

BRIEFLY

Serbs detain 21 UN cops: Serb rebels in Croatia's Krajina enclave have detained 21 UN civilian police in a hotel in a town partly under fire from Croatian troops, a UN protection force spokeswoman said on Wednesday, Reuters reports from Zagreb.

UNPROFOR spokeswoman Shannon Boyd said the 21 UN officers had been confined to the top floor of the hotel in the Serb stronghold of Benkovac since Sunday, two days after Croatia's army swarmed over a UN truce line into the region.

"The Serb militias say the UN police have been restricted for their own security. But this is totally unacceptable. There is no legitimate reason for this," Boyd told Reuters from UNPROFOR's headquarters in Croatia's capital Zagreb.

Six killed in Madrid mishap: Six people were killed and at least 12 were injured when a cinema billboard crashed down onto a busy street in the heart of Madrid on Wednesday, a police spokesman said, Reuters reports from Madrid.

The publicity hoarding, advertising the Hollywood film "Sister Act" fell onto the cinema doorway which then collapsed under the weight, crushing people standing below.

Witnesses said workmen had been trying to remove the massive billboard. A cinema employee told the news agency that the hoarding was three times bigger than allowed by law.

Gunman kills three in Florida: A gunman in a business suit opened fire in a crowded Tampa restaurant at lunch time on Wednesday, killing at least three people and injuring at least two others, police said, Reuters reports from Tampa.

The suspect, Paul Calden 33, was found dead of gunshot wounds, apparently self-inflicted, about two and a half hours later in his car in nearby clearwater, Florida.

Witness accounts suggested that Calden, a resident of this Florida city, was seeking revenge after being fired from a job but police said the motive was still under investigation.

The shootings occurred at about lunch time at Island Centre Cafe, a restaurant in the 13-story Fireman's Fund office building. Two men died on the scene, and one woman died shortly after at a Tampa hospital, city police chief Edward Gonzalez said.

Venezuelan diplomat killed in Miami: A Venezuelan diplomat ending a vacation trip with a stop in Miami before returning to his post in Paris was slain during a robbery in a fashionable Miami neighborhood, authorities said Wednesday, AP reports from Miami.

Jesus Delgado, who was posted to UNESCO in the French capital, died Tuesday night at Jackson Memorial Hospital of a single gunshot wound to the head, according to Miami police.

Delgado, 45, was shot outside a home in the fashionable Brickell Avenue area as he and two friends, a man and a woman, were leaving to go out for dinner.

"At the door of the building these two men with guns came up and said: 'Give me your money.' And they shot him in the head," Ramon Hernandez, press spokesman at the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, said Wednesday.

Algerian troops kill two FIS men: Algerian security forces shot dead two Muslim fundamentalists in a gunfight inside a mosque on Wednesday, the para-military Gendarmerie headquarters said, reports Reuters from Algiers.

The Gendarmerie, quoted by the official news agency APS, said two policemen were wounded in a shootout in Bordj Bou Arreridj, 170 KM (105 miles) southeast of Algiers, as the two fundamentalists tried to flee the town.

It said the men had just attacked a jeweller and stolen his vehicle.

"The terrorists fled to get out of town, running into two police patrols on which they opened fire, lightly wounding two policemen."

Ozal asks US to provide arms to Bosnian Muslims

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: Turkish President Turgut Ozal asked the United States Wednesday to provide weapons to Muslim fighters in Bosnia to ensure "equality on the battlefield."

Ozal said Bosnians are now fighting back after being killed and forced out of their homeland by Serbian forces when the conflict first began in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Turkish President made his comments before the Brookings Institute, a Washington-based research organization, on the first day of a two-week, private visit to the

United States.

Also later Wednesday, the appeal by Bosnia's embattled government for arms and the use of force to enforce the "no-fly" zone were due to come up for consideration, before the Security Council.

On January 14, Turkey's Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin urged the UN Security Council to lift the weapons embargo to allow Bosnians to defend themselves, adding that "his country has respected the defend themselves, adding that his country has respected the ban and has not armed the Bosnians."

The atrocities committed by Serbian forces have made the Muslims stronger in their resolve despite their military inferiority, Ozal said.

He said that Muslims would never agree to a political settlement — like the one proposed by the United Nations and European Community — that grants to the Serbs territory seized through violent "Peace can only be reached if (there is) equality in the war," Ozal said. He recommended more weapons for the Muslims "to make equality on the battlefield."

Asked about Croatian attacks on Serbs as it pushes to regain land lost in 1991, Ozal reiterated that "if peace is based upon the strength of the invader" it will not last.

Ozal also said that he did not believe the Iranian Islamic Revolution would spread beyond that country's borders because of Iran's economic weakness, even though the hard-liners may have that as an objective.

"I've not seen any example" that they have succeeded in expanding their revolution, the Turkish President said.

