

BRIEFLY

Fahd, Balladur hold talks:

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur held talks in Riyadh late Saturday during a brief visit by the French Premier designed to boost bilateral trade, reports AFP from Riyadh.

French officials said an outline cooperation agreement was to have been concluded during the discussions.

The king and the prime minister met face to face following a dinner given by Saudi authorities.

French sources said the proposed cooperation accord could result in billions of dollars in trade and defence contracts.

Tribal leader killed in Yemen:

Unidentified gunmen have killed a tribal leader and member of the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP), which said on Saturday that political assassinations were pushing the country towards civil war, Reuter reports from Dubai.

Party sources said three gunmen shot Abdel-Karim Saleh Al-Gahmi in the head on Friday as he was arriving by car at his home in the capital Sanaa.

Hungary to join NATO scheme:

Hungary has decided to join a NATO scheme offering closer military links and may be the first former Soviet bloc country to do so, a visiting US envoy said on Saturday, Reuter reports from Budapest.

Madeline Albright, US Ambassador to the United Nations, made the announcement after she and General John Shalikashvili, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, held talks with Prime Minister Peter Boross and other Hungarian leaders two days before a NATO summit is due to open in Brussels.

3 drug dealers held in Bangkok:

Two Americans and a man from Barbados were arrested carrying 1.3 KG (2.85 lb) of heroin when a patrol car stopped their taxi in central Bangkok, police said, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Police Lieutenant Colonel Chalad Utasing identified those arrested and charged with possessing narcotics for sale as Tanzanian-born Yahya Alis Alim, 40, his fellow back American, John Charles Hulten, 20, and Barbadian Daniel Jame Mungah, 28.

He said Salim was carrying a US passport issued in Seattle and Hulten was born in California.

Iranian Speaker blasts Pope:

Iran's Speaker of Parliament Ali Akbar Nategh Nuri yesterday blasted Pope John-Paul II for the Vatican's recognition of Israel, saying the move was an insult to the image of Christ, AFP reports from Tehran.

"The fact that the Pope has sanctioned the crimes of Israel is nothing new to us," Nategh Nuri said. "What is important is committing such an act on the birth anniversary of Christ."

"The move to recognise the Zionist regime was the greatest insult to the image of the Christian prophet," he said. In Islam, Jesus Christ is regarded as a prophet.

Blast leaves 33 injured in ROK:

An explosion, probably caused by leaking gas, rocked a block of flats in southwest South Korea yesterday, injuring 33 people, police said, Reuter reports from Seoul.

A police spokesman in the city of Yosu said the blast caused extensive damage to several flats and blew out hundreds of windows. About 1,000 residents were evacuated.

"Most of the victims were injured after being hit by pieces of broken glass," the spokesman said. He said police were investigating the blast on the eight floor of the building.

Wife wants to bury Gamsakhurdia outside Georgia

MOSCOW, Jan 9: The wife of former Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia called on Saturday for international pressure on the Georgian government to allow her husband's body to be buried outside Georgia, reports Reuter.

But, three days after Manana Gamsakhurdia first announced that her husband committed suicide on December 31, there was still no definite information on where his body was or even how he had died.

Gamsakhurdia took refuge in the rebel southern Russian region of Chechnya in early 1992 after fleeing to escape armed opponents besieging his parliament. His wife wants to bury him in the Chechen capital, Grozny.

"Considering the current anarchy in Georgia, we find it impossible to bury him in Georgia," she said in a statement published by the Georgian news agency Iberia.

"It is also possible that his corpse might be desecrated. Therefore, our wish is to bury Zviad Gamsakhurdia temporarily in Chechnya."

Gamsakhurdia returned to Georgia twice after being ousted

2 fundamentalists killed in Algeria

ALGIERS, Jan 9: Two armed Islamic fundamentalists were killed Saturday evening in an attack on the police station at Baucheraie, on the outskirts of Algiers, the newspaper Liberte reported today, reports AFP.

Two passersby were also wounded in the attack.

China, Japan to work for N-free Korean peninsula

BEIJING, Jan 9: China and Japan agreed to do their best to encourage North Korea to accept international nuclear inspections, visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Tsutomu Hata said Sunday, reports AP.

"We aren't saying we want China to put pressure on North Korea to open up its nuclear programme," Hata said, "but rather to pass on to North Korea the misgivings and worries of the world about the Korean nuclear problem."

China has refused to publicly comment on what it has told its ally North Korea regarding the nuclear issue, insisting it is a matter for North Korea to resolve in negotiations with the United States and the International Atomic Energy

Agency. However, other countries, including Japan, have repeatedly appealed to China to use its close ties with North Korea to help defuse tensions.

Hata said China and Japan both want a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and agreed to work toward that goal, but that China made clear its opposition to sanctions against North Korea.

