

Lee appointed new S Korean PM

SEOUL, Dec 17: The president appointed a unification expert as prime minister on Saturday in a prelude to a major government reorganisation expected to affect most key Cabinet posts, reports AP.

President Kim Young-Sam's choice of Lee Hong-Koo was seen as an indication of his desire to improve North-South Korean relations in the wake of the October 21 US-North Korea nuclear accord.

Upon his appointment, Lee said he foresees no big changes in South Korea's policy toward the North under a new Cabinet.

Lee also will be in charge of leading South Korea into a changing global economy regulated by the new World Trade Organisation.

Lee, 60, a US-educated former political science professor, had been serving as a vice prime minister and headed the Unification Board, a government ministry which monitored the US-North Korea nuclear negotiations.

The one-chamber National Assembly, controlled by Kim's Democratic Liberal Party, approved Lee's appointment in a 177-34 vote late Saturday, as required by the constitution. Now Kim is expected to reshuffle his 22-member Cabinet, possibly next week, presidential officials said, requesting anonymity.

They said the shakeup would affect most key Cabinet posts, including the defence, foreign affairs and economic portfolios.

The shakeup has been expected since early this month when Kim merged and consolidated major government min-

istries and cut dozens of high-ranking posts in one of the country's biggest reshuffles. He cited the need for a smaller, more efficient government.

A former ambassador to England, Lee replaces Lee Young-Duk, whose Cabinet came under public criticism over several public works and transportation calamities that claimed more than 70 lives in the past two months.

In South Korea, it is common for a president to reshuffle his Cabinet to boost flagging popularity.

9 Chinese dissidents sentenced

BEIJING, Dec 17: International human rights groups expressed outrage today after a Beijing court handed down China's harshest sentences against political activists in years and urged the world to condemn such abuses, reports Reuter.

"With the extra ordinarily harsh sentences handed down to nine Chinese dissidents yesterday, the consequences of lifting international pressure on China are clear... the Chinese leadership will stop at nothing to punish dissidents," Human Rights Watch Asia said.

The Beijing Intermediate People's Court in the district of Babaoshan on Friday sentenced nine political activists to jail terms ranging from three to as many as 20 years for "counter-revolutionary crimes, or subversion."

Mini-insurgency exists in Karachi, admits Benazir

KARACHI, Dec 17: Gunmen killed six people and wounded more than 20 in Pakistan's southern port of Karachi on Friday despite peace efforts by President Farooq Leghari and stern words from Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, reports Reuter.

"There is a mini-insurgency in Karachi. There is guerilla warfare and we should realise this," Benazir declared.

"We know the designs of ter-

rorists roaming in Karachi. They are against Pakistan's unity and we will fight them at all costs," she told a news conference in Islamabad after flying home from an Islamic summit in Casablanca.

At least 115 people have been killed in ethnic and sectarian violence in Karachi since army troops ended a 29 months deployment in Pakistan's biggest city on November 30.

Benazir said her government would seek to build up Karachi's civil administration and take political and economic measures to solve people's basic problems.

Leghari met leaders of the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM), which is fighting for the rights of the city's Mohajir majority, in a renewed drive for peace.

An MQM leader said later that Leghari favoured imple-

menting a 10-point agreement reached between the MQM and the government in October, but added that continuing attacks on MQM activists threatened to undermine any dialogue.

While the meeting was in progress armed youngsters, fired indiscriminately from rooftops and set at least four vehicles on fire in troubled eastern and central districts of the city.

One youth was killed in the gunfire and two people including a six-year-old girl were wounded, police said.

