

BRIEFLY



An old woman walks past two posters, one saying "the Bosnian army needs you" the other wishes "happy new year" at a roundabout in downtown Tuzla on Friday. The Tuzla airbase is the home of US soldiers from Task force Eagle. — AFP/UNB photo

Queen to honour Elton John: The pop star Elton John, the former UN commander in Bosnia, and a rural blacksmith were among those to receive honours from Queen Elizabeth II and Prime Minister John Major on Saturday for services rendered to the country, AFP reports from London.

Elton John, who was crowned the "liberace of pop" by his fans because of his flamboyant costumes and outrageous specials, received a CBE in the new year honours list.

ETA member held in Spain: Police arrested a suspected member of the armed Basque separatist group ETA on Friday, the fourth suspect picked up this week in connection with an alleged plot to attack Basque officials over the holidays, AP reports from San Sebastian, Spain.

The arrests follow the slaying this month of eight people, including an army major, which has prompted calls for tougher moves against terrorists. There have been no arrests in those killings, which authorities blame on ETA.

Israeli shells kill 1 in Lebanon: A man was killed and his father, brother and neighbour were wounded Friday when Israeli shells packed with metal darts bombarded their village after a guerilla attack on the Israeli-occupied zone in south Lebanon, UN sources reported, AP reports from Tyre, Lebanon.

They said the shells hit the village of Kabrikha, which is policed by UN peacekeepers from Ghana.

56 prisoners executed in USA: A record 56 prisoners were executed in 24 US states in 1995 — a number that could increase next year, an anti-death penalty group said Friday, AFP reports from Washington.

Since US states were restored the right to choose whether to implement the death penalty back in 1976, more than 300 prisoners have been put to death nationwide, 104 of them in Texas alone, according to the Washington-based National Coalition for Abolition of the Death Penalty.

Bush to visit Seoul in Jan: Former US President George Bush will visit Seoul on January 12-13 to lecture in Leadership Conference organised by the Seoul branch of Citibank, news reports said Saturday, AFP reports from Seoul.

Yonhap news agency said Bush would deliver two speeches during the conference which is being held as a part of Citibank's Asian leadership series, which brings together former and incumbent world leaders.

Kwasniewski selects key ministers: Poland's new President Aleksander Kwasniewski, on Friday nominated candidates for the posts of foreign and interior minister, left vacant since the hand-over of power on December 22, AFP reports from Warsaw.

Kwasniewski said he was nominating Dariusz Rosati, a 49-year-old economist, as foreign minister and Jerzy Koniczny, 44, former security chief in Solidarity governments, as interior minister.

Russia sends aid to Iraq: Russia has sent 27 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Iraq, including food and medicines for children, Russian diplomats said in Amman Friday, AFP reports from Amman.

The aid travelled Thursday from Jordan to Baghdad after arriving Wednesday by Russian cargo plane in Amman and has been provided with the "financial participation of the oil company Lukoil," a diplomat said.

145 US law officers killed in '95: At least 145 law officers died in the line of duty this year in the United States, including 13 in an April 19 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma, a police group reported Friday, AP reports from Washington.

The National Association of Chiefs of Police said the total is preliminary and is expected eventually to exceed the 169 officers slain in 1994. At this time last year, the group's preliminary count was 137.

Fresh fighting in Liberia: New fighting between rival rebel factions forced thousands of civilians to flee a northwestern city Friday and threatened a ceasefire in Liberia's 6-year-old civil war, AP reports from Klay, Liberia.

The fighting among rebels of Roosevelt Johnson's ULIMO faction left the city of Tubmanburg virtually deserted, said peacekeepers in the western provincial township of Klay.

Hong Kong will enjoy glorious tomorrow: China

HONG KONG, Dec 30: China has told Hong Kong it will enjoy a "glorious tomorrow" under Chinese rule, the day after Governor Chris Patten warned that residents will leave if their autonomy is threatened, reports said today, says AFP.

In his New Year greeting, Zhou Nan, Director of Xinhua news agency, China's de-facto government representative in the colony, called on the people of Hong Kong to work towards a smooth handover to China in 1997.

Chun improving as he stops fasting

SEOUL, Dec 30: Jailed former President Chun Doo-Hwan, who fell unconscious Friday on the 27th day of a hunger strike, has stopped fasting and his health is improving, a senior doctor said, reports AFP.

"Everything is OK with him and Chun will be able to take thin rice gruel from today and beef soup beginning on Sunday," doctor Lee Kwon-Jon of Seoul Police Hospital told Yonhap news agency.

Lee said Chun had eaten a little rice soup that had been brought from his home on Friday evening and had even joked about his hunger strike.

