

Riot police clash with protesters in front of the Polytechnic in Athens on Saturday night. Marchers hurled garbage at riot police who responded with tear gas as the Greek capital saw more protests yesterday, two weeks after the police killing of a teenager that sparked

Israel threatens major Gaza offensive

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel threatened yesterday to launch a major offensive against the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip as violence simmered around the impoverished territory days after the end of a truce with the Islamists.

Senior defence officials said after the weekly cabinet meeting that Israel was preparing a "response" to continuing rocket strikes from the besieged Palestinian coastal strip.

"We are preparing our response to the Hamas threat, with the decision yet to be taken on the timing and the scale," Amos Gilad, a senior adviser to Defence Secretary Ehud Barak, told public radio after ministers debated whether to launch a major ground incursion.

"We have to prepare for it carefully, like for a surgical operation," he said.

Earlier, a senior Israeli defence official told AFP that a major military confrontation in the territory was unavoidable after militants again targeted southern Israel

"It is obvious where we are heading in Gaza. The situation is intolerable but only thing that is deciding when events will unfold," the defence official said on condition of anonymity.

Olmert, the caretaker prime minister until a new government has been formed after snap elections called for February, said at the start of the meeting that "a responsible government is not eager to launch war but does not avoid it either. Therefore we will take the necessary steps."

Tensions around Gaza have risen steadily since Friday, when Hamas said it would not renew a six-month truce with

Since then, Gaza militants have launched several dozen rockets, causing some damage and slightly wounding a handful of civilians, and Israel has retaliated with air strikes, killing one militant and wounding three other Palestinians.

Two Israeli ministers who have campaigned for weeks for the army to oust the able to score a decisive victory against the Islamist masters of Gaza renewed their Islamists.

calls for tougher action.

"The second Israel comes under fire clear. The army's considerations are the we should fire back intensively to reduce their capabilities," said Trade and Industry Minister Eli Yishai of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party.

Deputy Prime Minister Haim Ramon insisted that it was now time for the Israeli army to end the control over Gaza that Hamas has enjoyed since ousting forces loyal to Western-backed Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in June last

"What we want is to end the Hamas regime in Gaza," Ramon told public radio. "The ceasefire has strengthened Hamas and weakened us both militarily and diplomatically, and therefore we must draw the conclusions and change our

Observers say the government is wary of launching a major offensive ahead of the early parliamentary elections called for February for fear that it would not be

Greek violence rages ahead of budget vote

AFP, Athens

nationwide unrest.

Athens as protests sparked by the fatal shooting Europe. of a teenager fused with political tension hours from the Greek parliament's budget vote yesterday.

extended deep into the night after hundreds of nearly five percent of its gross domestic product. people gathered late Saturday in the capital's shooting of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos.

In Athens, protesters occupying the Sunday. Athens Polytechnic university hurled firebombs and rocks at police who responded with tear gas, while clashes there and around the country saw police cars, a government building and banks targeted with the unrest newspaper. spreading to the port city of Piraeus and the island of Crete.

Unions piled extra pressure on the rightwing government ahead of the parliamentary budget vote.

Under-fire Prime Minister Costas Research.

Karamanlis' administration wants to reduce Greece's national debt -- which this year stands Street violence raged into a third week in at 93.9 percent of GDP, one of the highest in

The conservative leader said last week that Greece expects to pay about 12 billion euros (16 billion dollars) in 2009 to service its debt, Clashes between youths and police amounting to over 19 percent of its revenue and

The depth of anti-government sentiment Exarchia district, at the site of the December 6 witnessed over the past fortnight has also begun to bite in opinion polls published

> Pollsters Public Issue have the socialist opposition taking a lead on 38.5 percent as against Karamanlis' New Democracy, with 32.5 percent, according to the liberal Kathimerini

> Socialist leader Georges Papandreou's approval rating has also overtaken that of Karamanlis, the poll said.

In the centre-left Vima, a similar pattern of voting intentions was recorded by Kapa

Saudis deny Qaeda plot against hajj

Saudi Arabia has denied it report that it had advance intelligence of a plot against Mecca pilgrims, a newspaper reported yesterday.

The Arab News daily quoted interior ministry spokesman General Mansur al-Turki as rejecting a report in the USbased Internet publication Middle East Times citing American intelligence officials.