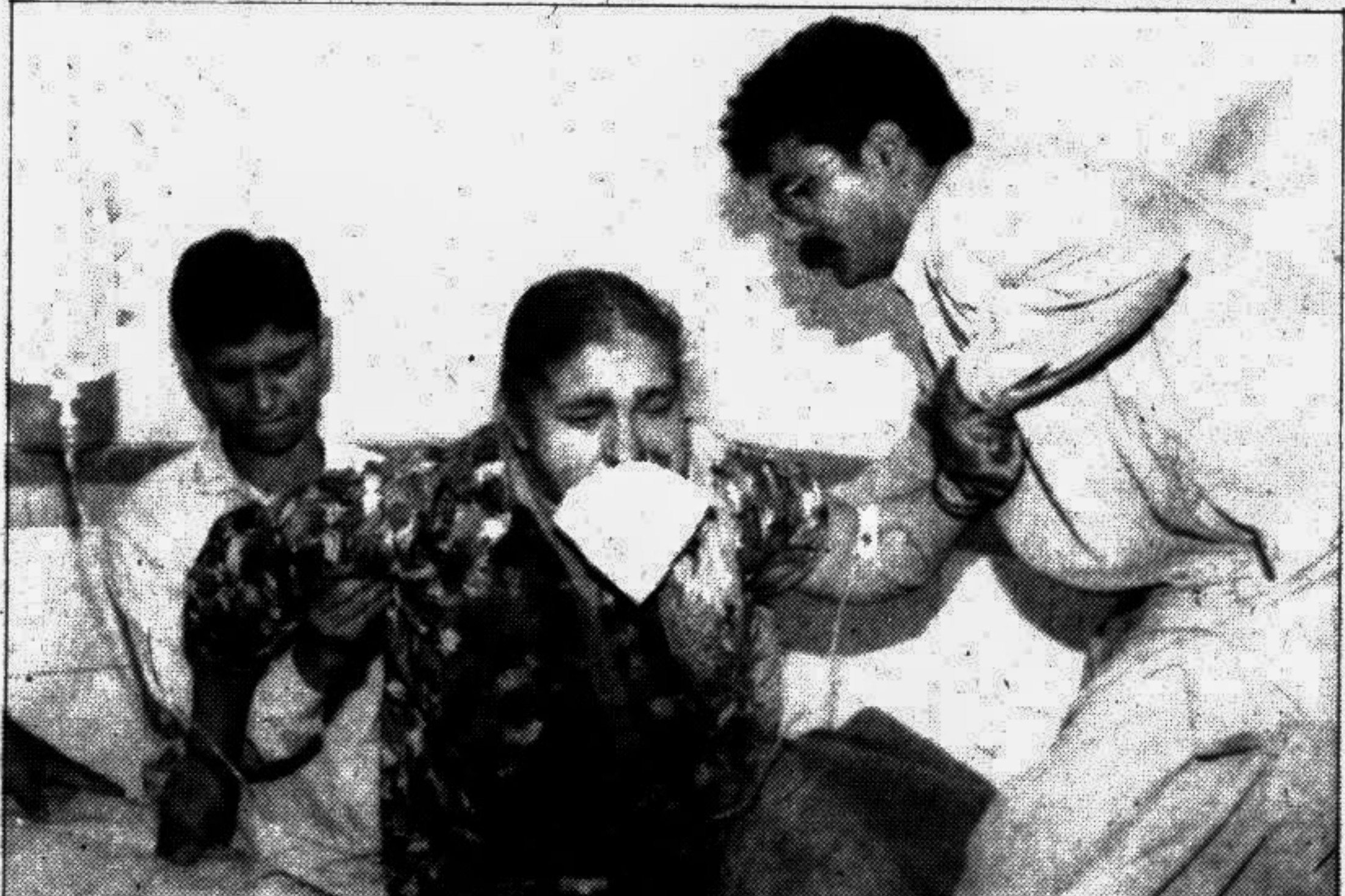
A police spokesman said the violence involved not just the MQM and the rival MQM (Haqiqi) faction, but also Muslim militants and other groups out to settle scores.

Gunmen killed two people and wounded eight in an evening attack on a restaurant in the busy market area of southern Karachi.

Witnesses said the assailants sprayed bullets at the restaurant from a car and drive away. Among the casualties was an elderly woman shot in the mouth as she stood on her balcony.

A local MQM leader in the volatile Shah Faisal Colony area said armed men were attacking the home of Zulfikar Haider, an MQM member of the Sindh provincial assembly, on Friday night.

"No police or rangers have arrived to arrest the culprits," the MQM official said by telephone.



Two medical volunteers help take an injured woman to the operating theatre on Friday after she was shot in the mouth when an unidentified gunman opened fire in a busy shopping area of Karachi. — AFP photo

Bosnia denounces Carter's mediation mission

ZAGREB, Dec 17: Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic on Friday again denounced former US President Jimmy Carter's projected mediation mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina this weekend, saying it was a "waste of time," reports AFP.

According to US officials in Zagreb, Carter is due in Sarajevo on Sunday at the invitation of Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, who put forward a six-point plan Thursday.

