

## BRIEFLY



Russian General Alexander Lebed (R) and his wife Inna (L) are escorted by a police officer Wednesday upon their arrival at Frankfurt airport. Lebed, 46, the former security advisor to Russian President Boris Yeltsin and one of his leading critics, was invited to Germany for talks with political party leaders by the Society for Foreign Policy and of the German-Russian Forum.

— AFP/UNB photo

**US assistance to Egypt to continue:** The US economic and military assistance to Egypt will continue in view of Egypt's important and pioneer role in the region, said the visiting US legislators, Xinhua reports from Cairo.

The members of a US congressional delegation made the remarks during a meeting with Egyptian People's Assembly speaker Ahmad Fathi Sourour yesterday. The US congressmen hailed the distinguished relations between Egypt and the US and said they regard Egypt as a friend and a main partner in pushing forward the peace process in the region.

**China-Guatemala hold secret talks:** Guatemala and China on Wednesday held secret talks in an effort to repair the effects of Beijing's veto that barred UN observers from monitoring a peace pact in the Central American country, diplomats said. Reuter reports from United Nations.

Diplomats, saying China had requested the talks, reported that the discussions would continue although they did not expect immediate results to undo Beijing's negative vote in the security council. The 14, other council members last Friday all supported sending 155 military observers to Guatemala for three months to monitor the UN brokered peace agreements that ended more than three decades of civil war.

**7 die as toilet collapses in China:** At least seven school children were killed when a school toilet collapsed in southwestern China's Sichuan province, it was reported yesterday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Another nine children were injured, as they swarmed to the toilet during a recess at the primary school in Xichong county on January 7, the Chinese-language Sings Tao daily said. Parents of the victims were planning to take the school authorities to court as the two-storey school toilet had already been showing signs of cracks, the report said.

**Mishap kills 5 cops in Philippines:** A passenger bus smashed into the back of a police truck south of the Philippine capital early this morning killing five policemen and injuring several others, local police authorities said, AFP reports from Manila.

The policemen were on their way back to their post in southern Manila after escorting the remains of a dead colleague to his hometown in the eastern Philippines, the spokesman said. The accident took place on a highway near the town of Gumaca.

**PWG blows up rly station in India:** Naxalites belonging to outlawed Peoples' War Group (PWG) blew up a railway station and torched telephone exchange in two separate incidents in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh last night, PTI reports from Hyderabad.

According to police the extremists of Raithnanga Dalam blew up Valigonda railway station near Kollagudem with explosive. The other group of extremists of Rachikonda Dalam Torched telephone exchange in Chautuppal Mandal. The two places where the incidents occurred falls in the Bhongir Assembly constituency being represented by the Home Minister A Madhava Reddy.

**Heroin worth \$ 11m seized in UK:** Customs officers in this southeastern English port seized heroin worth seven million pounds (\$11 million dollars) Wednesday when it arrived on a lorry carrying pottery, AFP reports from Dover.

The Turkish driver of the lorry was being questioned, a customs spokesman said, but gave no further details of the drugs haul.

**Sudan repels attacks on border:** Sudan has repelled two attacks on its eastern borders launched from Ethiopia and Eritrea but seven Sudanese soldiers were killed, Sudanese Army spokesman General Mohammed Al-Sanussi said Wednesday, AFP reports from Khartoum.

He told a press conference that on Tuesday Eritrean troops with some Sudanese opposition elements shelled the region of Gedabiet, seven kilometres (three miles) from the border in the Al-Kadafi area.

**Top Indian labour leader shot dead:** Gunmen yesterday shot dead India's best known trade union leader, Datta Samant, in Bombay, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, AFP says from New Delhi.

Samant was in his car when an unknown number of assailants opened fire at him from point blank range outside his house, the news agency said.

## Clinton plans to honour Dole with Medal of Freedom

WASHINGTON, Jan 16: US President Bill Clinton plans to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Bob Dole, his Republican opponent in last year's election. The medal is the United States highest civilian award, reports AP.

A White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Clinton plans to award the medal to Dole on Friday, during an event on World II.

