

BRIEFLY



Former Italian Red Cross president Maria Pia Fanfari (L), wife of former Italian prime minister Amintore Fanfari, hands over the "Woman for Peace" award to Sonia Gandhi, the widow of assassinated Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi during a ceremony in Rome on Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

Car bomb kills 11 in Grozny: Eleven people were killed and 60 wounded in a car bomb attack in the Chechen capital Grozny Monday in a bloody remainder that the republic remains a powder keg two weeks ahead of crunch elections, AFP reports from Grozny. The blast targeted the offices of the Russian territorial government and of Chechnya's pro-Moscow government.

Vladimov wins Booker Prize: Human Rights activist Georgy Vladimov, living in exile in Germany, on Monday became the first emigre writer to win the Russian Booker Prize worth 12,500 dollars for the best novel of the year, Reuter reports from Moscow. The 64-year-old Vladimov, who took 15 years to write the award-winning "A General and His Army" about World War II, told Reuters he did not think this was his best work. He preferred the 1975 short novel "Faithful Russian."

8 burnt to death in Seoul: Eight people were burned to death and three others were badly injured in a late night karaoke lounge fire in the plush Seoul district of Socho, television and news reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Seoul. Yonhap news agency said the 44-year-old owner of the basement karaoke bar and an adjacent complex of private signing booths was among those who died in the fire Monday, which was triggered when he tried to refill an oil heater.

Ross arrives in Damascus: US Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross has arrived in Damascus for talks with Syrian leaders on how to break the deadlock in stalled Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations, officials said yesterday, Reuter reports from Damascus. Ross, who arrived on Monday night, is due to meet Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara and President Hafez Al-Assad before heading back to Israel later in the day.

12 Filipinos buried alive: Twelve people were buried alive and several more were feared dead after landslides triggered by a tropical storm smashed three houses on Catanduanes Island in the Philippines, officials said yesterday, Reuter reports from Manila. "We're still digging up more bodies," provincial Governor Severo Alcantara said in an interview on the Manila radio station DZMM.

Al Gore arrives in S Africa: US Vice-President Al Gore arrived in South Africa late on Monday for a two-day visit, Reuter reports from Johannesburg. During his stay Gore will address a meeting of the South Africa-United States Binational Commission and will meet President Nelson Mandela and his deputies Thabo Mbeki and F W De Klerk, the country's last white head of state.

Gunmen kill 4 in Egypt: Gunmen in a car shot dead three coptic Christian men and wounded two in a hit and run attack in Southern Egypt on Monday, security sources said, Reuter reports from Assiut. In a separate attack in the same province at roughly the same time gunmen shot and killed policeman Mustafa Khalil Mohamed outside his house, they said.

74 illegal Asians held in UAE: Seventy-four Asians were arrested for illegally entering the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during a sweep involving coast guard ships and helicopters, a newspaper said Tuesday, AFP reports from Dubai. They arrested 39 people in Ras Al-Khaimah Saturday and Sunday and 35 others on a boat off the coast of Fujairah, AL-Khaleej reported. The breakdown of their nationalities was not given, although they were all said to be Asian.

US urges Egypt to probe alleged vote fraud

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: The United States called Monday on Egypt to investigate alleged vote fraud in last week's legislative elections, charging harassment of opposition candidates and reports of government interference, reports AFP. "Some of the opposition parties were denied an opportunity to present their case to the people," said State Department spokesman Glyn Davies. "There were some difficulties that we noted with harassment, arrests, detention, trial of political activists and campaign workers, and reported government interference with the election," he said. No opposition candidate won a seat in last Wednesday's parliamentary election, in which the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) won 123 of 137 seats, independents, most of them former NDP members, won 14 seats. Another 307 seats will be decided in run-off elections, on Wednesday. Only 66 opposition candidates from the Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood parties are in run-off contests. The charges of government interference, if proven, would be "in direct contradiction," to assurances by President Hosni Mubarak, said Davies. "In light of the statements by Egyptian government officials and their public commitment to free and fair elections, we look to the Egyptian government now to investigate those allegations of fraud and electoral irregularities, and we trust that they'll all be fully investigated," he said.

