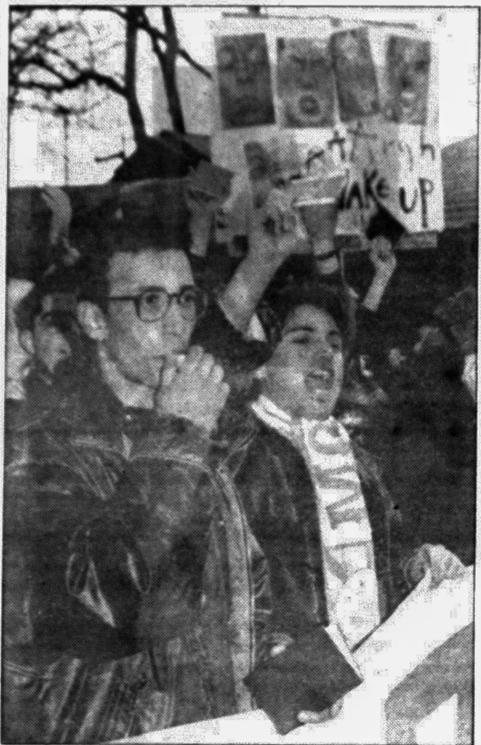


BRIEFLY



Serbian students shout in the center of Belgrade on Monday as they join an anti-government protest. Protestors, who have been rallying for nearly four weeks, have become a major challenge to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

Ex-ROK minister jailed: A former defence minister was sentenced to four years in prison on Tuesday for taking bribes and leaking military secrets during his time in office. AP reports from Seoul.

The Seoul District Court also fined Lee Yang-ho 150 million won (179,000 dollars), the amount he was accused of taking from Daewoo, South Korea's fourth largest conglomerate. At an earlier session, Lee had admitted to having taken the money from Daewoo, which had wanted Lee to approve the purchase of its combat helicopters. Lee also admitted he had given an arms dealer a memo outlining the government's arms purchasing plans.

Suspected witch killed in India: Villagers lynched a 60-year-old woman, Kamala Singh, at Rajshah village under Panskua police station suspecting her to be a witch, police said yesterday. PTI reports from Midnapur.

The local *janguru*, or the tribal priest Sunday directed the villagers to beat her to death on the suspicion that a couple had died of high fever due to her witchcraft. The tribal priest was arrested.

Remains of WWI troops found: The remains of 27 British soldiers who fought in the battle of Arras in World War I have been found during an archaeological excavation in northern France, officials said Monday. AP reports from Arras.

The soldiers belonged to the 13th regiment of the Royal Fusiliers who fought at Arras in April, 1917, according to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission at Beaurains. The remains were found Saturday at Monchy-le-Preux, near Calais, during an examination of grounds which are to be given over to industrial use.

Norwegian justice minister resigns: The former justice minister and the head of Norway's police intelligence unit resigned Monday following an outcry over using East German secret police files in a government investigation. AP reports from Oslo.

Grete Faremo, now the oil minister, was taking "constitutional responsibility for this case," and submitted a letter of resignation which was accepted. Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland said in parliament. Police intelligence chief Hans Olav Ostgaard resigned earlier in the day. While Faremo was justice minister, intelligence agents were looking for information about Berge Furre, an historian and former politician who was a member of an independent commission that was investigating the country's police and military intelligence units.

Myanmar poet awarded: Myanmar famous poet Hittar Sithu has been awarded the Great Poet Laureate presented by the Indo-China Venture Forum of Japan, the new Light of Myanmar reported yesterday. Xinhua reports from Yangon.

Hittar Sithu, also known as Uase Nyunt, is deputy minister for culture of Myanmar. He was honoured here on Monday by the Japan by the Japanese forum for his works "Old Yellow Leaf from the Mekong River" which attained literature of international level, the report said. He is the first Myanmar national who won the great poet laureate presented by a foreign country, the report added.

Casino owner killed in Moscow: The co-owner of a well-known Moscow casino was shot and killed outside an apartment building on Monday police said. AP reports from Moscow.

David Khachaturov, whose Golden Palace casino is located in the heart of the city, died at the site of the shooting in north-western Moscow, the Interfax news agency reported. The gunman fled and police were investigating. Moscow's murder rate has soared since the Soviet collapse and is now higher than New York City's. Bankers and businessmen figure are frequent targets of contract killers.

Sharma, Gowda pay tributes to martyrs

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: India yesterday celebrated in a grand manner the Silver Jubilee of the Victory marking the surrender of the Pakistan occupation army in Dhaka in 1971 to the joint command of Bangladesh Mukti Bahini and Indian Army, reports BSS.

Silver jubilee celebrations in Calcutta

CALCUTTA, Dec 17: The city yesterday joined the rest of the nation in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the victory of the joint command of Mukti Bahini and Indian army in the Bangladesh Liberation War, reports PTI.

