

BRIEFLY

Serbs free 187 peacekeepers: Bosnian-Serb forces have released the remaining 187 UN peacekeepers they had detained last month in retaliation for NATO air strikes, a UN official said yesterday. Reuter reports from Sarajevo.

"They have been released," said spokesman Colonel Jan-Dirk Merveldt. The 187 UN troops released included French soldiers and UN military observers of various nationalities.

Sharma, Rao to attend Tamil confce: Indian President Dr S D Sharma and Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao have confirmed their participation in the eighth World Tamil Conference to be held at Thanjavur from Jan 1, PTI reports from Madras.

Disclosing this to pressmen, State Revenue Minister S D Somasundaram said the president would participate in the inaugural function and the prime minister at the concluding day function on Jan 5.

I killed by dolphin in Brazil: A man died and another was injured after being attacked by a male dolphin that prefers to play with female swimmers, Brazilian newspaper reported on Friday. Reuter reports from Rio de Janeiro.

Joao Paulo Moreira, 33, died from internal haemorrhaging and Wilson Reis Pedrosa, 41, suffered a broken rib after being bitten by the dolphin at a beach on Brazil's south-central Atlantic coast near Sao Paulo on Thursday, daily O Globo reported.

Lankan clashes claim 5: Four Tamil rebels and a soldier were killed in continuing clashes in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, military officials said on Saturday. AP reports from Colombo.

The soldiers died when a group of 40 to 50 rebels attacked military bunkers in Vankalai village in northwestern Mannar district early Saturday, officials said. Troops retaliated with artillery fire, killing at least two rebels, officials said.

On Friday, two rebels were killed in a military ambush at Pavakkodichehenai village in eastern Batticaloa district.

Mortar attacks on Bihar: Three mortar bombs smashed into the besieged town of Bihar on Friday, killing a woman and wounding seven other civilians, UN officials said, Reuter reports from Zagreb.

Alex Ivanko, spokesman for the UN protection force which has a peacekeeping unit pinned down in the enclave, told Reuters it was not known who fired the mortar bombs.

IAEA Council meet ends: International Atomic Energy Agency's 35 governors ended a meeting of the IAEA Council on Friday agreeing to go over budget next year to finance steps to combat nuclear smuggling, an IAEA spokesman said, AFP reports from Vienna.

The council, the IAEA's second most senior body, after the annual policy-making conference, authorised the secretariat to beef up security for nuclear materials, make inventories of nuclear stocks and expand the IAEA data bank.

1 dies of alleged shark attack: A man diving for sea urchins off the Channel Islands was gored and killed on Friday in an apparent great white shark attack, AP reports from Santa Barbara, California.

The 40-year-old victim was attacked while diving from a boat near San Miguel island, 40 miles from Santa Barbara, said Coast Guard Petty Officer Dennis Hall. The two crew members aboard the boat began performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation after the man, whose right leg was gashed, stopped breathing, Hall said.

Pilot of missing US plane alive: A pilot whose plane crashed two weeks ago walked into Olancha Friday after trudging 20 miles through freezing temperatures in the wilderness, AP reports from Olancha, California.

Two friends who were injured in the crash — but alive when the pilot left the plane — were found dead, authorities said. Peter DeLeo, 33, stayed with the single-engine plane for several days, then walked across rugged terrain in mountainous forests after the Nov. 27 crash in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

1 shot dead at Chrysler plant: An autoworker shot one co-worker to death on Friday and wounded another after an argument about an assignment at a Chrysler Corp. plant, police said, AP reports from Sterling Heights, Michigan.

The gunman then sat in a chair to wait for police. The 48-year-old Sterling Heights man was to be charged with murder. Police would not release his name.

Ukrainian cargo ship sinks: Three sailors were missing after a Ukrainian cargo ship sank on Friday during a storm on the North Atlantic, leaving some crew members clinging to debris amid 30-foot-high (9-metre-high) waves 50 mph (80 kph) winds, AP reports from Halifax, Nova Scotia.

