BRIFFIY



A US soldier runs next to armoured vehicles entering on Tuesday the Serb-held Posavina corridor, one of the most hotly contested zones in northern Bosnia. US troops of the peace implementation force (IFOR) set up their first checkpoint 200 metres inside an area earmarked for Serb control, on the main road to Tuzla, where US forces in the region are headquartered.

- AFP/UNB photo

Russian DPM resigns: Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai sent a resignation letter Tuesday to President Boris Yeltsin following his election to Russia's new parliament, a spokesman said, AP reports from Moscow.

The spokesman, Gadzhigomed Gadzhigomedov, told the ITAR-Tass news agency that Shakhrai submitted his resignation in accordance with the Russian law, which forbids lawmakers from serving in the government and parliament simultaneously.

Top Palestinian editor jailed: Yasser Arafat's security police arrested the editor of the largest Palestinian newspaper after he refused to publish a flattering front-page story about the PLO chief, relatives and reports said Tuesday, AP reports Jerusalem.

Relatives and foreign journalists said they appealed to Palestinian officials for the release of Maher al-Alami, a prominent journalist and editor of the Al-Quds newspa-

56 pc Australians want republic: Fifty-six per cent of voters want an Australian to be head of state instead of the British monarch, according to an opinion poll published Wednesday, AP reports Sydney.

Results of the survey, printed in The Australian newspaper, show only 36 per cent still want to be ruled by the British crown. Eight per cent of those polled were uncommitted.

700 Jordanians jailed in Iraq: Iraq has jailed some 700 Jordanians, many for minor offenses, Jordan's foreign minister said Tuesday. AP reports from Amman.

Foreign Minister Abdul-Karim Kabariti accused Iraq of saying it was holding only 57 Jordanians.

13 killed in China gas leakage: A gas leak at a school dormitory on Christmas day killed 13 middle-schoolars and injured one other, it was reported

Wednesday, AP reports from Beijing. Rescuers spent almost three hours trying save the 14 students affected by the gas poisoning, but only managed to save one, the official newspaper Beijing Daily reported.

750 Russian cops arrested: More than 750 policemen were brought to trial on corruption charges and criminal proceedings have been leveled against some 2.000 Interior Ministry employees in the first 11 months of 1995, AP reports from Moscow.

Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov said only 40 of the 755 officers charged with corruption actually had been sentenced to jail terms.

Violence leaves 50 dead in Goma: At least 50 people, mostly civilians, died after a fight broke out between two army units near Rwandan refugee camps. setting off rioting and looting, UN officials said Tuesday. AP reports from Kigali, Rwanda.

Monday's riot started after a lieutenant colonel in a special army unit tried to disarm a drunken soldier from a different unit stationed in Goma, said Joel Boutroue. Chief of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sub-office in

Blast kills 2 in Belgrade: A hand grenade exploded Tuesday in a shop in downtown Belgrade, killing the manager and his assistant, a news agency reported, AP reports from Belgrade.

It was not clear why the grenade exploded in the manager's office, the official Tanjug news agency reported. An investigation was under way.

Egypt releases 95 Brotherhood backers

CAIRO, Dec 27: Egypt released 95 supposed backers of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood Tuesday, ending a month-long jail stint on charges of disrupting parliamentary elections, reports

State Security Prosecutor Hesham Seraya said some could face prosecution later because police say they found knives, daggers and anti-government leaflets in their houses before last month's balloting.

He did not say how many might face trial.

The men were rounded up because "investigations showed that they were preparing to make trouble during the elections," Seraya told the Associated Press.

The Brotherhood is legally banned, but the group had been allowed to function openly until last January when the government accused it of links to radical groups that have carried out violent anti-government at-

France conducts fifth N-tests today

PARIS, Dec 27: France plans to stage the fifth of its bitterly opposed nuclear tests in the South Pacific on Thursday, satirical French weekly Le Canard Enchaine said on Tuesday, reports

The paper said the test had been scheduled for December 22 but the government did not want it to take place amid a crippling threeweek-old public transport strike. France's worst labour unrest in a decade.

France has set off four underground blasts since September and is expected to bring the total to six by the end of February after which it has pledged to refrain from any further testing.

France resumed nuclear testing in September, provoking an outcry worldwide, especially from countries in the South Pacific.

SA flood death toll rises to 131

PIETERMARITZBURG. South Africa, Dec 27: The known death toll from floods which swept through a shantytown here on Christmas day had risen to 131 by late Tuesday a civil protection unit official said, reports AFP.

