'British govt split over arms sales to Pakistan'

LONDON, Jan 12: The British government is deeply split over whether to end a freeze on arms sales to Pakistan imposed after last October's military coup. The Guardian newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

The paper cited leaked cabinet documents showing that the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry want to resume sales as soon as

possible. However Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and Clare Short, who is in charge of international development, are opposed to any such move, remaining committed to the principle of an "ethical foreign

The documents pointed out that there are around 80 applications for arms export licences which have been on hold since October because of the freeze.

It was Cook who spearheaded the campaign to have Pakistan suspended from the Commonwealth after General Pervez Musharraf seized power in a bloodless coup last year.

Although Britain did not announce a formal arms embargo, no applications for arms export licences have been approved since the coup.

The issue will gain added weight when British defence chief Sir Charles Guthrie visits Pakistan from Thursday. He plans to meet Musharraf, according to the Guardian.

Algeria grants amnesty to AIS members

ALGIERS, Jan 12: Algeria's President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has granted general amnesty to fighters of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), which has observed a truce since October 1997, government and AIS officials said Tuesday, reports AFP.

A presidential statement said the AIS, whose strength is estimated at between 800 and 3,000 men, had decided to "definitively dissolve" in order to reintegrate "completely and totally into Algerian society."

The presidential pardon follows several weeks of talks between the authorities and the AIS, the armed wing of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), and comes two days ahead of a deadline for Islamic extremists to surrender.

The communique said the move recognised the AIS decision to observe a truce in 1997 and more recent efforts to "expose the enemies of Algeria and Islam." a reference to hardline groups still active.

The communique said the AIS, which last June said it would submit to the authority of the state, had decided "voluntarily to hand in all their arms and military means in their possession to the authorities." The leader of the AIS. Madani Mezrag, issued a com-

munique confirming the disso-

Indian crime show producer's wife stabbed to death

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: The man behind India's most popular television crime-watch programme -- "India's Most Wanted" -- has found himself in the police spotlight after his wife died from stab wounds to the stomach, reports AFP.

Suhaib Ilyasi's 27-year-old wife Anju died just after midnight Monday, after being rushed to hospital with two deep stab wounds to the stom-

The story was slapped on the front pages of Wednesday's Indian newspapers, all of which stressed the "mysterious circumstances" surrounding Anju's death.

Suhaib has maintained his wife committed suicide at home Monday evening following an

No clear-cut clue was available from the flat to tell us whether it was a homicide or a suicide," an investigating offi-, cer was quoted as saying by The

Hindu newspaper.
"India's Most Wanted," recently renamed "Fugitive," debuted on television more than a year ago and was an instant hit, making Ilyasi, the programme's producer-presenter, a major

Lanka coup bid takes new turn with state media involvement

COLOMBO, Jan 12: Sri Lankan police have questioned a government media boss in connection with a bid to assassinate President Chandrika Kumaratunga and establish a military regime, a state-run newspaper said Wednesday, re-

ports AFP. The Daily News which has been reporting on a wider conspiracy to stage a military coup following the attempt on Kumaratunga's life on December 18 said the questioning has thrown new light on the case.

'The parameters for ques-tioning this individual are the manner in which the particular section of the state media was used to facilitate the plot to as-sassinate the president," the Daily News said quoting police sources.

The newspaper did not name the head of a "state media institution" who was implicated in the coup bid in which it said businessmen, the main opposition, private newspaper editors and military officers too were

The main opposition United

National Party (UNP) accused the government of "fabricating evidence" to show a link between the assassination attempt and an alleged coup to form a military administra-

tion. "We have all condemned the assassination attempt which the government itself said was the work of a Tiger suicide bomber," opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe told re-

porters here. "By all means, investigate the assassination attempt but don't fabricate evidence to show there was a coup and make that an excuse to crack down on media freedom and suppress democracy.

The Daily News said a wealthy ethnic Tamil woman identified as Renuka Shanmuganathan had been "intensively and extensively" questioned by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) sleuths in the past few days.

The newspaper had earlier said police evidence of the plot, announced by state radio on Sunday, included several taped

telephone conversations. Top businessmen were directly linked to the conspiracy. It

"There are also reports that several army personnel too are linked to this alleged plot and there had been plans to capture power through a military coup if the president was killed in the town hall bomb blast," the Daily News said.

The state media said two newspaper editors, which it did not name, were linked to the conspiracy, although their al-

leged roles were not specified.

