

Israel rejects Russian call to hold confce on ME

YERUSALEM, Mar 10: Israel on Wednesday rejected a Russian call to hold a new international conference on the Middle East to relaunch the peace process in the wake of the Hebron Mosque massacre, reports AFP.

"We are against it. We have come far enough in the bilateral negotiations with the PLO and Arab countries to avoid having take a backward step," said Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Boaz Madai.

However, Madai said Israel had not been officially informed of the Russian proposal, and "when it is addressed to us we will study it as is fitting, and given a detailed response."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said Wednesday the February 25 massacre of dozens of Palestinian worshippers in the West Bank town of Hebron by a Jewish settler had derailed the negotiating process that began in Madrid in October 1991.

26 political parties to contest S African polls

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 10: Twenty-six political parties have confirmed they will contest South Africa's watershed election, but the door has been left ajar for black and white conservatives to join the April poll, reports Reuter.

The Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party and the white rightist Freedom Front failed to turn in list on Wednesday as political parties scrambled to beat an elastic deadline for submitting candidates.

But Frank Chikane, an official of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), said parties have until next Thursday to decide whether to participate in the April 26-28 election.

"Our attitude is that we should have an all-inclusive

Ivanov, just back from the Middle East, said the idea of another Madrid conference had the support of the parties in conflict and of the United States, the other co-sponsor of the peace process.

However, Madai said Ivanov had made no such declaration when he visited Israel last week.

Talks between Israel and the PLO on implementing a historic Palestinian autonomy accord were suspended after the massacre, as were separate Arab-Israeli talks.

Ivanov also called for swift adoption of a UN resolution of protecting Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories and setting terms for an international presence in the territories, the Interfax news agency said.

Meanwhile, Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad met with a group of Israeli Arabs here on Wednesday led by Abdel Wahab Darawshe, an MP in Israel's parliament, officials said.

ZAGREB, Mar 10: Bosnian Muslim President Alija Izetbegovic on Wednesday dismissed any possibility of Bosnia forming a confederation with Serbia, and said peace was now in the hands of the Serbs, reports Reuter.

Asked in an interview on Croatian television if he would accept a confederation with Serbia, should be Bosnian Serbs make that their condition for joining a Muslim-Croat federation planned for the war-torn republic, he relied this is completely out of the question.

Izetbegovic added, "There are many speculations about world powers having ideas about some new Yugoslavia, but to my knowledge such an idea does not exist".

Under US pressure, Bosnian Croats and Muslims agreed to end almost a year of

bitter fighting and form a federation that would have federal links with Croatia, the main supporter of Bosnian Croat forces.

US special envoy Charles Redman said in Zagreb on Wednesday the Bosnian Serbs would be asked to join the federation, but hours later a top Serb official poured cold water on such an idea.

Croatian media speculated that US policy was to reunite the republics of the former Yugoslavia in a new political union by offering the Bosnian Serbs a place within the new Bosnian federation with the provision it be confederally linked to Serbia.

Izetbegovic said the landmark Muslim-Croat deal mean the end of fighting between the former allies in the war against the Bosnian Serbs — the most dominant of the

three fractions.

The end of war in Bosnia

depends now on the Serbs side," he said, adding that the Washington peace plan was not aimed against them. "The agreement is open to the Serbs."

Meanwhile, Turkey Wednesday offered a mechanised battalion of 1,000 troops for Bosnia that could be ready to join UN forces within a week, its ambassador said.

The Turkish offer, not yet accepted, was made by Djoumarkady Atabekov at an informal troop contributors meeting of 20 countries meeting called by Britain's ambassador, Sir David Hannay, in an effort to raise thousands more soldiers to enforce ceasefires in the beleaguered republic.

France earlier Wednesday said it would send an addi-

tional 800 soldiers on a short-term basis.

Britain is expected to augment its 2,500 troops in Bosnia with another battalion and other nations, including Russia, the Ukraine and Spain have signalled their governments were considering smaller companies of troops.

Canada will consider requests at a cabinet meeting Thursday, the envoys said. They also said the United States was considering contributing more troops to Macedonia, where Washington has 315 soldiers, thereby freeing other contingents there to transfer to Bosnia.

The Turkish ambassador told Reuters: "we offered a mechanised battalion of 1,000."

"We don't want them to confront Serbs," he said.

Off the Record



Ruth Handler holds the "Barbie" doll, which she created, during a 35th birthday celebration at the FAO Schwarz Toy Store in New York March 9. The doll is the world's best selling doll with a reported 800 million dolls sold worldwide since 1959.

— AFP photo

Public smoking costs commuter's life

TOKYO: A Japanese commuter died after a fellow passenger kicked him in the face for smoking on a railway platform, police said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Hideo Sugiura, a 57-year-old furniture maker, had defied a 29-year-old businessman to stop smoking in the "non-smoking" section of the platform at a station near Tokyo.

In a fit of anger, the tall businessman shoved Sugiura and then kicked him in the face, a police spokesman said.

The man fell, hit his head hard on the platform and died shortly afterwards, the spokesman added.

"I advised Sugiura not to smoke on the non-smoking platform. I kicked him because he refused," police quoted the businessman as telling them after his arrest.