McNamara calls for N-free world

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: International efforts should be made to return to a world without nuclear weapons, says a former US secretary of defence who headed the Defence Department when the United States and Soviet Union were on the brink of nuclear war in 1962, reports AP.

"It can be predicted with confidence that the indefinite combination of human fallibility and nuclear weapons carries a high risk of destruction of nations. I conclude therefore, that we should seek to return to a non-nuclear world," Robert McNamara said Wednesday at a forum organised by the Office of Technology Assessment, a body that advises Congress.

He cited the misinformation and misunderstandings that brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war over Cuba in 1962.

He said that in addition to the countries known to have nuclear weapons, at least three others—Israel, India and Pakistan—are believed to be able to assemble one rapidly.

He said an agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons must provide protection against violators.

"There are many ways by which this could be done," he said. "None would require retention, at most, of more than a few hundred weapons by existing nuclear powers"



SURREY, Britain: A smiling Princess of Wales, patron of the Guinness Trust, arrives for a visit to the trust's project at Mortlake, Surrey on Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Iraq still a threat, says Kuwait

KUWAIT, Jan 28: Kuwait's Crown Prince has dismissed a suggestion by Iraq that its territorial claim on the Emirate was a thing of the past and said Baghdad remained a threat two years after its Gulf War defeat, reports Reuters.

Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al-Abdulla Al-Sabah told Al-Qabas newspaper in an interview published on Wednesday that Kuwait would soon launch a diplomatic drive to rally international support given continued tension with Iraq.

Sheikh Saad dismissed as incomprehensible a brief remark by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz in a CNN television interview on Monday that "the chapter of Kuwait is closed."

"Aziz did not give anything final. What does it mean that Kuwait's file is closed?" Sheikh Saad was quoted as saying.

Aziz had been asked whether Iraq, whose occupation troops were pushed out of Kuwait by a US-led alliance in February 1991, maintained its longstanding territorial claim.

Al-Qabas reported that "Sheikh Saad stressed that the Iraqi regime had not abandoned its greed and President Saddam Hussein was still threatening Kuwait. The events of the past two weeks were evidence of that greed."

Ukraine may sell plutonium in world market

KIEV, Ukraine, Jan 28: Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma said Wednesday that Ukraine would consider selling plutonium from nuclear warheads on the world market if his government fails to strike a disarmament deal with Russia, reports AP.

Kuchma made the statement even as Russian and Ukrainian negotiators reported progress in their talks on implementing START I, which calls for 30 per cent cuts in long-range nuclear arsenals.

Ukraine, which has 176 long-range missiles, has stirred concern in Russia and the West by demanding greater compensation and security guarantees before ratifying and implementing disarmament treaties with the United States.

Unlike Russia, Ukraine has not ratified START I, which was signed in 1991 by then-presidents Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev. Bush also signed START II last month with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Kuchma, speaking to reporters, said Russia has promised to pay Ukraine for the plutonium taken from warheads on Ukrainian territory. The offer is part of a proposed deal under which Russia will dismantle the weapons.

Kuchma added, however: "If we do not reach agreement with Russia, then we real, have many other offers." Kuchma cited Japan as one possible plutonium buyer, but gave no other details.

US opposes sanctions against Israel

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: The new US administration opposes international sanctions against Israel over the expulsions of Palestinians and appears willing to brave Arab resentment over the favoured treatment given the Jewish state.

"We would have to veto the resolution, a State Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP Wednesday, referring to a PLO-sponsored draft resolution calling for UN sanctions against Israel.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher had suggested Tuesday that a Security Council resolution punishing Israel would be rejected by the United States.

The US reaction follows and appeal to the Security Council by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali that it take measures to compel Israel to obey resolution 799, which demands the repatriation of some 400 Palestinians expelled to Lebanon December 17.

The Palestinians Liberation Organization immediately circulated a draft resolution containing sanctions against Israel.

The episode is the latest in the crisis over the expulsions, which has threatened to scuttle Middle East peace talks already undermined by a lack of progress.

Hillary gets Child Labour Committee Award

NEW YORK, Jan 28: First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and 11 other Americans were honored January 26 by the National Child Labour Committee (NCLC) for their extraordinary work with children in local communities across the United States, reports AP.

The awards, which recognize individuals who have made major contributions to children and youth, recall the work of the early 20th century photographer and labor activist Lewis Hine.

Govt, opposition accord on German asylum law

BONN, Jan 28: The government and opposition Social Democrats said Wednesday they have agreed on part of a new asylum law that would cut the flow of refugees into Germany, reports AP.

For months, legislators have debated ways of changing Germany's liberal asylum law, which led to the arrival of more than 430,000 asylum seekers last year.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl's government has pressed hard for the revision because the huge influx of refugees has strained social welfare funds and fueled neo-Nazi attacks against foreigners.

