

## Libya may hit NATO base in Naples if attacked

ROME, Jan 1: Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi says he does not consider US President Bill Clinton to be his enemy, but he warned that his country would strike a key NATO base in Italy if it is attacked, reports AFP.

Quoted on Sunday by Italian journalists who interviewed him in Tripoli, Gaddafi said Clinton was not an enemy in the same way that former US president Ronald Reagan had been in the 1980s.

"He is not an aggressive person," he said. "There is a lack of understanding between US, but no longer war."

"I no longer have the same opinion about America as I did before, even if I am convinced that the intervention in the former Yugoslavia is a way of occupying a land that has escaped American influence," he added.

Gaddafi, long suspected by

Washington of sponsoring international terrorism, added that if his country is attacked by the US military, it would retaliate by striking Naples, the Italian city that is NATO's Mediterranean base.

On relations with Italy, the former colonial power in Libya, Gaddafi said it was high time for Rome to move on from nice words to action and pay compensation for the years it occupied the country.

"Settle this business and cooperation between our two countries will be boundless," he said.

He ended his interview on a sporting note, saying that he would have liked to have been a soccer player because that is the sport which is most loved by the masses.

Last Friday, tens of thousands of Libyans watched the first soccer match to be played in Libya by two Italian teams since the end of Italian colonial rule in 1932.

## Tigers mark New Yr by storming police post Military may leave Jaffna soon, indicates Chandrika

COLOMBO, Jan 1: The Sri Lankan president on Monday indicated that the military could soon leave Jaffna city, the rebel stronghold in the north that was captured after 50 days of fierce battle, reports AP.

"It is our aim to establish a civil administration in the area as soon as possible and vest the administration in the Tamil people," Chandrika Kumaratunga said in her New Year's message to the nation.

Her statement came two days after rebel chief, Velupillai Prabhakaran, offered to resume negotiations to end the civil war if the military pulled out of Jaffna.

"It is the government's aspiration to find political solutions," Mrs. Kumaratunga said in Monday's message. But she has earlier ruled out

talks with Tamil rebels until they surrendered all their weapons.

Separatist rebels suffered their worst battlefield defeat when the Sri Lankan military captured Jaffna on December 5. The rebels had broken off peace talks in April and resumed fighting in the north and the east, areas they want as an independent homeland for minority Tamils.

The rebels allege widespread discrimination by majority Sinhalese who control the government and military. More than 39,000 people have been killed in the fighting since 1983.

AFP adds: Tamil Tiger guerrillas marked the New Year by storming a police station and fired a barrage of mortar bombs at an army camp in eastern Sri Lanka, raising the overnight death toll to 17, officials said.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked the Kelaputyanakulam police post in north-western Sri Lanka today and escaped after killing four constables, a police official said.

The LTTE also kept up a prolonged mortar bomb attack against the Valachchenai army camp in the eastern coastal district of Batticaloa but there were no casualties among the troops, a military spokesman here said.

However, he said five soldiers were killed and another five wounded in the northern town of Jaffna late Sunday when their vehicle went over a land mine planted by LTTE guerrillas.

## Afghan factions clash with jets around Kabul

ISLAMABAD, Jan 1: Rival Afghan forces fought around Kabul with warplanes and artillery on Sunday, dimming prospects for government-ordered peace talks, reports Reuters.

Afghan sources in Pakistan, citing reports they had received from the Afghan capital, said at least two people were killed and 18 wounded when government jets bombed Maidan Shahr town held by the Taliban Islamic militia, south of Kabul.

The Taliban retaliated by firing five rockets at Kabul and wounding at least five people, the sources added.

Forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani also fired artillery at Taliban positions south of Kabul from the capital's Tapa Maranjani hills. No details of casualties were available.

## Off the Record



Bono Vox, frontman of the Irish rock-band U2, walks over debris in Sarajevo's burnt out National Library on Sunday. Bono was invited by his friend, Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey. Bono arrived on a private visit to the Bosnian capital on Sunday. —AFP/UNB photo

## Nigerian junta frees Abiola's another aide

LAGOS, Jan 1: Nigeria's military authorities have freed another senior aide of detained presidential claimant Moshood Abiola, newspapers reported today, says Reuters.

They said Ademola Adeniji-Adele, who had been held without trial for 17 months in the northern city of Kanduna, was freed on Saturday and was expected to return to his home in Lagos on Wednesday.

