

## BRIEFLY



File picture dated July 17 1996 shows the last Hong Kong postage stamps bearing the head of Queen Elizabeth II which will be withdrawn from sale Wednesday. Under an agreement between China and Britain, they are to be succeeded January 26 by a new set of 16 stamps with "a neutral design with no connotation of sovereignty." — AFP/UNB photo

## Road mishap claims 11 in India:

A van carrying farmers collided with a truck in a western state Wednesday, killing at least 11 people and injuring five, a local news agency reported, AP says from New Delhi.

Details of the accident in Amreli district of Gujarat state were not immediately available. United News of India news agency said the farmers were going to a rally in Ahmedabad, the largest city in Gujarat.

The area is about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) southwest of New Delhi.

## Rajesh Pilot meets NSCN officials:

A former Indian minister held talks with the country's oldest separatist group on behalf of New Delhi during a recent trip to Thailand, a newspaper reported yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Rajesh Pilot, who was junior home minister in former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's government, met officials of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), the Times of India said. The NSCN, head by Issak Swu and Thungon Muivah, has been fighting for independence for the northeastern state of Nagaland for more than 40 years. The group is known to have bases in Myanmar, which borders Nagaland.

## 5 feared dead in NZ air crash:

A commuter plane crashed with three passengers and two crew aboard, Polynesian Airlines said Wednesday, AP reports from Wellington.

The airline said in a statement it feared there were no survivors. Managing director Richard Gates said flight PH211 went down on Tuesday during a brief scheduled flight from Pago Pago, American Samoa, to Apia, Western Samoa. Police were investigating. The cause of the crash was unknown. No further details were immediately available.

## US official to meet Kurdish leaders:

A top US official will meet Thursday with leaders from rival Iraqi Kurdish groups in an attempt to achieve reconciliation, the State Department said Tuesday. British and Turkish officials also will attend, AP reports from Washington.

Leading the talks for the US side will be Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau. The identities of the Kurdish delegates were not disclosed. They represent the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

## 1 killed in London train mishap:

A train killed an elderly woman in a London underground station, but the driver did not notice the accident, the Evening Standard newspaper reported on Tuesday. AFP says from London.

The victim slipped between the train and the platform on January 1 in Eastcote station, northeastern London, which was almost deserted at the time.

The woman was killed as the train left the station, the newspaper said, but the accident was only noticed by the driver of a train which arrived in the station a few minutes later.

London underground said it had opened an inquiry into the accident.

## Iraq returns remains of 60 Iranians:

Iraqi military authorities today handed over remains of 60 Iranian soldiers who were killed during the eight-year war between the two neighbours from 1980 to 1988. Iran's official news agency IRNA reported yesterday. Xinhua says from Tehran.

The hand over ceremony was held at the Shalamheen border point. The remains of the Iranian soldiers were recovered from Al-Emarah area where the Iranian armed forces launched their operation against the Iraqi forces.

## 3 die in PAK train mishap:

At least three people were killed and 60 injured when a Pakistani passenger train was derailed in Punjab province today, witnesses said. Reuters reports from Multan.

They said the Karachi-Lahore Express crashed at 5.40 am (0040 GMT) near Pervaz Wala, about 22 km (14 miles) from Khanewal, northeast of the city of Multan. The cause of the crash was not immediately known. One person died on the spot and two in hospital, the witnesses said.

Seventeen of the injured were reported to be in critical condition.

## Blasts hurt 10 in Iraq

DUBAI, Jan 8: Powerful mortar shells exploded early today close to the central Baghdad office of the Iranian armed opposition People's Mujahadeen Movement injuring about 10 people, all Iraqis, the organisation said, reports AFP.

A Mujahadeen spokesman contacted on the phone by AFP said three "supermortar" shells fell a few hundred metres (yards) from the organisation's bureau, which he said was the real target of the attack.

The spokesman, Farid Soleimani said "at least a dozen Iraqi citizens have been wounded, some of them critically. Some have had their legs amputated and are in a critical state."

"At 10:25 pm Tuesday, terrorists who have been sent from the mullah regime in Iran have attacked the central office of the Mujahadeen Khalq (People's

Mujahadeen) in Baghdad with supermortars."

