

## BRIEFLY

**Vajpayee to visit Kashmir today:**

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will visit Kashmir where a Muslim separatist insurgency has left over 20,000 dead since 1989, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Srinagar. Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah said Vajpayee, who will arrive today, will tour the regions of Ladakh and Jammu in his first visit since assuming power in the head of a Hindu nationalist coalition in March.

**Prof Subodh Chandra dead:**

Scholar and educationist Professor Subodh Chandra Sengupta died at his south Calcutta residence on Friday after prolonged illness, family sources said. PTI reports from Calcutta. Sengupta ex-professor of Presidency College and ex-professor of Jadavpur University, was 95 and is survived by three sons and two daughters. He happened to be one of the select few writers on Shakespearean authority. His book 'Aspects of Shakespeare's Tragedy' is taught at Oxford.

**Iranian wargames begin:**

Iran's navy yesterday launched manoeuvres in the gulf involving 50,000 sailors and marines with a message of friendship to Arab neighbours across the strategic waterway. Tehran radio reported. Reuters says from Tehran.

It said the main stage of the Vahdat-77 (unity-77) exercises started with a six-gun salute to the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with which Iran has been trying to improve ties.

**Turkish troops kill 22 Kurd rebels:**

Turkish troops killed 22 Kurdish rebels in clashes overnight in southeastern Turkey, officials said yesterday. Reuters says from Tunceli.

The heaviest fighting was in the rugged eastern province of Tunceli, where 10 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels were killed in a sweeping offensive backed by US-made Cobra and Sikorsky helicopters, military officials said.

**Voting begins in Taiwan:**

Voting opened at 13,472 polling stations yesterday all over Taiwan for crucial parliamentary and local elections seen to determine the island's future relations with Beijing, AFP says from Taipei.

Polling for city mayors, city council and legislative seats opened at 8:00 AM (0000 GMT) and will continue until 4:00 PM (0800 GMT).

**Plane crash kills 2 in Taiwan:**

Two Taiwan air force pilots were killed when their fighter plane crashed in eastern Hualien county, the military said yesterday. AFP says from Taipei.

The accident occurred Thursday night during a routine training mission when the pilots tried to land the twin-seater F-5F on a runway at the Chih Hang air base, the air force said in a statement.

**3 ROK soldiers die in explosion:**

Three South Korean soldiers were killed and five more injured when a gun shell exploded in a barracks, the Defence Ministry said yesterday. AP reports from Seoul.

Cpl Kang Chang-won, 21, and other soldiers were tinkering with the shell of a 90 mm recoilless gun they picked up in a range when the device exploded late Friday, the ministry said.

**Jeremy Irons gets European award:**

British Actor Jeremy Irons was given a European Film Academy special achievement award on Friday night at a glittering ceremony designed to be Europe's answer to the Hollywood Oscars. Reuters says from London.

Irons landed a Hollywood Oscar for 'Reversal of Fortune' and sparked controversy with his latest role, that of a man obsessed with a young girl in 'Lolita'.

**China detains 7 dissidents**

BEIJING, Dec 5: Chinese police have questioned or detained seven dissidents in a widening crackdown on organizers of a political opposition party, a human rights group reported Saturday, reports AP.

Police took Wang Zechen and Wang Wenjiang from their homes in Anshan city in the northeast Friday night and their whereabouts Saturday were not known, family members and the Information Center of Human Rights and Democracy Movement in China said.

Wang Zechen organized a petition signed by Wang Wenjiang and 188 other dissidents Wednesday demanding police release Xu Wenli and Qin Yongmin, two of the most influential members of the dissident community.

Xu and Qin were arrested Monday night and along with a third dissident, Wang Youcai, were accused of endangering state security, apparently for spearheading a five-month campaign to form the China Democracy Party.

The accusations were the most serious leveled against campaigners lobbying to register the party legally and challenge the ruling Communist Party's 49-year ban on opposition politics.

Wang Zechen was taken away for questioning by members of the State Security Bureau, China's secret police, his family members said in a telephone interview.

Police in Beijing and Wuhan also questioned three other dissidents on Friday, veteran activist Ren Wandong, and Chen

Zhonghe and Xiao Shichang, the Hong Kong-based Information Center said.

