

BRIEFLY



Representing the Bosnian army Col Muharem Efendic (L), Croatian army General Ivan Mamatuzovic (C) and Bosnian Serb army General Novica Simic (R) welcome each other after the first joint military meeting under US command in Porebrice on Wednesday bringing together military leaders of the former warring factions in northeast Bosnia. The meeting took place in a war-damaged building in the Serb-held area of the northern Posavina corridor. — AFP/UNB photo

Top Chinese official executed: A Chinese firing squad executed planning official Wang Jianye yesterday after a court in the southern boomtown of Shenzhen rejected his appeal against conviction in the city's biggest corruption case. Reuter reports from Beijing. The Shenzhen intermediate people's court rejected Wang's appeal against the death sentence on charges of taking bribes, corruption, bigamy and illegally crossing the border.

Kazakhs sign deal with PLO: Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev on Wednesday signed several economic and cultural cooperation accords with Israel and the Palestinian authority, officials said. AFP reports from Jerusalem. He told Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat that his country would soon open an embassy in Israel and a representation office in the self ruled Gaza Strip.

Yeltsin leaves Kozyrev dangling: Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev was still clinging to his job Wednesday after a meeting with President Boris Yeltsin. But he was clearly on notice, AP reports from Moscow. Yeltsin said this fall he would replace Kozyrev, his longest-serving minister. The question is when. Many observers expected Kozyrev to emerge from his meeting with Yeltsin Wednesday with his resignation in hand.

UN to pull out of Haiti in Feb: The US State Department ruled out on Wednesday speculation that US troops will be extended in Haiti beyond their scheduled departure early next year, AP reports from Washington. Spokesman Glyn Davies said the estimated 2,400 American soldiers serving in the UN mission in Haiti will begin pulling out as scheduled on February 29. The same deadline applies to all 6,000 troops serving under the UN umbrella in Haiti.

7 Andean band members killed: Seven members of an Andean folk-music band were killed and 13 injured when their bus pitched off the road and into a ravine early Wednesday, rescue workers said. AFP reports from Lima. The poor condition of the road in Peru's Andean province of Huarochiri and heavy rains made it necessary for police to resort to helicopters to transport the injured band members to hospital.

14 die in Ivory Coast road mishap: Several vehicles crashed on a foggy freeway just north of Abidjan Wednesday, killing 14 people and injuring 86, AP reports from Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

15 LTTE men killed in clash with troops

COLOMBO, Dec 28: Security forces killed at least 15 Tamil Tiger guerrillas during a brief fire fight in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna Peninsula, the military said today, reports AFP. Troops confronted a group of rebels from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) just outside Jaffna's main military base of Palaly on Wednesday, the military said in a statement. "Ground troops confirmed at least 15 terrorists were killed during the confrontation," the statement said, adding that six weapons and four hand grenades were recovered from the victims. There were no casualties among security forces, the statement said. There have been sporadic clashes be-

Beijing Court upholds Wei's 14-yr jail term

BEIJING, Dec 28: The Beijing Higher People's Court upheld today a 14-year sentence for dissident Wei Jingsheng, father of China's democracy movement, convicted of plotting to subvert the government, reports Reuter. The court upheld the original verdict, court spokesman Chen Xion said in a telephone interview. The Appeals Court did not have the power to lengthen Wei's prison term. Wei had attended the hearing at the court in western Beijing, he said, adding that he could not say whether the defendant had spoken in court. He now enters prison to begin his second lengthy jail term, after just six months of freedom since he was first imprisoned in 1979 for taking part in the Democracy Wall Movement, the most outspoken call for such a system since the 1949 communist takeover.

Arafat hails Israeli pullout from 6 WB towns

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, Dec 28: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Wednesday hailed the clockwork withdrawal of Israeli troops from six major West Bank towns and more than 450 villages as agreed in a September deal, reports AFP. "I note the precision of the implementation of this accord," Arafat told journalists after Israeli troops evacuated the town of Ramallah a day earlier. It was the last town to be completely handed over to Arafat's Palestinian Authority as agreed in September. Ramallah became the seventh West Bank town to gain autonomy after self-rule was launched in Jericho as well as the Gaza Strip in May 1994.

And disturbingly, Werner Fornos of the Population Institute said, 90 per cent of the growth is in poor countries, "already terribly torn by civil strife and social unrest and where all too many people live in brutal poverty." Fornos, giving the institute's "1995 World Population Overview," told reporters that effective birth control policies and practices could stabilise world population by 2015 at about 8 billion.

