

BRIEFLY



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein delivers on Saturday a nationwide address on the Army Day, asserting that Iraq will continue to cooperate with the United Nations. The UN Security Council has decided Friday to maintain international sanctions against Iraq for failing to comply with UN resolutions in place for more than five years, following the Gulf War.

— AFP/UNB Photo

Perry in Riyadh: US Secretary of Defence William Perry arrived late Saturday in Riyadh from Muscat on a 24 hour visit due to be dominated by questions of security in the Gulf. AFP reports from Riyadh.

Perry was due to meet Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdel Aziz for the first time since King Fahd handed over power to him on January 1.

5 Iranians to die for spying: Five Iranians were sentenced to death in Iran after being found guilty of spying for the United States and Iraq. Iranian radio reported Saturday. Reuter reports from Nicosia.

"Five Iranians, convicted of spying for the US government and the Iraqi Baathist regime, were sentenced to death Saturday the Islamic revolutionary court," said the radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

31 drown as ship sinks in Vietnam: Thirty-one people drowned when a ship carrying woodcutters to a forest sank in the Rac river in central Vietnam, a hospital source said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

The ship, which was carrying 100 people, went down Thursday in Hatinh province near a dam, the hospital source in Ky Anh district said by telephone. The cause of the accident was not known.

Guatemalans go to polls: Guatemalans went to the polls yesterday to pick one of two right leaning candidates for president, but worries of possible fraud prompted calls from US lawmakers to send an international observer team. AFP reports from Guatemala City.

Some 3.7 million residents were eligible to vote, Sunday, but high absenteeism was predicted in the runoff election between Alfonso Portillo of the rightist Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) and fellow rightist and front runner Alvaro Arzu of the National Vanguard Party (PAN).

10 poisoned to death in Sindh: At least 10 people died and another 110 fainted after taking food served at a funeral held in a village in the southern Sindh province of Pakistan. Xinhua reports from Islamabad.

The Associated Press of Pakistan reported Friday soon after taking some rice and curry served at the funeral on Thursday night, people began vomiting and some fell unconscious.

2 Americans die in Plane crash: At least two Americans died in the crash of a small plane near Puerto Trujillo on the Atlantic coast of Honduras, the Honduran air force said Saturday. AFP reports from Tegucigalpa.

The fate of a third American on board the Ceasna was unknown. The plane disappeared on Wednesday and was located Friday in dense forest 24 kilometers (15 miles) south of Puerto Trujillo, according to Honduran air force General Oscar Servellon.

US, DPRK teams to meet in Hawaii: A US delegation led by the chief of the Pentagon's office for missing servicemen will meet with North Korean officials next week to discuss repatriation of remains of US servicemen missing from the Korean war, the Pentagon said Friday. AP reports from Washington.

The meetings in Honolulu on January 10-12 are part of the US government's attempts to get North Korean approval for joint search teams to find and return US servicemen's remains. Talks in recent years have been snagged on North Korea's demands for financial compensation and its refusal to permit US experts to participate in the excavation and transport of remains from the 1950-53 war.

Arafat marks Greek Orthodox Christmas

BETHLEHEM, West Bank, Jan 7: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat marked the Greek Orthodox Christmas on Saturday by going to midnight mass in the Church of the Nativity here where just two weeks ago he attended a Christmas Eve Catholic religious service, reports AFP.

Arafat who is president of the autonomous Palestinian authority was among the congregation of around 500 Christians and Muslims who follow the religious service celebrated by the Greek Patriarch Diodoros 1.

TOKYO, Jan 7: Resigning Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama leaves Japan in much the same shape as when he took office — hungry for strong leadership, reports AP. Murayama led Japan through its most tumultuous year in decades — the year of the Kobe earthquake, the doomsday cult gas attack on the Tokyo subway and the painful 50th anniversary World War II's end. Yet during his 18 months as Japan's premier, the mild-mannered Murayama was often criticised as weak and vacillating. So when he declared Friday that he had enough, there was hope among Japanese for a more dynamic government. A nationwide poll by TV Asahi showed relatively strong support for Murayama's

Strike protesting massacre of 15 Hindus cripples Kashmir

JAMMU, India, Jan 7: A spontaneous protest strike today shut down parts of the Indian state of Kashmir to denounce the massacre of 15 Hindus by suspected Muslim separatists two days ago, police said, reports AFP.

All shops were closed and vehicles stayed off the roads in the mountainous district of Doda, where gunmen killed the 15 men at the tiny village of Barsala after dragging them from their homes late Friday.

