

BRIEFLY

Pak smuggler surrenders to US: A Pakistani accused of smuggling hashish into the United States surprised authorities by flying to New York and surrendering, AP reports from New York.

"We can't figure it out," Assistant US Attorney Jodi Avergun said Sunday. "He claims he wants to prove his innocence." Abub Afridi was charged with several counts of importing 50 tons of hashish to the United States between 1983 and 1988 and laundering tens of millions of dollars in drug profits. He was arraigned Thursday, a day after he arrived from Pakistan.

Gang leader held in Nablus: Palestinian police arrested the leaders of an armed gang that has terrorised Nablus for months on Sunday after a vast manhunt in the newly-autonomous town, Palestinian sources said, AP reports from Nablus.

Witnesses heard sporadic shooting as the police carried out a street-by-street search for the gunmen. No one was reported wounded.

2 Alien terrorists held in Manila: Two suspected foreign terrorists were arrested in Manila Sunday, a day after five others said to be their accomplices were taken into custody, AP reports from Manila.

The five were accused of possessing explosives and the two were believed to be accomplices in an alleged plot to sow terror in the country. "We are still hunting their leader," said Senior Inspector James Brillantes of the police's Criminal Investigation Service Command.

45 militants killed in Algeria: Security forces killed 45 armed Islamic militants in four days 24 of them in a single operation in Oum El Bouaghi eastern Algeria, Algerian security services said Sunday, AFP reports from Algiers.

The operation in Oum El Bouaghi carried out Thursday, was the most significant since the November 16 presidential election and was carried out after a turnout gave the authorities information, the security services said.

Kim to reshuffle cabinet: South Korean President Kim Young-Sam will reshuffle his cabinet on Tuesday or Wednesday after parliament approves his appointment of a new prime minister, Yonhap news agency reported yesterday, Reuter says from Seoul.

Political analysts said the reshuffle would help distance Kim's administration from a massive corruption scandal.

Protest against Wei's arrest in HK: Instead of holiday shoppers, first-raising, slogan-chanting demonstrators thronged the streets of downtown Hong Kong Sunday to protest the sentencing of Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng, AP reports from Hong Kong.

"Once again, the sentencing has shown us that there is no hope with Chinese authorities," said Cheung Yin-tung, a 31-year-old teacher. Wei, China's boldest advocate of democracy and human rights, was convicted last week of trying to overthrow the government and sentenced to 14 years in prison. Wei, 45, already has spent more than 16 years in detention.

Solzhenitsyn opted not to vote: Writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn opted not to vote in Sunday's parliamentary election in Russia, saying the electoral system was unjust and did not reflect the views of the people, Reuter reports from Moscow.

"Unfortunately this false election system yesterday is unjust, unfair, and does not allow the people to express themselves," the former dissident told the independent NTV channel as he accompanied his wife Natalya to vote in Moscow.

2 die in Russia's chopper crash: A helicopter serving as a flying ambulance crashed into a frozen lake in northwestern Russia on Sunday, and authorities said two of the three crew members were believed killed, AP reports from Petrozavodsk.

Police rescued one pilot who climbed back up on the ice after the Mi-8 chopper crashed into lake Ladoga about 100 metres (yards) from shore, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Trinidad PM hospitalised: Prime Minister Basdeo Panday, elected last month, has been hospitalised for tests. A hospital statement said he was in stable condition but did not say what was wrong with him, AP reports from Port of Spain.

Panday, 63, a lawyer, was at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex Sunday in Mount Hope, near the capital of this twin-island Caribbean nation.

Pope may visit Jerusalem: Mayor Ehud Olmert said Sunday after meeting a high-ranking Vatican official that he hoped Pope John Paul II could visit Jerusalem before the turn of the century, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The target date for the pope's visit is the year 2000, but there is an intention to bring this forward," Olmert said after talks with Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, the Vatican's secretary for international relations.