"Well now that my fast is over, I think all of those who care about my health will be able to have a happy New Year holiday," Lee quoted the 64-year-old former head of state as saying.

Taliban rockets kill 8 more civilians

KABUL, Dec 30: Eight Afghan civilians were killed and 41 injured when a deadly new wave of rocket and shell salvos struck the besieged capital Kabul, witnesses and doctors said today, reports AFP.

Four separate barrages of artillery shells and rockets fired by the Taliban militia blockading Kabul hit three areas of the city between late Thursday and late Friday, defence officials and witnesses said.

The latest series of barrages came as the Taliban roundly rejected an unconditional offer by Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani that he travel to opposition strongholds — including the Taliban centre at Kandahar — for talks on resolving the country's protracted civil war.

Zhirinovsky demands 3 cabinet posts, Speakership

MOSCOW, Dec 30: Vladimir Zhirinovsky demanded three cabinet posts for his ultra nationalist Liberal Democratic Party on Friday as well as the Speakership of the new Russian parliament after a strong showing in this month's election, reports Reuters.

He was lodging his new year wish list early while other leaders seemed busy contemplating a holiday before January's gathering of the new state Duma lower house, where Zhirinovsky's party will be the third biggest group with 51 of 450 seats.

"Our request is modest, since we understand the present government will not give key posts to the LDRP (Liberal Democratic Party)," he told a news conference.

Bodo rebels kill 5 people in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 30: Five people were killed and 14 injured overnight when tribal guerillas opened fire at a crowded market place in the eastern Indian state of Assam, police said today, reports AFP.

Police said militants of the outlawed Bodo Security Force opened fire at Choudhury Market in Assam's Barpeta district killing five persons on the spot.

About 10 militants fired automatic weapons and lobbed grenades before escaping in a truck, police said. "Indian troops chased them and returned fire, but no casualty has been reported."

Bodos, who form the majority of Assam's 1.4 million tribes people, are demanding a Bodo homeland on the Northern banks of the Brahmaputra river, which cuts through the state of 22 million people.

Strike by religious front disrupts life in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 30: Life was widely disrupted in Pakistan today in a general strike called by a multi-party religious front which accuses Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of undermining the country's Islamic identity, reports AFP.

Reports from major cities said commercial activity was largely halted with little traffic on roads, amid a heavy police turnout to prevent trouble.

Up to midday no major incidents were reported. Leaders of the Milli Yekhehatti Council (MYC), which sponsored the protest, said their strike call received a good response throughout the country.

An almost complete shut down of the main markets was reported in violence

plagued Karachi, where the roads were largely empty.

In Lahore, capital of populous Punjab province, most downtown markets were closed while thin traffic was reported on the roads, with police were patrolling the streets.

Marches were held in Peshawar, the main city in North West Frontier Province, most markets and shops suspended business in the area, in response to the strike call by Milli Yekhehatti Council (MYC), a multi-party grouping.

But reports said private and public transport was playing normally in Peshawar.

The MYC, made up of nearly a dozen parties, accuses the government of undermining Pakistan's Islamic identity and waging a cam-

paign against religious schools and clerics.

Late Friday in Karachi, police detained a leading Kashmiri activist allied with the fundamentalist party, Jamaat-i-Islami, which said the arrest was linked to the MYC strike.

Reuter adds: At least nine people were killed in overnight violence in Karachi ahead of a general strike by opposition Islamic parties, police and ethnic Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM) said today.

The MQM said police shot and killed four men in New Karachi, Joharabad and Li-aquatabad on Friday.

The police confirmed the deaths but said they had shot the four after being attacked. Five other people were killed in separate incidents



US President Bill Clinton (C) speaks to reporters as Speaker of the US House of Representatives Newt Gingrich (L) and Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R) look on during budget meetings at the White House on Friday. Clinton and Republican leaders are trying to work out a solution to the ongoing budget impasse. — AFP/UNB photo

Sarajevo airlift to end next week

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dec 30: After 41 months of flying in food, medicine and other supplies to starving, besieged Sarajevo; flying out civilians needing medical care; and ferrying journalists and officials in both directions, it's almost over, reports AP.

The longest airlift in aviation history, the United Nations' Operation provide promise mission to Sarajevo, will end next week, UN officials said Friday.

With main roads into Sarajevo cleared of Serb road-blocks under the terms of the December 14 peace agreement, aid convoys and commercial trucks laden with a wide variety of products — for those who can afford them — are rumbling into the Bosnian capital unhindered.

That means the airlift could end as soon as Monday, said Kris Janowski, Sarajevo

spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

"For many months, the airlift provided more than 90 per cent of everything that got into Sarajevo," said UN-HCR spokesman Ron Redmond in Geneva. "It quite literally kept the city alive."

