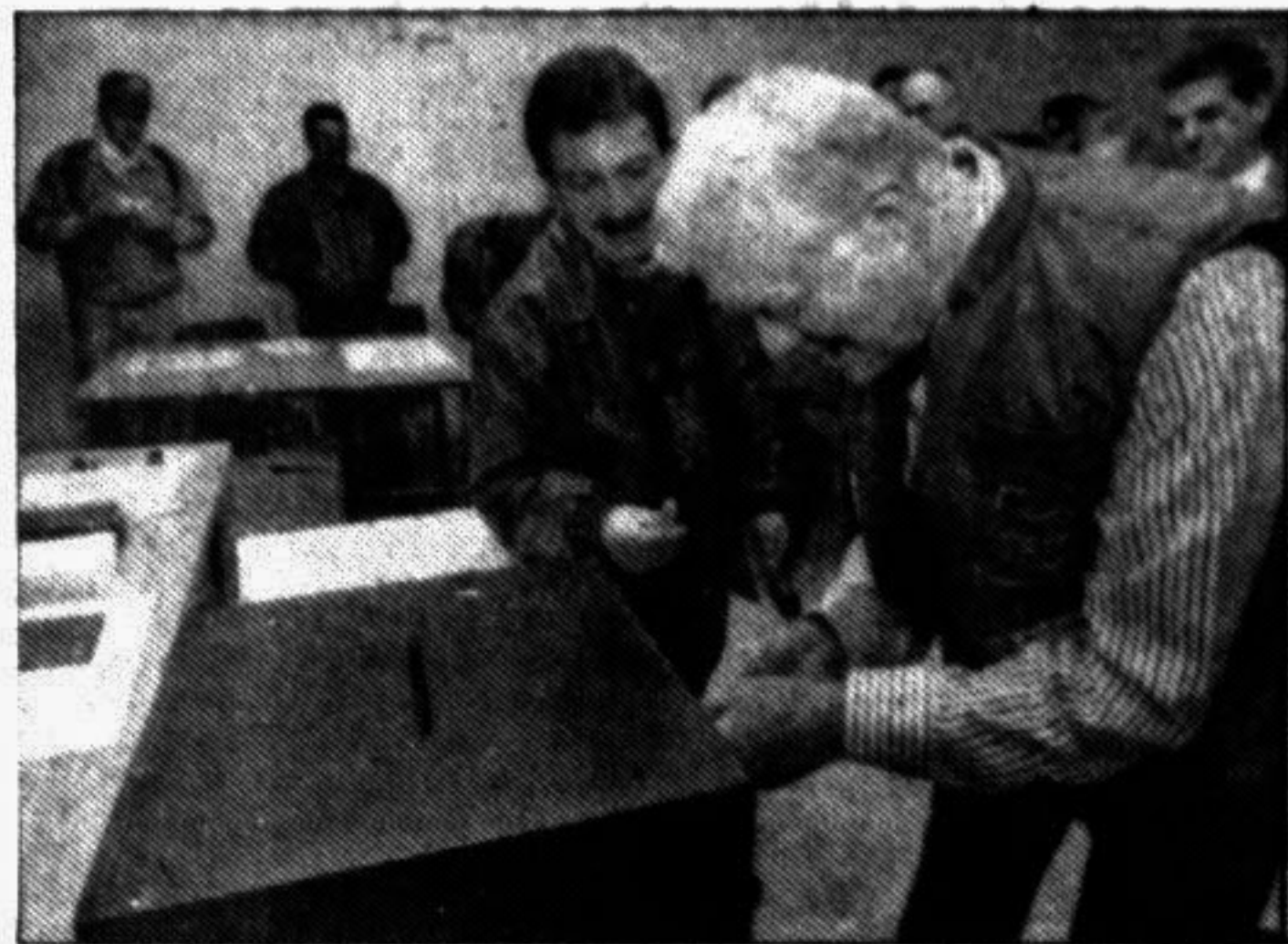


International

BRIEFLY



Former US President Jimmy Carter checks a ballot box in the Dahisha refugee camp in the West Bank on Saturday. Carter is heading a international delegation to observe the Palestinian elections. One million Palestinian in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem were invited to go to the polls for the first time in their history to elect a president and an 88-member Palestinian Self-rule Council.

