

BRIEFLY

Gaddafi in Cairo: Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi arrived in Cairo Sunday on an official visit expected to focus on the Lockerbie crisis which has strained Libya's relations with the West, reports Xinhua from Cairo.

Gaddafi arrived in Egypt through the northwestern border point of Al-Salloum by land and had tea at a tent which was put up there to receive him, according to the Middle East news agency MENA.

He then travelled by car to the Mediterranean town of Marsa Matruh, 200 kilometres to the east to meet local officials, the agency said.

Thai bus mishap claims 18: A bus en route to a funeral collided with another bus at a sharp curve in northern Thailand, killing 18 people, police said Monday, reports AP from Bangkok.

Twenty-three people were injured in the accident 11 pm Saturday in Pichit province, about 290 kilometres (180 miles) north of Bangkok, Pichit police officer Uten Sirapun said by telephone.

He said the bus crashed into a tour bus on a mountain curve where it was difficult to see oncoming vehicles. Seventeen people were killed instantly and another died in a hospital.

DPRK closing missions in Africa: North Korea is moving to close two more embassies in Africa, apparently to conserve badly needed hard currency, South Korean officials said Monday, reports AP from Seoul.

The Communist North, which shut down its embassies in Sudan, Albania, Ivory Coast and Afghanistan last year, now plans to withdraw from Togo and Burkina Faso, the Foreign Ministry officials said.

The main reason for the North Korean move appeared to be economic, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

North Korea, one of the world's few remaining Communist states, is reportedly experiencing acute economic difficulties after losing its major overseas markets in the former Soviet Union and other East European countries.

Russian Defence Minister in Paris: Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev arrived in Paris Sunday for a three-day visit during which he will sign an agreement on increased defence cooperation between Russia and France, says AP from Paris.

It was the beginning of the first visit to France by a Russian defence minister since 1912.

Grachev noted after arriving at Orly Airport south of Paris that he planned to examine daily life and combat training in the French armed forces.

While in France Grachev will meet with French Defence Minister Pierre Joxe and Chief of Staff Adm Jacques Lanxade.

Gunmen kill 9 blacks: Nine blacks were killed and seven seriously injured Sunday when gunmen opened fire on a vehicle and sent it plunging down an embankment, police said, AP reports from Johannesburg.

The attack took place near the eastern city of Pietermaritzburg, the site of vicious black faction fighting since the mid-1980s.

Two rifle-wielding men ambushed the vehicle, which overturned and rolled down an embankment, police said. The gunmen then fired again on the victims as they tried to escape from the wreck.

Police said they believed the attack was linked to an ongoing local rivalry but did not release additional details.

Palestinian boy killed in Gaza: Israeli troops shot dead a thirteen-year-old Palestinian boy and wounded 13 people in clashes in the occupied Gaza strip on Sunday, Palestinian sources said, reports Reuter from Jerusalem.

The army said it was checking the report.

In Shati refugee camp, soldiers shot and killed Marwan Dababish, 13, a bystander, as they clashed with Palestinians throwing stones. Eight other Palestinians were wounded.

Tigers ambush military patrol, kill 13

COLOMBO, Jan 18: Tamil Tiger rebels ambushed a military patrol and shot dead 13 soldiers in northeastern Sri Lanka Monday, military officials said, reports AP.

The attack came a few hours after the Tiger's clandestine radio station called for three days of mourning to mark the death of several guerrillas aboard a blazing ship off the southeastern coast of India Saturday.

The soldiers were attacked at Pulmoddai village, about 250 kilometers (157 miles) north-east of Colombo, said officials at the Joint Operations Command.

The troops fired back and later recovered the body of a guerrilla, a rocket-propelled grenade and a radio set, they said.

A top commander of the guerrillas, Sathasvram Krishnakumar, popularly known as Kittu, was killed when Indian

naval ships intercepted his boat.

The 280-ton M.V. Ahad sank Saturday 12 nautical miles off Madras, Indian officials said. Nine crew members who jumped into the sea were rescued.

On Monday, pictures of the rebel commander and white flags fluttered from homes and road crossings in the rebel-controlled northern provinces, residents said.

Krishnakumar, who was the Tiger commander for Jaffna peninsula commander until 1987, reportedly was sailing from a European country to Jaffna to discuss a peace plan initiated by some Scandinavian countries.

More than 17,500 people have been killed since 1983 when rebels from the minority Tamil community started a violent campaign for an independent homeland in the north and east.

ROK to grant amnesty to 7000 people

SEOUL, Jan 18: President-elect Kim Young-sams transition team said Monday the new administration would grant amnesty to thousands convicted of politically related or other crimes, reports AP.

