

Expansion of Jewish settlements PLO seeks emergency meeting of UNSC

GAZA, Dec 25: The PLO called on Saturday for an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank which it said violated its 1993 peace deal with Israel, reports Reuter.

Marwan Kanafani PLO leader Yasser Arafat's press advisor, said after the weekly cabinet meeting of the Palestinian authority which administrators self rule in Gaza and Jericho.

The cabinet called on the US and Russia cosponsors of the peace process and on Europeans to pay attention to collusion between the Israeli army and settlers on expansion of settlements and land confiscation.

He told Reuters the cabinet further called on the cospon-

sors and the UN Security Council to hold an immediate meeting to discuss Israeli's settlement policy which constitutes a violation of the PLO-Israel accord.

Expansion of settlements in which more than 100,000 Israelis live among the more than one million Palestinians in the West Bank was a cornerstone of the former hardline Likud government and a main obstacle to Israeli Palestinian talks.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin defeated the Likud in 1992 elections promising a settlement halt a position that paved the way for the peace deal with the PLO.

But Rabin has allowed some West Bank settlement to continue, especially around East Jerusalem captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

Opposition pushes demand for fresh polls

Ministers, party leaders voice support for Rao

NEW DELHI, Dec 25: India's ruling party, facing its most serious crisis in years, rallied behind Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao today after his key rival quit the cabinet in a challenge to the premier's leadership, reports AFP.

Federal ministers and party leaders voiced support for Rao one day after Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh resigned from the government, stunning the ruling Congress (I) party.

But a jubilant opposition, flush with its sweeping victory in recent elections in two key states, pushed its demands for Rao's resignation and fresh

polls for parliament, whose five-year term expires in mid-1996.

"This is the beginning of the fall of the Congress, edifice," said Janata Dal (people's party) President S R Bommai after word of Arjun Singh's resignation and his tirade against Rao spread across the country.

"I don't think this government will last till February," said Bommai. That's when five of India's 25 states go to the hustings in a crucial test of Rao's popularity. Rao, 73, became prime minister in June 1991.

Leaders of the ruling party

came to the defence of Rao, who is also the Congress president.

"Arjun Singh has conducted himself in a manner unworthy of a senior Congressman," said Welfare Minister Sitaram Keshari. Another Congress strongman, Bhajan Lal, charged Arjun Singh with "blackmailing" Rao.

Congress spokesman Chandul Chandrahar declined comment.

A few number of dissidents, however, threw their weight behind Arjun Singh, who is known to nurse prime ministerial ambitions and who led a nascent challenge to Rao in 1992.

Rao, who has been under fire for the Congress rout, has not commented on Arjun Singh's resignation.

Arjun Singh launched a tirade against Rao in a seven-page resignation letter, blaming him for the crisis in the Congress and for corruption scandals, which forced the premier to axe three ministers on Thursday.

"The disillusionment with the leadership today is so all pervasive," Arjun Singh said in the letter to Rao. "You only have to look around to see where the Congress stands today."

Queen prays for global peace in Xmas message

LONDON, Dec 25: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, in her traditional Christmas message, welcomed the arrival of peace in Northern Ireland, South



Queen Elizabeth II

Africa and the Middle East this year and prayed for an end to fighting elsewhere—not least in Russia, reports AFP.

In the message broadcast today, the Queen said people

were often reminded of violence and hatred around the world.

However, comfort could be taken, she said, from the fact that more and more people around the world live now in "real hope of their children growing up in peace and free from fear."

Already this year peace is "gradually taking root" in Northern Ireland, South Africa has been welcomed back into the Commonwealth as a democratic nation, and in the Middle East "long standing enmities are healing."

Addressing herself to those formerly involved in conflict, she said: "Christ taught us to love our enemies and to do good to them that hate us."

"It is a hard lesson to learn," she said, "but this year have seen shining examples of that generosity of spirit which alone can banish division and prejudice."

BRIEFLY

California population hits 32m: California's population surpassed 32 million in 1994, but population growth was slower than at any time since the early 1970s, state records show, AP reports from Sacramento.

As of July 1, the state was home to 32,140,000 people, according to official estimates released on Friday by the state's Department of Finance. That's an increase of 394,000 over the previous 12 months.

Storm batters New England: A storm that blustered up the length of the East Coast left more than 175,000 customers without power Saturday in New England and littered highways and railroad tracks with tree limbs on one of the year's busiest travel days, AP reports from Boston.

High wind knocked over the 50-foot (15-meter), 7300-pound (3,300-kg) Christmas tree outside the Prudential Center in Boston. Grews waited for the wind to die down before trying to put it back up.

Yemeni Speaker in Riyadh: Yemeni Parliament Speaker Abdallah Al-Ahmar arrived in Riyadh on Saturday for the highest level visit to Saudi Arabia by a Yemeni official since relations soured during the May-July civil war, AFP reports from Riyadh.

