

International

# Israel sets up more road blocks beyond West Bank 'green line'

## Clinton still scrambling for ME peace deal

JERUSALEM, Jan 7: The Israeli army set up five more road blocks overnight beyond the "green line" that separates the Jewish state from the occupied West Bank, a military source said, reports AFP.

The measure was taken "for security reasons" to assist Israeli troops and give better protection to Jewish settlers, many of whom are based in the area, the source said.

The Palestinians have expressed anger over the road blocks, which they see as signs that Israel plans to draw a border unilaterally between itself and a future Palestinian state minus areas of heavy Jewish settlements.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has frequently cited the possibility of a unilateral separation in case slow-moving Israeli-Palestinian negotiations collapse completely.

The plan would mean Israeli evacuation of more isolated Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories and the annexation of those near Israel proper.

In a statement, a settlers' group praised the army "for reinforcing

their security."

Palestinian international cooperation minister Nabil Shaath, cited Sunday by the Israeli press, said that according to his office's experts the road blocks go beyond the green line that separated Israel from the Jordanian-controlled West Bank before Israel captured the region in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

One road block was moved from Makkabim northwest of Jerusalem close to the Palestinian village of Harbata several kilometres away after attacks on the road, the army said.

After a first road block was moved Saturday top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat said the army should move it back to its former position.

"Israel is trying to set up de facto situations on the ground by establishing settlements and checkpoints. These gestures do not carry any weight," he told AFP.

In Washington, President Bill Clinton laboured Saturday to mid-way a Middle East peace deal amid growing Israeli and Palestinian pessimism that a final accord can be reached before he leaves office

January 20.

A White House official said that the US leader's Middle East trouble-shooter, Dennis Ross, would be in touch Saturday with Israeli envoy Gilead Sher before the latter leaves Washington.

And Washington planned contacts with both sides throughout the weekend in view of potentially laying out a next step towards peace early next week, possibly as early as Sunday, said national security spokesman P.J. Crowley.

That's when Clinton makes a speech in New York detailing his accomplishments in eight years of strenuous diplomatic efforts and outlines the remaining challenges, officials said.

"Our intent over the next two weeks is to take this process as far as we can," Crowley said late Friday after Sher met with Clinton at the White House to deliver Israel's formal acceptance -- with reservations -- of Clinton's blueprint for peace, which he handed the parties last month.

But in what may be the clearest indication that the clock is running

on the US president's efforts, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Saturday he was prepared to keep negotiating with Israel when President-elect George W. Bush takes office.

"We will continue (with talks) at the same rhythm as with Clinton, who wants to seal something before his departure. We will continue with Bush," Arafat said, stressing his side was "doing its best" to reach a peace deal.

Still, "we are deploying all our efforts (to reach an accord) because we do not want to be accused of stalling," Arafat told journalists before leaving Oman after a one-day visit.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has reportedly considered putting the entire peace process on hold until Bush takes office, even though a peace deal may be his only hope of defeating right-winger Ariel Sharon in a February 6 election.



Palestinians carry the body of 19-year-old Arigh Saber al-Jabali during her funeral in the West Bank town of Hebron on Saturday. Al-Jabali and her sister-in-law were shot by Israeli troops on Friday, as they hung clothes on the balcony of their home, in what the Israeli army said was in response to an armed attack on their position at the nearby Beit Hagai Jewish settlement. Her sister-in-law was injured and remained in hospital. -AFP photo



**Prince Charles breaks shoulder bone in fall**

LONDON, Jan 7: Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, broke a bone in his shoulder on Saturday after falling off his horse during a fox hunt, a spokeswoman for St James's Palace, his London residence, said, reports AFP.

The 52-year-old prince was thrown to the ground when his horse took an "unexpected jump" during a ride with the Mey Nell Hunt in Derbyshire, central England, the spokeswoman said.

An X-ray revealed he had broken a small bone in his left shoulder, she added. Doctors decided the injury would heal itself and put his arm in a sling.

The prince was on Saturday evening said to be comfortable and resting back at his home in Highgrove, central England.

The accident happened mid-Saturday. The prince fell awkwardly and, at first, believed he had dislocated his shoulder, St James's Palace said.