Junta threatens to 'annihilate' Suu Kyi, her colleagues

YANGON, Dec 5: Myanmar's military government today suggested democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was a traitor and said she and her pro-democracy colleagues would be "annihilated" if they tried to destabilise the country, reports Reuter. The state run New Light of Myanmar and Mirror Daily newspapers, both widely seen as mouthpieces of the ruling military, carried commentaries indirectly comparing Suu Kyi with a reviled 19th century traitor who helped British forces conquer Burma. "True young patriots are well aware of all your activities and they will annihilate, holding hands with the pro-

ple, anyone who makes the country unstable," the newspaper commentary said. "If you really have a true desire to see Myanmar (Burma) develop, it is essential not to do as you are directed by the imperialists," said the commentary entitled "Wither goes thou, Maung Ba Than." More than 100 years ago, Maung Ba Than helped British troops capture Mandalay, then the Burmese capital, leading to the imposition of British colonial rule throughout Burma. Suu Kyi, released from six years of house arrest in July, pulled her National League for Democracy (NLD) Party out of a government-organ-



Taiwanese parliamentary Speaker Liu Sung-Fan (4th from L) scuffles with several MPs while the parliament reviewing a bill governing rebuilding of houses for veterans on Tuesday. The parliamentary session reopened after the December 2 legislative elections in which the ruling Kuomintang retained a reduced majority, grabbing 85 seats in the 164-seat parliament, down from the previous 90. — AFP/UNB photo

Pandemonium in Taiwan parliament

TAIPEI, Dec 5: Legislators in Taiwan's parliament punched, wrestled and used the Speaker's gavel as a weapon today, the first day of work after elections on Saturday slashed the ruling Nationalist Party's majority, reports Reuter. state television showed one legislator breaking the Speaker's microphone and another used his gavel to beat rivals as a debate on a bill to refurbish veterans' residences erupted into a brawl. After the assembly passed the Nationalist motion to advance the hearing of the bill, members of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) tried to stall proceedings by walking out of the parliament. The DPP's objection was eventually overruled, prompting DPP legislators to storm the Speaker's podium, where the scuffled ensued.

Students urged to join Tigers' bid to retake Jaffna

COLOMBO, Dec 5: The Tamil guerrillas today urged students to join the separatist war against Sri Lankan security forces in a bid to recapture the Tigers' former citadel of Jaffna in the island's north, reports AFP. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a statement sent here from its London office said there could be no education for students as long as the Sri Lankan army remained in Jaffna. "We call upon all our young sisters and brothers to join hands in the freedom struggle the LTTE quoted unnamed students of the Jaffna University as saying "we have to take up arms and defend ourselves."

Israel may sign defence pact with US

JERUSALEM, Dec 5: Israel is considering a defence pact with the United States under certain conditions in what would be a dramatic shift in policy, Prime Minister Shimon Peres said, reports AFP. The defence agreement depends "on how it is done, its conditions, and its timing," Peres said in an interview with state television late Monday. Whether the US is willing or not needs to be checked out," the prime minister said. The defence pact would mark a significant change in Israeli policy as the Jewish state has always said it would never ask Americans to fight for it.

