

## The World

# Next step for India is to open dialogue, says Pakistan

Pak troops along Kashmiri border pulled back, Clinton hails peace overtures, militants vow to fight on

ISLAMABAD, Dec 21: Pakistan today welcomed "positive" signals from the Indian leadership on Kashmir but said they fell short of a clear response to Islamabad's call for meaningful dialogue, reports AFP.

Foreign Office spokesman Riaz Mohammad Khan said Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement in the parliament on Wednesday announcing an extension of New Delhi's ceasefire in Kashmir had a "positive tone."

"Yet it falls short of a clear response to Pakistan's initiatives that may justify optimism for an early start of a meaningful negotiating process on the Kashmir issue," he said.

Pakistan on December 2 ordered its troops to exercise "maximum restraint" along the Line of Control (LoC), the unofficial border between the Indian and Pakistani zones of the divided Himalayan state.

On Wednesday it announced a partial withdrawal of troops deployed on the tense LoC on the heels of the one-month ceasefire extension by Vajpayee, who also promised "exploratory steps" towards resuming a dialogue with Pakistan.

"For nearly three weeks there have been conditional statements emanating from New Delhi which show a certain reluctance to seize the opportunity which has been opened by Pakistan's initiatives," Khan said.

"India needs to make up its mind on a meaningful dialogue process."

Another report says, Pakistan on Wednesday announced a partial troop withdrawal along the tense unofficial border in divided Kashmir following India's extension of its ceasefire with Muslim militants, reports AFP.

The military's public relations department also called on India to appreciate the move by reducing its troop presence in its part of the Himalayan state.

"Pakistan has unilaterally taken another bold initiative to withdraw part of its forces deployed along the Line of Control (the unofficial bor-

der)," the military said in a statement.

"The move back has already commenced and the troops have started moving towards cantonments (barracks).

"The action manifests Pakistan's earnest and genuine desire to de-escalate the situation in order to facilitate the process of meaningful dialogue on the issue."

"It is hoped that India would also reciprocate in a similar manner and de-induct part of its 700,000-strong force deployed in Indian-occupied Kashmir."

But Kashmir's main militant group, the Hizbul Mujahideen, dismissed India's ceasefire extension as "drama" aimed at deceiving the world.

India should recognise Kashmir as a disputed territory, drastically cut its heavy troop deployment, release rebel prisoners and agree to three-way talks with Pakistan and the Kashmiris, Hashmi said.

Another report from Washington says, US President Bill Clinton Wednesday praised Pakistan's partial troop withdrawal along the conflicted unofficial border in divided Kashmir and India's extension of its month-long ceasefire there.

"This initiative (to prolong the ceasefire), along with Pakistan's announcement today... raises the hopes of the world community that peace is possible in Kashmir," the outgoing US leader said in a statement.

Earlier, hardline Muslim militant groups today rejected India's extended ceasefire in divided Kashmir and vowed to continue their armed struggle.

"It is a political gimmick and the Mujahideen have nothing to do with it," Haratul Mujahideen chief Moulana Farooq Kashmir said.

He said the Mujahideen would stop their bloody separatist insurgency only when the last Indian soldier left Kashmir, not on the basis of "mere announcements."

## Turkish prison assault fails to end hunger strike amid protests

ANKARA, Dec 21: A massive assault aimed at suppressing a widespread hunger strike by prison inmates appears to have failed, with Europe-wide protests signalling authorities here may have also paid a heavy diplomatic cost, reports AFP.

Armed resistance has continued in two jails, while detainees forcibly removed from others refused medical aid, with the official toll from the "rescue operation" in 18 Turkish jails put at 19 lives.

Although the Turkish government has declared the operation a success, saying that 187 hunger strikers had been hospitalised and were receiving treatment, the full picture is less clear.

A non-governmental medical organisation told AFP that all the prisoners the government claims to have rescued were refusing medical aid.



Miss World 2000, Priyanka Chopra (C), greets Indian President K. R. Narayanan (R) as Miss Asia-Pacific Diya Mirza (L) looks on yesterday at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi. Chopra and Mirza took their respective titles in London and Manila earlier in the month. --AFP photo

## Nagaland militants send Christmas peace message

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 21: One faction of a divided tribal Christian guerrilla group in India's strife-torn northeastern state of Nagaland made a Christmas appeal for peace and unity today, reports AFP.