The Foreign Minister spoke at a news conference on the final day of a two-day visit to Beijing intended to strengthen overall relations. His remarks were translated into Chinese by an official Japanese translator, and then translated into English by The Associated Press.

**Stand-off continues in northern cities
UN, Pakistan trying to extend truce in Afghanistan**

KABUL, Jan 9: A fragile cease-fire in the capital appeared to be holding Sunday, but there was a tense standoff between rival Islamic factions in key northern towns and cities, reports AP.

There was only sporadic gunfire Sunday morning in Kabul. It was the second day of relative calm following six days of brutal fighting that left some 4,000 wounded and hundreds feared dead.

Both Pakistan and the United Nations worked Sunday to extend the cease-fire.

UN officials, who declined to be identified, said they are trying to have the cease-fire extended for another 48 hours to arrange the evacuation of wounded and ferry emergency supplies into the devastated capital.

The UN moved its remaining international from Kabul to

Pakistan on Saturday and it negotiated with the warring Afghan parties in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

Pakistan's ambassador in Kabul, Tariq Azeezuddin, said Pakistan has received a promise that the truce, which was set to expire Sunday morning, would be extended 12 hours. He told reporters that Pakistan hoped to parlay the extension into a permanent truce.

However, few people thought that was possible.

"There will never be a cease-fire with the Communist militia," said Abdul Azeez Murad, spokesman for President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

He was referring to warlord Rashid Dostum, an ex-Communist who launched the offensive January 1.

So far, Rabbani's forces in the capital have held off an assault by Dostum and their other

main rival, Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

However, Rabbani's troops appeared to be on the defensive in Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh and Tashkurgan, important outposts in northern Afghanistan.

Dostum's men drove Rabbani's troops away from Mazar-e-Sharif and Balkh, and appeared to have some 2,000 Rabbani soldiers pinned down in Tashkurgan, according to international aid workers.

Mazar-e-Sharif, 300 kilometres (180 miles) northwest of Kabul, is the main city in northern Afghanistan and the other two towns are nearby.

Dostum, who was a general in the former Communist army, has been the dominant warlord in the north for the past two years. He sought to defeat Rabbani in Kabul with a major attack on New Year's Day.

The fighting has been some

of the fiercest since Muslim insurgents drove the Communists from power in 1992.

The warring factions agreed to a one-day truce, from Saturday morning to Sunday morning to allow hundreds of wounded to be evacuated from neighbourhoods on the front-line.

The truce was expected to be temporary and most people were ready for renewed fighting. Except for tanks and armoured personnel carriers the streets of the capital were deserted Sunday.

Tens of thousands of people, many carrying children and hauling their belongings on rickety carts, fled the capital on Saturday.

The United Nations took advantage of Saturday's calm to evacuate its international staff.



An Israeli borderguard fires at Palestinian stone throwers on Gaza City's Palestine Square Jan 8. Eliezer Zadberg, an opposition MP of the ultranationalist Tsomet party, said that the Israeli army is preparing to leave Gaza City in February if agreement is reached on implementing the Palestinian autonomy accord. — AFP photo

Mexican army prepare for guerilla war against rebels

MEXICO CITY, Jan 9: The army is preparing for a prolonged guerilla war, possibly more than six months, against an indigenous rebel organisation that launched an uprising in southern Mexico a week ago, officials said, reports AFP.

Clashes between the rebels and troops have occurred in at least 14 communities in the southern state of Chiapas since the New Year's day uprising, although the intensity of the fighting has subsided.

Troops have staged sweeps and bombing raids in parts of the Sierra Madre and Corralcuen mountains where units of the Zapatista National Liberation Army are believed to be concentrated, but officials

said these do not appear to have seriously affected the rebels.

The Defence Minister Friday put the death toll in a week of fighting at 99, including eight government troops. The Roman Catholic church in San Cristobal has estimated that 400 people have died.

Fears of rebel activity have spread to the capital, hundreds of kilometers (miles) to the north, after a car bomb exploded early Saturday in a shopping centre, causing damage but no injuries.

There was no immediate indication linking the bombing or other threats to the Zapatista rebels, but security has been stepped up at the Mexican

Stock Exchange and other areas of the capital.

The rebel organisation had announced it would not carry out attacks in major cities, but some observers said the car-bomb attack could have been staged to show the group's capacity to operate freely.

Zapatista rebels claimed responsibility for the bombing overnight of two electrical towers in the central Mexican states of Michoacan and Puebla, far from the focus of the uprising in the southern state of Chiapas.

Relief officials said more than 1,000 people from the region had fled their homes for shelters in nearby cities, fearing getting caught in the crossfire.



French President Francois Mitterrand (R) visits in a boat the flooded streets of the city of Saintes in central France, Jan 8, after the rise of the Charente river that overflowed several areas of the city. — AFP photo

NATO seeks new role after collapse of communism

BRUSSELS, Jan 9: The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, created nearly 45 years ago to guard against a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, is seeking a new role after the collapse of communism, reports AP.