One crew member of the Salvador Allende was rescued by a tanker Friday night, more than 17 hours after the cargo ship sank.

Merapi volcano may re-erupt: Indonesia's Merapi volcano is still active and local residents outside Yogyakarta have been put on alert for possible further eruptions the official Antara news agency said yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

"It spewed lava 63 times on Friday. We don't know where the lava went because the volcano was covered by clouds," Masatje Purbawingata, from Yogyakarta's Volcanology Office, told Antara.

Anti-dam activist hospitalised: The leader of a group fighting to stop the world's largest irrigation project was forcibly hospitalised by the police as she refused to take food for the 19th day in a row on Saturday, AP reports from Bhopal.

Medha Patkar is demanding that the construction work be stopped since the government has done nothing to rehabilitate those displaced by the project. Police-arrested 200 of her supporters when they tried to march through the streets of Bhopal, capital of Madhya Pradesh.

Pentagon cuts \$ 7.7b from budget: The Pentagon will squeeze 7.7 billion dollars out of its top weapons programme by cancelling a troubled missile effort, cutting some money from the air force's F-22 fighter jet and building only two prototypes of the army's high-tech Comanche helicopter, AP reports from Washington.

EU slates Serbs for violating safe zone around Bihar

ESSEN, Germany, Dec 10: European Union leaders today approved a statement condemning the Bosnian Serbs for violating the security zone around Bihar and said UN peacekeepers must continue their crucial tasks, reports Reuter.

"UNPROFOR should continue its crucial mission of providing humanitarian assistance and saving human life," the official text of the declaration said.

"If it were obliged to withdraw because of the impossibility of fulfilling its mandate, the implications for Bosnia and its civilian population would be severe," it added.

Democracy may be alien to Asia but there are signs of change

HONG KONG, Dec 10: Democracy, some Asian leaders argue, belongs to a Western value system that is alien to Asian culture, says AP.

Tell that to Taiwan, which just held its most extensive elections ever.

Or Nepal, which just swore in Asia's only elected communist prime minister.

Or Sri Lanka, which voted out its government and chose Chandrika Kumaratunga as president after she promised to bring peace to the strife-torn island.

As democracy was taking those strides, separate conferences in Malaysia and South Korea suggested the debate is not simply a cultural clash between Asia and the West, but a schism within Asia itself.

Although the Malaysian conference was devoted largely to rebutting Western concepts of democracy and civil liberties, the South Korean gathering strongly endorsed the democratic way and denounced those leaders who reject it.

Even within Malaysia, where democracy functions under tight government restrictions there are inklings of change.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has long been a prominent opponent of what he sees as Western posturing and arrogance in pushing human rights and democracy in Asia.

But his deputy and likely successor Anwar Ibrahim, has been sounding a somewhat different line. The other day, in a

speech in Hong Kong, he limited criticism of the West and concentrated most of his fire on the "altogether shameful" attitude of governments that use "Asian values" as an excuse for corrupt and autocratic rule.

Dr. Kim Sang-Woo, a political scientist at the Kim Dae-jung Peace Foundation, a co-host of the South Korean conference, said his group rejected the contention of some leaders that democracy is alien to Asia.

"What emerged at the forum was that democracy in the region is indeed moving toward the right direction in many countries, but there are those that are still very much stagnant," he said.

The problems are evident in emerging democracies like

Bangladesh, paralyzed by political bickering and street protests, and Cambodia, where the hopes over last year's historic election have been dimmed by rural violence and the gagging of dissent.

South Korea, on the other hand, is largely a success story. After decades of autocracy, it has a freely elected civilian president. Although Kim Young-sam's government has been buffeted by strikes and political street unrest, and has restricted some dissent, few believe democracy is in jeopardy.

The same goes for Thailand, a nation long accustomed to military coups. This weekend its elected coalition government is unraveling, but as Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai

recently told reporters, "Unpredictability is a certainty in the democratic system. You used to ask about coups; now you no longer ask. It means you yourselves, have more confidence."