There were more than 2,100 radical rightist attacks in 1992, and 17 people, including Germans and foreigners, were killed.

A committee of parliament members said it agreed on lists of so-called "safe third countries and safe countries of origin," making asylum applicants arriving from those nations ineligible.

The list includes all European Community nations, Austria, Switzerland, Poland and the Czech Republic. Any asylum seekers trying to enter Germany from those countries would automatically be rejected.

The list of safe countries of origin includes Romania, Bulgaria, Ghana and India, which are considered free of political persecution, the statement said.

The coalition government needs opposition support to get a two-thirds majority vote to pass changes to the asylum law, which allows almost anyone to apply for asylum in Germany.

A vote in parliament is expected in April.

UN troops arrest Khmer Rouge guerilla

PHNOM PENH, Jan 28: UN peacekeepers arrested a Khmer Rouge guerilla on charges of the "mass murder" of 15 mostly ethnic Vietnamese civilians and brought him before a Phnom Penh government court today, reports AP.

The guerilla, Than Theuan, 25, deserted from the Khmer Rouge ranks and confessed to his role in the massacre at the Vietnamese fishing village in Kompong Chhnang Province on December 27.

3 hurt in London bomb blast

LONDON, Jan 28: Three people suffered slight injuries in an explosion outside Harrods on Thursday, minutes after the department store was evacuated following a telephone warning, Scotland Yard said, reports AP.

A small explosion occurred outside an entrance to Harrods on Brompton Road about 30 minutes after a coded telephone warning, a Scotland Yard spokesman said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Ghali hints at withdrawal of peacekeepers from Croatia

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 28: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali hinted Wednesday he might withdraw UN personnel from Croatia because they had been placed in "grave danger" by fighting, reports AP.

The 15-nation Security Council would have to approve such a pullout. While not endorsing Boutros-Ghali's suggestion, it was preparing a non-binding statement Wednesday night threatening "further steps" against Croatia.

"Military action by the Croatian armed forces... has placed the entire peace process in the region in jeopardy," said Boutros-Ghali.

Last Friday, Croatians broke a year-long truce to recapture land they had lost to Serbs early in their six-month war in 1991. Two French UN peacekeepers were killed this week by Croatian shells, the UN said.

The council, has already demanded, in a binding resolution, that Croatia stop its offensive and condemned attacks against UN personnel. Russia's ambassador, Yuli Vorontsov, has threatened to push the Security Council to impose sanctions against Croatia if it doesn't make

peace.

The mandate of 16,000 UN peacekeepers and other forces in Croatia expires in about three weeks, and Boutros-Ghali said in an unusually alarmist report he was concerned about their safety.

The ongoing conflict has serious implications for the Security Council's consideration of the renewal of the mandate, he said in a report delivered to the council privately but then circulated to reporters.

Two diplomats on the Security Council, speaking on

condition of anonymity, said they interpreted the secretary-general's comment as a hint that the mandate of UN peacekeepers might not be renewed.

The United Nations set up protected zones in Croatia a year ago for Serbs to live separately from Croatian forces. The zones were part of a cease-fire to end fighting that erupted when Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia.

Until Croatians launched an offensive along the Adriatic coast last Friday, the republic had been relatively calm for a year. About 10,000 people died there in the 1991 civil war.

Boutros-Ghali told the Security Council said Serbia wants UN forces to remain, but added that the UN commander, Gen Satish Nambiar, "assesses the risk of a serious escalation of the conflict to be extremely high."

He said 10-15 French UN peacekeepers were under fire in Gales and that Serbs were preventing the evacuation of 21 UN police at a hotel in Benkovac.

Croatia's UN ambassador, Mario Nobilo, accused the Serbs of prolonging the fighting.

Yeltsin may visit Japan after G-7 summit

MOSCOW, Jan 28: Russian President Boris Yeltsin may visit Japan after the summit of the seven industrialized nations scheduled for July in Tokyo, Japanese Ambassador to Moscow Sumio Edamura said today, reports Xinhua.

He said in the International Press Center in Moscow that Russia and Japan could find a way of reaching mutual understanding. The basic problem between the two countries was to sign a peace treaty which should include the solution of the territorial issue between them.

Yeltsin's trip could help the two countries start a political rapprochement and resolve a series of economic problems, the ambassador said.

Japan is Russia's fourth largest trading partner. Edamura said his country had provided Russia with 100 million US dollars in loan and the two were negotiating a Japanese loan agreement for financing the modernization of Russia's oil and gas industry.

Yeltsin, before starting his trip to India on Monday, expressed the hope to visit Japan.

Off the Record

Fed up with public toilets

TOKYO: Young Japanese women are turning their noses up at public toilets in railway stations, reports Reuters.

The daily Asahi Shimbun published (Thursday) a survey saying 64 per cent of female university students were disgusted at the state of station lavatories.