World population grows by 100m in '95

WASHINGTON, Dec 28: The World's population grew this year by 100 million people, to 5.75 billion, the largest increase ever, the head of a Washington population research organisation reported Wednesday, reports AP.

And disturbingly, Werner Fornos of the Population Institute said, 90 per cent of the growth is in poor countries, "already terribly torn by civil strife and social unrest and where all too many people live in brutal poverty." Fornos, giving the institute's "1995 World Population Overview," told reporters that effective birth control policies and practices could stabilise world population by 2015 at about 8 billion.

India launches sat from Baikonur

NEW DELHI, Dec 28: An Indian remote sensing satellite was blasted into space aboard a Russian rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan today, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says AFP.

The 1,250-kilogram (2,750-pound) satellite, IRS-IC, lifted off aboard a 70-metre (231-foot) Molniya rocket from a snow-covered launch pad at 0645 GMT, the news agency said. Scientists from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which designed and built the satellite, attended the launch, it added.

The solar-powered satellite is expected to become operational in three weeks, when its three powerful cameras will begin to send high-resolution pictures back to earth.

Australia, NZ, Japan condemn France for 5th N-test

HONG KONG, Dec 28: Australia, New Zealand and Japan fired a barrage of rhetoric at France for conducting another nuclear test in the South Pacific, branding the act as a sign of arrogance and blindness to local fears, reports AFP. The test was last-but-one in a truncated series of blasts in a declared programme to test the French nuclear arsenal ahead of a worldwide test ban and devise simulation techniques. And with the equivalent of less than 30,000 tonnes of TNT, it was also one of the smallest so far. But it failed to prevent a powerful but now familiar wave of criticism from rolling out of the South Pacific and from Japan, the only nation to have suffered an atom-

bomb attack. French envoys trekked back to foreign ministries for a renewed carpeting, where they heard a common message: That France was badly damaging its reputation by persisting in the tests. The test "sends the worst possible message for the New Year to the people of the South Pacific," acting Australian Prime Minister Kim Beazley said. It demonstrated "an arrogant disregard" for a UN General Assembly resolution earlier this month calling for an end to all testing, he said. Acting Foreign Minister Gordon Bilney noted reports from Paris that said the test had initially been scheduled for December 22 — but was postponed because the French government was facing a political crisis at home be-

cause of its economic policy. In New Zealand, Prime Minister Jim Bolger said France was "its own worst enemy." "Its reputation in the Pacific is at an all-time low. When the tests are over, France will have to rebuild its credentials in the region. It has a long way to go," he said. In Tokyo, Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama said the tests were "meaningless," and it was only logical for France to put an end to them. In Seoul, the Foreign Ministry said South Korea "deeply regrets" the explosion, as a small group of protesters pelted the French Embassy with eggs. The 16-state South Pacific Forum said in Fiji that the test was "particularly unacceptable" in light of the UN General Assembly resolution.



Four suspected terrorists with covered faces, stand in front of arms and ammunitions recovered by the police after their arrest from different areas of Hyderabad, some 160 kms from strife-torn city of Karachi on Wednesday. Hyderabad police avoid to disclose the identity and affiliations of these terrorists due to on-going investigation to purge the terrorist activities in the city. — AFP/UNB photo

US offers compromise solutions to Israeli pullout from Golan

JERUSALEM, Dec 28: Israeli officials said Thursday that peace negotiations with Syria had got off to a good start, with US mediators reportedly offering compromise solutions to the key issue of an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, reports AFP. "The atmosphere in the negotiations is good," Yossi Beilin, Israel's minister in charge of the peace process, said today after the first round of talks at a remote retreat in eastern Maryland ended in an unscheduled late night dinner between Israelis and Syrians on Wednesday. "Our negotiators feel that their Syrian counterparts have a broader negotiating mandate than in the past," he told Israeli state radio, referring to previous talks which collapsed in June over the

Golan issue. Past Israeli-Syrian negotiations have all stuck on the issue of security arrangements surrounding an eventual Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, a strategic plateau which Israel seized in 1967 and annexed in 1981. This new talks are set to be broader, "simultaneously covering the Golan and issues of economic and political normalisation, water sharing and regional peace. Senior Israeli officials have made clear that Prime Minister Shimon Peres is willing to give up the Golan as part of a comprehensive peace agreement with Syria, but Israel is still insisting their withdrawal will be to the international border drawn in 1923 by colonial powers France and Britain. US, Israeli and Syrian of-

ficials have slapped a news blackout on the Maryland talks, but the Israeli daily Maariv reported that US mediators were offering a compromise solution to the border issue tracing a frontier between the 1923 and 1967 lines. In his radio remarks, Beilin acknowledged that "the United States is more involved in the discussions this time," but he added: "It's too early to say if the negotiations will lead to a breakthrough." "Things will become clearer as soon as the talks enter into the key issues: The depth of withdrawal (from the Golan) and the nature of peace," he said, adding, however, that the start of the talks appeared "favourable" to a successful conclusion.