Three of these weapons were hidden on the back of a big lorry parked 600 metres (yards) from the MK office and were fitted with time delay devices," he said.

The People's Mujahadeen Bureau, located on the east bank of the Tigris near the Sheraton Hotel and the French Embassy, was not hit and only its windows were blown out, he said.

"The sound of the explosions was heard all throughout Baghdad," he said.

One of the mortars exploded near the Haydari Hospital and Central Laboratory. The explosion left a crater five metres (yards) by three metres, the spokesman said.

He said few people were out in the streets at that late hour or the toll could have been much higher.

Hostage crisis  
Hasimoto criticises  
Japanese  
TV crew

TOKYO, Jan 8: Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto today criticised a Japanese television crew for entering the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima, where 74 people are held by leftist rebels, reports AFP.

"It was extremely regrettable," Jiji press quoted the Japanese Prime Minister as telling reporters in Brunei, where he was visiting.

"Such an act could invite unpredictable developments, and hamper the Peruvian government's efforts for the peaceful solution of the crisis and the release of all hostages," he said.

The TV Asahi correspondent and his interpreter were detained and questioned by the Peruvian authorities after they spent two hours in the residence, according to Jiji.

Japanese and foreign photographers came under fire last week for making contact with rebel leader Nestor Cerpa Cartolini inside the compound.

## Yeltsin sick

MOSCOW, Jan 8: President Boris Yeltsin canceled engagements for a third day Wednesday and remained in bed with the flu, his office said, reports AP.

Yeltsin was recuperating at his Gorky-9 residence outside Moscow, spending most of his time in bed and receiving regular visits from his doctor, Sergei Mironov, the Interfax news agency said, citing the president's press service.

Yeltsin became ill Monday, only two weeks after returning to full time work. He had been largely sidelined for six months due to heart problems, which included bypass surgery on November 5.

His spokesman Sergei Yastrzhemsky has stressed that Yeltsin's latest illness, described both as a bad cold and the flu, was unrelated to his recent heart trouble.

The spokesman said Monday that Yeltsin would be canceling appointments for the next several days.

## GCC meet held

Bahrain, Qatar  
urged to stop  
war of words

RIYADH, Jan 8: Gulf Arab Foreign Ministers met in the Saudi capital on Tuesday to urge Bahrain and Qatar to stop their war of words over disputed islands, sandbanks and reefs, reports AFP.

Ministers from Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates met with their counterparts from Bahrain and Qatar in a bid to defuse tension over the disputed Hawar islands and nearby territory, Gulf officials said.

The six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) discussed the "principal elements" of a report on which an accord between Qatar and Bahrain would be based, said a statement issued after the meeting.

The six are due to meet again on Sunday in the Saudi capital to continue their work.

The ministers conducted "exhaustive consultations on a draft memorandum of understanding containing precise ideas on the way to solve any conflict emerging between GCC members," the statement said.

Newt Gingrich  
re-elected Speaker

WASHINGTON, Jan 8: A chastened Newt Gingrich, narrowly re-elected Speaker of the House of Representatives under a cloud of ethical questions, accepted the honour on Tuesday with a blanket apology for any behavior that may have given offense or caused controversy, reports Reuters.

"Let me say to the entire house that... to the degree I was too brash, too self-confident or too pushy, I apologize," Gingrich said in his acceptance speech to the House.

"It is my intention to do everything I can to work with every member of this congress," the conservative Georgia Republican said in an immediate, extended gesture of conciliation to minority democrats and to the handful of fellow Republicans who refused to support him for re-election.

As its first act upon convening, the new house voted Gingrich into a second two-year term as its Speaker but only after heated controversy over whether he should step aside pending a decision on what punishment he should receive for breach of House ethics rules.

16,000 die of TB  
in Nepal each yr

KATHMANDU, Jan 8: Some 16,000 people die each year of tuberculosis (TB) in Nepal, which also sees an average 50,000 new cases during the same period, a health conference here told, reports AFP.

Durga Singh Bam, the Director of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation TB Centre (STC) said "half of the new cases are highly infectious."