The opposition says the charges against it and journalists were made after Kumaratunga appeared on state radio and television for over three hours last week and lambasted her rivals and accused two military officers of treach-

"While the government makes the army an easy sacrifice in the north in the hands of the LTTE (rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), the government blames them (the military) for conspiring with the

LTTE," the UNP said. "We call upon the people to rally round to protect the country from the presidential rage,"
the UNP said in a statement re-

ferring to Kumaratunga's scathing remarks after surviving the assassination bid. Private newspaper editors and a media watchdog expressed

fears that the government may use allegations of a conspiracy to crack down on journalists and crush media freedom ahead of parliamentary elections.
T' - Free Media Movement (FM.vl) u ... ribed as "ludicrous"

involved in a conspiracy to as-sassinate Kumaratunga and establish a military regime. The allegations of a plot to form a military regime have

the charge that the editors were

also seriously embarrassed the military.

Military spokesman Brigadier Palitha Fernando declined to comment on the charges that officers were involved and there has been no word from the army chief. Srilal Weerasooriya. . .

trying to

restore

democracy

15-party Pakistan Awami Itte-

had (PAI) and the 19-party

Grand Democratic Alliance

(GDA) are making hectic efforts

to evolve an unanimous strat-

egy to make the military regime

set a date for fresh polls, media

reports said here on Monday.

quoting sources, said the al-

liances, which had welcomed

the army takeover, would meet

after completion of the regime's

three months in office - the pc-

riod set for transition of power

from one elected government to

English daily The News.

reports PTI.

the other.

ISLAMABAD, Jan 12: The



Supporters of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet celebrate the British government's intention to release Pinochet on health grounds on Tuesday near the embassies of Great Britain and Spain in Santiago, Chile. The former strong man, who is under house arrest in London, was charged with torture and human rights violations during his 1973-1990 rule. - AFP photo

2 Pak alliances UK ready to free Pinochet

LONDON, Jan 12: Britain announced Tuesday it wanted to free Chilean former dictator Augusto Pinochet for health reasons, marking the beginning of the end to a controversial diplomatic and legal wrangle that has reverberated around

After 15 months fighting his way through the British courts to avoid being extradited to Spain, the likely scenario now is that Pinochet will be allowed to fly home within weeks.

the world, reports AFP.

The surprise announcement - although it is not a final ruling -- followed independent medical tests carried out on the 84-year-old general last week. The "unequivocal and unan-

imous" conclusion of the four leading doctors who examined him was that Pinochet was "at present unfit to stand trial, and that no change to that position can be expected," a Home Office

Home Secretary Jack Straw

was therefore "minded" to use his powers to halt the extradition process, it added.

His final decision will be made after representations from the Spanish and Chilean governments, several human rights groups and from Belgium, France and Switzerland, which all have outstanding requests for his extradition.

They have seven days in which to submit their cases. The announcement sparked

differing reactions in London. Santiago and Madrid: welcomed by the Chilean government and Pinochet's supporters, but greeted with anger and disappointment by human rights and exiles' groups.

The Spanish government said it would respect whatever decision London made -- indicating its unwillingness to prolong the wrangle even further.

Chilean Foreign Minister Juan Gabriel Valdes expressed "gratitude for the seriousness

Military takes over air, sea

transport in Maluku islands

with which the British government has proceeded in this delicate issue.

And in London, former British premier Margaret Thatcher, who has been one of Pinochet's strongest supporters here, expressed her satisfac-

According to The Guardian newspaper, the ex-dictator's future is assured. "Pinochet will be going back to Chile rapidly after the seven-day deadline is over." a Home Office source told

A court in London ruled last October that Pinochet should be extradited on 34 charges of torture and conspiracy to torture during the final two years of his 1973-1990 dictatorship.

His regime has been blamed

for more than 3,000 deaths. Carlos Reyes, a spokesman for Chile Democratico, which represents Chileans living in

exile, said: "We are reacting with horror.

US to introduce resolution on human rights in China

US President Bill Clinton speaks at Hopi Point on the Grand Canyon, Arizona,

accompanied by hiker Ann Weiler Walka on Tuesday. President Clinton signed the

proclamations creating new and expanding national monuments in the Grand Canyon area.