The protest brought life to a halt in the region of some 50,000 people, police sources said in Jammu, the winter capital of Kashmir, the country's only Muslim-majority state.

The killers, who were armed with AK-47 assault rifles and grenades, entered the sleepy village, rounded up the victims, took them to an open field and sprayed them with bullets, police and witnesses said.

The attackers stole cash and jewellery from several homes and set ablaze two government schools in the village before fleeing.

No one claimed responsibility for the massacre, but police sources said they suspected the Laskar-i-Toiba group, which Indian officials say consists mostly of Afghan mercenaries.

Hundreds of Islamic mercenaries, mainly Afghans, are fighting Indian troops in Kashmir on the side of the local Muslim militants. Many foreigner mercenaries are known to be active in the mountains of Doda, north of here.

News of the mass killings reached the authorities only Saturday, triggering widespread criticism of the police. The victims were buried on Saturday, and the adminis-

tration said on Sunday it had launched a massive manhunt for the killers.

Police said paramilitary forces were combing the hilly area.

It was the deadliest attack against Hindus, India's majority community, in Kashmir since 14 of them were dragged from a bus in Doda district and shot dead by unidentified gunmen on August 14, 1993.

A Muslim separatist campaign in Kashmir has claimed more than 12,000 lives by official count since 1989. India accuses Pakistan of arming and training the militants. Islamabad denies the charge.

Earlier report says, Muslim separatist militants killed 15 Hindu men after dragging them out of their homes in a

village in southern Kashmir overnight, police said on Saturday.

The 15 men aged between 16 and 65 were killed late Friday in the village of Barsala in Doda district, 190 kilometres (118 miles) south of Srinagar, a police spokesman said.

AP adds: Suspected Kashmiri separatist rebels raided a village in northern Jammu-Kashmir state, woke up people and shot and killed 15 Hindu men after separating them from Muslim villagers, police said on Saturday.

About 20 armed men stormed Barsala, a hillside village of few hundred people 176 kilometres (110 miles) from Jammu on Friday night and shook awake the sleep-

ing residents, a police official said.

The assailants then ordered Muslims to step aside, marched 15 Hindus, including a 16-year-old boy, to a nearby forest and shot them from close range, killing them instantaneously, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The attackers fled on foot to the surrounding forests after looting cash and jewelry from the villagers and setting fire to two school buildings, he said.

No rebel group has claimed responsibility for the killing. Police said the attackers were Muslim rebels but did not immediately disclose which of the half a dozen armed bands they suspected.



Kashmiris mourn on Saturday, the death of six foreign mercenaries belonging to the Pan-Islamic group, Harkat-ul-Ansar. The six were killed in a fierce 12-hours long encounter in Zainakote Friday.

— AFP/UNB photo

LTTE blames air force for bombing 2 forest reserves

COLOMBO, Jan 7: The Sri Lankan Air Force bombed two forest reserves in the north of the country causing "ecological damage," Tamil Tiger guerrillas said in a statement today, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said a Puccara ground attack aircraft and two Chinese-built Supersonic planes repeatedly bombed Chundikulam and Piramantharu areas on Friday.

"Exact details of the damage have not been assessed yet," the LTTE said in the statement sent here from its London office.

A military spokesman here was unaware of the air raids but said security forces bombed only targets identified as LTTE facilities.

"The terrorists have cut down a lot of trees in the jungles to build bunkers and have so far killed more than two dozen elephants who used to stray into Tiger jungle bases, particularly in the east," the spokesman said.

The LTTE said the air force was also dropping "barrel bombs," a locally made incendiary device,

Int'l confce calls for sanctions against Myanmar junta

NEW DELHI, Jan 7: An international conference on Myanmar concluded here Saturday with a call for worldwide sanctions against the ruling military junta to restore democracy and human rights in the country, reports AFP.

The three-day international convention for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar also demanded the "flow of free information both from and into Myanmar," slamming the "draconian censorship" imposed by the government.

"We condemn the continuing human rights violations in Myanmar and the total denial of democracy and fundamental rights which are a threat to regional and international security," a statement said.

"All governments and freedom-loving people should find practical way to help restore democracy and free political prisoners, it said, appealing to international financial institutions to "resist

aiding the present regime."

The conventions also called for the boycott of goods made by multinationals such as the US firm PepsiCo which has set up shop in Myanmar and the end to any "constructive engagement" with the government.