## Britain to unveil new agency to supervise docs

LONDON, Jan 7: Britain's government will unveil a new agency to supervise doctors amid public fears after the discovery that serial killer Harold Shipman might have murdered almost 300 of his patients, newspapers reported today, says Reuters.

Shipman was jailed for life last year after being convicted of killing 15 elderly patients, but a study of the former Manchester doctor's records revealed on Friday that he may have killed up to 297 patients over a 20-year period.

Health Secretary Alan Milburn is expected to unveil the new body to restore public faith in the medical profession the National Clinical Assessment Authority on Monday, the Sunday Telegraph reported.

The agency with the power to suspend and dismiss doctors, which will replace the General Medical Council as the main guardian of patient safety, will monitor standards and identify doctors accused of negligence or deliberately harming patients.

"This new body will be able to pick up the warning signs at an early stage before they turn into scandals or disasters. We want to do everything we can to prevent something like Shipman ever happening again," an aide to Milburn was quoted in the Sunday Telegraph as saying.

The new authority will investigate any doctors whose annual appraisal exposed serious weaknesses. It will also carry out checks on those judged to be deficient during hospital clinical audits.

## Senegal holds referendum on new constitution

DAKAR, Jan 7: Senegal was holding a referendum today on a new constitution, nine months after ending 40 years of socialist rule in favour of an economically liberal administration struggling to fulfil its election promises, reports AFP.

The West African country, still in the throes of transition, is due to hold legislative polls a year after electing veteran opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade as president last March.

There was no doubt that the 2.5 million voters would vote "yes" to the constitution as all the major parties are in favour of the text, which is opposed only by a few small groupings. The only thing in doubt is turnout, which the presidential side hopes will be "massive".

The proposed constitution transfers some of the president's powers to the prime minister, giving him some powers of decree.

The new law will also shorten the presidential term of office from seven to five years, renewable only once, and allows the president to dissolve the national assembly, still dominated by his socialist foes.



Congress (I) party activists burn an election manifesto of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during a demonstration in New Delhi yesterday to protest against the "false and deceiving" manifesto of the BJP-led coalition government. The demonstrators claimed that the government's decision to close down several small-scale industries in the city and to ban hand-pulled carts and cycle-rickshaws, reflected its anti-poor policies, contrary to the impression given in the party's manifesto. -AFP photo

# Congress confirms Bush victory

WASHINGTON, Jan 7: George W. Bush was officially declared winner of the 2000 US presidential election Saturday after Electoral College votes were counted and certified by Congress in a contentious session featuring a walkout by black lawmakers, reports AFP.

Democratic Vice President Al Gore, who won a majority of the popular vote in the bitterly contested November 7 election, announced the result in his capacity as US Senate president, giving Bush 271 electoral votes to his 266, with one abstention.

Bush's running mate Dick Cheney was declared vice president-elect by the same number of votes over Democrat Joe Lieberman.

"I am honoured," Bush said in Texas as the lawmakers gathered. "It's a humbling experience to become the president of this great land. And I want to reiterate what I said before: I'm going to be the president of everybody, whether they supported me or not. And people need to know that; people need to know that this is going to be an administration that will make decisions on what's best for America."

The 538 electoral votes were cast December 18 in the 50 state capitals and the District of Columbia, the federal capital. Each state's vote was

read and counted in alphabetical order in the joint session of Congress.

A dozen members of the Congressional Black Caucus walked out of the mostly-empty House chamber as the votes were tallied after Gore rejected their contest to the 25 electoral votes from the southeastern state of Florida.

Gore was the first presidential candidate in 112 years to win the popular vote and lose the electoral vote, coming within a few hundred votes of winning Florida, where victory would have allowed him to lock up the entire US presidential election.

But the vice president was forced to concede the November 7 election some five weeks later, when the US Supreme Court refused to allow a recount of contested ballots in several disputed Florida localities.

He became the first US vice president to preside over vote counting, sealing his own defeat, since Richard Nixon in 1961 certified that his opponent, John Kennedy, had won the presidency.

Ironically, it was Gore who overruled challenges to the contested vote in Florida raised by members of the House of Representatives, because objections had not been signed by a member of the Senate.

At a news conference after Saturday's event, Representative Carrie

Meek, a Florida Democrat, said: "All that's left for us now as the Congressional Black Caucus and as citizens of this country is to exercise our First Amendment right while we still have it and before it is further undermined by a politically dominated Supreme Court."

And congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson from Dallas, Texas said she was still "waiting for Mr. Bush to reach out to the Congressional Black Caucus."

"If he truly wants to reach out, and make this a priority -- voting reform -- then we can truly work with him," she said.

"We are chagrined, unhappy, and frustrated today, because we know who won, by the voters, to go to the White House. We will continue to object to the election procedures until they are corrected."

Earlier, Peter Deutsch, another Democratic representative from Florida, was ruled out of order when he called for a quorum.

In all, 13 Democratic representatives -- most of them members of the black caucus -- objected to Florida's votes. However, none was able to gain support among the 100 senators for an objection to delay the count.

## Electronic eyes to ease traffic congestion

SINGAPORE, Jan 7: Singaporeans can look forward to less congestion on the road once surveillance cameras are installed at 100 traffic junctions across the island-state in the next 18 months, the Sunday Times reported today, reports AFP.

The Land Transport Authority has embarked on a 6.3 million Singapore dollar (3.6 million US) to install surveillance cameras at selected road junctions to capture images of traffic conditions which will be available online, the report said.

The cameras will aid traffic operators to spot indiscriminate parking or loading and unloading activities which can block roads.

## Saudi boys lashed for chasing girls

RIYADH, Jan 7: At least 20 teenage boys have been given 30 lashes each for harassing schoolgirls in the Saudi holy city of Medina, in a crackdown on young troublemakers, a newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

The Commission for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice, which safeguards and polices Islamic morals in the kingdom, had ordered the recent punishments, Arab News said.

Medina governate has set up a separate committee to deal with the problem of boys chasing girls and granted it wide powers to "mete out severe and quick punishment."

A similar committee had been set up in Mecca to tackle the troublemakers, the daily said, and offenders would receive 30 lashes in public. Repeat offenders would be lashed again and jailed.

Arab News added that during December 350 young men had been arrested in shopping malls in the city of Taif in the mountains above Mecca. Forty youths had been detained by security officials for "teasing" women in a single evening.

Saudi Arabia's strict interpretation of Islam includes amputation of thieves' right hands, stonings for adultery and floggings for drinking alcohol.

People found guilty of murder, rape, apostasy, armed robbery, drug trafficking or repeated drug offences are often decapitated by sword.

## Thai election results delayed indefinitely

BANGKOK, Jan 7: The release of Thailand's election results has been indefinitely delayed due to a host of technical errors, mishaps and complaints over the counting process, the official Election Commission (EC) said today, reports AFP.

Vote count estimates released by media groups said Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai party may win a simple majority in the 500-seat House of Representatives.

Thaksin shied away from declaring himself the winner Sunday, saying he would wait until the official count is released, but the EC's revelation suggests it could be days before he can deliver his victory speech.

"We can't announce any official count and can't say when the official count result will be released because there were many complaints, and objections in many constituencies," said commissioner Yuwatur Gamoljev.

Apart from graft allegations, there were difficulties in abiding by strict new rules laid out in the 1997 anti-corruption constitution that applied to a lower house ballot for

the first time this weekend. Ballots from the rainy southern regions had arrived wet, others were late, and some officials forgot to apply the official sticker on the ballot sheet, he said.

Serious irregularities such as rampant vote-buying had forced counting to be stopped in six constituencies with dates set for re-elections later this month.

Exit polls after ballot boxes closed in Saturday's election indicated Thai Rak Thai had won as many as 230 seats against about 118 for the ruling Democrats.

But rough tallies of vote counts monitored by the Nation press group and iTV network said Thai Rak Thai may be able to form a government in its own right, holding between 245 and 256 seats against about 124 for the Democrats.

Regardless of the delays in the release of the official result, Thai Rak Thai was believed to be working on signing up coalition partners to ensure it had a comfortable majority in parliament.

## Indian investigators hunt for 11 'missing' people in West Bengal

CALCUTTA, Jan 7: A five-member federal government team arrived in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal today to investigate the alleged murders of 11 workers of the state's opposition party, reports AFP.

Followers of the state's ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) allegedly killed the workers of the opposition Trinamool Congress on Thursday night during a clash in the Chhota Angrya village, about 140 miles west of the state capital Calcutta.

