

Drug traffickers attack slum in Brazil: 12 killed

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil, Jan 10: An armed gang of drug traffickers invaded a slum and battled rival gangsters early Sunday. At least 12 people died, including two pregnant women, reports AP.

About 100 police occupied the Acari shantytown on Rio's north side Sunday afternoon, combing it for suspects. By nightfall only one had been arrested, television and newspapers reported.

The violence began when a group of 30 men stormed into the Acari slum, where a rival drug gang operates. The intruders, who seek control of Acari's drug selling points, sprayed the neighborhood with machine-gun fire and threw grenades, police said.

They killed a man and three women, including two who were pregnant, and threw their bodies in front of an abandoned warehouse.

The gunmen then moved to a hillside area of the slum and engaged in a gun battle with members of the rival gang. Five people died. That toll included two teen-age members of the invading gang, the Jornal do Brasil said in Monday's edition.

In between the two neighbourhoods, the gang members killed three other people, including a soldier and his cousin in the army reserve. Both were shot in the head, according to TV and newspaper reports.

It was not clear how many of the total dead were gang members or supporters and how many were by-standers.

Police said the introducing gang was led by a bandit known as Parazao, whose group controls most of the drug distribution in Rio.

A banner placed by the attackers across the bodies of the first four victims read: "Parazao does not play, he kills. If the police get involved they will die too," Jornal do Brasil reported.

Apparently alerted of imminent trouble, police cars drove through the shantytown just before the invasion, telling people to evacuate, witnesses said. But before people could flee, Parazao's gang invaded.

Rio Police Chief Jorge Mario Gomes said Sunday evening from the scene that police would stay in the shantytown until the two gang leaders were arrested.

NATO summit to map out new ties with former Warsaw Pact states

BRUSSELS, Jan 10: NATO leaders open a summit on Monday to map out a new relationship with their former Warsaw Pact foes that will attempt to reconcile East European demands for security guarantees with Russian fears of isolation, reports Reuters.

The summit, NATO's first in more than two years, comes at a critical time for the 16-nation western alliance, under fire for its failure to stop the Bosnian war and alarmed by the rising tide of nationalism in Russia.

NATO's response, spelled out in a keynote speech by U.S. president Bill Clinton on Sunday, will be to deflect calls by East European states for alliance membership now while offering them the prospect of joining some time in the future.

In the meantime, the former communist countries are to be offered a limited programme of military cooperation with NATO known as a "partnership for peace."

But it is a solution that threatens to satisfy, no one, leaving the East Europeans still feeling vulnerable and Moscow worried that, sooner or later,

NATO's frontiers will be moved up to the Russian border.

The other main theme of the two-day summit is expected to be the Bosnian war. France is pushing for tougher action, including fresh threats of air strikes to halt Serb shelling of Sarajevo, but the United States is reluctant to get more involved.

Clinton, on his first visit to Europe as U.S. leader, underlined Washington's commitment to European security, despite its growing interest in Asia and Latin America, and said NATO could not yet give up its mission to defend the west.

In a speech to young Europeans in Brussels, taped in the mediaeval city hall, he dwelt on the threat of intolerance and extremism in the former Soviet bloc and he warned ex-communist states against "grim pre-tenders to tyranny's dark throne."

His warning was seen as a thinly-veiled attack on militant Russian nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who made big gains in elections last month, although Clinton did not mention him by name.

Clinton, who will visit Prague, Moscow and Minsk after the NATO summit, said peoples from the Balkans to Central Asia faced a "race between rejuvenation and despair" as they struggled to switch from centrally planned to market economies.

Russians must decide whether they developed a peaceful market democracy "or whether in frustration they elect leaders who include back toward authoritarianism and empire."

Clinton said the partnership for peace scheme was the key to a new era of cooperation and would advance the progress of NATO's enlargement. "It looks to the day when NATO will take on new members," he said.

But, in a clear reflection of western fears that expanding NATO now would strengthen the hand of Russian nationalist opposed to President Boris Yeltsin's reforms, Clinton ruled out taking on new members for the time being.

"I say to all those in Europe and the United States who would simply have us draw a new line in Europe further east

that we should not foreclose the possibility of the best possible future for Europe," he said.