Toxic fumes kill 2 in SA: Two guests at a wedding died and 100 other people were taken to hospital after inhaling toxic fumes from a fire at a chemical plant Sunday, officials said, AFP reports from Cape Town.

Some 3,000 people were evacuated from the vicinity of the Somerset West Chemical Plant, 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of Cape Town, although residents said later in the day that they were returning.

1,000 Chinese cops killed in 5 yrs: More than 1,000 Chinese police officers have been killed and over 31,000 injured in the line of duty over the past five years, The Legal Daily said yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The newspaper said that 1,147 police officers have been killed and 31,223 wounded fighting crime since 1991. It gave no further details.

Police seize 67kg gold in Russia: Police confiscated some 67 kilograms (nearly 150 pounds) of gold and detained three people Sunday for trying to smuggle it out of a gold-rich region in Russia's Far East, a news report said, AP reports from Moscow.

Serbs approve peace plan with regret, complaints

MOUNT JAHORINA, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dec 18: Bosnian Serb leaders reluctantly and inevitably ratified the Balkan peace plan, but issued a wish list of what they would have preferred, reports AP.

The Serbs' 10-point list of objections Sunday to the Dayton peace deal was largely symbolic — an attempt to save face with their people.

"We cannot just accept it outright. We have to explain something to our people," said a Bosnian Serb deputy, who demanded anonymity.

They rejected the establishment of Muslim-Croat rule in Serb-held sections of Sarajevo and insisted on Bosnian Serbs' right to eventually secede from Bosnia.

Herzegovina and join neighbouring Serb-led Yugoslavia. But Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic negotiated the peace plan and is unlikely to back their demands. He refused to attend the meeting Sunday in Mount Jahorina, above Sarajevo.

There, the Bosnian Serb assembly formally accepted the deployment of US-led NATO peace enforcers to Bosnian Serb territory.

"We do not consider the Americans our enemies," said Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

"Dayton represents an overall defeat of the Serbs," he said. But "we have to be brave and go on with the building of our state."

Deputies demanded that an international tribunal revoke war crimes indictments against their leaders, whose actions during 3 and a half years of war they defended as "the struggle of the leadership for its own people."

Karadzic and Bosnian Serb military leader Lt Gen Ratko Mladic have been indicted by the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

The Bosnian government denounced the Serb assembly's declaration but dismissed it as irrelevant.

"I do not believe that anybody listens any more to what they say," said Hasan Muratovic, Bosnian Minister for Relations with the United Nations and NATO.



The 1995 Queen of the Tourism, Silje Syvertsen (C), 22-year-old from Norway pose for a group photo with first runner Victoria Vaisvilaite (R) from Lithuania and second runner up Beatrice Vornicu (L) of Romania after being crowned winners on Sunday in Taipei. Syvertsen beat 30 other contestants from 29 countries at the international beauty pageant. — AFP/UNB photo

Dispute over Red Sea islands Yemeni, Eritrean forces begin observing ceasefire

SANAA, Dec 18: Yemeni and Eritrean forces today began observing a ceasefire after three days of fighting over a strategic Red Sea island, a source close to the Yemeni government said.

"The ceasefire took effect at midnight (2100 GMT Sunday) on the island of Hanish al-Kabir. It is being respected," the source told AFP.

The Yemeni government has been discussing the formation of special committee to oversee the ceasefire, which is to include delegates from Yemen, Eritrea and the

US military attaches based in each country, he said.

But a US Embassy official in Sanaa said he "was unable to confirm" that two American were on the committee.

The Yemeni source said the Eritreans captured a bridgehead on the island, which covers around 90 square kilometres (36 square miles) and is 42 kilometres (26 miles) from the Yemeni coast. The Eritreans landed on Friday, Eritrea announced overnight that it had concluded a ceasefire agreement with Yemen.