Emerging Friday from talks with UN special envoy Yasushi Akashi at the airport in the southern Croatian city of Split, Izetbegovic said: "The call for Jimmy Carter to serve as a mediator in the Bosnian crisis would be a waste of time if it revolves around modifying the peace plan we have accepted."

Under that plan, put forward by the five-nation contact group of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, the Serbs would relinquish around one third of the territory they now hold, cutting back from 70 per cent

of Bosnia-Herzegovina to 49 per cent.

Izetbegovic said Akashi agreed with the Bosnian government that the next step should be a ceasefire in the Bihac pocket, where the mainly-Muslim Bosnian fifth army crops is under siege from the Bosnian Serbs and dissident Muslim leader Fikret Abdic.

"Then the ceasefire should be extended to cover the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina," he said, according to the Croatian news agency Hina.

Izetbegovic Thursday dismissed Karadzic's plan providing for freedom of movement for UN convoys, reopening Sarajevo airport, a ceasefire in and around Sarajevo, and a pledge to respect human rights.

He branded it mere propaganda designed "to create a good impression with the American public."

If Karadzic wants to let convoys through he can do it "without much talk," Izetbegovic said.

Myanmar troops attack HQ of rebel students

BANGKOK, Thailand, Dec 17: More than 1,000 Myanmar government soldiers armed with AK-47s, grenades and artillery, have been attacking student rebels in an effort to seize their jungle headquarters near the Thai border, the students said on Saturday, reports AP.

Minn Aung Myint of the All Myanmar Students Democratic Front, said in a telephone interview from the area that the students had repelled government forces that have been trying since Tuesday to seize their headquarters at Dawn Gwin, about 640 kilometres (400 miles) northwest of Bangkok.

The soldiers bombed one of the outposts controlled by the 700 students earlier this week, but the students repelled them with automatic rifles, grenade launchers and mortar from positions on a nearby hilltop, Minn Aung Myint said.

No students have been injured in the skirmishes.

Singapore PM's 'clear limits' on criticisms

SINGAPORE, Dec 17: In a fresh assertion of authority, Singapore's prime minister says there are clear limits to what people can say while criticising him or his government, reports AP.

"I have to set out the out-of-bounds markers clearly, so that everyone knows the limits of openness and consultation," Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said in a letter to a local author on Friday.

The limits "do not include demolishing the respect for... the prime minister and his government by systematic contempt and denigration in the media," Goh told Catherine Lim, a popular short-story writer who had criticised him.

It is the second time in two weeks that Goh has commented on the relationship between Singapore's leaders and its people, who rarely criticise their government publicly.

Off the Record

Diana turns down Xmas lunch with Charles

LONDON: Princess Diana has turned down an invitation to join her estranged husband Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, and Queen Elizabeth II for Christmas lunch, the Sun reported yesterday, says AFP.

The paper said the princess was asked to join the royal family for their traditional celebrations at Sandringham, the queen's state in Norfolk, eastern England, but she will leave after the Christmas morning church service and return along to Kensington Palace, London.

Earlier this month, the tabloid press reported that Diana, the Princess of Wales, would spend two nights with the royal family at Sandringham this Christmas.

But the Sun on Saturday quoted a royal "insider" as saying: "She changed her mind. She could not stomach spending Christmas at Sandringham which she loathes."



Michael Jackson to buy Einstein's eyes?

LONDON: The eyes of Albert Einstein, long thought to have been cremated with the rest of his body, have been discovered hidden for 40 years in a New Jersey Bank vault, the Guardian reported on Saturday, says AFP.

The paper, which carried pictures of the eyes, reported that the visual organs of the father of relativity whose work led to the creation of the atom bomb, were secretly removed during his autopsy.

Lawyers for the eyes' present-day owner were said to be seeking a buyer. One source close to negotiations was quoted as saying pop superstar Michael Jackson had expressed interest in adding them to his collection of human oddities.

The sale price could go as high as five million dollars, said the paper.

Dr Henry Abrams of Loveladies, New Jersey, who was Einstein's personal ophthalmologist until the physicist's death in 1955, is now in possession of Einstein's eyes, which he removed using scissors and forceps during the postmortem.

The story of the eyes is a postscript to the fate of Einstein's brain which now sits in three jars in the Kansas apartment of the pathologist who removed it nearly 40 years ago. The doctor says he is keeping it for research.

