

900 students held during protests at Rangoon Varsity

BANGKOK, Dec 18 : Burmese dissidents said Wednesday that 900 students were arrested during two days of peaceful protests at Rangoon University last week demanding the release of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners, reports AP.

The Bangkok-based Burma Information Group said in a statement it was "very concerned about the suppression of peaceful student demonstrations in Burma."

Some 400 to 500 students demonstrated at Rangoon University on December 10, the day Suu Kyi was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. She remains under house arrest for her nonviolent opposition to Burma's military government, and her family accepted the prize for her in Oslo, Norway.

Several hundred students also demonstrated at the university the next day, again parading around the campus and shouting "Down with Dictatorship!" and "Release Aung San Suu Kyi!".

The first day the military sealed off the university but did not enter the campus, and the students dispersed after a couple of hours. The second day police and soldiers broke up the demonstration. Local residents saw police vans enter the campus and estimated that 100 to 200 students were arrested.

The Burma Information Group said about 150 students were arrested the night of December 10, and many more were seized the following night, including 64 who were taken from two dormitories.

Farhana's family refuses to attend judicial body

Culprits should be stoned to death : Benazir

KARACHI, Dec 18 : Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto has demanded the men who gang-raped her friend Farhana Ilyas be stoned to death—a traditional Islamic punishment, reports Reuter.

Both the alleged attack on a woman from Pakistan's elite and her family's decision to make their charges public are unprecedented in a traditional, class-bound society where rape is a humiliation normally inflicted only on poor women.

"We demand Sansar (death by stoning) of the culprits," Bhutto told Karachi lawyers at a meeting on Tuesday night.

Ilyas has told police she was raped repeatedly on the night of November 27 at her Karachi home by five gunmen who said they had been sent by a Sindh provincial official, Irfanullah Khan Marwat, to punish her for her links with Bhutto.

Marwat, who is a son-in-law of Pakistan's President Ghulam

Ishaq Khan, denies the charges.

The government has pledged to make Islamic law and punishments supreme in



Pakistan, a move opposed by Bhutto on the grounds that it would weaken parliament and undermine women's rights.

Hayat's father has rallied his

clan, the Khattar tribe, to pledge to avenge the alleged attack and women have taken to the streets of Pakistan's major cities to demand Ishaq

charges but the Hayat family has refused to attend.

Hayat's father, Sardar Shaukat Hayat, has said he does not expect the tribunal to find the culprits as long as a pro-government party, whose interior affairs adviser is Irfanullah Khan, is in power in Sindh.

Bhutto was sacked as Prime Minister by the president in August 1990 on allegations of misrule which are being heard by special courts, empowered to disbar her from public office for up to seven years.

Meanwhile, at least 11 people have been killed this week in gunbattles between police and bandits in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, police said today, reports Reuter.

They said four villagers, one of them a woman, a policeman and six bandits were killed in three separate clashes on Tuesday.

Lanka admits human rights violation

COLOMBO, Dec 18 : The government on Wednesday admitted that its security forces had violated human rights while battling Tamil separatist guerrillas and pledged to investigate, reports AP.

Where inquiries disclose that members of the security forces have been guilty of such excesses, appropriate action is being taken either departmentally or through the courts," a statement from the presidential secretariat said.

Bradman Weerakoon, International Affairs adviser to President Ranasinghe

Premadasa, later said at least 50 cases were pending in courts regarding human rights violations by the security force personnel.

The Sri Lankan government has virtually accepted many of the recommendations by Amnesty International following a visit by an Amnesty delegation to Sri Lanka in June.

The report by the London-based organization accused both government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main Tamil rebel group, of human rights violations since June 1990.

UN needs \$5m to keep troops in Iraq

NEW YORK (United Nations), Dec 18: The United Nations needs at least five million dollars before year's end to keep some 500 peacekeeping troops in Iraq, diplomatic sources said Tuesday, reports AP.

If the money is not raised, the troops will be withdrawn, diplomats said.

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, who coordinates UN humanitarian aid to Iraq, has already sent 50 soldiers home and plans to ship another 85 troops back to New York on Thursday, the sources said.

ULFA declares truce

NEW DELHI, Dec 18 : Insurgents battling for the secession of the north-eastern Indian state of Assam have freed their last six hostages and declared a unilateral ceasefire, newspapers reported today, says AP.

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) said in a surprise statement in the state's Guwahati city that it would observe a "total ceasefire" from midnight Tuesday, clearing the decks for peace talks.

