occurred amid reports that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were nearing agreement in Cairo on terms for implementing Palestinian self-rule in the occupied territories, the key part of a peace deal between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel.

The victim was reported in moderate condition with a stab wound in the stomach. He was one of two Israelis working by a garbage dump near both an Israeli settlement and a Palestinian village about 30 kms (20 miles) south of Jerusalem.

FIS turns down proposal for talks

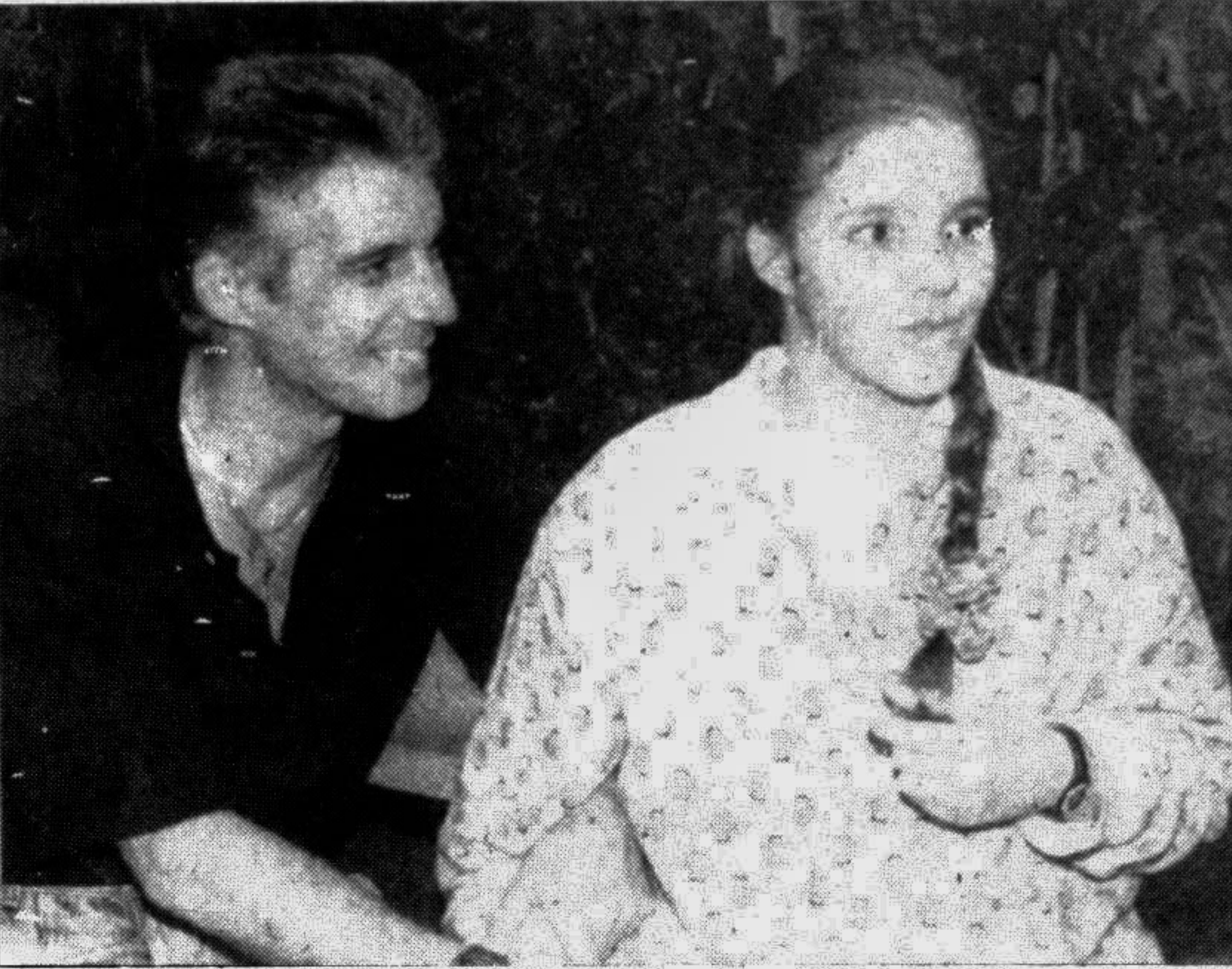
PARIS, Dec 29: Outlawed Algerian Islamic fundamentalists appear to have rejected a government proposal for dialogue to end violence in Algeria, French radio said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

