

BRIEFLY

Space shuttle Endeavour lands:

The space shuttle Endeavour landed on Tuesday, ending a six-day mission in which astronauts deployed a satellite, walked in space and taught school children science lessons, reports Reuter from Cape Canaveral.

The shuttle, briefly delayed by XOC, touched down at 8:38 am (1338 GMT) at the Kennedy space centre on its 96th orbit with Air Force Colonel John Casper at the controls.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) said the 2 billion dollars shuttle and its crew of five were in good shape after Endeavour's third space flight, the 53rd of the US shuttle programme.

The astronauts "were all excited about the success of the mission, and I am, too," said Jeremiah Pearson, NASA chief of space flight.

Japan's Prince postpones ME trip:

Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito has postponed a trip to the Middle East scheduled to start Friday, the government said yesterday, reports AFP from Tokyo.

The Crown Prince was to visit Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait during a two-week trip.

Chief Cabinet Secretary and top government spokesman Yohel Kono said that due to tension in the Gulf, the situation was "not suitable" for the goodwill visit.

The decision was approved at a cabinet meeting yesterday, Kono said.

Tremor hits Japan:

A powerful earthquake far beneath the Sea of Japan shook wide areas of Japan late on Tuesday, but there were no reports of injuries or serious damage, the meteorological agency said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

The tremor, which registered 6.8 on the Richter scale, occurred at about 11.40 pm (1440 GMT), the agency said. Its focal point was 500 KM (310 miles) underground, and much of the shock was harmlessly dissipated.

The inhabited area most affected was Onahama, about 120 KM (75 miles) north of the Tokyo on the Pacific coast, where the tremor registered three on the Japanese scale of seven.

It rated just one on the Japanese scale in Tokyo.

Ogata, Alagabid talk Bosnia issue:

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sadako Ogata held talks in Jeddah Tuesday with Secretary General of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Hamid Alagabid on the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, says AFP from Jeddah.

According to a statement released at the OIC in Jeddah, "the two parties examined ways of strengthening co-operation between their respective organisations to provide aid to victims of the conflict in Bosnia."

Alagabid and Ogata also reviewed efforts by the OIC "to bring end to Serbian aggression against Bosnia," the statement said.

Ogata, who has been in Saudi Arabia since Friday or Saturday visited the Rafha desert camp, which is providing shelter for nearly 30,000 Iraqis who fled Iraq after the Gulf War.

Russian General arrested:

A Russian Air Force General has been arrested for running a multi-million rouble business from his far-east airbase, flying businessmen and cargos to and from China in military aircraft, Ivestia newspaper said on Tuesday, reports Reuter from Moscow.

It quoted Major General Vladimir Rodionov, arrested by military counter-intelligence, as saying he was only "restoring justice" by taking a cut from fortunes accumulated by traders.

Ivestia said former flying ace Rodionov charged roubles and dollars to fly groups from dozens of Russian cities. Crews took a half of the profits and servicemen were used as a sales force to hawk Chinese goods supplied as additional bribes, it said.

Armenian troops down 3 Azeri warplanes

MOSCOW, Jan 20: Armenian forces in the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh said they had shot down three Azeri warplanes on Tuesday, according to an Armenian agency, reports Reuter.

But the Azerbaijani Defence Ministry, which acknowledged the loss of two warplanes at the weekend, said it was not aware of any further aircraft being shot down on Tuesday.

The Armenian Snark News agency, quoting the defence staff in the Karabakh capital of Stepanakert, said the Azerbaijani air force had lost a total of seven warplanes, SU-25s and Mig-21s, over Karabakh this year.

Independent confirmation of claims and counter-claims over casualties and material losses are difficult to obtain in this Transcaucasian erupted in 1988 when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of Glasnost allowed expression of ethnic resentments that had simmered in decades of harsh Communist rule. But Gorbachev proved unable to tackle the problems at the root of the Soviet Union's most costly conflict.

West trying to divide Iraq, says Arafat

PARIS, Jan 20: PLO leader Yasser Arafat, an ally of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War, accused the western alliance on Tuesday of trying to use its latest military strikes against Iraq to partition the country, reports Reuter.

He also accused the West of a double standard in its desire to bring Arabs to the negotiating table with Israel on the one hand and its aggression towards the Arabs of Iraq on the other.

This is in fact an attempt to divide up Iraqi territory," the Palestine Liberation Organisation leader told

Free French leader Rene Pleven dead

PARIS, Jan 20: Rene Pleven, a leader of the Free French in World War II and twice prime minister in the 1950s, has died at the age of 91 of an undisclosed illness. He was buried Monday in his native Brittany, the rugged peninsula of western France, reports AP.