Playing down a recent border flare-up between Yemen and Saudi forces, Sheikh Ahmar told reporters his visit was aimed at "strengthening and normalising the traditional ties" between Sanaa and Riyadh.

Rockets kill 4 in Kabul: Opponents of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani killed four people and wounded 32 when they fired rockets into the capital Kabul on Friday and Saturday after a lull of several days, official Kabul Radio said, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

The broadcast, monitored in Islamabad said anti-Rabbani militia controlled by Hezb-I-Islami Party leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar fired 244 rockets into residential areas in the previous 24 hours. Three houses and a shop were destroyed.

Elections in Uzbekistan: Voters in the former Soviet Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan went to the polls on Sunday to choose a new parliament in elections in which no opposition candidates have been allowed to run, AFP reports from Tashkent.

Polling stations opened at 7.00 a.m. (0800 BST) and were to remain in operation until 8.00 pm (2100 BST). Seven million people were eligible to cast ballots to fill the 250-seat people's assembly.

France cancels flights to Algeria: Air France cancelled all flights to Algeria scheduled for yesterday after four gunmen hijacked an Airbus A 300 of the French national carrier with 229 passengers and 12 crew still on board, an airline spokesman said on Saturday, AFP reports from Paris.

The decision also affects the Air France subsidiary air inter. The announcement came as witnesses in Algiers said that the hijackers had killed up to seven people.

Blast claims 3 in Pakistan: A bomb exploded in a bus in Pakistan's Punjab province on Saturday, killing three people, and wounding several others, the state television said, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

It said the explosion at Kamoke, north of the provincial capital Lahore, rocked the bus. There was no immediate information about who set off the bomb.

Fire takes 7 lives in US: Fire fanned by stiff wind rapidly engulfed a house early Saturday and killed seven people, five of them children, in their sleep. Two of the victims were believed to be young autistic twins, AP reports from North Attleboro.

Flames were billowing out of every window of the two-story house by the time firefighters arrived.

China to publish book by Mao: The central committee of China's Communist Party has approved publication of "Selected Works of Mao Zedong on Foreign Affairs," the Xinhua news agency said Saturday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The book focuses on Mao's world view and China's diplomatic policies, said the report from Xinhua, monitored in Hong Kong. It includes 160 articles, speeches, talks and comments of Mao between 1937 and 1974.

Ancient village found in HK: Archaeologists have unearthed a 3,500-year-old village, believed to be the oldest settlement in Hong Kong, on the island of Lantau near the site of the colony's new airport, AFP reports from Hong Kong.



An elderly Russian woman calls to stop the bloodshed in Chechnya as a military patrol stands behind her during the rally near Gorky Park in Moscow on December 24. Representatives of different political movements participated in the rally protesting the Russian attack on the Caucasian republic. — AFP photo

Russia threatens all-out attack on Chechen capital

ARGUN (Russia), Dec 25: Russia warned Saturday it would soon launch an all-out attack on Grozny unless separatist forces surrendered, said a senior government official, as fierce battles raged for this strategic town east of the Chechen capital, reports AFP.

"The Russian federal authorities will undertake armed action in the next few days to take Grozny under their control" if the breakaway Russian republic's leaders do not surrender, television quoted Russian Deputy Prime Minister Nikolai Yegorov as saying.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin had been expected to address the nation on the Chechnya crisis Saturday, but a presidential aide later hinted a statement was no unlikely before a meeting Monday of the

Security Council. Meanwhile, international condemnation of the Russian military intervention in Chechnya mounted, as rifts within parliament and the army deepened over Yeltsin's handling of the conflict.

In Chechnya, heavy fighting continued around Argun, some 20 kilometres (12 miles) east of Grozny, as Russian helicopter gunships and heavy artillery pounded rebel Chechen positions.

They responded with rocket attack as the two sides battle for control of the main road from Grozny to the neighbouring Caucasus republic of Dagestan.

The fierce clashes sparked and exodus of panic-stricken civilians, causing huge traffic jams as hundreds of cars took

to the roads, fleeing to mountains south of Grozny, and west from Argun away from the current fighting.

Among those fleeing with their valuables an AFP correspondent spotted a peasant family and its herd of 15 cows.

In Moscow, spokesman Vyacheslav Kostikov said in a communique that the Security Council meeting would conduct "a general analysis of the political and military aspects linked to restoring constitutional law in the republic of Chechnya."

Kostikov did not say whether Yeltsin has postponed his address to the nation, but Radio Moscow echos said Kostikov had indicated that Yeltsin would not make a statement until after Monday's meeting.