Police, who with army troops spent the day scouring the banks of the Umsindusi river, which burst its banks on Monday, earlier said they feared the toll would rise to more than 150.

Police spokesman superintendent Henri Budhram said shocked relatives of missing people Tuesday helped police and army troops search the muddied river banks for those swept away by the flood.

Yeltsin meets Chernomyrdin to talk changes to his cabinet

MOSCOW, Dec 27: Russian President Boris Yeltsin met Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin on Tuesday to discuss possible changes to his cabinet after last week's parliamentary elections, in which Communists triumphed, reports Reuter.

The Presidential Press Service, quoted by Interfax news agency, said the meeting at Yeltsin's residence at Barvikha on the outskirts of Moscow also discussed the situation in the breakaway Chechnya region.

"The preliminary results of the elections to the State Duma (lower chamber) and priorities for social and eco nomic policy were discussed at the meeting," the Press Service said.

Serbian opposition parties form 'parallel parliament'

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, Dec 27: \$erbia's opposition parties formed a parallel assembly" Tuesday to protest a decision by President Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party to ban live TV coverage of parliament, reports AP.

The move was an attempt by Serbia's fractured opposition to form a united front against Milosevic, whose popularity has soared since he negotiated a peace deal for Bosnia. Meeting in an ante room in

the Serbian assembly building, 108 opposition deputies vowed to form "a united front against the Communists," the independent Fonet news agency reported. The Socialists, former Communists, have 123 of 250 seats in parliament and rule with the support of coalition partners. The "parallel assembly"

comprises the major opposition parties. It is not likely to enjoy any real power other than as a statement of protest

"The regime has decided, after it ended the Bosnian war, to start a war in Serbia against the opposition and anyone who thinks differently than them," said Vuk Draskovic, leader of the largest opposition group, the Serbian Renewal Movement.

Milosevic has proved a master at maintaining power. He whipped up nationalist furor blamed for the Serb rebellions that sparked war in the former Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Bosnia.

Later, in hopes of eliminating economic sanctions against his regime, he broke with Serb rebels across the border and advocated peace. selling the policy to his peo-

arrival on Tuesday of Palestinian police in the southern West Bank village of Al Zahirya.

Blast destroys Kashmir official's house

Al-Faran contacts embassies

to free hostages for money

lier demand for the release of

15 Kashmiri separatist mili-

tants held by Indian authori-

rejected by New Delhi.

ties. The demand had been

them as guests for the last

five months plus and you can

expect that we have spent

lots of money. We have also

lost two of our colleagues

while defending your

tourists," the Al-Faran repre-

sentative was reported by

The Guardian to have told Sir

fused to discuss any sort of

financial deal, told his caller:

"I don't think we can be in a

position to compensate you

for the money you have ex-

pended. I sympathise with

We have been treating

the town of Hebron after 28 years of occupation.

LONDON, Dec 27: The

captors of four Westerners

held hostage in Kashmir

embassies in New Delhi with

suggestions that they could

be freed in exchange for

money, The Guardian news-

phone exchange on Decem-

ber 7 between Sir Nicolas

missioner in India, and a

representative of Al-Faran,

the group holding Britons

Paul Wells and Keith Mangan.

American Donald Hutchings

Guardian, the kidnappers

made no reference to an ear-

According to The

and German Dirk Hassert.

Fenn, the British High Com-

paper reported today, says,

The paper cited a tele-

since July have contacted

ple through the tightly controlled state media. The peace accord, signed

in Paris on December 14. won the suspension of sanctions against Serbia and its only remaining partner in Yugoslavia, Montenegro.

Opposition parties began boycotting parliament in late July after Milosevic's Socialists banned live television coverage of parliamentary sessions. The Socialists apparently feared opposition attacks could sway public opinion against Milosevic as the tried to break Besnian Serb resistance to peace.

Draskovic announced that sessions of the new parliament will also be held "out in the open, so that we can have a live people's coverage in-stead of TV."

the loss of your colleagues."

AP adds from Srinagar: A

powerful explosion destroyed

a wood-and-concrete house

of a local government admin-

istrator in Kashmir on Tues-

day, injuring 10 people, po-

plosion near the state capital,

Srinagar, was the ninth in

the last two months in pri-

blast, but in the past, both

the government and pro-in-

dependence Kashmiri groups

have accused one another of

setting off the explosions to

tarnish each other's image.

vate houses, police said.

The early morning ex-

No one immediately

lice said.