WASHINGTON, Jan 12: Washington is to introduce a resolution condemning China for its human rights record at the upcoming United Nations Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva, the State Department said Tuesday, re-

"The decision to go forward with this resolution at the commission is based on the fact that the government of China's human rights record has continued to deteriorate," said James Rubin.

"Over the past year, the government of China intensified its crackdown on political dissent, initiated a campaign to suppress the Falun Gong, and

MOSCOW, Jan 12: New

Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin

approved a new strategy Tues-

day to combat Chechen gueril-

las after daring rebel raids in-

flicted heavy losses on Russian

forces in the breakaway repub-

rity chiefs to discuss the tacti-

cal rethink, triggered by

Chechen strikes on Argun east

of Grozny, the second city Gud-

ermes further east and Shali, to

"The situation has radically

changed," Defence Minister Igor

Sergeyev told state-run ORT

television. "New proposals were

put forward which Vladimir

Putin has carefully studied and

Putin met defence and secu-

lic, reports AFP.

the southeast.

approved." he said.

intensified controls on unregistered churches and on the political and religious expression of ethnic minority groups, especially Tibetans," Rubin ex-

"We have long been deeply disturbed about the human rights situation in Tibet, and particularly the tight restriction on Tibetan Buddhism," he

"Controls on the media and the Internet have also been tightened," he added.

But while the United States seemed prepared to take the lead on the issue at the March meeting, how the European Union reacts could sway the Commission's final vote, a Hu-

Putin approves new strategy

after Chechen counter-attack

"Given that the amount of

liberated territory has in-

creased, we must of course

change tactics," added Sergei

Ivanov, secretary of the Krem-

the activities of the law en-

forcement agencies, that is the

interior ministry, the public

prosecutor's office, the security

mention of Grozny and Russian

media was abuzz with specula-

tion that Moscow was about to

unleash a new assault on the

city after rebels took advantage

of a lull around Grozny to

Senior officials avoided all

services," he said.

counter-attack.

lin advisory body, the Security

"First of all, we must step up

man Rights Watch representative said here. "The EU decision could tip

- AFP photo

the balance," he said. Rubin acknowledged not everyone was on board with the United States.

"We will obviously try to work closely with our colleagues in Europe who care about human rights and who understand the value of using an international forum like the commission to promote human

"But we're aware of the fact that other governments, some in Europe, have a different view," he said.

A similar resolution failed to pass last year, Rubin added.

The rebel strikes were the

Meanwhile, Moscow said its

first major setback for Putin,

whose handling of the war has

made him the hot favourite to

win March 26 presidential elec-

forces were firmly back in con-

trol of the three towns and took

Russian journalists to the Shali

area, where its said up to 150

Chechen fighters had been

killed in two days of vicious

in outlying districts of the

town, 25 km southeast of

Grozny, though its reporter said

journalists were told it was too

dangerous to venture into the

town centre.

NTV showed Russian troops

The undisclosed sources said the meeting was likely to be held at Lahore or Islamabad between January 15 and 20. statement said. A date may be set till when

the alliances could wait for an announcement from the junta on holding fresh elections. If the regime does not pay heed to the demand of the alliances. they could launch a movement for restoration of democracy. The sources claimed that the

regime had sought dialogue with leaders of component parties of the alliances on issues such as increased tension with India after the hijacking of an Indian plane and the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

But the alliances' leadership, the sources said, restrained those with whom the military rulers wished a dialogue, from entering into talks to avoid giving indirect political support to the present setup.

Quake jolts Japan

TOKYO, Jan 12: A moderate earthquake jolted eastern Japan today, shutting down an experimental nuclear reactor. reports AP.

The magnitude 4.3 temblor took the plant off-line at the Japan Atomic Research Institute in Tokaimura, about 110 kilometres northeast of Tokyo, spokeswoman Tsuka Kanai

The reactor is designed to automatically stop operating when an earthquake strikes, she said.

Kanai said the reactor suffered no damage and resumed operating about 80 minutes after the quake hit.

No damage or injuries were reported elsewhere from the quake centred about 50 kilometers underground in Ibaraki Prefecture (state), the Meteorological Agency said.

Tokaimura is the site of Japan's worst nuclear accident, at a uranium processing plant. One worker died and scores of people were exposed to radiation after employees set off an uncontrolled nuclear reaction by pouring too much uranium into a mixture to make fuel.