But the state police said they had so far not found clear evidence of the alleged murders as no corpses had been recovered.

The incident had prompted an angry demand by Trinamool Congress leader and federal railway Minister Mamata Banerjee for an independent probe.

West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya said the allegations were trumped up by the opposition.

Mamata Banerjee arrived in the

village on Saturday afternoon to lead the hunt for the bodies of the 11 missing people.

The searchers could find only pieces of human skull, a tooth and some blood-soaked rags.

Displaying bullet cartridge shells found on the village grounds, Banerjee said there was clear evidence of the carnage.

"It is the rule of jungle prevailing in the state. I will give these bullets to the federal government to prove how the police were also involved in the killing," Banerjee said.

A senior police official admitted there was evidence of violence as they had also found bullet shells on the village grounds.

"We could not probe further as there was seething tension in the area," Additional Police Superintendent S S Panda told AFP.

He said the police were still combing nearby forests in the hope that they would be able to recover the missing bodies.

## Ghana's new parliament sworn in

ACCRA, Jan 7: Ghana's new parliament was sworn in today ahead of the inauguration of John Kufuor as president to succeed longtime ruler Jerry Rawlings, reports AFP.

The 200 members, including 100 from Kufuor's New Patriotic Party (NPP), jointly took the oath of office in a ceremony at Parliament House that was broadcast on national television.

The lawmakers, many draped in traditional Kente cloth, swore their allegiance to the republic and constitution of Ghana before taking the oath of office as members of parliament.

The body earlier unanimously elected Peter Ala Adjetey, a lawyer and former NPP chairman, as speaker.

Rawlings' National Democratic Congress (NDC) saw its comfortable 133-seat share of parliament shrink to 92 in last month's historic elections that swept the opposition NPP to power.

The eight other seats in the incoming parliament were won by smaller parties and independents, one of whom is outgoing foreign minister Victor Gbeho.

He stood as an independent to prevent a win by the NPP candidate against a particularly unpopular NDC MP in a Volta Region constituency.

The landmark elections in the west African country mark the first time since independence in 1957 that Ghana will see a transfer of power from one elected president to another.

## 19 rhinos die in nine months in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Jan 7: At least 19 rhinos have died in the past nine months due to poaching and natural causes, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation of Nepal officials said today, reports AFP.

"Of the 19 who died, six were killed by poachers while the rest died of natural causes," assistant ecologist Narendra Babu Pradhan said.

"Poachers killed four rhinos by shooting and two by other weapons," he said.

Rhinos are killed mainly for their horns while their hides, meat and hoofs are used for various medicinal purposes.

The number of the endangered one-horned rhinos which are found only in Nepal, India and Bhutan is put at 1,800, according to World Wildlife Fund estimates.

# Fear and furore escalate over uranium weapons in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Jan 7: Fear and furore escalated in Europe this weekend over possible after-effects of depleted uranium shells fired by NATO in the Balkans, with reports of a growing number of cancer victims among former personnel there, reports AFP.

The head of a UN team which found depleted uranium at eight sites which NATO planes hit with the controversial depleted uranium (DU) ordnance in 1999 has warned that children and landmine clearance teams were particularly at risk, the BBC reported.

The team urged that the targeted sites be sealed off. But this has not yet happened, a spokesman for NATO-led peacekeepers confirmed Saturday.

NATO's highest decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council, will meet on Tuesday to discuss the crisis.

Seven Italian soldiers and one Italian civilian, five Belgian soldiers, two Dutch soldiers, a Portuguese soldier and a Czech military pilot had died from either cancer or leukaemia since returning from the region.

Four French soldiers and four Belgian troops also contracted cancers.

The Spanish daily El Mundo said eight cases of cancer -- two of them fatal -- had emerged in recent months among Spanish soldiers and aid workers who had served in Bosnia or Kosovo.

But the World Health Organisation said Saturday it had found no post-war increase in leukaemia cases among civilians in Kosovo.

Uranium is used in DU munitions to make bullets or missiles denser so they can cut through armour. The material gives off relatively low levels of radiation, but can be dangerous if ingested, inhaled in dust or if it enters the body through cuts or wounds.