Highlighting U.S. reluctance to be drawn into the war in former Yugoslavia, Clinton barely touched on the issue, saying only that it showed the west that early action was best to prevent conflicts that could later run out of control.

But other NATO leaders, exasperated by the deadlock in Bosnian peace talks and the humiliation of U.N. peacekeeping forces, made clear they would be pressing the issue.

Host Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene of Belgium said the question of air strikes to halt the 21-month-old conflict was on the agenda. "We must seriously consider whether to carry out air strikes," he told reporters.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said NATO preparations were under way for air strikes against Serbian gunners besieging Sarajevo if circumstances warranted. But a senior U.S. official said action was not imminent.

Inclusion of CIS into NATO may lead to WW III : Zhirinovskiy

MOSCOW, Jan 10: Nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, head of the single biggest faction in Russia's new parliament, warned NATO today that incorporation of former Soviet bloc states into the alliance could lead to World War Three (WW III), reports Reuters.

"It would be a huge mistake and a tragedy for NATO, Europe and the whole world if they move to take in our neighbours," Zhirinovskiy told reporters. This would mean NATO took the path of preparing for World War Three against Russia.

Zhirinovskiy, whose Liberal Democratic Party won about a seventh of seats in elections on December 12, said he planned to become head of the parliamentary foreign relations committee to press the Foreign Ministry to take a tough stand on the issue.

Many East European leaders have spoken in favour of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), membership in advance of today's summit of the

alliance in Brussels. Lithuania is the only former Soviet republic to formally ask to join.

Pro-membership sentiment in eastern Europe and former Soviet republics has been boosted by the strong election showing of a Zhirinovskiy, who advocates the restoration of a Russian empire.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin's chief spokesman told NATO leaders last Thursday that incorporating Lithuania and East European states into their ranks now could wreck reform in Russia and boost extreme nationalism.

"We will not allow a single foreign division near Russia's borders," Zhirinovskiy said. "Any military unit which receives orders to move towards Russia will be exterminated."

"Don't we have enough conflict in the Balkans, in the Caucasus and in Central Asia?" He added, "If Russia has another conflict on its western borders, that would be the beginning of World War Three."

BRIEFLY

LTTE sacks six top leaders:

Shri Lanka's main Tamil armed group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has sacked six of its top leaders, according to local press yesterday, Xinhua reports from Colombo.

The Island in a report quoted LTTE's chief theoretician Anton Balasingham as saying that the six leaders including Mahattaya and Yogi of the political wing of the armed separatist movement were being interrogated following their removal from the positions that they held for years.

Balasingham revealed this when a journalist of Holland's radio interviewed him in the northern rebel capital Jaffna last week, the paper said.

Fire bombs kill 2 in Hong Kong: A man tossed two lighted bottles of fuel into a crowded bank in Hong Kong Monday, killing two people and injuring 11, four of them critically, police said, AP reports from Hong Kong.

Police arrested the 32-year-old Chinese man moments after the morning attack on a branch of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in Kowloon, north of Hong Kong Island.

His motive was not known. Two women were confirmed dead in a hospital. One man and three women were hospitalised in critical condition, and seven injured were admitted in poor condition.

Kravchuk to meet Yeltsin, Clinton: Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk plans to come to Moscow for talks with Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton on January 14, the Interfax news agency reported, AP says from Moscow.

The talks would likely focus on Ukraine's plans for dismantling the nuclear arsenal it inherited from the Soviet Union. So far, Ukraine has refused to adhere to its treaty obligations to return all of the weapons to Russia.

The three countries have been working for more than a month on an agreement for Ukraine to give up its nuclear arsenal, the third largest in the world.

Interfax, quoting unidentified sources in the Russian Foreign Ministry, said reports of plans for Clinton to travel to Ukraine sign an agreement were "without foundation."

British minister resigns: Lord Caithness, Britain's Minister of State for Transport, resigned from government on Sunday night following the death of his wife, Reuters reports from London.

Prime Minister John Major's office issued a statement on behalf of Caithness saying: "Following the death of my wife I have told the Prime Minister that I wish to resign from the government in order to devote more time to my children."

The spokesman for Major said: "The Prime Minister was deeply saddened by this tragic news and in the circumstances has accepted Lord Caithness's resignation."

