

BRIEFLY

12 die in Java road mishap: A multiple collision in Puncak hill resort, south of Jakarta, has killed 12 people and seriously injured six others, the Antara news agency said on Monday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Turkish violence kills 6: An armed clash between two groups killed a town mayor and five other people on Sunday in an area of southeastern Turkey dominated by ethnic Kurds, the Anadolu news agency said, AP reports from Batman.

US surgeon gen steps down: US Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, forced to resign because of her blunt talk, says she told the truth from the perspective of the poor, whose outlook is "very different from someone who plans a trip to Europe every summer," AP reports from Washington.

Int'l drug confce in Bangkok: Fighting the international problem of narcotics by reducing demand is the theme of a United Nations-sponsored international conference that opened on Monday. AP reports from Bangkok.

US officer dies in Pakistan: The US embassy is investigating the death of an US air force sergeant who fell from his fourth-floor hotel room window, embassy officials said on Sunday. AP reports from Islamabad.

3 killed in Manila church: A suspected drug-crazed man killed three church workers before he was shot to death by policemen inside a church in Manila early yesterday morning, Xinhua reports from Manila.

S Lebanese clash claims 5: Guerilla fighters ambushed an Israeli military patrol in south Lebanon on Sunday, killing an Israeli soldier. Security sources said four guerillas also were killed, AP reports from Marjayoun.

Polish WWII commander dies: Maj Gen Stanislaw Maczek, believed to be the last surviving senior allied commander from World War II, is dead at 102. AP reports from London.

1 held for newsman's murder: Police have arrested a Cambodian army colonel in the gunshot slaying of a Cambodian journalist last week in eastern Kompong Cham province. Information Minister Ieng Mouly said yesterday. Reuter reports from Phnom Penh.

Chinese economist Yao dies: Yao Yilin, a former Chinese vice premier and a conservative economist, died on Sunday of illness. He was 77. AP reports from Beijing.

Mail bomb kills 1 in US: A bomber who has killed one person and injured 23 others over the last 16 years appears to have struck again, this time killing an advertising executive with a mail bomb, the FBI said on Sunday. AP reports from Newark, New Jersey.

Ancient Iranian tower damaged: Torrential rain has damaged one of Iran's most ancient sites, a 3,000-year old ziggurat or stepped tower near the Iraqi border, newspapers reported on Sunday. AFP reports from Tehran.

Swiss avalanche kills 4: Four people were killed and two were injured when an avalanche struck members of a youth mountaineering group. AP reports from Schwaegalp, Switzerland.

Eastern manuscripts stolen: Book thieves have stolen a collection of ancient Eastern manuscripts worth 100 million dollars from a St. Petersburg library, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported on Monday. AP says from St. Petersburg.

Leftists suspected in Tokyo fire: Ten cars were destroyed on Monday by a fire, police suspect may have been set by radical leftists opposed to the expansion of Tokyo's international airport. AP reports from Tokyo.

US troops arrest 400 Cubans: American troops arrested about 400 Cuban refugees on suspicion of inciting the riots that injured hundreds of soldiers and refugees last week, the US Southern Command said. AP reports from Panama City.

International

Bad weather halts Russian offensive in Chechnya

MOSCOW, Dec 12: Thick fog in Chechnya has halted Russian military operations in the separatist Caucasian republic, the Russian Information Centre said today, a day after Russian troops went in to subdue the Chechens' three-year-old bid for independence, reports AFP.

"It has not been decided for the moment to pursue military operations because of a deterioration in weather conditions," said a communique issued from the special information bureau at Mozdok in the republic of North Ossetia which borders Chechnya.

"Under present conditions, Russia fears all kinds of provocations against its troops," said the communique without specifying whether the pursuit of operations would have involved aircraft.

The information bureau said the Chechens "are going ahead with military preparations" and at a meeting Sunday night of the Chechen security council "decided to declare war on Russia."

The communique said Chechen forces had been deployed around Grozny, the Chechen capital, to counter an eventual attack by the Russians who sent several hundred tanks into the rebellious republic on Sunday.

The Russian armoured vehicles have advanced to within a few dozen kilometres of Grozny, according to latest reports.

Chechen authorities have set up a command post near the military airport about six kilometres (four miles) from Grozny.