Ren had already been warned on Wednesday to stop working for the China Democracy Party. Chen and Xiao had been arrested along with Qin Yongmin on Monday but were released after two days.

They and the two Wangs had been among dozens of dissidents trying to organize the China Democracy Party in at least nine provinces and major cities.

Two other dissidents interrogated Friday in two separate provinces had been taking part in fasts to pressure authorities to release Wang Youcai.

**Anti-Milosevic politicians meet EU leaders**

VIENNA, Dec 5: Prospects for peace in Kosovo and progress in the rest of Yugoslavia are dim as long as President Slobodan Milosevic remains in power, opposition politicians said Friday, reports AP.

"We must make it clear to the people that such a bad government as we have now has not served the (Yugoslav) people," Zoran Djindjic, a former Belgrade mayor, told reporters.

Djindjic made his remarks following a meeting of Serb opposition figures and Austrian Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schuessel, whose government currently holds the European Union presidency.

**Sharif seeks US mediation on Kashmir with India**

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif urged President Bill Clinton on Thursday to mediate peace with archrival India over control of the disputed region of Kashmir to douse nuclear tensions in South Asia, reports Reuters.

Complimenting Clinton on helping forge peace agreements in the Middle East, Bosnia, and northern Ireland, Sharif said: "We do appreciate that, but I think South Asia is also one of the key areas where America must involve herself."

Sharif called Kashmir a 'nuclear flashpoint' and said Islamabad and New Delhi were incapable of settling their differences on their own.

Asking Clinton to step in, he said the South Asia would remain tense until the issue was resolved.

"We have a history of not being able to resolve anything bilaterally," Sharif told the National Press Club, a day after he

met with Clinton.

"We need to sit down and seriously engage ourselves in talks to resolve the issue of Kashmir... I think a third party involvement becomes necessary."

India and Pakistan have fought three wars two of them over Kashmir, since their independence from Britain in 1947.

India, which rules two-thirds of the region, says Kashmir is an integral part of its territory and that the dispute with Pakistan must be solved bilaterally.

Sharif said Clinton told him in talks on Wednesday that he was keen to get involved in some way or the other, he wants the problem to be resolved.

The Prime Minister was unapologetic about Islamabad's nuclear tests in May, which drew international condemnation and US sanctions amid fears of a nuclear arms race between Pakistan and India.

"Pakistan had to respond to

the Indian threat, and I think the international community must understand and recognise Pakistan's legitimate security concerns. Our security was in clear danger, he said.

Sharif called the sanctions "absolutely unjust and unfair," and expressed hope that they would be lifted.

Washington imposed economic sanctions on India and Pakistan after the tit-for-tat nuclear tests.

Many of the restrictions have been waived amid concerns about their economic consequences.

At their meeting Clinton told Sharif he needed to do more to restrict Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme before Washington could ease sanctions further.

But Sharif said his government would not sign the CTBT until sanctions were lifted and progress made on Kashmir.

**Congress ready for fresh polls if BJP-coalition falls through**

NEW DELHI, Dec 5: Indian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi declared today she was prepared for fresh parliamentary election if the ruling Hindu nationalist coalition collapsed, reports AFP.

Sonia said in the northern city Chandigarh that she could not say how long Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's coalition government would last after its drubbing in recent state elections.

"I cannot say anything about the life of the coalition," the Press Trust of India quoted the Congress leader as saying, "but if the situation demands, the Congress is prepared to face a fresh general elections."

It was the first reference by Sonia to possible new elections amid political uncertainty resulting from the Hindu nationalist rout in the November 25 state polls.

**Impeachment hearings****White House****lawyers ask****for more time**

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: White House lawyers have asked the Congressional Panel considering the possible impeachment of President Bill Clinton for up to four days to present their defence, according to a letter released Friday, reports AFP.

The lawyers said they would call witnesses before the House impeachment, and criteria for the prosecution of perjury, obstruction of justice and abuse of power — the three allegations that Clinton faces.

"We anticipate that it will require no more than three to four days of the committee's time to deal with the topics above, at which time counsel for the president will present a final argument," the lawyers said.

**Britain, France****agree on need****for European****defence force**

SAINT MALO, France, Dec 5: Britain and France agreed at a summit today on the need to build a credible and independent European defence force, reports AFP.

In a joint statement issued on the second and last day of a Franco-British summit, the two countries said: "The (European) union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises."

