

BRIEFLY

Lankan troops kill 4 Tigers: Sri Lankan security forces killed four Tamil guerrillas outside a northern military complex that was overrun by rebels last month and later retaken by the military, officials said Saturday, AFP reports from Colombo.

Troops killed the four men from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on Friday as they tried to infiltrate the forward defences of the Pooneryn Base, a military spokesman said.

Hosokawa cancels Europe tour: Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa has dropped plans to tour Europe in mid-January, due to his tight schedule in parliament, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation reported yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Hosokawa had been considering meeting French President Francois Mitterrand, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Italian Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi during a tour of unspecified European nations, the national network said.

Croats close detention centres: Bosnian Croat forces freed all their remaining Muslim prisoners of war and closed detention centres on Friday, Croatian state radio said, Reuter reports from Zagreb.

The report could not be immediately verified with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which was supervising the Bosnian Croat's unilateral release of Muslims that began on Tuesday.

The operation was suspended a day later over a shooting incident but resumed on Friday.

Riots claim 9 in Argentina: Army troops patrolled the streets of Santiago Del Estero Friday in the wake of riots that the hospital said left nine people dead and more than 100 injured, AFP reports.

The death toll rose to nine in rioting by unpaid government workers in the northwestern provincial capital, said Luis Muratore Montefinos, at the Santiago Del Estero regional hospital.

Late Thursday, thousands of demonstrators, many of them government employees who have gone unpaid for three months, took over government headquarters in this northwestern provincial capital, setting fire to furniture and buildings and stoning police.

Ice jam causes flood in Mongolia: An ice jam caused the Yellow River to flood several towns in Inner Mongolia, forcing 5,200 people to flee their homes, an official newspaper said Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

The river known for frequent flooding because of its low banks, overflowed December 7 in three places in Inner Mongolia's Dengkou County, about 800 kilometers (500 miles) west of Beijing, the China Daily said.

The waters topped at least 80 houses and flooded 1,250 others, it said. More than 500 soldiers laboured until Friday to repair the riverbanks and staunch the flow.

3 missing in Chinese tanker blast: Three people were missing when a 28,000-ton tanker caught fire and exploded in China's eastern coastal city of Qingdao, the official China Daily reported Saturday, AFP says from Beijing.

Another 35 people including a woman and a baby were rescued from the tanker that swept the oil tanker, it said.

It took firemen 20 hours to extinguish the blaze, the English-language newspaper said, adding that the tanker was "badly damaged" and there was "no oil leak."

Inspection of N-facilities DPRK to accept US proposal with a 'few reservations'

SEOUL, Dec 18: North Korea on Monday will respond positively but with a "few reservations" to a counter offer by Washington on inspection of its nuclear facilities, a Seoul daily said today, reports AFP.

The Kyunghyang Daily, in a front page story, quoted an unnamed diplomatic source in Washington as saying that "with very few reservations, North Korea will convey its acceptance of the US proposal."

The message will be conveyed during an unofficial working-level contact on Monday in New York, the daily said, without detailing the reservations. But it linked the reported new flexibility on the nuclear issue to recent policy changes in Pyongyang.

A meeting of the North's supreme People's Assembly December 9 put priority on trade, in a move seen by analysts here as indicating a slight shift towards openness by the hitherto closed and rigidly self-reliant Stalinist society.

Unconfirmed reports had said Washington, at the last working level contact between the two on December 10, offered to halt annual joint South Korean US military "team spirit" exercises the moment an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team arrived in Pyongyang.

The offer was conditional on the North agreeing to IAEA inspection of all seven of its nuclear facilities and a promise to reopen talks with the South and

exchange special envoys.

One week earlier, on December 3, North Korea had said it would accept inspection of five of its seven nuclear facilities, but not a nuclear reactor and a laboratory at Yongbyon, the two most suspect facilities.

The Kyunghyang report came after a North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman charged Friday that Washington was putting "artificial obstacles" in the way of bilateral talks, and that it would never yield to US pressure over its alleged programme to produce a nuclear weapon.

"It entirely depends on the US attitude whether the third round of talks are held and the nuclear problem is solved," Pyongyang's official KCNA news

agency quoted the spokesman as saying.

In the December 10 meeting, Washington had insisted on a return to dialogue between the two Koreas as a precondition for the third round, KCNA said.

"We cannot but be surprised at the fact that the United States is laying artificial obstacles again, by connecting the exchange of special envoys between the North and the South," the spokesman said.

"If the United States continues to resort to pressure and delaying tactics without showing concern with the progress of the dialogue, it is hard to expect an agreement," he said. Adding that "we showed the utmost lenience we could offer at the present stage."



