US seeks Russia's help

Iraq dismisses inspectors' right

to enter presidential palaces

Cold wave claims 5 in India: At least five people have died from a cold wave sweeping northern India, press reports said yesterday, AFP reports from New

Three of the deaths took place Tuesday and Wednesday in the northern desert state of Rajasthan while two men froze to death while sleeping on the pavement of the national capital.

PIA sr executive killed in Pakistan: Unidentified men shot and killed a senior executive of the national flag carrier Pakistan International Airlines (PIA)

Wednesday, police said, AFP reports from Karachi.
Witnesses said Hasan Musa, 45, was parking his car in front of his office in the city's eastern district when three men riding a motorbike opened fire on him from close range. Musa received four bullets in the chest and two in the neck and died on way to hospital, doctors said.

Blast kills 8 Burundian soldiers: Eight Burundian soldiers and a local official were killed when their vehicle detonated an anti-tank mine, an army spokesman

said Thursday, AP reports from Bujumbura. Spokesman Lt. Col Isaie Nibizi blamed Hutu rebels for planting the mine which exploded Wednesday on the road to Mubimbi, 25 kilometres (15 miles) south of the capital Bujumbura. "Anti-tank mines continue to explode, even though the security situation is improving," Nibizi said.

Longest undersea tunnel in Japan: Japan opened the world's longest undersea highway tunnel Thursday, cutting 80-kilometre from the journey between cities on opposite sides of Tokyo Bay, AP reports from Tokyo.

Provincial governors on the two sides said the new 1.48 trillion yen (12 billion dollars) "Aqualine" expressway, which includes a 9.5-km stretch under the bay, would boost commerce. Sentaro Ohba, representative of a civil group campaigning for clean air in Kawasaki city, said, "We fear that with increased traffic, the atmospheric pollution will be getting worse."

9 killed in China road mishap: A chain-reaction crash involving more than 40 vehicles on a fogshrouded highway outside Beijing killed nine people and injured 34 others, a newspaper reported Thursday, AP says from Beijing.

The accident occurred at 8 am on Wednesday on a section of the heavily travelled expressway between the Chinese capital and the port city of Tianjin, the Beijing Evening News said. It did not give any other details about the accident. Unusually heavy fog in the Beijing area on Wednesday and Thursday reduced visibility to a few dozen yards (metres), forcing airlines to cancel or delay some flights at the capital airport.

Flights resume at Beijing Airport: Flights resumed midday yesterday at Beijing Airport where a thick fog since the previous evening had left 14,000 people stranded, aviation authorities said, AFP reports from Beijing. Three international flights took off around midday and several flights were due to land later in the afternoon.

Military-style bombs found in China: Construction workers digging a trench for a power line unearthed a cache of 2,500 small military-style bombs in a district of Beijing, a newspaper reported, AP says from Beijing.

Security forces excavated the bombs in the city's Xuanwu district, but haven't figured out where they came from, the Thursday edition of the Xinmin Evening News reported. The bombs — 20 centimetres (8 inches) long and 6 centimetres (2 1-2 inches) wide — appeared to be military but it wasn't clear when or where they were made, the newspaper said.

Bomb attack kills 1 in S Lebanon: A member of the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army (Sula) militia was killed in an attack by Hezbullah guerillas in South Lebanon this morning, both parties said, AFP reports from Marijayoun.

Hezbullah said fighters from its armed wing Islamic resistance set off a bomb early yesterday as an SLA patrol was passing near the Kfarfalus crossing point between the Israeli-occupied buffer zone in South Lebanon and the rest of the country "causing deaths and injuries." The SLA confirmed the explosion and said one of its men was killed.

2 Apollo 1 astronauts awarded: Two US astronauts who died in a fire as Apollo 1 underwent preflight tests 30 years ago were given the Space Medal of Honour on Wednesday by President Bill Clinton, AFP reports from Washington.

