

BRIEFLY

US to recognise Ukraine: US Secretary of State James Baker has given a clear hint that Washington will soon recognise Ukraine as an independent state after receiving satisfactory assurances on its nuclear arms policy, reports Reuter from Kiev.

Baker said after meeting President Leonid Kravchuk on Wednesday that the United States was very satisfied with Ukrainian promises on democracy, economic reform and nuclear safety.

"Ukraine is in the forefront of those republics that are embracing those principles and values" laid down by President George Bush as touchstones for recognition, he said.

President Kravchuk, who met Bush in September and won election in a direct ballot three weeks ago, said he was "immensely pleased" with Baker's presentation of the US position.

Zulu leader withdraws from talks: Zulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi on Wednesday said he was withdrawing from Friday's start of South Africa's constitutional talks, reports AFP from Johannesburg.

In a statement from the capital of his Kwazulu Black Homeland, Buthelezi said he was pulling out because Zulu King Goodwill Zwelinthini had not been invited to Friday and Saturday's Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA).

Buthelezi's Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party is one of the main players in the talks and has demanded three separate delegations—one for Inkatha, one for Zwelinthini and a delegation of the government of the self-governing Kwazulu Homeland.

Quake shakes Kuril islands: A strong earthquake with a preliminary reading of 6.7 on the Richter scale shook the Kuril islands north of Japan on Thursday. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, reports AP.

The Central Meteorological Agency said the tremor's epicenter was about 20 kilometers (12 miles) below the surface of the sea in the Kuril trench, which runs beside the island chain stretching north of Japan.

The agency said there was no danger of tidal waves from the earthquake.

It said the quake registered 1 on the Japanese scale of seven in the cities of Nemuro, Obihiro, Iwakodate and Hiroo, on the northern island of Hokkaido.

30 killed in Djibouti police firing: Up to 30 people were killed early Wednesday when police opened fire on civilians during a raid on the Afar district of Arhiba in the capital of Djibouti, a former Prime Minister of Djibouti told AFP.

Abdallah Mohammed Kamil, said in a phone conversation that Gendarmes and young recruits of the paramilitary National Security Force (FNS), known as "Skinheads" had fired on ethnic Afars refusing to climb aboard army lorries to be taken away.

"A witness counted 30 bodies lying on the ground," Kamil said. However a spokesman for Djibouti president Hassan Guled Aptidon denied there had been deaths and referred only to "some wounded Gendarmes and policemen."

An independent source confirmed that gunfire had been heard in the Afar district of the capital, but was unable to provide any confirmation about casualties.

Bush to convene Soviet-aid confce: President Bush will convene an international conference early next month to coordinate the flow of food, medicine and fuel to the collapsing Soviet Union as winter closes in. The White House has announced, reports AP from Washington.

Western nations, oil-rich Arab Kingdoms and the newly emerging democracies in Eastern and Central Europe all will be invited along with global financial institutions. Secretary of State James A. Baker said Thursday in elaborating on the move in a speech at Princeton University.

Bush, meanwhile, signed legislation Thursday to provide dollars 400 million in US defence funds to help the Soviets dismantle their nuclear and other weapons, and was 100 million for transport of humanitarian assistance.

'Big Three' to seek global sanctions against Libya

WASHINGTON, Dec 19: Britain, France and the United States have agreed to seek international sanctions against Libya for its role in the bombings of two passenger planes over Scotland and Niger in 1988 and 1989, the New York Times reported today, says AFP.

Citing unidentified officials from the three countries, the daily said a UN Security Council resolution banning international flights in and out of Libya and barring the sale of aircraft, spare parts and airline services would be sought in January.

Should that fail, The Times added, The European Community or the group of seven industrialized countries would be asked to support the sanctions.

The three nations were also considering stronger punitive measures against Libya, ranging from diplomatic sanctions

to bans on the sale of military equipment to Tripoli, on Libyan oil exports and a freeze on Libyan assets in foreign banks, the sources said.

