

## UNGA urged to upgrade status of Palestinian representation

UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 2: Palestinians at the United Nations Monday called on the UN General Assembly to upgrade the status of their representation, making a plea for "full participation" in the 185-member organisation, reports AFP.

"We hope the current session will endorse the full participation of Palestine in the proceedings of the United Nations," said Palestine Liberation Organisation official Faruq Kaddumi, during a UN General Assembly debate.

Kaddumi spoke after Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, urged UN support "to enable Palestine to participate fully in the work of the United Nations," in a message to the UN marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The UN General Assembly is to vote on a draft resolution this week that would upgrade the Palestine mission.

However, the current proposal explicitly rules out giving the Palestine observer mission voting rights and excludes the Palestinians from fielding candidates for UN posts.

The Palestinian delegation has pointed out that the draft, expected to be voted on Wednesday, does not entail seeking full

UN membership, nor achieving official UN recognition of a Palestinian state.

Palestine observer Nasser al-Kidwa said the draft resolution if adopted without modification would give his mission "super-observer" status.

In his speech, Kaddumi dwelled at length on the failure of the Middle East peace process, which he blamed above all on Israel's refusal to halt settlement building in Arab occupied areas.

"The American position remains hesitant," Kaddumi said, charging that US foot-dragging has given Israel more time to "confiscate Palestinian lands."

Israeli Ambassador Dore Gold did not deal directly with the issue of Palestinian representation in his speech to the assembly.

But he denounced the "common misconception" that the peace process was "in an idyllic state until last year and has only just lately deteriorated. This is completely false."

Gold stressed that "the government of Israel is determined to make this peace process work," outlining prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's latest proposals for further redeployment of Israeli troops on the West Bank.

## Israel threatens to annex West Bank

JERUSALEM, Dec. 2: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened Monday to annex part or all of the West Bank if Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat declared an independent state, Israeli television said, reports AFP.

If Yasser Arafat unilaterally proclaims a Palestinian state, Israel will annex the Jordan Valley, other territory and perhaps even everything," Netanyahu told MPs from the far-right Tzomet Party, said the television.

"A unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state would destroy all the accords that we have agreed with the Palestinians," added Netanyahu.

The more territory Israel controls, the more annexed territory there will be," said the premier, rejecting a proposal from the MPs to annex the Jordan Valley immediately.

The television commentator said it was Netanyahu's most explicit threat yet to annex part or all of the West Bank, occupied by Israel in 1967 and considered the heart of the greater Israel claimed by the Israeli

right.

Netanyahu last week issued a veiled threat to annex some occupied Palestinian territory if Arafat goes ahead with plans to proclaim an independent state in 18 months.

AP adds: Israel's plan to pull its troops from more West Bank land — an offer with several strings attached — is merely a ploy to keep control of the territory, Palestinians officials said Monday as they rejected the plan.

Tayeb Abel Rahim, secretary-general of the Palestinian Authority, said the Israeli Cabinet's offer was deceptive, and that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was violating past agreements signed by Israel.

"It is like throwing sand in our eyes," said Abdel Rahim, who speaks for Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Israel's Cabinet decided in principle Sunday to pull back troops in the West Bank. It set no date and attached five demands, including a crackdown on Islamic militants and the handover of Palestinians suspected of killing Israelis.

The Cabinet decision, considered inadequate by the opposition in parliament, prompted a no-confidence vote, which Netanyahu survived by a 50-45 margin.

The prime minister, in a Monday evening phone conversation with Arafat, described the redeployment decision as an important move forward in the peace process.

It appears unlikely, however, that Arafat would carry out arrests on a scale that would satisfy Israel.

Netanyahu's hard-line policies have steadily eroded Arafat's standing, and he is reluctant to risk a showdown with his most powerful political rival group Hamas.

The Palestinian Authority, not wanting to be seen by its people as Israel's lackey, also has refused to hand over suspects sought by Israel in connection with attacks on Israelis.



United Front members Chandrababu Naidu, left, and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, right, greet the press after meeting with President KR Narayanan at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi Monday. The United Front, who's government resigned from power Friday, favours new elections for parliament instead of participating in a Congress Party-led coalition. — AP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY

**Tigers ambush bus, kill 9 in Lanka:** Tamil Tiger guerrillas ambushed an army bus in northwestern Sri Lanka yesterday killing nine people and wounding seven others, officials said, AFP reports Colombo.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) opened fire at the bus in the district of Mannar, officials said adding that five reports suggested there were seven men and two women among the dead. The attack came amid the military's biggest offensive against the LTTE in a bid to open the 76-kilometre (45 mile) highway through territory held by the Tigers to the northern Peninsula of Jaffna.

