

Talks on independence of E Timor Indonesia, Portugal at odds over settlement

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 9: Indonesia and Portugal disagreed Monday on a consultative mechanism that would enable the East Timorese to eventually gain independence, reports AFP.

Speaking at a news conference after two days of UN sponsored talks here, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and his Portuguese counterpart Jaime Gama also disagreed on the need for a UN presence in the former Portuguese territory at this stage.

UN special representative Jamasheed Marker meanwhile announced that the ministers would meet here again on March 10 following a senior officials meeting on the previous day.

Indonesia is proposing that the East Timorese be consulted on draft UN autonomy proposals that the ministers hope to complete by the end of March.

These proposals would be submitted as a final solution to the East Timorese.

If rejected Indonesia says the Portugal, which is still the administering power in its former colony, and the United Nations

would be responsible for the territory which could then move towards independence.

On Monday Alatas said the two ministers were searching with UN help for a mechanism that would enable the East Timorese to express their views in an "effective manner, but without a vote and in a consultation short of a referendum."

But "we have an open mind as to what kind of methodology may be realised."

We must find a methodology that is acceptable to all, he said.

His remarks contradicted

comments by Gama on Sunday

who told reporters that Alatas had for the first time at the closed door talks accepted the idea of a "popular consultation" that would be a referendum in all but name.

Gama stressed Monday that Portugal believed the East Timorese should be consulted in a democratic way on their fate.

Marker said his team was looking at options but "there are no short cuts to democracy, much less the question of short circuiting the democratic process that is out that cannot be done."

Anwar was arrested Sept 20, two weeks after his firing by Mahathir sparked massive anti-government protests. Mahathir claimed his handpicked successor was morally unfit to lead this predominantly Muslim Southeast Asian nation.

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Anwar accuses Mahathir aides of conspiring to destroy him

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 9: Jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim on Tuesday accused close aides of his former boss Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of masterminding a campaign to destroy him, reported AFP.

According to top police officials, hate mail directed at him was part of a scheme in which Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin and Consumer Affairs Minister Megat Junid were involved, Anwar told the court in the most direct accusations so far against his former colleagues.

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his defence Monday on the first four corruption charges, he

faces an additional corruption and five sex charges at another trial.

The police "came up with this grand design of some political personalities out to finish me," Anwar said from the witness box in the colonial brick courthouse beneath a Moorish clock tower.

"They alerted me on the seriousness and the dimensions of these allegations and the political campaign against me," he said.

The warnings about a plot came during regular briefings he received from Mohamed Said Awang, then the head of the country's top police intelligence unit, the Special Branch.

Investigations into hate mail sent to him in 1997 revealed that powerful politicians loyal to Mahathir were key actors in the political plot, Anwar testified.

Mahathir, Daim and Megat Junid are among the witnesses defence lawyers plan to call during the trial, now in its fourth month.

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told that police, acting on Anwar's orders, had coerced retractions from two people who had made allegations of sodomy and adultery against Anwar.

Ummi Haifida Ali, in a letter addressed to Mahathir, alleged that Anwar was sleeping with her sister-in-law, the wife of Anwar's private secretary.

Ummi also encouraged Azizan Abu Bakar, a former chauffeur in Anwar's household, to make the allegation that he was repeatedly sodomized by Anwar.

Ummi's letter and Azizan's allegations are the planks on which the prosecution case is built.

Anwar said he had asked the police to probe the hate mail, but was startled by their finding that top politicians were involved.

"They pressed upon me that the involvement of Daim, Megat Junid and Aziz Shamuddin — who are known to be confidants of the prime minister — would certainly complicate their investigation," Anwar testified.

Aziz Shamuddin is Ma-

hathir's political secretary.

Anwar said that police also named a powerful governing party politician who was forced to resign from a state chief minister's office after being accused of statutory rape.

"Police informed me of the... collusion of Rahim Tamby Chik," Anwar said. Rahim resigned as the chief minister of Malacca state following allegations that were highlighted by opposition politicians in 1995.

He was never prosecuted but an opposition lawmaker was sentenced to 18 months in jail for printing a pamphlet that questioned that lack of prosecution. Anwar has openly expressed sympathy for the jailed member of Parliament, Lim Guan Eng.

Anwar said that during the probe into the hate mail, police never suggested that one day Anwar himself could be prosecuted on the basis of those allegations.

"The question of criminal action was never, ever contemplated or considered," he said. "I was the complainant and the victim."

Murtaza Bhutto murder case

14 accused freed on bail

KARACHI, Feb 9: Fourteen Pakistani police officers facing trial over the murder of former premier Benazir Bhutto's brother Mir Murtaza Bhutto were released on bail on Monday, lawyers said, reports AFP.