The honour, the highest accorded to US astronauts, went to Lieutenant Commander Roger Chaffee and Lieutenant Colonel Edard White, who died in a fire on Jan 27, 1967 as part of the US effort to go to the moon.

Japan's opposition chief re-elected: Japan's main opposition New Frontier Party re-elected its leader Thursday to another two-year term as president at a party convention, AP says from Tokyo.

In a ballot of 414 New Frontier Party Diet members and local representatives, party head Ichiro Ozawa received 230 votes. while his challenger, former Management and Coordination Agency chief Michihiko Kano, tallied 182 votes.

Tories agree to reveal source of party funds

LONDON, Dec 18: The opposition Conservatives agreed on Wednesday to lift the veil of mystery surrounding how they get the money to operate the best-funded political party in Britain, reports Reuter.

Party leader William Hague said he would comply with a request from a high-powered committee looking into standards in British public life for a list of all donations, of 5,000 pounds (8,250) dollar or more since 1992.

Although the committee is not asking for donors to be named, the party's move does mean that for the first time it will be possible to see how much of the Conservatives money comes from abroad.

Their opponents have constantly complained that while in power between 1979 and April this year, the Conservatives were accepting money

The committee on standards in public life, chaired by Sir Patrike Neil, wrote to all British political parties on Wednesday asking for a list of major dona-

from rich foreign businessmen.

tions dating back to the 1992 general election.

It said it did not want the names of donors but did want to know what sort of people or bodies they were - including whether they were foreigners. "We will provide the Neil

committee with all the information that they have asked for," Hague told parliament. Prime Minister Tony Blair

had already agreed to publish such a list. Blair was rocked recently by

revelations that the boss of formula one motor racing had given his Labour Party one million pounds before the May one election. Blair met the businessman,

Bernie Ecclestone, after the election and agreed to amend government policy on ending the sponsorship of sporting events by tobacco firms by of fering formula one a temporary exemption.

Nadir is now a fugitive from British justice in the Turkishcontrolled northern sector of



Iraqi people and a group of handicapped children demonstrate in front of the UN offices in Baghdad on Wednesday, to protest against the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq since 1990. They said in one of their slogans "Stop the sanctions and let us smile". - AP/UNB photo

Aziz also repeated Irag's demand that the UN inspectors stop using an American U-2 spy plane for their monitoring and suggested that an Iraqi aircraft or one from another country could be used by the teams.

Meanwhile, mindful of Russia's influence in Baghdad, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright appealed to her Russian counterpart Wednesday for further help in pressuring Iraq to allow full access to UN

weapons inspectors. Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov promised to help, but said Russia would not support the use of force if diplomatic efforts fail to persuade Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to allow the search of sites he has designated "palaces."

Experience teaches us that Saddam Hussein will meet our demands only if we are united and firm," Albright told a joint NATO-Russia council after meeting privately with Primakov at an hour-long break-

Albright called for negotiating persistence to gain UN Security Council support to force Iraq to provide inspectors unfettered access. But, like President Clinton, she held out the possibility of military action. "We must persist in diplo-

matic efforts to secure Iraqi compliance, without ruling out other options if diplomacy Albright told the NATO-Russia permanent Joint Council. "Foreign Minister Primakov has played a vital role in this effort and Russia's support will remain critical."

Primakov stressed that Russia won't go beyond diplomacy. "We are against the use of force," he said at a news conference. "I think in this regard we have a solid majority (on the Security Council) behind this position. At the same time, we feel Iraq must work with the special UN commission."

Inspectors must certify that Iraq has dismantled its weapons of mass destruction before the council will lift tough economic sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which led to the Persian Gulf War.

Clinton for keeping US troops in Bosnia

NATO forces capture 2 indicted Croat war criminals

SARAJEVO, Dec 18: NATO forces captured two Bosnian Croats indicted by the UN war crimes tribunal early Thursday in central Bosnia. One of the suspects was shot three times and seriously wounded after he resisted arrest, reports AP.