French radio said a statement from the leadership of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) turned down proposals for a national dialogue, calling instead for continued armed struggle.

It said a three-page statement warned those who might be tempted to talk not to negotiate with "the arbitrary junta supported by arrogant foreign states and the army."

"The FIS calls on the Algerian people to demand an Islamic regime, and calls on fighters to continue the jihad or holy war and on the Islamists to unite," the radio quoted the statement, received in Paris, as saying.

Since the elections were scrapped, and the FIS subsequently banned, more than 1,800 people have been killed in violence.



Alina Maria Salgado Fernandez, 16, (R), granddaughter of Cuba's Fidel Castro sits Dec 28 with her father, Francisco Salgado, a Cuban dancer before her departure for the United States. Castro has cleared the way for Fernandez to join her mother, Alina Fernandez Revuelta, who fled the communist state Dec 20. — AFP photo

PLO, Israeli negotiators close to accord on major issues

CAIRO (Egypt), Dec 29: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators opened a third day of negotiations Wednesday amid reports they were close to agreement on issues blocking implementation of their peace accord, reports AP.

Israel radio said they were haggling over the wording of a "paper of understanding" on border crossings and the size of the Jericho areas now occupied by Israel to be put under Palestinian control.

Progress was made Tuesday, but it was not a breakthrough, said Gad ben-Ari, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's spokesman. He said they had reached "tentative agreements which still require approval in Jerusalem and Tunis," headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

PLO leader Yasser Arafat flew into Cairo International Airport overnight for consultations with the Palestinian team, headed by his deputy, Mahmoud Abbas. Arafat was en route from a visit to neighbouring Sudan.

Abbas and the Israeli team leader, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, were to meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at midday, but it was unclear if they would initial the agreement then.

Egypt, the first Arab nation to sign a peace treaty with the

Jewish state, has been mediating throughout the negotiations started after Israel and the PLO signed the agreement September 13 at the White House.

Under the plan, Israel was to start withdrawing its troops from the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho December 13. But the deadline was missed when Israel and PLO

teams could not resolve the sticking points.

Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, and Peres — key figures behind the secret talks in Norway that led to the September pact — arrived Monday to try to bridge them.

Both are said to favour a quick agreement to try to stem spiralling violence in the occupied territories by opponents of the pact.

Israel's army radio said Wednesday that a compromise emerging on the border crossings to Egypt and Jordan indicated both Israelis and Palestinians would have monitoring posts, with the Israelis' positions closest to the frontiers.

The Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth said Israel would retain the power to refuse entry to anyone.

Israel sees the protection of borders as a question of security that should remain in its hands, while the Palestinians insist guarding borders is part of the autonomy they were promised in Gaza and Jericho.

The radio said Israel was offering the Palestinians control of some 50 square kilometres (20 square miles) of land around Jericho, more than double its earlier offer.

Arafat had demanded 200 square kilometres (80 square miles). The Palestinians want as large a Jericho area as possible as a stepping stone to control of the surrounding West Bank.

The Israeli and Palestinian teams met for more than 12 hours Tuesday at a Cairo hotel and reported progress when the talks recessed early Wednesday.

Hezbollah launches fresh attacks on Israeli bases

MARJAYOUN, Lebanon, Dec 29: Pro-Iranian Hezbollah fighters launched fresh attacks on Israeli positions in southern Lebanon early today, regional sources said, after a day of fierce ground fighting and eight Israeli air strikes in the region, reports AP.

