



Abbas says peace deal with Israel possible in six months.



Pink says she'll never pay to watch rival Britney Spears' concert.



Defence minister al-Obeidi reopens the Iraqi air force academy after nearly 18 years.

International

kiosk

Nato seeks Russia help in Kabul

Moscow: Nato chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen on Wednesday asked Russia to supply helicopters for the conflict in Afghanistan, after talks aimed at ending Moscow's rift with the alliance. He asked Moscow to help Nato efforts with helicopters and training, as he made the first trip by a Nato chief to Russia since last year's Georgia crisis. Meanwhile, three Afghan and Iraqi journalists working for *Guardian* were freed after being taken hostage six days ago in Afghanistan, the newspaper said on Wednesday. — AFP

China's Rs 220m aid to Nepal

Kathmandu: In a move that may raise concerns in India, China on Wednesday said it will train the Nepalese Army and pledged Rs 220 million as military assistance for procuring "non-lethal" hardware and logistics. The pledge was made during a meeting between a Chinese military delegation led by Maj. Gen. Jia Jialing and defence minister Vidya Bhandari. The money will be used to supply the "non-lethal" military hardware, including logistics and training to the Nepal Army, adviser to defence minister Subhash Devkota said. — PTI

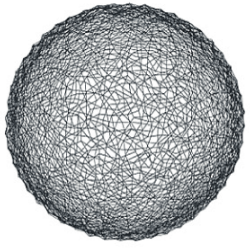
Obama writes letter to Kim

Washington: US President Barack Obama has written a personal letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong Il as part of an intense effort to draw the reclusive nation back to nuclear disarmament talks, a senior state department official said. The letter was delivered to North Korean officials last week by Obama's special envoy for North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, the official said on Tuesday. Meanwhile, Kim is suffering from chronic laryngitis and he can't work without resting every other day, a news report said on Wednesday. — AP

Suu Kyi in talks with party elders

Rangoon: Myanmar's junta allowed detained Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to meet with three elderly senior members of her party on Wednesday in a rare concession by the military regime. The democracy icon was taken to a state guesthouse in Yangon for the talks with 92-year-old party chairman Aung Shwe, secretary Lwin, 85, and executive committee member Lun Tin, 89, all of whom are in poor health. — AP

Climate talks in 'ICU', says Ramesh



COP15
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 2009
FINANCIAL Chronicle IN COPENHAGEN

HARDEV SANOTRA
DC | COPENHAGEN

Dec. 16: Climate talks continued to tumble in rough weather as India, China and the G-77 nations took strong exception to a second "Danish text" that emerged Wednesday morning, saying they would not allow a "parachuted document" to decide the negotiations.

Two days before the meeting ends, and as world leaders begin to arrive for the final, high-level stretch, there is no consensus between developed and developing countries on a common text.

The objections came as soon as Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen abruptly took over conference presidency from his minister Connie Hedegaard



Greenpeace activists (left) with a poster of US President Barack Obama during a demonstration and a Danish riot policeman (above) beats a demonstrator during protests in Copenhagen on Wednesday. — AFP, AP

and opened the session for speeches by heads of state and government.

"The issue was earlier taken up with Ms. Hedegaard and we were assured that there would be no top-down text," said Mr Vijai Sharma, environment secretary and one of India's lead negotiators.

He said it was important that discussions were carried out on the basis of only two texts, the Kyoto Proto-

col and the long-term cooperative action.

Chinese negotiator Su Wei said the new Danish text put forward by the presidency was "tantamount to an obstructive process, affecting the outcome of the talks", adding that "if we do not solve this, the meeting in Copenhagen will not be able to go ahead".

The fireworks inside the plenary were matched outside the Bella Centre, where

police used teargas to disperse hundreds of protesters who made an attempt to gate-crash into the venue.

Environment minister Jairam Ramesh, who early on Wednesday told this newspaper that in his view the climate talks had been reduced to a "NATO exercise", meaning "No Action, Talk Only", indicated later in the day that the situation had only worsened, saying the talks were now "in inten-

sive care", although he did not expect it to "die".

Meanwhile in New Delhi, a day before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh leaves for Copenhagen, Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said India would not block talks, but it wouldn't buckle under pressure either, adding that the "numbers on the table" put forward by developed countries for emission cuts are "disappointing". Dr Singh is expected to

arrive in Copenhagen late on Thursday evening, too late to attend a dinner hosted by the Danish Prime Minister.