JAKARTA, Jan 12: The In-Christians has killed at least

donesian military has taken over the operation of air and sea transportation in the strifetorn Maluku islands, the official Antara news agency said, reports AFP. "State-owned passenger

ships temporarily will not visit harbours in Maluku isles ... because of the uncertain security situation there," Kalalo Nugroho, a spokesman for the ministry of communications told Antara.

Nugroho said navy warships and military planes would now be used to transport passengers travelling within the Maluku islands, where a year of violence between Muslims and

Seven navy warships have

transported already more than 3.500 refugees from Tobelo subdistrict on Halmahera island to neighbouring Ternate and North Sulawesi province, Antara said quoting navy spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Ditva Sudarsono. Mr e than 400 people,

most / Muslims, were killed in Tobero when Christians, angered at hearing that a Protestant church was burned in Ambon, attacked Muslim residents late December.

Sudarsono said navy vessels have also been patrolling Maluku waters to prevent outside ships from supplying weapons to the warring religious groups in the islands.

The state shipping company, PT Pelni, suspended services to Ternate, the capital of North Maluku province, after the hijacking of one of their vessels by panicked refugees last week. The military took control of

security in the Maluku islands on December 29 when the violence between Muslims and Christians spiralled out of control, killing more than 700 in

The Sultan Babullah airport in Ternate had already been closed to all but military traf-

Israel, Palestinians agree on land handover

JERUSALEM, Jan 12: Israel told the Palestinians on Tuesday it would pullout of more of the West Bank and Gaza by September even if a final peace agreement is not reached by the deadline that month, officials said, reports Reuters.

"Israel is committed to implementing the third phase withdrawal whether there is a final status agreement or not," chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told reporters after meeting his Israeli counterpart Oded Eran on Tuesday.

Israel and the Palestinians are negotiating a framework accord to achieve a final peace agreement by September. The talks should tackle the most

difficult issues, including the fate of Jerusalem. Jewish settlements, borders and millions of Palestinian refugees.

Eran's office told Reuters:

"It's true. The decision (on a final pullout) will be taken by Israel between the period of February and September." But Erekat said that when and where the final pullout

would take place had not yet been decided. Israel is to withdraw from another 6.1 per cent of the West

Bank on January 20, following a pullout from five per cent last The last handover, mandated by a September interim

peace deal, was to have taken

delayed by a row between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators over what areas should be included. They finally broke the deadlock last week, reportedly

with an Israeli undertaking to

consult the Palestinians on the

land that will be covered by the

place on November 15 but was

next withdrawal. With the January 20 handover, Palestinians will be in full or partial control of 40 per cent of the West Bank, which Israel captured from Jordan in the 1967 Middle East war.

The Palestinians want all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, most of which they control, for a future independent state.

Lankan troops kill 15 Tiger rebels: Sri Lankan troops shot dead at least 15 Tamil Tiger guerillas in fresh fighting in the north of Sri Lanka amid heavy exchanges of artillery fire, the defence ministry said Wednesday, AFP

reports from Colombo. Security forces killed 12 members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the northern Jaffna peninsula while three more were killed in the east of the country on Tuesday, the ministry said. It said the LTTE was firing artillery at five places in the Jassna peninsula on Tuesday and that the military was carrying out counter bombardments.

That and United States agents have seized 126 kilograms of heroin bound for the US and arrested two alleged drug traffickers, a senior minister said Wednesday, AFP reports from The two men, both Thais, were arrested while transporting heroin to Bangkok airport which was to be sent to the US by a

Chinese drug smuggling gang, Interior Minister Sanan

Kachornprasart said. The sting was pulled off by officers of Thailand's Narcotics Suppression Police working in close cooperation with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). 2 killed in airport platform collapse: Two Singapore Airlines engineering staff were killed and one was in critical condition after an elevated platform they were

standing on collapsed at Changi Airport in Singapore, the airline said Wednesday, AFP reports from Singapore. A Singapore Airlines (SIA) spokesman said the accident occurred while the three were servicing a Boeing 747-400 aircraft on the apron at the airport. The three staff were carrying out maintenance work on an aircraft when the elevated platform on which they were standing toppled over," the spokesman said.

