

Gorbachev a courageous leader: Reagan

LOS ANGELES, Dec 26: Former US President Ronald Reagan, who once called the Soviet Union an "evil empire", said on Wednesday Mikhail Gorbachev was a courageous leader who would live forever in history, reports Reuter.

Reagan, 80, who moved to the Bel Air estate of Los Angeles after leaving the White House, issued a statement saying: "Mikhail Gorbachev will live forever in history. From our first summit meeting in Geneva and throughout all our subsequent meetings, I have found him to be a courageous leader."

"He has been willing to break down barriers that have divided our countries and enslaved his citizens. The people of the Soviet Union and all freedom-loving people around the world owe Mikhail Gorbachev a great debt of thanks."

Reagan lashed out at the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" in March 1983 as he urged opposition to a nuclear arms freeze. Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union in March 1985.

Kurdish rebels kill 11 Turks

ISTANBUL, Dec 26: Kurdish separatists killed 11 civilians in a petrol bomb attack on an Istanbul store on Wednesday, spilling their violent campaign into Turkey's commercial capital, reports Reuter Thursday from Istanbul.

Eyewitnesses said about 50 Kurdish guerrillas aged about 20 set fire to a department store owned by the brother of the emergency governor in the Southeast, main site of seven-year insurgency by the Kurdish Workers Party.

"There were about 50 of them. They came clapping and shouting 'Long Live Kurdistan'. Then they threw petrol bombs inside the shop," one eyewitness told Turkey's Star-1 private television.

Business district, killed a two-year-old girl, seven women, one of them pregnant and three men.

At least 20 people were injured, some trampled underfoot as people scrambled to get out.

World leaders praise Gorbachev for joining West in search of peace

LONDON, Dec 26: World leaders unanimously praised Mikhail Gorbachev who resigned as Soviet leader on Wednesday as his superpower empire collapsed, saying he had ended the cold war and allowed democracy to reach communist-led eastern Europe, reports Reuter.

In rare tributes to a former foe, western leaders catalogued political achievements of Gorbachev, who ruled the world's largest country for nearly seven years and oversaw the demise of communism in many parts of the world.

"I wish to express to him my personal gratitude for the work accomplished in the defence of peace and to assure him of my feelings of friendship and best wishes," French President Francois Mitterrand said in a statement.

"He was one of the men who most marked the history of this century by preparing and organising the advent of liberties in his country, the end of the cold war and disarmament," he said.

President Bush of the United States, long a superpower rival of the giant Soviet state, cut short his Christmas

Chinese team to visit independent republics

BEIJING, Dec 26: A high-level Chinese delegation left today to visit the newly independent republics that have replaced the Soviet Union, reports Reuter.

The delegation led by Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade Li Lanqing and Vice Foreign Minister Tian Zengpei will visit republics including Russia, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

"The delegation will exchange views with the hosts on the development of bilateral relations and issues of common concern," the spokesman said in a statement distributed by the officials New China News Agency.

holiday at his Camp David mountain retreat to make a nationally broadcast speech about the end of the Soviet Union and its effect on the United States.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said Gorbachev called Bush on Wednesday morning shortly before he made his resignation address.

Bush praised President Gorbachev for the historic transformation of the Soviet Union and for his personal courage and leadership in reforming the country," he said.

Manfred Woerner, Secretary-General of the West's NATO alliance that opposed the old Soviet Bloc's Warsaw Pact, commented: "Without the changes he introduced in the former Soviet Union the fundamental policy transformation there would have been unthinkable."

"It was in response to these reforms that NATO could extend the end of friendship to the countries of central and Eastern Europe," he added.

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Gorbachev's closest western ally, saluted the Kremlin chief for opening the

iron curtain to clear the way for German unification last year.

"We Germans-- and I personally-- owe him tremendous gratitude. The political achievements of Mikhail Gorbachev were correctly honoured by the bestowal of the Nobel Peace Prize," Kohl said, referring to Gorbachev's

Gorbachev says he won't hide in woods

WASHINGTON, Dec 26: Mikhail Gorbachev said Wednesday he intended to continue playing a role in public life despite his resignation as President of the now-defunct Soviet Union, reports AP.

