



PHOTO: AFP

Israeli soldiers clash with foreign and Palestinian activists during a pro-Palestinian protest at the major Israeli checkpoint of Qalandia, between the West Bank city of Ramallah and Jerusalem, yesterday where nine people were arrested including some foreigners.

## World may recognise Palestine soon

Says Israel minister

AFP, Jerusalem

With peace talks stalled, the "entire world" could recognise a Palestinian state within a year, a dovish Israeli cabinet minister warned yesterday, urging the resumption of negotiations.

The comments from Industry and Trade Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer come after Ecuador formally recognised Palestine as an independent state on Friday, following the lead of other South American countries.

Brazil, Argentina and Bolivia gave formal recognition earlier this month while Uruguay said it will do so early in the new year.

"I would not be surprised if within a year the entire world, even the US, recognizes a Palestinian state, then we will have to explain how this happened," Ben Eliezer told reporters ahead of the weekly cabinet meeting.

Israel opposes any recognition of a Palestinian state, saying its establishment must be reached through negotiations and not through unilateral moves.

But with the breakdown of peace talks, the Palestinians have said they are considering new

diplomatic options, and welcomed the recognition from the Latin American nations.

Direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians, the first for nearly two years, began in Washington on September 2. But they quickly stalled, when a 10-month Israeli settlement freeze expired on September 26.

The Palestinians refused to resume negotiations without a new moratorium and on December 7 Washington admitted that it had failed to convince Israel to renew the building ban, despite offering a generous package of incentives.

Ben Eliezer, from the dovish Labour Party, said Israel must do all it can to get talks back on track.

"We must do all everything possible to renew talks with the Palestinians, even if it means a settlement freeze for a few months," he said.

Palestinian negotiators have emphasised a set of alternatives to new talks, including seeking recognition of a Palestinian state along the borders that existed in 1967, before the Six Day War.

## UK gives \$62m to UN disaster fund

BBC ONLINE

The UK is to put \$62m into a UN fund set up to respond to natural disasters.

The money will fill two-thirds of the shortfall in the fund in a year when more than 260 million people in the world were hit by natural disasters.

International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell has also called for a more coordinated response to events.

Lord Ashdown will report in the new year on a separate review into the UK's response to natural disasters.

The international response to two large catastrophes in 2010 - the earthquake in Haiti and floods in Pakistan - was slow in coming and poorly coordinated.

Mitchell said that a "lack of support" for the UN disaster fund threatened to "undermine its ability to deal with future shocks".

The disaster fund was used to provide aid after several smaller disasters in 2010, such as an outbreak of measles in Lesotho, and lead poisoning in Nigeria.

## IVORY COAST CRISIS

### Thousands flee for Liberia: UN

BBC ONLINE

About 14,000 people have fled Ivory Coast to neighbouring Liberia following last month's disputed Ivorian presidential election, the UN says.

It says it is prepared for a total of 30,000 refugees in the region. Most of those fleeing are supporters of Alassane Ouattara, who is recognised internationally as the new president.

Three West African presidents will go to Ivory Coast on Tuesday to personally urge incumbent leader Laurent Gbagbo to quit, Benin's foreign minister says.

Gbagbo has rejected widespread calls to step down, citing vote rigging in northern areas.

The spokeswoman for the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), Fatoumata Lejeune-Kaba, told the BBC that most of those who had left Ivory Coast since the 28 November election had come from villages in the west of the country.

She said they had been walking for days to escape tensions they feared could explode into violence, and the flow was continuing.

A UNHCR statement added: "With their numbers growing, the humanitarian needs are increasing for the mostly women and children refugees as well as for the villagers hosting them."

## NZ city hit by strong aftershocks

AFP, Wellington

A series of strong, shallow, aftershocks rattled the New Zealand city of Christchurch yesterday, cutting electricity supplies, damaging buildings and forcing evacuations.

Although there were no reported injuries, parts of the central city were cordoned off as a precaution following one of the most damaging series of quakes since a 7.0 shake in early September caused widespread destruction.

The most powerful of the aftershocks was magnitude 4.9 on the Richter scale and 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) deep with its closeness to the city centre magnifying its impact.

## Anti-racism rally draws 2,500 in Moscow

AFP, Moscow

Several thousand people rallied in central Moscow yesterday to protest a wave of ethnic violence that shook the Russian capital this month following the deadly shooting of a football supporter.

The demonstrators chanted "Russia is open to everyone" and held up signs reading "Russia without fascism, Russia without Nazism" during the sanctioned gathering on Pushkin Square, just a few blocks from the Kremlin.

An AFP reporter said about 2,500 people had gathered at the rally, which was attended by opposition leader Vladimir Ryzhkov and liberal Kirov region governor Nikita Belykh, in one of the largest such gatherings in months.

"I think that the Moscow unrest has been caused by all the rot that has accumulated in our society and which is only now rising to the top," the RBC Daily website quoted popular radio personality and columnist Viktor

Shenderovich as telling the crowd.

The December 4 shooting of a Moscow football fan by a Muslim suspect has sparked a wave of ethnic disturbances in the Russian capital, with groups of ultra-nationalists holding several large rallies throughout the city.

Police said that racism was the probable cause of a spate of recent deadly attacks against ethnic minorities from Central Asia and Russia's predominantly Muslim southern republics.

In one of the most shocking cases, Russian investigators said that a boy aged just 14 had been arrested on suspicion of the apparently racist murder of a citizen of the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan.