India treads delicately over political asylum for Tibetan boy

NEW DELHI, Jan 12: The defection of a young Tibetan spiritual leader from China has put India in a spot over political asylum, as New Delhi weighs its traditional support for Tibetan

ties with Beijing, reports AFP. Opinion makers here are divided over what decision New Delhi will take over the 14year-old Karmapa Rimpoche, who dramatically appeared in India a week ago after an arduous and dangerous journey over the Himalayan mountains.

exiles with a desire to improve

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalistled coalition is keeping its cards close to the chest, as Tibetan lobby groups urge the granting of political asylum and others warn of the diplomatic consequences.

to take a very cautious approach," warned M.V. Rappai, a China expert at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses Before jumping to a conclu-

sion, the government should

explore if any other country is

ready to give the Karmapa polit-

ical asylum.

"Any decision the Indian China do?" government takes will have a major implication for its relations with China."

India's predicament increased Tuesday after China issued a warning against granting asylum to the Karmapa, who heads one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao indicated that granting political asylum would violate an agreement between New Delhi and Beijing on non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

The Indian government did not react to the Chinese comments, but Minister of State for External Affairs Ajit Panja declared any decision would be taken within the framework of traditional Sino'-Indian rela-"The government will have tions.

> versity said India should not be seen to bow to Chinese pressure: "Giving asylum to the Karmapa would be proper. After all we have given asylum to the Dalai Lama," professor S. Sahadevan told AFP. "India must

assert its position. What can

Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Uni-

India says the question of asylum has not yet arisen, because the Karmapa has not actually applied for such status since his arrival in the northern Indian hill station of

Dhramsala on January 5. Dharamsala is the seat of the Dalai Lama's governmentin-exile, which is not recognised by any country, including India.

The Hindu newspaper re-

ported that India "may accept

the Karmapa's de facto refugee

status." All Tibetans arriving in India are screened by the Tibetan government-in-exile, which then applies to the Indian government for refugee status on their behalf.

Tibetan refugees enjoy a lot of freedom, including the right A South Asia expert at New to travel -- both dornestically and abroad -- on their identity -cards and special Indian travel documents. Many analysts here believe New Delhi will simply accord

the same status to the Karmapa,

rather than taking the more

sensitive step of granting for-

mal political asylum.

In 1959, when the Dalai Lama fled Tibet for India, then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru wasted no time in granting him political asylum. Three years later India and

China fought a bitter border

war over the Himalayas in which New Delhi suffered a humiliating defeat. Although bilateral relations have improved since the 1970s, they remain fragile. China was among the most vocal critics of India's nuclear

explosions in 1998. Indian offi-

cials say privately they do not

want to rub Beijing the wrong

way needlessly. "India has to proceed with abundant caution," warned Brahma Chellaney, a strategic expert. Added commentator M.D. Nalapat: "Indian interests demand the avoidance of a repeat of the fateful 1959 decision to get embroiled in the Tibet is-

India is home to some 100,000 Tibetan exiles, and the community clearly wants New Delhi to permit the Karmapa, who is recognised by the Chinese government as well as the Dalai Lama, to stay on.

Exercise may reduce risk of heart disease for diabetics: Study

levels of insulin appear to make people prone to blood clots, a finding that could explain why diabetics are so susceptible to heart attacks and strokes, researchers say, reports AP. About 75 per cent of people

with the most common type of diabetes die of heart attacks or strokes. Previous studies have found

that high blood pressure and low levels of "good" cholester of account for about half of the higher-than-normal risk of cardiovascular disease in dia-

This new study — published in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association - tried to determine what role elevated insulin levels May. Based on their findings, the

researchers suggest that exercise, which makes 'he body more receptive to the effects of insulin, might improve a person's ability to di asolve blood clots and possibly lower the risk of cardiovasc ular disease. "Exercise ought to be really.

really encouraged," said Dr.

James B. Meigra, an internist at

CHICAGO, Jan 12: Elevated Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. 'The most common form of

d'abetes - type 2 - afflicts Elbout 14 million Americans. They are resistant to insulin. the protein that helps the body use sugar and other energy sources, and as a result they have elevated insulin levels.

From 1991 to 1995, Meigs and his colleagues studied about 3,000 people enrolled in the Framingham Offspring Study, a long-term examination of risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Participants included diabetics, people with its precursor

condition and non-diabetics. The researchers found that non-diabetics who had elevated insulin levels also had elevated levels of PAI-1 antigen, a chemical' that impairs the blood's ability to dissolve clots. The association was the same in diabetics and people with the precursor condition, though, their levels of insulin and the antigen were even higher.

From that, Meigs sugge sted that, "one effect of insulin resistance is to make the blood less able to dissolve clots.