**Prince Andrew in Barbados:** Barbadians may talk of dumping Queen Elizabeth as their head of state. But they didn't blink when Prince Andrew showed up to march in Monday's Independence Day parade, AP reports from Port St Charles.

The Duke of York arrived in Barbados Saturday after spending two days in volcano-hit Montserrat, one of Britain's four remaining Caribbean colonies. Dressed in gleaming white British Navy fatigues, he joined Barbadians in celebrating 31 years of independence from Britain.

**'Road to Nhill' gets Alexander Prize:** Australia's "Road to Nhill" by director Sue Brooks won the top \$50,000-dollar Golden Alexander Prize for best film at the Salonika Film Festival Monday, AFP reports from Salonika, Greece.

The film by Brooks, former assistant to award-winning director Jane Campion who made "The Piano," recounts how a dozen elderly bowlers involuntarily shake up the sleepy provincial town of Nhill.

**Australian killed in Philippines:** Six masked men armed with knives attacked and killed an Australian contractor dredging a much-flooded river north of Manila, police said Tuesday, AFP reports from Manila.

John Paul Wright, 39, died after being stabbed nine times in the Friday attack, police officer Apollo Soliman said.

## US negotiator says Third World less responsive to new global warming agreement

KYOTO, Japan, Dec. 2: In initial negotiations, Third World governments are showing little interest in the US effort to extend fuel emission cutbacks to the developing world in a new global warming agreement, a US negotiator reported Tuesday, reports AP.

Inclusion of China and other developing nations under the binding accord may prove key to winning US Senate approval for the treaty protocol being negotiated in 10 days of talks that began here Monday.

"We've seen some inklings of interest, but in terms of the negotiating dynamic right now there's not been a lot of movement from developing countries," said the senior Clinton administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He met with reporters just hours after it was announced in Washington that Vice President Al Gore would travel to Japan next week to present the US case before the 150-nation conference.

Gore's presence "shows we consider this to be a profoundly important issue," President Clinton said.

But Gore will be flying into a diplomatic fray that has

quickly taken on a tough, antagonistic tone.

Two key players, the United States and the European Union, are offering widely different plans for 21st-century cutbacks in carbon dioxide and other

## Somali warlords plan to meet to set up govt

CAIRO, Dec. 2: Somali warlords Monday announced plans to hold a national reconciliation meeting in Somalia later this month to set up a government for their embattled country, reports AP.

The national reconciliation meeting is to be held on December 20 in the town of Baidoa, 250 kilometres (150 miles) northwest of Mogadishu, they said in a statement released here.

The statement said "The participants of the Cairo-Somali meeting, after concerted efforts and brotherly consultations, have unanimously agreed to hold a national reconciliation meeting on December 20 in Baidoa (Baidoa)."

gases, mostly by products of fossil fuel burning, that are linked to the growing threat of global warming.

The Europeans propose that industrial nations reduce emissions by 15 per cent below 1990 levels by 2010. Clinton has proposed cutbacks only to, not below, 1990 levels, as of 2012.

American negotiators appeared to throw the Europeans off balance Monday by announcing a shift in one position, saying they would consider "differentiated" emissions targets — that is, requiring different levels of emissions cutbacks for individual countries.

A European Union spokesman suggested this move, which is supported by Japan, may be a ploy by the United States to push through a deal allowing it to reduce emissions less than Europe would.

The Clinton administration official told reporters the US team has no specific numbers in mind yet — except that it wants to retain the back-to-1990 level for the United States in any "differentiation" scheme.

On developing countries, the Americans have made little headway.

## New compact disc 'Diana tribute' goes on sale

LONDON, Dec. 2: The tribute album to Princess Diana raked up steady sales Monday, its first day in the stores, but didn't create the big Christmas rush some had anticipated, reports AP.

The album, called "Diana, Princess of Wales — Tribute," features a Who's Who of artists, including Paul McCartney, George Michael, Bruce Springsteen, Eric Clapton, Sting, Annie Lennox, Peter Gabriel and Luciano Pavarotti.

The HMV chain said it had sold 7,000 copies in its 100 stores around the country by late afternoon.