Hosokawa to visit China in March: Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa is planning to visit China on March 20 and 21, the Mainichi Shimbun daily reported yesterday quoting sources accompanying Foreign Minister Tsutomu Hata on his weekend trip to Beijing, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Hosokawa told Journalists Monday, in response to the report, that "nothing has been decided."

Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng invited Hosokawa to visit China at the earliest opportunity in a meeting with Hata during his weekend visit there.

Bomb blasts near NATO office: A bomb exploded early yesterday near NATO offices here, causing damages but no casualties, police reported, AFP says from Rome.

The size of the device was not immediately known but the blast left a crater one meter (yard) in circumference in a small garden close to the offices.

The explosion, which occurred just hours before the start of a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation summit in Brussels, shattered windows in nearby buildings.

10 French killed in Indonesia :

Ten French tourists died in a road crash on the Indonesian island of Bali on Sunday, the tour operator announced here, AFP reports from Paris.

Sixteen other French nationals and two Belgians were injured when their bus fell into a ravine during rainy weather. The accident occurred during a stopover on the island. The tourists were on a southeast Asian cruise.

41 killed as troops, Kurds clash in Turkey

ANKARA, Jan 10: At least 31 rebels of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and 10 soldiers were killed in a series of clashes between Turkish troops and Kurdish rebels over the past three days in Southeastern Turkey, reports Xinhua.

An official statement issued today by the emergency law governor's office said in a massive operation launched in areas near Syrian and Iraqi borders, a total of 31 Kurdish guerrillas were killed and their weapons seized. Nine government soldiers and a lieutenant were also killed in the fighting.

Bosnian fighting suggests guns, not peacemakers will rule

ZAGREB, Jan 10: The Serb bombardment of Sarajevo and the government offensive against Croats in central Bosnia bode ill for settlement of a war that has claimed more than 200,000 lives and made more than 2 million people homeless, reports AP.

Neither peace negotiations in Geneva on January 18 nor talk of outside intervention at this week's NATO summit is likely to quiet the guns.

Fighting usually intensifies before peace talks as each side — Serb, Croat and the Muslim-led government — seeks to improve its negotiating position.

But even by Bosnian standards, the recent shelling of Sarajevo has been intense. Meanwhile, government forces

are racking up battlefield successes to the west.

There are many reasons for the surge in fighting. All point to continued war.

The government has rejected previous peace plans, saying the territory offered is insufficient. Feeling abandoned, the Bosnians have decided to go for broke, seizing as much land as possible before serious negotiations.

The main target has been the Croats of central Bosnia.

Several villages and towns have been taken. Early Sunday, Bosnian forces cut the main road linking two ends of the major Croat enclave of Vitez.

Control of the Lasva Valley, where Vitez is located, would dramatically increase the gov-

ernment's hold on a swath of central Bosnia. The area would extend 75 miles (120 kms) from near Gornji Vakuf, southwest of the valley, to Tuzla in the northeast.

Vitez also has major weapons factory — something the Bosnians, handicapped by an international arms embargo, desperately need.

The government also had a rare success against the better-armed Serbs in late December, when a Serb offensive northeast of Sarajevo failed.

Sources said that Bosnian Serb commander, Gen Ratko Mladic, dispatched inexperienced troops on the failed mission. Casualties were reportedly high, though no figures were given.

The Serbs are now bringing in reinforcements, including professional soldiers from neighboring Yugoslavia, in the campaign to link Serb forces in the north and south and isolate Tuzla.

UN sources acknowledged the increased Yugoslav army presence in Bosnia, but — as with the presence of soldiers from neighbouring Croatia — have chosen not to make it an issue.

Bosnian government forces also have engaged the Serbs in a Sarajevo neighbourhood just a few hundred yards from the city's main thoroughfare.

That Bosnian offensive apparently fueled last week's Serb shelling.

The bombardment of Bosnia's battered capital is in-

tended to pressure the Bosnian government into accepting a peace deal.

Pummeling the Bosnians into a deal reduces the chances of having to make territorial concessions — an issue splitting the Bosnia Serb leadership.

A peace agreement also increases the likelihood that sanctions on economically ravaged Yugoslavia, the Serbs' close ally, could be lifted.