The Times of India and other newspapers said the outlawed guerrilla group would observe the ceasefire indefinitely, but the government would not pull out army troops from oil-rich Assam immediately.

The Indian Express said informal contacts between the government and ULFA, which has been facing an army offensive since it gunned down one

of its hostages in September, were established a fortnight ago.

Assam Chief Minister Hiteshwar Saikia told reporters in Guwahati Tuesday, that he was hopeful of early talks with the leftist group and that he would lift the ban on the group if it agreed to give up violence.

The ceasefire announcement came a day after the ULFA freed the last six of 14 hostages it seized July 1 in support of its demand for the release of its members from jails in the state. Almost all abducted victims were government employees.

Three of the hostages, including a Soviet engineer, were subsequently killed, while five were released after the Assam government released scores of ULFA prisoners.

It was not immediately

clear what made the ULFA sue for peace, but newspapers said the army operations, which had led to the arrests of more than 1,700 rebels, were responsible.

Sikhs kill 14 more

Reuter adds : Suspected Sikh militants shot and killed 14 people, including three women and six children in a remote village in the foothills of the Himalayas, the United News of India news agency said today.

The victims were murdered on Tuesday night near the town of Pilibhit, some 240 km (150 miles) east of Delhi, it said.

Pilibhit, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, has been hit by a wave of Sikh militant attacks in recent months. It is close to the Nepalese border and surrounded by thick forests where the insurgents are believed to hide.

BRIEFLY

US relief for Y'slav refugees :

The United States on Tuesday contributed seven million dollars in relief aid to help refugees from the civil war in Yugoslavia, reports Reuter from Washington.

A major United Nations relief effort to help 500,000 people forced from their homes by the Serb-Croat conflict began on Tuesday with the arrival in Yugoslavia of a preliminary convoy of aid trucks.

President George Bush directed Secretary of State James Baker in a letter to use seven million dollars in US emergency refugees funds to meet unexpected urgent needs of refugees and other displaced persons resulting from the civil conflict in Yugoslavia.

He said the money may be used as contributions to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other international organizations and governments as necessary.

ROK hangs 9 murderers

SEOUL, Dec 18: South Korea hanged nine murderers in two cities today, the Justice Ministry said, reports Reuter.

They included a man who raped his friends' wife and later killed her and her two year old daughter. Another two who murdered four bar employees were later convicted in 20 cases of robbery and rape.

Two women and six men were hanged in Seoul and another person in Kwangju.



MANILA : Irene Marcos Araneta (C) youngest member of the Marcos family arrives Tuesday from Malaysia with her two sons at Manila Airport ending almost six years of exile. Imelda (behind Irene) with her son Ferdinand Marcos jr (L) and Irene's husband Gregorio Araneta (R) welcomed them at the airport. —AFP/UNB photo

Stephen Solarz in North Korea :

US Congressman Stephen Solarz has met with North Korean Foreign Minister Kim Yong-Nam in Pyongyang, according to a report by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) monitored in Tokyo, reports AP.

The report late Tuesday did not mention the contents of talks between Kim and Solarz, chairman of the US house of representative subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Solarz, who arrived in Pyongyang Tuesday, is also expected to meet President Kim Il-sung to press for the opening up of North Korean nuclear facilities for international inspection.

His trip follows the signing last week of an historic inter-Korean non-aggression pact and comes as international pressure mounts to block the country's nuclear ambitions.

US willing to host confce on Soviet aid

WASHINGTON, Dec 18: The White House said on Tuesday it still intended to host of an international conference to coordinate Soviet aid in spite of French opposition, reports Reuter.

Secretary of State James Baker last week proposed a conference in January of industrialised nations to coordinate the flow of assistance to the Soviet republics in coming months.

French President Francois Mitterrand on Sunday attacked the US proposal, telling President George Bush in a phone call that it would be a waste of time.

Eight killed in S Africa violence

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 18: South Africa authorities today reported eight people killed in political violence across South Africa, including the two-year-old daughter of a policeman, reports AP.

Police said gunmen entered the policeman's home in violence-wracked Vosloorus black township east of here late Tuesday and when they did not find him they gunned down his daughter instead.

Armenia, 5 others to join commonwealth

MOSCOW, Dec 18: Armenia and five central Asian republics will sign on December 21 the agreement on the commonwealth of independent states formed by the three Slavic republics of Byelorussia, Russia and Ukraine, reports Xinhua.