Dutch troops led the early morning operation while American forces provided undisclosed backup, officials at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Belgium, said.

No NATO forces were injured, but spokesman Maj. Peter Clarke in Sarajevo said one suspect was hospitalized and the second was en route to the international tribunal's prison in The Hague, Netherlands.

The arrests came about 1 am (0100 GMT) near the Croat-held central Bosnian town of Vitez, 50 kilometres (30 miles) northwest of Sarajevo, Clarke said.

The wounded suspect was identified as Vlatko Kupreskic, one of three brothers indicted by the tribunal in connection with massacres of Bosnian Muslim villagers near Vitez in

Meanwhile President Bill Clinton is preparing to an-nounce he will keep US troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of a NATO-led force past next June, when their mission is set to expire, administration officials said Wednesday.

Anti Taliban coalition group ready for ceasefire

BAMIYAN, Afghanistan, Dec 18: The leader of one of the coalition groups fighting the Taliban militia said Wednesday they were prepared to discuss a ceasefire with the Islamic militia, reports AFP.

Karim Khallili, the head of the Hezb-I-Wahdat, said "We have no objection to a ceasefire," but added that "depends on the Taliban." Despite a Taliban blockade

on the province of Bamiyan, which has left some 160,000 people in danger of starvation, the opposition was prepared to "initiate a peaceful solution" to the civil war. "We do not believe there can

be a military solution as no one is capable of imposing it," he

He also said the agreed with an international arms embargo on Afghanistan, provided it was total and verifiable.

Khallili also hit out at the Taliban for the blockade which he said was designed to "break" bad.

the people's opposition." He made his comments as the United Nations began an airlift of badly needed food supplies to the province.

The first five tonnes of wheat arrived at Bamiyan's freezing airport from the northwest Pakistan city of Peshawar aboard two Antonov 32 transport planes chartered by the World Food Programme (WFP).

A total of 1,500 tonnes of food is to be airlifted following the refusal by the Taliban militia to allow road convoys through its lines, arguing the food would be used by Wahdat fighters.

Khallili also said relations between the opposition coalition members were "very friendly." But observers said relations

between the Wahdat, the forces of former President Burhanuddin Rabbani and those of general Abdul Rashid Dostam were

Kumaratunga plans to go ahead with election in Jaffna

COLOMBO, Dec 18: Disregarding protests from democratic Tamil parties, the Sri Lankan government has decided to go ahead with elections in the government-controlled areas of the Tamil-majority Jaffna peninsula, India Abroad News Service.

BAGHDAD, Iraq, Dec 18: Baghdad stood defiant Wednes-

right to enter presidential

ton that it is ready to fight if

erately agitating the situation

The United States has

strongly backed a UN demand

tors to inspect some of Saddam

Hussein's 40-odd palaces,

using to hide key information

on its banned weapons pro-

said Tuesday in Washington

that the United States would

"consider other options" if in-

"I wouldn't rule out any-

Aziz brushed aside the UN

demand, saying Wednesday that

the palaces are "not connected

or related to disarmament" and

would not be opened to inspec-

States is "threatening as they

had threatened in the past, we

simply tell them that we are not

scared and we are ready to de-

fend our sovereignty and our se-

tack US targets or citizens if

the United States struck Iraq.

Aziz said: "I am not in a posi-

tion to discuss these tactics. I

am not the commander-in-

Asked if Baghdad would at-

thing. I never have and I won't"

Clinton told a news conference.

spections are obstructed.

US President Bill Clinton

attacked, reports AP.

sons."

grammes.

tions.

curity."

chief."