That report said massive reported. security arrangements for the hajj earlier this month focused on intelligence that al-Qaeda had planned to attack Mecca and the more than 2.4 million participants in the annual Muslim pilgrimage.

"We didn't launch any huge counterterrorism operation," Turki said, calling the Middle

robat peir from Archanistan

East Times report "incorrect," Arab News reported.

The Middle East Times, foiled an al-Qaeda attack on sister publication of this year's hajj, rejecting a US Washington's conservative Washington Times, reported on December 16 that the massive security at the hajj was because of intelligence "that al-Qaeda planned to launch a bloody assault on Muslim pilgrims taking part in the annual pilgrimage."

> Turki called the security operations in Mecca normal for the hajj, Arab News

"This is not something new It's normal, we do it all the time," he said.

He also denied the Middle East Times report that the Saudis had launched preemptive raids against suspected al-Qaeda cells three months before the hajj, saying that "no such arrests were made."

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'Sonia, Shahrukh among 50 most powerful people'

PTI, New York

Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan have been ranked among the 50 most powerful people in the world by the US-based magazine 'Newsweek' in a list topped by President-elect Barack Obama.

Pakistan army chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, who controls the the country's nuclear weapons, is placed 20th on the list of the global "power elite" at the beginning of 2009 in the magazine's January issue.

Obama, who scripted history by becoming the first black-American to be voted to the White House, is followed by Chinese President Hu Jintao, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, German Chancellor Angela Markel and powerful Russian Prime MinisterVladimirPutin.



File photo shows Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdallahi celebrating after Mauritania's historic presidential election victory on March 26, 2007 in Nouakchott. Mauritania's military junta freed ousted president Sidi Ould from house arrest yesterday after weeks of international pressure.

Deposed Mauritanian president freed

AP, NOUAKCHOTT, Mauritania president's chief of staff, said

The deposed president of the desert-encircled African nation of Mauritania was set under house arrest.

But those in his inner circle said Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi is still under surveil- surveillance. lance. They pointed to the security forces posted inside demanded his staff wake the his home in the country's capital and the soldiers still

patrolling his native village.

soldiers woke Abdallahi's family shortly after 3 a.m., banging violently on the door of his home in Lemden, free Sunday after 41/2 months a village 150 miles (240 kilometers) from the capital where the military had placed him under 24-hour

The security forces 70-year-old president, who was not told where he was going and was not allowed to Kaber Ould Hamoudi, the be accompanied by his family

BJP-led NDA banking on post-polls allies

But still it suffers from friendless in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh

PTI, New Delhi

Desperate to win new allies feels that it was on a stronger in the post-poll scenario. ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, to its fate of being 'friendless' in key Tamil Nadu and and instead take the support ing on post-poll allies and a "nota trusted ally". new strategy for Uttar

and feels that the just con- and other parties. cluded Assembly elections in five states was a "drawn predict how BSP or for that Congressis nowhere".

wicket than the ruling UPA company with the Left parties

In an interview to PTI, JD(U) President Sharad Yadav, The NDA will be having a who has recently been made down to NDA and UPA," he meeting in the new year after acting convenor of NDA, said said. the BJP National Executive the Third Force has no future meet to draw strategies ahead as BSP supremo Mayawati was of the parliamentary polls not ready to align with the Left

matter even Ram Vilas The opposition alliance Paswan-led LJP would behave

Yadav said in the olden the BJP-led NDA has resigned whose "blunder" was to part days it was the job of JD(U) to forge unity among Third Front partners. But now Left is mak-Andhra Pradesh but is bank- of Samajwadi Party, which was ing the effort and BSP is there to throw a spanner into it.

"So, ultimately the fight in the Lok Sabha polls will boil

He felt that the "geography" of UPA has shrunk and "you don't see the ruling alliance in the Gangetic Plains He said it was difficult to from Delhi to Bengal.



A Christian Palestinian boy dressed as Santa Claus attends the last Sunday Mass before Christmas at the Latin Catholic Church in Gaza City yesterday. Some 2,000 Palestinian Christians live in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip.