Military sources in Jerusalem said the air force late Tuesday struck Hezbollah targets in the Jabal Safi region and returned safely from the mission.

Israeli planes earlier Tuesday had carried out seven raids on the Iqlim Al-Tuffa heights and the western part of the Syrian-controlled Bekka Valley, wounding at least three people near the port city of Sidon, police said.

Hezbollah, despite a day-

India has 12 m blind people

CALCUTTA, Dec 29: India has at present 12 million blind people and over 80 per cent of the blindness is caused due to cataract which is cent per cent curable, the chairman of the all India intraocular lens conference, 94 Dr. P.K. Bakshi has said, reports PTI.

Addressing a press conference '94, beginning at Salt Lake Stadium on January 1, Dr Bakshi said that lot method was not costly and it helped affected persons to resume their normal work within a short time.

He said that an indigenous intraocular lens which costs Rs. 350, was quite good compared to the exported ones. He, however, admitted that a large section of the country's population could not afford even this costs.

Bogota trying to track down Escobar's overseas assets

BOGOTA, Colombia, Dec 29: In one of the largest treasure hunts in modern times, authorities are trying to track down slain drug lord Pablo Escobar's fortune, which is believed to be scattered throughout the world, reports AP.

A scramble for the loot among remnants of his Medellin cocaine cartel has already left behind a trail of bodies since Escobar was killed four weeks ago. He fell to security forces December 2 in a gunfight on a Medellin rooftop.

About 1 billion dollars in assets suspected of being Escobar's has been seized in recent years in Colombia, authorities say.

But the government believes it will find nowhere near all the holdings of the man described

by Forbes magazine in 1991 as the 62nd richest in the world, with an estimated net worth of more than 2.5 billion dollars.

"There are many places the money could be hidden, bank accounts in Switzerland for example," said Francisco Sintura, the Assistant prosecutor general whose office is in charge of seizing Escobar's assets.

"It's perfectly possible we will never find much of the money and property."

A senior drug agent said Escobar remained wealthy until his death, despite being the target of the biggest manhunt in Colombian history and seeing his gang surpassed by the Cali cartel as the world's main supplier of cocaine.

"What we have found amounts to a minor share of ev-

erything Escobar owned," said another senior government official.

He spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing that discussing Escobar's fortune might mark him for assassination.

A shadow of its former self, the Medellin cartel is still considered dangerous: Threats faxed to government officials last week and signed by the cartel said President Cesar Gaviria and others "who smilingly announced Escobar's death" will be killed — "not even bullet-proof jackets will save you."

Sintura and the other senior official, interviewed separately, said several foreign governments were being contacted in efforts to track down Escobar's overseas assets. They would not say which ones.

If front groups believe authorities are close, they could start another round of a global



Pablo Escobar shell game to prevent an impounding of assets. Officials said they cannot estimate Escobar's total wealth. With so much of it hidden, they would be merely guessing, they said.

His foreign holdings included hotels in the United States, Venezuela and Panama, shares in two European banks, investments in the Tokyo stock exchange and ranches throughout the Caribbean, the newspaper El Espectador said Sunday, without giving specifics.

He also reportedly owned ranch land in Australia and had investments across Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Escobar may have made savvy, low-key investments overseas, but some of his properties in Colombia showed the flamboyant side of a man who rose from being a car and gravestone thief to the world's most powerful cocaine traf-

Typhoon death toll rises to 50 in Philippines

MANILA, Dec 29: The death toll from Typhoon Nell rose to 50 Wednesday, the Red Cross reported, says AP.

Almost 400,000 people were driven from their homes when Nell struck the southern Philippines this week. On Wednesday, the storm, downgraded to a tropical depression, was in the South China Sea heading for Vietnam, forecasters said.

Nell was the 32nd tropical storm to hit the country this year in a record-breaking season.

The casualty figure was expected to rise further as more reports come in from provinces where communication lines had been cut.