



Pope John Paul II receives the traditional Roman Chalice from Mayor of Rome Francesco Rutelli, in the Jesuit church of Saint Ignatius of Loyola Wednesday, after celebrating as he does every New Year's Eve, the service of prayer and song named Te Deum Laudamus, after the ancient Christian hymn of praise and thanksgiving.

—AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

2 hurt in Jakarta chopper crash: A helicopter from the missionary aviation crashed on a training flight in Indonesia's easternmost province of Irian Jaya but the two people on board were not hurt, a report said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

The HU-500 helicopter crashed while conducting touch-and-go exercises in Pugina, in the central mountainous district of Jayawijaya at a early Wednesday afternoon, the Antara news agency said. The pilots on board, Len V Vingerden of the Netherlands and Denis Pengstrazer of the United States, escaped without injury, said Mathis Papazares, the airport head in the district capital of Wamena.

US concerned about jailed newsman: The United States on Wednesday expressed concern about an American journalist jailed in South Korea on charges of slander against a Seoul newspaper, Reuter says from Washington.

We have raised our concerns about the arrest with the appropriate Korean authorities' State Department deputy spokesman James Foley told reporters. He said Richard Choi, 49, a news anchor and talk show host for Radio Korea in Los Angeles was charged with malicious slander by the Korean daily newspaper Hankuk Ilbo for broadcasting "allegedly false rumours" that the newspaper was facing financial difficulties and might be taken over.

10 killed in Panama air crash: A Panamanian passenger plane crashed Wednesday over eastern Panama in poor weather killing all 10 on board, aviation official said. AFP reports from Panama city.

Six Panamanians and four US citizens died when the aircraft, operated by the Panamanian airline Aeotax, crashed in Kuna Yala one of the country's most popular tourist areas, said Eustacio Fabrega, director of Panama's civil aviation authority. "The aircraft crashed into a hill and burned and we are sure that there are no survivors," he told reporters.

Fire claims 8 in China: Eight people were killed and four injured when a fire ripped through an eight-storey commercial building in Changchun in north-eastern China near the North Korean border, it was reported yesterday. AFP says from Hong Kong.

More than 300 people were in the building when the fire broke out in an amusement arcade on the second floor, the semi official China news service said. At least 400 firemen were involved in fighting the blaze which started Tuesday evening and was not brought under control until Wednesday morning, the report said.

Blair promises better life in '98 for Britons

LONDON, Jan 1: Prime Minister Tony Blair, relaxing on a far away holiday island in the Indian Ocean, promised Britons today that life would be better for them in 1998, reports Reuter.

Blair who is spending the New Year holiday with his family in the Seychelles told readers of the tabloid Sun newspaper in a signed article "last year was a good year, this year can be better."

He vowed to forge ahead with a controversial reform of the welfare state saying "We cannot go on spending billions on economic failure when we need to be investing more in success."

But he promised the Labour government would not take money from people who have no other means of support but benefits."

In a separate New Year message issued through the Labour Party, Blair told the party faithful it is now eight months since we won the election, in those eight months we have been to make an impact on our country Britain is better."

International

Rafiq Tarar sworn in as Pakistan's 9th president

ISLAMABAD, Jan 1: Conservative Islamist Rafiq Tarar was sworn in Thursday as Pakistan's ninth president, despite a court challenge next month that could disqualify him, reports AP.

In a simple ceremony at the palatial white marble presidency, Tarar, wearing the traditional Pakistani dress of baggy pants and long shirt, took the oath of office.

Largely a ceremonial post, the job of president became vacant on Dec. 2, after a protracted power struggle that paralysed the country and had many people fearing a military takeover.

The president and Supreme Court Chief Justice waged a bitter struggle against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his two-thirds majority in Parliament.

In the end President Faoq Leghari resigned, the chief justice was removed and Sharif emerged a clear winner.

Tarar, a virtual unknown until his nomination for president by Sharif, is a former justice on the Lahore High Court.

Opposition lawmakers, led by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, have called Tarar a "puppet" of Sharif's.

Liberals and human-rights activists in Pakistan say his

judgements while on the Lahore High Court do not bode well either for minorities or women.

He has spoken out against Pakistan's family laws, which give women the right of divorce and right to contest for custody of children.

He has publicly supported harsh Islamic punishments, like the amputation of limbs for theft and the death penalty for blasphemy. And he has written against the promotion of members of the minority Ahmedis sect of senior government jobs or appointed to the

Moi leading in Kenya polls

NAIROBI, January 1: With slightly over half of the constituencies reporting Thursday, incumbent President Daniel arap Moi was leading in Kenya's drawn-out general elections, reports AP.

Moi, 73, who is seeking a fifth, five-year term, led by more than 300,000 votes in unofficial results from 111 of 210 constituencies, the private Kenya Television Network reported.

But government officials and religious leaders in Pakistan say Tarar is being misrepresented.

Information Minister Mushahid Hussein called Tarar a "moderate".

Tarar won the presidential elections Wednesday handily.

In Pakistan the president is indirectly elected by lawmakers in the National Assembly, Senate and four provincial parliaments.

Tarar once remarked that women involved in these cases, are prone to lying." Jilani was quoted as saying in an article on Thursday in the English-language newspaper, The News.

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