The committee, headed by former Prime Minister Chung Won-shik, said it would formally recommend that Kim issue a special amnesty to more than 7,000 people.

During his presidential campaign, Kim promised if elected to issue a special amnesty to pardon minor offenders, including those convicted of politically related crimes.

Kim won the Dec. 18 election with 42 percent of the votes cast. He begins his single five-year term on Feb. 25.

The planned amnesty would be larger in scale than the one extended in 1987 when President Roh Tae-woo took office, said one committee member, who asked not to be identified.

The 1987 amnesty, the largest in South Korean history, affected 7,234 political and other criminal offenders.

Missile attack on Iraq appropriate: Clinton

WASHINGTON, Jan 18: President-elect Bill Clinton said Sunday the US missile strike against Iraq was "appropriate and forceful." His press secretary said the incoming administration was "prepared to continue taking appropriate action until Iraq complies," reports AP.

Clinton and his advisers took a tough line toward Iraq as the incoming president arrived in Washington for his inauguration on Wednesday.

Moments after Clinton's bus pulled up to the Lincoln Memorial for an inaugural festivity, his deputy national security adviser, Sandy Berger, boarded the vehicle to brief the incoming president.

There was no sign of retreat from the military confrontations between the Bush administration and Iraq. "We're prepared to continue taking appropriate action until Iraq complies," reports AP.

Clinton's communications chief, George Stephanopoulos said Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein "doesn't realize that there is no daylight between President Bush and President Clinton on this."

Stephanopoulos said Clinton "is determined to be tough" with the Iraqi leader.

"We've been fully briefed. We've been in regular contact," Clinton said of the increase in

tensions that put a shadow over his otherwise festive bus journey through the Virginia countryside to the nation's capital.

"Saddam Hussein's continuing provocation has been met, by appropriate and forceful response. I fully support President Bush's action," Clinton said. "Saddam Hussein should be very clear in understanding that the current and the next administration are in complete agreement on the necessity of his fully complying with all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions."

Of the shooting down of an Iraqi fighter in the northern Iraq no-fly zone, Myers said:

"He supports the action." Clinton adviser Nancy Soderberg was with him on the bus tour and was keeping in constant touch by phone with Clinton's national security advisers Anthony Lake and Berger in Washington.

Lake, in turn, was keeping in touch with National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and other members of the Bush team, Myers said.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said Clinton had "not been asked for his approval" of Bush administration actions. "But we have tried to keep him informed every step of the way. President-elect Clinton has the benefit of all the details," Fitzwater said.



MOGADISHU: A Somali child watches through barbed wire the distribution of some 120 tons of wheat and sorghum in the village of Afgio, 25 km west of Mogadishu Sunday. —AFP/UNB photo

US ready to place troops in Somalia under UN command

MOGADISHU, Jan 18: The United States hopes it can hand over command of peacekeeping troops in Somalia to the United Nations in two weeks' time, a military spokesman said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

"We feel we're rapidly approaching the point where we'll be able to make a very smooth handover to the United Nations command that's going to follow us," said Marine Colonel Fred Peck, the chief US military spokesman in Somalia.

"We are perhaps only a couple of weeks away from being at that point," he told a news conference.

Peck said the US-led task force, which landed on December 9 to stop gangs from looting relief supplies for the starving, had secured eight relief bridgeheads in the famine-hit interior.

"The tough nut still is here in Mogadishu," he said, adding that Marine Major General Charles Wilhelm, US Commander in the capital, had given himself a goal of achieving relative calm and stability here by the end of the month.

He said the 850-strong 3rd battalion, 9th Marine regi-

ment, the first big unit to leave Somalia would start flying back to its base in camp Pendleton, California, on Tuesday.

About 900 Australian troops are replacing the Marines in the famine-torn of Baldoa.

Robert Oakley, Washington's special envoy to Somalia, said last week the US will keep a "very large presence" in the country after handing military command to the United Nations.

There are now more than 36,000 troops from 21 nations in Somalia, including 25,000 Americans.

Peck said 300 Somalis met last week to discuss formation of a new police force for Mogadishu, a project he described as a "priority item for the UN."

Somali warlords agreed after lengthy talks in Addis Ababa last week to disarm their militias under UN and US supervision and to pursue discussions on who should attend a national reconciliation conference planned for March 15.

General Mohamed Farah Aidede, perhaps the most powerful militia chief of all, returned to Mogadishu on Sunday.

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Move to end Sultans' immunity from prosecution Mahathir places bill in parliament

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 18: Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Monday presented to Parliament a bill to revoke the immunity from prosecution enjoyed by the hereditary monarchs of nine Malaysian states, reports AP.

