

BRIEFLY



Picture dated December 19 shows Greek-Cypriot Zoe Efshatiou (L), accompanied by her husband Demetris, waiting outside the surgery room in a Nicosia hospital where she, 23 and pregnant with 11 nine-week-old embryos, is to be operated. Zoe Efshatiou, who become pregnant following fertility treatment, has aborted nine fetuses to give two a better chance of survival, the official Cypriot News Agency said Tuesday. She underwent a second termination of three fetuses Monday after aborting six on December 19. — AFP/UNB photo

One more Chinese dissident jailed:

Chinese dissident Li Hai has been sentenced to nine years in prison for "violating state secrets," his mother said in Beijing Wednesday. AFP reports from Beijing.

I have received a letter from the court announcing the December 18 sentencing of Li Hai to nine years in prison," Gong Liwen said in a telephone interview. Li Hai, 42, was arrested on May 31, 1995.

Chandrika calls for unity:

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga yesterday called for unity to build a peaceful and developed nation, Xinhua reports from Colombo.

In yesterday's new year message the president said she earnestly hoped that the new year will be a blessed one bringing peace, prosperity and happiness to all Sri Lankans. Since assuming office two years ago, she said, her government has accomplished much which it could be proud of. However there is much more to be done and further targets to be achieved.

Clinton invites Netanyahu to White House:

US President Bill Clinton invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House at the beginning of 1997 for "strategic" talks, the Prime Minister's spokesman said Tuesday. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

US mediator Dennis Ross delivered the invitation, in a message from Clinton in which the US President said he wants "to be briefed on the strategic situation" in the Middle East, Bazak said. Clinton also congratulated Netanyahu "for his firm commitment to the road to peace," Bazak said.

Mishap kills 6 in Malaysia:

Six people were killed when a train in Malaysia ploughed into their car at a railway crossing late Tuesday in Segamat, southern Johore state, news reports said yesterday. AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The passenger train, traveling at 100 kms an hour, dragged the car for over 200 metres before the crushed vehicle rolled out of the way. A witness reported seeing Pang Chin Choy, 49, trying to drive across the tracks despite warning signals and an alarm. Also killed were Pang's wife, two children and two relatives.

Clashes leave 3 killed in Philippines:

Defying government warnings, Filipinos greeted 1997 with rowdy merry-making that left at least three people dead and 168 others injured, police and health officials said Wednesday. AP reports from Manila.

Police said a drunken high school teacher shot and killed his neighbour Nathaniel Santos, 37, for exploding firecrackers near his home. The bullet ripped Santos' chest and hit his brother-in-law, Japanese businessman Akira Sakamoto, 38, in the groin, police added. Police also said two men were stabbed to death Sunday while they were having a drinking session with friends in Minalin town in Pampanga province, north of Manila.

4 miners rescued in China:

Four coal miners who had been trapped for 16 days in a 107-metre (yard)-deep mine shaft in northeast Liaoning province, have been rescued, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Tuesday. AFP says from Beijing.

Authorities said the four, who were pulled out late Monday, survived the first six days eating bark from wooden supports before a hole was drilled into the shaft to supply them with fresh air, food and water. On December 15, Fan Yongping, Zhang Qingyu, Wang Qinglin and Wang Qingxiang were checking electric circuits inside the mine in Yixian county, when roof supports in the pit collapsed, blocking the exit with rocks.

PDG leading in Gabonese polls:

The ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) has retained its parliamentary majority following the second round of partial elections held at the weekend, results showed Tuesday. AFP reports from Libreville.

The PDG, led by President Omar Bongo, has so far won 66 seats in the new 120-member body, with results from 28 districts still to be declared from the second round held Sunday. Voters had gone to the polls to elect the remaining half of the country's representatives to the 120-member national assembly, where the PDG had 66 seats in the outgoing parliament, after voting in a first round on December 15.

20 executed in S China:

Authorities in south China executed 22 people last week as part of the "strike hard" crackdown on crime, an official newspaper said, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The executions were carried out last Thursday shortly after court sentencing in Guiyang, capital of Guizhou province, the Guizhou daily said in an edition seen in Beijing yesterday.

Basu for granting maximum autonomy to Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: The West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, has called for granting of maximum autonomy to all the three regions of Jammu and Kashmir and not declaring of separate states there, reports PTI.

In an interview to "Asian Age" newspaper, Basu said he had suggested to Dr Karan Singh, who is heading a committee to deal with the question of autonomy to the northern border state, not to recommend creation of separate states for different parts of J and K.