"I have no intention of hiding in the woods," a defiant Gorbachev said in an interview from Moscow with Cable News Network minutes after a terse resignation speech was broadcast live to the nation.

He said he had informed U.S. President George Bush by telephone earlier Wednesday that he intended to continue

1990 award.

The 12-nation European Community said it recognised Russia, led by Boris Yeltsin, in place of the defunct Soviet Union now that Gorbachev had resigned.

Russia and two other Slavic republics launched a commonwealth of independent states on December 8, which

was joined by eight other Soviet republics last week, to replace the collapsing 69-year-old Soviet state.

But the EC called on Gorbachev's successors to dissolve the union in a "peaceful, democratic and orderly way."

British Prime Minister John Major hailed Gorbachev, 60, as the man who had altered world history and helped make the world a safer place.

"It is given to very few people to change the course of history," Major told reporters. "But that is what Gorbachev has done. Whatever happens today his place in history is secure."

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who first met Gorbachev in Britain shortly before he assumed power, said: "He did great things for the world and we are very grateful."

"It is a totally outstanding man in history that is now leaving the scene and we hope that his successors in the different republics will follow the same policy," Norway's Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg said.

North Korea accepts nuclear inspections

SEOUL, Dec 26: North Korea declared Thursday it will sign a treaty allowing international inspection of its nuclear facilities, South Korean officials said, reports AP.

North Korea also declared that it would not possess facilities for nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment, suggesting the hard-line Communist state would not attempt to manufacture nuclear weapons.

"It's a very positive development and brightened hope for an agreement (between the two Koreas)," said Lee Dong-Bok, a South Korean delegate to talks with North Korea on Thursday.

The surprise North Korean announcement came during talks on the nuclear dispute that threatens to scuttle a historic, two-week-old reconciliation agreement for the heavily armed peninsula.

Lee said the North Korean statement was contained in a "declaration of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula" proposed for adoption by both Koreas. The proposal strongly resembled one by the South, he said.

The North Korean draft calls for peaceful use of nuclear energy and would ban the production, introduction and stockpile of all nuclear weapons on the peninsula.

It also would ban nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities. Such facilities can produce plutonium, an essential material in nuclear weapons.

Lee said North Korean officials also declared that they now believe South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo's announcement last week that there are no nuclear weapons left in his country.

Sharif to visit France next month

ISLAMABAD, Dec 26: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will visit France next month to press for the delivery of a French nuclear power plant, promised more than a year ago, a government official said Thursday, reports AP.

MOSCOW: The Soviet flag comes down from Mikhail Gorbachev's office in the Kremlin Wednesday shortly after he announced his resignation in a television address to the nation. — AFP/UNB photo

Demise of USSR a divine retribution: Mujahideen

ISLAMABAD, Dec 26: Afghan rebels who battled Red Army troops for nine years said Thursday the collapse of the Soviet Union is divine retribution for the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, reports AP.

Burhanuddin Rabbani, a rebel leader in the 13-year long war against the Soviet Union, said: "I believe in the verse of the Koran... that you will see the destruction of dictatorships that have oppressed people. The Soviet Union and Communism are being buried in front of our eyes."

Iraqi Health Minister fired

BAGHDAD, Dec 26: Iraqi Health Minister Abdel Salam Mohammad Saeed has been dismissed and replaced by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, officials newspapers reported today, reports AP.

Omid Medhat Mubarak has taken over as Health Minister and will also stay on as acting Social Affairs Minister.

Faced by a trade embargo since its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Iraq has complained of medicine and food shortages although they are officially exempted from the sanctions.

Glasnost, perestroika brought chaos: China

HONG KONG, Dec 26: China accused Mikhail Gorbachev late Wednesday of bringing political, economic and ethnic crisis to the now-defunct Soviet Union by reforming its communist system during his seven years as President, reports AP.