Mahathir acted after failing to work out a compromise with the Sultans over the last two days.

The bill would amend the constitution to end immunity from prosecution for Sultans accused of offenses ranging from assault to not paying debts.

In a statement Monday, the Sultans said they agreed with Mahathir that there could not be two systems of justice in the country and no Sultan had the right to harm anyone.

The conference of rulers recommends an advisory board be established whose function would be to make recommen-

dations to the appropriate state authority for the removal of the ruler before he is charged or sued," the statement said.

The Sultans said details of their proposal needed further consideration and discussion.

Mahathir's proposal was to be debated by the elected House of Representatives Monday and Tuesday. The Senate, made up mainly of government appointees, is to debate it Wednesday.

In both houses, Mahathir's National Front coalition has enough support to win approval, and some opposition parties have promised their backing.

Some lawyers say the amendments to take away Sultans' privileges would need the Sultans' consent to become law.

Mahathir says, however, the

constitution provides that any bill passed by Parliament becomes effective after 30 days even if the Sultan's don't sign in approval.

The government has been unhappy for some time about reports of Sultans and royal family members assaulting people, obtaining state-owned timber land at almost no cost, and not paying debts.

It decided to act after Sultan Iskandar Ismail of Johore state allegedly assaulted field hockey coach Douglas Gomez at the Johore palace last Nov. 30. Gomez had criticized the state education department's order to withdraw his Sultan Abu Bakar College hockey team from a national meet.

Last July, Iskandar's second son, Tunku Majid, 22, allegedly assaulted a hockey goalkeeper in a dressing room after his team lost. He was

banned from playing hockey for five years.

"Following two incidents of a ruler and a prince assaulting the people, the government could not view such incidents lightly without affecting its credibility as a responsible government. The government has to take a firm stand to protect people from being victimized by rulers," Mahathir said in presenting the bill.

He added, however, that the government wanted to retain the system of hereditary monarchs. It is still sedition for anyone to call for abolishing the monarchy.

In 1977, Iskandar was convicted of culpable homicide, ordered jailed for six months and fined 6,000 ringgit (dls 2,400). His father, who was than Sultan, pardoned him. He did not go to jail or pay the fine.

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The 1987 amnesty, the largest in South Korean history, affected 7,234 political and other criminal offenders.

Buoyant Bill Clinton pushes aside problems soon to confront him

WASHINGTON, Jan 18: A buoyant Bill Clinton pushed aside "the complex and massive problems" soon to confront him and stepped toward the presidency with a visit to his old campus and a talk to foreign ambassadors awaiting America's new leader, reports AP.

Washington crackled with anticipation over Wednesday's ceremonial installation of a young, new president whose instincts had been shaped by neither global war nor economic depression.

Spread out as far as the eye could see, a third of a million waving, cheering, picture-taking people welcomed Clinton and Vice President-elect Al Gore and their families to the capital on a mild Sunday evening in January.

Democrats celebrated the first inauguration of one of their own in 16 years. Clinton embraced it all, throwing his head back in laughter, hugging old friends, giving the thumbs-up signal.

Renewed bombing in Iraq disrupted none of it, even if Saddam Hussein called the raids a "new chapter in the mother of all battles."

Clinton's hours until his investiture at noon (1700 GMT) Wednesday brim with purposeful symbolism, touching all bases — a word with the diplomatic corps, a tribute to the slain martyr of black Americans, a meal with some of society's victims.

Foreign problems occupied Clinton's first evening in Washington. He met for several hours at Blair House with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Colin Powell, and with Gore and Warren Christopher and Les Aspin, his nominees for secretaries of state and defense, respectively.

A somber undertone broke through Clinton's remarks as he made his way to Washington from Jefferson's home in Charlottesville, Va.

He stopped outside an old country church in the village of Warrenton, Va, and talked to the townsfolk of "the complex and massive problems" that await him.

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CHARLOTTESVILLE, Virginia: US President-elect Bill Clinton (L) and Vice President-elect Al Gore share a laugh Sunday during a question and answer session with students at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's historical home. —AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

They travel 1,000 km on skis

PUNTA ARENAS, Chile: Four US women have reached the South Pole, ending a more than 1,000-kilometer (621-mile) journey on skis across vast frozen planes, without using motor vehicles or dog teams, reports AP.

The American women's transantarctic expedition included a teacher, Sunniva Sorby; a skiing expert and guide Anne Dalvera; Veteran climber Sue Giller and trek leader Ann Bancroft, now the first woman to have reached both the North and South Poles on skis.