When a band like Oasis release and album, they can sell 100,000 on the first day. But that is the nature of their fan base," HMV spokesman Gemaro Castaldo said. "There is a real mix on this album and customers don't expect it to sell out so they are not in a rush to buy it."

There is no doubt whatsoever it is going to sell extremely well in the long run," he said.

A spokeswoman for the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, which will receive all the proceeds from the album, said fund officials had intentionally not hyped "the release and so were not surprised no large lines formed outside music shops Monday morning."

## I K Gujral India must learn to live with coalition govt

NEW DELHI, Dec. 2: India's outgoing Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral on Monday said the country will have to learn to live with coalition governments, reports AP.

"The country will never have one-party rule at the centre in the future. It would have to adjust with coalition governments," Gujral told state television in an interview.

Gujral's statement came as his ousted minority United Front coalition urged Indian President K R Narayanan to dissolve parliament and order new elections to fill in a political vacuum.

The Congress (I) Party, brought down Gujral's coalition Friday by withdrawing its backing after seven months.

The Congress, which has ruled India for almost 40 years, pulled the plug after the fragile alliance refused to dump its DMK member party linked to the 1991 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Gujral said: "I refused to compromise with the demand for the removal of the DMK to uphold moral values."

The DMK has denied allegations in an official report that

it connived with Sri Lankan Tamil guerrillas, accused by India of staging Gandhi's murder.

## Caste violence in India claims 50 lives

PATNA, India, Dec. 2: An upper-caste army swept into a village and shot dead at least 50 people, an official in northern India said Tuesday, reports AP.

District commissioner Lal Sota was quoted by Press Trust of India news agency as saying the attack occurred Monday night in a village near Patna, the Bihar state capital. Bihar is one of India's most trouble states. Riven by caste clashes and criminal violence.

Sota blamed Ranbir Sena, a private army composed mostly of upper-caste landowners. Low-caste villagers in Bihar have fought back, often helped by communists.

While Sota put the toll at least 50 people, all from lower-caste, unnamed police officials were quoted as saying as many as 75 were killed. Police said 300 gunmen descended on the village late Monday.

## 'Anti-defection law must be amended to prevent horse-trading in India'

NEW DELHI, Dec. 2: Drastic changes must be made in the anti-defection law to prevent horse-trading and desertions in any fluid political situation like the present crisis, experts said, reports PTI.

"The present law is inadequate, full of loopholes, essentially misconceived and has been reduced to a dead letter by the present events," Syed Shahabuddin, former MP, said.

He said the law, as it exists now, has failed to curb defections effectively and achieve objectives it was enacted for.

Admitting that there was some truth in the allegation that the law was enacted with "ulterior motives" by the Congress, which wanted to save its overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha not be moulded everytime according to the needs.

"It is hypocrisy right down if they want to amend the law in the present circumstances," he said while stressing that an Ex-PM who quits his party should be bound to seek a fresh mandate.

Shahabuddin said a firm, adequate, reasonable and just

anti-defection law was needed for survival of parliamentary democracy in the country currently "afflicted by the disease of defections."

They were speaking at a discussion on "Another look at defection" organised by the Centre for Peace and Progress here.

They again suggested a change over to the presidential form of government as a "way out of the current crisis which has made a mockery of parliament."

"Can we keep on going back to the people again and again keeping in mind the exorbitant amount of money each election costs," he asked.

He stressed that president of India certainly had a larger mandate than H D Deve Gowda who was made a prime minister when he was not even a member of parliament.

"Our president is chosen by elected representatives of the people and he can be an executive head," he said.

He also regretted that a national government was not possible in the country because "political untouchability has become an ill of the polity."



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, left, shakes hands with Geri Halliwell, (Ginger Spice) of the pop group "Spice Girls" as Emma, Victoria, Mel C and Mel B (far right) look on, Monday evening, after their appearance at the Royal Variety performance at London's Victoria Palace Theatre. — AP/UNB photo

## Foreign mercenaries keeping violence alive in Kashmir

Binoo Joshi writes from Srinagar

Foreign mercenaries are holding the key to insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir while local extremist groups are either lying dormant or acting on the fringes.

These are observations of the security agencies in the state which have been fighting the secessionist insurgency for the past eight years during which over 20,000 people have lost their lives.

"The terrorism in Kashmir is only because of foreign militants," state police chief Gurbachan Jagat told India Abroad News Service.

His statement is matched by the assessment of other security agencies. While the intelligence agencies say that extremism in Kashmir survives because of foreign mercenaries, the separatists term their presence as "support from friendly quarters."