"I said you please don't recommend for different parts of Kashmir become separate states. One Kashmir, and within that the other two regions should also get autonomy. As much autonomy as you can give them, keeping one or two subjects with the centre," Basu said.

Blaming the Congress for the present impasse in Kashmir, Basu said Dr Farooq Abdullah, who was elected as the Chief Minister earlier, was "unnecessarily driven out by Indira (Gandhi)".

3,651 soldiers killed, claims LTTE

COLOMBO, Jan 1: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas today said that they killed 3,651 government soldiers and destroyed two helicopters and three navy craft, reports AFP.

The clandestine voice of Tigers radio of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said their biggest single kill was the attack against an army garrison in the north-eastern region of Mullaitivu in July.

The LTTE said they killed more than 1,200 soldiers in the Mullaitivu attack alone, but did not give their own losses for the corresponding period.

There was no immediate reaction from the military authorities but the defence ministry has from time to time claimed thousands of casualties among Tigers involved in fighting government troops in the north-east.

Shiite leader shot dead in Pak Punjab

ISLAMABAD, Jan 1: Unidentified gunmen have shot dead a Shiite leader in the Pakistani province of Punjab, the sixth killing there in 24 hours, police said today, reports AFP.

Ayub Ali Siddiqui, President of the Multan chapter of the main Shiite political party, the Tehreek-i-Jafria Pakistan (TJP), was killed by two assailants on a motorbike, they said.

Siddiqui, a banker, was returning home from his office late Tuesday in a scooter rickshaw when the assailants armed with automatic weapons opened fire as the vehicle slowed at an intersection.

The Shiite leader who was critically wounded was rushed to hospital where he died later. A passer-by was also shot but he was reported out of danger.

Ignoring govt ban Suu Kyi attends New Year eve celebration

BANGKOK, Jan 1: Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi attended a new year's eve celebration outside her home, ignoring government restrictions on her movements, a party source said today, reports AFP.

Aung San Suu Kyi attended a dinner at the home of Kyi Maung, co-Vice Chairman of her National League for Democracy (NLD) on Tuesday evening, the NLD source, reached by telephone from Bangkok, said.

The NLD source said the opposition leader had left her compound without asking permission from the military authorities, as they have asked her to do since an outbreak of student unrest last month.

International

Army launches search for Bodo rebels

Militants blow up railway bridge in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, India, Jan 1: Indian tribal militants, blamed for a train bombing that killed 38 people Monday, destroyed a railway bridge in another attack today police said, reports AFP.

A police spokesman said Bodo rebels blew up the bridge in the Darrang district of the far-eastern state of Assam at 1:50 am (20:20GMT) today using a remote-control bomb.

A goods train crossed the bridge near Goresahwar, around 100 kilometres (62 miles) north of Guwahati, shortly before the incident, but there were no casualties.

The attack was the third in the state this week.

The official death toll following Monday's bombing, which derailed a crowded train and destroyed three carriages near Fakiragram in the remote district of Kokrajhar, remained at 38 Wednesday.

The bodies were transported to Guwahati Tuesday night for identification.

Six of the 63 injured in the attack, meanwhile, remained in critical condition, according to hospital sources.

The day before, a road bridge in the state was blown up.

Bodo separatists, campaigning since 1987 for a tribal homeland in Assam and adjoining states, have not claimed responsibility for any of the bombings but have been blamed by police and state politicians.

AP adds, as the rebels seeking an autonomous homeland escalated violence, the state government decided to call in the army to fight the militants, officials said.

It also ordered state police and paramilitary forces to patrol railway tracks passing through the rebel strongholds, officials said.

Rescuers sliced and peeled the metal sides off the wreckage of the express train and said they hoped to restore by Wednesday evening the only rail line to the area through the narrow land route between

Bangladesh to the south and Bhutan to the north.

Two bombs were placed in a culvert and triggered from a distance of 800 yards (meters) on Monday, said I. Bishnoi, a police officer. No one claimed responsibility for the blast, but police said Bodo militants have become more violent in recent months as rival factions compete for dominance.

Over the weekend, Bodo rebels blew up a road bridge linking Guwahati, the state capital, with the area, about 35 miles (55 kilometers) from the site of Monday's blast. Seven people were injured.

Reuter adds, rescue workers searched for more bodies from the wreckage of a bombed Indian train and officials said the army had launched a search operation for suspected tribal guerrillas.

Officials said more victims were expected from the wreckage but not as many as 300 initially believed killed.



