

BRIEFLY



Congress supporters try to grab a Sonia Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi poster outside her house in New Delhi Tuesday. Sonia, widow of Rajiv, who was grandson of Nehru and son of Indira, has agreed to revive the party's sagging fortunes by campaigning in the forthcoming general elections. — AP/UNB photo

Quake shakes Japan: An earthquake measuring five on the Richter Scale hit the Tokyo region early yesterday, the Japanese Meteorological Agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo. It said the epicentre of the quake, which occurred at 2:17 am (17:17 GMT Tuesday), was 80 km (50 miles) underground. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage. NHK television said.

Earthquake hits Tibet: An earthquake measuring 5.6 on the Richter Scale shook a remote, mountainous area in Tibet early Wednesday morning. The official Xinhua news agency reported, AFP says from Beijing. There were no reports of casualties or damage, according to Xinhua. The region affected by the quake is a remote area on the northern Tibet plateau, in the Kokoshili mountain range.

Blast on bus claims 3 in Spain: Three people were seriously injured late Tuesday after an explosion on a bus in the southern Spanish city of Seville, an emergency worker said, AFP reports from Seville. A witness said the explosion was caused by a bomb the size of a gas cylinder carried aboard by a man who moments earlier had got out of a car which had stopped in front of the bus. The witness said the man was among those injured. A woman and an unidentified person were also hurt. There were only people on board the bus at the moment of the explosion. City security officials were not immediately able to list the cause of the blast.

Gunmen kill 2 in Miami: A gunman opened fire from an apartment balcony in a middle-class neighbourhood early Tuesday, killing two people and wounding two others, police said, AFP reports from Miami. The suspect, a white man in his 40s whose identity has not been released, began shooting shortly before 1 am (06:00 GMT) from unknown reasons said Patrick Brickman, spokesman for the Miami-Dade Police Department. In incident began when an office-duty policeman working as a security guard in a condominium alerted authorities about a small fire on the building's fourth floor. Shortly after, the guard called police about a sniper on the same floor.

Army officer kills col in Vietnam: A ranking army officer was killed after a senior commander opened fire in a military court building in Ho Chi Minh City, witnesses and newspapers said Wednesday, AP reports from Ho Chi Minh City. The gunman allegedly wounded a second soldier and then tried to kill himself. Col Vo Van Trung was shot several times and died after falling from a second floor balcony while trying to escape from the gunman, said a man who witnessed the Tuesday incident from a coffee shop across the street.

Ex-Khmer Rouge leader killed: A former Khmer Rouge commander who defected to the government army was shot dead after opening fire on military police at a security checkpoint, government officials said Wednesday, AP reports from Phnom Penh. Phong Pheap was shot by military police at a checkpoint in the Samrong Truong district of Kampong Speu province, 50 kilometers (30 miles) west of Phnom Penh, on Tuesday evening, his commander, Col. Huor Sarath, said at his cremation ceremony. Police asked to search Phong Pheap's truck, but he refused and opened fire, wounding one and destroying a car, said Huor Sarath.

Prison revolt ends in Brazil: Inmates threatening to kill seven hostages with makeshift knives released their captives Tuesday, ending a 30-hour uprising in a Brazilian prison, AP reports from Sao Paulo. "Thank God it's all over," Warden Jose Ruisuñero de Moraes, one of the hostages, said by phone. The eight inmates who held us hostage agreed to be transferred to other prisons that are less crowded. None of the hostages, which also included three guards and three employees, were injured, he said. The uprising began Monday while lunch was being served at the Monte Santo Prison in the northeastern state of Paraiba, near the city of Campina Grande.

Thousands defy ban to protest elections fraud in Guyana

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, Jan 14: Police fired tear gas on thousands of opposition supporters who defied a government ban Tuesday on street demonstrations to protest alleged elections fraud in Guyana, reports AP. Businesses and schools closed as at least 10,000 demonstrators, encouraged by opposition leader Desmond Hoyte to take to the streets peacefully, pushed past riot police and marched into downtown Georgetown. Several people were treated for tear gas inhalation, including a 7-week-old girl, after police gassed the crowd two blocks from Hoyte's home, police said. Opposition leaders urged the protesters to disperse in the afternoon. But some stayed behind, hurling rocks at police and piling burning tires along Regents Street, the city's main thoroughfare. Police did not fight back. At least 12 people were injured and 25 were arrested Monday in clashes with police and beatings by mobs of rampaging youths in the capital of the South American nation. The mayhem began after a high court judge dismissed a petition by the opposition People's National Congress that challenged the legitimacy of Janet Jagan's inauguration as president following December 15 elections. Former President Hoyte, who lost to Jagan, claims the election was rigged by Jagan's People's Progressive Party. Jagan, 77, is the US-born widow of former President Cheddi Jagan, who died last year. To stop the violence, Home Affairs Minister Samuel Hinds announced a one-month ban on street protests Tuesday. Hoyte urged his supporters to ignore it.