Floral tributes were laid at the "Vijay Smarak" near Fort William in memory of the valiant soldiers who laid down their lives during the war.

West Bengal Governor KV Raghunatha Reddy, Jammu and Kashmir Governor Gen (ret'd) KV Krishna Rao besides the two heroes of the joint command Gen JS Aurora and Gen JFR Jacob, were present at the function.

Senior officials of the three services later placed wreaths at the memorial.

Display and spectacular airshows marked the silver jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh war yesterday.

Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu, speaking on the occasion, expressed the hope that the existing bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh, should be further strengthened in near future.

Vijay Dibas celebrated in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, Dec 17: Vijay Dibas was celebrated here yesterday in honour of the martyrs and veterans of the three services and to commemorate the silver jubilee of the victory of the joint command of the Mukti Bahini and the Indian armed forces in the liberation of Bangladesh, reports PTI.

On the occasion, an ex-servicemen's rally was organised by the sub-area headquarters at Narang here to honour the war veterans of the three services of the state.

Altogether 350 ex-servicemen, 43 widows and 197 dependent wives and children from Kokrajhar, Darrang, Dhubri, Barpeta, Kamrup, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Jnanab Chouk and Sipajhar attended the rally.

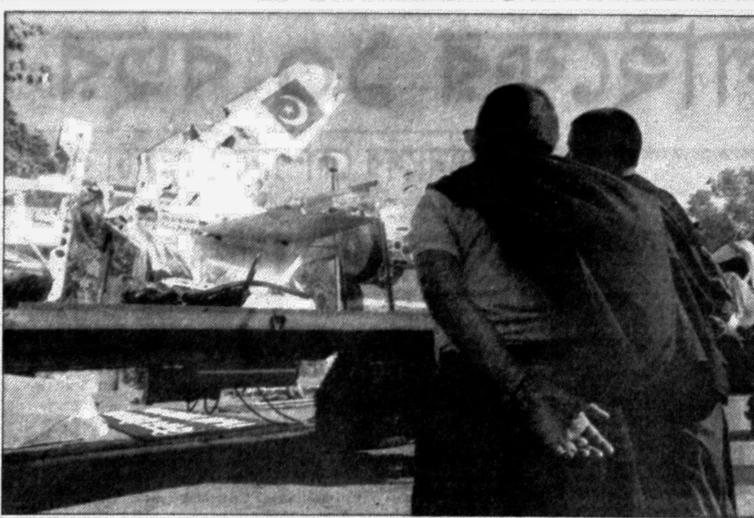
Bus strike continues in Delhi

NEW DELHI, India, Dec 17: Angered at the city's safety campaign, private bus operators kept their vehicles off the capital's streets for a second day Tuesday, leaving commuters stranded or at the mercy of overcharging taxis, reports AP.

Talks between the New Delhi state government and the bus operators remained deadlocked, United News of India reported.

Owners of about 4,000 Blue-line buses called an indefinite strike after authorities imposed a crackdown on the vehicles that have been involved in 162 fatal accidents in 1996.

Nearly one person in 10 killed in a road accident in the capital this or 190 people died under the wheels of a Blue-line bus, according to statistics published in the Times of India daily.



Two Tibetan Buddhist monks stand before a destroyed Pakistani jet fighter on Sunday in New Delhi one day before the country marks the 25th anniversary of India's victory over Pakistan which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. Scores of people on their Sunday outing pursued the military hardware employed during the 1971 conflict on display in a park attached to the India Gate war memorial.

Iran warns stern action against any US attack

TEHRAN, Dec 17: Iran's spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday warned that his country would respond forcefully to any attack on it by the United States, reports AFP.

Foreigners must not think they can foster insecurity in Iran and at the same time maintain security in the region, said Khamenei in a speech to commanders of the Pasdaran or guards of the revolution.

If the satans do something like this, the people of Iran will not let the source of the blows escape without a reply he said, in an allusion to the United States which is always referred to as satan in official terminology.

Khamenei, whose speech was carried on state radio, added that everything shows that the American government is thinking of planning a blow against Iran, but it should have learned its lesson from past failure and now know the Iranian people.

The day when Iran has its security is the day when the Persian Gulf region will also have its security added Khamenei.

The Los Angeles Times reported earlier this week that US officials were considering retaliating against Iran if they accept the Saudi theory that Saudi Shiite Muslims were responsible for the June 25 truck bombing in Dharan that killed 19 air force personnel.

'Serbia may not deserve further US support' Milosevic concedes another electoral loss

BELGRADE, Dec 17: Slobodan Milosevic conceded another electoral loss Monday. But heartened by US support, his opponents vowed to continue demonstrating until the Serbian president hands over all major cities claimed by the opposition, reports AP.