"The total number of TB patients in Nepal is estimated to be around 80,000," Bam said. Nepal's current population stands at 19.6 million.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the four-day 6th governing board meeting of the STC Tuesday, Bam added "Most TB patients belong to the most economically productive age group, thus posing a grave threat to the nation's social and economic well-being."



An Iraqi veiled girl carries a box containing food donated by French Humanitarian group Equilibre Tuesday. Ten trucks from the non-government organisation arrived in Baghdad carrying 200,000 dollars worth of food and medicine for Iraqi children. It is the first time a French group travels to Iraq to distribute food and medicine to children, suffering from sanctions imposed since 1990. — AFP/UNB photo

## Ross continues mediation efforts

'Israeli demand to delay troops  
pullback key obstacle to deal'

JERUSALEM, Jan 8: The PLO said on Tuesday an Israeli demand to delay by two years a promised troops' pullback from West Bank areas was a key obstacle to a deal on handing over most of Hebron town to Palestinian self-rule, reports Reuters.

US Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross continued his mediation efforts between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

Netanyahu said the sides had agreed on most points and it would soon be evident if a deal had been reached, he did not elaborate.

"We are in fact in the final stages of negotiations but I cannot tell you when we will conclude an agreement because we have been in the final stages of

negotiations for the last six to eight weeks and the decision not to close the agreement has essentially been a Palestinian decision," Netanyahu told Jewish leaders from abroad.

David Bar-Illan, Netanyahu's communications director, said the sides were wrangling over peace moves to follow Hebron.

Bar-Illan confirmed Israel wanted to postpone to 1999 the last of three Israeli redeployments from occupied rural West Bank areas which under a 1995 interim peace deal were to be completed by September 1997.

The last redeployment is a very, very contentious issue. Our interpretations are very far apart," he told Reuters.

Bar-Illan said Netanyahu proposed to Ross in a pre-dawn

meeting that Israel complete further West Bank pullouts by the spring of 1999, when the sides are slated to complete "final status" peace negotiations.

PLO officials quickly blasted the Israeli proposal as a violation of timetables set under the original peace deal signed with Israel's previous Labour-led government.

"This is an irresponsible proposal... the agreement specifically states that the last stage of further redeployments from the West Bank be completed by September 7, 1997" said negotiator Hassan Asfour.

Arafat spokesman Marwan Kanafani said the further redeployment issue was the focus of a "tense" meeting between Arafat and Ross in Gaza on Tuesday evening.



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (L) and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher (R) smile at a question posed by a reporter Tuesday at UN headquarters in New York. The meeting between the two was an opportunity for Christopher to congratulate Annan on his election to the Office of the UN Secretary General. — AFP/UNB photo

## Christopher assures Annan

## US to pay its hefty debt to UN soon

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 8: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher Tuesday gave "private assurances" to new UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that the United States would soon pay its hefty debt to the world body, reports AFP.

Speaking at a meeting of the two officials, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns told Journalists that "vigorous reform" within the United Nations would help convince the Republican majority in Congress to free the funds.

He said the outgoing secretary of state assured Annan that payment of the 1.3 billion

dollars in accumulated areas is "at the top of our agenda."

"We don't take pride in being a debtor," he said, adding that the US administration was "working closely with Congress" to try to settle the debt.

"The United States wants and should meet its financial obligations," Burns said.

He did not say when Annan would make his first official visit to Washington, but a UN source told AFP it should be some time between January 20 and 25, just after the celebrations marking the inauguration of President Bill Clinton's second term.

Christopher, who will step down at the end of the month, congratulated Annan on his election as secretary general, and said Washington had "great confidence" in him.

Unlike his predecessor Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Annan enjoys strong support from Washington, and Christopher said Tuesday Annan's nomination marked "a positive turning point."

Burns said the United States believed it was time to "renew a close relationship" with the United Nations. "We believe we should be centrally involved with the United Nations," Burns said.

Georgia offers enriched  
uranium for sale

TBILISI, Georgia, Jan 8: Stuck with a cache of highly enriched uranium from Soviet times, Georgian officials are offering the radioactive material for sale — as long as it's not for military purposes, reports AP.