The United National Party (UNP), the main opposition at the centre, has decided to boycott the elections, saying the violent atmosphere in the north was not conducive to holding polls. The Tamil parties agree. but have said that if the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga was determined to hold elections despite their warnings, they would con-Among other reasons for the

Tamil parties' protest is that many Jaffna people have been displaced due to the government-LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) clashes and the voter lists are inaccurate. "Although the government assured that enough security will be provided, we are sure that there will be violence," a spokesman for the Tamil United Liberation



Chandrika Kumaratunga

Now that the government is determined to complete elections in Jaffna municipality and 16 other local bodies in Jaffna and Kilinochchi districts before the golden jubilee of independence, which falls on February 4, 1998, Tamil parties

have refuctantly agreed to field

Front (TULF) said.

The TULF, which had a monopoly in Tamil politics until the entry of militant groups in the early 1980s, has decided to enter the fray and announced the candidature of Sarojini Yogeswaram, widow of party stalwart A. Yogeswaran who was slain by the LTTE, for the post of Jaffna Mayor. The filing of nominations, which began on December 16.

will close on December 23. Election Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake said. "Polling will be held within four to six weeks thereafter," he

The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), which is the biggest Tamil party in Parliament with nine seats, will contest seats in all the local bodies, party leader Douglas Devananda said.

Other Tamil parties - the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) - will also field candidates.



Air Canada Flight 646 lays in the woods at the Fredericton airport Wednesday. Thirtyfive of the 42 people aboard the plane were rushed to a hospital after the crash lave Tuesday, and eight remained hospitalised Wednesday, said Air Canada President Lamar - AP/UNB photo Durrett.

Parties continue frantic search for allies in Indian polls

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: Indian political parties continued their frantic search for allies even as a squabble in the Election Commission clouded the world's largest poll to be held next year, reports India Abroad News Service.

United only by the desire to beat the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which has been given the edge by analysts, two main rival formations were trying to patch up winning combinations out of a plethora of national and regional par-

But with the caretaker United Front (UF) coalition and the Congress party riddled with desertions, things were looking up for the BJP, said analysts. The most successful in the last general election less than two years ago, the BJP faced the comforting prospect of a divided opposition in India's biggest states.

However, media attention

was diverted by the unseemly public quarrel between two members of the three-man Election Commission. Election Commissioner GVG Krishnamurthy had gone on protest leave after the Chief Election Commissioner MS Gill publicly rapped him for acting on his own. Gill was upset that Krishnamurthy had asked the BJP ally Shiv Sena, the ruling party in western Maharashtra state. to hold in-house polls without consulting him.

Krishnamurthy later accused Gill of political partisanship and the two were advised by President KR Narayanan not to let their differences affect the smooth conduct of the general election.

India's electorate is estimated at 600 million who will cast votes in nearly a million polling booths across the country. Around 4.5 million people are expected to be deployed for the smooth conduct of the poll

In the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh which elects 85 MPs to the 545-member Lok Sabha, lower house of Parliament, the BJP looked set to face a triangular contest with Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) on one side and the pro-Dalit (lower caste) Bahujan Samaj Party and the Congress on the

other. In Bihar, which chooses 54 MPs to the Lok Sabha, both the main UF constituent Janata Dal (JD) and the Congress had split with former state Chief Minister and leader of the JD breakaway group, Laloo Prasad Yadav, finally parting ways with the UF. Yadav, on parole after a four-month jail term for his alleged role in the Bihar government financial fiddles during his term, was making things difficult for the UF by tying up his party with the BSP

and the Congress in an anti-

BJP alliance from which the UF was excluded. Yadav hit out at two senior

Bihar JD leaders, Railway Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, JD working president Sharad Yaday and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda, declaring that his Rashtriya (National) Janata Dal (RJD) stood for "Real Janata Dal". Although caretaker Prime Minister IK Gujral, also in the JD, is said to have a soft corner for Yadav, he gave in to pressure from UF partners who have long been demanding that the three RJD ministers in the gov-

ernment be asked to leave. The UF received another setback in the eastern state of Orissa, which elects 21 MPs. when the state unit of the JD split and began cosying up to

The Congress, rated third runner behind the BJP and the UF in pre-poll surveys, was in trouble in Bihar, Karnataka and West Bengal. In Bihar, for-mer state Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra had hived off another outfit from the Congress party, while former Karnataka Chief Minister S Bangarappa had again deserted the Congress.