He will also not make any speech, as the speech in the high-level segment was being delivered by Mr. Ramesh.

And Dr Singh will leave for India late Friday afternoon, presumably after helping the world arrive at a climate deal, or after it unravels.

diary

Swedish PM co-opts Indira Gandhi

Swedish Prime Minister Frederik Reinfeldt gave out a statement on behalf of the European Union on Wednesday. Interestingly, the first thing he remembered was Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's poster to the world at the first UN climate conference in Sweden in 1972.

Mrs Gandhi was the only world leader who thought it fit to attend the climate talks then, and she asked, "Are not poverty and need the greatest polluters?"

Mr Reinfeldt said the world had come a long way since 1972, "but we have not been able to respond to that challenge", but then went on to co-opt Mrs Gandhi into the European worldview on climate change.

"Hunger, disease and poverty will never be defeated in a world where global warming goes above 2 degrees celsius.

Let us answer Mrs. Gandhi's question here in Copenhagen! Let our Copenhagen not be just about restrictions and constraints but about sustainable development, green growth and possibilities!"

—Marianne de Nazareth

Defiant Tehran testfires upgraded Sajjil-2 missile

Tehran, Dec. 16: A defiant Iran on Wednesday test-fired an improved version of its Sejil 2 medium-range missile which it says can reach targets inside Israel, prompting a sharp rebuke from Britain. "It hit the defined target," state television reported, without giving further details.

The two-stage Sejil, powered by solid fuel, is capable according to Iran of travelling 2,000 km, which would put arch-foe Israel, most Arab states and parts of Europe, including much of Turkey, within range.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said the test of the missile was a matter of "serious concern" and makes the case for "moving further on sanctions." Brown is in Copenhagen for the climate summit, where he discussed it with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

"I have expressed to him and he has also expressed concern about the test of a long-range missile by Iran," Brown said, according to his Downing Street office in

deadly arsenal

- ▶ SHAHAB-3 (Meteor-3)
- ▶ SHAHAB 2 and 1
- ▶ SEJIL (Lethal Stone)
- ▶ SEJIL 2
- ▶ ZELZAL (Quake)
- ▶ FATEH 110 (Conqueror)
- ▶ TONDAR-69 (Thunder-69)
- ▶ NAZEAT (Removal)
- ▶ FAJR-3 (Dawn), FAJR-5
- ▶ OGHAB (Eagle)

London. "This is a matter of serious concern to the international community and it does make the case for us moving further on sanctions." "We will treat this with the seriousness it deserves," Iranian Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi said Wednesday's test was aimed at bolstering the nation's defences and insisted missiles would not be used for offensive purposes.

"The missile test that we witness today is one ring of our defence capability chain in line with increasing the

armed forces' deterrent power," Vahidi was quoted as saying by the Fars news agency. Iran's missile capability, he added, is "merely defensive and for peace, stability and calm in the region and will not be used against any country." Vahidi said this version of the Sejil was "impossible to destroy" due to the "high speed" at which it hits the ground. It also has anti-radar capability.

Meanwhile, The US House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved sanctions legislation aimed at forcing Iran to freeze its nuclear programme by depriving it of gasoline. The measure would empower US President Barack Obama to effectively block firms that supply Iran with refined petroleum products, or the ability to import or produce them at home, from doing business in the US.

The House passed the bill, which has yet to clear the Senate, by a 412-12 margin with four voting "present." — AFP



A figurine of Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi is displayed in a nativity scene in Naples on Tuesday. — AP

Intruder held outside Silvio room

Rome, Dec. 16: A young man with psychological problems was stopped by Italian police early on Wednesday as he tried to reach the room of PM Silvio Berlusconi at a Milan hospital.

Mr Berlusconi is recovering at the San Raffaele hospital from a vicious attack at a political rally that left him with a broken nose, two broken teeth and other facial injuries on Sunday.

The 26-year-old man, who has named by Italian media only by his initials T.C., reportedly comes from the northern city of Turin.

He was stopped by staff from Milan's San Raffaele hospital at 2 am local time after taking the elevator to the seventh floor, directly from the hospital's underground parking lot, usually reserved for staff members and visitors.

Hospital staff stopped the man and immediately called the police. The man then told the police that he just wanted to talk to the Premier. "I just wanted to talk to him. I want to see him. I want to see how he is doing," the man reportedly said.