The accord signals a new bonding between Britain and France on the need to build a European defence arm.

**'Hijacked' plane****lands safely****in Russia**

MOSCOW, Dec 5: A passenger plane that had reportedly been hijacked landed safely in southern Russia on Friday, emergency officials said, reports AP.

Security agents combed the Tu-154 for explosives and searched all the passengers, but found no bomb and no hijacker, said a police spokesman in the southern Russian city of Krasnodar.

The airport in the Siberian city of Omsk, where the plane departed from, received a phone threat saying there was a bomb aboard the plane after it was airborne, the spokesman said. He would not give his name.

Dozens of riot troops, fire engines and police gathered at the Krasnodar airport to meet the plane when it landed Friday night, Russia's NTV television reported.

It was unclear how many passengers were aboard or whether they knew of the bomb threat.



A Bosnian Muslim woman Ibrimsa Halimovic walks in peaceful demonstration called "Justice for Breko" in downtown Sarajevo, Friday. The eastern Bosnian town of Breko is now a part of the Bosnian Serb territory and the final decision about Breko's status will be announced in a few weeks. — AP/UNB photo

**Religious violence grips Indonesian capital**

UJUNG PANDANG, Indonesia, Dec 5: Weeping Roman Catholics consoled and hugged each other Saturday in the ashes of their church that was burned down by angry Muslim mob, reports AP.

Hundreds of troops and police patrolled the city of Ujungpandang on Sulawesi island. Civilian guards stood watch over other places of worship in the city, 1,350 kilometres east of Jakarta.

Friday's attack on the Kare Catholic Church was the latest in a series of tit-for-tat violence between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority in Indonesia.

Social tensions are on the rise in the world's fourth most populous nation amid political turmoil, student protests and the worst economic crisis in decades.

The sectarian attacks come atop of a dramatic climb in Indonesia's crime rate and sporadic outbreaks of riots and looting in some parts.

During the past two weeks at least 25 churches and 18 mosques have been set afire or ransacked by the followers of rival faiths in five cities and towns across the sprawling island nation of more than 300 ethnic groups.

"I saw brutality and cruelty. I don't really understand why devoted religious followers attack other places of worship," said

Rev Van Rooy, a Dutch-born priest assigned to the Kare Church.

The mob came in through the front. They jumped over the fence and climbed through the windows.

"I wanted to defend my church. But we are Christian, we are just a minority compared with the crowd," he said of Friday's attack.

A mass of mourning will be held in the ruins on Sunday, he said.

Other witnesses said the mob of several thousand shouted "God is great" and "burn" as some carried cans of kerosene inside.

Pews and prayer books were placed in heaps and set on fire. Statues and other holy ornaments were smashed. The church's walls and roof collapsed.

Police said the attacks took place after weekly prayers ended at nearby mosques and appeared to be an act of revenge for assaults against Muslim places of worship earlier.

On Monday Christian rioters in the city of Kupang, south-east of Jakarta, burned and ransacked 15 mosques in retaliation for the Nov. 22 burning of churches in Jakarta.

Police said 22 churches had been attacked in the capital, including four that were burned.

Many of Indonesia's Christians are ethnic Chinese, who

are often targeted when social unrest flares because of their relative wealth. Residents said most Chinese shops in Ujungpandang remained shut Saturday.

"I feel so sad and angry. But we are not able to do anything because we are the minority," said a 45-year-old Chinese Christian woman too scared to give her name.