He is the third aide of Abiola, the undeclared winner of the annulled 1993 presidential election, to be freed since pressure on the government to release political detainees was stepped up last November after nine minority rights activists were hanged.

Adeniji-Adele, an associate of Abiola in the days leading to the millionaire's proclamation of himself as president in June 1994, told reporters in Kanduna he had no regrets for his role, the Independent Punch newspaper reported.

## Ending '95 with a very chilly plunge

MONTPELLIER, France: Happy N-n-n-new Year! Eighty nudists celebrated the last day of 1995 on Sunday with a traditional plunge into the chilly waters of the Mediterranean, reports AP.

The sun was shining in this French Riviera town, but the sea was a frigid 9 degrees C (48 degrees F) when the bathers, including Swiss and German vacationers, took their annual plunge.

Most of the nude swimmers braved the icy waters for a full 10 minutes as some 1,000 onlookers gathered on the beach. Among the bathers was a politician, keeping a teeth-chattering promise.

Regis Passerieux, mayor of nearby Cap d'Agde, had campaigned to re-election earlier in the year by pledging: "If I'm re-elected, I'll swim."

This time last year, only 56 swimmers mustered the courage to take the plunge in slightly warmer waters.

## Dec 31, 1999 will be the biggest blast of 20th century

NEW YORK: Still wondering where to go for the year's New Year's Eve party? Relax, you can squeeze in somewhere. Starting to make plans for December 31, 1999? Forget it — you're probably already too late, reports AP.

Even Mickey Mouse has run out of rooms.

Although it's still four years off, the changing of the annual odometer to 2000 has already shaped up as the biggest blast of the 20th century.

Guest lists are filled in at some of the world's party hot spots.

The Rainbow Room in Manhattan: there are 470 people ahead of you on the waiting list. The Savoy Hotel in London: the fortunate can enter a lottery for seats or rooms. Don't even try the Space Needle in Seattle: it's booked for a private party.

Reservations are piling up for the annual Kaiser Ball in Vienna... at the posh La Tour d'Argent restaurant in Paris... at the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan.

Looking for something a little more traditional? Colonial Williamsburg is full and there's 107 names on the waiting list.

Good luck visiting Mickey or Minnie, Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, reports all 17 company-owned inns are taken that night.

"People look at New Year's as a time for a new beginning," said Rainbow Room publicist Andrew Freedman. "And a turn of the century is really monumental in terms of new beginnings."

## Whales dying of measles

PARIS: Blue whales in the Mediterranean are dying of a mysterious disease that some researchers suspect may actually be a strain of the measles, reports AP.

Scientists at a laboratory at the University of Corsica said at least four whales that succumbed to the illness had symptoms of the measles, including spots on parts of their flesh.

The French medical journal "Research" said the whales were discovered between September 29 and November 27. Their skin was mottled "like the effect of paint thinner on paint", the journal said.

Microscopic analysis showed that one whale, found near Ajaccio in the south of the French Mediterranean island, had an abnormally large number of red blood cells and had suffered from a high fever, both classic symptoms of the measles.

Researchers have sent samples to a laboratory in Ireland to determine whether the disease that killed the whale was the same one that killed more than 5,000 dolphins in the Mediterranean in 1991, the report said.

It said the dead whales all had high levels of lead, mercury and cadmium in their systems, and the effects of the pollution would have lowered their immune systems and possibly made them susceptible to the disease.

There are only about 3,000 blue whales in the western Mediterranean, the researcher said.

## BRIEFLY

**King Hussein to visit Israel soon:** Jordan's King Hussein will travel to Israel soon on a first official visit since the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1994, an Israeli official said yesterday, Reuters reports from Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres's spokeswoman told Reuters King Hussein would attend a ceremony in northern Israel honouring Israeli and Jordanian peace negotiators and visit Tel Aviv. Israeli radio said Hussein would probably make the visit to January 10.

**US extends aid to PLO:** The Senate approved a measure Sunday that extends US aid to Palestinians for three more months, allowing the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to continue operating its Washington office, AFP reports from Washington.

Senators unanimously voted to extend the Middle East peace facilitation act, set to expire Sunday, through March 31.

**Imam shot dead in Algeria:** The Imam of Sidi M'cid Mosque in Constantine City, Zidane Boumaaza, 62, was killed by gunmen Sunday after Fazr prayers, the Algerian Ministry of Religious said, AFP reports from Algiers.