Peres govt survives no-confidence Israel reaffirms claim over Jerusalem as undivided capital

JERUSALEM, Dec 5: Prime Minister Shimon Peres reaffirmed Israel's claim over Jerusalem as its undivided capital and said it would never be the subject of compromise, reports AFP. "We never thought yesterday, today or tomorrow that Jerusalem would be the subject of compromise or be divided," Peres said late Monday during a memorial ceremony in Jerusalem for slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. "Jerusalem should also not become a partnership of two capitals for two states," Peres was quoted as saying on the radio. The United Nations on Monday reaffirmed its oppo-



South African President Nelson Mandela and Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeka Anyokuu address the media at Mandela's residence in Johannesburg on Monday. Mandela called for sanctions against Nigeria to be intensified following the execution of 9 opposition political leaders by the military government. — AFP/UNB photo

'Repression systematic in Chechnya'

GROZNY, Russia, Dec 5: Russian repression is systematic in Chechnya, nearly a year after Moscow's forces invaded the Caucasus republic to crush a separatist revolt and six months after they concluded a fragile ceasefire with the rebels, witnesses said, reports AFP. Umar Askerov, 19, who was picked up in a search of his district, said: "They took me into the forest, put me against a tree and said they were going to execute me, then they fired in the air." The Russians were drunk and shouting, "tell us where you have hidden arms, where your fighting friends are," he said. Taken to the Russian headquarters, here, Askerov was beaten up, then freed a few days later. The Russians said he had been arrested "by mistake." Askerov's younger brother

Usman, 15, was less lucky. Arrested at a checkpoint because the driver of his car was carrying a pistol, he has been held for more than a month. "I spoke to some people who were detained with him," his mother Zina said, "when the Russians brought him into the cell they had beaten him so badly that he was unconscious, and the prisoners had great difficulty in bringing him round." She added that the Russians had told her she could have her son if she produced a Russian soldier held by the separatists. "Everyone does it, but ransoming a Russian prisoner costs 10 million rubles (200 dollars, or 20 times the average monthly wage), and where would I get so much money? The Russians also demand money to give information, or even to hand over the body of a detainee, while everyone says that only a great deal of cash can get a relative freed from camp where he was thrown because the soldiers at a checkpoint took a dislike to his face. Every man knows that the moment he steps out of doors he is under continual threat of arbitrary arrest, followed at best by a beating and a few days in detention. Even so, the executions seemed to have slowed, as the Russians appear anxious to show that matters are returning to normal ahead of the elections planned for December 17 to choose a new head of government acceptable to Moscow. On Saturday they showed to the press what they claimed to be the last holding centre in Grozny, a prison containing a number of windowless cells and steel cages. A Russian official said the prisoners were well-treated, and nine out of ten were freed without being tried. But Issa Nuradyev, a non-commissioned officer of the pro-Russian Chechen police, said the worst happened before prisoners got to the holding centres. Nuradyev was arrested on the evening of November 26 while he was on patrol in uniform. "The Russian soldiers decided my papers were false and took me to the Kommandatura," he said. "They threw me into a camp basement, without light, where I stayed for two full days, while anyone who felt like it beat me up." The Russians not only tried to force him to admit he was a separatist fighter, but to enhance their prestige by signing a "confession" that he had been captured while attacking a Russian post, Nuradyev said.

Security forces kill 29 Muslims in Algeria

PARIS, Dec 5: Algerian security forces killed 29 Muslim militants during a three day operation with one third of them gunned down after a tip from a repentant guerilla, the Algerian official news agency APS said on Monday, reports Reuter. Among the 29 men killed last week in 11 regions throughout Algeria 10 were shot dead by troops led by repentant militant to the guerilla's hideout in the mountain area of Fellaoucene in the western province of Tlemcen. Quoting an official security statement, APS said troops destroyed stocks of food and medicines and stolen vehicles in the assault on the militants hideout. Earlier, APS said authori-

Off the Record

Lennon's voice echoes beyond the grave

LONDON: The Beatles on Monday released their first single in 25 years with John Lennon's rasping voice echoing from beyond the grave in "free as a bird," reports Reuter. But bookmakers say they could be kept from the coveted number one slot by Michael Jackson whose new single "Earthsong" rocketed straight to the top on its release. The Beatles single is based on a home demotape made in 1977 by Lennon, who was shot dead outside his New York apartment three years later by a lone gunman. His widow, Yoko Ono, gave the tape to the three surviving Beatles who added extra vocals, backing and lyrics to the song which heads a new anthology album reviewing the history of the world's most famous pop group that was released last month. Bookmakers William Hill quoted Jackson as odds-on favourite to be number one on Christmas day. He could deprive the Beatles of their chance to land their 18th number one.