"We want to forgive and forget the past and usher in a new era of hope and peace where there is no more bloodshed and rivalry among fellow Nagas," said Kitovi Zhimomi, self-styled prime minister of the outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).

"Let us all realise the importance of unity and vow on the eve of Christmas and New Year to stop the rivalries."

Zhimomi belongs to the NSCN faction led by S.S. Khaplang, which has been involved in a bitter internecine struggle with a rival faction led by Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah.

Both factions are spearheading

separate campaigns in mountainous Nagaland state for an independent tribal homeland outside the Indian federation.

"We want all forms of violence and killings to be stopped once for all," Zhimomi said.

"We want a meaningful dialogue with the Indian government and to succeed in our mission it is pertinent that all the Nagas unite and fight under one umbrella by shedding any differences that may have arisen."

The Indian government and the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN entered into a ceasefire in August 1997, which has been followed by several rounds of peace talks.

The Khaplang faction announced a unilateral ceasefire earlier this year, although the federal government was yet to formally lay down ground rules for the truce.

## UN staff hopeful of quick return to Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 21: UN aid workers are hoping for a quick return to Afghanistan after withdrawing ahead of new sanctions imposed this week, but the political wing's future there remains in doubt, officials said today, reports AFP.

Anticipated protests against UN offices have not materialised following Tuesday's decision by the Security Council to broaden sanctions against the ruling Taliban regime for their alleged support of terrorism.

The regime's reclusive leader, Mulla Mohammad Omar, condemned the sanctions but asked people to avoid public demonstrations like those which saw UN offices ransacked after the first round of sanctions were imposed last year.

"We're hopeful that the situation remains stable in Afghanistan and we can go back to the work that we're committed to," a

UN relief official said.

Some 60 foreign UN staff pulled out of Afghanistan before the sanctions, leaving their relief operations in the hands of local workers.

On the political side things were less optimistic following the Taliban's vow to "retaliate" if its overseas representative offices are closed, as required under the latest sanctions.

Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel said the offices of the UN Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMIA) could be closed in retaliation, while the peace talks it organised with the opposition would be abandoned.

The sanctions will come into effect in 30 days unless the Taliban comply with the UN resolution demanding they deliver indicted terrorist Osama bin Laden for trial and close alleged terrorist camps.

## Uproar in Indian parliament over women's seats bill

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: India's lower house of parliament was adjourned for three hours today as some MPs gave an unruly welcome to a bill aimed at reserving 33 per cent of seats for women, reports AFP.

The bill was first introduced in parliament three years ago, but has since been frozen in committee amid sharp party differences on the percentage figure and demands for special provisions for women from minority communities and lower castes.

As soon as parliament opened Thursday, MPs from different parties occupied the well in front of the speaker's chair to press their opposing cases.

Eventually, the Speaker was forced to adjourn the session until the afternoon.

A section of lawmakers favour

a recent suggestion by India's election commission that instead of reserving seats in parliament, political parties fix a percentage of electoral tickets for women candidates.

This was opposed by the main opposition Congress Party and the communist parties, which favour the bill in its present form.

"This suggestion by the Election commission can only be imposed on the officially recognised parties like the Congress," Congress MP Renuka Choudhary said, adding that there were several smaller parties who could bypass this rule.

The coalition government, led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party, is itself divided on the issue.

## New US policy on China heralds rough times ahead in Asia

SINGAPORE, Dec 21: Plans for a national missile defence system and a tougher attitude towards China point to rougher times ahead in Asia under the administration of incoming US President George W. Bush, the Singapore Straits Times said today, reports AFP.

One of Southeast Asia's leading newspapers, the Straits Times praised the president elect's foreign policy team in an editorial, saying "their knowledge and experience will compensate for Mr. Bush's lack of curiosity about the world and inexperience."

However, early signs that a Republican administration under Bush would take a tougher line on China and Russia, as well as push for a national missile

defence system were likely to have political reverberations in Asia, the newspaper said.

"Of more immediate concern to Asia are the plans for a national missile defence system and attitude towards China," the Straits Times said.