— AFP/UNB photo

Poland reports 79 Indians: Poland has deported 79 Indians back to their country after they entered the country overland, hoping to make their way illegally into Germany. Polish border police said on Saturday, AFP reports from Warsaw.

They were sent back to India on Friday on a Polish airlines charter flight. Some of the Indians had entered Poland legally, but were later convicted of various offences, the police said.

19 Muslim rebels killed in Algeria: Algerian security forces have killed 19 Muslim guerrillas in three Algerian areas, including 12 in a mountain hideout, official and newspaper reports said on Saturday. Reuters reports from Paris.

The forces shot dead 12 rebels on Wednesday on Boussifia Mountain, 330 km (206 miles) east of Algiers, in a huge operation, an official security statement, carried by the official news agency APS said.

Madonna arrives in Argentina: Despite stinging criticism from the president, Madonna arrived Saturday to begin filming the screen version of the controversial musical "Evita," AP reports from Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Chirac leaves Rome for Paris: French President Jacques Chirac left Rome for Paris at the end of a ceremonial state visit to the Vatican on Saturday, Reuters reports from Vatican City.

NATO to guard suspected mass graves in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Jan 21: NATO troops will guard suspected mass graves where Bosnian Serbs are accused of burying the bodies of thousands of victims, NATO sources said, as its peace mission moved towards a more assertive role on war crimes, reports Reuters.

US human rights envoy John Shattuck was to make an unprecedented visit today to a village in eastern Bosnia near where reporters have described an alleged mass grave where bones protrude from earth smelling of rotting flesh.

NATO's commander in Bosnia praised the formerly warring parties for cooperating with the Dayton peace timetable in the first 30 days of peace, but said their failure to release all prisoners of war as planned marred the record.

Admiral Leighton Smith warned the three ethnic factions they could face "enormous pressure," including the loss of financial aid, if they did not release all prisoners soon.

"This is a good day," Smith told journalists, after reviewing compliance with a crucial January 19 deadline for the withdrawal of warring forces from Bosnia's long ceasefire line, other military conditions and the prisoner release.

It's obviously a milestone day... we have observed substantial compliance on the military issues of this peace agreement by all parties."

But he said none of the three factions — Muslims, Croat and Serb — had carried out the agreed unconditional release of all registered prisoners.

US issues stern warning to Burundian leaders

BUJUMBURA, Burundi, Jan 21: US Ambassador Madeleine Albright sternly warned political and military leaders on Saturday that Burundi risks tumbling into a whirlwind of violence, reports AP.

On a fact-finding mission for President Clinton and the UN Security Council, the US ambassador to the United Nations said the international community was concerned about the possibility of a military coup.

"The political situation in Burundi has been tenuous for some time and we want to make it clear that Burundi will be isolated if any group tries to take power by force," Albright told a news conference before her departure.

Burundi, which is 85 per cent Hutu and 15 per cent Tutsi, is locked in a simmering ethnic civil war that many

believe could soon boil over. The UN special rapporteur for Human Rights in Burundi, Paulo Pinheiro, warned on Thursday that genocide is already gripping Burundi.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has repeatedly called for a UN military intervention force for Burundi in the event it explodes in ethnic slaughter like Rwanda in spring 1994.

Albright said that all options, including an intervention force or UN security guards for humanitarian operations, remained open.

"The international community wants to see a democratic Burundi survive," said Albright.

During her 9-hour visit, the ambassador visited an orphanage in the capital and joined a women's meeting organised to promote reconciliation.

Aznar leading in opinion polls

MADRID, Jan 21: In a convention replete with videos and upbeat music, the head of the party favoured to win upcoming elections vowed to reenergise Spain's democratic spirit after years of scandal-ridden Socialist rule, reports AP.