Bid to free kidnapers

Gunmen attack detention centre in Grozny

MOSCOW, Jan 14: About 100 gunmen attacked a Chechen government post in the capital Grozny on Tuesday in an unsuccessful bid to free four men being held as suspected kidnapers, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, reports AP. Several men were wounded in the 30 minutes of fighting, which included large-caliber machine guns and grenade launchers, officials said. Chechen authorities detained three of the attackers in the attack on the base located between downtown and Severny airport. Khunkar Israpilov, head of the Chechen anti-terrorist centre, was quoted as saying, "We're not losing the war, but the other side's gaining ground." Michelman said "but this right will survive because the alternative is unthinkable." Nine days before the 25th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in the 1973 Roe vs. Wade case, NARAL released its annual survey of such limitations and Michelman expressed alarm that 17 states have three or more abortion regulations in the last year. Eleven states enforce two restrictions on abortion, 12 states enforce on restriction and 11 states do not restrict abortion, the NARAL survey found.

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Talks with Clinton last chance to save peace process: Arafat Israel sets condition for troop withdrawal from West Bank

JERUSALEM, Jan 14: Israel decided on Tuesday not to carry out a troop pullback in the West Bank until the PLO meets commitments made a year ago in a US brokered document, and aide to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, reports Reuter. A senior Palestinian negotiator reacted angrily to what appeared to be a fresh Israeli ultimatum, accusing Netanyahu of trying to stall the long-delayed withdrawal further. The cabinet decided today that there can be no Israeli withdrawal before the Palestinians live up to their commitments according to the Hebron agreement and note for the record" David Bar-Illan, a top Netanyahu aide, told Reuters. The US negotiated note of the record accompanied the 1997 deal on the handover of most of the West Bank town of Hebron to Palestinian rule. Israel has accused the PLO of reneging on key pledges in the Hebron document, primarily to combat "systematically and effectively terrorist organisations and infrastructure" and to "complete the process of revising the Palestinian national charter." But the PLO says it has been making a genuine effort to curb attacks by Muslim militants and has already cancelled clauses in the charter which Israel contends for its destruction. "The important thing is that we believe that if the Palestinians keep their side of the bargain, we'll keep our side of the bargain," Netanyahu told reporters after the cabinet meet-

ing "it's a very simple idea — it's called a contract." The cabinet adopted the terms ahead of a meeting next Tuesday between Netanyahu and US President Bill Clinton to discuss the long-delayed pullback. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat also blasted the move and blamed Israel for the stalemate in the peace process. "Everything is frozen because until now the Israeli government has not come up with any positive initiative," Arafat told reporters. As the cabinet set its demands of the PLO, Israel remained on high alert over fears of attacks in its cities or ambush shootings at settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. Netanyahu has said "terrorist organisations" may strike before his talks with Clinton. Arafat has his own White House meeting with Clinton on January 22. AFP adds, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat warned Tuesday that next week's peace talks with US President Bill Clinton are the last chance to save the peace effort with Israel, official Jordanian television reported. Arafat is scheduled to meet Clinton on January 22, two days after the US president holds talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Arafat said there is "no doubt" that the talks represent "the last chance to save the peace process." He added: "I hope that Clinton will be able to convince Netanyahu about this issue."

Bid to bury victims Graveyard of violence-ravaged Algerian village to be extended

SIDI HAMED, Algeria, Jan 14: Survivors and relatives buried on Tuesday victims of a vicious massacre in Algeria in which more than 100 men, women and children were shot dead, blown up, burnt alive and slaughtered, reports Reuters. The graveyard at Sidi Hamed village, some 30 kms (20 miles) south of Algiers, had to be extended to accommodate the graves of the victims from Sunday night's carnage. The Algerian Interior Ministry on Tuesday denied with great firmness that the death toll in the massacre was more than 400, and stuck with the official figure of 103 dead and 70 wounded, including 10 in critical condition. The ministry, in a statement read on state-run radio, was reacting to Algerian newspapers reports that more than 400 civilians were killed in Sidi Hamed.