Sanaa and Asmara have

disputed sovereignty over Hanish al-Kabir and two other islands, Lesser Hanish and Jebel Zogar, which are strategic because they control access to the Bab al-Mandab Straits between the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

Earlier Reuter says: Eritrea has agreed to a ceasefire with Yemen to end fierce fighting over disputed islands in the key Red Sea shipping lane, BBC world service radio reported today.

Earlier, official Yemeni sources said the two countries fought a fierce battle with aircraft and warships.



Bosnians take a walk in the rain in Mostar, south-western Bosnia on Sunday passing in front of a bombed out building which was destroyed during the confrontations between the Bosnians and Croats in 1993. Mostar was divided into Croat and Muslim sectors since it was put under European Union administration in July 1994 following 11 months of fighting. French troops were clearing mines and renovating the war-ravaged airport that is to serve as their logistics base during the historic NATO operation in the Balkans. — AFP/UNB photo

India getting ready to conduct N-test: Leghari

ISLAMABAD, Dec 18: President Farooq Leghari said today he believed reports that Pakistan's arch-rival India was getting ready to carry out a nuclear test, reports Reuter.

"They (the Indians) have already done a nuclear test before," he told reporters who asked him about a New York Times report that India might be preparing to test a nuclear device.

"I don't know if it will be a smiling Buddha-2. I believe they are preparing," Leghari said.

India carried out its sole nuclear test in 1974, dubbing the explosion, which it said was for peaceful purposes, smiling Buddha.

The Pakistani president, who was attending an Asia-Pacific solar experts meeting, declined to comment further. "Let's wait and see," he said.

Roh in court to face charges of accepting \$ 369 m in bribes

SEOUL, Dec 18: Former South Korean president Roh Tae-woo arrived in court on Monday to face charges of accepting 369 million dollar in bribes from business conglomerates in the biggest trial in the nation's history, reports Reuter.

He was wearing a white prison smock with baggy sleeves as he stepped for the prison bus that brought him from the Seoul detention house.

Roh, 63, was apparently cooped up in a wooden chamber constructed within the prison bus.

The disgraced former general looked haggard and pale as he walked a few steps into a holding room with his arms folded in front of his chest. His head slightly bowed. But he was not handcuffed or roped as is customary.

Time magazine chooses Gingrich man of the yr '95

NEW YORK, Dec 18: Newt Gingrich, the fiery and controversial Speaker of the Republican-led House of Representatives, has been chosen 1995's man of the year by Time magazine, reports AFP.

Widely credited with engineering the 1994 electoral coup that saw the Republicans retake the house from the Democrats for the first time in 40 years, Gingrich has "changed the language and substance of American politics," Time said.

Displeased by the Democrats he defeated, Gingrich finds himself on the cover of Time at a bitterweet moment.

Social Democrats win polls in Austria

VIENNA, Dec 18: Chancellor Franz Vranitzky's Social Democrats emerged the clear winners in legislative elections Sunday, ruling out a role in government for right-wing leader Joerg Haider, reports AP.

The result showed Austrians fear Haider in power and voted for the stability of the past 25 years under Social Democratic rule. Haider blamed "against propaganda" on his party's failure to make "a bigger leap forward."

For the first time since he took over the third-ranked Freedom Party in 1986, Haider failed to increase his share of vote. But the party, which wants to bar immigrants, held onto fall but one of its 42 seats in the 183-seat parliament.

The Social Democrats go 38.3 per cent of the vote, up 3.4 per cent from elections 14 months ago. That gave them 71 seats in parliament, up from 65 last year.

Heavy fighting in Chechnya on Russia's election day

GROZNY, Dec 18: While Russians voted in parliamentary elections Sunday, the war in Chechnya continued to see some of its fiercest fighting in months as the battle for the republic's second-largest town intensified, reports AP.

The clash over Gudermes also came against a backdrop of disputed elections for a new leader of the breakaway republic. Reports of preliminary results showed that Doku Zavgayev, the Kremlin-appointed prime minister of Chechnya, was the likely winner — a verdict the rebels were certain to denounce.