"I didn't know he was dead because I got on my train immediately," he added.

Killer surrenders as 'buried memories' of past pricks his conscience

NEW YORK: A schizophrenic who killed four women in New York, San Francisco and Mexico City in the 1970s surrendered to authorities Wednesday after "long-buried memories" of his past began to re-emerge his lawyer said, reports AP.

Ricardo Silvio Caputo, who voluntarily surrendered to state police, could still be prosecuted for three of the deaths including the 1974 killing of Judith Becker in Yonkers, said his lawyer, Michael Kennedy.

Becker was Caputo's psychotherapist as well as his lover.

Caputo vanished after she was murdered.

Caputo later killed Barbara Taylor in San Francisco and Laura Gomez in Mexico City, Kennedy said.

Caputo was romantically involved with all of his victims, Kennedy said.

Caputo's killing spree began in 1971 when he was 22 years old. He stabbed his fiance, Natalie Brown, in Manhasset, Long Island, and called police to the scene. He was found mentally incompetent by a Nassau County court and was committed to Matarwan State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

At Matarwan he met Becker, a psychologist assigned to treat him. She arranged for him to be transferred to the minimum security psychiatric facility at Wards Island in New York City, where Becker arranged furlough privileges.

Caputo and Becker had a love affair for several months until he killed her in October 1974 and then disappeared.

He killed Taylor and Gomez over the course of the next year, Kennedy said.

Wife beaters to face 20yrs jail

MANILA: Filipino wife beaters face up to 20 years in jail and loss of half their salary while awaiting trial under a proposed new law, reports Reuter.

A congressional committee on Wednesday approved the "wife cruelty act", which seeks to curb a growing incidence of wife beating in the Philippines where men cultivate a macho image.

The bill, still to be passed by the male-dominated congress, would give wife-beaters up to 20 years in jail and a battered wife the right to collect immediately at least half her husband's salary.

Violence-prone husbands may also be required to undergo psychiatric tests.

Blast leaves 8 hurt in Baluchistan

QUETTA, Pakistan, Mar 10: A bomb injured at least eight members of a minority Muslim sect as they were praying at a holy mountain in southwestern Pakistan, police said today, reports Reuter.

The bomb exploded after being tossed into a gathering of the minority Muslim Zikris as they prayed late on Wednesday on one of the holiest nights of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, officials said.

The Zikris, a small, controversial sect that lives in the remote southwestern province of Baluchistan, gather each year to pray at Murad Mountain, about 2,100 km (1,300 miles) southwest of Islamabad.

Officials said the injured were taken to hospital and a police cordon was thrown around the site to prevent further violence. Three of those injured in the explosion were policemen.

Mubarak asks Muslim states to work for moderate Islam

CAIRO, Mar 10: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, speaking on one of Islam's holiest nights during Ramadan, said Muslim militants preached backwardness and distorted a religion that called for enlightenment and progress, reports Reuter.

Mubarak, whose country is facing a rising tide of violence by Muslim militants seeking to destabilise his government, urged Muslim states across the world to work for moderate Islam to prevail.

"Prominent among them are obstructive backwardness, contradictions, destructive terrorism, rigid extremism and sharp deviation."

It was one of Mubarak's harshest attacks on fundamentalist groups which have been campaigning since 1992 to topple his government and instill an Islamic state in its place.

The destructive terrorism is impairing the Islamic nation.

Its course of action is evil, aggressive, wicked and inhu-

man ... its motives are criminal and its schemes are bloody ... it falsely wears the mask of religion, it hides behind the shield of reforms and deceitfully shouts resounding slogans but the aims behind them are misguided.

"Reviewing the condition of our nation pains us, it bleeds our hearts and confuses our minds," he said. "What is painful are these negative phenomena which are alien to our nation and religion.

"Prominent among them are obstructive backwardness, contradictions, destructive terrorism, rigid extremism and sharp deviation."

"Where is the godliness and sincerity in adopting behaviours that contradict all the Quranic text and Islamic teachings?"

Mubarak also questioned whether the Quran condoned the shedding of people's blood because they held different opinions from those of the fundamentalists.



Romain Baumstark, Director of the French House for the Elderly Haras, in Marseilles, comforts 107-year-old Marie-Rose Bonfiglio from Italy March 9 who has lived illegally in France for 104 years following the belated renewal of her French resident's card.

— AFP photo

5 held for stealing Buddha statues in Myanmar

YANGON, Mar 10: Five men were arrested recently for stealing and illegally selling Buddha statues and antiques from ancient pagodas in Bagan, historical site of Myanmar, according to an official report today, says Xinhua.

Members of Defence Services Intelligence and police exposed and arrested the five thieves acted under the orders of presiding monk Ukesava on January 8.

A total of 78 kinds of antiques and ten statues were found concealed in Minkyaung Monastery of presiding monk Ukesava.

The presiding monk Ukesava sold a 13th century craft bronze Buddha statue from Mingalazedi Pagoda, a Bagan era craft bronze Pyinsalawka Buddha statue, an Irrawaddy era bronze statue and an ancient wooden figure of Hinthu bird last December, totalling value of 50,000 US dollars.