Judge Yasmin Abbasi granted bail to 14 of the 17 jailed officers after there was no substantive progress in the case over the past two years.

Three officers, including the ex-chief of intelligence bureau Masood Sharif and police officers Wajed Durrani and Rai Tahir, were denied bail. The reasons for the rejection were not known but lawyers said they could appeal to superior courts.

Under Pakistani law, a prisoner facing trial is granted statutory bail if his or her case shows no substantive progress within two years of arrest, lawyers said.

In the Murtaza Bhutto murder case, only 12 out of 22 prosecution witnesses have testified since the trial began in early 1997. All the jailed men have spent two years in jail.

The key accused, Benazir's husband Asif Ali Zardari, was granted bail on medical grounds recently, but remains in prison facing several other

criminal and corruption charges.

Former Karachi police chief Shoab Suddle was granted bail in the same case in December 1996.

Two other police officers and former Sindh chief minister Abdulla Shah are listed as fugitives in the case that rocked the Benazir government.

Murtaza and seven of his political colleagues were killed in a police shootout near his seaside Clifton residence in September 1996.

Social worker gunned down in Karachi

KARACHI, Feb 9: An elderly female social worker was gunned down by unidentified assailants today in Pakistan's troubled port city of Karachi, police and family sources said, reports AFP.

Naeem Farzana, 50, was shot dead at her home in the city's Lilaquatabad district, police said, describing it as "targeted" killing.

The assailants sprayed her with bullets from outside after she refused to open the gate, a family member said.

House prosecutors bring case to close

Justice Dept to probe Starr's handling of Lewinsky affair

WASHINGTON, Feb 9: The US Justice Department has advised Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr that it intends to investigate his handling of the Lewinsky affair, but the probe has not begun, officials said Monday.

"Orissa Chief Minister J B

Patnaik has offered to resign,"

PTI said, adding that he had

made his move after two meetings with Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi on Monday evening.

PTI quoted senior Congress

Party official Madhavrao

Scindia as saying that Patnaik

had "put in his papers and left it to Sonia Gandhi to make a decision on it."

Congress rules Orissa, where

an Australian Christian mis-

sionary, Graham Staines, and

his two young sons were burnt

to death by a mob of alleged

Hindu zealots last month.

In two other incidents in the

poverty-stricken state over the

past week, a Catholic nun said

she was gang-raped in a taxi

and two Christian teenagers

were killed by unidentified assa-

lants.

The Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP), which leads the federal

coalition government, has criti-

cised the Congress Party for

failing to protect the lives of

Orissa's people.

One topic for the impending

investigation is the Jan. 16,

1998 offer by Starr's deputies to

former White House intern

Monica Lewinsky of an immu-

nity deal conditioned on her

not discussing it with her

lawyer, Frank Carter.

Justice Department rules

prohibit government prosecu-

tors from discussing immunity

deals with defendants outside

the presence of their lawyers.

Starr's office is required to fol-

low these rules unless doing so

would undermine the purpose of

his investigation.

Starr has denied any impropriety in his office's dealings with Ms. Lewinsky.

The presidential lawyer said

the House impeachment case

was "more focused on retribu-

tion, more designed to achieve

partisan ends" than on the high

standards the Founding

Fathers had set for removing a

president from office.

Off the Record

Is a free computer worth your personal life?

PASADENA: An electronic commerce company offered Monday to give free computers to as many as one million people in exchange for details about their personal lives, including where they go and what they buy on the Internet, reports AP.

Users must be willing to look at an incessant barrage of advertisements that will appear on-screen whenever the computer is turned on.

On Monday, plenty of people seemed willing to make the trade with Free-PC.com. Access to the company's Web site was clogged. Phone lines were busy, and some people even showed up at the company's offices looking for free computers.

Initially, Free-PC.com will give 10,000 new Compaq Presario computers to applicants willing to provide information such as their age, income and hobbies. If there's enough demand, the number of free computers could rise to 1 million, the company said.

Consumer advocates warned applicants to carefully consider whether a new computer is worth their personal information.

