### International

# Norway's peace move hits snag as Tigers reject peace talks

Fresh fighting kills 54 in Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 17: Sri Lanka's Tamil separatists ruled out entering Norwegian-backed peace talks out campaign with the government for an independuntil the government declares a ceasefire as officials ent homeland in the island's north-east. The conflict today reported 54 people were killed in another day so far has claimed over 60,000 lives. of clashes, reports AFP.

statement from their London office urged the international community to pressure the Colombo gov- security forces withdraw from the Jaffna peninsula. ernment to adopt a ceasefire, adding that genuine which the rebels held for nearly five years until they neace talks could not be held "under conditions of were driven out in December 1995. war, violence and hostility.

in the northern Jaffna peninsula or the spate of attacks in the island's north-east over the past few the statement.

reported that 54 people were killed Saturday in the island's embattled northeast, after they launched a fresh offensive against the LTTE in Jaffna.

Government forces were Sunday consolidating areas wrestled from rebel control.

killed in Saturday's clashes in the peninsula while another nine rebels were killed in the north-east in three separate clashes, the ministry said.

A 15-year-old girl was also killed after being caught in crossfire.

Since 1972, the rebels have been waging a drawn-

In their statement, the Tigers said while Norwe-The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a gian-backed talks could not go ahead while fighting continued, they stressed they were not demanding

'The Sri Lankan government has deliberately However, the Tigers did not refer to fresh fighting distorted our genuine plea for a peaceful environment for peace talks as a condition," the LTTE said in

"Sri Lanka has misinterpreted our call for the The defence ministry in a statement Sunday creation of conditions of normalcy as a situation that includes the withdrawal of armed forces from Jaffna. We did not demand the withdrawal of the armed forces.

Norway has been trying since last year to bring the

Sri Lankan government and the Tiger rebels to the Twelve government troopers and 32 rebels were negotiating table. So far there has been no face-toface meeting between the two sides. While the LTTE insist peace talks have no chance

of succeeding unless a ceasefire is agreed between the government and the rebels, the government has flatly refused to have a ceasefire before talks begin.



US President-elect George W. Bush (R) selects retired Gen. Colin Powell (L) to be his Secretary of State during announcement at Crawford Elementary School in Crawford, Texas on Saturday

--AFP photo



Kashmiri separatist leaders meet at the All Party Hurriyat Conference at their headquarters in Rajbagh, Srinagar yesterday. Kashmiri separatist political leaders began the crucial meeting to unify their position on the Indian Army's ceasefire in the region and future peace talks. -AFP photo

## Kashmiri leaders meet to discuss peace moves

India may extend Kashmir truce: Advani

SRINAGAR, India, Dec 17: Kashmiri separatist political leaders began a crucial meeting today to unify their position on the Indian Army's ceasefire in the region and future peace talks, reports AFP.

All seven leaders of the All Party Hurriyat Conference -- an umbrella organisation comprising around two dozen separatist parties -- are in the state's summer capital Srinagar for the meeting.

"The discussions on the peace process and ceasesire will be with reference to where it will lead and whether there could be a resolution of the dispute (with India)," said Abdul Gani Bhat, a senior separatist leader.

Political observers said New Delhi will be keenly watching the outcome of the meeting as it could open the way for an extension of the ceasefire, scheduled to end on December 30.

A senior Hurrivat member, speaking on condition of anonymity, said divisions among the separatist groups meant the talks were likely to be long and "It is an important meeting. We will have to disci-

pline some of our members who have been unnecessarily creating confusion by giving divergent statements," he said.

declared a unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir on November 27 to coincide with the holy Muslim month of Ramadan.

The moderate Hurriyat, which favours three-way talks invloving Pakistan, India and Kashmiri separatists, has found itself in a difficult position as pro-Islamic militant groups have rejected the ceasefire as a propaganda ploy.

Meanwhile, the Indian government could extend a unilateral ceasefire declared in the state of Kashmir beyond the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Home Minister L.K. Advani said Saturday.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted Advani as saying Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was likely to make an announcement during the current parliament session, which is scheduled to end next

"We can consider extending the ceasefire and a decision in this regard will be taken before the end of the winter session of parliament," Home Minister L.K. Advani told the news agency.

Advani told reporters in the western Indian city of Silvassa there had been a "perceptible" reduction in separatist militant operations and infiltration across the border from Pakistan since the ceasefire Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee began.