Jordanian King Hussein, right, and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat leaving the meeting room in Raghdam Palace on Tuesday. After three hours of talks concerning the Israeli peace process, following on from Arafat's latest meeting with US envoy Dennis Ross. — AP/UNB photo

Abortion rights activists losing ground in US

WASHINGTON, Jan 14: Abortion rights activists are losing ground in the United States, nearly 25 years after the landmark court case that guaranteed women's right to choose abortion, the head of one advocacy group said on Tuesday, reports Reuter. While the basic right to abortion is not now in jeopardy, regulations are biting away at access to the procedure, Kate Michelman, President of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL) said at briefing. "We're not losing the war, but the other side's gaining ground," Michelman said "but this right will survive because the alternative is unthinkable." Nine days before the 25th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in the 1973 Roe vs. Wade case, NARAL released its annual survey of such limitations and Michelman expressed alarm that 17 states have three or more abortion regulations in the last year. Eleven states enforce two restrictions on abortion, 12 states enforce on restriction and 11 states do not restrict abortion, the NARAL survey found.

US-led inspection team denied entry into Iraqi weapons sites

WASHINGTON, Jan 14: The White House said that the United States was not insisting on the "presence of any US national" on UN weapons inspection teams. But it said that was a decision for the United Nations, not Iraq, reports AP. UN Ambassador Bill Richardson said patience with Iraq "is running out in a lot of Security Council capitals. The Iraqis are really pushing this to the brink." Iraq's barring of the inspection team evoked memories of the events of last fall when Iraq prevented US monitors from entering the country, setting in motion a three-week period when there were no inspections at all. Iraq is "up to its old tricks," Richardson said. Presidential spokesman Mike McCurry predicted the current dust-up will end much the same way as the last one did. "We were in this situation before and he (Saddam) gained nothing from it," McCurry said. He said the United States will not allow the Iraqis to "pick and choose" weapons inspectors. At the Pentagon, spokesman Michael Doubleday said the US force in the area includes two Navy aircraft carriers and 21 Navy ships all told. About 350 warplanes are in the area, along with 28,800 military personnel. Meanwhile the chief UN weapons inspector said Tuesday he will take Chinese, Italian and Canadian representatives to Baghdad when he holds talks there next week on UN demands for unrestricted access to all suspected weapons sites. "I will be accompanied again by three commissioners — one from China, one from Canada, one from Italy," chief inspector Richard Butler told reporters after briefing the Security Council. "It's very clear the issues we'll discuss in Baghdad will continue to be those of access to presidential and sovereign sites."



Shi'ite Muslim leader Sajjid Naqvi, second from left, visits the Monipur cemetery in the heart of Lahore Tuesday, where 28 people were gunned down on Sunday during prayers. A Sunni Muslim militant group calling itself the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi took responsibility for the killing and promised further attacks against other members of Pakistan's minority Shi'ite community. — AP/UNB photo

Lankan govt preparing for elections in Jaffna

COLOMBO, Jan 14: The government is bracing for this month's crucial local elections it hopes will marginalise Tamil Tiger rebels in Sri Lanka's battle-scarred north, reports AP. "The government is going by the theory that if it manages to hold the elections successfully, it can show to an average Tamil that issues can be solved by the electoral process," said Jehan Perera, a political analyst. The Tamil Tigers, fighting an insurgency war since 1983, say they will not settle for anything less than an independent homeland in the north and east. The main rebel group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, accuse the Sinhalese majority of discriminating against ethnic Tamils and is expected to try to disrupt the Jan 29 balloting in northern Jaffna peninsula. "The government wants to hold the elections basically to marginalise the LTTE and to show that the Tamils can manage their affairs without the LTTE," Perera said. In addition to at least 20,000 troops stationed in Jaffna, 8,000 policemen will be posted in the peninsula to thwart any attempt by the rebels to disrupt the elections, said Mahinda Hettiarachchi, the senior superintendent of police. Despite the Tigers' opposition, other Tamil groups, including some former rebel organisations, have decided to take part in the elections. They are willing to consider government plans promising minority Tamils a greater say in running their affairs within the Sri Lankan union. The military captured the Jaffna peninsula, home to 500,000 Tamils, from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in May, 1996. Since then, the Tamil Tiger rebels have suffered more military reverses and were now restricted to smaller towns and northern and eastern jungles.