In contrast to western praise for the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the official Xinhua news agency said Gorbachev's policies of openness and restructuring had brought chaos to the former superpower.

His "new thinking, glasnost and political pluralism have brought political chaos, ethnic strife and economic crises" to China's northwestern neighbour, Xinhua said in a report dated from Beijing and monitored here.

Gorbachev announced his resignation late Wednesday, ceding control of the armed forces and nuclear launches to Russian President Boris Yeltsin, whose country will inherit Moscow's seat on the United Nations Security Council.

"The disintegration of the Soviet Union followed turbulent changes in recent years, when the Soviet Union was rocked by political instability,

economic slump and rising ethnic strife," the news agency said.

Chinese authorities, who fear surging nationalism in the former Soviet republics could spill across their own borders, initially took a cautious approach to the demise of the

Soviet Union and only recognized its collapse Tuesday.

Beijing indicated on Tuesday, however, that it was ready to set up ties with the 11 republics that formed a new commonwealth of independent states in Alma Ata last weekend.



TBILISI: Members of the opposition against President Zviad Gamsakhurdia relax during a lull of fighting outside the Georgian parliament Tuesday where the President is held up with his supporters. — AFP/UNB photo

Soviet collapse leaves treaties in doubt

WASHINGTON, Dec 26: The demise of the Soviet Union leaves in doubt commitments to scores of treaties with the United States ranging from nuclear arms reduction to international accords on pollution and polar bears, reports AP.

Some, such as a convention on the rules of warfare, date back to the czarist-era 19th century. Others like a U.S.-Soviet treaty on fishing rights in the Bering Sea, are only months old.

republics, eager for quick recognition by the United States and the West and entrance into the United Nations, are ready to accede to all major bilateral and international accords.

"In terms of treaty law the old Soviet republics appear to be buying into the Baker checklist," said David J. Scheffer, an international law expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "It's in their self-interest to do so."

Secretary of State James A. Baker, on his just-completed

five-day swing through five former Soviet republics, made it clear that adherence to conventions on arms control and human rights must precede admission to conventions on arms control and human rights must precede admission to the international community of nations.

He came away with assurances from the republics they will strictly abide by such accords as the international Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty signed by President

Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow last July.

Still, there are dozens of protocols, some outdated, some irrelevant, that will need to be examined as the new governments in the Soviet Union evolve.

To name just a few, the Soviet Union and the United States have accords in such areas as atomic energy, education, environment, fisheries, grain, health, housing, narcotics, nuclear tests, pollution, post-space, taxes, telecom-

Off the Record

Even Gorby's pen betrays

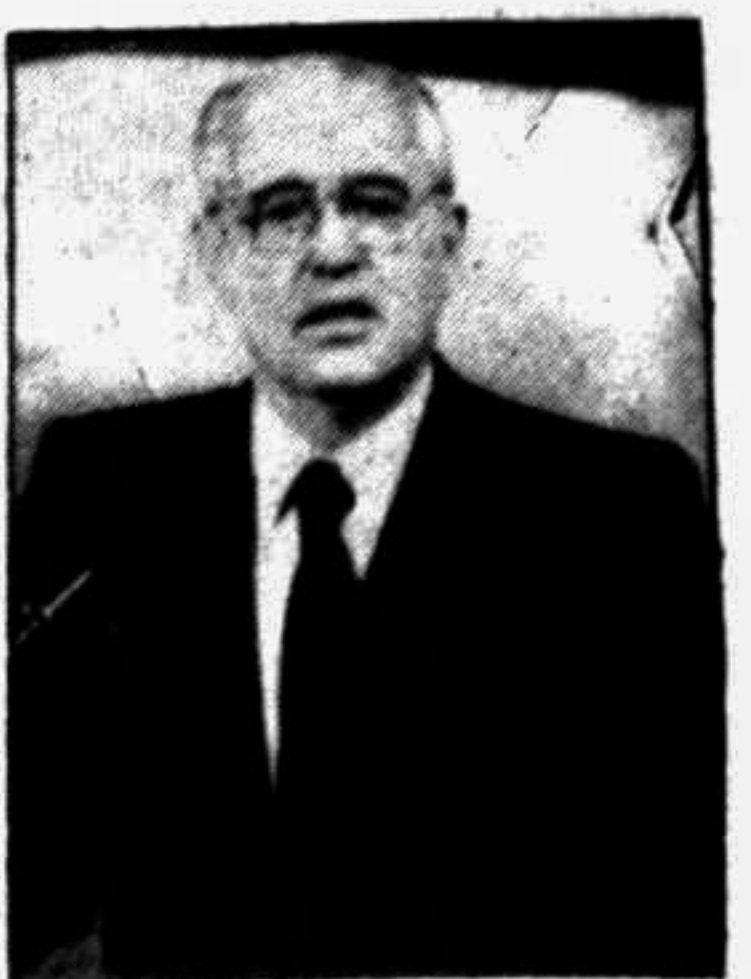
WASHINGTON: Mikhail Gorbachev used a pen borrowed from the president of the U.S. Cable News Network television to sign his job into history, CNN reported on Wednesday, says Reuter.