Washington and London are seeking Libyan compliance with their demand that two Libyan agents be extradited for trial in connection with the December 21, 1988, downing of a Pan Am jumbo jet over Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed 259 people on board and 11 on the ground.

Both countries announced indictments against the Libyan agents on November 14.

France has also accused Libyan agents of the bombing of aUTA jetliner over Niger in September 1989, in which 170 people were killed.

Samphan, Son Sen return home tomorrow

BANGKOK, Dec 19: Khmer Rouge leaders Khieu Samphan and Son Sen will return to Phnom Penh Saturday, nearly one month after they were forced to flee the Cambodian capital by a hunch mob, the clandestine Khmer Rouge radio reported, reports AP.

Their return will allow Cambodia's Supreme National Council to meet later that day.

NZ to recognise Slovenia Croatia

WELLINGTON, Dec 19: New Zealand is likely to recognise the independent status of Croatia and Slovenia in the new year, Foreign Minister Don McKinnon said in a statement today, reports AFP.

This would follow a similar decision expected by the European Community.

New Zealand would move in step with the rest of the international community on the issue. McKinnon said, adding "and collective international moves on recognition will, I hope, improve the chances for an early resolution of the conflict in Yugoslavia."

In another statement McKinnon said New Zealand had established diplomatic relations with the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. New Zealand's ambassador to the Soviet Union had been accredited to the three.

"We in New Zealand greatly admire the courage and determination of the Baltic peoples in their struggle for independence" from the Soviet Union, he said.



JERUSALEM: Palestinian residents of Silwan place barbed wire around their houses Wednesday to prevent Jewish settlers from entering their property. Some two hundred settlers moved here into five Arab houses. Background in AL Aqsa mosque. — AFP/UNB photo.

Israel wants to buy time : Ashrawi

Next round of Middle East talks in Jan '92

WASHINGTON, Dec 19: Arab-Israeli peace talks have adjourned until January after six days of obstinate debate over the status of Palestinian delegates, the meaning of UN resolutions and the US role in the peace process, reports Reuter.

They parted without agreement on where they would meet next or even on what they had achieved in the negotiations.

Each accused the other of trying to bend the ground rules set by the United States during preparations for the Middle East peace conference which opened in Madrid on October.

"No real progress was achieved during the two weeks... the only reason was the Israeli insistence on creating obstacles," said Mowaffaq Allaf, the chief Syrian delegate.

"It's very clear to us that there is no seriousness of intent. They (the Israelis) just want to buy time," added Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi.

But Israeli negotiators, who brought the talks to a close by saying they had to go home to consult their government, painted the talks in a very different light.

"We have made significant progress. We were able to begin to probe substance. In all cases we're well ahead of where we were a few weeks ago in Madrid," said Israeli spokesman Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israel had one-day meetings with each of Syria, Lebanon and a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation in Madrid on November 3. The talks resumed in Washington on December 10 after weeks of

arguing over the venue. The venue for the next, third, round is also a problem which might call for controversial US intervention.

Israelis and Palestinians said they had agreed to meet again on January 7. The ranking Lebanese said his talks would resume on January 8 and Allaf said Israel wanted to see the Syrians after January 13.

But for none of the three sets of negotiations is there agreement on where to meet. The Arabs insist on coming back to Washington, the Israelis prefer the Middle East. In the meantime, the United States, as the driving force behind the peace process, will have to decide whether to let the talks stumble along at a snail's pace or step in with compromise proposals.

Gorbachev won't be in politics, plans charity work : Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Dec 19: Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin, on the eve of a visit to Italy on Thursday, said he was dissolving the Soviet Foreign and Interior ministries and expected Mikhail Gorbachev to leave politics, reports AP.

A Soviet newspaper reported Thursday that Gorbachev has drafted an announcement of his resignation, and Yeltsin said the Soviet

leader planned to devote himself to charity work.