Among their gripes were lack of toilet paper, lack of privacy, and too many cubicles with doors opening inwards where molesters could hide.

The poll was conducted by Professor Masaaki Takahashi, who interviewed 260 women students at his university in Nishinomiyu, western Japan. Asahi Shimbun noted that many public toilets in the region were still dual-use, for both women and men.

Royal Bengal Tiger electrocuted

CALCUTTA: A Royal Bengal Tiger, an endangered species listed in the Indian schedule of the Wildlife Protection Act, was electrocuted inside the Sunderban tiger reserve forest on Tuesday, according to delayed reports received here, reports PTI.

The reports said that the animal was electrocuted after it touched the energised fencing put around the tiger reserve to prevent the big cats from straying into the adjoining villages. The tigers normally prowled around the energised fencing and avoided touching it.

Discs of presidential songs

SEOUL: Compact discs of songs composed or sung by President Roh Tae-woo will be issued soon for use as gifts, presidential officials said Thursday, reports AP.

The discs will not be for sale, but will be distributed to commemorate the end of Roh's single five-year term on Feb 24, the officials added. Roh will be the first South Korean president to issue musical records.

Roh composed four of the 14 songs on the discs, including one for an army regiment he once commanded, the officials said. Roh, 61, retired from the army in 1980 as a full general.

\$75m G-7 fund for N-safety in ex-East Bloc

PARIS Jan 28: The Group of Seven industrialized nations on Wednesday set up a \$75 million fund to improve troubled nuclear reactors in the former East Bloc, a French government source said, reports AP.

Other countries were expected to contribute to the fund set up at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, said the source close to the Elysees Palace of President Francois Mitterrand.

The Group of Seven includes the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Canada.

France will contribute 100 million francs (\$18.8 million), the source said.

At the initiative of France and Germany, the Group of Seven, decided in principle to set up the fund during its last summit in July in Munich.

Nations in Western Europe have been especially concerned about nuclear plants

Clinton admn gears up lobbying for lifting military gay ban

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: President Clinton, intent on reversing the military's ban on homosexuals despite intense opposition, will include in his policy a "strict code of conduct" governing sexual behaviour of all troops, the White House said Wednesday, reports AP.

As opponents of Clinton's policy lit up switchboards at the White House and on Capitol Hill, the administration geared up its lobbying effort, sending Defense Secretary Les Aspin to lobby members of Congress. Clinton himself called one powerful opponent, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn of Georgia.

In a speech on the Senate floor this afternoon, Nunn reiterated the need for extensive hearings on the issue and his opposition to lifting the ban.

"It is in everyone's interest to see if we can resolve this issue through consensus rather than confrontation," Nunn said.

Nunn presented a series of

provocative questions that must be answered before any action is taken, including whether separate living quarters or any changes in law on sodomy would be needed.

"I urge that the White House, the president and all his advisers, including the secretary of defense, think through these questions very carefully before they take any kind of action that could be perceived as final," he said.

It's not simply the right of homosexuals at stake. It's also the right of all those men and women who serve in the military.

Clinton spokesman George Stephanopoulos said Clinton, planned to detail his policy Thursday.

The president refused to answer reporters questions on issue of gays in the military at a picture-taking session with members of Congress, insisting that the meeting was to focus solely on the economy.

Asked if the controversy was distracting him from being

able to develop his economic program, Clinton snapped: "No, it's distracting you. It's not distracting me."

Democrats on the Senate Armed Services Committee were meeting with Clinton at the White House this evening. Aspin held a breakfast meeting with top members of the congressional military and defense appropriations committees.

The spokesman acknowledged the White House was receiving "a fair amount" of phone calls opposing Clinton's position, but said the new president was undaunted by the outcry.

"I think that the president understood when he made this decision that it was likely to be a controversial decision," Stephanopoulos said.

A Washington Post-ABC News poll released Wednesday showed that those asked split evenly with 47 per cent on each side of the question of whether gays should serve in the military.



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of Defence Les Aspin (2nd-R) tells reporters on Wednesday that President Bill Clinton will wait six months before issuing an executive order revoking the ban on homosexuals in the military. — AFP/UNB photo

Quake hits China: 31 injured

BEIJING, Jan 28: A strong earthquake injured at least 31 people in remote southwest China early Wednesday, an official report said, reports AP.

The quake, measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale, hit Yunnan province's Pu'er County at 4:32 am (2032 GMT Tuesday), the official Xinhua News Agency reported. The county is about 300 kilometers (190 miles) southeast of the provincial capital of Kunming.

The report said there were no reports of deaths. Most houses suffered damage, and two cracks were found in the dam of a local reservoir, Xinhua said, without giving other details.

The Richter scale is a gauge of the energy released by an earthquake, as measured by the ground motion recorded on a seismograph.

A quake of magnitude 6 can cause severe damage.