Trained as a lawyer, Pleven joined the Free French after the fall of France in 1940 and was named minister of colonies.

Clinton pledges to inject spirit of innovation in govt

WASHINGTON, Jan 20: On the brink of his presidency, Bill Clinton pledged to inject a spirit of innovation in government and said, "I desperately want to make a difference," reports AP.

Nearly half his Cabinet received preliminary approval, and Clinton on Tuesday filled out his State Department team to confront a rash of global crises.

Asking the prayers and support of friends and foes alike, Clinton said, "I face daunting challenges too great for any person's mind to comprehend or wisdom to judge or strength to meet alone."

At noon Wednesday, Clinton is to recite the historic 35-word oath and become America's 42nd President. Fifteen minutes earlier, Vice President-elect Al Gore is to

be sworn in. Both men plan to begin the day worshipping at the Metropolitan African



Methodist Episcopal Church, a prominent black church.

Clinton's last day as a private citizen was filled with celebration and reflection, last-minute preparations and final rehearsals.

Thousands of people paid between \$100 and \$1,000 for tickets to "a presidential gala" of entertainment featuring Elton John, Barbara Streisand, Aretha Franklin, Chuck Berry, Judy Collins and the Alvin Ailey Dance Troupe. The rock group Fleetwood Mac reunited for the performance.

Clinton began his day Tuesday by paying solemn tribute at the graves of the two slain Kennedys, John and Robert, his political heroes. He placed a white rose at each burial site and bowed his head in prayer. About 20 members of the Kennedy clan joined

him. President Bush held a farewell lunch with Vice President Dan Quayle and said goodbyes to his aides.

White House walls once filled with a pictures of Bush stood bare, spruced up with a fresh coat of paint. Workmen toiled outside to touch up the inaugural parade stand.

At the Capitol, stand-ins for Clinton and Vice President-elect Al Gore, with white name tags draped from their necks, went through the motions of Wednesday's ceremony at the west front of the Capitol as photographers and broadcasters checked camera angles. Chief Justice William Rehnquist inspected the stand where he'll swear in Clinton at the stroke of noon.

9 states to send troops to Mozambique

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 20: Nine countries have so far agreed to provide troops for a major UN peace-keeping operation to monitor a cease-fire and elections in civil war-torn Mozambique, Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

In a letter to the Security Council, he named the potential troop donors as Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cape Verde, Egypt, Italy, Malaysia, Sweden and Uruguay.

The council voted unanimously on December 16 to establish the UN operation in Mozambique (Onumoz), comprising about 7,500 troops, police and civilians.

The hard-pressed United Nations already has more than 50,000 troops and other personnel serving in peace-keeping operations as far afield as Yugoslavia, Cambodia, El Salvador and South Lebanon.

Onumoz is to include five self-sufficient infantry battalions of 850 men each as well as an engineer battalion, three logistics companies, a headquarters company, and IR, communications, medical and movement control units, plus 354 military observers.

Australia urges Khmer Rouge to join peace process

BANGKOK, Jan 20: Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans urged the radical Khmer Rouge faction Wednesday to join the UN peace process in Cambodia before this month's deadline for participating in elections, reports AP.

On Friday, he is to fly to Phnom Penh to meet UN and Cambodian officials and discuss the problems of the peace process. Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, another major mediator, was to arrive in Bangkok Wednesday for Cambodia diplomacy.

Evans, speaking at a luncheon meeting of Australian businessmen, said Cambodia's long-term interests are best met by proceeding with a general election scheduled for May. He said it is in the best interests of all parties, including the Khmer Rouge guerrillas to participate.

The Khmer Rouge, which killed hundreds of thousands of Cambodians during its rule in the 1970s, has violated the

1991 Cambodian peace accord that Evans helped draft and defied the 20,000-member UN mission trying to guide the country toward free and fair elections.

The Khmer Rouge has said it will not participate in the polls under current conditions.

Jan 27 is the last day for parties to register for the election, and Phnom Penh government premier Hun Sen has called for the Khmer Rouge to be outlawed if it fails to join in the peace process by Jan 31.

The United Nations has imposed a ban on sales of petroleum to the group.

Evans said it was debatable whether further sanctions against the Khmer Rouge would be productive.

"What's crucial is to get the elections held, to get some democratic legitimacy for a Cambodian government and an effective transition to real authority being vested in that government," he said.