White House spokesman Mary Ellen Glynn declined to say whether Dole would be offered the medal, but added: "That sounds like an excellent way to pay tribute to a person who has devoted a lifetime to public service."

## 'Iraq must satisfy UNSCOM'

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 16: Iraq must still account for a number of missiles to satisfy UN arms inspectors despite the unearthing of four missile engines and "minor pieces of debris" of missiles which Iraq unilaterally destroyed after the 1991 Gulf War were likely to "clarify the situation concerning the unaccounted-for missiles."

"But the gap is certainly larger than that," between the number of Soviet-made Scud missiles which Iraq claims to have destroyed and those independently verified by the UN arms inspectors Buchanan stressed.

UNSCOM is concerned that Iraq is concealing more operational missiles than have been accounted for, and may also have used foreign components to boost its home-grown missile force.

Under UN resolutions adopted after the Gulf War, the UNSCOM inspectors must account for and supervise the destruction of all Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, including missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometres (93 miles) which could target Iraq's neighbours.

## Lanka to open missions in four states

COLOMBO, Jan 16: Sri Lanka will open diplomatic missions in south Africa, Saudi Arabia and Qatar and reopen one in the Philippines, the foreign minister said, reports AP.

This year we hope to expand our diplomatic frontiers," Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told reporters Wednesday.

Kadirgamar did not set any dates and said the plans would be subject to "financial constraints."

High commissions, or embassies, were planned for South Africa, Qatar and the Philippines, and a consulate in Jeddah as the government pursued employment, investment and trade abroad.

This year we want to pay attention to countries in the Middle East, Gulf, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America," Kadirgamar said.

Sri Lanka at present has 42 high commissions.

## Albright plans to visit Asia, Europe in Feb

WASHINGTON, Jan 16: US Secretary of State designate Madeleine Albright plans to travel to Europe and Asia in February on her first trip as the top US diplomat, informed sources said, reports AP.

Albright's nomination to become the first woman Secretary of State in US history was expected to be approved by the Senate just after president Bill Clinton takes office for a second term January 20. The Czech-born former UN envoy was expected to visit key NATO members in Europe.

The most likely dates for the trip appear to be February 12-22 but the exact itinerary has yet to be set, the sources said.

## Peruvian rebels for world pressure on Fujimori

LIMA, Jan 16: Marxist rebels holding 74 hostages in the Japanese ambassador's residence posted a message on their Internet web page on Wednesday urging their supporters around the world to help them pressure President Alberto Fujimori to release their imprisoned comrades, reports Reuter.

"It is necessary to put pressure on Fujimori to release all our political prisoner comrades, who are hostages of the dictatorship regime," the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) said in a statement on its "Rebel voice" web page.

Fujimori has refused to bow to the rebels' demand that the 74 hostages they are holding be swapped for the freedom of 400 imprisoned MRTA members.

The MRTA urged supporters to hold protests outside Peruvian embassies and consulates over the next three days and to write letters to Fujimori and send copies of the letters to human rights organisations and the media.

# Minister resigns protesting deal with PA Israeli cabinet approves agreement on Hebron

JERUSALEM, Jan 16: The Israeli Cabinet approved early today an agreement with the Palestinians to extend self-rule to Hebron, but only after more than 12 hours of stormy debate and urgent US intervention, officials said, reports AP.

The agreement was approved by a vote of 11 to seven, in line with projections, government spokesman Shai Bazak said.

Several hours earlier the Palestinian leadership overwhelmingly approved the agreement, reached just before dawn on Wednesday during summit between Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Under the agreement, Israel will withdraw its troops about 80 per cent of Hebron, leaving a soldier behind to guard about 400 Jewish settlers living amid the city's 120,000 Palestinians residents. The redeployment will take place by this weekend, Israel radio reported.

A US letter of assurances attached to the Hebron protocol

also reaffirms Palestinian and Israeli obligations to carry out other aspects of a 1995 interim peace accord, including further Israeli troop withdrawals from unspecified West Bank rural areas.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership overwhelmingly approved on Wednesday an agreement with Israel laying out the terms for the handover of most of Hebron to Palestinian rule, officials said.