The team completed its 67-day journey Thursday, after braving fierce winds and temperatures of as low as minus 26 degrees Celsius (minus 15 degrees Fahrenheit).

Earlier this year, Norway's Erling Kagge made the trip to the South Pole solo.

The group of women started their journey November 9 after being dropped by airplane at Hercules Inlet.

Buying fags banned, not smoking

SINGAPORE: Those under 18 years of age would not be allowed to buy cigarettes but they would not be banned from smoking under legislation introduced in Parliament Monday, reports AP.

The Smoking (Control of Advertisements and Sale of Tobacco) Bill follows a government warning last year that it would take action to curb an increase in teen-age smoking.

After a 1991 survey, the Health Ministry reported that the number of boys aged between 15 and 19 who smoked had increased from one in 20 in 1987 to one in 10. The proportion of girls in the same age group who smoked increased from 0.1 percent to 0.7 percent.

The new law is expected to be enacted promptly because the ruling People's Action Party holds an overwhelming majority in Parliament.

It is the latest step in a campaign to make this the world's first smoke-free city.

Watching violent movie he kills his classmate

BANGKOK: An 8-year-old boy mimicking a violent movie he had just seen on television killed his classmate with a pistol in northeastern Thailand, police said Monday, reports AP.

Police said Suphot Kamkong went outside to play with his classmate Saturday after watching "Gold IV," a popular Thai movie featuring fierce shooting scenes and several locally hired Americans portraying the bad guys.

At first, the boys played with a toy gun but Suphot said it was too short so they went into Suphot's house to play with a real one, said police Capt Jaturon Tragulpan. Suphot shot his classmate, Teerapong Pimpru, once in the back. Suphot's mother had just left the house to go talk with neighbours.

Suphot was taken to a police detention house for people aged under 15, the police captain said by telephone from Korat province's capital, about 210 kilometers (130 miles) northeast of Bangkok.

Khmer Rouge refuses to free UN peacekeepers

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, Jan 18: Khmer Rouge guerrillas refused Monday to free three UN peacekeepers from Britain and Chile whom they seized in central Cambodia, a UN spokesman said, reports AP.

The officers and their Cambodian interpreter were detained upon arriving 8 am Sunday at a meeting with the Khmer Rouge along the Stoen Sen river in Kompong Thom province, said spokesman Eric Falt.

He said UN officials have maintained radio contact with the three naval observers — a British lieutenant commander, a British sergeant and a Chilean lieutenant. He said they were well equipped with radio batteries and food. He did not have their names.

UN officials in Kompong Thom and Phnom Penh were negotiating the release of the latest group of prisoners but Monday the Khmer Rouge still refused to give in, Falt said.

The Khmer Rouge briefly held six other UN peacekeepers last month in the same area, about 140 kilometers (85 miles) north of Phnom Penh.

On Friday, Khmer Rouge guerrillas detained an American military observer for 24 hours near the Thai border in Siem Reap province in northwestern Cambodia, Falt said. He was freed Saturday

unharmd, he said. His name was not available.

In recent weeks, the guerrillas have detained peacekeepers a half dozen times in different locations before releasing them unharmd.

Violating a peace accord it signed, the Khmer Rouge has refused to disarm and generally prevented peacekeepers from entering its territory to prepare the country for democratic elections in May. The Khmer Rouge slaughtered Cambodians during its fanatical Communist rule in the 1970s before being ousted in a Vietnamese invasion. It then fought the Vietnamese-installed government for nearly 13 years before the peace accord.

The three naval observers were to meet with the Khmer Rouge Saturday as part of an effort to persuade the guerrillas to cooperate with the peace process.

When only a junior guerrilla officer showed up for the meeting, the peacekeepers asked him to call his superior, Falt said. The superior never arrived, so the men left that evening with plans to return Sunday.

The junior officer met them again Sunday, forced them further upriver, and said he would detain them until his superior arrived, Falt said.

Gore for war crimes tribunal to try Saddam

WASHINGTON, Jan 18: President-elect Al Gore called on Sunday for the creation of a war crimes tribunal to try Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein but refused to say Saddam should be captured if the tribunal finds him guilty, reports Reuter.

Appearing on US television, Gore said he would recommend that Saddam be tried, a proposal he first suggested before Bill Clinton picked him as his vice presidential choice.

"I will certainly urge that be done," Gore said.

"War crimes have certainly been committed and are being committed formal accounts. The violence against these two large groups of dissenters in Iraq continues, and there are UN resolutions specifically forbidding that," Gore said.

He said there are existing forums to try Saddam but said it was premature and hypothetical to say Saddam should be captured, as the United States seized Panama's former ruler, Manuel Noriega, for trial in the United States.

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