Meanwhile, Russia confirmed today that 47 of its servicemen had been captured when its troops entered the Chechnya on Sunday.

A spokeswoman for a special government information centre on Chechnya said the servicemen had been captured inside the breakaway territory, near the border with the semi-autonomous republic of Dagestan.

A Chechen religious leader heads a group of volunteer villagers who arrived in Grozny on Sunday following news that Russian troops are advancing closer to the Chechen capital.

— AFP photo

Nepal wants to impose border controls with India

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Nepal wants to impose border controls with India to keep out illegal immigrants and anti-Indian militants, the Himalayan kingdom's new prime minister was quoted today as saying, reports Reuter.

"If we do not have any work permit system, Nepal will be swamped by Indians, posing a big problem for us," Man Mohan Adhikary was quoted by the Times of India as saying in an interview.

Currently, Indians can cross into Nepal without a passport or visa. Adhikary said a regulated border would help India by checking activities aimed against it.

Adhikary, 72, said he would like to visit India in January to work out details of a fresh approach to bilateral issues.

Deputy Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal recently said the new Communist government wanted to end a tilt towards India.

Nepal told Reuters the Communist wanted to rewrite a 'four-decade-old bilateral treaty that allows Indians to buy land in Nepal and would place the kingdom under India's defence shield in the event of external conflict.

"Because of an open border with India, some undesirable elements cross over the indulgence in anti-India activities."

'10,000 Indians to die of AIDS daily by 2000'

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: Some 10,000 Indians will die every day of AIDS by the turn of the century, a leading health official said yesterday, reports Reuter.

"India will have at least 30 million HIV infections, killing 10,000 of them everyday," the Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted I S Gilada, secretary general of the Bombay-based private Indian Health Association, as saying.

Gilada said the rate of HIV infection today among housewives in Bombay was the same as it was among the city's prostitutes eight years ago.

We want to control this by regulating the border," the newspaper quoted Adhikary as saying.

Adhikary did not explain what these activities were, but India recently arrested Yakub Memon, a key suspect over bomb blasts in Bombay in 1993, after he crossed over from Kathmandu.

Indian officials have said Pakistani agents have used Kathmandu as a base for militant activities in India. Pakistan denies the charge.

"We do not have any definite information about a particular country or any agency's involvement. But we would like to assure India that Nepal would not allow any activity which may pose danger to its security," Adhikary was quoted as saying.

Adhikary's Communist unified Marxist-Leninist Party beat the Nepali Congress in November's general election, the second poll after an anti-monarchist movement brought multi-party democracy four years ago.

Winnie sued for alleged non-payment

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 12: Winnie Mandela, estranged wife of South African President Nelson Mandela and a deputy minister in his government, is being sued for alleged non-payment of a charter flight, a Sunday newspaper reported, says AFP.

A claim of more than 50,000 rand (14,050 dollars) has been lodged in the Supreme Court against Mrs Mandela by Foster Webb Air Charter, which claims the money is due to them for a Lear jet flight to Luanda ordered by Mrs Mandela. City Press reported.

Mrs Mandela, the deputy minister of arts, culture, science and technology, has denied she is responsible for the debt, claiming she only acted as an agent when arranging the flight for another person.

The charter company said in its affidavit that Mrs. Mandela had confirmed that she would make the payment when she arranged the flight to the Angolan capital.

DPRK accused of selling missiles to Arabs

SEOUL, Dec 12: North Korea still is selling Scud-type medium-range missiles to hostile Arab countries in the Middle East, Israel's ambassador to South Korea said on Monday, reports AP.

"We are very much concerned about sales of very sophisticated weapons to very dangerous regimes in the Middle East" by North Korea, Ambassador Asher Naim said at a news briefing.

He said Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin also would express his worries during a four-day South Korea visit starting Wednesday.

Naim said Israel will try to persuade North Korea through the United States to curtail the sales.

Rabin, now in Tokyo, is to meet with South Korean President Kim Young-sam and business leaders to promote economic and technological cooperation. He also is to tour the tense demilitarised zone separating the South from Communist North Korea.

Agreements on establishing direct air routes between Tel Aviv and Seoul, cooperation in agricultural technology and cultural exchanges will be signed during the visit, Naim added.

He said talks on cooperation in arms technology would not be ruled out.