Officials said only two officials out of 37 voted against the agreement reached before dawn between Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the right-wing government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

They were Communications Minister Imad Fajuri, a former leader of the radical Islamic movement Hamas and Labour Minister Samir Ghoshe.

Three other people participating in the vote, which involved members of Arafat's Cabinet and the PLO Executive

Committee, abstained, including Justice Minister Feih Abu Middein and Social Welfare Minister Intisar Wazir, the officials said.

AP adds: Cabinet Minister Benny Begin resigned Wednesday to protest the Israeli-Palestinian accord signed earlier in the day.

Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh, who announced the resignation, said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would try to dissuade his colleague early Thursday morning. The resignation would only go into effect in 48 hours.

Netanyahu, spokesman Shai Bazak said the prime minister spoke with Begin already following the meeting, but would discuss the issue with him again on Thursday.

"The Prime Minister said he was sorry for the decision and that especially at this time the forces should be rallying to stand united before the big challenges facing the State of Israel," Bazak said.



An Israeli woman is in tears as right-wing women organisations demonstrate outside the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem Wednesday, against the deal signed early in the morning at the Erez Crossing in the presence of PM Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, that will extend Palestinian self rule to the flashpoint West Bank town of Hebron and beyond.

— AFP/UNB photo

## Fighting erupts in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 16: Fierce fighting erupted in western Afghanistan between the Afghan Uzbek militia led by Rashid Dostum and the Taliban last night, reports Xinhua.

The fighting broke out following the talks between the Taliban and the anti-Taliban alliance in Islamabad had failed to score any achievement.

This was also believed to be the first year battle between the Afghan warlords during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan which started last Friday.

It was reported that Dostums forces launched a massive ground attack against the student militia in the western province of Badghis.

Heavy fighting continued between the two factions said the reports adding that no shift in previous position was observed.

Fighting was also reported between Dostum forces and the Taliban militia in Ghur province.

Afghan observers believed that fighting was likely to intensify in different parts of Afghanistan after failure of the talks between representatives of the Taliban and the anti-Taliban alliance in Islamabad without any progress.

The talks organized by the UN special envoy Norbert Holl, failed to produce any fruitful results as was obvious from the beginning of the parley.

Both sides were giving priority to their demands instead of trying to develop a consensus on establishing peace in the

war-torn country.

It was reported that Afghanistan's ousted Defense Minister Ahmad Masoud and Dostum had recently met in northern Afghanistan and discussed the prevailing situation in the country.

The two faction leaders had agreed to launch joint attacks on Kabul as well as provinces controlled by the Taliban.

It was yet not clear whether Masoud forces were involved in the continued fighting or not.

The Taliban militia overran Kabul last year and pushed the forces of the ousted government led by Masoud towards north.

The spectacular rise of Taliban prompted the rival groups, including Dostum Masoud and Karim Khalili who led Shiite Hezb-i-Wehdat faction to close their ranks.



Sri Lankan journalists demonstrate Wednesday against the government's use of tough anti-terrorism laws to crackdown on the media. The demonstration was prompted by the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act to arrest the news director of a private television station just over two weeks ago.

— AFP/UNB photo

## Sharif to make Quranic edn compulsory if elected

ISLAMABAD, Jan 16: Former Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif told an election rally Wednesday he would introduce compulsory teaching of the Muslim holy book, the Quran, in schools if his party is voted to power, reports AP.

Quranic education would be made compulsory up to secondary school level, said the president of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party, quoted by the official Associated Press of Pakistan news agency.

He was addressing a public meeting in south Sindh, home province of his arch political foe Benazir Bhutto, who was sacked as prime minister by president Farooq Ahmed Leghari on November 5 for alleged corruption and misrule.

The PML and Benazir's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are major contestants in the elections due on February 3, with the Movement for Justice led by cricket hero-turned-politician Imran Khan claiming it would steal the show.