### Democrats to undergo shake-up, Clinton to maintain grip

WASHINGTON, Dec 17: Less ited with having dramatically than a week after Al Gore con- improved the party's financial ceded the election, top US Democrats decided the party needed a leadership shake-up to add 'new been repeatedly criticised over blood" and prepare itself for future battles, a party spokes- the Democrats during this year's man said Saturday, reports AFP.

ensure that outgoing President independent voters, which Bill Clinton -- and his wife Hillary -- will wield strong influence within his party for years to come as the man who will lead the Democrats is known as Clinton's long-time associate and confi-

"It's true that Terry McAuliffe has been slated to become the new national chairman of the party," Democratic National Committee (DNC) spokesman

run for office again and will likely go back to practising law," he added.

ana and has been in charge of the

"Joe Andrew has decided not to

Luis Rosero told AFP.

Andrew, who hails from Indi-

DNC since March 1999, is cred-

But the party leadership has

the populist message adopted by election campaign, saying it did The changes are likely to not resonate with moderate and resulted in Gore's failure to win a clear majority on November 7.

According to Rosero, the number two man in the party hierarchy, DNC general chairman Edward Rendell, was also on his way out.

Rendell caused an uproar in Democratic ranks last Tuesday. when he publicly urged Gore to concede after the US Supreme Court ruled against him in his dispute over Florida votes with Republican George W. Bush.

But Rosario said Rendell's impending departure had nothing to do with his roundly condemned remarks, "in which he expressed his personal opinion."

In May, the Iranian parliament

Iran, which has called for

greater aid from Europe to fight

shipment point for narcotics

coming from over the border en

voted to seal off the frontier with

Afghanistan and approved fund-

# 'Israel, Palestinians to hold separate talks with US

Troops kill 2 more Palestinians

GAZA CITY, Dec 17: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said on Sunday that separate Israeli and Palestinian delegations would hold talks with US officials in Washington in the coming days,

tration the ways of supporting and safeguarding the peace process and confirming what has already been concluded," Arafat told reporters here.

Palestinian information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said earlier that the Palestinian delegation would leave for Washington on Tuesday.

"We will go to Washington Mohammed Dahlan. Tuesday to consult with the American administration to explore if there is any possibility of resuming negotiations," Abed Rabbo

injuring at least 26 people, offi-

cials said, reports AFP.

tinian officials pursued talks Abu Rudeina told AFP. overnight amid renewed efforts to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table after more than 11 weeks of deadly violence.

"In our current contacts, we are working on two issues: the 'Two delegations will go to joint effort to reduce the violence Washington in the next few days and resume cooperation, and we to examine with the US adminis- are also looking into ways to progress on the peace process," said Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami, who led the Israeli delegation at the three-hour meeting.

The Palestinians were represented by top negotiator Saeb Erakat, information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo and Gaza Strip preventative security chief

Clinton spoke by telephone with Arafat for 45 minutes on Saturday "on the ways to save the peace process and restart negotiations before President Clinton's Earlier top Israeli and Pales- term ends." Arafat adviser Nabil

But the White House said that while the outgoing president was trying to help restart talks, there was nothing on the table.

'We are taking an inventory of Camp David and looking at how we can build on it and if we can proceed to negotiations," Ben-Ami said, referring to the failed July peace summit hosted by Clinton. Meanwhile, two Palestinians

were killed by Israeli soldiers on Sunday near the Rafah terminal at the crossing point between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, although the circumstances were not immediately clear, hospital officials

Iyad Mohammed Daoud, 27, and Ahmed Abdel Jalil Kassas, 33, were shot dead and a third man, whose identity was not immediately available, was seriously wounded, they added.

#### 42 Afghans killed in clashes with Iranian security forces TEHRAN, Dec 17: Iranian battalion of troops near the bor-

eastern Iran.

along the border.

mayor of a city in eastern China's Jiangsu province has been sen-

tenced to life in prison for accepting bribes totalling more than

220,000 dollars, the Beijing Morning Post said Sunday, AFP reports

Yuannantong city. The court recovered 100,000 yuan (12,000 dol-

lars) from Pan, which he allegedly took while serving as vice mayor.

Pan was also accused of accepting expensive watches and refrigera-

Taliban arrest BBC staffer: Afghani-

stan's Taliban have arrested a local BBC employee here on charges

Abdul Saboor Salehzai was picked up from his Kabul office on

that he was working with the organisation without the authorities'

Saturday, foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Osman Sheryar

permission, a senior official said Sunday, AFP reports from Kabul.

tors as gifts from those trying to curry his favour.