"We are open to all proposals, except for those from rogue regimes," said Georgy Kharadze, director of Georgia's Physics Institute. We are categorically against selling this fuel to someone who pursues military goals."

The uranium-235 was used for scientific projects involving a research nuclear reactor built in the late 1950s at the institute just outside Tbilisi, the capital. It was left there when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

The Georgian government acknowledges that it wants to get rid of the uranium, but has not released details about possible sales.

Last year, the institute sold about 11 pounds (five kilograms) of uranium 235 to Uzbekistan for 20,000 dollars Kharadze said. The institute has about 9.5 pounds (4.3 kilo-

grams) of the uranium left — enough to build a nuclear weapon, according to Shukri Abramidze, head of the institute's Centre for Applied Research.

William Potter, a nuclear expert at the Monterey (California) Institute of International Studies, agreed the Georgian uranium could be used for weapons production.

The material available in Georgia fits the top end of the line — highly, highly enriched uranium," said Potter, who specialises in the former Soviet union.

Potter noted that Georgia would be violating the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which it signed, if it sells the highly enriched uranium to any country whose nuclear facilities are not under the full oversight of the International Atomic Energy Agency. India, Pakistan and North Korea are among those in that category.

Kharadze denied reports that the institute has been approached by Iran, which is receiving help from Russia to build a nuclear power plant.

LTTE storms army  
bunker : 5 killed

COLOMBO, Jan 8: Tamil Tiger guerrillas stormed an army bunker in northern Sri Lanka killing five security personnel and wounding another 15, the Defence Ministry said today, reports AFP.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) gunmen attacked the defence line in Vavuniya district on Tuesday as the army kept up an operation against the rebels in the east of the country.

The Defence Ministry said there were casualties among the Tiger attackers but gave no details.

The army is conducting a search-and-destroy mission against the LTTE in the coastal district of Batticaloa, officials said.

The LTTE is leading a drawn out campaign for independence in northern and eastern Sri Lanka where the two million

Tamil minority is concentrated.

More than 50,000 people have been killed in fighting in the past 24 years.

Tunisia for lifting  
ban on Libya

TUNIS Jan 8: Tunisia on Tuesday asked for the lifting of an international embargo against Libya and called instead for a "peaceful solution" to its North African neighbour's problems, reports AP.

In his annual New Year diplomatic speech, Tunisian President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali said it was time for the world to lift the sanctions.

"A peaceful solution must be found to the embargo imposed on Libya after this country responds to the requirements of the international community," Ben Ali said.

## Off the Record

## 'J' aime la France'

PARIS: Woody Allen loves France. So does Claudia Schiffer. Even Mickey Mouse is ready to pledge his affection to the land of the Eiffel Tower and Disneyland Paris, reports AP.

French tourism officials on Tuesday unveiled 14 television ads with celebrities gushing, "J' aime la France."

The ads feature Allen, Schiffer, Tina Turner, Ray Charles, Roger Moore, Julio Iglesias and others saying "I love France" in different parts of the country, from the Mediterranean to Paris.

"It's good to know that millions of people in the world love France from the bottom of their heart, as one person," Tourism Minister Bernard Pons said.

## All on New Year's day

GREENWOOD, Wisconsin: It was no easy feat, but Alice Olson set a triple-play record that has stood for 50 years, reports AP.

Mrs. Olson gave birth to her first son, Gerald, on New Year's Day, 1943. Her second boy, Duane, arrived Jan. 1, 1945. The third child, Richard, entered the world the first day of 1947.

"We're still the world's New Year trio, and it has yet to be repeated anywhere," said Gerald Olson, who turned 54 last week.

"I've kept my ears open. Nothing has ever come anywhere close to this."

When Alice and Daniel Olson's third son arrived, his birth was heralded with headlines like "Every Other New Year's Day."

Mrs. Olson said that after that, her husband got a little teasing every March about planning another New Year's Day baby. But the couple's two other children — both girls — broke the cycle.

Did Darwin have  
panic disorder?

CHICAGO: To most, Charles Darwin was an adventuresome 19th century naturalist whose theory of evolution shook the scientific world, reports AP.