The five central Asian would be members of the commonwealth are Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirghizia, Turkmenia and Kazakhstan.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin made the announcement after his talks with Soviet President Mikhail

Koirala leaves for Colombo today

KATHMANDU, Dec 18: Prime Minister Gijra Prasad Koirala leaves here Thursday as the head of the Nepali delegation to the summit conference of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Colombo, the foreign ministry said, reports AP.

The SAARC summit is due to take place on Saturday.

Koirala is scheduled to meet Thai Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun in Bangkok on his way back from Colombo, the ministry said.

Iraq starts rebuilding damaged bridges

BAGHDAD, Dec 18: Iraq is in the midst of a spirited drive to rebuild bridges, power plants and other facilities damaged or destroyed in the war with the US-led coalition, The Baghdad Observer reported today, says AP.

More than 1,800 technicians engineers and labourers "are currently working round the clock" to finish rebuilding the Al-Harthah power station, the largest generator in southern Iraq, the English-language daily said.

UN to send team to S. African talks :

Responding to an invitation, UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar said he will send a high-level delegation to South African talks this weekend on drafting a new constitution, reports AP from United Nations.

The UN chief announced Tuesday that the team UN observers will be led by Mrs. Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

South African political leaders, both white and black, will meet at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa, or CODESA, to open negotiations on ending white-minority rule.

They will be discussing a new constitution that would give voting rights to the black majority. Right-wing whites and some militant blacks oppose the talks.

Israeli jets raid Palestinian base :

Israeli warplanes on Tuesday raided a base held by a radical Palestinian faction in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa valley of eastern Lebanon, injuring at least two guerrillas, reports AP from Lebanon.

Four Phantom jets struck positions held by the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) in a mountain region between Sultan Yacoub and Loussaia.

The planes dropped 12 bombs, some of them with a delay mechanism, on the base, which is made up mostly of tunnels carved out of the rock, security sources reported.

The PFLP-GC, which sealed off the base, said at least two of its fighters were injured. Bombs fitted with anti-personnel charges exploded more than two hours after the raid, a correspondent at the scene said.

20 tribesmen killed in Colombia :

Dozens of gunmen stormed a country house occupied by indigenous tribesmen and began shooting indiscriminately, killing at least 20 persons, police said Tuesday, reports AP from Colombia.

Survivors blamed the attack on the Medellin cocaine cartel.

The massacre, apparently touched off by a land dispute, took place late Monday in the southwestern Colombian state of Cauca, police said.

All the victims belonged to the 80,000-member Paéz tribe, which in recent years has taken over several ranches from wealthy landowners in the region.

Fresh move to stop war in Yugoslavia

BELGRADE, Dec 18: European Community mediator Lord Carrington and 21 United Nations observers start new peace missions to Yugoslavia today but there is no sign of the country's almost six-month conflict ending, reports Reuter.

Fighting continued unabated in Croatia on Tuesday after the EC set January 15 as the date for recognising any Yugoslav republic that wants independence and meets its conditions.

The breakaway republics of Slovenia and Croatia were disappointed not to win immediate recognition as independent states but said they were willing to wait. Serbian officials strongly criticised the EC decision.

Carrington, a former British Foreign Secretary, said he would meet the leaders of all six Yugoslav republics to explain the EC's decision and seek backing for a ceasefire. But he seemed unconvinced that fighting was about to stop.

Asked if swift recognition would help ease the conflict or stoke it, Carrington said in a radio interview: "I think we shall have to wait and see which of those two is right."

Slovenian and Croatian officials said Carrington would meet their republic's Presidents, Milan Kucan and Franjo Tudjman, in the southern Austrian city of Graz.

EC officials said he would then travel to Yugoslavia for

talks with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and the heads of the other republics.

The 21 UN observers, including 12 military officers, were due to arrive in Belgrade to explore prospects for sending a 10,000-strong peace-keeping team to Yugoslavia.

The UN says it will send a large peace-keeping force only if an effective ceasefire takes hold. But fighting shows no sign of easing, despite bitter cold across the battlefields.

Croatian radio said nine people had been killed and 20 wounded in battles in the last two days in and around Osijek in eastern Croatia. It reported battles on many warfronts.

The Belgrade-based news agency Tanjug said the Croats

opened fire on positions of Serbian irregulars and the Yugoslav army around Nova Gradiska, Daruvar and Pakrac in central Croatia.

The two sides, who have fought since Croatia declared independence in June and its Serbian minority rebelled, accused each other of brutal murders. The reports were not confirmed.