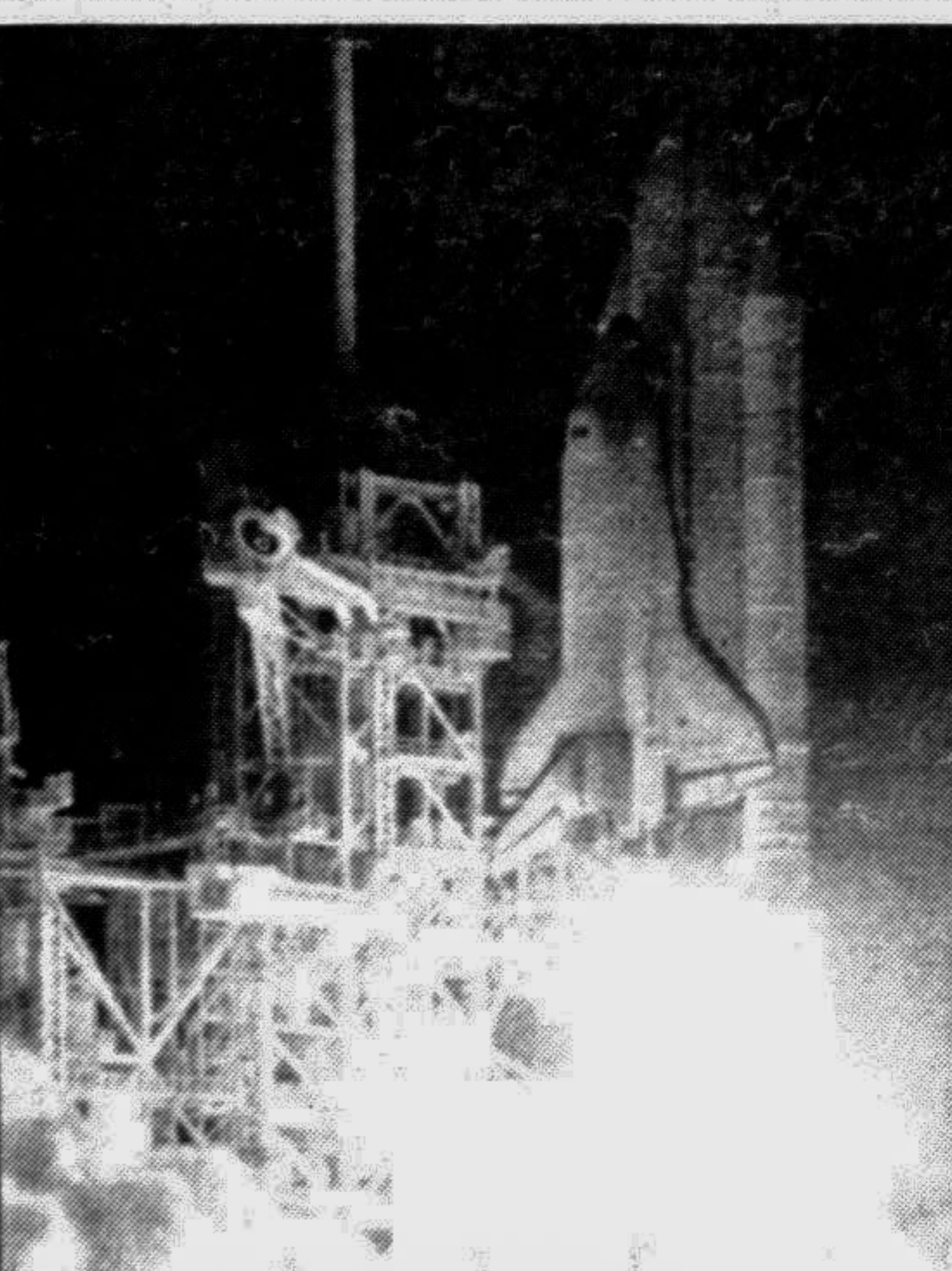
Islam arrived in the 7th century in Indonesia. Now 90 per cent of Indonesia's 202 million people are Muslim, making it the world's biggest Islamic nation. Others are Christian, Buddhist or Hindu.

Religious diversity based on a belief in God is enshrined in the national philosophy, known as Pancasila, adopted when Indonesia declared independence from Dutch colonial rule in 1945.

The attacks come despite repeated calls for calm by Indonesian President BJ Habibie as well as Muslim and Christian religious leaders.

Indonesia's security problems have worsened since May when deadly riots and protests helped oust Habibie's predecessor and onetime mentor, President Suharto, to quit.

For 32 authoritarian years Suharto used iron-fisted methods to keep a lid on the archipelago's social and ethnic rivalries, often at the expense of human rights.



The Space Shuttle Endeavour lifts off early Friday morning on a mission dedicated to the first US assembly flight for the International Space Station. — AP/UNB photo

**Last remnants of Khmers surrender**

BANGKOK, Dec 5: The last remnants of the Khmer Rouge, the radical Marxist guerrillas who killed nearly two million Cambodians, have surrendered to the government, a journalist close to the rebels said on Saturday, reports AP.