In West Bengal, firebrand Congress leader Mamata Banerjee announced that her new Trinamool Congress would contest the election on its own. Banerjee's revolt had also for the first time made Rajiv Gandhi's widow Sonia play a mediatory role in party affairs as she reportedly tried to persuade Banerjee not to weaken the Congress.

The most sought after ally was the BSP. Although it had just 11 members in the dissolved Lok Sabha, the BSP is popular with the sizeable Dalit population of north India, specially in Uttar Pradesh, central Madhya Pradesh and northern Punjab.

Voting begins in S Korea

SEOUL, Dec 18: South Koreans began voting today in a presidential election which political analysts forecast could be the closest in the country's history, reports Reuter.

State-run television showed a line of older voters waiting for polling stations to open in the southeastern city of Taegu, the long-time power base of South Korea's governing party. Voting hours were 6 am

(2100 GMT, Wednesday) to 6 pm (0900 GMT) for an election largely overshadowed by a financial crisis which forced this proud nation to accept IMF assistance earlier this month. In past elections, many peo-

ple voted early and used the rest of the day as a holiday. Weather forecasters predicted a sunny day and television broadcasts showed many voters dressed in hiking clothes.

Thursday was a national holiday. About 55,000 police were placed on alert across the country from Wednesday to ensure

voting went smoothly.

Albright, Israeli PM begin ME peace talks in Paris

PARIS, Dec 18: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright began talks in Paris today on the stalled peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, reports

But little was expected from

he talks since Israeli government hardliners barred Netanyahu from presenting the US diplomat with details of a promised troop withdrawal from the West Bank. After a two-hour meeting

with Netanyahu at the Israeli embassy in Paris, Albright was due in London later today to pursue talks with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. It is the third time since

November that Albright holds talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders in a US attempt to revive the peace process.

Malnutrition kills 13 children per hr in Latin America, Caribbean

MEXICO CITY, Dec 18: Malnutrition kills 13 children under 5 years old every hour in Latin America and the Caribbean, a United Nations official said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Marta Mauraz, regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), said countries in the region had the technology and resources to eradicate hunger by 2010 but lacked the right politicians.

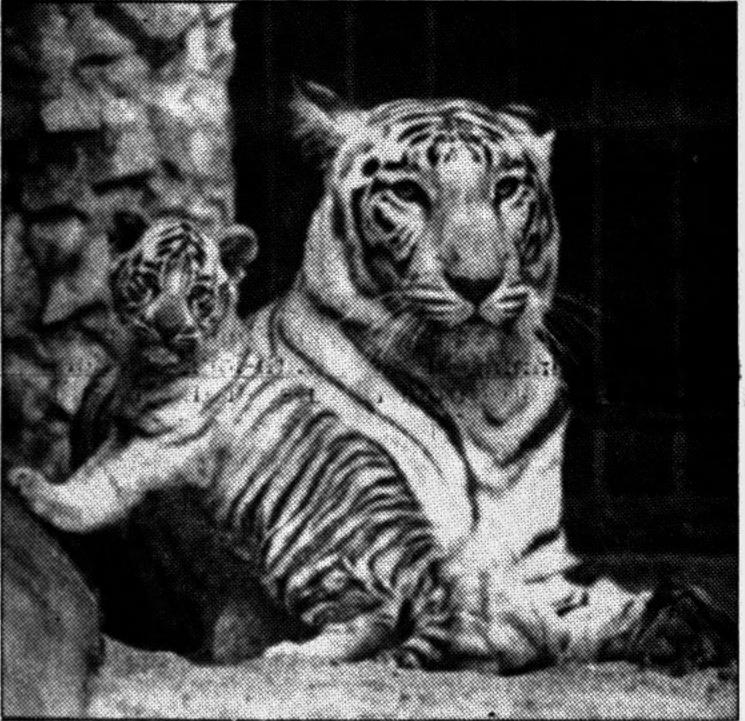
"What v." don't have is the pontical will," Mauraz, a Chilean, told a news conference in Mexico City. Each year, she said, 114,000