Wolves force soldiers to return 'kidnapped' cubs

BEIJING: Chinese soldiers who stole three wolf cubs from their lair were forced to return their new pets after a pack of angry, howling adult wolves surrounded their barracks, the People's Daily said yesterday, reports Reuter.

A group of soldiers on patrol from their barracks in the Taishan area of Shandong province in the northeast found the three wolf cubs in their lair in a mountain cave on December 11 and took the animals home with them to rear, it said.

At about 10:00 pm that night, a pack of more than 10 angry wolves surrounded the barracks, baying and howling, it said.

Since wolves are endangered and protected in China, the senior officer ordered the cubs to be returned.

An army dog was deployed to carry the cubs out one by one in its mouth and return them to the howling pack.

Jackpot strikes twice!

TALLAHASSEE, Florida: Sometimes, lightning does strike twice, reports Reuter.

Margaria Sanchez, a retired secretary from the Miami suburb of Hialeah, was quite happy in April when she won 22,400 dollar in Florida's Fantasy Five lottery game.

But the regular lottery player, who fled Cuba for the United States 28 years ago, did not stop gambling 10 dollar to 20 dollar per week on the games and on Friday, she claimed her second jackpot—5 million dollar.

The sum, which represents half of the December 3 drawing for a 10 million dollar jackpot, will be paid out over 20 years and comes to about 4,800 dollar a week.

BRIEFLY

Milosevic due in Greece Dec 19:

Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic will visit Greece on Monday for talks with Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu and Foreign Minister Carolos Papoulias, a Foreign Ministry statement said Friday, AFP reports from Athens.

Milosevic recently met Greek opposition leaders in Belgrade. Greece has taken a largely pro-Serb stance, supporting the lifting of the UN embargo on former-Yugoslavia.

12 soldiers missing in Kashmir:

At least 12 Indian soldiers, missing since Wednesday, are feared to be buried under an avalanche in the mountains of the northern state of Kashmir, newspapers said yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

An army spokesman told the Asian Age daily on Friday that a massive search operation, including foot and ski-patrols and air surveillance, had been launched in the northern district of Kargil.

3 Thais shot dead in Karachi:

Western diplomats have advised their nationals to keep away from danger zones in Karachi after 12 more people, including three Thai students, were gunned down, AFP reports from Karachi.

The three Thais were shot dead and two of their Thai companions injured when gunmen opened fire on Friday outside a religious training centre. Police said the Thai students, who were Muslims, had come to Pakistan for Islamic studies.

Somaliland clashes claim 20: More than 20 people have been killed and about 100 wounded during the past week in factional fighting raging in Hargeisa, the capital of the breakaway republic of Somaliland, its self-styled "president" Mohammed Ibrahim Egal said yesterday, AFP reports from Nairobi.

Egal told AFP by telephone from Hargeisa that his government had imposed a state of emergency in the Somaliland last week, and his troops were in process of "chasing" rebel fighters out of Hargeisa.

Attack on Kampala mosque:

Seven Muslim worshippers were wounded when a man threw a grenade into a crowded mosque in central Kampala on Friday, witnesses said, AFP reports from Kampala.

The attacker was killed by an angry mob who caught up with him and stoned him to death. It was not immediately clear why he carried out the attack, the second in the mosque in two months.

Israeli officer shot in WB:

An Israeli officer was shot and wounded in the occupied West Bank on Friday and the Islamic Hamas group said it was responsible, Reuter reports from Ramallah, WB.

Jewish settlers said the reservist army officer, a West Bank settler, was driving his car in the town of Ramallah when shots were fired. He was wounded in the shoulder and his condition was described as moderate.

8 die in Borneo chopper crash:

A Bell helicopter has crashed into a river in the Indonesian part of Borneo island killing eight people, the afternoon Suara Pembaruan daily reported yesterday, Reuter says from Jakarta.

Suara Pembaruan said the only survivor, a two-year-old child, was in hospital with serious injuries. A five-month-old and two children were among the victims.



Miss World 1994 Aishwarya Rai arrives in her hometown of Bombay on Friday in a horse-drawn carriage through Cater Road where she lives. Seated opposite Rai is the international president of Miss World Inc. Julia Morley. Hundreds of people came to greet her along the route. — AFP photo

World religious leaders' appeal for peace

BARCELONA, Spain, Dec 17: Some 50 leaders of world religions and peace activists, including the Dalai Lama, issued an appeal for world peace at a meeting in Barcelona on Friday, reports Reuter.