Recent opinion polls have shown that Muscovites are growing increasingly anxious about the number of non-ethnic Russians in the city -- a xenophobia that underscores the fragile coexistence of the country's Slavic majority and its 160 smaller ethnic groups.

## LATEST LEAKS

### US DEA reach goes beyond narcotics

AFP, Washington

The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has grown into a global intelligence organisation whose reach extends far beyond international drug trafficking, according to new US government cables.

Citing documents from the whistleblower website WikiLeaks, The New York Times reported in its yesterday edition that the DEA's operations had become so expansive the agency has had to fend off foreign politicians who want to use it against their political enemies.

One August 2009 cable reported Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli as having sent an urgent BlackBerry message to the US ambassador asking the DEA to go after his political enemies.

"I need help with tapping phones," the paper quoted the president as saying.

The request was denied, which sparked new tensions between the two countries.

Martinelli, who, according to the cables, "made no distinction between legitimate security targets and political enemies," retaliated by proposing a law that would have ended the DEA's work with specially vetted Panamanian police units.

## American Civil war message deciphered

BBC ONLINE

A message in a bottle delivered to a Confederate general during the American Civil War has been deciphered, 147 years after it was written.

In the encrypted message, a commander tells Gen John Pemberton that no reinforcements are available to help him defend Vicksburg, Mississippi.

"You can expect no help from this side of the river," says the message, which was deciphered by codebreakers.

The text is dated 4 July 1863 - the day Vicksburg fell to Union forces.

The small bottle was given to the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia, by a former Confederate soldier in 1896.

Earlier this year the museum's collections manager, Catherine Wright, decided to investigate the wrapped note it contained.

It was "just sort of a curiosity thing", she told the Associated Press news agency.

When Ms Wright found that the message was coded, she asked retired CIA codebreaker David Gaddy crack it - which he did in several weeks. A Navy cryptologist later confirmed the deciphering.

Historians regard to fall of Vicksburg as an important victory for Union forces. The Confederates were finally defeated in 1865.

## UK mulls law to fine airports after Heathrow chaos

AFP, London

British ministers said yesterday they wanted to introduce new laws to allow regulators to fine airports for travel disruption, after a pre-Christmas cold snap all but shut down Heathrow Airport last week.

Transport Minister Philip Hammond told the Sunday Times that regulators should have tougher powers to punish airports who fail passengers, after thousands were forced to sleep at Heathrow when heavy snow grounded flights.

"There should be an economic penalty for service failure," he said. "Greater weight needs to be given to performance and passenger satisfaction."

Hammond said it was unacceptable that BAA, the Spanish-owned operator of Heathrow, which is the world's busiest airport for international passenger traffic, would face no punishment from the regulator under the current system.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has confirmed that there will be no fines, the paper said.

Terminals at Heathrow Airport were turned into dormitories for several days in the run-up

to Christmas as angry passengers unable to fly were forced to spend the night on luggage trays used as makeshift beds.

Most flights are now operating normally but the shutdown caused outrage, with Prime Minister David Cameron at one point stepping in to offer military assistance to the operator, which BAA declined.

The Department for Transport confirmed it was looking at options for new legislation, and junior transport minister Theresa Villiers said this would give regulators powers to intervene between regular five-year reviews.

"The regulator would have the chance to get involved to work out whether the airport is performing well enough in the face of winter resilience, whether it has prepared well enough, and whether it has let passengers down or not," she told BBC News.

"It (the legislation) would give the regulator the power to fine an airport where it does let passengers down and doesn't prepare properly for severe weather conditions."

At the moment, the CAA can only impose fines in specific categories, such as for how long passengers queue at security, seating availability and cleanliness.

## 8 US tourists killed in Egypt bus crash

AP, Cairo

A tour bus slammed into a truck in southern Egypt yesterday, killing eight American tourists and injuring 21 others in the latest fatal crash involving tourists, the state news agency said.

The bus was taking a tour group on the 115 mile (185 kilometer) journey from Aswan to the ancient temples of Abu Simbel, when it ran into the truck parked on the side of a single lane desert road, killing six women and two men.

The Egyptian driver and a guide were also injured in the accident.

Egyptian security officials said the hurt Americans were first transferred to a military hospital for treatment and then 10 of the injured, including two Egyptians, were airlifted to a hospital in Cairo.

## Nigerian president vows to find Jos bombers

BBC ONLINE

Nigeria's president has said his government will do all it can to find those responsible for a string of bomb attacks that killed at least 38 people near the central city of Jos.

Goodluck Jonathan promised that the bombers would "face the law". No group has said it carried out the attacks.

The Christmas Eve blasts happened in an area where up to 1,000 people died in sectarian clashes this year.

The region straddles Nigeria's mainly Muslim north and the Christian south.

About 74 people were wounded in the bomb blasts. Some are in a critical condition.

In a separate development, at least six people died in attacks on churches by suspected Islamists in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri.

Speaking in the capital Abuja, President Jonathan said: "I assure all Nigerians that we shall unearth those behind the Jos bomb explosion and apprehend them to face the law."

A statement from his office added: "The president expressed sadness at explosions which killed many innocent Nigerians, Christians and Muslims alike."

Friday night's bomb explosions occurred during Christmas Eve celebrations in villages near Jos, police say.

Gregory Yenlong, a spokesman for Nigeria's Plateau state, told Bloomberg news agency that there had been threats "to disrupt Christmas celebrations in Jos".

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