Russia, China to sign N-cooperation accord

MOSCOW, Jan 7: Russia and China are to sign a major civilian nuclear cooperation accord including guidelines for converting military nuclear industries, Russian Atomic Energy Minister Viktor Mikhailov said on Saturday, reports AFP.

Mikhailov told Interfax news agency the accord would provide for closer cooperation in thermonuclear fusion projects, uranium mining and processing and nuclear waste recycling.

Indian politician George Fernandes, a leader of the Samta (equality) Party and chief organiser of the event, moved a resolution condemning the so-called national convention set up by the military junta.

The national constitution approved by the national convention was used by the Myanmar military's State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to legitimise its rule. So the constitution is illegal, he said.

The meeting appealed to international bodies, particularly the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, to intervene for the uplift of refugees living in unsegregated camps in foreign countries.

It also demanded an "immediate end to forced slave labour involving women and children" and the total denial or rights to ethnic minorities such as the Karens and Arakanese.

27 more Chechens killed in 24 hrs Russians fear fresh Chechen offensive

MOSCOW, Jan 7: Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev said on Saturday that Ozhokhar Dudaev's Chechen rebel fighters might be preparing an offensive against Russian troops in the breakaway region, Interfax news agency reported, says Reuter.

Defence Ministry troops said they mounted a "clean up operation near the town of Shatoi on Friday and killed up to 30 separatists a sing the army might be getting tougher with the rebels who still control southern mountain area.

President Boris Yeltsin national security adviser told Interfax military stores also on Russia's borders would be

checked after four soldiers including an officer were caught trying to leave Makhachkala near Chechnya with a car-load of weapons.

Meanwhile, the Russian military in breakaway Chechnya said today it had killed 27 separatist fighters in the last 24 hours as clashes continued in the southern region, news agencies reported.

ITAR-Tass quoted the federal forces press centre as saying troops had captured a grenade launcher operator and ammunition and two Russian servicemen had been slightly wounded in the mostly Muslim region.

Off the Record

Bid to perform smallest show on earth

SAN FRANCISCO: Maybe it's because Maria Fernanda Cardoso wears a silver cape and wields a tiny whip, reports AP.

Or maybe it's because she harnesses fleas with tiny wires, gives them names like Tenny and Tiny and then blows on them to coax them to walk across a minitightrope or jump from a high dive.

Whatever it is, audiences at the Cardoso Flea Circus often leave her weekend shows at the Exploratorium science centre with bemused looks on their faces.

"People don't think it's real," Cardoso says. But close examination reveals that there are, indeed, fleas attached to wire harnesses or dressed in costumes — live fleas that dance (sort of), juggle and lift weights.

One of them, a mighty mite named Tarzan, pulls a toy big rig.

"He's the strongest, but not the smartest. Otherwise he wouldn't do this," Cardoso says with a coy grin as her mostly adult audience squints to get a look.

Then there's Harry Flea-dini, the world's smallest escape artist.

"Oh," she says, feigning a look of surprise as she opens his box. "He's gone already."

Some think Cardoso's show is strange. Many think it's funny. And at least one person in the audience always asks if the fleas are alive.

"They're very skeptical," Cardoso's assistant, Heidi Zednik, says.

Yr end drinking ends with sewage water

SEOUL: A man who fell into a manhole after a year-end drinking binge was rescued Saturday after eight days of drinking sewage water and wrapping himself in plastic bags to keep warm, police said, reports AP.

"It was pitch-dark down there. I scrambled for the way out and yelled repeatedly for help, but nobody came," Cho Sung-chul, a 51-year-old company worker in Seoul, was quoted as saying in a police report.

Police believe Cho, 51, heavily drunk, lost consciousness after he fell into a manhole on the night of December 28 in southern Seoul. When he woke up, he lost his way in the dark labyrinth of the sewage system, police said.

He was rescued by police early Saturday after Kim Choong-bae, 42, a Seoul company worker, heard a feeble cry for help from below near his home.

Cho was listed in a stable condition in hospital. He told police that he drank sewage water and wrapped his body with plastic bags to fend off winter chill.

Premadasa's bed fetches Rs 25000

COLOMBO: A bed used by Sri Lanka's assassinated President Ranasinghe Premadasa sold for a disappointing 25,000 rupees (just under 500 dollars) Sunday at the first ever auction at the presidential household, reports AP.

The floor price for the wooden double bed with a twin mattress was set at 20,000 rupees but the government expected much more at the auction, officials said.

About 50 items used by Premadasa and his predecessor Junius Jayewardene went under the hammer following a directive by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to get rid of excess furniture, officials said.