In two separate demonstrations, a total of about 130,000 opposition supporters and students flooded Belgrade streets, chanting "Victory" and "Resignation".

The victory calls celebrated Sunday's court confirmation of an opposition win previously annulled on Milosevic's behalf in Nis, Serbia's second-largest city. The calls for resignation were directed at Milosevic.

And on Monday, opposition officials in Smederevska Palanka said that a local court reinstated their victory after it had been annulled by a lower court. Officials in both municipalities confirmed the opposition wins.

The opposition claims that until (the) thieves are punished," he said. The protests are growing and our demands are getting more radical.

Draskovic, who met Sunday with US envoy John Kornblum, said the Americans were very supportive of our peaceful and democratic way of fighting for the recognition of the election will of the Serbian people.

Meanwhile former US negotiator Richard Holbrooke says Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic has failed to promote democracy in the Balkans and may not deserve further American support.

Holbrooke Monday credited the Serbian leader with playing a critical role in the Dayton peace accord a year ago that ended ethnic conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Holbrooke said the war will not recur.

But, he said, Milosevic "has not done enough on the civilian side" and the United States "does not and should not have a special reason to support him."



UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (R) shakes hands with Ghana's Kofi Annan (L), his successor, on December 16 at UN headquarter in New York.

'Israel not helping ME peace process'

WASHINGTON, Dec 17: Ratcheting up US criticism, President Clinton said Monday that Israel is not helping Mideast peacemaking by its settlement activity. He said he was concerned and had informed Jerusalem of his views, reports AP.

At a news conference, Clinton said Israel and the Palestinians had left the explosive settlement issue to the negotiating table. "It just stands to reason that anything that pre-empt the outcome... cannot be helpful in making peace."

"I don't think anything should be done that would be seen as pre-empting the outcome," Clinton said.

Former Secretary of State James A. Baker III, who conducted extensive Arab-Israeli negotiations under former President Bush, said the Clinton administration was backsliding, nonetheless.

"We have gone from calling the settlements illegal in the Carter administration, to calling them obstacles to peace in the Reagan and Bush administrations, and now we are saying they are complicating and troubling," Baker said in a telephone interview from Houston.

It seems to me if you are going to make progress in this area, the US should remain true to its policy positions," Baker said.

Earlier, the White House called Israeli settlement activity on the West Bank and in Gaza troubling and a complicating factor in Mideast peacemaking — but avoided sharp disagreement with the Likud government in Jerusalem.

Annan ready to work with US Congress

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 17: On the eve of his appointment as UN secretary general, Kofi Annan said he was ready to work with the US Congress to improve the United Nations and place the organisation on a sound financial basis, reports AP.

"But I have to caution here that any precipitous attempts to move the organisation in one direction or the other before there's a broad consensus on the part of the member states could be counterproductive," he added.

Annan said Monday that his first task would be to put together an effective team "that will help me carry out my responsibilities" as the seventh UN chief.

100,000 Rwandan refugees return from Tanzania

But Annan, the head of UN peacekeeping operations, cautioned that dramatic changes in the direction of the world organisation without a consensus among the 185 member states would backfire.

RUSUMO, Rwanda, Dec 17: Refugees filled the road that links Tanzania to Rwanda as far as the eye could see Monday. By evening, more than 100,000 had crossed the border and headed home after 2 1/2 years of living in camps, reports AP.

The 58-year-old Ghanaian was chosen Friday by the Security Council to succeed Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was vetoed by the United States for a second term.

Red Cross spokesman Carl Naucier said he thought that nearly all the 535,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees in Tanzania will have crossed back into Rwanda by the end of the week.

The 185-member General Assembly is expected to ratify the council decision Tuesday afternoon, so that Annan can take office on schedule January 1.

"Everything is very orderly. There is no problem on the Tanzanian side," he said. "The military are very helpful, and it's all working very well."

In an interview with "News Hour with Jim Lehrer," Annan said he "will not hesitate" to work with the US Congress to restore the United Nations' financial position and restore its image within the United States.

Naucier's upbeat comments contrasted with reports earlier in the day that Tanzanian troops had fired into the air to force thousands of the refugees to return to home while police in trucks kept the stragglers moving along the road to the border.

The Republican controlled Congress has refused to pay the 1.4 billion dollars US debt to the United Nations because it considers the organisation inefficient.

The refugees fled from Rwanda to Tanzania in 1994 when more than a million Rwandan Hutus scattered into neighbouring countries, including Zaire and Tanzania. The refugees feared retribution for a Hutu-led genocide of 500,000 minority Tutsis.

The Clinton administration opposed Boutros-Ghali because he was allegedly sluggish in pressing for reform. US officials also complained they found Boutros-Ghali obstinate and difficult to work with.