Former Pakistan cricket star-turned politician Imran Khan shakes hands with his party supporters during the visit of his constituency for the national assembly seat Tuesday. Khan who is the chief of his own party *Tehrik-i-Insaf* (movement for justice) started his own election campaign for the general elections in Pakistan which are scheduled for the February 3 1997. — AFP/UNB photo

Netanyahu sets condition for meeting Arafat

JERUSALEM, Jan 1: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet with Yasser Arafat only after the Palestinian leader agrees to Israeli demands enshrining the security of Jewish settlers in Hebron, a spokesman said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Shai Bazak's comments to Israel radio seemed to dash hopes that negotiators were nearing conclusion on the long-delayed Israeli redeployment from the West Bank city.

On Tuesday, top Netanyahu aide David Bar-Ilan said it was likely Netanyahu and Arafat would meet Wednesday afternoon to conclude the agreement, but Bazak said no time had been set for a summit.

"It is not clear yet if there will be a meeting," Bazak said on Israel radio. "The agreement will be signed only after the demands of Israel are met and the conditions are met that the prime minister set for the security of the Jewish community in Hebron."

Israel was rejected the Palestinian demand for a joint patrol at the Tomb of the Patriarchs and wanted to improve security conditions for Jews on Shuhada Street where Arabs also live, Bazak said.

In addition, Israel seeks to define areas near Jewish enclaves where Palestinian police will be prohibited from entering, Bazak said.

Israel is insisting on these

arrangements and when they are met then apparently there will be a meeting between the prime minister and Arafat. But probably at the end of such a meeting it will be possible to initial an agreement," Bazak said.

But chances of Palestinian acquiescence did not seem very high, especially on the Israeli demand of exclusive control at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, holy to both Jews and Muslims.

Top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said the issue of joint patrols at the Tomb of the Patriarchs would be left for negotiation three months after the Israeli pullback from 80 per cent of the city, Israel radio said.



The leader of the Tupac Amaru guerrillas Nestor Cerpa 'Comandante Evaristo' (C) speaks to photographers Tuesday inside the residence of the Japanese ambassador in Lima, Peru. About 20 media photographers and cameramen were allowed by Cerpa into the residence to meet with the guerillas. — AFP/UNB photo

"Baghdad may have hidden missile parts"

Iraq condemned for not cooperating with UN

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 1: Fearing Iraq may have hidden missile engines and parts that could be used to build prohibited weapons, the Security Council condemned in a resolution Monday for not cooperating with UN inspectors, reports AP.

Iraq refused the inspectors' request, earlier this month, to take about 130 Russian-made missiles to a US lab and determine whether Iraq removed their engines and key parts, substituting lower-grade Iraqi ones.

Iraq buried the missiles before March, 1992, claiming to have disarmed them. Rolf Ekeus, who chairs the inspection team, reached agreement with Iraqi officials in October to inspect the remains.

"Maybe they are very afraid of this investigation," Ekeus said Monday. "How many significant components have been removed from the actual full missiles before they were destroyed?"

Ekeus and other inspectors believe Iraq may plan to put

Russian engines and parts — which are better than ones Iraq has technology to build — into Iraqi-made missiles, thereby making them more powerful and accurate.

"Why would you keep them unless you wanted to stick them with something that could be made indigenously?" said Ewen Buchanan, an aide to Ekeus on the inspection team, known as the UN Special Commission on Iraq, or UNSCOM.

Ekeus said Iraqi officials in one case even admitted that Iraq had replaced a Russian engine with an Iraqi one.

UNSCOM officials want to inspect the missiles at the US Army Missile Command in Huntsville, Alabama, which they said is the best facility in the world for intricate missile testing.

Iraqi UN ambassador Nizar Hamdoun said Iraq was cooperating with the commission but does not want the missiles taken to the United States, rather than Russia, for inspection.

Khmer leader urges break-up of Cambodia's coalition govt

PHNOM PENH, Jan 1: A top Khmer Rouge leader fired the first salvo of the new year in Cambodia's increasingly tense political battle, urging a break-up of the coalition government, reports AP.

Khieu Samphan, one of the founders of the brutal Communist group, urged Cambodia's First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh to split off from his coalition partner and promised support if he did so.

Khieu Samphan said the prince, son of King Norodom Sihanouk, would win the 1998 general elections if he disassociated himself from Second Prime Minister Hun Sen.

"If he can do that our (Khmer Rouge) people will support him, and his party," Khieu Samphan said in a broadcast over the guerrilla's clandestine radio Wednesday.