A Palestinian pulls the arm of an Israeli soldier as villagers clash with Israeli troops on Wednesday in Beit Hanina in East Jerusalem in protest against work on a by-pass road that will serve Jewish settlers and other Israeli traffic after Israel army redeployment in the area north of Jerusalem. — AFP/UNB photo

Amman seizes Iraq-bound chemicals

AMMAN, Dec 28: Authorities have seized several kilograms (pounds) of Iraq-bound chemical material that could be used in manufacturing weapons in violation of UN sanctions, official sources said Wednesday, reports AP. The material was intercepted a few weeks ago following a tipoff from UN authorities who had discovered information on the shipment in documents provided by Iraq, one of the sources reported on condition of anonymity. The source said the material was held up at Amman airport for several months.

Golan settlers wrestle with wisdom of Israeli withdrawal

MEVO HAMMA, Golan Heights, Dec 28: Amitai Shelem's position atop a cliff on the Golan Heights afforded him a comfortable perch to survey much of northern Israel stretching to the Mediterranean Sea, reports AP. "Have we gone mad?" the settler asked, pondering the notion that the government might order a withdrawal from the plateau for a peace treaty with Syria. With Israel-Syria peace talks set to resume Wednesday in Washington, the once-unthinkable prospect is beginning to seem real to the 13,000 Israelis living on the Golan. Some are even getting used to the idea. "I don't want to leave my home, but I didn't think the personal issue is relevant," said Yigal Kipnis, a 46-year-old citrus grower who made the rocky, windswept plateau his home 17 years ago. If the Golan could be traded for peace, he said, "It's worth it." Yet since Israel began peace talks with Syria in 1991, and especially in the three years since Yitzhak Rabin was elected premier, a Golan settlers' lobby has fought to galvanise public opinion against giving up the territory. Stickers and placards proclaiming "The people are with the Golan" popped up everywhere, and polls showed a strong majority of Israelis opposed the total

Golan pullout Syria demands in exchange for peace. Even so, Kipnis maintained, most Golan settlers have gradually reached the same conclusion he has — but have remained silent on an issue that has the potential to sharply divide their close-knit rural communities. Such a trend would reflect an apparent softening of Israeli public opinion in general following Rabin's assassination last month by a Jewish extremist opposed to his policy of giving up land for peace. Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Rabin's successor, is calculating he can rally support behind a Golan-for-peace deal if it is widened to

include Syrian-controlled Lebanon — where Israel faces a war of attrition — in addition to Syria itself, and is consigned by most Arab leaders. Such a deal, Peres promises, would end almost a century of Arab-Israeli conflict and give Israel crucial leverage in negotiating a permanent peace settlement with the Palestinians after the current autonomy period, which is to last through 1999. The PLO's case for a foothold in the holy city of Jerusalem, for example, would be weakened if the entire Arab world were already living in harmony with the Jewish state, Israeli officials suggest. Shelem, who moved here

four months after Israel seized the heights in the June 1967 war, worries that sacrificing the Golan is unnecessary. Unlike the 2 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, the 18,000 Arab Druse residents of the Golan were never restive, and the ceasefire line between Israel and Syria has remained quiet for decades. "The situation for the last 20 years has been one of peace," said the 54-year-old father of four. "It might take 10 or 20 years but (formal) peace could be reached without giving up the Golan." Hundreds of yards (metre) below the former Syrian military outpost where Shelem stood was the Sea of Galilee,

which is ringed by Israeli kibbutzes and resorts and provides nearly one-third of Israel's drinking water. "Jews cannot live down there with Syrians up here," Shelem warned. Israel is seeking a large demilitarised zone as a possible solution. In any case, officials are hinting a pullout from the territory of almost 450 square miles (1,165 square kilometres) is near. Hagai Meron, who heads Parliament's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, suggested Tuesday that the government should begin preparing to move the settlers out and pay them compensation.