Jose Maria Aznar, whose Popular Party is ahead by as many as nine points in opinion polls, acted all but assured Saturday of becoming the first candidate to end Socialist Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez's 14-year grip on power.

Even union members, holding their own meeting across town, felt Aznar will win the March 3 vote. They warned that the conservative leader, who has promised to cut Spain's deficit, would face strikes if he cuts deeply into social spending.

MOSCOW, Jan 21: Every time Boris Yeltsin cracks down, a legion of critics are ready to write him off. But the Russian president is gambling that being tough and crushing Chechen rebels could boost his political fortunes, reports AP.

His public appearances throughout the nine-day standoff were vintage Yeltsin: menacing grimaces, slandering of lists, tongue-lashing of ministers.

The no-nonsense performance was designed to show that Yeltsin, who is expected to run for second term this year, is fully in charge after a two-month absence from the Kremlin to recuperate from a heart attack.

Top opposition politicians, including Communist Party chief Gennady Zyuganov and reformer Grigory Yavlinsky,

Strike grips Karachi

KARACHI, Jan 21: Police and paramilitary troops guarded key points in Karachi today as a general strike gripped the city after a day of political violence that left 12 dead, reports AFP.

Large areas of Pakistan's commercial capital were paralysed by the strike called by the main opposition Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), accusing the police of deliberately killing its activists. Five MQM members and another seven people were killed on Saturday.

The volatile central district, where the MQM activists were killed, was completely deserted. Security forces took up positions at key points to prevent violence. The industrial western district was also paralysed.

At least four vehicles were burned in the run-up to the strike, but there were no reports of violence yesterday morning, officials said.

All major markets, commercial centres, schools and colleges were closed. The Karachi stock exchange, Pakistan's main bourse, was also expected to stay closed.

Top Chinese dissident released

HONG KONG, Jan 21: A leading Chinese dissident has been released after eight months in detention and ordered not to return to Beijing, a Hong Kong television network reported Saturday, reports AP.

Television Broadcasts Ltd (TVB) said Liu Xiaobo, an activist during the 1989 pro-democracy movement, was sent to his parent's home in Dalian in Liaoning Province in northern China after his release on Friday.

It quoted Lium however, as saying in an interview from Dalian that he plans to return to Beijing to continue his political activity.

Liu was quoted as saying that his release was an attempt by China to quell international criticism of its crackdown on political dissent.

Mashoor may take Brotherhood leadership

CAIRO, Jan 21: Mustafa Mashoor, the 74-year-old Islamic activist, expected to take over the Muslim Brotherhood, inherits and influential movement battered by a year long government crackdown, reports AP.

Mashoor has effectively headed the group for months after illness and age incapacitated Mohammed Hamed Abul Nasr, the 83-year-old leader who died Saturday. As a result, Mashoor is almost sure to be appointed supreme guide in coming days by the Brotherhood's small and secretive Guidance Council.

His policies are not expected to differ much from those of Abul Nasr, who espoused non-violence and called for the gradual implementation of Islamic law, or Sharia. Like Abul Nasr, Mashoor is reluctant to seek a confrontation with the government.

Clinton greets astronauts

HOUSTON, Texas, Jan 21: US President Bill Clinton on Saturday personally greeted the astronauts who returned from a nine-day mission in space, telling them their endeavors were crucial to US relations with Japan and Russia, report AP.

"Our space programme is an important part of our partnership for world peace," Clinton told the astronauts at Ellington field in Houston, before the crew — including a Japanese astronaut — went to the Johnson space center for a debriefing.

It is an important part of how we relate to and work with the Japanese, the Russians and others in building a more cooperative, safer world for the 21st century," said Clinton, in Houston to attend the funeral of a former US legislator.

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Crackdown on Kashmir militants begins

SRINAGAR, India, Jan 21: Indian troops have launched a sweeping crackdown on Muslim separatists in Kashmir ahead of the country's Republic Day celebrations this week which the militants have vowed to disrupt, reports AFP.