Pakistan mall fire kills 10

AFP, Islamabad

The death toll from a massive fire that gutted a major shopping mall in the Pakistani garrison city of Rawalpindi has risen to 10, with six others still missing, officials said yesterday.

Rescuers were combing through the debris in search of survivors at Ghakhar Plaza which partially collapsed 12 hours after the blaze erupted in the early hours of Saturday, deputy city commissioner Haseeb Athar told reporters.

Head of Swedish Academy resigns

AFP, Stockholm

The head of the Swedish Academy, which each year awards the prestigious Nobel Literature Prize will step down in June after 10 years in the post, he announced at the body's annual year-end gathering.

Horace Engdahl, 59, an author and literature critic, will be replaced by Peter Englund, a writer and historian who was elected to the Academy in 2002.

"In line with a decision taken back in May by the Academy, which with admirable restraint has kept it secret until today, I will be leaving my position of my own will on June 1, 2009, exactly 10 years after I took over from Mr. (Sture) Allen," Engdahl announced late Saturday.

Belgium scrambles to avoid political collapse

AFP, Brussels

Belgium's monarch on the country away from a new French-speaking regions. political crisis.

over a scandal linked to trou- interfere in the break-up of bled Fortis bank.

Saturday held new meetings June 2007 left the country with political party leaders in a unable to form a new governbid to find a transitional gov- ment to overcome deep divi-

The meetings will hold the together a cabinet in March, key to whether King Albert II which has now collapsed accepts the resignation of under allegations that his French bank BNP Paribas.

Belgian-Dutch bank Fortis, Deadlocked elections in which nearly collapsed in the global financial crisis.

The scandal, dubbed by the Belgian press ernment willing to try to lead sions between Dutch and "Fortisgate", centres on a legal battle with Fortis's Leterme finally pulled minority shareholders over the government sale of the bank's Belgian assets to prime minister Yves Leterme aides pressured judges not to The court has frozen the sale.

New Thai cabinet sets to work amid complaints

AFP, Bangkok

Thai Premier Abhisit Vejjajiva's newly unveiled cabinet set to work yesterday on building reconciliation and reviving the economy, despite the threat of protests over some appointments.

Key ministers from the Democrat Party met to discuss policy matters, a day before an official swearing in ceremony on Monday in front of the revered king.

"After the royal audience tomorrow, the JPMorgan Chase. prime minister may call for another discussion of government policy before the cabinet meet for the first time on Tuesday to approve the policies," said deputy interior minister Thaworn Senneam.

The cabinet list was announced Saturday after King Bhumibol Adulyadej signed a royal command approving the ministers, appointed after Abhisit won a parliamentary vote to bring a Democrat-led coalition into power.

Of the 36 cabinet posts, 24 ministers are serving in government for the first time.

Heading the economic team is finance minister Korn Chatikavanij, an Oxford contem porary of 44-year-old Abhisit. The minister formerly worked for investment bank

But amid a global financial downturn exacerbated by political turmoil in the kingdom, business leaders have criticised the choice of other economic ministers tasked with reviving the country's fortunes.



Vacancy Announcement

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is an implementation agency of technical assistance of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Safe Motherhood Promotion Project (SMPP), jointly funded and implemented by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and JICA, is aiming to improve health status of women of reproductive age and neonates in the targeted district, Narsingdi. The project plans to recruit a qualified Bangladeshi national for the following position:

Technical Officer for Midwifery (1 post, Narsingdi)

Responsibility: To closely work with the Project's staff, GoB counterparts, and formal/informal care providers in the Project's site to promote the provision of quality MNH service

Qualifications:

· Minimum Bachelor in the areas of midwifery or in relevant areas

· At least 5 years experiences in midwifery related work

Strong practical experience on midwifery

· Ability to provide technical assistance in midwifery related trainings/orientations

· Willing to reside in the target district (Narsingdi), and make frequent field visits

 Must have Project Documentation and Monitoring experiences

 Must be a good team player and rapport builder with public and private partners

Research experiences will be an asset

· Have a strong command in English (written and

Computer skills

Applicants are requested to submit their detailed CV along with a cover letter and recent photograph to the Safe Motherhood Promotion Project office, Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP), 12th Floor, 6 Kawranbazar, Dhaka-1215 by 31st December 2008. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted for the interview.