children from Latin America and the Caribbean die for lack of enough to eat. About 633 million children worldwide suffer mainutrition, she added. Mauraz was in Mexico to present UNICEF's world report

on the state of childhood. She said progress had been made in UNICEF's 28-year effort against hunger but "We can't rest on our laurels."

In 1970 half of all children in the region lacked proper nutrition, she said, while today there are six healthy children for every one lacking enough to

Off the Record



A white tiger cub's attention is distracted as photographers aim their cameras at the Calcutta Zoo, Wednesday. With the cub is its mother Gayeti. The cub born on October 16, 1997, raises the number of white tigers in the zoo to nine. The cub was brought out for public viewing for the first - AP/UNB photo time on Wednesday.

Most expensive after Waterworld

LOS ANGELES: "Titanic", Hollywood's most ambitious and expensive film ever, will sail onto US screens Friday, nearly six months after its original opening date, reports AFP.

Not surprisingly for Hollywood, the film was over budget. Numerous obstacles pushed the cost of Canadian Director James Cameron's film from its original 110 million dollars to reportedly more than 200 million dollars, and possibly as much as 285 million dollars.

Co-produced by paramount and 20th century fox studies. "Titanic" broke the previous record set in 1995 by Kevin Costner's 200-million dollar "Waterworld." To recover their costs, including a massive promotional

budget, the movie would have to hauf in nearly 400 million dollars, according to the formula typically used by studios. No one doubts that US filmgoers will pour into movie theatres to see the latest creation by Cameron, the man who directed "terminator 2: Judgment Day" and "The Abyss" but a for-

Fatherly advice

eign audience is less certain.

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil: The father of an 11-year-old rape victim, who won court approval to have an abortion, has decided she will not have the procedure, a doctor said Wednesday, reports AP.

The abortion had been scheduled for Wednesday, but the girl's father backed out at the urging of a priest and a retired obstetrician, the Jornal do Brasil news agency said.

The girl, who has not been identified because of her age, was raped four months ago in Sapurcaia, a town 130 kilometres north of Rio de Janeiro. She was 10 at the time. On Monday, judge Luiz Olimpio Mangabeira Cardoso

authorised the abortion — a decision that stirred debate in this largely Roman Catholic country. "He (the girl's father) said he didn't want his daughter to have the abortion anymore because he said she might be at risk," said Dr. Carmen Athaide of Rio's Fernando Magalhaes Maternity

Hospital. Athaide disagreed that the abortion would have endangered the girl, saying going through with the pregnancy actually puts

the girl at greater risk. "As her legal guardian, her father has the right to decide whether or not she should go through with the abortion," the doctor said.

Incredible

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, California: A 13-year-old girl hiked nearly 20 miles (30 kilometers) across the Mojave Desert in freezing temperatures to get help for her stranded mother and her young brother, an Air Force spokesman said, reports AP. The girl began her trek Thursday night when the family car broke down on the sprawling base best known for space shuttle

landings. The three, identified only as a military family, were returning from the desert city of Barstow, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) east of the base. The car ran out of gas.

"All three of them — the mother, the infant and the child started walking toward Edwards Air Force Base," said spokesman George Fox. "After a while the mother, carrying the baby, got tired and couldn't go any farther. So the 13 year-old continued on. "She must be really quite something." Fox said of the girl's

The 22-month-old boy was in serious condition Saturday at

the base hospital with hypothermia and frost bite to fingers and