Increased access means the end of an era for Sarajevo's cooks, who battled for years to make the basic aid diet of flour, rice, pasta and canned food tasty and interesting.

The United Nations took control of Sarajevo's airport on June 29, 1992, less than three months after Bosnia's war began, and began flights on July 3 of that year.

Planes from more than 20 countries have flown 12,900 sorties to bring in 160,000 metric tons of supplies. In recent months, five countries — Canada, Britain, France, Germany and the United States — have kept it going.

N Korea accuses South of building up arms

TOKYO, Dec 30: North Korea accused Seoul today of building up its arms in what it said was a "vicious challenge" to peaceful reunification, reports Reuter.

The South Korean puppets announced the "defence intermediate-term plan for 1997-2001 some time ago. Commenting on this, Rodong Sinmun today brands it as a vicious challenge to the ... desire of all the fellow countrymen who are eagerly longing for ... peaceful reunification," the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), monitored in Tokyo said.

The Belicose Kim Young-Sam group have turned the whole land of South Korea into a mass-destruction weapon exhibition and are frequently staging the military manoeuvres against the North in league with outside forces to drive the situation of the country to a dangerous brink of war.



A US Army GI stands atop a gravel pile as he does guard duty during the helicopter pontoon lift and gravel dumping operations to complete the pontoon bridge by tomorrow get underway on Friday. After severe flooding overran the US IFOR bridge camp, helicopters were called in to get the bridge construction going again. According to the US IFOR contingent commander General Nash the pontoon bridge will be complete today. — AFP/UNB photo

Major won't hold early polls in '96 Tory MP's defection hits British Govt hard

LONDON, Dec 30: British Prime Minister John Major's troubled government was rocked by the defection of a former vice chairman of his ruling Conservative Party to the minority opposition Liberal Democrats, reports Reuter.

Emma Nicholson, a member of Parliament since 1987, said on Friday the Conservatives had lurched to the right and she could no longer support the party.

Her decision, announced in an interview with BBC television, slashed Major's already slender majority in the House of Commons and prompted British media speculation that he could be forced into an early general election in 1996.

Opposition parties reacted with glee to Major's discomfort and signalled that

they were ready for an election long before the government's term of office runs out in May 1997.

AFP adds: British Prime Minister John Major said today he would not hold early elections in 1996, despite the defection of a Conservative deputy which has further reduced the government's tiny parliamentary majority.

"I don't expect to have a general election in 1996. I have said repeatedly that I expect an election in 1997," Major told BBC radio.

"No one can be sure of these things but I expect an election in 1997," he added.

"I was elected to do a particular job. I would expect to complete that job and I would expect go through to 1997. That is my stated intention and that's what I intend to do," Major insisted.

First public mass wedding ceremony in Pakistan

KARACHI, Dec 30: At least 107 young Muslim couples were married in a mass ceremony here, in what has been billed as Pakistan's first public mass wedding ceremony, organisers said today, reports AFP.

Held in the city's hockey stadium, the mass wedding late Friday was organised by a rightwing, social welfare group known as the Pasban (protectors), linked to the Jammat-e-Islami, the country's best organised religious party.

Most of the couples paid 15,000 rupees (428 dollar) for their marriage, although those who could not effort it were not charged, while Pasban funded most of the festive, colourful event, organisers said.

The brides, all of whom were dressed in traditional red and gold bridal outfits, with fresh white flowers pinned to their hair, sat under the canopies as their bridegrooms rode around the ground in decorated horse-drawn carriages.

Most of the couples said their marriages were arranged by their families as it is traditional in Pakistan.

"I am very happy," said Asma Jabeen, one of the 107 brides. "I am enjoying this mass wedding." Many brides and grooms said the idea of a mass wedding had appealed to them and their parents.

Several brides were tremendously shy and kept drawing their red and gold chiff on veils across their faces.

Off the Record

Free Barbudans angry at Di's invasion

CODRINGTON, Barbuda: Princess Diana may see herself as a British goodwill ambassador, but Barbudans beg to differ, reports AP.

Angry residents of this Caribbean island nation called a town hall meeting Friday to complain that a public beach has been closed by police and Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force officers protecting Diana's privacy.

Islanders also said they felt slighted because Diana turned down an invitation to present awards at a ceremony Friday for people who helped the island recover from Hurricane Luis, which ripped through in September.

"Our beaches are open, we're free to do what we want on them, so we're not at all happy about this," said resident Natalie Nedd.

Diana, 34, the estranged wife of Prince Charles, is taking a Caribbean vacation while her two sons, Prince William, 13, and Prince Harry, 11, spend the Christmas holidays with their father, heir to the British throne.