The rebel attacks which precipitated the war's flareup on Thursday were an unequivocal protest against the balloting. The separatists had demanded that Russian

troops withdraw before any elections were held.

Several Russian units remained surrounded by rebels in Gudermes, according to a Russian Interior Ministry official.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said federal troops had hesitated to use tanks and aircraft during the elections, which began Thursday, but planned to strike back after polls closed late Sunday.

Meanwhile, Russian planes began reconnaissance flights over Urus-Martan, an important district centre where a tense standoff between separatist militants and neutral or pro-Moscow Chechens began Saturday.

The Interior Ministry official did not comment on casualty figures in either city.

Off the Record

More fuss about Di's Love affair

LONDON: Is wealthy property tycoon Christopher Whalley the new man in Princess Diana's life? Royal watcher Richard Kay, who has close ties to the princess, wrote Saturday that she's "bitter and dismayed" at the importance given to a casual friendship. And pop singer Sinitta told a tabloid she's the most important woman in Whalley's life, reports AP.

The Sun and the Daily Mirror reported Friday that the 34-year-old princess had been dating the 40-year-old bachelor for the last 14 months, after they met at the Harbor Club, an exclusive west London fitness centre.

But the rival tabloids appeared to back away from the purported romance on Saturday.

"They are not having a relationship," The Sun quoted Whalley's mother, Joanna, who is also a Harbor Club member, as saying. "They are acquaintances who met at the club and had coffee together. Christopher is distraught that this has come out. He's terrified Diana will think he had something to do with it."

The Daily Mirror's front page Saturday featured a photo of Sinitta, dressed as a sexy princess for a Christmas stage show of Aladdin, with a headline saying: "I'm Di Man's REAL Lover."

"Diana knows the situation between Christopher and me. The three of us all have coffee and a chat together in the mornings at the Harbor Club — they are very palmy but that's it," Sinitta was quoted as saying. "He is like an agony aunt — he protects her when she wants to get away from the press and things like that."

Whalley played down the friendship, reportedly telling the Sun on Friday: "I'm not one of her regular friends. So she's phoned me a couple of times — what exactly is the big deal?"

Bid to absorb Nixon!

NEW YORK: It's a wonder he didn't have dreams about Richard Nixon. Anthony Hopkins says he watched a lot of videotapes while preparing to play the title role in Oliver Stone's "Nixon," reports AP.

"All the time. Every night before I went to bed, as a matter of fact, to take it into my subconscious," Hopkins said in an interview in Sunday's New York Daily News.

"I listened to his voice, I watched the final speech to the White House staff just before he went to the helicopter — I think I must have watched that 50 times. Fast-forwarding, rewinding. I used to sit close to the television sometimes just to pick up on his mannerisms as if I could absorb them from the television. I found him a most fascinating man."

"I really started to get quite fond of him, to have a deep compassion for the man. I know he did some appalling things, made some appalling decisions... took the lives of many people. And Watergate itself, which was a disgrace. But I feel a great compassion for him, and I think he's a great tragic figure ultimately."

Experts okay new report on global warming

ROME, Dec 18: Governments and experts from 120 countries have approved a major new report on global warming after a week of haggling over how far man is to blame for climate change and what should be done to stem the problem, reports Reuter.

The UN-backed intergovernmental panel on climate change warned in its new study that there is a "discernible human influence" on the weather and the earth will suffer side-effects for centuries even if greenhouse gas emissions are stabilised.

Environmentalists said that meant there was no time to lose.

"Governments have to act now," said Greenpeace's climate policy director Bill Hare after the IPCC approved the report on Saturday at a week-long meeting in Rome that ended this weekend.

"All governments have dragged their heels on taking action to reduce emissions but now there can be no further excuses for inaction," he said.