Here is a brief sketch of NATO:

MEMBERSHIP: Twelve countries signed the founding North Atlantic Treaty in Washington on April 4, 1949: Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United States. Greece and Turkey acceded to the treaty in 1952, (then West Germany in 1955 and Spain in 1982).

AIM: The alliance is purely defensive with its members pledging, according to article 5 of the treaty, that "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all." After the collapse of communism in 1989 NATO sought additional missions, such as peacekeeping and promoting regional stability through dialogue.

RESOURCES: NATO has an integrated military command to which all members assign national forces except France. Spain and Iceland. NATO members had available a total of 3.4 million troops in Europe in 1989, including 326,000 from the United States, but

the figure is forecast to drop to just over two million by 1997.

The alliance is developing a rapid reaction corps of about 200,000 troops, which should be fully operational next year, and has radar planes and a standing naval force in the Mediterranean.

PRINCIPAL INSTITUTIONS:

The main policymaking body is the North Atlantic Council, which meets regularly at ambassador level, at least twice a year at the Foreign Minister level and as the need arises as a summit. Defence Ministers from all countries except France meet as the defence planning committee or the nuclear planning group.

Bushfires flare around Sydney

SYDNEY, Jan 9: Deadly bushfires flared again today around Sydney forcing thousands of evacuations, and firefighters feared flames could roar into heavily populated suburban areas for the first time, reports AP.

Fire storms raged in Kuring-Gai Chase National Park, 20 kilometres (13 miles) north of the city centre, threatening houses along a 10-kilometre (six mile) front, authorities said.

In fire-hit areas around the city, walls of red flame leapt roads and, as winds veered, swiftly changed direction.

In the outlying northern suburb of Belrose, about 300 elderly people, some bedridden, were evacuated from a hostel and nursing home.

Nearly 10,000 firefighters, including volunteers and troops, were battling blazes which erupted to the north, south and west of the city in an operation costing an estimated 4.0 million dollars (2.7 million US) a day.

Pakistan calls for solution to Tajik-Afghan conflict

TASHKENT, Jan 9: Pakistani Foreign Minister Asef Ahmed Ali called here Saturday for an urgent solution to the conflict on the Tajik-Afghan border on the second day of his visit to the former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, reports AP.

"Pakistan is very much concerned about the conflict on the Tajik-Afghan border," the foreign minister told a news conference at the Pakistani embassy in Tashkent following talks with Uzbek President Islam Karimov as well as with Uzbek Foreign Minister Saidmuhhtar Saidkasaymov.

"I am pleased to tell you that Pakistan and Uzbekistan share the same point of view on the Tajik-Afghan problem," he said.

Zhirinovsky wants cooperation with US, others

MOSCOW, Jan 9: Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the extreme Russian nationalist who has shocked the world with threats and inflammatory statements, said on Saturday he posed no threat and wanted cooperation with others, including the United States, reports Reuter.

Zhirinovsky, whose party won a large slice of the vote in parliamentary elections last month and has talked of restoring the Russian empire, made his abrupt change of tack in an interview with CNN television.

"I would like to say, no problem for the world... we stay as a democratic state," said Zhirinovsky.

UN sanctions claim 4 lakh lives: Iraq

BAGHDAD, Jan 9: Almost 400,000 Iraqis, including 140,000 children under five years old, have died as a result of UN sanctions imposed more than three years ago, the Health Ministry said Saturday, reports AP.

A Health Ministry report carried by the official Iraqi news agency said since the sanctions went into effect in 1990 until the end of 1993, 397,226 deaths were registered in Iraq.

The report said the children who died suffered mainly from malnutrition and other illness caused by it.

It said contagious diseases such as the whooping cough, polio and lung illnesses have multiplied since the start of sanctions.

Arafat agrees to loosen control over PLO policies

AMMAN, Jan 9: Yasser Arafat has "agreed in principle" to loosen his control over PLO policies, a leading Palestinian negotiator said Saturday, reports AP.

Reformers want to form spe-



cial committees that include Palestinians from the occupied territories and elsewhere to negotiate a peace plan with Israel, rather than leaving the job to PLO-appointed delegates.

Haidar Abdul-Shafi, who led the Palestinians in peace talks two years ago, said Arafat had asked him recently to mediate

between the PLO leadership and Syrian-based factions, who oppose a peace settlement with Israel.

He spoke to reporters after a two-hour meeting with 50 Jordan-based Palestinians who had signed a petition criticising Arafat's single-handed decision-making approach.

Abdul-Shafi, a physician from the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip, said changes would not be immediate.

"We are very satisfied with the outcome" he said of talks with Arafat in Tunis earlier this week. "I think it would be wrong to say that my mission has failed."