The diplomat, who re- claimed responsibility for the

Rise of Islamists in Turkey worries US

WASHINGTON, Dec 27: On the record, the Clinton administration steered clear Tuesday of a move by Turkey's two main secular parties to form a coalition denying power to the country's triumphant Islamic-oriented Welfare Party, reports

Privately, however, senior US officials expressed unease over the potential impact on US foreign policy if the surging Muslim traditionalists who finished first in Sunday's parliamentary election take charge in Ankara. Prime Minister Tansu

Ciller said a coalition, between her True Path party and Motherland would provide a near-majority in parliament. Another party that has promised support would give them the edge to form a government.

"It's up to the Turks how to form a government," acting State Department

spokesman Glyn Davies said. In the same vein. White House spokesman Brian Cullin said: "We're just emphasising that Turkey is a good friend and ally to the US and we fully expect it to remain so - whomever participates in the new governing coalition."

Necmettin Erbakan, the Welfare Party leader, has vowed at various times to take Turkey out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, order all US military bases closed and revoke or renego-

tiate a trade pact with the European Union.

"Some of the views of the Welfare Party are not exactly pro-Western," one official

Some accused confess Rabbani's link

Peshawar blast suspect identified

Persian-speaking-Afghan is a act, the police official said. prime suspect in last week's car bomb blast here that left 45 people dead and more than 100 injured, a top police official said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Unofficial figures put the toll at 60 killed and 200 wounded. Police chief Syed Masood Shah told a news conference that the suspect was identified as Abdul Mateen, who was still at-large. State-run television showed a picture of the suspect, a middle-aged bearded man, and Shah said a "red alert" was placed for Mateen along the Afghan border and other frontiers. Mateen was accused of

Palestman women celebrate with an antique Swedish Karl Gustav submachine gun the parking the booby-trapped The Israeli army evacuated on Monday the military base and prison in the village close to car that caused the explo-- AFP/UNB photo sion, and he had a number of

PESHAWAR, Dec 27: A accomplices in plotting the

The police chief said several groups of saboteurs had recently infiltrated Pakistan from Afghanistan, although he said he would not accuse the Afghan government of involvement in the blast.

AP adds, although nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack, police accused Mateen of working for the government of Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani. At least nine Afghans have

been arrested in connection with the string of bombings, some of whom have confessed to being agents of Rabbani's government. Police have not linked the

Peshawar blast with another explosion at the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad

Off the Record

She likes to laugh, make people laugh

NEW YORK: Sultry Sophia Loren was right at home play ing for laughs in "Grumpier Old Men," reports AP. "I've played many dra

matic characters," the actress tells McCall's in next month's edition. "But I like to laugh and make people

Loren, 61, plays a restaurateur who sets up shop in a small Midwestern town. Wal ter Matthau and Jack Lemmon get miffed because her establishment will replace two of their favourite hang-

While she isn't known for humorous roles, Loren insists: "I never chose roles that were sexy just for the sake of being sexy. I chose roles that were warm. nerable and fragile."



Di's bid to cheer-up herself on Boxing Day

LONDON: Princess Diana during the Christmas holiday visited the woman newspapers have identified as her former bulimia therapist, according to London news reports Wednesday, reports AP. The Sun said Diana spent 65 minutes with "her bulimia

"to cheer herself up" on Tuesday, Boxing Day, the second day of Britain's traditional two-day Christmas break. "Di turned to Susie Orbach for comfort after spending

therapist" Susie Orbach at her clinic in northwest London

Christmas Day apart from Wills (William) and Harry." her two sons, it wrote. Prince William, 13, and Prince Harry, 11, spent

Christmas Day and Tuesday at Sandringham, Queen Elizabeth II's country estate in eastern England, with their father Prince Charles, his mother the Queen and other members of the royal family.

Diana refused an invitation from the Queen, who has called on her and Charles to divorce soon, to spend Christmas at Sandringham.

The Sun quoted an unnamed close friend of Diana as saying: "It is quite sad that the Princess of Wales - one of the richest and most popular women in the world - has to visit her therapist on Boxing Day."

The Sun's rival, the Daily Mirror, had a similar report. It identified Ms Orbach as Diana's "health guru" and "the psychotherapist she turns to in times of trouble" and in explanation of the origin of Diana's relationship with her.

