

UN starts paying US \$144m compensation to Gulf War affected workers

GENEVA, Mar 13: A UN committee has started paying out 144 million US dollars Wednesday to thousands of individuals claiming damages from the Gulf War in the first disbursement under an 'oil-for-food' deal with Iraq, the UN said, reports AFP.

Bangladeshi workers who left Iraq and Kuwait and were affected during the Gulf War will also get the compensation.

The UN Compensation Committee (UNCC) said 57,636 claimants represented by 63 government and one international organisation would receive an initial payment of 2,500 dollars each.

The committee is funding the payouts from its 30 per cent share of Iraqi oil exports over six months, totalling two billion dollars.

UN resolution 986 gave the UNCC its funding authority, earmarking the rest of the money from Iraqi oil sales, which restarted in December, for food and medicine for Iraqi civilians hurt by continuing international sanctions.

The sanctions were imposed after the defeat of Iraq, which

invaded tiny Kuwait in the summer of 1990, by a US-led coalition.

Nearly 134 million dollars of the initial payout will go to category 'A' claimants — individuals forced to leave Iraq and Kuwait — and about seven million dollars to category 'C' claimants — individuals who suffered losses of less than 100,000 dollars.

Governments have submitted the documents on behalf of their citizens.

Egyptians are receiving the biggest single chunk of initial compensation money, with 23,334 claims totalling more than 58 million dollars. They are followed by Sri Lankans, Indians and Bangladeshis.

Some 13.45 million dollars has already been awarded to category 'B' cases which cover serious personal injuries or deaths of spouses, parents or children caused by the war.

The next payment for 'A' and 'C' claims is expected to be made in August 1997. If UN 986 resolution is extended, about 575 million dollars is needed to cover 230,000 successful claims, the UNCC said.

BRIEFLY

Mild quake shakes Philippines:

A moderate earthquake shook the Philippine tourist resort of Puerto Galera, south of Manila on Wednesday night, but there were no reports of damage, government seismologists said yesterday.

The tremor, measuring 5.9 on the Richter scale, was the second quake in the Philippines in less than 24 hours. A 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit the southern Mindanao island before dawn on Wednesday and caused a fire in Cagayan de Oro city. However, no casualties were reported.

Tribesmen seize 20 in Nigeria:

Some 20 Westerners, including 16 French nationals, have been taken hostage by a local tribe on an oil platform of Nigeria, the French Foreign Ministry said yesterday.

A ministry spokesman told Reuter that the hostages were employees of the French company ETP. The rig was situated on a marshy stretch of land near the coast in the region of Houari, he said.

3 gets heavy jail term in France:

Two women and a man received heavy jail sentences late Wednesday for raping a man after presenting him with a 10,450-franc (2,000 dollars) bar bill, AFP reports from Jnopol.

Bar hostess Ross-noelle Bleuse, 31, manageress Chantal Macauda, 43, and Guy Erie, 41, a customer, tortured fireman Michel Gentil, 26, forcing him to fellate the landlady's dog and sodomising him with a champagne bottle.

Cyclone hits Papua New Guinea, 2 die:

Two people are dead, 23 are missing at sea and thousands are homeless Thursday as Cyclone Justin pounds the Papua New Guinean coast, emergency officials said. AP reports from Port Moresby.

The huge Cyclone Justin is loitering hundreds of miles east of Queensland and south of Papua New Guinea. "What's happening is it's forcing our monsoon weather to go around in bigger circles, that's what has caused the problems," National Disaster and Emergency Services director Leith Anderson said.

Troops seize 37 weapons in Jakarta:

Indonesian troops have seized 37 foreign made weapons, including 22 rifles from a village with doctor, in an operation against separatists in the province of Aceh, Antara News Agency said yesterday. Reuter reports from Jakarta.

It said the weapons seizures in three locations in the North Sumatran province of Aceh, brought the total number of guns found since May 1996 to 120 along with more than 8,000 rounds of ammunition. Last month, 45 rifles were seized.

Child abuse rate rising in US:

Child abuse in the United States is rising at an alarming rate, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) says in its latest annual report released Wednesday. AFP reports from Washington.

In 1995, CDF says, 96,000 cases of abuse were reported to child protective services, up 25 per cent from 1990. Some 468,000 children were removed from their families in 1994, up 16 per cent from 1990.

New NKP chairman named:

South Korean President Kim Young Sam has named former Supreme Court judge Lee Hoi-chang as chairman of his ruling New Korea party, state television reported yesterday. Reuter reports from Seoul.

Lee, dubbed 'Mr Clean' by the local media, has a reputation for refusing to compromise his principles. Kim apparently turned to the independent minded Lee in hopes of restoring his political credibility badly damaged by a loan scandal.

Mahathir's partymen blast S'pore minister's remark

JOHOR BAHRU, Malaysia, Mar 13: About 100 members of Malaysian Premier Mahathir Mohamad's party today staged a two-hour protest in Johore, calling Singapore senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew "senile" for branding the state a crime-ridden place, reports AFP.

The members of the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in Johore were at the airport in this southern Johore state to await Mahathir's arrival for a two-day scheduled state visit.