He said he wouldn't pain any political activity. Yeltsin told Italian television, "It's his choice, not ours."

Yeltsin also said he planned to sign decrees disbanding the powerful Interior Ministry, which controls the Soviet police and riot troops, and the Foreign Ministry, which runs

all of the country's embassies and foreign missions. Most of their functions are expected to be taken over by Yeltsin's Russian Federation, the largest and richest of the 12 remaining republics. But other republics also may establish their own diplomatic posts and police forces after the Soviet Union is transformed this month into a loose Commonwealth of Independent States.

Gorbachev on Wednesday urged the moribund national legislature to hold a final session "and announce a transfer of power to the new inter-state structure."

The Soviet president made the proposal in a letter to leaders of the six republics that plan to join the new commonwealth on Saturday in Kazakhstan's capital, Alma-Ata, the Tass news agency said.

Yeltsin is expected to fly directly from Italy to the Alma-Ata meeting. His two-day visit to Rome, which will include talks with Italian President Francesco Cossiga, is his first trip abroad since he formed the new commonwealth December 8 with the leaders of Ukraine and Byelorussia.

It will highlight his position as the country's dominant



leader planned to devote himself to charity work. He said he wouldn't pain any political activity. Yeltsin told Italian television, "It's his choice, not ours."



Yeltsin is expected to fly directly from Italy to the Alma-Ata meeting. His two-day visit to Rome, which will include talks with Italian President Francesco Cossiga, is his first trip abroad since he formed the new commonwealth December 8 with the leaders of Ukraine and Byelorussia.

ULFA offers peace talks

GUWAHATI, Dec 19: Maoist separatists fighting New Delhi's rule in India's north-eastern Assam state said on Wednesday they were ready for peace talks with the government, reports Reuter.

"We know there will be difficulties, but we are willing to negotiate with the government," said Sidhharta Phukan, Publicity Secretary of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

Phukan's announcement

followed the release on Monday of six hostages held by ULFA guerrillas.

The six were the last of 15 people kidnapped in July by the guerrillas who wanted the release of 5000 jailed comrades.

The separatists killed three of the 15 hostages — two oil executives and a Soviet engineer — after the state government refused to free all the prisoners. The killings prompted New Delhi to order an army crackdown on the

rebels.

Assam's Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia said the six hostages released on Monday — two senior government officials, three oil executives and a driver — were freed at the same time in different parts of the state.

The ULFA, which charges that the resources of the tea and oil-producing state are being plundered by outsiders, declared an indefinite ceasefire on Tuesday.

Baltic states fear coup by Soviet troops

VILNIUS, Lithuania, Dec 19: Fear has spread throughout the three Baltic states that disintegration of the Soviet Union could panic the roughly 230,000 Red Army troops still in the newly independent countries, reports AP.

Many Balts fear violence if their republics fail to supply food and fuel to the soldiers. Some believe the troops might try to seize power, especially Latvia, where ethnic Latvians comprise only a bare majority.

"It is a constant potential coup," President Vytautas Landsbergis said in an interview. "The leaders of these troops have stated on

several occasions that they can... act on their own. It is a putsch situation."

Latvian and Estonian leaders are in the same situation. Political turmoil in the former Soviet Union has stalled negotiations with Moscow authorities about withdrawing the troops.

The small Baltic states who independence after the failed August coup.

They fear that these thousands of Soviet troops on their soil, together with hard-line Communist supporters, will try to topple local elected governments. Baltic leaders say about

100,000 Soviet troops are in Lithuania, 100,000 in Latvia and 30,000 in Estonia.

"There is the possibility of a new civil war and a new putsch in Russia, and the risk is being increased by the uncertainty of the soldiers and officers of the former Soviet Union," said Jonas Gecas, chief of the new Lithuanian volunteer army.