The declaration climaxed a week-long UNESCO conference on the "Contribution of Religions to the Culture of Peace."

"We face a crisis which could bring about the suicide of human species or bring us a new awakening and a new hope," the statement said.

"Our communities of faith have a responsibility to encourage conduct imbued with wisdom, compassion, sharing, charity, solidarity and love."

Egypt searches for new leadership role in Maghreb

CAIRO, Dec 17: Since Anwar Sadat made peace with Israel in 1979, Egypt has relished the international attention it earned for its role as a key Middle East peace broker, reports AP.

But now other Arab states are working out their own peace deals, and some Egyptians fear Cairo's regional importance will diminish, resulting in a drying up of the billions of dollars in yearly aid from the United States and other countries.

Searching for a new leadership role, President Hosni Mubarak has begun looking westward to see if his country might join the North African bloc of nations known as the Maghreb Union, including Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia.

"There is increasing thinking among the Egyptian political elite and the officials that Egypt is not invited to play a major role in the new Middle East," said Nabil Abdul Fatah of the Center of Political and Strategic studies in Cairo.

It's not a cheery prospect for the region's most populous nation, which often sees itself as the natural leader of the Arabs.

But, Egypt's announcement of its desire to participate in the Maghreb union has some Egyptians wondering about the wisdom of the move and North Africans questioning Mubarak's intentions.

At a recent Maghreb summit, Tunisian Foreign Minister Habib ben-Yahya hinted that Egypt has no place in the bloc. To underscore its cultural dis-

tinctness from Egypt, he invoked as a symbol a dish that is popular across North Africa — but not in Egypt.

"Why do the Egyptians want to join this union," he asked rhetorically. "It's only for the people who eat couscous."

In the 1950s and 1960s, under Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt led the Arabs in wars against Israel and in rebuking the region's former colonial overlords, Britain and France.

Sadat's peace treaty led to years of ostracism for Egypt from its Arab brethren. It also cost him his life; two years after he signed it he was assassinated by Muslim fundamentalist militants.

With the start of the U.S.-backed Middle East peace talks in 1991, Egypt was back on

center stage in the role of peace consultant. Cairo became an indispensable stop for leaders of archenemies such as Syria and Israel and superpower envoys trying to broker between Arab and Jew.

Now, Egypt's importance appears to be waning again, after Jordan in October becoming the second state to sign a peace deal with Israel. Morocco and Tunisia are on the same track, having established low-level diplomatic ties with Israel. The Palestine Liberation Organisation has negotiated an autonomy deal.

"When Syria... signs its own peace treaty with Israel, Egypt will feel even more removed," said Abdul Fatah of the Cairo research organisation.

Egyptians also fear that the

isolationist mood in a U.S. Congress dominated by Republicans will lead to a reduction in the yearly 2.2 billion dollars that Egypt still receives from Washington as a reward for the peace treaty with Israel.

Despite the aid, Egypt's foreign debt has soared to more than 40 billion dollars in recent years.

Labib Kamhawi, a Jordan University political science professor, predicts Egypt might also be shunted aside by an eventual alliance of Jordan, Israel and the Palestinians, which "could emerge as the superpower of the region."

Not so, said Egyptian columnist Helmi Nammur, who formerly chaired the Arab Cooperation Union. Formed in 1989 with Iraq, Jordan and Yemen as a counterweight to the oil-rich Gulf, the union collapsed after the 1990-91 Gulf crisis.

He noted that the Maghreb members "suffer from economic stagnation as well as from a dangerous tide of political violence that threatens their stability."

"What is the point of joining a union under such circumstances?" asks Nammur. Despite Mubarak's assertion that he has "no ambitions" within the Maghreb Union, some North Africans fear that Egypt may nonetheless be looking for a leadership role.

PLO-Hamas talks fail

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, Dec 17: Joint talks between the Palestinian authority and the opposition Hamas group set up to defuse tension after clashes in Gaza left 13 dead have stalled, a Hamas leader said on Friday, reports AFP.

"We announce that the committee has reached a dead-end," said Mahumud Zahhar.

The body was set up by the Islamic resistance movement Hamas and the Palestinian authority earlier in December after Hamas supporters and Palestinian police clashed in November.

"We place the responsibility for the committee's failure on the (Palestinian) government," Zahhar said at a rally held to celebrate the seventh anniversary of the creation of Hamas.