A veiled Palestinian woman makes the V-sign during Islamic Resistance Movement rally after Friday prayers (December 17). HAMAS has rejected the Palestinian autonomy accord signed by Israel and the PLO in Washington in September. — AFP photo

Chinese military team in India

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: A high level Chinese military delegation arrived here early this morning to pay a good will visit to India, reports Xinhua.

Headed by Lieutenant General Xu Huiti, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, the seven-member delegation was greeted by Lt General S K Sharma, Director of the Indian Army Intelligence Bureau, at the Delhi International Airport.

During its 5-day stay in India, the delegation would hold discussions with India Chief of Army Staff General B C Joshi, Air Chief Marshal S K Kaul and the Navy Chief, Admiral V S Shekhawat.

The delegation will also call on India's high ranking military officers.



Teresa receives UNESCO Award

CALCUTTA, India, Dec 18: Nobel laureate Mother Teresa received the UNESCO peace education prize on Saturday for her work among the poor and destitute during the last four decades, reports AP.

Presenting her a check of 50,000 dollars the director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Federico Mayor, said the 83-year-old nun's work "exemplifies the values and purposes of peace education."

Peace talks in jeopardy Myanmar generals refuse to recognise Democratic Alliance

MAE SOT (Thailand), Dec 18: Peace talks between Myanmar's military junta and autonomy-seeking ethnic minority groups are in jeopardy because the generals refuse to recognise a rebel alliance, rebel sources said today, reports Reuter.

They said the army's State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) refused to talk to the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), which links a dozen rebel groups to politicians and students who fled the army's campaign to suppress democracy in 1988.

"SLORC sent a letter to us that they do not recognise the DAB and insist on talking with

individual factions," a senior source within the Karen Christian minority group told Reuters.

General Bo Mya, leader of the rebel ethnic minorities, had sent a letter to SLORC seeking peace-talks under the auspices of the DAB, of which he is chairman.

"General Bo Mya is responsible for the DAB, which is regarded as the opposition organisation. We cannot negotiate with the SLORC individually," said Maung Maung, Vice-President of the Karen National Union.

"If SLORC refuses to hold peace talks with DAB, the only

way out is to continue fighting."

The junta has been making peace overtures to individual minority groups this year in what some diplomats see as an effort to divide and conquer the autonomy movement. Ethnic rebels have been seeking separation from Yangon.

DAB, which is dominated by the Karen, has faced difficult times as ethnic rebels such as the Kachin reached individual peace agreements with Yangon.

The Thais, who have been providing safe haven for the rebels, now say they will not be allowed to operate from their territory.

Serbian go to polls today

BELGRADE, Dec 18: Serbians go to the polls for the third time in four years Sunday to elect their 250-seat parliament, a body that plays second fiddle to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, reports AFP.

None of the candidates can hold a candle to Milosevic, who is putting his weight behind the ruling Socialist Party, the former communists.

His former adviser, Zeljko Sincic, the Deputy Premier of the rump Yugoslavia, is trying to present himself as the rising star, but his efforts lack conviction, according to observers.

The latest polls put the Socialist Party at 25.5 per cent of the vote, ahead of an opposition which has refused to form a common front to oppose Milosevic's Party.

Neo-fascist leader Vojislav Seselj, 39, of the ultra-Nationalist radical party, was courted by the Socialists in the poll last December.



Dayanara Torres of Puerto Rico, 18, Miss Universe 1993 greeting Thai children during her visit to Bangkok's Children Welfare Home yesterday. — AFP photo

Talks with Pakistan to help improve bilateral ties: India

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: India has expected that the forthcoming Indo-Pak talks at the Foreign Secretary level, due to be held in Islamabad from next January, would be successful in initiating a forward movement in the relations between the two countries, reports Xinhua.

In his meeting with members of the parliamentary consultative committee here Friday, India's Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs RL Bhatia said that it was untrue to say that the 1972 Simla agreement between India and Pakistan had not been functional.

The agreement had ensured peace in the sub-continent for more than 20 years. He hoped that the Islamabad talks would result in an improvement in bilateral relations.

Earlier, Pakistan Foreign Minister Sardar Assef Ali told visiting US delegation of republican senators that he did not expect any outcome from the talks with India.

Referring to Indo-American relations, most members of the parliamentary consultative committee stressed the importance of Indo-US relations but maintained that there should be no compromise on the basic fundamental principles of the country's foreign policy.

On issues of human rights, non-proliferation and trade, which have been raised by the Americans, most of the members felt that India's viewpoint should be projected frankly without being defensive in the least.