Big UN food convoy drives into besieged Kabul

KABUL, Jan 7: A big UN food convoy drove into the besieged Afghan capital, Kabul, on Saturday after a four-day journey from Pakistan. UN officials said, reports Reuter.

Workers unloaded more than 2,600 tonnes of wheat flour and wheat from 93 trucks, hired from an Afghan haulage firm by the World Food Programme (WFP), destined for hungry residents. "This is the largest convoy that the United Nations has been able to get into Kabul," said a WFP official. "There's not even been this many trucks for Sarajevo."

The convoy had to negotiate a pot holed road from Peshawar in Pakistan to reach Kabul via the eastern city of Jalalabad, the only supply route still open to the capital.

Four other routes are controlled by factions opposed to the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

The WFP official said the food, now stored in ware houses around the city, would be distributed to 166,250 needy people next month. The consignment is expected to last two weeks and should reduce the market price of wheat flour.

Prices have soared since the Islamic Taliban Militia began blockading Kabul three months ago. Last month UN officials warned that as many as 60 per cent of the city's population could not afford to feed themselves during the winter.

The WFP supplies up to 20 per cent of Kabul's food needs and hopes to bring in up to 1,000 tonnes of food each month.

UN officials said another convoy of nine vehicles carrying urgently needed medical supplies was on its way to Kabul after being held up en route for several days.

TV documentary may 'poison' Sino-UK ties

LONDON, Jan 7: China has warned that a British television documentary alleging that thousands of children have died in state orphanages will "poison" bilateral relations, the Observer newspaper reported today, says AFP.

It cited Liu Jianchao, first secretary at the Chinese Embassy in London, as saying "it will poison the atmosphere between China and Britain. It is a very bad move, very detrimental."

rayama," Iizuka said. "But I don't think Hashimoto will be like that in the longer term." Hashimoto, 58, is the son of a Cabinet minister and a legislator himself since 1964. He earned a reputation as a tough opponent of U.S. trade policies last summer when he successfully faced down American demands that Japan guarantee U.S. makers of autos and auto parts a share of the Japanese market.

Recently he has tried to project a more pro-U.S. image.

Murayama's resignation is effective Monday, along with those of his Cabinet. Parliament is to convene Thursday to elect a new prime minister, and because the coalition holds a majority, Hashimoto's selection is assured.

Japanese hope for more dynamic govt

likely successor, Ryutaro Hashimoto, the combative trade minister sometimes depicted in cartoons as a Samurai warrior.

Hashimoto's selection would bring the conservative Liberal Democratic Party back to power 2 and a half years after a historic election defeat.

Japan remains much as the Liberal Democrats left it: mired in recession and generally disillusioned with government.

The Liberal Democrats lost elections in July 1993 in large part because of outrage about incessant corruption. The party handed over power that August to the first non-

LDP government in 38 years. But the LDP regained a foothold in government in June 1994 by aligning with Murayama's left leaning Socialists and the small Harbinger Party. The deal put Murayama in office but also made him a prisoner of an alliance custom made for gridlock.

Murayama had never held a Cabinet-level position, and he seemed untainted by the money scandals that had plagued the government. His benevolent image won him some popularity at first.

But his ability to lead had already been questioned by the time of the Kobe earthquake on January 17,

1995, which killed more than 6,000 people. Murayama was bitterly attacked by opposition politicians and victims for waiting hours to order emergency measures.

The 50th anniversary of the Japanese surrender in World War II also called on Murayama to confront the mounting calls that Japan make a full apology for wartime atrocities.

While Murayama made the most complete acknowledgement of the country's war role, he was forced by conservative opposition to do it in a separate news conference — seeming more a contrite private citizen rather than a head of government.

Still, it is uncertain if a more forceful personality would have been more successful in organising government support or pushing through new policies.

"It was a case of sacrificing leadership in the usual sense of the term to exercise leadership in keeping the coalition together," said Shigetaro Iizuka, professor at Nihon University and a former political reporter.

And Hashimoto, despite the bravado he has displayed in tough trade talks with the United States, could be trapped by the same forces.

If he tries to keep the current three-party coalition, it'll be the same as Mu-



Palestinian women holding Korans march on Saturday with some 20,000 demonstrators through the streets of Ramallah protesting against Friday's killing by suspected Israeli agents of Yehiya Ayash. In the meantime more than 100,000 Palestinians calling for revenge turned out for the funeral of Ayash, the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas master bomb-maker behind a wave of suicide attacks against Israel. — AFP/UNB Photo