But scholars have long known about another Darwin, haunted by mysterious maladies no long after he returned home to England after his famous voyage aboard the HMS Beagle in the 1830s.

In Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association, two doctors offer a possible posthumous diagnosis: panic disorder, a common and often treatable form of anxiety. And one, they suggest, that may actually have helped make him a pioneer.

"From the writings of Darwin himself, as well as biographical materials, we conclude that he may have suffered from pan in order with agoraphobia," a fear of open spaces, wrote Thomas J. Barloon, a radiologist, and Russell Noyes, a psychiatrist. Both are at the University of Iowa College of Medicine in Iowa City.

Panic disorder is a chronic mental illness characterised by sudden attacks of fear, accompanied by a variety of physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, dizziness, trembling and intestinal distress — all symptoms Darwin himself described in his various writings, the authors wrote.

It can be treated with psychotherapy and medication. "His illness had its onset at the age of 28 years, which is typical for panic," they wrote. "Events, such as formulation of his evolutionary theory, which he feared would bring him into conflict with the British scientific establishment, may have contributed to the onset of his symptoms."

## Opposition to seek criminal charges against Serbian govt

BELGRADE, Jan 8: Slobodan Milosevic's political foes accused some of his closest associates Tuesday of organising police beatings of demonstrators, and said their lawyers would pursue criminal charges against them, reports AP.

The Serbian capital was quiet as people celebrated Christmas according to the Orthodox calendar. On Monday night, Christmas Eve, more than 200,000 people turned out for a combination protest march and holiday celebration.

The evening was marred by an explosion, likely caused by a grenade on the grounds of the headquarters of a party allied with Milosevic. No one was hurt in the blast at offices of the Yugoslav United Left, the party of Milosevic's wife, Mirjana Markovic.

Zajedno, the opposition coalition whose name means

together, has been behind seven weeks of protests since courts and election commissions controlled by the Serbian leader annulled November 17 local elections that the opposition won.

The coalition said in a statement its lawyers would seek criminal charges against Interior Minister Zoran Djindjic and his assistant Radovan Stojic — both of whom are very close to Milosevic — because of the beating of demonstrators last month in Serbia, the dominant republic of Yugoslavia.

Milosevic last month deployed thousands of police to try to curb the protests. On December 27, riot police and dozens of people in civilian clothes clubbed smaller groups of demonstrators as well as reporters dispersing from a daily

protest. Dozens were injured. Zajedno claimed that its own investigation showed the action was organised and ordered by Sokolovic. The coalition also identified people it said took part in clubbing of the protesters, including some police commanders.

Under Yugoslav law, public prosecutors are responsible for filing criminal charges. If they do not act, citizens have the right to file charges directly. Prosecutors and courts are loyal to Milosevic, and it seemed unlikely that the officials would be prosecuted.

A delegation of Belgrade students, who also have been protesting against Milosevic, met Monday with Sokolovic but he did not agree to their demand to pull police from the streets. The students warned that as of Thursday, they would no longer

back off when confronted by the police.

The students called off their daily march for Tuesday because of the Christmas holiday, but Zajedno leaders were planning to lead a protest later in the day.

Students did, however, win assurances from the Yugoslav army on Monday that it would not use force against the demonstrators, as it did in March 1991. There have been signs that army is increasingly turning against Milosevic, who has built up the police force at the expense of the army.

There were no police on the streets Monday night, and the crowd that gathered was one of the largest since the protests began.

A big Christmas tree and traditional oak branches for the Orthodox holiday decorated Republic Square, where opposi-

tion supporters gathered for a walk to the capital's biggest cathedral.

Protesters streamed through downtown to St. Sava Cathedral, where Patriarch Pavle followed the Christmas custom of burning oak branches and offered holiday greetings.

In their strongest attack ever, Serbian Orthodox Church leaders assailed Milosevic last week for "crushing the will of the people" and fomenting civil strife.

There was no immediate reaction Tuesday to the blast at the headquarters of Markovic's neo-Communist party. Opposition leaders accused the party of staging the blast itself to give the government an excuse to crack down. The party in the past has urged a get-tough approach with the protesters.