Ranariddh, who leads the royalist FUNCINPEC party, and

Hun Sen of the Cambodian People's Party, were named co-premiers following UN-supervised elections in May, 1993. The international community provided some 2 billion dollars to help bring peace to the war-ravaged land.

But relations between the two and their followers have grown increasingly tense, with verbal accusations traded in the capital almost daily and violence occasionally erupting between the two camps on the countryside.

Both prime ministers claim to have been targets of assassination plots.

Analysts say this conflict poses a greater danger to Cambodia than the Khmer Rouge, whose ranks have been greatly thinned over the past year by mass defections. Both the political parties have attempted to woo the defectors, thus bringing them into the political equation.

Off the Record

A royal bedroom for Camilla

LONDON: Prince Charles has allocated a bedroom at his country house to his mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles, and ordered staff there to address her as 'M'lady', a British newspaper reported Tuesday, says Reuter.

The tabloid Daily Mirror quoted an unnamed member of staff at Highgrove, the prince's west of England house, as saying: "We don't have a problem addressing Camilla as M'lady. If that's what the boss wants, that's what will happen."

The Mirror said Parker Bowles often stayed at Highgrove, even when Charles was out of the country, and generally ran the domestic side of the house.

Since Charles divorced Princess Diana last year, there has been speculation that he would like to marry Parker Bowles, but such a move could harm his chances of becoming king when his mother, Queen Elizabeth, dies.

Parker Bowles' own home, Ray Mill house, is 20 miles (32 km) from Highgrove. It has been known for some time that Charles allows her to stable her horses at Highgrove.

Mughal manuscript to be unveiled 1st time in 200 yrs

LONDON: A 17th century Mughal manuscript, chronicling the early reign of Emperor Shahjahan, will be unveiled for the first time in 200 years before the public in India and the United Kingdom, reports PTI.

Queen Elizabeth has decided to make available the art masterpiece, part of the fabled private collection of the British royal family, to the people to mark the 50th anniversary of India's independence.

The manuscript, called the *Badshahnama* — the chronicle of the king of the world — was presented to George The Third by the Nawab of Lucknow.

Badshahnama, which traces the first ten years of the reign of Shahjahan, the emperor who built the Taj Mahal for his beloved Queen Mumtaz Mahal, has been described by art experts as an "historical testament of one of the greatest era of cultural achievement of the history of India."

The 249 folio text tracing the chronology of important events in the first ten years of the rule of the Mughal emperor is embedded with four illustrations including that of court scenes, royal hunts, religious processions and other events.

It will be travelling to India for public display in important art galleries preceding the visit of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh in October.

Before that, the manuscript would be on its first-ever display in the United Kingdom at the Queen's Gallery at Buckingham Palace reflecting the decision approved by the queen that the royal collection should be made more active.

Ghali leaves UN office

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 1: As several hundred staff members clapped, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali left the United Nations complex yesterday, ending a turbulent five years as the world's top diplomat, reports Reuter.

"Thank you for everything you have done. I wish you a happy new year. I wish success for the United Nations. I wish success for my successor Kofi Annan," he said, in reference to the 58-year-old Ghanaian head of peacekeeping, who takes over as Secretary-General for a five-year term from today.

Boutros-Ghali, a former Egyptian Deputy Prime Minister and architect of the Camp David talks that led to the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, said he would offer his modest services to work for peace in the Middle East but he did not specify how.

Boutros-Ghali, 74, an intellectual law professor and author who assimilated large quantities of information quickly, was jolted in his quest for a second-term by a US veto, an event that still puzzled him.

People from Asia to Las Vegas casino hail 1997

UNDATED, Jan 1: As the world spun into 1997, people around the globe hailed the passage of time with rites old and new, from the solemnity of Mass at Mother Teresa's nunnery in India to the festive demolition of a Las Vegas casino, reports AP.

This new year also was a rehearsal of sorts for the millennium, with Pope John Paul II himself talking about throwing a big party three years from now — even though the next 1,000-year cycle doesn't start technically until January 1, 2001.

Sydney harbour's biggest-ever fireworks display was billed as Australia's dry run for that city's hosting of the 2000 Olympic Games. About 400,000 people packed the shores for the 100,000 Australian 1 million (US \$800,000) pyrotechnic display with bursts of light and colour shooting over the white-shelled opera house.

Big Ben, London's most famous timekeeper, almost missed its date with the New Year when unusually low temperatures of -4C (25 F) appar-

ently caused some sluggishness in the bells, the BBC reported. But engineers set to work on the mechanism behind the famous illuminated clock face on Parliament tower, and the familiar chime rang out at midnight.