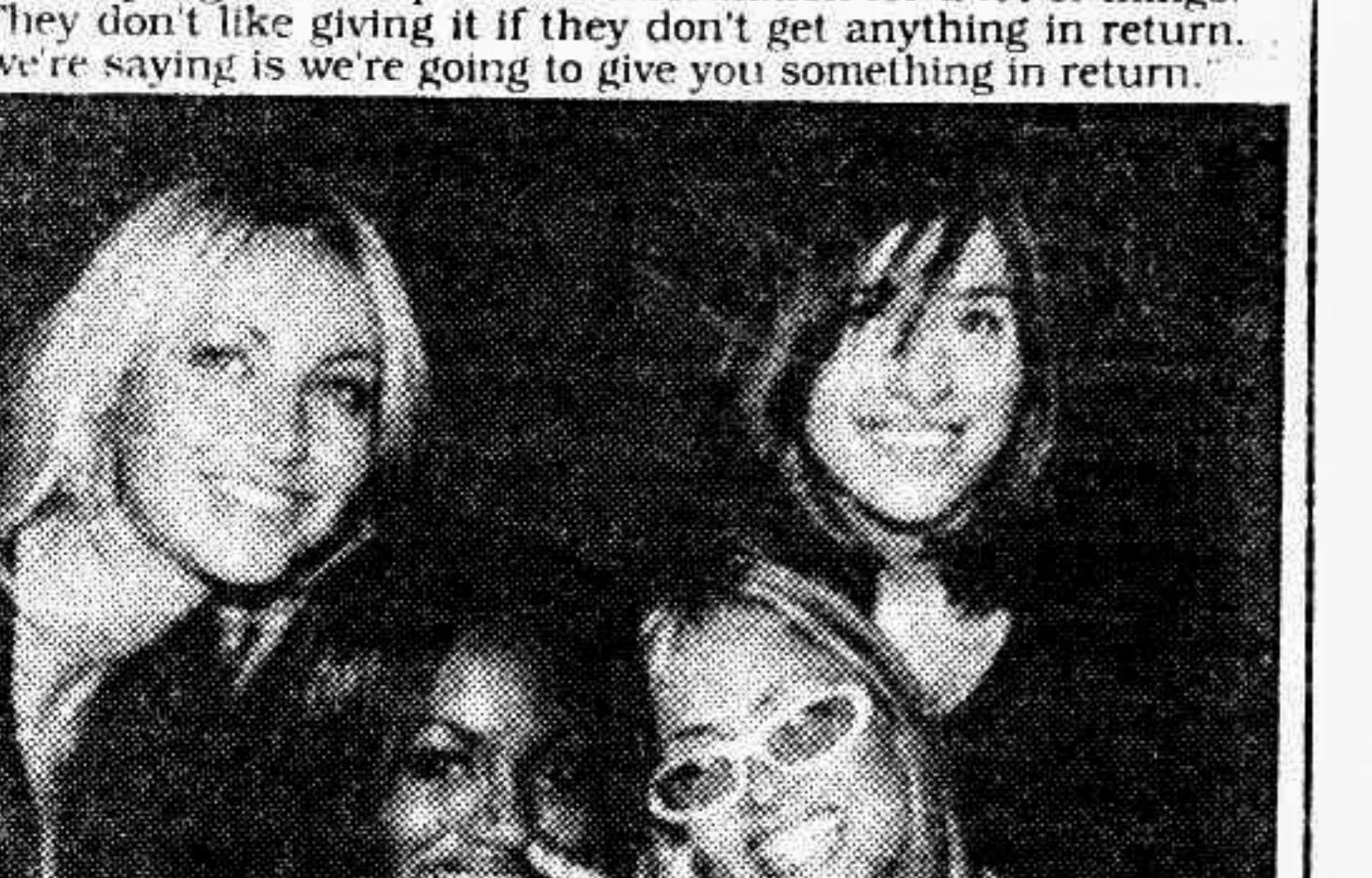
The application asks consumers how much money they make, what kinds of cars they own, what hobbies and interests they pursue and to which magazines they subscribe. Once a person is accepted into the system, the company will also track which Internet sites they visit and which ads they click onto.

"For those people that care about their privacy, or might care about their privacy in the future, I urge them to think long and hard because you have to provide information about your history to this company," said Evan Hendricks, editor of the newsletter Privacy Times. "They're going to start collecting information about you, your finances and your personal tastes."

LaVigne said Free-PC.com will use the information only to build a demographic profile to determine which ads should appear on the user's screen. Companies that advertise through Free-PC will never see personal information about participants, he vowed.

"We're going to have to build a trust level with people," he said. "People give their personal information for a lot of things."

"They don't like giving it if they don't get anything in return. All we're saying is we're going to give you something in return."



Pop group All Saints, (L-R): Natalie Appleton, Shaznay Lewis, Nicole Appleton and Melanie Blatt, appeared together for the first time in months during a press conference in London Monday to end the split rumours and add five dates to their summer tour. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Hun Sen begins visit to China:

Prime Minister Hun Sen left Cambodia yesterday for a four-day visit to Beijing as speculation swirled over whether China will block international efforts to prosecute Khmer Rouge leaders, AP reports from Phnom Penh.

Hun Sen and Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji are expected to sign agreements on extradition, tourism, cultural cooperation and future loans, according to a Camb