"Soviet officers see the withdrawal of Soviet troops from eastern Germany and they know how these troops are living now, without apartments, in spite of Germany donating money," he said, referring to the \$1.5 billion Germany has promised to build

PPP activists clash with security forces

ISLAMABAD, Dec 19: Thousands of supporters of ousted Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto clashed with armed security forces outside the parliament building here today, reports AFP.

Several people were injured and a jeep was seen overturned, while the parliament itself was sealed off.

The trouble broke out after Bhutto and other members of the Pakistan People's Party left the chamber as President Ghulam Ishaq Khan was making his annual address to the two houses of the parliament.

Bhutto staged her walk-out in protest at what she called the "Fascist" attitude of the President, who declared her government dissolved in August 1990.

The political climate has been tense since a personal friend of Bhutto, Farhana Veena Hayat, was sexually assaulted by unknown men on November 27.

Roh resuffles cabinet

SEOUL, Dec 19: South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo replaced seven ministers in a cabinet reshuffle today, a presidential spokesman said, reports Reuter.

Roh named former chairman of the joint chiefs of staff Choi Sae-Chang to succeed Lee Jong-Koo as Defence Minister.

Lee was regarded as a leading hawk in the cabinet. He caused a political furor this year over his reported remarks that South Korea was considering a raid on North Korean nuclear facilities if Pyongyang did not permit international inspection.

Barbara files nomination for Bush

CONCORD, New Hampshire, Dec 19: President George Bush's wife Barbara filed nominating papers for her husband in New Hampshire on Wednesday, making him a Republican candidate in the State's Presidential primary election in February the first of the US electoral season, reports Reuter.

While a Bush re-election effort is expected, the president has not yet officially declared yet that he is officially standing. But Mrs Bush filed the "Declaration of candidacy" papers for him in New Hampshire and paid the 1,000 dollar fee.

Under pressure from within his own party, from conservative commentator Patrick Buchanan, and from the weak economy, Bush is having to work harder to win votes here he once took for granted.

Bush's popularity has plummeted from 90 per cent after the Gulf war to 47 per cent, its lowest point ever. Polls cite what people view as the President's mishandling of the economy as the major reason.

Two-headed eagle likely to return as Russia's emblem

MOSCOW, Dec 19: The two-headed eagle — without its Tsarist crown and scepter — seems likely to return as Russia's national emblem, reports Reuter.

President Boris Yeltsin's government decided on Wednesday to recommend the eagle to Parliament, replacing an emblem incorporating the communist hammer and sickle.

First Deputy Prime Minister Gennady Burbulis told reporters that the bird should be "not too vicious-looking" and added that without its crown and scepter the symbol would have no connotations with the pre-revolutionary imperial regime.

Earlier this year a song from 19th-century composer Ivan Glinka's opera "Igor for the Tsar" was chosen as Russia's national anthem.

Off the Record

'Death' can be hazardous to your health

LONDON: Tired of your usual brand of cigarettes? Death could be the answer, reports Reuter.

Death, a new brand just launched in Britain, makes its nonsense point with a skull and crossbones printed on the pack and health warnings that leave nothing to the imagination.

"I'm being honest. I am selling death — that is my market," said B J Cunningham, Managing Director of Death cigarettes U.K.

In case there could be any doubt, an extra health warning on the pack says: "Cigarettes are addictive and debilitating. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you smoke, quit."

Cunningham, himself an inveterate smoker, said sales were going well so far despite a higher than average price. "My intention is to make a profit, but this is an honest way of selling cigarettes," he said.

Ten per cent of takings will go to cancer research charities.

Grandson indeed

DETROIT: Dr. Richard Mudd has worked so long trying to clear his grandfather of complicity in Abraham Lincoln's assassination that he was dumfounded when he learned he'll finally get the chance, reports AP.

"After 75 years, I'm getting tired of the thing," the 90-year-old Mudd said Tuesday from his home in Saginaw, Mich. "But I'm not tired to the point I wanted to give it up."