While realists were likely to dominate the formulation of Washington's policy on China, "they will have to contend with a Republican right wing that is determined, even rabidly, anti-China," it said.

Bush's commitment to pursue the missile defence system "will only exacerbate these tendencies, for China (like Russia) has made it clear that it will respond vigorously" if Washington deploys such a system.

## Other side of globalisation coin is illegal immigration

PARIS, Dec 21: Globalisation may have become the buzz word of the year 2000, but behind all the rhetoric about eliminating world poverty lies a harsher reality for millions in the developing world, reports AFP.

No amount of fine sentiment can persuade people in the poorest countries that the world is coming to them and that good times are just around the corner.

An International Labour Organisation report, "Workers Without Frontiers - The Impact of Globalisation on International Migration" estimates that the number of migrants around the world is currently in excess of 120 million and predicts the figure will grow in the 21st century.

Certainly with the imminent expansion of the European Union eastwards, there is

already an increased flow of migrants eager to share the rewards ahead of time.

For many still believe that the key to personal prosperity lies, not in the opportunities for increased trade with the developed world, but actually by getting up and heading for the bright lights of the big cities in Europe and the United States.

In their thousands they still pour across borders in the hope of a new life and untold riches, many spending their meagre life savings on the journey and often failing to reach their destination, returning home defeated, destitute and disillusioned.

And there is no-one easier to exploit than an underclass of illegal immigrants living in constant fear of arrest and deportation, so that the traffic in human goods

becomes doubly lucrative -- cashing in on a desire to escape to more wealthy surroundings and then, once they are there, by forcing them to work for slave wages in appalling conditions.

On the outskirts of every large city in Europe are to be found ranks of sad prostitutes from north and west Africa, from the Balkans and the satellite countries of the former Soviet Union, lining up to ply their trade and having no control over the money they earn.

In the heart of many European capitals, too, backstreet sweatshops operating on low-paid illegal immigrant labour turn out garments that sell for more than the people who put them together could earn in a year.

It is a problem of global proportions: Mexicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans heading for the United States, north Africans swimming across the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain, Albanians, Kurds, Iranians, Iraqis and Turks crossing the Adriatic in barely seaworthy boats to Italy. And boat people in Asia, African migrants heading for Europe add to the constant waves of human cargo from China and the Indian sub-continent, many bound for Britain, the promised land now reaping the harvest of its colonial past.

"Trafficking is a very lucrative exercise," Peter Stalker, the author of the ILO report, noted. "An organised trip over an East European border, or a boat trip from Morocco to Spain would be worth about 500 dollars."



US President Bill Clinton (C-from back), flanked by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (R) and US Security Advisor Sandy Berger (L), face members of the Israeli and Palestinian negotiation teams during a "working session" on Wednesday at the White House in Washington, DC with a view to end the violence in the Middle East. Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat is seated (3rd L) while Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami (3rd R). Others are unidentified. --AFP photo

## Clinton outlines 'parameters' of possible peace deal: Ami

Palestinians to persist with UN observer force resolution

JERUSALEM, Dec 21: US President Bill Clinton has outlined to Israeli and Palestinian negotiators "parameters" of a proposed peace deal, most of which Israel considers acceptable for purposes of discussion, Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami said today, reports AFP.

President Clinton presented us with the parameters of an accord; that is to say, a possible margin of manoeuvre on the different unsettled issues, and we consider most of them to be an acceptable basis for discussion," Ben Ami told Israeli military radio from Washington.

Ben Ami also said Clinton had expressed a desire to complete current discussions by January 10, which is 10 days before his term as president ends.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have been meeting since Tuesday at Bolling Air Force base near Washington in an effort to find sufficient common ground to resume the moribund peace process.

And on Wednesday, Clinton met with Ben Ami and top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat at the White House.

Meanwhile, a proposal to dispatch a UN observer force to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, voted down in the UN Security Council late Monday, could be reintroduced within several days, a senior Palestinian official said yesterday.

"That's a possibility," Permanent Observer of Palestine at the UN Nasser al-Kidwa told reporters. "From our point of view, in a few days we will be ready to make the necessary conclusion."