Negotiators for the last band of guerrillas holed up near the Thai border met Friday with representatives of the government in Phnom Penh at Preah Vihear temple at the northern edge of Cambodia and agreed to lay down their arms, according to Nate Thayer of the Far Eastern Economic Review.

In 1997, Thayer became the first journalist allowed to interview the Khmer Rouge's late leader Pol Pot, who had not been seen in public in nearly two decades. He is one of very few outsiders trusted by the guerrillas.

The surrender of the Khmer Rouge brings to an end more than 30 years of civil war in Cambodia that began with the Marxist guerrilla's insurgency against the government in Phnom Penh in the late 1960s.

Not included in the surrender deal, however, were the Khmer Rouge's three top surviving leaders, Tak Mok, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea. Pol Pot died in April this year.

The Cambodian government and the United States have expressed a desire to capture all three and make them stand trial for genocide and crimes against humanity.

Khem Nuon, Tak Mok's chief of staff who negotiated the surrender with government officials, said simply, they are "retired" and are not part of the deal.

He refused to go into details about them, Thayer said.

Khem Nuon claimed he was negotiating on behalf of 5,000 remaining ragtag troops and 15,000 civilians living under Khmer Rouge control.

Thayer said, however, that he believed the estimate of fighting men was inflated, and that many of the civilians are living in the Phu Noi refugee camp in Thailand.

"There must be unity. There is no other way. There is no way for a military solution. No weapons. Only political struggle," Thayer said Khem Nuon told him in a telephone interview.

The government was represented at the negotiations by Meas Sophea, deputy chief of staff of the Cambodian military.

Under the agreement, the remaining guerrillas will join the government army and the civilians will return to Anlong Veng, the guerrillas' former stronghold in the north.

While the Khmer Rouge laying down their arms and Hun Sen and Ranariddh working together, the country is poised to begin perhaps its most stable period in decades.

The Khmer Rouge came to power in April 1975 by overthrowing the US-backed Lon Nol government.

Under the leadership of Pol Pot, they emptied out the cities and attempted to turn the country into an agrarian utopia by herding the population on to collective farms.

The experiment was a disaster economically and in human terms. Famine soon affected many parts of the country.

Those suspected of harboring opposing views, or merely of being educated, were put to death.

Nearly two million people died of execution, overwork, starvation or disease under the Khmer Rouge.

They fought a guerrilla war against successive governments ever since, but wings of their movement began defecting to the government starting in 1996, leaving only the hardliners in the north left carrying on their struggle.

That struggle ended Friday.

**Palestinian cabinet rejects Israeli conditions**

GAZA, Dec 5: The Palestinian cabinet rejected on Friday what it called "the wrongful conditions" set by Israel for handing over more West Bank land to Palestinian self-rule, reports Reuters.

In a statement after its weekly meeting, the cabinet also accused Israel of trying to create a crisis that would stop US President Bill Clinton from visiting the Jewish state and Palestinian-controlled areas as planned from December 12 to 15.

"The Palestinian leadership has discussed the wrongful condition set by the Israeli government for the implementation of the Israeli withdrawal," the statement said.

The Palestinian leadership rejected these pre-conditions which have no connection with the Wye River memorandum, it said, referring to the land-for-security deal signed at the White House on October 23.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced this week he was suspending the transfer of more West Bank territory after an attack by Palestinians on an Israeli soldier and a civilian in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Wednesday.

The Israeli cabinet also demanded Palestinian President



New Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit, left, meets with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Thursday during a courtesy call to Vajpayee's residence in New Delhi. Dixit was among the candidates in a Congress Party landslide in local assembly elections last week which could spell trouble for Vajpayee's wobbly government coalition. — AP/UNB photo

**Anwar challenges his dismissal**

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 5: Jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim on Saturday challenged the constitutionality of his firing as deputy prime minister on grounds that the Malaysian king had not given his consent, reports AP.

Anwar, who is on trial on corruption and sexual misconduct charges, made the challenge in an affidavit he filed in court Saturday. Also Saturday, a ruling on his appeal for release on bail was delayed. Anwar says he is innocent of all charges.

Last month, Anwar filed a lawsuit saying that only Malaysia's king could dismiss a Cabinet minister and Mahathir had flouted the constitution by dismissing him.

