

International

UAE prof urges Muslim states not to allow human cloning

DUBAI, Jan 11: A medical professor from the United Arab Emirates has called on Muslim governments not to allow Western researchers to carry out human cloning experiments banned in their own countries, newspapers reported here Saturday, says AFP.

Governments "should ban any research organisation or scientist, local or foreign, who seeks to use Islamic countries as an arena for carrying out illegal experiments on human cloning," said Mammun Al-Shaqfa, professor of medicine at the Medical Faculty here.

Shaqfa was speaking at a seminar in the UAE Emirate of Sharjah organised in response to Chicago-based scientist Richard Seed's announcement Wednesday that he intended to pursue human cloning in the United States or anywhere else in the world he was allowed to.

"Islam is not opposed to scientific research, but authorisation of any experiment is not recommended unless the Sharia (Islamic Law) pronounces on its legality or illegality," Shaqfa said.

"Human cloning is inadmissible because it destroys the basic social concepts of the family, married life and parenthood," said Mohammed Al-Morsi Zahra, dean of the Faculty of Theology and Law at the UAE University.

"Instead of wasting billions of dollars on human cloning, it would be more worthwhile to improve the health and social conditions of human beings," he said.

State of emergency in 5 storm-hit counties in US

NEW YORK, Jan 11: New York State Governor George Pataki said Saturday President Bill Clinton granted his request to declare a federal state of emergency in five winter storm hit northern counties, reports AFP.

Pataki also said he had asked Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) chief James Lee Witt for federal help in cleaning up the mess left by days of ice storms and bitter cold.

"We are dedicating every resource possible to help the people of the (state's) north county, but it is clear we need federal assistance to respond to a disaster that far surpasses anything we have ever seen," Pataki said in a statement.

Pataki requested from FEMA such help as 1,625 generators, 25,000 cots and 50,000 blankets and 750,000 meals enough to feed 25,000 people three times a day for 10 days.

The disaster, clearing the way for federal aid, was declared in Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson and St Lawrence counties.

"As the situation merits, the federal government is poised to provide whatever help that may be required to ensure normal living conditions are restored as soon as possible," Witt said in a separate statement released in Washington.

Quake death toll rises to 48 in China

NANTAN, China, Jan 11: The death toll from a powerful tremor near China's Great Wall rose to 48 Sunday, with more than 1,200 people seriously injured, as rescue work continued after a bitterly cold night, officials said, reports AP.

In Nantan, one of scores of villages struck by Saturday's magnitude 6.2 earthquake, farmers terrified that their quake-damaged earth and brick homes would collapse spent the night huddled under hastily erected lean-to's.

In four towns along the border between Zhangbei and Shangyi counties, 80 per cent of the houses were flattened, said Huangfu Qing, a seismologist coordinating rescue work from Zhangjiakou, the largest city near the quake-hit area. Xinhua said more than 70,000 houses collapsed.

Medical teams, including some from the People's Liberation Army, were sent to the area, Xinhua said. More than 1,500 soldiers from Beijing were also dispatched, along with 500 tents and 5,000 winter coats, it said.

20m new voters enrolled for Indian polls

NEW DELHI, Jan 11: India's 120 million Muslims have nothing to fear and their rights will be protected if the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) takes power in March, the party said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

India will remain a secular state, unlike some of the theocratic states in South Asia, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the BJP's candidate for prime minister said in a news conference.

The BJP rose to prominence in the eighties on a plank of Hindu revivalism and is now under the moderate Vajpayee making its strongest bid for power in elections starting next month.

But rivals accuse the BJP of a deep-seated prejudice against Muslims.

Early opinion polls have placed the BJP ahead of arch-rival Congress Party and the ousted United Front comprising 15 regional, communist and right wing groups.

"For us members of minority community are citizens of this

24 Shiite Muslims killed in Lahore

LAHORE, Jan 11: Gunmen opened fire on a memorial service in a Shiite Muslim graveyard in the heart of Pakistan's eastern Punjab capital of Lahore on Sunday killing 24 people, and injuring more than 30 others, police said, reports AP.

Many of the wounded who were brought to Lahore's Mayo Hospital were in critical condition with gunshot wounds, said hospital officials.

Relatives of the dead arrived at the hospital wailing and beating their chests and screaming at police to arrest the gunmen. More than 100 policemen surrounded the hospital, Lahore's largest hospital.

It wasn't immediately clear who was behind the shooting, but officials fear it was religiously motivated.

The police suspect the gunmen belonged to a group known as the Sipah-e-Sahabah, or the Friends of the Guardians of the Prophet, a militant Sunni group. However no one has taken responsibility for the killing.

There is no doubt that Sipah-e-Sahabah was involved in the firing and there will definitely be repercussions," said Hasan Turabi, a leader of the Tehrik-e-Jafria or Movement for Shiite Muslim Law in Pakistan.

Turabi, contacted by The Associated Press in the southern port city of Karachi, didn't say what form of repercussion would occur as a result of the massacre.

Nearly 100 Shiite Muslim worshippers had gathered at the graveyard to offer prayers for their departed relatives when two gunmen on a motorcycle drove up and opened fire with automatic weapons, police said.

People scrambled for cover, but before the shooting stopped 20 people were dead and another 30 wounded. Four others died later in hospital.

"We were in the middle of our prayers," said a trembling Imam Hassan, 52. "Two men with kalashnikovs just walked up and started firing. Everyone started screaming and trying to find a place to hide, but they just kept on firing."

The wounded and dead were taken to nearby hospitals by people in the area, while they waited for the ambulances to arrive. The shooting went on for several minutes.

Worshippers stopped motorised rickshaws, motorcycles and passing cars to take the wounded to the hospital, said Hassen.

"Even the ambulance didn't arrive for a long time," he said.

Police officials, who took about one hour to get to the scene, have cordoned off the area.

Turabi accused the Punjab administration of failing to protect Pakistan's minority Shiite community.

"They are not doing their duty to protect us," he said.

Nearly 300 people have been killed in religiously motivated violence in the past one year. Most of the killings have occurred in Pakistan's most populous Punjab province.

Most of Pakistan's 140 million people are Sunni Muslims who hold no grudge against their Shiite Muslim brethren.

However, small, well-armed militant groups have emerged in Pakistan and they routinely clash.

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