Taiwan's December 3 election of governor and mayors would seem to bear out President Lee Teng-hui's claim to have transformed a virtual dictatorship into the world's first all-Chinese democracy.

The contrast with the Communist Party regime across the Taiwan Straits is striking. "Beijing can no longer claim that democracy is an alien creed to the Chinese. Taiwan has given them conclusive proof to the contrary," exulted the Eastern Express

newspaper in Hong Kong.

China, which claims sovereignty over Taiwan, icily refused to comment, although its state-run news media dismissed the election, dwelling on the violence and corruption that occasionally marred it.

Still, optimists believe that as China's economy develops and the middle class becomes large enough to matter politically, Beijing will look to Taiwan and Hong Kong for inspiration.

Taiwan's election "will have an influence in mainland China," predicts Hsu Shui-teh secretary general of the island's governing Nationalist Party. "I believe democracy is the general desire of people in China."

Khmers kidnap 38 civilians

PHNOM PENH, Dec 10: Khmer Rouge guerrillas have abducted 38 people in Siem Reap province, the country's most important tourist centre, according to a provincial official, reports AP.

The Khmer Rouge in recent months have staged a number of such mass abductions for unknown reasons. In some cases they have asked ransom, in others murdered their captives, calling them government spies.

The government has suggested that the guerrillas, faced with defections, are abducting people to increase their manpower ahead of what they expect to be a government offensive.

The latest kidnapping took place Thursday night in Kralanh district.

Russia, Chechnya move closer to armed conflict

GROZNY, Russia, Dec 10: Russia and rebel Chechnya have moved closer to war since the breakaway region showed it had no intention of giving into pressure from Moscow, reports Reuter.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin ordered the government to use all measures available to the state to disarm rival forces in Chechnya increasing the likelihood of military intervention and ignoring democratic appeals for a peaceful solution.

He sent defence minister Pavel Grachev and interior minister Viktor Yerin to north Ossetia, a region bordering Chechnya in the north Caucasus where most of the big military force flown in over the last 10 days is massed.

They joined counter-intelligence chief Sergei Stepashin and deputy prime minister Nikolai Yegorov in charge of coordinating action there.

A Reuter photographer in the area said the troops were tense and many officers expected an order to move into Chechnya.

Chechen vice president Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev shrugged off the latest Russian demand and said his people were ready to fight to defend their independence.

"It would not surprise me if they (Russians) brought in the troops. We are ready for this he told Reuters people who want to be independent have to be prepared for everything."

He added he did not expect the Russian troops to move into Chechnya immediately after Yeltsin's decree.

The centre of the region's capital Grozny was deserted on Friday night except for about 50 people shopping at an outdoor market.

A lonely guard at Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev's palace said with a broad smile

"What do we have to be afraid of? We have tea and meat here. Come and join us."

Chechnya's main opposition force, which failed to take Grozny with the help of Russian tanks late last month vowed to resume fighting on Monday, reversing an earlier decision.

Statements from the provisional council made it clear the opposition was preparing to defy Russia's ultimatum to lay down its arms or to provoke Russia to send in troops.

Russia's polity on Chechnya moved from talks to threats since the abortive opposition attempt to dislodge Dudayev.

Yeltsin's decree on Friday did not directly mention any use of force but formalised a decision by his security council, including top military officials to use all constitutional means available to end the crisis in Chechnya.

Its wording left little doubt

Arab League urges OIC to help Bosnia, Libya

CAIRO, Dec 10: The Arab League Friday urged Muslim leaders at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Morocco to take action to help Bosnian Muslims and Libya, reports AFP.

Adnan Omran, Deputy Secretary General of the Arab League, said the OIC must "assume its responsibilities faced with the massacre of the Muslim people in Bosnia."

"After the failure of the European Union and the United Nations to contain the conflict, Islamic states must act to help the Bosnian people and must not stop at simply making speeches," he added.

Omran was speaking before he set off for the Moroccan city of Casablanca, where the two-day OIC summit opens Tuesday.