Off the Record

Husband jailed for hanging nude pictures of wife

BOURG-EN-BRESSE, France: A man who posted nude snapshots of his estranged wife around town has been sentenced to three months in jail and fined 50,000 francs (Dhs 8,600), court officials said Friday, reports AP.

The man was convicted Thursday of public indecency for hanging the pictures at a bakery and a shopping centre in the couple's nearby hometown of Bellegarde in Southeastern France.

The pictures, taken during the couple's honeymoon, carried the woman's name, address and telephone number. The chief judge also noted the pornographic character of the pictures.

The couple, which later divorced, was not identified and the nature of their dispute was not disclosed.

Little murderer

NEW DELHI: A 5-year-old half-naked farmer's son has been abandoned by his family after he was branded by his village as the Little Murderer, reports AP.

Police said the boy, Harender Choudhury, clubbed three other children to death of December when they refused to stop their noisy games in front of his hut.

His parents, fearing reprisal from the victims' families, fled the farming village of Purederpur, leaving the boy to fend for himself. Neighbours chase him away, said Ratan Lal Kanojia, the deputy inspector general of police of the Champaran district in the eastern state of Bihar.

Harender cannot be arrested and charged, because Indian law says no child below the age of six can be prosecuted.

"This is the first case of its kind, we are at a loss what to do," said Kanojia, who was reached by telephone Saturday.

"We have asked social welfare groups to come and see what they can do about this boy," he said.

Foreigners marrying Vietnamese women

HANOI: More and more foreigners are taking Vietnamese marriage partners, particularly foreign men marrying Vietnamese women, according to the latest official figures, reports AP.

Under the headline "rise in marriages with aliens," the official Saigon Reader Saturday indirectly quoted Justice Minister Nguyen Dinh Lock as saying that in the first six months of this year, there were 635 such applications in southern Ho Chi Minh City.

This compared to less than 2,000 similar requests from 1989 to 1992.

The minister said that in the year to July 31 there were 102 applications by foreigners to marry Vietnamese in the capital Hanoi, but no previous figures were given.

No breakdown was given of the ratio of Vietnamese women to men getting married to foreigners except to say most marriages were between Vietnamese women and foreign men.

The report did not say how many applications were successful. The process for foreigners to receive permission to wed Vietnamese is lengthy and complicated.

58 pc Kuwaitis against women's political rights

KUWAIT, Dec 18: Most Kuwaitis oppose granting women the vote or the right to stand for parliament, according to an opinion poll published today, reports Reuter.

The Kuwait University survey of 3,500 men and women showed 58 per cent opposed political rights for women, 24 per cent wanted women to have the franchise and 18 per cent favoured granting women the right both to vote and to stand for parliament.

The survey published by newspapers showed a sharp split between traditionalist Bedouin areas and liberal Kuwait City.

Ninety-one per cent of respondents in the mainly Bedouin Jahra settlement and Kuwait's desert areas opposed

giving women either the vote or the right to stand for parliament.

Most Kuwaiti respondents from the affluent central residential areas of Kuwait City wanted full political rights for women — 77 per cent said they wanted women to have both the vote and the right to stand for parliament.

Organisers said in a statement 500 replies had to be cancelled because "many recipients who opposed women's rights filled the sheets with Koranic and other holy verses, poems and idioms supporting their views."

Women activists had hopes of winning the right to vote after the 1991 Gulf War liberation because of the prominent role women played in the civilian resistance to Iraqi occupation.

FIS sets five conditions for talks with Govt

BONN, Dec 18: Algeria's outlawed Muslim fundamentalist party said Friday it is ready to negotiate an end to fighting that has killed more than 2,000 people, but only if the army-backed regime makes major concessions, reports AP.

Rabah Kebir, spokesman in exile for the Islamic Salvation Front, presented five conditions, including negotiations between his movement and the Algerian leadership in a neutral setting.

The demands also included release of all political prisoners and repeal of all laws enacted since a military-backed ruling council took power in January 1992 to deny fundamentalists an imminent victory in parliamentary elections.

The Algerian government later Friday did not respond to the demands but set its own conditions, among them that front moderates could take part in the talks if they don't use religion for political ends.

Many front leaders have

promised to establish an Islamic state if they come to power.

Kebir, at a news conference in Bonn, also said his movement should be allowed to talk with militant Muslim guerrillas to arrange a peace.

It was the first formal response by the Salvation Front to recent peace overtures by Algeria's ruling council as it gropes for a way out of violence that recently escalated with the killings of foreigners.

The Salvation Front has denied responsibility for the killings of 23 foreigners in Algeria since late September.

"It's not the goal of the Salvation Front to fight foreigners," Kebir said, stopping short of an outright condemnation of the killings.