An Army panel said Monday it will consider next month whether to expunge Dr. Samuel Mudd's 126-year-old conviction on charges of aiding Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, by setting Booth's broken leg.

The hearing could mean victory for Richard Mudd, who has struggled for decades to win exoneration of his grandfather. Mudd and his family are to appear January 22 in Washington before a panel of the Army Board of Correction of Military Records.

Samuel Mudd, 32, was arrested April 24, 1865, 10 days after Lincoln was shot at Ford's Theater. He claimed he had known nothing of the killing — and was ignorant of any assassination plot — when Booth arrived on horseback at his home in Maryland, near Washington, D.C.

Bi-President for lesbian rights

WASHINGTON: Patricia Ireland assumed the presidency of the National Organization for Women amid controversy about her domestic life and her labeling of lesbian rights a NOW priority.

Ireland, a lawyer who was named NOW president on Sunday, recently revealed she has a husband in Miami and a female companion in Washington.

She has declined to label herself lesbian or bisexual or to go into detail about her personal relationships.

She has said lesbian rights is one of NOW's four priority issues, and the organization employs a full-time staff member who focuses on the issue.

"By focusing on lesbian issues, NOW shows itself totally out of step with the majority of American women," said Beverly LaHaye, president of Concerned Women for America, which calls itself a pro-family women's group.

"The average woman today wants respect and fairness in the workplace and in society... 'Lesbian rights' is certainly not one of her priorities," LaHaye said.

Fires were his business

LOS ANGELES: The Chief arson investigator for the suburban Glendale Fire Department was indicted Wednesday for arson, the U.S. Attorney said, reports AP.

Capt. John L. Orr, 42, a 17-year veteran of the department, had been writing a novel about a firefighter who was an arsonist. It describes "uncanny similarities" to some of the fires Orr is charged with, said federal agent Michael Matassa.

Orr maintains he is innocent. He was charged with five counts of arson and three of attempted arson, said U.S. Attorney Lourdes G. Baird.

He faces a maximum of 80 years in prison and 2 million dollars in fines if convicted. He was held in lieu of 50,000 dollars bail pending a December 23 arraignment.

Federal agents searched Orr's home and car and seized two incendiary devices, videotapes of arson fires and a pistol that could be used to launch a device that ignites fires, authorities said.

Lankan Buddhists oppose peace proposal

COLOMBO, Dec 19: The Sinhalese Buddhist Association has warned that the new peace proposals put together by a senior Tamil minister could cause enmity among people and destroy sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka, reports AP.

The group comprising monks has called the efforts by Tourism and Rural Industrial Development Minister Savumiamoorthy Thondaman a "traitorous exercise."

The Association in a statement published in the Island newspaper Thursday, called upon the people, Buddhist leaders and organisations to be alert and vigilant and condemn the proposals.

Thondaman has forwarded his proposals to a Parliamentary Select Committee. The Tamil minister is seeking the approval of the proposals by the government and other political parties before he meets Tamil rebels in their stronghold Jaffna peninsula, early January.

The recruitment of terrorists into the forces, would amount to legalizing terrorism," the Buddhist Association said in its statement.

The rebels since 1983 have been fighting for an independent homeland in north and east of Sri Lanka where many of the Tamils live. The violence has claimed over 20,000 lives in the past eight years.

Thousands protest Colombian massacre

CALOTO, Colombia, Dec 19: Carrying the coffins of 20 of their people killed in a massacre and shouting "Narcotraffickers out," thousands of Indians marched through this palm-lined village in a funeral procession, reports AP.

The procession Wednesday coincided with the arrival by helicopter of President Cesar Gaviria and a government entourage at the rural home where about 50 assailants opened fire Monday night on a group of tribespeople and killed four children, six women and 10 men.

"In fact, this could be the beginning of world war III."