He said representatives from the OIC's 51 members would also discuss the "unjust" international sanctions on Libya in April 1992.

The UN Security Council imposed an air and arms embargo to force Libya to hand over to Britain or the United States two suspects in the December 1988 airliner bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people.

Sanctions were broadened in 1993 to a freeze on some Libyan assets abroad and a ban on some oil-related equipment.

Omran also condemned Israel's insistence that Jerusalem was its eternal and undivided capital, and said the holy city was "Arab territory, the eternal capital of the Palestinians."

The dispute over Jerusalem and the Arab-Israeli peace process would also be discussed at Casablanca, he said.

He urged Muslim states to "adopt a position on the continuation of Israel's nuclear armament, which is a large obstacle on the path to peace" in the Middle East, and to refuse to sign and extension to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty until Israel signs the accord.



The wives of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, Lea (R) and Souha (C) chat as a member of the Nobel committee Sissel Roennbk looks on during a photo session before attending dinner at Oslo's Grand Hotel on Friday. Father-to-be Arafat responded jokingly yesterday when asked if he would step down from politics to take care of his new family. — AFP photo

Malaysian peacekeepers to remain in Bosnia

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 10: Malaysian troops would remain in Bosnia even if the United Nations withdrew its peacekeepers from the war-torn country, Defence Minister Najib Tun Razak said Friday, reports AFP.

"We are committed to being in Bosnia and our actions must match our words," said Najib, amid reports that France, Britain and the United States were seriously planning to withdraw their peacekeepers from Bosnia.

The minister said if the United Nations withdrew, Malaysia was willing to remain in the Balkans.

"We are now under the UN, but we could also work things out with the host country (to remain)," said Najib, but stressed that Malaysian peacekeepers would only remain if their presence was seen to be "beneficial" and they could provide humanitarian assistance.

Najib condemned Wednesday's withdrawal of part of the Bangladeshi peacekeeping force in the so-called UN "safe area" of Bihar in northwestern Bosnia, saying the damage done to UN credibility was "irreparable."

"It is meaningless to de-

clare safe havens but not provide the necessary resources to protect them," said Najib.

Predominantly-Muslim Malaysia has been a fierce supporter of Bosnian Muslims and a scathing critic of western nations for what it sees as half-hearted attempts to end the 32-month-old conflict.

But Najib said Malaysia's support was not based on religion.

"It's not a question of Muslims versus Christians but a basic principle of a right of existence," he said, adding that Malaysia was also working closely with the Croats.

Kashmir police tear gas rally led by Malik

SRINAGAR (India), Dec 10: Police fired tear gas shells Saturday to prevent as many as 1,000 people, led by militant leader Yasin Malik, from marching to the United Nations Military Observers' office in Srinagar on the World Human Rights Day, reports AP.

A spokesman for the Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front claimed that Malik, suffered injuries as he was manhandled by security forces.

"We want neither India nor Pakistan. We want independence," chanted Malik's supporters as they assembled outside the Front's office in the summer capital of Jammu-Kashmir state.

Police fired tear gas shells as the protestors made repeated attempts to march to the United Nations office to present a memorandum.

India doesn't seek extradition of LTTE chief, says Lankan FM

NEW DELHI, Dec 10: Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar on Friday denied that India had sought the extradition of a Tamil guerilla chief accused by New Delhi of plotting former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, reports Reuter.

Indian officials investigating the 1991 murder say they want to extradite Velupillai Prabhakaran, head of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), for Rajiv Gandhi's murder during an election rally near Madras.

"India has not sought the extradition of Prabhakaran, I would like to state that categorically," Kadirgamar said.

Off the Record

Tongue-in-cheek guide to Europe

WASHINGTON: The French are mean, the Swiss are boring and Italy is dirty and full of nasty old ruins, according to a new tongue-in-cheek guide which advises Americans against setting foot in the Old World, reports AFP.

"Don't go to Europe," it cautions the uninitiated traveller. "Europe offers nothing that can't be found within the comfort of your own local fast-food establishment."