The circumstances of his slaying were not reported, but imams have often been the targets of Islamic extremists in Algeria, where 52 were killed in 1994 alone, according to the security services.

**Fighting continues in Liberia:** Fighting between rival militias of the United Liberation Movement, ULIMO, was continuing around Tubmanburg 60 kilometres (35 miles) northwest of Monrovia, a relief worker from the area said Sunday, reports AFP.

Nathaniel Gbaryou, who travelled on foot from Klay to Elicit nurses and drugs for wounded civilians, told AFP the sound of gunfire was heard throughout Saturday night and early Sunday.

**1000 US citizens serving in RRF:** The US government has more than 1,000 men and women serving in a Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) to combat any potential nuclear terrorist threats, a US News magazine said Sunday, AFP reports from Washington.

The Nuclear Emergency Search Team, or nest, was set up in 1975 after a terrorist seeking a 200,000 dollar ransom threatened to blow up Boston with a nuclear device, Time magazine reported.

**Former AP senior editor dies:** James L. Watson, a senior editor at the Associated Press until his retirement in 1995, died Sunday of a heart attack. He was 65. AP reports from Sioux Falls, south Dakota.



Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui (C), joined by Premier Lien Chan (R) and presidential secretary general Wu Poh-Hsiung, raise their right hands on Monday during a national flag raising ceremony in early morning to celebrate the New Year. The ceremony, attended by more than 10,000 people, was held in front of the Presidential Office. —AFP/UNB photo

## Pakistan concerned at anti-Tehran programme Iran condemns US Congress move to approve covert action fund

NICOSIA, Jan 1: Iran said today it would protest to the United Nations and the World Court if the US Congress approved covert action fund to destabilise the Iranian government, reports Reuters.

"If Washington does not reject the congressional act against the Islamic republic, Iran will lodge a protest with the UN and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi said.

"The era of anarchy in international relations has ended and the United States is obliged to respect international laws and commitments," the Iranian news agency IRNA quoted him as saying.

Iran has condemned moves in the US Congress to allocate up to 20 million dollar to fund a covert action programme aimed at moderating policies of the Islamic republic's government, branding it "state terrorism".

Deputies in Iran's parliament on Sunday supported a move for an Iranian fund to fight American "conspiracies" against Islamic countries.

AFP adds: Pak-

istan expressed concern on Sunday over a 20-million dollar covert US programme against Iran and offered its good offices to help resolve differences between Washington and Tehran.

Foreign Minister Aseff Ahmed Ali made the statement in the Senate, after four opposition members raised the issue.

He said any covert action against Iran would be a blatant interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign country and negate the basic principles of inter-state relations.

## Arafat urges Palestinians to vote for best candidates

QALQILIYA, West Bank, Jan 1: Trying to show he is not hoarding power in self-rule areas, PLO chief Yasser Arafat urged Palestinians on Sunday to vote for the superior candidate in upcoming elections — even if it's not him, reports AP.

"I appeal to you not to vote for Yasser Arafat — vote for the best," he told a crowd of several thousand from the roof of the Qalqiliya city hall.

"We give our allegiance to you," the crowd roared back.

Speaking on the last day of candidate registration, Arafat, whose only opposition for president of the new Palestinian Council is a little-known 72-year-old social worker, also said he welcomed criticism.

"If you see any wrong in me, correct me with your sword," Arafat said, citing the words of seventh century Muslim Caliph Omar Ibn al-Khattab, known for his just rulings.

Arafat has frequently muzzled the Palestinian press since establishing his government in July 1994. Just last week, he imprisoned the editor of the Al-Quds newspaper for failing to give front-page coverage to a story comparing Arafat to al-Khattab. Maher Alami was released on Saturday.

"Precisely on the eve of the elections, when we are saying we are moving towards democracy, this gives a horrible image of Palestinian society," Alami said. "We are not yet a democratic society."

In the January 20 election, voters will fill 88 council seats and pick a council president.



An elderly Palestinian gets very excited and tries to catch the attention of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat who speaks to tens of thousands of Palestinians during his first visit to the West Bank town of Tulikarem on Sunday. In his speech he calls for the people to participate in the January '96 elections and to work for good relations with their Israeli neighbours. The old man who put up a good show that included fainting, was invited up to the roof of the old Israeli military headquarters building to meet Arafat. —AFP/UNB photo

## Calcutta Zoo tiger kills youth

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: A tiger in the Calcutta Zoo killed a drunken youth who tried to place a garland on it today, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, reports Reuters.