An unspecified number of suspects have been arrested in house-to-house sweeps in this city of 800,000 to prevent possible militant attacks during Friday's national celebrations, police sources said.

"We have made many arrests to foil violence during Republic Day," a police spokesman said in Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir and a long-time hub of Muslim separatists seeking to end Indian rule over the province.

Kashmiri Muslim militant groups have threatened to intensify attacks on Indian troops on and before the January 26 Republic Day and asked the people to observe

it as a "black day". "It may be a Republic Day for Indians, but not for us as we have never considered ourselves as part of India," said Shabir Shah, a prominent leader of Kashmir's separatist drive which has left more than 12,000 people dead.

"How can India claim to be a democratic country when it is suppressing the rights of Kashmiris?" he asked.

Added Umar Farooq, chairman of Kashmir's Freedom Conference: "It is a black day for us. Any day that is celebrated by Indians is a day of mourning for us."

On Republic Day last year, eight people were killed when a string of bomb blasts rocked a large stadium in Kashmir's winter capital Jammu while Governor K V Krishna Rao was taking the salute at a military parade.

Muslim militants claimed responsibility for the audacious attack which also in-

jured more than 100 others. This year, the stadium was sealed off three months ago to prevent militants from planting explosives. "It has been thoroughly checked for explosives," said a police officer.

Army soldiers, backed by paramilitary troops, have fanned out across Srinagar and other parts of Kashmir conducting house-to-house searches for arms and militants.

Since 1990, the guerrillas have staged Sneak rocket attacks at a sports stadium in Srinagar where military parades are held on Republic Day, a national holiday in India.

Security forces are reportedly moving around with surrendered militants known as "informers," police and Muslim sources said. At least 30 suspects were arrested from three residential districts here on January 19.



Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, poses with children at charity dinner to benefit "Chances for Children" in Greenwich, Connecticut, on Saturday. The Duchess is Founder and Chairman of the charity group which helps needy children. The British press recently reported that the Duchess is mired in debt and was cut off from royal financial support.

—AFP/UNB photo

Fired minister Jakhar says Anti-corruption policy won't help Rao in upcoming polls

NEW DELHI, Jan 21: A former minister who resigned with two colleagues after being named in India's biggest corruption scandal slammed Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao for letting him down, adding that the policy would not help Rao in upcoming polls, reports AP.

Former agriculture minister Balram Jakhar was quoted as saying in remarks published today that he had accepted bribes from a businessman.

"Neither Prime Minister Rao nor the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the federal investigating agency) showed me the courtesy of showing my version of the charge's levelled against me," he told the Times of India

Daily. "I wrote to the prime minister requesting him to send me a copy of the charge-sheet so that I could give a reply. When there was no response from his side, I resigned," Jakhar said.

Jakhar and two other ministers quit the cabinet Wednesday, a day after the CBI named them as recipients of funds from businessman Surendra Jain, who is alleged to have paid more than 20 million dollars to 115 politicians between 1988 and 1991.

The scandal also forced the resignation of Lal Krishna Advani, president of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP).

Jakhar said Rao's strategy of sacrificing three ministers would not help the Congress, India's oldest party, in general elections widely expected in April. The BJP is expected to give a stiff fight to the ruling party.

"If one sets one's house on fire, how can one help good results in an election? I do not see any morality in killing one's own people."

The veteran Congress leader from the northern state of Punjab, India's grain bowl, also denied suggestions that he had prime ministerial ambitions and had been flaunting his following among "kisans" (farmers) to intimidate Rao.



US President Bill Clinton (L) talks to reporters with the Space Shuttle Endeavor crew from L-R: Mission Specialist Daniel Barry, Mission Specialist Winston Scott, Japanese Astronaut Mission Specialist Koichi Wakata, Pilot Brent Jett, Mission Specialist Leroy Chiao, Mission Commander Brian Duffy at Ellington Field on Saturday in Houston, Texas. The crew had returned earlier in the day from the shuttle's nine-day mission to recover a Japanese satellite.

