

## Aideed may proclaim himself president

MOGADISHU, Dec 7: Somali faction leader Mohamed Farah Aideed may proclaim himself president in the next two weeks, his aides say but his rivals have warned that the action could reignite factional warfare in strife-ravaged country, reports AFP.

In his speech when opening an ongoing National Conference he convened in mid November and attended by his allies Aideed said the meeting would discuss the establishment of a government in the Horn of Africa country.

Somalia has been without a central administration since rebel fighters, including Aideed overthrew the government of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991.

But Aideed's main rival, self

styled President Ali Mahdi Mohamed, said on Monday, "the move by Aideed would be the beginning of a new war."

"We will not recognise the outcome of the unilateral conference" Mahdi told journalists.

Sources within the conference said, the transitional administration Aideed intends to establish to act like an interim parliament is to be made up of 195 nominated members.

It is to run the country for four years or more, Aideed's allies said.

Aideed has described his National Conference as "broad based," claiming that 13 of the 16 factions signatory to the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement were represented.

## Russia, Chechnya pledge to settle dispute without war

GROZNY, Dec 7: Russia and Chechnya have pledged to settle their dispute without force but the leader of the breakaway region says the threat of war has still not been completely removed, reports Reuter.

Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev met Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev on Tuesday with Russian troops massed along Chechnya's borders following fighting between the regions' government forces and opposition groups.

Dudayev made it clear he believed the talks had averted the immediate threat of a Russian invasion and agreed to release 20 Russian army officers captured in Chechnya, although Moscow says they

went there as mercenaries of their own accord.

The main thing is that we can resolve all questions without war, Dudayev said after the talks in Ordzhonikidzevskoye in the Ingushetia region bordering Chechnya.

Asked if the danger of war had been fully removed, he told a news conference later in the Chechen capital, Grozny, "I can't give guarantees like that just as the defence minister can't."

Grachev was the first top Russian officials to meet Dudayev since he declared Chechnya's independence from Russia in 1991.

The mainly Muslim region of about one million people has

defied Kremlin efforts to regain it in ever since and the situation there worsened this autumn when fighting erupted.

Russia threatened last week to crack down by declaring a state of emergency and sent plane loads of troops to areas close to Chechnya's borders but it then agreed to talks.

Grachev and Dudayev both warred combat fatigues emerged from talks in a buoyant mood saying they had made progress.

"On many questions there is disagreement but we can resolve the conflict by peaceful means," Grachev said.

Dudayev looked pleased with the negotiation.

We agreed we would meet

again and maybe not only once the tie which was knotted will take time to undo, he told the Grozny news conference.

Dudayev said he had freed seven of the 20 Russian officers captured in fighting alongside opposition forces in Chechnya and that the rest would be released soon. The first seven were expected back in Moscow early on Wednesday.

"We will give up the prisoners. Seven were released today," he said.

Grachev said he would meet Russian President Boris Yeltsin's security council officials on Wednesday to brief them on the talks.

### Bakhtiar murder: Two Iranians jailed in France

PARIS, Dec 7: A French court has sentenced two Iranian to prison for the murder of the Shah of Iran's last prime minister but rejected prosecutors' arguments that Tehran was behind the killing, reports Reuter.

It acquitted a third defendant, whom prosecutors had said was the link between the Iranian Intelligence Services and the 1991 murder of Shapour Bakhtiar on French soil.

The special Criminal Court imposed a life sentence on Ali Uakkil Rad for Bakhtiar's assassination and ordered him to serve at least 18 years.

Massoud Hendi was sentenced to 10 years for being an accessory to the murder and ordered to serve at least two thirds of the sentence.

The third accused, Zeynab abedine Sarhadi, a great-nephew of Iran's President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, was freed.

### Zail Singh's condition deteriorates

CHANDIGARH, Dec 7: The condition of the former President Zail Singh deteriorated last night, doctors attending on him in the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research here said, reports PTI.

The document also calls for the appointment of two co-chairmen to oversee the nine-member Minsk group tasked with trying to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis.

Independent sources suggested the co-chairmanships would go to Sweden and Russia.

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The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has left more than 20,000 dead over six years, though a tentative ceasefire has been observed by both sides since May.

The CSCE declaration calls on its executive to consider "as soon as possible a plan for setting up (....) such a force, organised within the framework of article 3 of the 1992 Helsinki Accord, in full agreement with the United Nations' charter."

Article III calls for observation by the warring parties of a "lasting and effective ceasefire."

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