Police around the world banned the celebratory shooting of firearms, but many people went ahead and started the new year off with a bang — setting off firecrackers and firing guns.

In the Philippines, officials threatened to arrest anyone who set off firecrackers with more than a third of a teaspoon of explosives per stick. Homemade fireworks can pack an unpleasant surprise — the wounded often contract tetanus from cow dung used to control the speed of burning.

Still, many Filipinos ignored the warnings. Rowdy celebrations left at least three people dead and 168 injured, according to a preliminary report by government officials. But health Secretary Carmencita Rodica said that represented a "dramatic decrease" in the

number of casualties from previous years.

Police in Paris banned all firecrackers this year under security measures stemming from a December 3 subway bombing. But that didn't stop some of the thousands of revelers on Champs-Elysees, Paris' most famous avenue.

In Belgrade, Yugoslavia, where the annulment of election results has sparked daily protests against Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, opposition leaders appealed to supporters to refrain from the traditional celebration of shooting guns into the air.

Shortly after midnight, opposition leaders addressed about 150,000 supporters who jammed the center of Belgrade, sharing champagne and hamburgers in sub-freezing temperatures. Unlike previous days, riot police did not try to restrict the opposition gathering.

In public spaces such as Madrid's Puerta del Sol, hordes gathered to count down the year's final seconds. Like the celebration in New York's times

Square, the scene in Madrid is broadcast nationwide into Spanish homes. Most families start the new year by eating 12 grapes — one for each chime of the clock.

New year's Eve left at least one building in ruins in the American gambling capital of Las Vegas, where as many as 300,000 people gathered for a bash that got started with the spectacular implosion — complete with fireworks — of the 11-story Hacienda Hotel to make way for a new resort.

In Sweden, last-minute buyers mobbed the state liquor store at the ski town of Salen, 200 miles (320 kilometers) northwest of Stockholm.

With nine days off, about 1 million Japanese were traveling abroad to celebrate the passing of the Year of the Rat and the arrival of the Year of the Ox, the second in the 12-year cycle of the Asian zodiac.

Aside from Hawaii, the most popular overseas destination for Japanese was Hong Kong which celebrated its last New Year's holiday as a British

colony.

In a holiday address, Chinese President Jiang Zemin promised to maintain Hong Kong's prosperity and freedoms when the territory returns to Chinese rule on July 1.

As party-goers shivered in the Northern Hemisphere, people in Rio de Janeiro donned white outfits to go to the beach with flowers and other offerings for Iemanja, an Afro-Brazilian water goddess.

Bad weather put a damper on New Year's celebrations in South Korea. Thousands of people on their way home to celebrate the holiday were stranded Wednesday when a storm warning shut down ferries to dozens of islands off the south and west coasts.

About 5,000 people showed up in Moscow's Red Square despite temperatures of about OF (-18 C), firing off firecrackers popping champagne bottles, and dancing in front of about two-dozen stern-faced troops. Typically drawing Communist die-hards in past years, the New Year's celebration this year drew only about three or four of

them, with red Soviet flags and pins.

In some places celebrations got out of hand. In New Zealand, police used batons to disperse a crowd of about 3,000 drunken revellers who rioted early Wednesday during New Year celebrations in the popular beach resort of Whangamata southeast of Auckland. Police said they arrested at least 100 people, and several dozen people, including some police officers, were injured when the crowd threw bottles and stones.

In Fremantle, Australia, 35 people were injured, 13 of them seriously, when an overcrowded balcony collapsed at a party just before midnight.

In Rome the pope called on the city to get ready for 2000 when the capital is expected to host million of people for Holy Year and millennium celebrations.

In Calcutta, India, Mother Teresa attended a New Year's Mass that was held four hours before midnight Tuesday to mark the end of the year-old nun, who is recovering from heart surgery.

Over 480,000 Rwandans return home so far

NAIROBI, Jan 1: More than 480,000 Rwandan refugees have returned home from Tanzania since the beginning of December, leaving some 50,000 still in the country, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Refugees "continue to arrive" from Tanzania at the rate of about 450 per day, UNHCR spokesman Paul Stromberg, based in Kigali, told AFP.

"We think that small groups will continue to arrive at the border for some time yet," he added.

Refugees in Tanzania, numbering some 530,000 began a mass exodus towards their homeland after Tanzanian authorities ordered the camps, which they had occupied for two and a half years, to be closed before December 31.

The decision to send back the refugees followed the massive return to Rwanda of close to 500,000 refugees in eastern Zaire, after fighting broke out between local Tutsi rebels and Zairean forces.