—AFP/UNB photo

Iran to launch efforts to restore Pak-Afghan ties

TEHRAN, Jan 21: Iran is to launch efforts to restore relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan at the request of their two governments, Deputy Foreign Minister Alaeddin Boroujerdi announced today, reports AP.

Boroujerdi, who heads his country's bid to broker peace in Afghanistan, said "Iranian officials were to hold talks with Pakistani and Afghan counterparts in the near future to work out ways" to reconcile Kabul and Islamabad.

The mediation effort will be in response to "appeals" from both sides, he told the official Iranian News Agency IRNA.

Relations between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan have soured in the past months.

Islamabad has described the government of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani as "illegitimate" while Kabul accuses Pakistan of

interfering in its internal affairs and supporting the Islamic opposition, the Taliban militia, which is besieging Kabul seeking to overthrow the government.

Tehran, on the other hand, recognises Rabbani's government, but is deeply suspicious of the fundamentalist Taliban, which it accuses of being manipulated by Pakistan and the United States.

Worried at the possible rise to power of the religious student-led militia, Iran has launched an aggressive effort to mediate a settlement between warring Afghan factions in the past months.

Boroujerdi called on Afghan factions to lay down their arms, especially during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, to begin here Monday. He also urged the Taliban to enter negotiations with other factions in Afghanistan.

Off the Record

"Generosity" — woman desires most in a man

PARIS: A tall, funny gentleman with a real heart of gold is the kind of man a French woman desires most, an opinion poll released Saturday suggests, reports AP.

Twenty-three per cent of 300 French women who took part in the survey — conducted for romance-novel publisher Harlequin — said generosity was the trait they preferred most in a man.

Thirteen per cent said intelligence. Only one per cent cited either ambition or "a superlover with the body of a young Greek god".

Humor turned on 17 per cent of respondents when they were asked for their preferred method for being seduced — while 38 per cent said they definitely wanted someone tall.

The poll was conducted for Harlequin ahead of Valentine's Day.

'Budgie the Helicopter' may come to rescue Fergie

LONDON: "Budgie the Helicopter" may come to the rescue of the big-spending Duchess of York, whose mother-in-law said she wouldn't give her any more money to pay off her debts, reports AP.

The Duchess, popularly known as Fergie, has written children's books featuring the little helicopter who rushes to the rescue of damsels, and others, in distress.

Now she's struck a deal with a US producer of children's television that she hopes will help her pay off her huge debts. Her office in London announced the agreement Saturday but would not name the television company.

The estranged wife of Prince Andrew arrived in the United States on Thursday amid reports that her lavish spending has landed her deeply in debt. Unidentified royal sources told London newspapers her overdraft with bankers Coutts and Co. was close to dollars 4.5 million.

'Flying Nun' echoes Greta Garbo's famous line

NEW YORK: Echoing Greta Garbo's famous line, Sally Field says she wants to be alone, reports AP.

The two-time Academy Award winner and erstwhile "Flying Nun" says she now "realises that people need their solitude and separateness."

The 49-year-old star of the recently released "Eye for an Eye" reflects after two failed marriages — one to high school sweetheart Steve Craig, the other to producer Alan Greisman — that couples should have separate bedrooms.

"There's something unnatural about sleeping in the same bed, dressing in the same closet, sharing everything," Field says in the January 29 issue of People magazine.

Field says she has stopped feeling guilty about her lifelong penchant for solitary activities, such as needlepoint, reading and writing in her journal.

"I am finally coming to grips with the idea that I don't like giving up my space," says Field, a mother of three who landed her first TV job in 1965 as the boy-crazy "Gidget."

"I don't need somebody with me to make me whole. I am totally complete."

Bahrain's army ready to intervene to end unrest

MANAMA, Jan 21: The armed forces said Saturday they were ready to intervene to end the latest bout of opposition protests in this small island state, reports AP.