Unfortunately he looks alike Chun

SEOUL: A South Korean man with an unfortunate resemblance to disgraced former President Chun Doo Hwan was beaten up by a drunk after he got into a Taxi, the Korea Times reported Tuesday, reports Reuter. "You look like Chun Doo Hwan who got arrested. You must be as bad as he is. I should punish you," the newspaper quoted his assailant as saying. Korean taxis are often shared by passengers travelling in the same direction. The newspaper quoted police in the southern city of Ulsan as saying Yang Chul-Won, 50, was drunk at the time. His victim was not only a Chun look-alike, he also shared the same surname, the paper said. Chun was arrested and detained on Sunday on charges of military rebellion stemming from a 1979 coup and a massacre of civilians the following year.

Tastier than fish, as rich in protein as chicken

RIO DE JANEIRO: Tastier than fish and as rich in protein as chicken, crocodile meat could help solve Brazil's malnutrition problem, a Sao Paulo University researcher says, reports AFP. More than 1.5 million caimans are massacred in the Amazon region wetlands known as the pantanal every year by poachers who sell the skins for 100 dollars a piece. But researcher Pedro Romaneeli claims that the white to pinkish meat from the reptile is a healthy delicacy that is almost cholesterol free, like fish and as rich in protein as chicken. "The best meat can be found in the tail," says Romanelli who for five years raised and slaughtered 15 caimans to study their nutritional value. More than 15 per cent of Brazil's population suffers from malnutrition, a rate that soars to 30.7 per cent among children younger than five.

Graft charges against Chun likely S Korean ruling coalition develops major cracks

SEOUL, Dec 5: South Korea's ruling coalition developed major cracks today as followers of two jailed former president said they intended to quit key party posts, reports AFP. Chairman Kim Yoon-Hwan of the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP) told journalists he would tell President Kim Young-Sam when they meet later today of a "situation where I cannot carry out my duty." Three other holders of key DLP posts, including the politically important Taegu City chapter head Kang Jae-Sup, also said they planned to resign in protest against the jailing of Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo. The DLP chairman said there was mounting opposition from conservatives in the former leaders' home provinces of north Kyongsang and its capital, Taegu, over the methods and procedures used for dealing with the ex-generals — turned-presidents. AFP says, South Korean prosecutors, who have already jailed former president Roh Tea-Woo on graft charges, may now file similar charges against another former president, Chun Doo Hwan, television and news reports said today.

France keen to play more active role in NATO

BRUSSELS, Dec 5: France intends to become more active in NATO and will henceforth join in meetings of the alliance's military committee, though it will not reintegrate the military structure it left in 1966, it was announced here today, reports AFP. France has authorised its army chief of his permanent representative in Brussels to take part fully in military committee discussions from now on, French Foreign Minister Herve De Charatte said at NATO headquarters here. "France has decided to play a bigger role in all the bodies of the Atlantic alliance in line with what we are now doing in the former Yugoslavia but naturally, this does not mean joining the alliance's integrated structures," De Charatte said. The French defence minister will not attend meetings of the defence planning committee or the nuclear planning group. Neither will French troops be represented in the senior ranks of the NATO command structure. Within the military committee, French Army Chief of Staff General Jean-Phillips Douin and his permanent representative in Brussels, General Jean-Paul Pelissou may now intervene on all matters barring those concerning the integrated military structure. France particularly wants them to take part in discussions on the new missions undertaken by NATO since the end of the Cold War in 1989, namely peace operations as in Bosnia, overtures to eastern Europe and efforts to stop the proliferation of nuclear arms weapons of mass destruction.