Afghan radicals rocket Kabul: 3 killed

KABUL, Jan 20: At least three people were killed and more than 80 injured when radical opponents of the Afghan government launched rocket attacks on the capital Kabul on Tuesday, officials said, reports Reuter.

The officials blamed the Hezb-I-Islami party of hardline Mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar for the third successive day of rocket attacks.

The government and Hezb both claimed victories in the fighting.

The Defence Ministry said government troops had captured important Hezb bases and weapons east of Kabul in a sweep to flush out the party's fighters.

The clean-up operation is being carried out because of continued shelling over the past few weeks and the threat to Kabul airport, a Ministry spokesman said.

He said government forces had entered the outlying area east of Kabul, capturing 15 tanks and some artillery pieces.

The Hezb-run Afghan news agency in neighbouring Pakistan said the party's fighters had killed many government troops and captured 100.

5 Sind political parties oppose federal system

KARACHI, Jan 20: Five small political parties in Pakistan's southern province of Sind have banded together to oppose what they call the country's oppressive federal system, a spokesman for the new group said today, reports Reuter.

Spokesman Mumtaz Bhatti said the Sindi nationalist party's, who formed the United National Alliance on Tuesday, wanted a looser, more decentralised system "wherein the nationalists will be the masters of their own destinies."

Bhatti, a cousin of executed former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, said: "Pakistan is a country of many nationalities to its federating units."

Czech, Slovak admitted to UN

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 20: The Czech and Slovak republics were admitted to the United Nations Tuesday by voice vote at the General Assembly, reports AFP.

The two countries were created after the peaceful division of Czechoslovakia into two states, the Czech and Slovak republic.

The resolution was introduced by Bulgarian Ambassador Stoyan Ganev, who called the occasion a historic event.

After the approval, the Czech and Slovak representatives took their seats in the assembly to the applause of delegates.

Present at the vote was Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who last week recommended acceptance of the two new states.

US State Department report Iran continues to be major abuser of human rights

WASHINGTON, Jan 19: "Iran continues to be a major abuser of human rights, and there was no evidence of significant improvement in 1992," the US State Department annual human rights report concluded Tuesday, reports AP.

The report said abuses included summary executions; widespread torture; repression of the freedoms of speech, press, and association; arbitrary detentions; lack of fair trials; repression of the Baha'i religious community; and severe restrictions on women.

The Government, dominated by a political elite composed of Shi'a Muslim clerics and of laymen allied with these clerics, attempts to impose its views of political and socio-religious orthodoxy," the report said, giving citizens little control over their political rights.

"The Government's hold on power continues to be reinforced through arrests, summary trials and executions, and other forms of intimidation implemented by an extensive internal security system," it said.

The Iranian government goes to great lengths to conceal its human rights abuses,

the report said. "Domestic elements that might monitor and report on the Government's practices are ruthlessly suppressed."

"The Government has repeatedly indicated in public statements that it equates active political opposition to Iran's Islamic revolution with terrorism." In addition, the government continues to carry out political assassinations of its opponents residing abroad," the report said.

German authorities were also investigating the killings in September 1992 of four Iranian Kurdish dissidents,



BAGHDAD: Iraqis look at the ruins of a civilian building Tuesday, wrecked by an allied attack. — AFP/UNB photo



TOKYO: Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito (L) and his fiancée Masako Owada walk together at the Togu Palace after their joint press conference. The couple were "officially" engaged Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

German men worried about ability to make love

BONN: German men are becoming increasingly worried about their ability to make love, according to a survey published Tuesday by the women's magazine Freundin, reports AP.

Only 48 per cent considered themselves to be "good lovers" compared with 53 per cent in 1987 and 66 per cent in 1980, it said.

A total of 58 per cent admitted to having fears of being unable to satisfy a woman, and a third of men aged 18 to 29 confessed they had erection problems.

Despite the change in confidence, most men's fantasy woman remained unchanged, long-legged, with a sensual mouth, long blonde hair and a generous chest, and dressed in silk underwear.

The survey also showed that German homosexuals were more confident about disclosing their sexual preferences: 62 per cent today, against only 55 per cent in 1982.

Orphaned tiger cubs arrive at a new home

OMAHA, Neb: Two endangered Siberian tiger cubs orphaned in the wilds of eastern Russia have arrived at a new home, the Henry Doorly Zoo, with their claws out and growls in their throats, reports AP.

The cubs were born in late August or early September to Lena, a tiger studied in a US Russian project at the Sikhotealin Biosphere Reserve in Russia.

Lena died, apparently killed by poachers, and the cubs were rescued November 21 about 400 miles (640 kilometers) north of Vladivostok.