Fresh wave of violence leaves Chechnya at crossroads Karen rebels end talks with Yangon MOSCOW, Dec 27: After a new upsurge of violence in

Either option could mean

still more months of blood-

shed. The guerillas have re-

grouped and appear to be

well-equipped for winter.

and neither side appears

willing to settle for anything

Chernomyrdin says there is

no military solution to the

conflict that began December

11, 1994, when Russian

troops marched into Chech-

nya to crush its drive for in-

Prime Minister Viktor

but complete victory.

MAE SOT. Thailand. Dec Chechnya, Russia and 27: A Karen guerilla delega-Chechen rebels have two choices to end their year-old tion has returned from a first round of peace talks with war: compromise on self-rule Myanmar's ruling military instead of independence, or fight to the bitter, bloody and said they were hopeful more talks to end their 46end, reports AP. year war would be held soon.

The seven-member team from the Karen National Union (KNU) travelled to the southeastern Myanmar city of Moulmein on December 13 and met regional Myanmar army commanders, delegation member Nay Soe told Reuters today.

The meeting was the first between KNU representatives and the Myanmar military to be held in Myanmar since failed negotiations in 1963.

Even as Russian troops were trying to pound the rebels into submission in some of the heaviest fighting in months. Chernomyrdin insisted Monday that his gov ernment wants to make peace.

The Kremlin signed an agreement December 8 with the government installed by its troops in Chechnya, giving the republic expanded control over its internal affairs and the right to open repre-

sentative offices abroad. But the rebels weren't involved in negotiating the agreement, and President Boris Yeltsin's government appears unwilling to resume negotiations that collapsed in October

Instead. Russian insisted

on elections December 17 to legitimise its handpicked leader for the republic, Doku Zavgayev, ignoring rebel demands for Russian troops to withdraw before the vote.

If talks with Russia resume, a key demand by the rebels is likely to be new elections.

The rebels so far won't accept either Zavgayev's government or expanded selfrule under the control of Moscow. That has led to some of

the fiercest fighting in A 10-day battle for Gudermes. Chechnya's secondlargest city, killed at least 600 Chechens, half of them civilians. According to Chechen officials, one-third

of the city, which was spared

in earlier fighting, is in ruins Gudermes might be only the beginning.

King Hussein of Jordan (R) and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak hold a joint press

cor ference at the royal palace garden in Aqaba, 350 km (some 210 miles) south of Amman

on Tuesday. Mubarak said that Egypt and Jordan share common goals in their relations

with Iraq and in the Middle East peace process, after his talks with King Hussein.

The situation in many areas again looks like a puffpastry pie stuffed with gunpowder," the daily Komsmol skaya Pravda wrote Tuesday.

The rebels appear to dominate the areas southeast of the Chechen capital of Grozny and are harassing Russian troops elsewhere. The Kremlin's strategy

appears to be based in part on the belief that the majority of Chechnya's residents are tired of the war. Russian authorities also

seem to think the guerillas can't sustain a prolonged war and would sooner or later seek an honorable way out. such as accepting an

In order to undercut the authority of Dzhokar Dudayev. a former Soviet air force general who became president of Chechnya in 1991 and spearheaded its independence drive, the Russians installed

-AFP/UNB photo

With its leader, Zavgayev, in place. Russia now claims to have a legitimate negotiat ing partner instead of Dudayev, making any talks with the rebels unnecessary

their own man this spring

Yeltsin's government is hoping for a compromise among the Chechens under Zavgayev's leadership — en forced by his police and Russian troops.

That seems to work in individual locations, with village elders and pro Moscow police often persuading guer-

rillas to leave villages to avoid

But so far, the Kremlin and its Chechen supporters have failed to win the public's loyalty by delivering on promises of massive aid.

At least 30,000 families remain homeless, according to official figures, and there is no economic activity besides limited agriculture and market trade

The rebels also have demonstrated they can easily return. Trying to thwart the elections and remove Moscow loyalists, armed separatists recently seized key buildings in several cities.

Russia could go after the rebels with its full military might, but that wouldn't be

Hata in leadership race TOKYO, Dec 27: Leading

Ozawa defeats

Japanese powerbroker Ichiro Ozawa won a contest to head the nation's main opposition party today after his only opponent conceded defeat on the basis of initial results, reports Reuter.

rival, ex-prime minister Tsutomu Hata, told reporters as he admitted defeat in the leadership contest held by the Shinshinto (New Frontier Partyl, a broad opposition party formed last year.

"We have no regrets in

fighting the election. Ozawa's

Oazawa's campaign office also issued a statement claiming victory in the leadership race.