"The PLO leadership knows that we want reforms, and we know that this can't take place overnight," he said. He said Arafat "agreed in principle" to the reformists' petition.

The reform demands coincided with a deadline in PLO-Israeli negotiations to implement the September 13 accord for Palestinian self-rule in the occupied West Bank region of Jericho and the Gaza Strip.

Off the Record**Too risky for public!**

KEENE, NH: Roger and Peggy Santaw are married, but they aren't speaking to each other. They're not feuding — a judge has ruled that any contact between them would be too risky to the public, reports AP.

Santaw is a convicted rapist, serving time in a state prison. Mrs Santaw is on probation after being convicted of trying to help her husband and another inmate shoot their way out of the Cheshire County Jail last year.

Superior Court Judge Arthur Brennan said Santaw is dangerous. On Thursday he rejected Santaw's request for visits or letters from Mrs Santaw, saying he had to consider "above all else, the safety of the community."

The Santaws were married in January 1993 while Santaw was being held on charges he kidnapped and raped a woman, then left her in the woods to die. He was later convicted.

Two days after the jailhouse marriage, Mrs Santaw showed up outside with instructions from her new husband to smash a hole in a library window large enough to pass two handgrips inside.

Police allege Mrs. Santaw couldn't break the shatterproof glass with a wood-splitting maul, so she fired six shots at it from a .32-caliber pistol. Before she could smash the glass, guards spotted her husband and another inmate bashing at the window from the inside with a library table leg.

Brennan said the escapes plot showed the couple is a threat.

Mrs. Santaw was sentenced to a year in jail. She was released on probation in September and is living in Massachusetts. One condition of her release forbade her from having contact with her husband for the five years she's one probation.

Santaw told the court that is unreasonable. "I don't feel my marriage is going to survive much more of this," he said.

President's son held for beating journalists

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay: The son of Argentine President Carlos Menem was detained for questioning after he and two bodyguards were accused of beating a pair of journalists, police said Saturday, reports AP.

Carlos Menem Jr, 25, and the bodyguards were questioned by authorities late Friday and held for further interrogation, a police statement said.

Photographer Enrique von Wartenberg and fashion editor Ines Hernandez of the Buenos Aires magazine "Gente" accused the three of beating them and taking away their camera while they were photographing fashion models at a discotheque in the Atlantic coast resort of Punta del Este, 92 miles (144 kms) east of Montevideo.

Hernandez told the Associated Press in a telephone interview that she and Von Wartenberg were photographing models when Menem arrived and warned them not to take his picture.

"Menem started pushing Vo Wartenberg and immediately several of his bodyguards appeared and began hitting us," she said. "My body hurts, and Enrique has a black eye and bruises on his face and neck."

Menem made no immediate comment.

The incident occurred just hours before President Menem arrived in Punta del Este to meet with presidents Luis Lacalle of Uruguay and Juan Carlos Wasmosy of Paraguay.

Justices in opera as extras

WASHINGTON: Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg abandoned the gravity of their judicial robes and donned white powdered wigs Saturday night for an appearance with The Washington Opera, reports AP.

The justices, both opera lovers, were extras in the opening performance of "Ariadne auf Naxos," an opera about a high-society party given by a wealthy Viennese man. They stayed on stage for about 1 hour and 25 minutes.

They looked something like George Washington and an elegant Viennese lady of the 17th century, opera spokeswoman Suzanne Stephens said.

Scalia was fitted with the costume Placido Domingo wore during the 1986 world premiere of the opera "Goya" in 1986, Stephens said.

Ginsburg appeared with a feather in her wig and without her trademark glasses.

The opera, composed by Richard Strauss, pokes fun at the conventions of grand opera in the 1600s, Stephens said.

'Flying Elvises' come to Memphis

MEMPHIS: "Flying Elvises" sporting paste-on sideburns and rented jumpsuits hustled to Memphis on Saturday, taking advantage of low one-day air fares to celebrate Elvis Presley's 59th birthday, reports AP.

Bill Gannaway of Fort Worth, Texas arrived in Memphis in rented Elvis splendor after buying a 59 dollar round-trip ticket. He was accompanied by friends Fred and Ray Wilkinson, who also were wearing spangled, somewhat weathered jumpsuits.

Because of their attire, they and their wives got 20 dollars off on the 79 dollars fare from Dallas on American Airlines. They also got to ride first class.

Presley's former residents, Graceland, generally draws about 1,200 visitors on his birthday. But largely because of the low air fares, 4,000 to 5,000 people were expected to tour the house.

Graceland draws 650,000 visitors a year.

Bob Chappelle, John Cooper and Ken Griffin wore paste-on cardboard sideburns and called themselves "The Flying Elvises, Huntsville, Ala. chapter."

They flew in on 59 dollars round trip tickets with Northwest Airlines.