The paper said Pan Baocai was sentenced by a court in

security forces have killed at least ders with Afghanistan and Paki-42 Afghans in the past three days stan to stop the flow of narcotics and freed more than two-dozen into the country. Since then, hostages, the state IRNA news more than 100 people, mostly agency said Saturday, reports Afghans, have been killed in

The news agency said 35 Afghans were killed in shootouts regularly blames the Sunni Friday morning in the Chenaran region of Khorassan province not far from the Afghanistan border. The Iranian military freed 27 villagers who were being held

Meanwhile seven other ing for electronic surveillance Afghans were killed in the provincial city of Khaf over the past three days and several others were wounded, IRNA said, adding the drugs trade, is a major transthat a few rifles and a small quan-

tity of morphine were found. The conflict intensified three route to lucrative markets in weeks ago when the military Europe, the Gulf and central announced that it had deployed a Asia.

from Beijing.

2 Japanese trains collide: 1 killed TOKYO, Dec 17: Two passenger trains collided in western Japan today in a suspected brake failure, killing a conductor and

'Two one-carriage trains collided on the Keifuku Railway, and 27 people were taken to hospital, Iran, a Shiite Muslim state, said Kazuya Shimizu, a spokesman at Fukui Prefecture Police, Taliban militia which controls some 320 km northwest of Tokyo. most of Afghanistan for the rise in Tadao Sasaki, a 57-year-old drug trafficking in the region. conductor, died in the accident.

#### Violent protest against Haider's Vatican visit

ROME, Dec 17: Police said today they detained seven people for questioning over their role in violent protests against visiting Haider overnight, in which at least 31 people were injured,

reports AFP. Seven civilians and 24 members of security forces were hurt after clashes broke out late Saturday afternoon when police cordoned off the area near the Vatican where Haider was staying at a hotel and attending a Christmas ceremony in Saint Peter's Chinese mayor gets life term: Avice Square.

### Tigers kill circus artist

CALCUTTA, India, Dec 17: A 20-year-old circus performer was mauled to death by three tigers during a performance in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, police said Saturday, reports AFP.

Rita Chetri was attacked late Friday during her act in which nine tigers were required to jump over her and then pass through a ring of fire, according to Howra district police officer, A.B Sen.

## Police dig deeper into Bollywood's links with organised crime

BOMBAY, Dec 17: Indian mafia money. police today said film star Salman Khan had been questioned and other celebrities will be examined as part of an investigation into Bollywood's links with organised

'We called Salman on Saturday and questioned him as he wanted to leave abroad for medical treatment. We are going to call in other stars and other people as D Shivanandan told AFP.

Salman Khan, Preity Zinta and duit for "dirty" crime money. Rani Mukherjee were the stars in a film called "Chori Chori Chupke on Tuesday for allegedly using gle-hold on Bollywood.

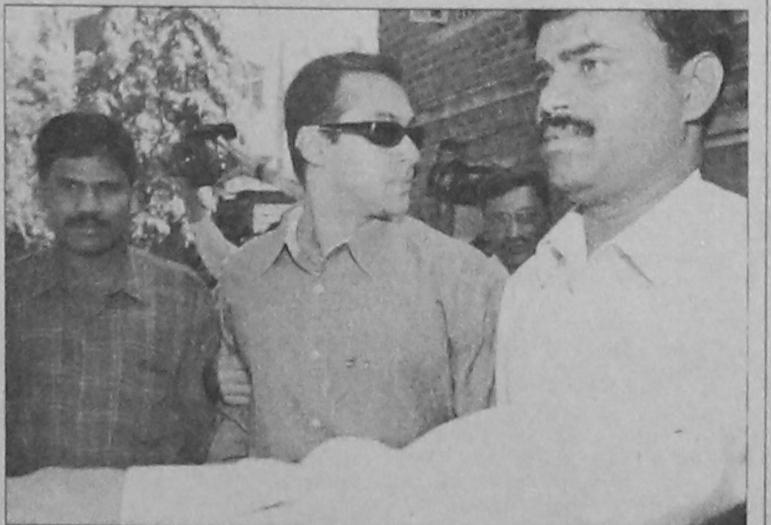
"We have strong evidence about the connections of the film producer Nazeem Rizvi and (crimelord) Chhota Shakeel.

Shivanandan said.

The film, which literally translates as "Hush Hush" was due to be released this month.

On Friday, the police also interrogated prominent film financier Bharat Shah, one of the well," joint police commissioner, film's backers. The police said he may have been acting as a con-

According to police, the underworld, in the form of people such Chupke" whose producer Nazeem as Bombay mafia boss Dawood Austrian far-right leader Joerg | Rizvi was arrested by the police | Ibrahim, had a "very deep stran-



Indian film actor Salman Khan (C) is ushered into the Special Crime Branch office for questioning on Saturday in Bombay. Khan was interrogated for four hours in connection with the underworld financing of the film "Chori Chori Chupke Chupke". -- AFP photo



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