It was the latest sign of government determination to end weeks of unrest.

Authorities also placed the most prominent opposition preacher, Abdul Ameer al-Jamri, under house arrest after earlier warning him and several others to stop using their pulpits to air political demands.

The official Gulf News Agency quoted a military official as saying the army was ready "to take any military measures needed to end the situation and halt all acts threatening security."

The official was not identified further. He said such action would be in accord with Bahrain's laws.

The country's armed forces are 7,000 strong. So

far, the unrest has been handled by regular police and riot police.

Civil unrest that flared three weeks ago reached a peak Thursday night with crowds in predominantly Shiite Muslim villages attacking police, setting 38 fires and burning a number of homes and cars, according to a government statement.

It resumed Friday and Saturday, according to an official statement carried by GNA. The statement by an Interior Ministry official said rioters set 43 fires, burned two cars and blew up five gas cylinders, injuring a passerby whose condition was not known.

A government source told The Associated Press a number of "leaders responsible for inciting" the unrest were arrested. Other rioters and organisers were being interrogated and will face legal action, the government said.

Can Yeltsin gain political fortune by crushing Chechens?

said Yeltsin's decision to wipe out Chechen rebels who held more than a 100 hostages in a village in southern Russia would hurt his chances of being reelected.

Otto Letsin, a prominent political commentator at the newspaper Izvestia, wrote Friday that the decision to annihilate the rebels was "a fateful mistake" that could cost Yeltsin a second term.

But Yeltsin's critics have written his political obituary many times before, and each time they have been thrown by the 64-year-old former construction boss's ability to rebuild his political career.

They said his career was over in 1993 after sending in tanks and troops to drive his political opponents from the parliament building. They said it again in 1994 when he ordered the army to put

down Chechnya's independence drive.

Yeltsin also was criticised last year for another Chechen hostage crisis, in which more than 100 people were killed and the rebels went unopposed. Critics said that fiasco probably encouraged the rebels to try again.

Yeltsin's strong actions to crush the rebels this time were those of an exasperated president, and appeared to be an attempt to put an end to the Chechens' cycle of guerrilla actions.

But they also can be seen in terms of an impending election campaign by a shrewd politician who is unabashed by his reliance on force to resolve political crises.

The victory by Communists and nationalists in December's parliamentary elec-

tion showed Russian voters want politicians who are tough and ready to defend Russia's interests — at any price.

Politicians opposed to the war in Chechnya like former prime minister Yegor Gaidar bombed in the election. Although the public is disgusted by the army's performance in the 13-month war, being soft on Chechnya is a dud at the polls.

Yeltsin's actions this week clearly show he got the public's message.

A poll of Moscow residents taken January 15 by the VTsIOM polling agency found that 44 per cent of those asked thought the Russian government's handling of the crisis was correct, while 36 per cent thought it was not.

So far, Yeltsin's handling

of the hostage crisis in southern Russia have not translated into improved ratings for himself, and he couldn't make good on a pledge to rub out Chechen terrorism.

The December elections also showed that many Russians are disillusioned with the market reforms Yeltsin introduced in 1992, which have turned millions into paupers and created a small class of millionaire princes.

Voters fed up with poverty, wage delays, unemployment, inflation and falling living standards flocked to the Communist ticket.

Even as the military was busy trying to wipe out the Chechen rebels and free the hostages, Yeltsin was at work at purging his Cabinet of its remaining reformers.

Aristide ties the knot

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Jan 21: Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, 42, married Haitian-American attorney Mildred Trouillot, 30, at a quite religious ceremony late Saturday, reports AP.

The wedding, at Aristide's private residence east of the Haitian capital was attended by US National Security Adviser Anthony Baker.

In taking their marriage vows, the bride and groom said there would be no "divorce" between them and the people of this impoverished Caribbean island nation.

Trouillot, whose popular president affectionately calls "minouché" — met Aristide during his exile in Washington, following a violent coup that forced him out of office in September 1991.

Aristide was returned to power in October 1994.