"For the moment, there is much too much talk of continuing the fighting," negotiator Lord David Owen said last week, questioning the point of holding peace talks.

Enmity between Owen and the Bosnian leadership, which sees him as pro-Serb and has called for his resignation,

means no one is trusted at the talks.

The increased fighting has fueled frustration within UN ranks and reportedly prompted Gen. Jean Cot, commander in former Yugoslavia, to ask for the right to call air strikes. His commander in Bosnia, Lt. Gen. Francis Briquemont, is resigning early after criticizing UN strategy.

Talking to the Associated Press last November, Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic hinted at Bosnian strategy.

"There is only one rule. The rule of law is only for someone else, but not for Bosnia," Silajdzic said. "That's why there are no diplomatic break-

throughs."

Gamsakhurdia buried in western Georgia

LONDON, Jan 10: Former Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who according to his wife committed suicide late last month, is reported to have been buried in the Samegrelo region of western Georgia, a senior Georgian official said Sunday, reports AFP.

Deputy Prime Minister Irakli Menagharishvili said government representatives who travelled to the rebel leader's home republic of Chechen had been told by people claiming to have witnessed his death that he was buried in an area still held by his partisans.



ANC Secretary General Cyril Ramaphosa (R) and a bodyguard run for cover under tree as shooting broke out during a peace tour of a black township with South African Communist Party leader Joe Slovo Jan 9. Four people, including a journalist, one of the assailants and two bystanders, died in the gunbattle in Katlehong, South Africa. — AFP photo

Afghan truce collapses

KABUL, Jan 10: A fragile truce collapsed shortly before dawn on Monday as rival Islamic factions fired several rockets on the eastern outskirts of the city, reports AP.

The renewed fighting came after nearly 48 hours of relative calm that had allowed tens of thousands of frightened residents to flee the city.

Vicious factional fighting that began New Year's Day has left at least 4,000 people injured and hundreds more feared dead.

The warring groups agreed to a cease-fire last Saturday to allow the wounded to be evacuated from frontline neighbourhoods and foreign aid workers and diplomats to flee the city.

Pakistan said it had negotiated an extension to the truce, hoping to parlay it into a permanent peace, although few people believed that was possible.

The United Nations, which evacuated its international staff during the weekend, was also talking to rival Afghan groups seeking a prolonged ceasefire to remove the wounded and ferry in emergency supplies to refugees.

Officials at the dusty Pakistani border town of Torkham said at least 9,000 refugees crossed into Pakistan on Sunday. They came in buses, dilapidated pickup trucks and packed into the back of brightly coloured 16-

wheeler trucks.

President Burhanuddin Rabbani's soldiers have managed to hold on to most government buildings and strategic military sites, although his arch-rival, Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, claims to have inflicted heavy losses.

Red Cross officials said Hekmatyar's ally, the powerful Uzbek warlord, Rashid Dostum, has repulsed an attack by Rabbani's forces in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. A former general in the Communist army, Dostum controls much of northern Afghanistan.

The fighting has reduced entire neighbourhoods to rubble and sent tens of thousands of residents fleeing their homes for safety.



A refugee family with their disabled son (L) sits under the open sky Jan 9 after fleeing from the Afghan capital of Kabul. Thousands of shell-shocked residents continue to empty the city after a week of fierce artillery duel and aerial bombardments. — AFP photo

ANC won't grant Afrikaners demand for homeland

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 10: African National Congress (ANC) President Nelson Mandela said here yesterday ANC would not grant the Afrikaners demand for a separate homeland, reports Xinhua.

Some Afrikaners (Dutch origin white people in South Africa) are demanding for the establishment of a separate homeland in future South Africa.

Mandela made his statement in a television interview here tonight.

He said such a move would lead to other ethnic groups demanding their own separate entities and the break-up of the country.

"We will be breaking up South Africa into a number of different political entities, which will destroy the economy," he said.

Deng makes first public appearance in Shanghai

HONG KONG, Jan 10: Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping strolled through a Shanghai luxury hotel lobby on New Year's Day, making his public appearance in nearly a year, a Hong Kong newspaper said Monday, reports AP.