NATO Secretary-General George Robertson ordered a detailed investigation of potentially contaminated Bosnian sites following calls from Belgium, France, Italy and Portugal for further information on DU projectiles and their potential health hazard.

Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres was reported on Saturday as casting doubt on information coming from NATO on DU

ordnance. "The moment has come no longer fully to trust others, as we have been doing hitherto," he told journalists on Friday.

A study by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) in November found that in Kosovo eight of 11 sites chosen from among 112 for testing were slightly radioactive.

But Major Steven Shappell, chief spokesman for Kosovo's NATO-led peacekeeping force, said on Saturday the potentially contaminated sites had not been marked or sealed off despite the UNEP recommendation they be sealed pending further tests.

The Pentagon has said no adverse effects had been found in US personnel who handled the ammunition and rejected calls for a moratorium on the use of DU shells, still being used by US peacekeepers in Kosovo.

While radiation levels were not thought dangerous, there was a potential danger if children or mine-clearance teams inhaled dust from the weapons, the UNEP team leader Pekka Haavisto said.

"If you explode mines in the areas where there is DU ammunition

in the ground, you probably also explode again some DU ammunition and inhale this type of dust," Haavisto said.

"So you cannot totally exclude the possibility that people can sometimes suffer serious health effects from this type of ammunition," he added.

"It can happen that children are playing in those areas, they pick up some remnants," he added.

But the World Health Organisation said it had found no post-war increase in leukaemia cases in Kosovo and no evidence of a link between the disease and uranium shells fired by US jets during the six-week conflict which ended in June 1999.

Erik Shouten, head of the WHO mission to the province, said his team had consulted Pristina University Hospital, the only one in Kosovo to which leukaemia cases would normally be referred, and found no increase in cases since the bombing.

Meanwhile Greece has asked Sweden to take the lead in Europe to clarify dangers posed by DU ammunition in the Balkans. Swe-

den currently holds the rotating European Union presidency.

Greece's Defence Minister Akis Tsohatzopoulos asked Bjorn von Sydow, his Swedish counterpart, to broach the issue at the next EU defence ministers' session.

Germany says tests carried out on its veterans over the last 12 months have revealed no radiation-linked illness.

But pressure mounted on the British government to screen Balkan veterans for cancer as it emerged the defence ministry has known about the risks of DU weapons at least since the Gulf War 10 years ago.

The ministry insisted the risks were minimal.

A spokesman said junior defence minister John Spellar had told the House of Commons last November that the ministry was aware early in the 1990-91 conflict that oxide dust from the weapons did pose a limited health risk.

Hopes of peace talks increased after Solheim first met Prabhakaran on November 1, during which the rebel leader expressed his willing-

## Norwegian envoy arrives in Colombo today to kickstart peace process

COLOMBO, Jan 7: Norwegian special peace envoy Erik Solheim will arrive in Colombo on Monday to meet Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Tamil Tiger leader V. Prabhakaran in a fresh effort to break a deadlock over the start of new peace talks, reports AFP.

Solheim was expected to meet Kumaratunga and Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar to sound them about his new proposals to break the deadlock over starting a new round of peace talks with the rebels, the state-run Sunday Observer said.

He was later expected to travel to the rebel-held northern Wanni region to hold a second meeting with Prabhakaran.

The newspaper reported that Solheim, who was in New Delhi last week to hold talks with Indian Leaders to kickstart a new Sri Lankan peace process, later visited London to meet Anton Balasingham, spokesman for the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Hopes of peace talks increased after Solheim first met Prabhakaran on November 1, during which the rebel leader expressed his willing-

ness to hold unconditional peace talks with Colombo.

The LTTE subsequently demanded the government declare a ceasefire, which was rejected by Colombo.

But the rebels later declared a month-long unilateral ceasefire, which was also rejected by the government, stating that it was an attempt by the rebels to retrain and regroup.

The government said the two sides could begin unconditional peace talks during which an agreement over a ceasefire could be reached.

Subsequently the conflict has escalated in northern Jaffna Peninsula, with government troops capturing large tracts of territory from the rebels.

For its part Colombo reiterated its stand on the eve of Solheim's visit, with Minister for Media Anura Priyadarshana Yapa stating that the government would consider the LTTE's peace proposal for a ceasefire only after the two sides enter into a fresh round of negotiations.