The ethnic Mohajir Qaumi Movement, representing Muslim immigrants from India after the 1947 partition of the sub-continent, is considered to be strong in Sindh's capital city

of Karachi.

Sharif, a wealthy industrialist from Punjab province known from economic liberalisation during his 1990-93 stint in office, said he would turn Pakistan into a welfare Islamic state.

Society would be rid of corruption, poverty and exploitation, the PML leader pledged.

He blamed the ousted Benazir government for the country's economic plight and for other problems confronting Pakistan.

Sharif said during the campaigning for the first party-based polls in 1988, he rarely saw PML flags and people usually shouted "long live Bhutto," but now the situation was different and people were "proud of hoisting PML flags."

Later, addressing another public rally in nearby Khairpur, Sharif said Benazir was "now trying to escape" from the election process, adding "we shall not allow her to run away." He calmed the PPP had been wiped out of Punjab province, the North West Frontier province and from Baluchistan, and that it was now the turn of Sindh to reject them.

## Pak army denies any differences with govt

ISLAMABAD, Jan 16: Pakistani army Wednesday pledged its support for the democratic process in the country and denied any differences with the caretaker government, which is preparing to organise national elections next month, reports AP.

The statement by a spokesman of the military's public relations wing, carried by the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) news agency, follows some local press reports suggesting a rift.

A spokesman for the ISPR (Inter-Services Public Relations) has "Categorically dispelled the impression that there are any differences between the government and the armed forces," the agency said.

The spokesman said the armed forces "remain committed to the constitution and fully support the constitutional measures to sustain the democratic process."

The statement coincides with an ongoing controversy over the role of a Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS) set up by President Farooq Ahmed Leghari on January 6 to advise and aid the government.

Leghari has rejected claims by critics that the move was an attempt to involve the army in politics, enhance the president's powers and weaken the role of a future elected government to be formed after the February 3 elections.

Headed by Leghari himself, the new body includes the prime minister, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff committee, chiefs of the army, navy, air force and ministers of defence, foreign affairs and finance.

The president has said the council was a purely advisory forum for consultations on important issues related to national security, economy and law and order.

## Off the Record

### Circumcision ceremony for women

FREETOWN: Dozens out of 600 Sierra Leone women who took part in a mass circumcision ceremony over the weekend were in hospital Tuesday, with some in intensive care, health workers reported, says AP.

About 20 of the 100 women admitted to a health centre at Grafton displaced people's camp, near Freetown after Sunday's cruelly conducted ceremony were released Tuesday.

"The rest are showing signs of slow recovery although about 10 are still in intensive care," said a staff member of the health centre, run by the Belgian Branch of Meedecins Sans Frontieres (doctors without borders).

The circumcision ceremony was performed by a local branch of the Bundo secret society under conditions several participants described as unsafe and unsanitary.

The wife of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah became embroiled in the affair after rumours circulated that she gave her support for the ritual.

"I have no knowledge of such a thing taking place nor did I give the OK," said Mariam Kabbah in a radio interview.

### Return of dead!

LOD ISRAEL: An Israeli who had been buried under a heavy tombstone in a funerary vault with two hundred-year-old corpses near Tel Aviv emerged from the grave, the Yediot Aharonot newspaper reported Wednesday, says AP.

Avraham Masil, 55, was buried alive in Lod cemetery after he was viciously beaten then hung three times from a tree by three men to whom he owed about 3,000 dollars.

The three men were angry because he had not repaid them, he told the daily.

"I was still alive, and I waited until they left before trying to move the tombstone gently with my elbows. I was efficient with my efforts so I didn't die of asphyxiation."

"It took about 20 minutes which seemed to me like a century, but God heard me and I got out," the bruised and dirt-covered man told police.

His "grave diggers" have been questioned and put in jail.

### Existence of life outside solar system!

LONDON: Primitive life could exist on planets recently discovered outside our solar system or their moons, according to US scientists whose work was reported today in the British specialist weekly Nature, reports AP.

Darren Williams, James Kasting and Richard Wade, of the University of Pennsylvania, said the right conditions could prevail in the planetary systems of two stars, one in the constellation of the Great Bear and the other in the Swan.