The news agency said the unidentified youth and companion used a ladder to enter a cage holding the Royal Bengal Tiger. The tiger also mauled the victim's companion but not fatally, PTI added.

A crowd of people who witnessed the incident ran in panic for the exit of the zoo, PTI said, without giving details.

Calcutta is close to the Sunderbans delta, the natural habitat of the endangered Royal Bengal Tiger.

## Glow of Palestinian autonomy fades as new reality sets in

JENIN, West Bank, Jan 1: The middle-aged merchant, watched a group of Palestinian policemen dressed in navy blue uniforms strut past his dusty paint shop and sighed, reports AP.

"Wherever you go in Jenin these days you see policemen. Why?" said Saadeddine Khalaf. "They say they were bringing us democracy and freedom. The only freedom we are allowed is the freedom to cheer for the Palestinian Authority."

As Israel cedes more areas to the Palestinians, many are glumly realising that, for now, self-rule means mainly freedom of movement within their towns — far less than the national independence they crave.

Disturbing questions are also emerging about Yasser Arafat's notion of democracy. An editor was detained for refusing to put a flattering story on Arafat on the front page, preachers have been told not to criticise Arafat's government and opposition activists have been jailed for leafletting.

Over the past two months, Israel handed the Palestinians control of six West Bank towns and over 400 villages, where almost all the West Bank's 1.2 million Arab residents live. Palestinian elections are slated for January 20 and by March, Israeli troops are to withdraw from most of the last town, Hebron.

But the new West Bank map is a bewildering patchwork.

While Palestinians are in full control of the cities — about 7 per cent of the West Bank's territory they share control of several unconnected rural areas with Israel.

Israel retains full control over almost two-thirds of the area pending further withdrawals and a final settlement, to be negotiated in talks that are to begin in May.

The result is that most Palestinians still need Israeli permission to leave their towns, and Israeli troops still can stop their cars on roads between towns and frisk passengers.

"We don't feel independent. The soldier who was inside the town is now on its periphery... He's ruling us from outside," said Suleiman Yousef, owner of a parking lot in Jenin.

An activist of the militant Islamic movement Hamas in Nablus said he hasn't been able to visit in-laws who live on the edge of the city two kilometers (a mile) away for fear Israeli troops who still control that area would arrest him.

Palestinians officials dismiss such complaints, stressing this is only an interim period.

People should not be worried. We're here to protect them and to make sure their lives get better," said Kadour Mousa, head of Arafat's office in Jenin.

Some, like Jenin gas station owner Mohammed Hafif, agree.

"I don't care about the shortcomings of the (Palestinian) Authority. It brought us peace and security and that's the most important thing," he said.

The deployment of Palestinian policemen, numbering about 6,000, has been relatively smooth, with a little of the violence that marked the early weeks of self-rule in the Gaza Strip last year.

The economy has not changed much. Arab Israelis still cross into Jenin to shop for food, electrical appliances and furniture, and the number of Palestinians with jobs in Israel — officially about 50,000 is the same.

Arafat has also tried to assure voters he is democratic, urging crowds who greeted him Sunday in newly autonomous Qalqiliya "not to vote for Yasser Arafat, vote for the best."

But concerns about autocratic rule have been reinforced by acts like the December 26 arrest of Maher al Alami, an editor and columnist of Al-Quds daily. Al Alami, who was freed Saturday, said he was detained after a laudatory story that Arafat wanted on the front page appeared inside.

A member of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement said the Ministry of Religious Affairs has ordered preachers to refrain from attacking the Palestinians Authority and the Israel-PLO peace agreement in their Friday sermons and to talk positively about the elections.

Some Palestinians are also appalled at the sums that have been spent on preparations for Arafat's visits to newly autonomous areas.

## Yeltsin's '96 resolution is to fight poverty

MOSCOW, Jan 1: President Boris Yeltsin's New Year's resolution is to fight poverty, reports AP.

In a mostly upbeat New Year's Eve address, Yeltsin said he believed Russia was on its way to economic recovery. But he promised relief for pensioners and a crackdown on those who steal money earmarked for the poor.

The 64-year-old president, who returned to the Kremlin on Friday for the first time in two months after serious heart trouble, probably will sound the same theme of economic recovery if he runs for re-election in June.