On Tuesday, the Malaysian government said the king had agreed to Anwar's Sept 2 sacking. It asked the High Court to dismiss Anwar's lawsuit as "frivolous, vexatious and an abuse of the court process."

The next hearing was set for Jan 25.

Meanwhile, the Court of Ap-

peal debated whether it had the right to hear Anwar's bail appeal, then decided to delay its ruling. That court moved the next hearing to Dec 12.

Last Saturday, the three appeal judges postponed the bail hearing for similar reasons. A decision not to hear the case could thwart any further attempts to free Anwar on bail.

Anwar's bail application has been turned down by a lower court once and an appeal against it also failed.

Judge Augustine Paul said Anwar's lawyers couldn't prove that he would not tamper with witnesses, if released on bail.

Anwar was arrested Sept 20, only hours after organising a mammoth rally in the capital. During that protest, he called for sweeping government reforms and the resignation of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

Mahathir sacked Anwar Sept 2 as deputy prime minister and finance minister after deeming him morally unfit to lead the Southeast Asian country.

**Reno advised to reject independent counsel for President Clinton**

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: Attorney General Janet Reno has strong recommendations from her advisers against ordering an independent counsel investigation of President Bill Clinton over Democratic campaign financing during the 1996 election, officials said Friday, reports AP.

Reno had her second meeting of the week on Friday with aides who supervise the Justice Department's 90-day preliminary inquiry into Clinton and Democratic Party issue advertisements. That inquiry ends Monday, when Reno must re-ally her decision on an independent counsel to a special court or ask for up to 60 more days.

Although Reno has usually followed the advice of these aides during the two-year investigation of 1996 campaign financing, her spokesman Myron Marlin said, "At this point, there has been no decision."

Senior Justice officials were described as far more unanimous in their recommendation on Clinton than they had been on two other independent counsel decisions involving campaign finance cases that Reno made in the last two weeks.

In those cases, she rejected a counsel to scrutinize Vice President Al Gore and got up to 60 more days to study the case of former White House deputy chief of

staff Harold Ickes.

Although the FBI continued to recommend an independent counsel as it has for the entire campaign finance investigation, most Justice aides advised Reno that the evidence was clear and convincing that Clinton had no criminal intent, according to officials who requested anonymity.

Some Justice officials even questioned whether the party issue ads constituted a civil violation of election law, which is necessary before there can be any criminal violation, officials said.

These aides pointed out that a majority of the Federal Election Commission on Thursday had questioned whether there were civil violations. The panel has three Democrats and three Republicans.

At issue at the FEC were staff audits done for the commission which concluded that both Clinton and his 1996 Republican opponent, Bob Dole, committed civil violations of federal spending limits. The audits recommended that Clinton repay the government 7 millions dollars and Dole repay 17.7 million dollars.

The FEC auditors argued that the issue ads, which both Clinton and Dole personally helped coordinate, went too far and amounted to advocating the candidate's election.

tingent on its conditions being met.

In Washington, the US State Department sided with the Palestinians saying on Thursday it was inappropriate to add new conditions to the implementation of this agreement.

Israel stepped up pressure on the Palestinian authority on Friday to curtail anti-Israeli violence barring Palestinian officials from entering or leaving Ramallah.

The Israeli army said it erected roadblocks outside Ramallah and did not allow Palestinian officials police and security men to pass until it won a pledge from the authority to take strong action against rioters who attacked the Israelis on Wednesday.

"After the commitment was made, the roadblocks were dismantled," the army said in a statement.

The brief blockade was the latest sign of mounting Israeli-Palestinian tensions ahead of Clinton's visit.

Under the Wye agreement Clinton will address a meeting of the Palestine National Council and other Palestinian groups in Gaza at which they will reaffirm the annulment of provisions in the Palestinian National Charter calling for Israel's destruction.

**Nigerian military destroys rebel base, kills 70**

FREETOWN, Dec 5: Nigerian military jets destroyed a Sierra Leonean rebel base in four days of bombing raids, killing at least 70 fighters and capturing a swath of rebel-held territory, military officers said Friday, reports AP.

The attacks which ended Friday on the rebel base near the town of Gbera, about 125 kilometres north of Sierra Leone's capital, were launched by the Nigerian-led West African intervention force called ECOMOG, force spokesman Paul Aghimimen said.