Israeli police take fingerprints from what is left of the body of a Palestinian suicide bomber that exploded himself at a busy Jerusalem bus stop early December 25. Eleven Israelis and one Palestinian were wounded in the blast. The Islamic fundamentalist Hamas has claimed responsibility for the attack. — AFP photo

Indian navy staff held while passing secrets to Pak mission

NEW DELHI, Dec 25: A civilian employee of the Indian navy was arrested while allegedly passing secret documents to a member of the Pakistani mission here, police said today, reports AFP.

K.K Parasuram 56, an assistant with the navy's Directorate of Weapons, was arrested late Saturday in a residential district after he accepted 7,500 rupees (250 dollars) in exchange for the documents, the police said.

Shapal Khan, an assistant at the Pakistani embassy who allegedly received the secret documents, was detained for some two hours before he was handed over to his country's diplomats.

"We could not interrogate the Pakistani official since he has (diplomatic) immunity," Deputy Commissioner of Police Deep Chand said.

Unrest continues to rock Karachi: 5 more killed

KARACHI, Dec 25: Five more people were killed as unrest continued to rock Karachi and the Malir district, near the city's airport, after a suspicious fire destroyed some 300 shops, police and officials said today, reports AFP.

An angry mob blew up a power transmission line, plunging most areas in Malir into darkness overnight, residents said. Several local opposition leaders have blamed police for the blaze in a used clothing market.

The fire, which started early Saturday, gutted more than 300 shops, and came on the heels of a mob attack on a police station.

That attack was in retaliation for the police killing on Friday of a bridegroom and his friend.

President Bill Clinton on Friday extended for a year the US trade and financial embargo,

Libya accuses US of manipulating Security Council

TRIPOLI, Dec 25: Libya reacted angrily on Saturday to Washington's decision to extend sanctions for another year, accusing the United States of manipulating the UN Security Council, reports AFP.

"The latest US decision clearly confirms that the so-called Security Council has developed into a docile tool in the hands of the US government for carrying out aggressive plots against the peoples of the world," the Libyan news agency Jana said.

"The world can thus bear witness to the US arrogance towards peaceful people, and the great Jamahiriya (Libya) in nothing but a victim of injustice and devilish plots aimed at eliminating freedom and progress," it added.

Off the Record

Sartorial guidelines for legal eagles

SINGAPORE: What the well-dressed lawyer in this prime city-state should wear to court is now official, according to a report Sunday, reports AP.

Women lawyers must wear black skirt and black or plain coloured shoes, long sleeved white blouse and no flashy jewellery. Men will have to wear long-sleeved white shirts, a tie of "subdued" colour, a black jacket, black trousers and equally boring shoes.

In keeping with their steady efforts to maintain order in public life, authorities laid down the sartorial guidelines in a newly published book that also exhorts lawyers to be punctual at court hearings.

Latecomers risk a judgement against their clients, or they could be made to pay the costs of the hearing, the Sunday Times reported.

The dress code puts an end to women lawyers wearing traditional dresses of their religion or race — Malay Muslims wear a headgear and a loose shirt while ethnic Indians, mostly Hindus, wear saris.

'High time' for discussing masturbation openly?

LONDON: In an editorial supportive of *British Medical Journal* General Jocelyn Elders, a leading British medical journal says it is "high time" that masturbation be discussed openly in sex education classes, reports AP.

US President Clinton dismissed Elders after she made comments supporting the discussion of masturbation during an AIDS meeting at the United Nations on Dec 1. The *Lancet*, in an editorial published on Saturday, says Elders' dismissal is "a bizarre example of the triumph of politics and prejudice over common sense."

The journal refers to a 1988 sex survey that revealed 82 per cent of British men and 75 per cent of British women have masturbated at some time.

"Since most people start to masturbate during adolescence, sex education lessons in school present an appropriate opportunity to raise the subject," The *Lancet* said.

Dad sues store for lack of diaper-changing facility

NEW YORK: There's a new rallying cry on gender discrimination: Equal rights for dads who change diapers!

A father is suing Lord and Taylor's department store after being forced to change his 15-month-old son on the edge of a wet wash basin in the department store's men's room, the *Daily News* reported on Saturday, says AP.

The women's bathroom there, like many American restrooms for women, has a diaper-changing table, but the men's room, like most restrooms for men, does not.

The offended father, Andrew Dwyer, who is on paternity leave from his job as a lawyer, filed suit on Friday in state Supreme Court, seeking compensatory damages of 1,500 dollars and punitive damages of 10,000 dollars, the newspaper said.

US, allies acting like enemies of Jesus: Iraq

BAGHDAD, Dec 25: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Saturday condemned the United States and its allies for maintaining sanctions, accusing them of acting like the enemies of Jesus, in a televised Christmas message, reports AFP.