"If a foreigner is on the side of the oppressors, he is not welcome," he said.

The Armed Islamic Group, one of several armed Islamic groups, has claimed responsibility for most of the killings.

Gunbattle leaves 16 dead in Philippines

MANILA, Dec 18: Six government soldiers and at least 10 Muslim rebels were killed on Wednesday in a gunbattle in a remote village in southern Philippines, "Philippine Star" reported today, says Xinhua.

Quoting Col Redolfo Loraes, commander of the 603rd army brigade, the national newspaper said that the army scout rangers were on patrol in the rebel-infested new Panay village in North Cotabato when they were ambushed by about 300 members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Bosnia accuses West of ignoring genocide against Muslims

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 18: Bosnia's UN ambassador on Friday accused Western countries of betraying and abandoning his nation and of ignoring genocide against Muslims by "fascist barbarians," reports AP.

Mohamed Sacirbey called for an end to the UN arms embargo against his government so that it can defend itself against aggression by heavily armed Bosnian Serbs and Croats.

But the Security Council, which imposed the arms embargo against all parties to the conflict, is not expected to relax the ban.

Sacirbey, in a speech to the assembly, said his multiethnic, multi-religious nation had been betrayed by Western democracies and the Security Council which did not halt aggression against it.

"We continue to be the victims of genocide," he said. "We continue to suffer the senseless deaths of thousands due to the continuing sieges by the fascist barbarians."

But he said his government was committed to a negotiated

peace. "When the international community has failed to confront the genocide against our population and has allowed our civilians to be shelled, shot and denied basic essentials," he said, "we must negotiate with our tormentors to minimise the suffering."

Bosnia, Sacirbey said, would make the most painful concessions that never have been made by the Western nations demanding such concessions.

He said it continues to endorse the latest European Union initiative. It would reward Serbs with an easing of sanctions for their withdrawal from a small amount of Bosnian

Muslim land seized through "ethnic cleansing."

But Serbs are accustomed to appeasement, he said, and do not understand the carrot of incentives, without the stick of punishment.

Speaker after speaker, many of them from Muslim nations, denounced the aggression against predominantly Muslim Bosnia and the occupation by Serbs and Croats of large chunks of territory. They said that any political settlement must not reward aggression and "ethnic cleansing."

The proposed resolution demands an immediate cease-fire by all parties — Serbs, Croats

and Muslims — so that peace negotiations could be resumed. But it does not support current negotiations and plans to partition Bosnia into ethnic enclaves, saying that acquisition of territory by force and ethnic cleansing are unacceptable.

Bosnian Serbs now occupy more than two-thirds of Bosnia, an independent predominantly Muslim nation and member of the United Nations.

The resolution demands that Bosnian Serbs lift the siege of Sarajevo and other designated "safe areas" and urges UN peacekeepers to take all necessary measures to protect the Muslim enclaves.

US denies change in policy toward Haiti

WASHINGTON, Dec 18: Secretary of State Warren Christopher Friday expressed support for ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and denied there had been any change in US policy toward Haiti, reports Reuter.

Christopher and the White House discounted a Los Angeles Times report that US policy toward Haiti had collapsed following a failed attempt to convene a reconciliation conference in the Caribbean nation.

Asked whether Washington still has confidence in Aristide, Christopher said: "Our dealings with him here in the United States... found him responsive and effective."

Christopher, speaking at a photo-taking session, also praised the acting Haitian Prime Minister, Robert Malval, saying he was held in "very high regard" in Washington.

"We hope (Malval) has not left the scene permanently," Christopher said. Malval, who had proposed

the wide-ranging reconciliation conference last week, has repeatedly threatened to resign unless there is movement toward restoring the democratically elected Aristide government, ousted in a 1991 military coup.

Malval resigned Wednesday when it became clear the conference — which was to have included members of the military regime as well as social and political leaders — would not be held. He is staying on as acting prime minister until a successor is named and confirmed by the legislature.

At the United Nations in New York, a spokesman said envoys from the United States, France, Venezuela and Canada, a UN advisory group on Haiti, planned to visit Aristide Monday.

The four, at a Paris meeting earlier this week, also decided to go to Haiti along with their military experts, to speak to Cedras but no date was set.

Ukraine resents Yeltsin's statement

KIEV, Dec 18: The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry expressed resentment Tuesday over a statement by Russian President Boris Yeltsin concerning Ukraine's summoning the Russian Charge d'Affaires in Kiev, reports Xinhua.

Foreign Minister Anatoly Zlenko said Yeltsin's statement was unhelpful in trying to resolve differences between the two countries on disarmament.

"We can only express our regret to put it mildly, this serves the interests of neither Ukraine nor Russia."