The draft resolution, calling for deployment of a United Nations observer force to protect Palestinians, received eight votes in its favor with seven abstentions, one vote shy of the nine required for passage.

Al-Kidwa said that the exact timing of the resolution's re-emergence would depend both on developments in the Middle East -- where eleven weeks of Israeli-Palestinian violence has left nearly 350 people dead -- and events in Washington, where negotiators from both parties met today with US President Bill Clinton.

"If developments on both fronts would warrant such steps (that is, retabulating the resolution), we then believe that we stand (a) much bigger chance at least to get the necessary majority and, we hope, much more," he said.

When asked about reports that the United States -- which, as a permanent member of the Security Council, has veto power -- would veto the resolution unless Israel gave the green light for its passage, al-Kidwa rejected this notion out of hand.

"Israeli consent is not needed," he insisted. "Israel's prior approval of any action by the Security Council is a shameful thing to suggest."

"In any case, the US position alone will not be reason enough for us not to try to come back to the Security Council," al-Kidwa added. "Our next step is going back to the council and, in light of the result, we will decide on further action within the United Nations system."

## Tigers pound navy, police posts: 13 killed

COLOMBO, Dec 21: Tamil Tiger guerrillas pounded a key detachment in northeastern Sri Lanka today, killing five sailors as eight other people died in clashes elsewhere, officials said, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas fired mortar bombs at the navy facility at Salapapairu, which left five sailors dead and wounded two others.

In the second incident, the Tiger rebels used small arms to attack a police post in the Amapara district, killing one paramilitary policeman and wounding another officer, officials said.

They said police repulsed the attack, killing at least seven Tiger rebels.

## Guam on alert amid Laden's threat of attack

AUCKLAND, Dec 21: The US territory of Guam was on alert today after authorities received an e-mail threatening a chemical attack on the island's international airport, Governor Carl Gutierrez said in a statement, reports AFP.

Guam International Airport Authority and the Governor's Office had received the e-mail threat claiming to represent wanted Saudi dissident and billionaire Osama bin Laden.

Bin Laden, who is living as a guest of the Taliban Islamic militia in Afghanistan, is wanted by US authorities in connection with the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

"The attack on Guam will take place on Christmas Eve, with deploying (nerve gas) V agents and hazardous bioagents. The main targets are the hotels, restaurants and public places," the e-mail said.

## Sharif's exile in KSA to last 10-yr: Musharraf

ISLAMABAD, Dec 21: Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf said yesterday former prime minister Nawaz Sharif would remain in exile for 10 years, reports Reuters.

Sharif, ousted by Musharraf in a bloodless coup in October last year, was freed from jail 10 days ago and sent to Saudi Arabia.

Musharraf also said, in a state radio and television broadcast, he had received Saudi guarantees that Sharif would not take part in politics or speak against the Pakistani government during his exile.

A government statement before Sharif was freed from a fort near Islamabad on December 10 and put on a Saudi plane, said only that "Sharif and his family have been exiled to Saudi Arabia," without specifying the period of the banishment.

Wednesday's speech by Musharraf was the first formal

confirmation of the exile period.

Musharraf said sentences of life imprisonment and hard labour handed to Sharif on charges of corruption and attempting to hijack a plane had been remitted or converted into 10 years' exile. A ban on Sharif holding public office would remain in force, he said.

Musharraf said Sharif was given clemency following a request from Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, but did not give details.

"I assure you that we have guarantees that he will not take part in politics or speak against the government," Musharraf said.

He dismissed speculation by newspapers and political commentators that the clemency would lead to political changes, including the possible establishment of an interim government to oversee elections.



Ann Veneman (C) accepts her appointment as Secretary of Agriculture as President-elect George W. Bush (L) and Donald Evans (R), Secretary of Commerce, look on at a news conference at The University of Texas in Austin, Texas on Wednesday. --AFP photo

## Clinton urges Nepal, Bhutan to resolve refugee problem

KATHMANDU, Dec 21: At the end of his administration US President Bill Clinton appears to be putting pressure on Nepal and Bhutan to resolve their decade-old refugee problem, reports DPA.

The English language daily Kathmandu Post reported today that President Clinton has written to Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala urging both Nepal and Bhutan to find a solution to their refugee problem.