"The US government and other Western leaders, through their aggression and unjust blockade — are deliberately killing Iraqi children and elderly people," Saddam said in a speech addressed to the Iraqi people, the Arab nation, Christians and "all men of goodwill."

Referring to the crippling UN trade and oil embargo imposed on Iraq after its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Saddam said Washington and its allies "are no different from those who persecuted Christ and his early disciples, and they falsely claim to follow Christ."

Christians make up around one million of Iraq's population of 16 million. Many of them have migrated under the pressure of UN sanctions.

Saddam pledged that Iraq "will not bow to the arrogant ones' injustice" and "will keep up the Jihad (holy war) for freedom."

"We are profoundly confident that the blockade imposed by the US administration will be shattered — thanks to the steadfastness of the Iraqi people and with help of the just countries, organisations and individuals."

New election law in Japan comes into effect

TOKYO, Dec 25: Japan's revised election law designed to clean up politics came into effect today, reports Reuter.

The law redraws the electoral map for the first time in seven decades, replacing multiple-seat constituencies with a combination of 300 first-past-the-post districts and 200 proportional representation seats.

Lawmakers and analysts said the new system meant more policy-oriented elections rather than ones geared to purely local issues.

Other measures, including tighter controls on campaign funding to eliminate endemic corruption, will come into force on January 1.

Row over remains of Hitler's hideaway in Berlin

BERLIN, Dec 25: Should the remains of the bunker where Adolf Hitler committed suicide at the end of World War Two be demolished or turned into a museum to remind Germans of the darker side of their history?

The question has provoked a bitter row in Berlin, where leaders of the city government, or senate, have recommended that the subterranean chambers under what was no-man's land at the Berlin Wall should be bulldozed or blown up to make way for other buildings, reports Reuter.

The opposition Greens in the city parliament, which still has to make a final decision say the sealed-off underground chambers should be opened up to provide a reminder of Germany's Nazi past.

Turning the remains of the

former chancellery and bunker complex into historical monuments would give them unmerited significance, said Rainer Klenke, spokesman for Berlin's Culture Ministry.

The ministry, which studied the issue for the senate had concluded the site should not be opened for fear of creating a neo-Nazi shrine.

"The remnants are too modest to merit protection of the area," Klenke said when he presented the senate's reports to parliament.

The debate arose as city officials were assigning plots of land for new office buildings before the German government moves to Berlin from Bonn at the end of the decade.

Some of those who have seen what remains of Hitler's hideaway — from the surface

no more than a patch of wasteland — say the rooms contain so much kitsch that they should be made into a small museum to help debunk the Fuehrer's legacy.

"It will never become a pilgrimage for neo-Nazis," said archaeologist Alfred Kernl, author of the classified report. "It's too laughable."

In one room, he said, a mural shows Hitler's chief bodyguard barking orders to SS trainees in the form of thunderbolts, symbolising the Nazi belief that commands from superiors were forms of the Holy Spirit.

Another mural shows elite Waffen-SS soldiers sternly protecting motherly blonde women or guarding two men as they sit down for a beer.

Rotting furniture in one room bears strange engravings

copied from ancient Germanic ruins.

Movable items such as chairs and gas masks were confiscated by authorities after the war, but these could be replaced if the bunker is opened as a museum, said Kernl.

The actual bunker where Hitler ran the last campaigns of World War Two and committed suicide on April 30, 1945 with his mistress Eva Braun, was destroyed during the Soviet army's assault on the Nazi capital.

The remaining rooms, three to six metres (10 to 20 feet) below central Berlin, have been sealed since then.

They might have stayed that way if the city had not decided to build offices for Germany's federal states on the site.

The Greens say the senate report is an effort to "sweep

away relics of Berlin's past with a bulldozer."

"We must leave the bunker there," said Albert Eckert, the Greens member pressing the issue. "We can build a glass ceiling over it so that people can walk over it."

It was no surprise that the senate decided as it did.

Culture Minister Ulrich Roloff-Momf said he agreed with the city's Jewish community that the rooms could become a neo-Nazi pilgrimage site no matter how they were presented.

Ministry spokesman Klenke said too little remains of the complex to justify saving it for posterity.

"Only the two rooms for (Hitler's) chauffeurs remain, and there's nothing in them," he said.

American and Israeli Jewish

France ready to help free hostages

CHAMONIX (France), Dec 25: French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur today said his country was ready to help free hostages held by Islamic fundamentalists aboard an Air France plane at Algiers airport, reports AFP.

"The French government is ready to help free the hostages at Algiers airport," he said, as he emerged from morning mass in the French Alpine town where he is on holiday.

Another report from Paris adds: Suspected Islamic militants holding a French airliner in Algiers with more than 200 people aboard issued an ultimatum today for the release of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) leaders under house arrest in Algiers, reliable sources said here.