Tanjug said more than 8,000 Serbian refugees had fled their homes in central Croatia in the last few days and sought refuge in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina. More than half a million people have become refugees since the fighting began.

Serbia gave no official reaction to the EC decision in

Off the Record

Madonna's 'wedding' gown fetches 11,000 dollars

NEW YORK: Madonna's wedding dress — not the Sean Penn model, but the one of the cover of her "Like A Virgin" album— sold for 11,000 dollars Tuesday at a Manhattan auction, reports AP.

Victor Laslo's fictitious "Casabianca" passport and handwritten Rob Dylan lyrics also were snapped up at the joint Hollywood-rock 'n' roll auction at Sotheby's.

The Madonna dress, a low-cut white number featured on her 1984 release, went to a bidder buying on behalf of an unidentified company, said Sotheby's spokeswoman Laura Stewart. A matching headpiece was sold with the dress.



Hitler bites three in 'fit of passion'

TAMPA, Florida : A German shepherd named Hitler won't be killed for biting three people, but the judge who gave him a second chance suggested a gentler name might produce a friendlier dog, reports AP.

"One person said, 'With a name like that, he's got to be bad'. Circuit Judge Daniel Gallagher said.

The 3-year-old dog was to be put to death at an animal shelter for biting two children and an adult in his neighbourhood. One youngster required 11 stitches to close three wounds.

The dog was picked up after neighbours complained. His owner, Brenda Krepps, appealed to the judge, saying the dog isn't normally aggressive but was wooing a female dog at the time of the attacks and acted in a fit of passion.

Blood is thinner than superstition

BEIJING: A school teacher in rural southwestern China beheaded his young daughter on the advice of a fortune-teller, the official Legal Daily said today, reports Reuter.

A 30-year-old father, Wang Faxing of Guizhou province, in September that his three-year-old daughter would someday threaten his life.

A few days later, when his wife went out, the man cut off the child's head and hid the body in a cave, the newspaper said. The teacher was arrested but the newspaper did not say what happened to him after that.

The story was presented as an object lesson in China's campaign to root out "feudal superstition."

Shrinking mountain

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: Mount Cook, the highest mountain in New Zealand and the South Pacific, shrank somewhat on the weekend, reports AP.

New Zealand's conservation department said Sunday that an avalanche lowered the 3,764-meter (12,100-foot) peak by several metres when it sent millions of metric tons of snow, ice and rock hurtling down its eastern face.

No one was hurt in the avalanche: Eight climbers on the mountain at the time of the landslide were accounted for.

UN embargo causes death of 80,000 infants: Iraq

CAIRO, Dec 18: Iraq said on Tuesday that 80,000 of its children have died because of shortages caused by UN sanctions imposed over its invasion of Kuwait, reports Reuter.

"More than 80,000 children under the age of five have died so far," envoy Nabil Nejjm Al-Tarkiti said after handing the Cairo-based Arab League a list of urgently-needed medical supplies.

"The sanctions threaten further deaths among children, women and old people," said Takriti, Baghdad's emissary to the 21-member league.

Takriti asked League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Maguid to urge member states to send it medicine. The envoy said Iraq had run out of key drugs including cancer treatments.

Iraq said last month that 65,000 children had died because of shortages of food and medicine and another 350,000 were at risk this winter. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said the figures were realistic.

Iraq's Health Minister Abdel-Saleem Mohammad Saeed recently challenged the western powers to live up to their human rights ideals by unfreezing his country's foreign assets.

Britain freed 70 million pounds sterling (125 million dollars) for Iraq to buy drugs after Baghdad freed jailed businessman Ian Richter from jail in November.

The West accuses Iraq of cynical manipulation of the sanctions issue, charging that Baghdad could have access to essential funds if it went ahead with a UN plan allowing it to sell a limited amount of oil.

Iraq starts rebuilding damaged bridges

More than 1,800 technicians engineers and labourers "are currently working round the clock" to finish rebuilding the Al-Harthah power station, the largest generator in southern Iraq, the English-language daily said.

Xinhua adds: The declaration on Yugoslavia adopted by the 12 foreign ministers of the European Community (EC) has triggered strong reactions from the war-torn Balkan nation.

The declaration, adopted Monday night in Brussels, Belgium, appealed to all Yugoslav republics to decide whether they were ready to become independent nations.

The Yugoslav federal presidency said at a meeting on Tuesday that the EC declaration was detrimental to the country's sovereignty.

It stressed that it would firmly defend the inalienable rights of the Yugoslavians and the national dignity