Gorbachev's own pen ran out when he went to sign the decree transferring control of the nuclear arsenal to Russian President Boris Yeltsin, the network said from Moscow.

The historic stroke came from a gleaming black pen belonging to CNN president Tom Johnson, who was in Gorbachev's office during his resignation speech.

"After his speech, he had to sign the document, and his pen did not work," Stuart Lory, CNN's vice president and a former Moscow bureau chief, said in a satellite interview on CNN's "Larry King Live" show.

After lending Gorbachev his pen, Johnson asked for it back, Lory added.



She stays, he goes

LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth has hinted that she will not abdicate in favour of her son Prince Charles, British newspapers said Thursday, reports Reuter.

In her traditional Christmas speech, the monarch said, "with your prayers and your help and with the love and support of my family I shall try to serve you in the years to come."

The Daily Mail said the Queen, who will mark 40 years on the throne in February, gave a coded message which should end speculation that she would quit in favour of her eldest son, aged 43.

The Queen is now 65 — retirement age for most Britons — but the Times quoted experts on the royal family as saying she would never consider relinquishing the throne.

"I'm quitting" ran a headline above a photograph of Gorbachev. "I'm staying" read another above one of the Queen.

Fake myth to fight 'great myth'

NEW YORK: Oliver Stone, whose movie "JFK" has been criticised as distorting history and mixing fact and fiction, asserts that he "grew up reading fake history," reports AP.

"I'm a child of distortion," the director is quoted as saying in the January issue of Q magazine. "I grew up reading fake history. I'm still grouping my way, trying to figure it out, to see the truth, to understand what really happened."

Stone, who was 17 when President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, said the Warren Commission finding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone killer "is a great myth, and in order to fight a myth, maybe you have to create another one."

"I suppose our movie is a countermyth: that the man was killed by larger political forces, with more nefarious and sinister objectives," Stone said.

"I don't know who did it... I'm more concerned in a way with why Kennedy was killed than in who or how."

Georgian President seeks ceasefire

TBILISI (Georgia), Dec 26: Georgia's President Zviad Gamsakhurdia sought a temporary ceasefire today to evacuate wounded loyalist troops from the Transcaucasian Republic's besieged parliament, reports Reuter.

Four days of fighting have killed at least 34 people in the southern republic.

After continual pounding by opposition artillery, Gamsakhurdia said the situation inside the parliament government complex in the capital Tbilisi was critical.

He had asked Health Ministry officials to negotiate with opposition leaders to allow ambulances to pass through the barricades.

Speaking by telephone in a clearly anxious voice, he told Reuter on Wednesday that food supplies were insufficient and medical aid was necessary.

But he was not prepared to meet opposition demands for him to leave the parliament and step down.

"These criminals are continuing to bomb the parliament," he said in reference to rebel national guardsmen who have bombarded the building since Sunday with heavy artillery and other weapons deployed across the street.