A majority of the foreigners are reportedly from Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and are being pushed into Jammu and Kashmir with the motivation of

fighting a "Jihad" or Islamic holy war, against the "infidels" in the state, sources said. Some of them are reportedly battle-hardened men who have fought for different militia in Afghanistan.

The number of such mercenaries in the Valley is estimated at close to 1,000. "This is our rough estimate," said Jagat, who alleged Pakistan was making use of foreign mercenaries in its "desperation" to "keep militancy alive in Kashmir."

Foreign mercenaries with experience in fighting guerrilla warfare in Afghanistan are giving tough resistance to the Indian security forces in the Valley. "There is no denying the fact that these elements were proving quite hard," admitted a senior Border Security Force (BSF) official.

The BSF, like the Army, has lost hundreds of its men in encounters with foreign mercenaries in the Valley. "They fight for long hours and do not surrender easily," said the BSF of-

ficer. "It is a do or die (situation) for them," the officer told IANS.

Foreign extremists are believed to have been behind some of the most horrific incidents in the eight years of secessionist violence. One such incident was the burning down of Char-e-Sharief shrine - one of the most revered shrines of Muslims and Hindus alike - in May 1995 by Mast Gul and his associates, who were reportedly from Pakistan. The mercenaries escaped after setting the shrine and the town afire.

Sources said that these foreign mercenaries prefer to die because their families get huge sums for if they are killed in battle. Moreover surrender here means nothing to them as unlike local extremists they are not used by the security forces in counter-terrorism measures.

"They are poor in their knowledge of geography and the latest strategy of Pakistan has been to keep one group of militants ignorant about others and their areas of operation,"

sources in the Army said.

The foreign mercenaries get caught when they are betrayed by locals. The sources said this happened in October this year when the local guide disappeared, leaving eight Afghan mercenaries to walk into the Army's trap. The mercenaries had then surrendered before Union Home Minister Inderjit Gupta and state Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah.

C.M. Bhat, Inspector General of BSF at the Kashmir frontier, said many of the foreign mercenaries worked on contract. They leave the Valley after their contract period ranging between six months and two years expires, he said.

These militia men get regular salaries back home, a portion of which is paid in advance when they start their journey towards the Indian side of the Line of Control from Pakistan. Bhat said. "Many of them have started going back," he, however, added.

— India Abroad News Service

## Gas explosion leaves 59 dead in Siberia

MOSCOW, Dec. 2: A huge methane gas explosion ripped through a coal mine in southern Siberia early Tuesday, killing at least 59 miners, officials said, reports AP.

The blast tore through the Zvyarnovskaya mine in Novokuznetsk at 1:17 am (1717 GMT Monday), according to the Minister of Emergency Situations in Moscow. The cause was not immediately known.

By mid-afternoon, there were 59 confirmed deaths and eight other miners remained missing, authorities told the Itar-Tass and Interfax news agencies.

The Emergency Situations Ministry, which earlier said 41 were killed, could not immediately confirm the higher death toll.

Officials said four other miners made their way to the surface after the blast and were hospitalised with gas poisoning.

Rescue teams headed from Moscow to Novokuznetsk, located 3,000 kilometres (1,850 miles) southeast of Moscow and 500 kilometres (300 miles)

north of the Mongolian border. Rescuers were digging through the debris in hopes of finding survivors.

## Kashmiri pandits' confce Dec 17

JAMMU, Dec. 2: The return of Kashmiri pandits to the valley and their rehabilitation in different parts of the country will be discussed at the second World Kashmiri Pandit Conference (WKPC), scheduled to be held at New Delhi on December 17, reports PTI.

Organised by Panun Kashmir (PK), an organisation of displaced Kashmiri Hindus from the valley, the conference will be attended by delegates from all over the country and abroad, the convener of PK, Dr Agni Shukher said.

Meanwhile, seven persons, including Shiv Sena supremo, Bal Thackeray, will be honoured with the 'Sharda Samman' awards for exemplary service to the community, Dr Shukher said.



Mona Siksik, 25, from Gaza's Rafah refugee camp holds Monday her baby Suha while, from left, Yasser, Arafat and Zahwa lie on the bed in the intensive room in Naser Hospital in Khanyounis City. Mona gave birth Friday night to quadruplets. Mona and husband Atis named the boys Yasser and Arafat, and the girls Suha — after Arafat's wife — and Zahwa — after Arafat's daughter. — AP/UNB photo