She is staying at a guest house in Codrington, where most of the island's 1,500 residents live. The village is about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from the K-Club, a posh private resort whose beach was screened off for Diana's visit. However, all beaches in Barbuda are public.

"Legally, we can access the beach and sit next to her, legally, it's not the K-Club's or Diana's, and we totally object to anybody trying to shut off what is public property," said Franella Francis, former chairwoman of the Barbuda Council, the island's local ruling body.

Back in cold, clammy London, The Daily Mail reported that Prime Minister John Major told Queen Elizabeth II that a marriage between Charles and his mistress Camilla Parker Bowles would be unacceptable.

Cranes' final good bye to Keoladeo Park

JAIPUR: Siberian cranes which adorned the Keoladeo National Park in winters, have failed to arrive for the third consecutive year, reports PTI.

The tallest birds from Siberia, which visited the marshy lake of the National Park at Bharatpur for their winter sojourn, were later sited in 1992-93 winter season.

Bird watchers feel that the Siberian cranes have bid a final good bye to the Keoladeo Park due to the hazardous route via Afghanistan and Pakistan where they fall prey to gun shooters.

The continuing war in Afghanistan is further contributing in making the route unfriendly.

There number had started dwindling in 1970's and it went down to 11 in 1990-91 and six in 1992-93.

An experiment conducted in 1993 by the International Crane Foundation to release artificially hatched chicks in the migratory flock failed when the visitors left for their homeland leaving behind the locally released birds.

The two artificially hatched chicks have, however, adopted the habitat making the part their permanent home.

Syria yet to disclose what kind of ties it wants with Israel

WASHINGTON, Dec 30: Senior Israeli negotiators said that Syria had reaffirmed its interest in concluding a peace treaty but left unclear during three days of talks the kind of relationship it had in mind, reports AP.

"We have yet to obtain a satisfactory answer to the question — what kind of peace, what level or depth of peace?" Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich said Friday as negotiations were shifted from Maryland's Eastern shore to Washington on a more informal basis for the long holiday weekend.

He said Israel was not interested in the kind of "cold peace" it has with Egypt, which the diplomat contrasted with the warm relationship Israel has developed with Jordan.

"This hopefully will be answered in the next few weeks, but it has yet to be answered," he said.

And yet, both Rabinovich and Uri Savir, head of the Israeli delegation, spoke warmly in separate interviews with The Associated Press of the exchanges they had with Syrian negotiators at the Wye Plantation.

"Compared to our mutual perceptions of each other, we had a very good dialogue," Savir said. "So something is beginning to change."

"We are trying to find a common basis for our potential agreement," Savir, the director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, added. "We will have to wait another few days before we can come with clear recommendations to our government as how to proceed from here."

Savir, assessing the first phase of the reopened peace talks, said "we are still at half time" and that "we definitely have significant gaps."

Even before this round of talks Israel knew Syria wanted a peace treaty with Israel, Rabinovich said. "We know now even more vividly

that Syria is interested in making peace with Israel."

He stressed, however, it will require a deep relationship, not just a formal accord, and that Israel's security needs also must be satisfied.

As part of the treaty, Israel is expected to withdraws from the Golan Heights, thereby surrendering strategic plateau from which it has been able to monitor Syrian tank movements and guard Israeli villages from cross-border shelling.

The decision to keep talking over the New Year's weekend instead of having the delegations go home for a

break was a sign of progress.

US mediator Dennis Ross proposed the extension. The negotiators will stay in hotels in Washington and hold what a State Department spokesman called informal contacts under US supervision.

Diplomatic sources disclosed, meanwhile, Israel had proposed joint economic projects with Syria on the disputed Golan Heights and stressed the importance of maintaining Israel's supply of drinking water, which originates there.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, in a move favoured by the Clinton ad-

ministration, proposes to yield the strategic territory to Syria as part of a peace accord.

The schedule of an Israeli pullout, the terms of Syrian recognition and measures to secure the border against surprise attack are among the issues to be ironed out.

The delegations quit the Wye Plantation at midday to take up residence in Washington hotels. The talks are due to resume at the Wye Conference Center next Wednesday, and Secretary of State Warren Christopher intends to go to the region the following week, Dinger said.

9 ME terrorists arrested in Philippines

MANILA, Dec 30: Philippine police have arrested nine Middle East men, suspected of being terrorists, including the brother of World Trade Centre bombing mastermind Ramzi Yusef, Interior Secretary Rafael Alunan said today, reports AFP.

Alunan said six of the arrested men carried Iraqi passports, including Adel Ammon whom he identified as the brother of the alleged mastermind of the February 1993 World Trade Centre bombing in New York in which six died and over 1,000 were injured.