He had no weapons at the time of his arrest. However, the police found hockey sticks in his car as well as two small kitchen knives.

Investigators from Italy's anti-terrorism unit, Digos, found that the man had psychological problems and he is reported to have been sent for mandatory psychiatric treatment in 2008.

By arrangement with AKI

Uninvited tourists enjoy breakfast with Obamas

Washington, Dec. 16: It was not a state dinner, and they did not crash it on purpose.

Still, a couple who showed up at the White House a day early for a tour somehow wound up at an invitation-only breakfast with President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle. It was left to the White House once again to explain how people who were not on an event guest list wound up being ushered into the presidential mansion anyway.

The improbable adventure of Harvey and Paula Darden, Mr Obama supporters from Georgia, took place on Veterans Day, two weeks before Virginia socialites Tareq and Michaela Salahi infamously crashed the Obamas' state dinner for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The Dardens mistakenly showed up a day early for a tour scheduled through their congressman. The White



A couple who showed up at the White House a day early for a tour somehow wound up at an invitation-only breakfast with the Obamas

House and Secret Service both said the Dardens went through the appropriate security screenings and were allowed into the breakfast as a courtesy because there were no public tours the day they arrived.

That explanation was news to Harvey Darden, 67, a retired pharmacist, who said he and his wife never were told about the breakfast. They thought they were

simply starting their tour until they were ushered into the East Room, offered a buffet spread and told they would be meeting the President. "The further we got into the White House, the more surprised we were," Mr Darden said in a telephone interview. "My wife looked at me, and I looked at her, and I said, 'You know, I don't know if we're in the right place.'" — AP

Reopen Zardari cases, orders SC

NRO null and void

SHAFQAT ALI
DC | ISLAMABAD

Dec. 16: Pakistan's Supreme Court on Wednesday struck down the controversial National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) — ordering to reopen cases against incumbent President Asif Ali Zardari and other beneficiaries. A 17-member bench, headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, in its short order, declared the NRO as null and void after taking around seven hours to announce the decision.

The court had announced it would declare the short order two hours after it completed the hearing at 2:30 pm but announced the verdict eight hours later, keeping journalists, politicians and the public waiting and guessing.

The NRO was promulgated by former military ruler Pervez Musharraf in 2007 to withdraw political cases against several politicians and bureaucrats including

PPP in trouble over AQ letter

Pakistan's disgraced nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan has dropped a bombshell on the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led government with a four-page letter to a British journalist discussing details about nuclear proliferation and his partners in connection with the nuclear proliferation. "The letter has come as a surprise and blow to the government. The high ups are considering action against Abdul Qadeer Khan," a senior government official told this newspaper.

In the hand-written letter — a kind of chargesheet in case — he alleged that "they might try to get rid of me to cover up all the things they got done by me". Dr Khan indicted a general (now retired) for receiving \$3 million from North Korea "through me ... and asked me to give some drawings and machines".

On Iran, he wrote: "Probably with the blessings of Benazir (Bhutto) and a (now retired) general Gen. Imtiaz (now dead) asked me to give a set of drawings and some components to the Iranians. The names and addresses of suppliers were also given to the Iranians".

Mr Zardari who replaced him as the head of the state in 2008. The verdict will build pressure on Mr Zardari to quit his post and get himself cleared by the courts. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led by Mr Zardari himself says there is no chance that the President will resign.

The opposition, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz),

has asked the President to give up the top slot and pave a path for a suitable candidate to head the state. Other opposition groups also support the PML-N.

Mr Zardari is also reported to have developed differences with the powerful army leadership who still call the shots despite the revival of democracy in 2008 after a lengthy dicta-

torship. "The court has struck down the NRO terming it as unconstitutional", a court official said. According to the judgment, the NRO is contrary to the equality guaranteed by the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan. Similarly, all the cases, disposed off because of the controversial ordinance, now stand revived as of October 5, 2007, said the judgment. In addition, the court has also ordered the government that it should immediately reopen the Swiss cases concerning President Zardari.

"The provisions of the NRO seem to be against national interests thus it violates several provisions of the constitution", the ruling said. Earlier, during hearing of petitions against the NRO, the chief justice said even Parliament has no right to change the basic structure of the constitution.

The court summoned the summary file of directives issued for the elimination of Swiss cases against Mr Zardari when the hearing resumed on Wednesday.