The first confirmed discovery of a planet outside the solar system was announced in October 1995, and was followed by a number of others.

However in a commentary accompanying the Nature article, paleontologist Christopher Chyba said that our ignorance even of our own solar system was such that to our knowledge the earth was still the only inhabited world.

that Arafat's government will control 80 or more per cent of the West Bank by the time the withdrawals are complete.

But loopholes exist that allow Israel to keep as much West Bank territory as it wants — according to Israel's interpretation, at least — to protect settlements and to prevent Israel from an invasion by Arab countries.

The expectations of the Arab world and the United States clearly impose some constraints, but Netanyahu policy adviser David Bar-Ilan said there was enough flexibility in the agreement to allow Israel to keep most of the West Bank.

## Ustad Akbar Ali Khan to be given prestigious award

CALCUTTA, Jan 16: Sitar maestro Ustad Ali Akbar Khan would be awarded the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi award by the Dover Lane Music Conference Committee, reports PTI.

The award, which comprises a citation and a finely sculptured plaque, would be given to the maestro at the inaugural function of the 45th Dover Lane Music Conference on January 19, the organisers told a press conference there today.

The music conference, among the oldest in the country, this year would feature Ustad Vilayat Khan, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, Pandit Jasraj, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasiya and Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra.

# Hebron accord—a defining moment for Netanyahu's govt

JERUSALEM, Jan 16: The Hebron agreement was a defining moment for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government — even if it arrived more by accident than design, reports AP.

The US mediated accord drove Israel's hard-line premier into the arms of his old enemy Yasser Arafat and went a long way toward ending the guessing game about whether Netanyahu would honour Israel's peace agreements.

Now, all rhetoric to the con-

trary, Netanyahu is a full-fledged member of the Oslo club. He has staked his own political reputation on the success of the Israel-PLO agreement and pledged to make three further troop withdrawals in the West Bank after the Hebron redeployment.

What brought about the transformation seems to be less a grand design by Netanyahu than external events — especially the September riots by Palestinians frustrated with Netanyahu's delays on Israel's peace commitments and angered by his opening of a tourist tunnel near a Muslim holy site in Jerusalem.

Until then, Netanyahu was playing hard-to-get about meeting and dealing with the Palestinian leader that he long condemned as a criminal and terrorist.

"Events played upon Netanyahu and Arafat rather than it being their own initiative," said political scientist Yossi Alpher.

US President Clinton's intervention also played a large part in steering the course of negotiations and overcoming the deep suspicion the two sides had for each other.

"I think trust is a serious problem," said Dore Gold, Netanyahu's chief negotiator.

The help of US mediator Dennis Ross was sought because it was considered too risky after the riots to slowly cultivate a relationship while Arab-Israeli relations declined.

"We didn't have a year or a year and a half to build trust," Gold told The Associated Press. "If we had given that kind of time the whole situation could

have declined. It's for that reason that the US role was far more pivotal than it was under the previous government."

Even though many of the changes negotiated in nearly four months of talks are relatively minor, perhaps what matters most is that the accord is now one that bears Netanyahu's stamp of approval. That — and the fact that a relationship has begun where many thought none was possible.

"Netanyahu has now created his own Oslo agreement," said Alpher, Mideast director of the American Jewish Committee. "It is no longer the one he inherited. It is Netanyahu's own agreement which reflects his own commitment."

Understanding, if not trust is also building. For example, after long

hours of negotiations in hotel conference rooms, Gold and Arafat's chief deputy, Mahmud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, have developed warm relations.

"One has to see beyond the tough give-and-take of negotiations, and you find there are people very likable and whom you regard as friends. I think they feel that way about us," Gold said.

What's on paper, however, is vague and sets the stage for a major conflict with the Palestinians over the extent of Israeli withdrawals and, ultimately, Palestinian hopes for statehood.

Israel promised to leave 80 per cent of Hebron and then make three further troop withdrawals, starting in March and ending in mid-1998.

Palestinian expectations are