Last month, 640,000 Rwandan refugees returned home from eastern Zaire when attacks by Zairian rebels freed them from Hutu militia control.

Off the Record

They want to give her a chance to return

JERUSALEM: A brother and sister whose mother died 10 days ago have gone to court for permission to keep her body at home in a freezer, reports AP.

If they can't they, they will consider having her buried in ice — or under a glacier in Alaska. Moshe and Rachel Esther Beeri told a Tel Aviv magistrates court Sunday.

Police ordered the siblings to hold a regular burial for their mother, Miriam Beeri, who died at age 70. But they refused, saying they hope scientists may one day figure out how to restore her to life.

"We want to go on living close to mother and give her a chance to return to us in the future," Moshe Beeri, 49, told the Maariv newspaper. "Who knows what science may achieve in the next few years."

"For many years we talked to mother about this possibility, and she was very much in favour of it," he said. "I too, when my time comes, would like my body to be frozen."

The siblings have been keeping their mother's body in a special freezer that cost \$90,000.

Iraqis sacrifice hundreds of sheep for Uday

BAGHDAD: Iraqis have sacrificed hundreds of sheep for President Saddam Hussein's eldest son Uday who is recovering from last week's gun attack, official sources said Tuesday, reports AP.

Hundreds of sheep were slaughtered Saturday for the second day in a row and the ceremonies continued late into the night in the Al-Mansur business and residential neighbourhood. The Al-Jumhuriya newspaper said.

A band played popular music, residents threw candy to children in the crowd, while trucks were tasked with taking the meat from the slaughtered animals to various Baghdad neighbourhoods, the newspaper said.

A band played popular music, residents threw candy to children in the crowd, while trucks were tasked with taking the meat from the slaughtered animals to various Baghdad neighbourhoods, the newspaper said.

Israel, PA resume peace talks on troop pullout from Hebron

JERUSALEM, Dec 17: Moving away from confrontation, Israel and the Palestinians resumed peace talks Monday on Israel's long-overdue pullout from Hebron, reports AP.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said that Netanyahu adviser Yitzhak Molcho met with Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat late Monday and that the two would reconvene soon.

Israeli media, citing Palestinian sources, said a Palestinian court convicted two men of carrying out last week's West Bank highway ambush that killed two Israelis, and sentenced them to 25 years in prison each. But Palestinian officials denied this.

The Netanyahu government responded to that attack with a defiant decision Friday to pump more money into Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, where the Palestinians hope to set up an independent state. The aid could lure more Israelis to the areas, where 145,000 settlers live amid 2 million Arabs.

But on Monday, Netanyahu tried to defuse tensions created by that decision to by saying Israel will not build new communities in disputed areas before a final peace deal is reached.

The right time to announce new settlements is in the context of the negotiations on the permanent agreement," he said after appearing before parliament's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee. "Until then we will not establish new settlements."

New settlements will be linked to the question of how we wish to see the map that emerges in the final settlement, which the sides are supposed to reach by 1999, Netanyahu said.

"In areas not handed over to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the permanent agreement, Israel will be able to do whatever it wants."

Netanyahu's assurances did not negate his government's controversial policy of expanding existing settlements, however.

In the Knesset, Israel's parliament, the dovish opposition brought a no-confidence motion against Netanyahu over his settlement policy. The motion was rejected by 56-21 vote.

Despite Monday's positive developments, Israel and the Palestinians are still deadlocked over how to implement the interim agreements signed by Netanyahu's dovish predecessors.

Israeli troops were to leave most of Hebron last March, but the pullout was delayed by suicide bombings by Islamic militants. Netanyahu, elected in May, has further delayed it in an effort to improve security arrangement for the 500 settlers who live among the city's 130,000 Palestinians.

Israeli officials say that after more than two months of talks an agreement was nearly complete, but Arafat is holding up the signing to win assurances from Israel on other issues.

The stalemate has led to assessments that the West Bank and Gaza might be on the verge of an explosion similar to the clashes that killed 79 in September.

But on Sunday night, contacts were renewed when Arafat met with Molcho, after having refused for several days to receive the premier's advisers. After the meeting, Arafat called Netanyahu in Jerusalem.

A statement by Netanyahu's office said he asked Arafat to do more to rein in Palestinian militants, especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which claimed the drive-by shooting last week, in which Jewish settler Eeta Star and her 12-year-old son Efraim were killed.

Israel TV and Army Radio, citing anonymous Palestinian sources, said late Monday that a Palestinian security court had convicted two men of carrying out the attack.

But Jibril Rajoub, a top Palestinian security official, told the AP the reports were not true. And Israel Radio said the Palestinian attorney-general Khaled al-Kidre denied the reports and said the investigation into the incident was continuing.