Russian jets raid Chechen village, 4 killed

SHALI, Russia Dec 28: Russian warplanes attacked a small village in the southern Vedeno region of the break-away republic of Chechnya killing four civilians a Chechen independence source said Wednesday, reports AFP. The aircraft pounded the hamlet, near the village of Mekhketi 50 kilometres (30 miles) southeast of the Chechen capital of Grozny, with rockets and machine gun fire the source said. Local residents who fled to nearby Shali confirmed that air strike had taken place, but they were unable to say what the target was or whether there had been any casualties.

Camilla Parker firm to marry Charles

LONDON, Dec 28: Prince Charles' long-time girlfriend Camilla Parker Bowles is determined to marry him and become his consort, a British newspaper reported today, says Reuter. Parker Bowles, 48, has told the heir-to-the-throne she wants to marry him after he and Princess Diana divorce and expects to receive the title Her Royal Highness, said the Daily Express, quoting unidentified senior government sources and friends. "Friends of Camilla say she is tired of conducting their relationship in secret. She is not prepared to be his mistress forever," the newspaper said. If the report is correct it would add a new dimension

to the crisis which has rocked Britain's royal family since Charles and Diana separated in 1992. It could put Charles on a collision course with senior church of England figures. Queen Elizabeth, anxious to repair the tarnished image of the royal family, wrote to Charles and Diana last week urging them to seal their increasingly bitter separation with a divorce. Both Charles and Diana have publicly admitted having affairs. Charles quickly agreed with his mother, but Diana was variously said to be furious and devastated that news of the Queen's letter had become public and she has not replied.

Pakistan denies link to arms-drop in Purulia

ISLAMABAD, Dec 28: Pakistan has denied Indian allegations that its intelligence service was involved in a mystery air-drop of weapons over eastern India, reports AFP.

told reporters in the western city of Puna that Pakistan's military intelligence was suspected of organising last week's air-drop of weapons over eastern India. Chavan described the incident as a "serious development which can not be taken lightly."

Foreign Minister Asaf Ahmad Ali in a statement late on Wednesday expressed surprise and resentment over reported remarks of Indian Home Minister SB Chavan that the "needle-jerk habit" of the Indian leadership to blame Pakistan for their problems. The Indian home minister

Three parachute — loads of arms were dropped near Purulia in the Indian state of West Bengal on December 17 from an AN-26 transport plane. The plane was later seized by the Indian authorities. Five Latvians and a Briton aboard the Russian-made aircraft, which was forced down by Indian Air Force MiGs while heading for the Pakistani city of Karachi, have reportedly confessed to dropping the weapons.

Off the Record

Travelling under a false name!

ST JOHN'S Antigua: Princess Diana flew quietly into the Caribbean, escaping to the sunshine after a home-alone Christmas without her sons in a freezing London, reports AP. Traveling under a false name, Diana arrived on a scheduled British West Indies Airlines flight that arrived at 6:20 pm (2220 GMT) Wednesday, 40 minutes late, just enough to ensure that darkness had fallen. The 34-year-old princess waited until all other passengers had gotten off the plane. Then she descended to a waiting car that whisked her away to a small plane belonging to the luxurious K-Club resort on nearby Barbuda Island. A two-bedroom suite there costs about \$3,000 a day. The flat coral island, with only 1,500 residents, is 30 miles (50 kilometres) from St John's capital of the twin-island former British colony of Antigua. It was unclear how many people were in Diana's party. Two or three other people from the plane appeared to join her in the car. Diana appeared to be dressed casually, in blue jeans and navy sweater with a soft bag thrown over her shoulder. She left London after what appears to have been a miserable Christmas with tough negotiations for a divorce from Prince Charles lying ahead.



Crocodile's sun-bath at Florida beach

MIAMI BEACH, Florida: A 9-foot (2.7 metres) crocodile crawled out of the ocean and surprised tourists at a trendy Florida beach, reports AP. Animal control officials captured the animal and returned it to a conservation area 40 miles (65 kilometres) away. Todd Hardwick, who trapped the crocodile, said the tourists who found the animal poked at it with sticks. He said they were lucky the normally aggressive reptile was weak from the chilly weather. Temperatures were in the mid-50s Fahrenheit (13 degrees Celsius). "If it had been August, he would have been all over the beach knocking people down with his tail," Hardwick said. Hardwick, summoned by state game officials, said the 250-to-300-pound (113 to 136-kilogram) animal snapped at the people a couple of times. "These guys use their tails to knock something down and sweep it toward their mouth, and they are very fast," he said.