Author Chris Harris also tells the "ugly American" what his welcome is likely to be.

"Europeans don't like you. They know you - thousands of pot-bellied, polaroid-snapping, extra-ketchup-asking for polyester Hawaiian-shirted ambassadors from our nation have preceded you," he writes.

Worse still, he warns, "Over a hundred different languages are spoken in Europe," where English is still lamentably considered a second language.

Not only is peanut butter scarce on the continent, Europeans are all "smokaholics." Their motto: "If you're old enough to breathe, you're old enough to smoke."

But Harris does look on the bright side, noting "Fortunately the smell is somewhat hidden because Europeans don't believe in deodorant."

Not even French food is sacred in the book, which describes the "unique way" chefs "give animals like snails, pigeons and frogs fancy names, thus transforming common backyard pests into expensive delicacies."

Bride abets groom to rape daughter

RIVERSIDE, California: A woman was convicted Friday of failing to notify police that her 7-year-old daughter had been beaten and raped by the woman's AIDS-infected groom at their wedding reception, reports AP.

The child tested positive for the HIV virus. She and her mother are not being identified by The Associated Press to protect the child's privacy.

The 38-year-old woman was convicted of felony child endangerment and being an accessory to rape. She faces a maximum sentence of nearly seven years.

Frank Bridges, a former juvenile probation officer, was sentenced in June to 38 years in prison after admitting to five felony counts related to the Jan 15 attack.

Bridges, 43, whose surname is different from his step-daughter's, refused to testify against his wife at her trial.

On the couple's wedding day, Bridges lured the child to a bedroom, promising to reward her with a dollar. Once there, Bridges locked the door, hit the girl and raped her.

Hearing his sister's screams, then seeing her bloodstained dress, a 10-year-old brother dialed 911. Jurors heard a tape of the call and the mother's voice screaming, "Don't! Don't!" just before the line went dead.



Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams (C front) is surrounded by senior members Lucilita Bhreatnach (L), Richard McAuley (back row) and chief negotiator Martin McGuinness (R) during a press conference on Friday in Belfast, where the British government and Sinn Fein sat face to face for their first official talks in Ulster's 25-year civil conflict. — AFP photo

Yeltsin has nose surgery

MOSCOW, Dec 10: President Boris Yeltsin was hospitalized for nose surgery, the presidential press office said on Saturday in a terse announcement, reports AP.

The statement said the surgery on Yeltsin's septum was "without complications."

It did not say when the operation was performed or whether the president was still in hospital. It did not describe the president's ailment or the surgery or his post-operative condition.

The presidential press office refused to provide any additional details.

The presidential press office statement said Yeltsin would be recovering from the surgery for eight days, but would be able to work during the recovery period.

The surgery was at the Central Clinical Hospital, an exclusive facility for the Kremlin elite and the well-connected.

Tibetans tortured for not applauding Chinese team

BEIJING, Dec 10: Tibetan prisoners were tortured after they refused to greet a visiting Chinese delegation with applause, a human rights group said on Saturday, reports AP.

The incident took place recently in Drapchi Prison, the Washington-based International Campaign for Tibet said in a news release. Prison officials ordered the prisoners to clap, but the response was silence, it said.

Tibetan political prisoners also have been writing independence slogans on the prison's walls, the report said. The information was from a source in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, whom the group did not identify.

The report also said prisoners were beaten and held in cells so small they could hardly move.

Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled leader, said on Saturday that China has threatened to jeopardise the careers of the Tibetan party cadres and those employed in government service unless they recall their children from schools in India.

"If the children of Tibet are deprived of the right to pursue their education according to their wishes, we can then imagine how the right of our people can otherwise be disregarded," the Dalai Lama said in a statement on World Human Rights Day.

His Holiness said there was a tremendous discrepancy between the official Chinese claims and the ground reality in Tibet.

"Nothing is said about the tens of thousands of Chinese students sent to study in foreign countries," he said.

The Dalai Lama left Tibet after a failed uprising against China, which sent its army there in 1950.