The demonstrators held banners to denounce Lee as "senile and uncouth," and demanded that Lee tender an apology to the Malaysian government.

"We must make Lee Kuan Yew apologise," one of the demonstrators shouted as Mahathir's car drove away from the airport and headed for the city.

Lee, in a legal document, had described Johore as being a

8-member Nepal's cabinet

KATHMANDU, Mar 13: Nepal's new government announced an eight-member cabinet yesterday two days after Lockendra Bahadur Chand was appointed Prime Minister by King Birendra to form the new coalition government, reports Xinhua.

According to a press statement issued by the royal palace, the eight members include two from Chand's National Democratic Party (RPP) four from the Communist Party (United Marxist Leninist, PML-UML) and two from the Nepal Goodwill Party (NSP).

Prime Minister Chand will also hold the portfolios of defense and royal palace affairs.

Other cabinet members and their portfolios are as follows:

Bam Dev Gautam (CPN-UML) Deputy PM, home, industry, and other 10 portfolios.

Sahana Pradhan (CPN-UML) forest, soil conservation.

R. K. Mainali (CPN-UML) health.

Amrit Kumar Bohara (CPN-UML) local development.

Ranindra Nath Sharma (RPP) finance, foreign affairs, water resources and other four portfolios.

Gajendra Narayan Singh (NSP) supplies science and technology.

Rameshwar Raya Yadav (NSP) law and justice, women and social welfare.

International

Settlement process in East Jerusalem to begin next week

JERUSALEM, Mar 13: Defying warnings of violence and a torrent of world criticism, Israel intends to break ground next week on a disputed Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem, a cabinet minister said, reports Reuter.

The settlement plan is at the heart of what former prime minister and peacemaker Shimon Peres called on Wednesday the "biggest crisis in Israel's ties with the PLO and the Arab world" since its landmark 1993 peace deal with the Palestinians.

Jordan's King Hussein warned there was a "very strong chance of violence" if Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pushed ahead with plans to build 6,500 homes for Jews on the wooded hilltop called Jabal Abu Ghneim by Palestinians and Seidemann said he did not expect the houses to actually be built.

Israel has made similar promises in the past but never followed through, he said. "It's a public relations ploy."

Palestinians were outraged by Israel's decision to go ahead with the Har Homa project, saying it completes a ring of Jewish neighborhoods that cuts off Arab parts of east Jerusalem from the West Bank.

Past challenges to the Har Homa project were based on appeals of land confiscations and were rejected by the Supreme Court.

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week the work will begin on Har Homa."

Kahalani's statement coincided with a UN debate in which the PLO urged the General Assembly to denounce the plan and other Israeli policies it said violated the peace process.

Earlier in Gaza, Palestinian Prime Yasser Arafat voiced hope of a meeting of US, European and Arab envoys on Saturday to rescue Middle East peace from the deepening crisis.

AP adds, an Israeli peace group is going to court to stop construction of a 6,500-unit Jewish housing project in disputed east Jerusalem, arguing it is part of an illegal pattern of discrimination against Palestinian residents.

Although Israel confiscated both Arab and Jewish land for the Har Homa project, it plans to build housing only for Jews, Danny Seidemann, attorney for the group Ir Shalem, said Wednesday.

That constitutes illegal discrimination against Arab residents, he said.

Seidemann said Ir Shalem

first raised its current challenge in 1994, but the court heard Wednesday by the Supreme Court.

The government has said it will build badly needed infrastructure and grant building permits in Arab neighbourhoods of east Jerusalem, which it said would lead to construction of more than 3,000 homes.

But that promise was met with skepticism by Palestinians, and Seidemann said he did not expect the houses to actually be built.

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Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast War and later annexed it. Palestinians hope to establish a capital in the eastern part of the city, which Israel says must remain undivided under Israeli sovereignty.

Israel won't join in int'l confce to be held in Gaza tomorrow

JERUSALEM, Mar 13: Israel yesterday angrily announced that it will not participate in the Palestinian-sponsored international conference to be held in Gaza Saturday, the state-run Israel radio reported, says Xinhua.

Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister David Levy made the announcement in a strongly-worded statement during a Knesset (parliament) plenum session yesterday afternoon.

Levy declared that Israel will not agree to go to such a tribunal to face an accusation finger. He warned that such a move could put the peace process into a deep abyss.

Palestinian National Authority (PIA) President Yasser Arafat Tuesday invited the US, Russia, the European Union, Norway and Japan to attend an international conference in Gaza on March 15 to discuss the current crisis in the peace process stemming from recent Israeli decisions on building settlement in east Jerusalem and redeployment.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu now on an official constitutes a violation of the Oslo accords between the two sides.

However, the US has responded positively and announced to send US Consul-General in Jerusalem Edward Abington to the meeting.

The Tupac Amaru rebels canceled a session Friday after accusing the government of trying to tunnel under the Japanese ambassador's residence, where they are holding 72 hostages.

On Monday, government negotiators went into the session after two mediators, Archbishop Juan Luis Cipriani and Canadian Ambassador Anthony Vincent, announced that an agreement had been reached to resume the talks. They did not elaborate.

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