Nepal and Bhutan have held nine rounds of futile high-level official talks to resolve the problem and President Clinton's letter comes ahead of the next round slated to begin in the Nepalese

capital on December 24.

Clinton's letter was delivered to the Nepalese Prime Minister on Tuesday, the paper said.

Talks between Nepal and Bhutan have been bogged down on the question of verification of some 100,000 Bhutanese refugees living in UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) run camps in east Nepal.

Early this month, two senior US officials, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Karl Inderfurth, and Assistant Secretary for Refugee Affairs Julia V. Taft, visited Nepal and Bhutan and presented a compromise proposal to both sides.

## Peres announces candidacy for PM

JERUSALEM, Dec 21: Israeli elder statesman and Nobel Peace laureate Shimon Peres has officially announced he intends to run for prime minister, setting the stage for a three-way clash with Prime Minister Ehud Barak and ultra-nationalist Ariel Sharon, reports AFP.

"I have decided to be a candidate but evidently I could not be without the support of the Meretz party," he told Israeli public radio late Wednesday.

His announcement came after a meeting of the head of the left-wing Meretz party, Yossi Sarid, who he said had backed the indefatigable 77-years-old Peres, currently minister of regional cooperation.

It also came despite warnings he could cause a split Israeli peace vote that would usher in Sharon, the burly ex-general reviled by the Palestinians for triggering the eleven weeks of Israeli-Palestinian violence has left nearly 350 people dead.

## Rebels kill 2 Bhutanese in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 21: Indian separatist militants have shot dead two Bhutanese nationals and wounded 16 others in the northeastern Indian state of Assam close to the Bhutanese border, police said today, reports AFP.

A police spokesman said heavily armed militants on Wednesday ambushed a crowded bus owned by the Bhutanese government near Badiguri, 250 km west of the state capital Guwahati.

Militants of the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) stopped the bus and fired indiscriminately on the passengers, resulting in the death of two Bhutanese nationals, G.M. Srivastava, additional police chief of Assam told AFP.

## Queen of Sheba legend comes back to life in Yemen

MARIB, Yemen, Dec 21: The legendary kingdom of Sheba in the Yemeni province of Marib, dating back 3,000 years, is coming back to life with the restoration of the ancient Throne of Balqis, which one archaeologist believes could become one of the world's great tourist sites, reports AFP.

"Marib" was for centuries the political, economic and religious centre of the once mighty kingdom of Sheba, the ancient Yemeni civilisation made famous by the queen of Sheba, Balqis, referred to in the Torah, the Bible and the Koran," said Burkhard Vogt, head of a German excavation team.

Of the civilisation founded in the 10th century BC and which reached its peak between the eighth and first centuries BC, the only vestige to have been unearthed so far is the throne.

The site was opened to the public in November after 12 years of German-financed restoration led by Vogt's team.

## Nepal bows to Chinese pressure to repatriate Tibetans

BEIJING, Dec 21: Nepal has begun repatriating Tibetans fleeing Tibet under pressure from China to tighten border security in the wake of the Karmapa Lama's escape, a watchdog group said today, reports AFP.

The London-based Tibet Information Network said it received unofficial reports that at least 60 Tibetan refugees who reached the border areas of Nepal after escaping across the Himalayas were returned to police on the Chinese side.

The Nepalese government has also intensified security on the Nepal-India border, and has arrested several Tibetans trying to return to Tibet from northern India, where the Tibetan government in exile is located.

Nepal has been used for years as a transit for Tibetans travelling from China to India.

## Jiang warns media in Macau not to be 'irresponsible'

MACAU, Dec 21: Chinese President Jiang Zemin Thursday again raised hackles as he warned the media not to be irresponsible as the end of a three-day visit marking the first anniversary of Macau's return to Chinese rule, reports AFP.

On a brief visit to Hac Sa beach on Macau's Coloane island, the Chinese leader said press freedom did not mean the media could act irresponsibly and ignore its social responsibility.

"Both press freedom and social responsibility should be put in perspective. Being responsible for society, does not mean there is no press freedom," he told journalists covering his visit.

Jiang's remarks followed an earlier swipe at the press when he said the media should not only value freedom of speech but should have more respect for their social duties.