Israel held two rounds of secret talks last year in Beijing with North Korea in efforts to persuade it to curtail arms sales to the Middle East.

No agreements were reached, and the talks stopped "for solidarity with the United States and South Korea" because US-North Korea Nuclear talks were in progress, Naim said.

The nuclear talks led to an agreement in October to freeze the North's suspect nuclear programme in exchange for diplomatic and economic incentives.

Chinese cinema fire: 1 held

BEIJING, Dec 12: Chinese public security officials have arrested the deputy director of the Friendship Hall cinema where 325 people, mostly children, were burnt to death in a fire last week, officials said, reports Reuter.

The deputy director, whose name was not given, was arrested on Sunday evening, an official of the propaganda department in the remote oil town of Karamay said by telephone. He did not say on what charges the man had been arrested.

Casablanca ready for OIC meet

CASABLANCA, Dec 12: As it awaits the opening on Tuesday of the seventh Islamic summit, Casablanca has been turned into a fortress guarded by thousands of security troops and banners praising Islam hanging in the streets, reports Reuter.

Traffic has been banned from most areas of the city hosting the two-day summit and road blocks have been erected on virtually every major artery of the city of four million people that is Morocco's financial capital.

"Islam is the best guarantee of human rights," proclaims one banner fluttering in the breeze from the Atlantic Ocean.

Along the corniche, virtually the only area where Casablanca's inhabitants are allowed to roam freely during the preliminary meetings of Islamic foreign ministers, families enjoyed the sunshine as army helicopters clattered overhead.

"In the distance, the massive Hassan II Mosque, which boasts the world's tallest minaret, stands in testimony to Morocco's Muslim credentials as host to the world's biggest Islamic gathering and birthplace of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) 25 years ago.

Nearly all the foreign ministers of the 52-member OIC — it was expanded by one on Saturday with the inclusion of Mozambique — are in Casablanca for preparatory meetings before the summit. It is not yet known how many heads of state will attend.

"Islam is the message of forgiveness and tolerance," reads another banner, echoing the slogan that has been adopted by many of the arriving foreign ministers hoping to present the moderate face of Islam to a world jarred by Muslim extremism.

Moroccan Prime Minister Abdelatif Filali urged Muslim leaders to "correct the image of Islam in the West" which he said was a matter of the highest priority for Morocco.

Morocco, mindful of the violence in neighbouring Algeria between Islamists and the army-backed government, is keen to "preserve its image as a stable Muslim country as it embarks on a policy of economic liberalisation which it hopes will turn Casablanca into a leading business centre in North Africa."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa of Egypt, whose country is also battling Muslim fundamentalism, urged the OIC to "defend the image of Islam from attacks within and without."

OIC drafts resolution on political violence

CASABLANCA, Dec 12: The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) will adopt a code of conduct towards Islamic fundamentalism and political violence in the Muslim world, Algerian Foreign Minister Salah Dembri said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

"It is not Islamic fundamentalism which is to blame but political terrorism, violence and extremism under the cover of religion," Salah Dembri told Reuters in an interview.

OIC foreign ministers met on Sunday to complete the agenda for an OIC summit on December 13 and 14.

"What is called fundamentalism is in fact the exploitation of our moral values for political purposes. This is unacceptable," Dembri said.

In closed sessions over the weekend experts discussed a draft resolution entitled "International code of conduct against terrorism" for presentation to the heads of state for adoption.

"A global consensus has been reached among the OIC members to put an end forever to all forms of violence and terrorism and it is a good thing," he said.

The code will organise relations between the OIC state members based on the principles of international treaties such as non-interference in internal affairs and not encouraging "actions of destabilisation," he said.

Dembri said the OIC states would establish cooperation conventions "to fight political terrorism and eradicate the phenomenon gradually in the coming years."

"The code is a good step forward which will mark the summit of Casablanca," Dembri said.

Thai opposition likely to join Leekpai's govt

BANGKOK, Dec 12: Chatichai Choonhavan, leader of the opposition Chart Pattana party, said today he had agreed in principle to join the embattled coalition of Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, reports Reuter.

Leekpai's previously five-party coalition was placed in a minority in parliament by the defection on Thursday of the New Aspiration party over a constitutional reform.

"The party has agreed in principle to join the government but we have to be cautious," Chatichai, a former prime minister who was toppled in a bloodless coup in 1991, told reporters.