After a 36-hour trip from the reserve, the cubs were placed in a snow-covered, open area Monday at the centre of the zoo's Cat Complex.

The pair, a male and a female weighing about 50 pounds (22.5 kilograms) each, clawed at their cages and growled while zoo employees worked to release them from their travel cages.

"They really look good. They're quite active," said zoo director Lee Simmons.

Once out of their cages, they split up and explored the perimeter of the enclosure, bumping into the surrounding glass walls.

Chelsea wants to get rid of press coverage

WASHINGTON: Chelsea Clinton seems to be a quick study when it comes to dealing with the press: Leave your parents home and you'll have a chance at some privacy, reports AP.

Her father, the new president, shares an example in a television interview being broadcast tonight.

"Her school at home had an assembly on the last day for her — a little good bye assembly — and she told us to stay home," Bill Clinton said in the interview. "She didn't want any press coverage for it. She just wanted it to be between her and her friends. So we did."

Manila looks to Clinton to patch up strains

MANILA, Jan 20: The Manila government is looking to President Clinton to patch up strains that the Philippines itself helped to create, reports AP.

"We share with you America's wish for a stronger nation and the hope for equitable and sustained economic progress, not just for our respective peoples but for all nations," President Fidel Ramos said in a message to Clinton on the day of his inauguration Wednesday.

Major Manila newspapers also wished Clinton success in restoring economic vitality in a country that is the Philippines' major trading partner.

"Filipinos offer their ardent prayers for President Clinton's success and look forward to a more fruitful partnership with the American people under his administration," wrote The Manila Bulletin.

The tone of the comments is in sharp contrast to the acrimony that often surfaced during the administration of former President Corason Aquino.

Despite US support for her administration, Mrs Aquino's followers never forgave President Bush for remarks he made during a 1981 visit as vice president.

Wartburg Castle threatened by booming tourism

THE WARTBURG, Jan 20: If the walls of this 900-year-old castle could speak, they might say, "shut the doors!" reports AP.

The Wartburg, which gave refuge to Martin Luther and Goethe, is feeling the full brunt of tourism now that it is no longer secluded within communist East Germany.

In the past two years, more than 2 million people have tramped over the drawbridge high above the Thuringia forests to one of the oldest, best-preserved shrines to

German history and culture. Hundreds more fly low to get a view from overhead.

Although the castle's caretakers relish the attention and revenue, the human traffic causes problems. Frescoes are being shaken off the walls and the breath of tourists injects too much humidity into the rooms.

There is even talk of restricting access.

"We would rather have a few less visitors," acknowledged mayor Peter Brodhun of Eisenach, the town at the base

of the Wartburg. Brodhun also is a member of the foundation that manages the castle.

The Wartburg has been a cultural and political mecca since the first parts of it were built in 1067.

During the reformation, Luther hid in the castle and finished translating the Bible into German, creating the written standard for the modern language.

On the walls of his small workshop are pilgrims who came to touch the spot where

Luther's ink well was said to have hit the wall when he threw it at the devil.

Goethe, one of Germany's greatest writers, described the Wartburg as "lofty magnificence" and began the process of turning it into a museum.

St. Elizabeth spent most of her life in the castle. Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner wrote music to honour it.

In 1817, hundreds of students rallied at the Wartburg for a free, united Germany. The Nazis briefly erected their swastika in place of the castle's

cross. The Communists conserved the castle as a nationalistic symbol.

During the lengthening peak tourist season at the Wartburg, people wait in line for hours just to get through the arched stone entrance. Cars and tour buses pack the three parking lots while others snake along to Eisenach below.

About 400,000 people a year visited the castle before the internal German border came down in late 1989, said Guenter Schuchardt, deputy director of the Wartburg

Foundation.

That more than tripled the next year, to 1.4 million. More than half of them toured the rooms of the Palas, which houses the Luther collection, frescoes from the 1850s and paintings by such as Lucas Cranach, along with tapestries and other relics of the Wartburg's past.

Tourism declined after that to about 1 million a year. Then in the spring of 1992, the Wartburg celebrated three anniversaries.

Mandela urges Clinton to help promote peace in South Africa

WASHINGTON, Jan 20: African National Congress President Nelson Mandela is urging President-elect Bill Clinton to work to accelerate the peace process in South Africa and to promote peace around the world, reports AP.

Mandela, at a news conference Tuesday in Washington, said, "I'm confident that the President-elect will take advantage of his youth with big freshness" to resolve conflicts around the world.