The IPCC, which was set up by the United Nations and the World Meteorological Organisation in 1988, wants its report to serve as the basis for policymakers into the next century.

Based on independent research by some 2,500 scientists, the report concluded that if greenhouse gas emissions go on growing, sea levels could rise by 15-95 centimetres (6-38 inches) by the year 2100.

The earth's temperature could rise by between one and three degrees Celsius over the next century, it said.

The IPCC warns entire species of animals and plants could become extinct as a result.

Arafat becomes candidate for presidency

JERICHO, Dec 18: PLO leader Yasser Arafat has become the first official candidate for Palestinian presidential elections due to take place on January 20, officials said today, reports Reuter.

PLO officials submitted Arafat's registration papers and a receipt for the 3,000 dollar fee from the Bank of Palestine on Sunday, said Abd Al-Nasser Mekki, an official at the elections committee office in self-ruled Jericho.

"Abu Ammar became the first official candidate for presidential elections, he said, using Arafat's nom de guerre."

Arafat set a date of January 20 for the elections.

Israeli pullout from WB creates little opposition

KFAR SABA, Israel, Dec 18: Nira Shaul woke up Sunday to a country that seemed to have shrunk significantly overnight, reports AP.

It is only 20 kilometres (12 miles) to the Mediterranean Sea where Israel begins, she noted, pointing westward while keeping an eye on her two children playing in a nearby field. The Jewish state now ends just across that field, in the newly-autonomous Palestinian town of Qalqilya.

"I fear terrorists. I fear burglars," said the brown-haired 35-year-old housewife, shuddering. "We are not safe."

To date, the army's withdrawals from Palestinian territories — from the Gaza Strip and Jericho in May 1994, and now from much of

the West Bank — has created surprisingly little opposition.

But Qalqilya, which the army evacuated Saturday night, is different. It overlooks central Israel at a point where the country now appears to have become perilously narrow, the skyline of Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean visible in the distance.

Israelis no longer frequent Qalqilya's cheap markets, as they did before the Palestinian uprising that began in 1987 ended two decades of misleadingly cordial relations.

But its loss is psychologically disturbing, reminding many Israelis of the claustrophobia they felt before the 1967 war, when Israel at its narrowest point was only several kilometres (miles)

wide. Many also fear that the Palestinians may become an enemy again — this time armed and independent near Israel's main cities.

A top police official in the area, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said there has been "a wave of thefts" along the Israel-West Bank border in recent months since the autonomy framework began to emerge. The thefts range from cars and farming equipment to seeds and even fish from a breeding pool, he said.

Police believe almost half of all stolen cars in Israel — some 40 a night — are taken to Palestinian areas, but few of the thieves are caught.

Kfar Saba resident Adir Korkosari, 22, said he

catches young Palestinians "prowling the neighbourhood all the time." He noted Qalqilya was the hometown of the suicide bomber who in October 1994 boarded a bus and blew himself up in Tel Aviv, killing 22.

Palestinian authorities have acknowledged crime in border areas has become a problem, but maintain that in some cases — car theft, for example — Israeli accomplices are involved. Palestinians also say economic hardship brought on, in part, by Israel's frequent closures of the West Bank and Gaza contribute to Palestinian crime.

Kfar Saba mayor Yitzhak Wald is lobbying the government to erect an electronic fence between Kfar Saba and Qalqilya.

Crack down on street fighters in Nablus

NABLUS, Dec 18: In the first attempt by the Palestinian authority to impose its rule on the West Bank's largest city, Palestinian police hunted renegade street fighters in the twisting alleyways of Nablus on Sunday and surrounded the home of their leader, who later surrendered, reports AP.

The target of the roundup was the Fatah Hawks, a group headed by Ahmed Tabouk, which was formed with PLO backing two years ago as a vigilante force to rid the city of drug dealers.

Tabouk turned himself in to Palestinian authorities Sunday night, ending a tense standoff just moments before a deadline set by PLO police.