Deng, 89, was driven through two newly redeveloped commercial districts, including Nanking Road, the neon-lit shopping boulevard that showcases Shanghai's economic boom, the Beijing-funded Wen Wei Po said.

Then, the adulatory report continued, "at about 7 p.m. on New Year's Day, a hale and hearty Uncle Deng walked steadily and vigorously into the lobby of the New Jingjiao hotel, accompanied by members of his family."

It did not publish any photos of Deng's stroll. Rumours that Deng is gravely ill or dead are denied by his family.

He was last sighted on the even of the Chinese New Year last January.

Four children killed in Baltimore fire

BALTIMORE, Jan 10: A pile of clothing on top of a heating grate in a row house ignited Sunday, starting a fire that killed four children, reports AP.

A woman and three other children were in critical condition.

The fire was reported at 4:30 a.m. It took fire fighters about 30 minutes to bring it under control.

The dead identified as Samuel Terrell, 2 1/2; Quintin Terrell, 4; Diminque Glover, 8; and Jeannette Glover, 11.

Off the Record

Wife goes on trial in penis severing case

MANASSAS: Lorena Bobbitt dreads testifying that her husband's alleged abuse made her temporarily insane and gave her an "irresistible impulse" to cut off his penis, her lawyer said, reports AP.

"She knows she will have to relive a lot of physical and emotional abuse," lawyer Blair Howard said.

Mrs. Bobbitt's trial was scheduled to begin Monday. She faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted of malicious wounding, a felony.

Mrs. Bobbitt's lawyers said she will testify that the abuse drove her to cut off John Bobbitt's penis with a kitchen knife as he slept on June 23. She says he had come home drunk that night and forced her to have sex.

Bobbitt, expected to testify against his wife, denies he ever abused her and was acquitted in November of sexually assaulting her. He testified at his trial that he planned to leave his wife of four years when she attacked him.

Bobbitt's penis was reattached and doctors said he may regain full use within two years. The couple has filed for divorce.

Millions of hungry mouths to feed

ROME: They napped. They stretched in the sun. They dined at the usual spots, reports AP.

It was a pretty ordinary week for Italy's street cats. Not so for their caretakers.

First they were told they would have to get official licenses to keep feeding their felines. Then they were told the report was a mistake. Then no one was sure. Then the final word came: The free meals can continue.

"I'm tired from worrying," said Rosa Da Palma, who each day places leftovers on wax paper in a square in central Rome. "This is an act of charity. What could be wrong with that?"

Apparently too much litter and too many litters.

A parliament committee last week discussed requiring licenses for people who voluntarily feed street cats, whose numbers are rising in some areas. The committee also raised the possibility of a 30 fine for caretakers who do not clean up the paper and food scraps the cats leave behind.

The idea — which was later dropped — was widely reported in the Italian media. In response, switchboards at government offices were clogged. There was talk of protest marches.

Man hacks wife, children to death with machete

SUVA, Fiji: A man went berserk after finding his wife in bed with another man, hacking her and their five children — including two babies — to death with a machete, police said, reports AP.

Farm labourer Ram Chandra, 34, surrendered to police soon after Saturday's attack.

Chandra lost control when he discovered his wife, Suruj Lata, in bed with another man at their home at Togomasi village, in western Fiji, police said. The man escaped as Chandra beheaded his wife.

Chandra then killed his two sons and three daughters, who ranged in age from two months to 14 years.

He cleaned blood from the blade of the weapon, which is normally used for harvesting sugar cane, and walked five kilometers (three miles) to a police station.

Chandra is due to appear in the Nadi Magistrates charged with murder next week, police said.

Vietnam bans toy weapons

HANOI: The Vietnamese government has banned all toy weapons including guns, knives and swords because they encourage violence and social disorder, an official newspaper reported Monday, says Reuters.

The Interior Ministry issued the ban to "prevent incidents caused by the use of dangerous toys," the Ho Chi Minh city daily Saigon Giai Phong said.

It listed toy guns, knives, swords, bows and arrows, and lighters shaped like guns and grenades. Most are imported from neighbouring China.

The ministry defined as dangerous toys which "might threaten human life and health, damage property or promote a psychology of violence, of which had elements could take advantage ... to carry out criminal acts, having a bad effect on social order and security," the newspaper said.