"We are in a blockade. We are willing to negotiate, but they are demanding my resignation and I cannot agree to that," he said.

The opposition forces, which accuse Gamsakhurdia of stifling democracy, also said they would not back down and expected the President and his troops to surrender within the next day or two.

Georgia is the only one of the 12 former Soviet republics that did not join the new Commonwealth of Independent States which is replacing the superpower Soviet Union.

Mahathir in Seoul

SEOUL, Dec 26: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad arrived in Seoul for a four-day private visit which will include a courtesy call on President Roh Tae-Woo, officials said, reports AP.

Mahathir will probably call on Roh Friday, but the two men are not expected to discuss official matters, according to a South Korean official helping to coordinate the visit.

The Malaysian leader will visit the Hyundai Group shipyard in Ulsan on Saturday for a ribbon cutting ceremony marking the delivery of a 50,000 tonne ship ordered by Malaysia.

BRIEFLY

Kurds send team to Baghdad: Kurdish political leaders sent a delegation to Baghdad on Wednesday in a third attempt to negotiate an end to the government's two-month old economic blockade of Kurdistan, reports Reuter Thursday from Iraq.

The delegation, which does not include top party leaders, left for the Iraqi capital at the government's invitation.

The blockade has caused economic chaos and widespread hardship in Kurdistan. The salaries of government employees have been terminated and fuel and food shipments interrupted.

Christmas lull in Croatia: Christmas Day brought a relative lull to the battlefields of Croatia but both sides tried to use this to score political points, reports Reuter Thursday from Belgrade.

The Federal Yugoslav Army, fighting in support of Croatia's Serb minority, said in a statement it was observing restraint as "the Croatian side wishes to celebrate Christmas in peace".

Serbs observe the orthodox Christmas in two weeks' time. Croatia's Catholic religious leaders urged respect for the festival and Croatian radio blamed incidents on the army, saying, "there is no Christmas ceasefire."

Pro-Cuban guerillas kill ten: Five policemen and five civilians were killed in a 12-hour assault by pro-Cuban guerillas on a police station in a coca-crowding region of the Amazon jungle, police officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuter Thursday from Peru.

About 200 guerillas of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement attacked the police station at Juanjui, 550 km northeast of Lima from Monday night until early Tuesday, said a police official in Tarapoto.

Five policemen and five Juanjui residents, victims of cross-fire, died in the attack and four policemen were wounded, according to the officials in Tarapoto, 150 km north of Juanjui.

Eight killed in Mujahideen attack: At least eight people died and several more were injured as the Mujahideen fired several rockets into the Afghan capital Wednesday, the government and sources said, reports AP Thursday from Kabul.

One rocket hit a children's playground killing four local children, as nine more landed elsewhere in the city.

National television said four more people were killed from the explosions across Kabul late Wednesday.

Military sources said dozens more were "badly wounded."

Kim Jong may replace father:

Kim Jong-Il designated heir of North Korean President Kim Il-Sung, has assumed the post of Supreme Commander of the North Korean Army, Pyongyang radio said Thursday, reports AP from Tokyo.

Kim Jong-Il attended a military meeting in Pyongyang on Wednesday as Army Chief, the radio said in a brief report.

Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday that the Central Committee of North Korea's ruling party on Tuesday elected Kim Jong-Il to the military post previously held by his father.

Observers speculated that the younger Kim, 49, might replace his father as President on the occasion of Kim Il-Sung's 80th birthday on April 15.

Clashes leave 5 dead in Colombia: Marxist guerillas attacked a police station in a remote Colombian town on Christmas Day and three policemen and two rebels were killed in fierce fighting, the independent news agency Colprensa reported, says Reuter Thursday from Bogota.

The father of the station commander, who was visiting his son, was also killed when rebels of the Colombian revolutionary armed forces attacked Piedrancha, in the southwestern province of Narino, 500 km (300 miles) southwest of Bogota, the agency said.

The guerillas virtually destroyed the police station and painted political slogans on buses in the town before fleeing.