Chart Pattana, has been in opposition since Chuan's democrats formed a coalition in September 1992.

Off the Record

Designer moonlight for the Taj

NEW DELHI: The Taj Mahal is getting designer moonlight, reports Reuter.

Tourists flocking for a full-moon view of the marble wonder will now have fail-safe artificial light for a romantic vision of the magnificent tomb. A Moghul emperor built for his beloved wife, the Times of India said yesterday.

A private engineering company has designed a new lighting system for the 17th-century monument, India's top tourist attraction, the Times of India said.

"With specially designed timers, filters and lighting devices, they can now produce the moonlight effect, which the full moon creates as it traverses the sky from dusk to dawn," the newspaper said.

The Taj, built by Shah Jahan for his second wife Mumtaz at Agra, some 200 km (125 miles) from Delhi, attracts each year 1.5 million tourists, a third of them foreign.

Most visitors like to view the great monument by moonlight, which suffuses the banks of the Yamuna River with a romantic ambience.

Another breach of royal security

LONDON: A royal to Princess Margaret slipped a convicted child molester into London's Kensington Palace for sex in his rooms, just yards away from Princess Diana's apartments, a newspaper reported on Sunday, says AP.

The revelation is the latest of several embarrassing security breaches for the royals.

The weekly News of the World said that Eddie Houghton convicted three times of molesting children and once of illegal use of a firearm, advertised for homosexual companionship in a local weekly in November.

Harold Lodge, butler to the queen's younger sister, Princess Margaret, responded, the paper said. The two arranged to meet near Kensington Palace, which houses the apartments of Princes Margaret and Princess Diana, as well as other royals.

Lodge, 51, took Houghton, 43, to the palace, Houghton hadn't revealed his criminal past to Lodge, and when Houghton saw two uniformed guards at a side entrance to the palace, he was concerned he would be exposed. But the guards greeted Lodge and waved them through.

"It was so simple," the News of the World quoted Houghton as saying. "I could have had a bomb strapped to my back."

Lodge rooms in a building separate from the palace, but his apartment is just metres away from Diana's, who was in the palace at the time. Houghton said Lodge was careful to avoid the royals' personal security, who might have checked Houghton more thoroughly.

Buckingham Palace and Scotland Yard refused to comment on the report.

Acupuncture therapy for eye diseases!

BEIJING: China's Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine has applied a new acupuncture therapy to eye disease treatment, with clinical practice showing an effect rate of 90 per cent and a relapse rate of only 13 per cent, reports Xinhua.

The therapy is suitable for the treatment of cataracts, myopia, amblyopia, glaucoma, optalatrophy, presbyopia and eyeground syndrome, according to the academy.

Dubbed "no needle acupuncture," the therapy uses a rubber hammer instead of the usual needles.

Dr Ma Xuzhou, the inventor of the therapy, said that according to Chinese traditional medical theory, eye diseases reflect the decline of vital energy in the internal organs.

"I believe the major causes lie deep in the body," she said.

More than 100,000 eye disease sufferers have been treated by the new therapy.

'Motor-lances' to combat traffic jams

BANGKOK: Where regular ambulances can't reach sick people stuck in Bangkok's paralysing traffic jams, motorcycles can, and a Thai-American doctor has pressed them into service, reports AP.

Dr Chattrue Duangret, who just moved to Thailand from New Castle, USA, said on Monday he thought up the service while wondering in heavy traffic one morning what happened to those caught in gridlock during emergencies.

"You get trapped in traffic and die and nobody says anything about it because nobody can reach you," Chattrue said. "My friends said, 'Tough luck. You live in Bangkok. That's the way it is.'"

But, he said, motorcycle ambulances, or "motor-lances" as he calls them, could weave in and out of the traffic to reach stranded emergency cases.

So Chattrue persuaded Bangkok General Hospital to equip two motorcycles with life support equipment. Four motorcycle drivers and seven nurses, who ride along as passengers, now stand by at the hospital to answer emergency calls.

But Bangkok residents, used to suffering in silence in the city's traffic, have yet to tap into the free service. Chattrue said only four patients have called in the six weeks since the hospital began offering it. The "motor-lances" reached all of them in less than 15 minutes, saving two of the patients, he added.