Off the Record

Spice Girls top another list

LOS ANGELES: The Spice Girls are "the only spices on the planet that have no taste" says the acid-tongued Blackwell, reports AP. On his 38th Annual Worst Dressed Women List, which also includes men in drag, the top 10 roll-call of fashion dishonours included television comic Ellen DeGeneres ("Throw those baggy fashion bombs back in the closet!"), Madonna ("Let's be blunt, yesterday's 'Evita' is today's 'Velveeta'") and cross-dressing rocker Marilyn Manson ("He looks like Alice Cooper doing 'Rosemary's Baby'"). Winners of the dubious distinction in the last two years were US basketball player Dennis Rodman and New York radio shock-jock Howard Stern. The acid-tongued Blackwell, who was designing dresses for the rich and famous when he originated the list in 1960, annually skewers celebrities in an effort he says is designed to encourage fashion consciousness. In announcing the latest, list Tuesday, Blackwell also commended "fabulous fashion independents," including Anne Heche, Roma Downey, Jada Pinkett, Courtney Love, Demi Moore, Viscountess Serena Lindley, Nicole Kidman, Tomi Braxton, Lisa McCree and Salma Hayek.

Be honest, or pay fine

SAN FRANCISCO: San Francisco began operating its newest streetcar this week on the honour system, reports AP. "So far, it seems to be working," said Municipal Railway chief Emilio Cruz. "Every time you buy and buying their tickets," he said. "But for those who want to take the risk of being ticketed, there will be officers on patrol." Riders do not have to show their 1 dollar tickets or transit passes to drivers, but must be prepared to prove they have paid for their ride if caught in spot checks. The penalty is a 126 dollars fine for a first offence.

Coming soon — 'The Versace Movie'

MIAMI: Action, movie make Menahem Golan has wrapped up filming on "The Versace Movie" in his bid to be the first to bring the murder of fashion designer Gianni Versace to the big screen, reports AP. The film is in the editing process and could be in theatres before spring, said Victoria Rose, a spokeswoman for Splash Films, which co-produced the film with Pan Am Pictures Inc. of Miami Beach. The movie features Italian actor Franco Nero as Versace, and newcomer Shane Perdue as Andrew Cunanan, who police say killed Versace. Cunanan killed himself just over a week after the Versace murder, holed up in a Miami Beach houseboat while law enforcement agents nationwide carried on a huge manhunt. The movie also features Steven Bauer as an FBI agent on the trail of Cunanan and was filmed entirely on South Florida. The houseboat where Cunanan killed himself, now partially sunk and in danger of being demolished by Miami Beach city officials, was not used in the Golan film. An Italian filmmaker purchased the rights to use the boat shortly after Cunanan's death. Movie companies began eyeing the Versace murder as grist for a film just days after the designer was shot to death on the steps of his Miami Beach mansion July 15. Pan Am Pictures chairman Sam Lupowitz said in September that he wanted to move fast, before the public lost interest in what was one of the year's most sensational murder cases. Golan, who wrote and directed the film, also made "Delta Force," several of the "Death Wish" sequels starring Charles Bronson, and "Entebbe: Operation Thunderbolt."

AI urges govts to make '98 year for women's rights

LONDON, Jan 14: Amnesty International urged governments Wednesday to make 1998 "a wonderful year for women's human rights" by ensuring that they implement commitments to end gender-based violence and promote real equality of the sexes, reports AP. "While violence against women is not the only obstacle preventing women's enjoyment of their human rights, it has been identified by the international community as a barrier to women's full enjoyment of their human rights in every single country of the world," it said in a new document. The international human rights organisation said violence is "a strong characteristic" of many human rights violations against women in the family and society. The London-based group called female circumcision "one of the most alarming manifestations of violence against women" and urged countries that condone the practice — 28 in Africa and several in the Middle East — to halt it. Reproduction is one aspect of personal privacy where the state often intervenes, Amnesty International said, calling for women's rights to reproductive health to be respected. It noted that governments attending the 1995 UN women's conference in Beijing registered the largest number of reservations about a section in the final document saying women have the right to control their own sexuality free of coercion. The governments justified their reservations on grounds of national culture and religion, it said.

Khun Sa reuniting army to resume war against Myanmar govt

MAE HONG SON, Thailand, Jan 14: The scattered troops of a defeated opium warlord are reuniting into a 15,000-man army to resume their war against the Myanmar government, a Thai security official said Wednesday, reports AP. The new guerrilla force recently acquired a huge cache of weapons and Myanmar watchers expect a sharp surge in fighting in the coming months, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. In the past three weeks, three ethnic Shan rebel forces, some formerly led by notorious opium warlord Khun Sa, have been working together and launching coordinated hit-and-run attacks on government troops throughout central and southern Shan State, the official said. A renewed guerilla war would be a setback for Myanmar's military government, which has touted ceasefires with many ethnic insurgents as one of its successes. The rebel attacks also discredit government claims that it is in full control of the area and show it is less likely to be able to stem the massive flow of drugs that originates in Shan State. For more than a decade, Khun Sa was the kingpin of the Golden Triangle — the rugged, opium rich region where the borders of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos converge. He commanded an army that ranged between 10,000-20,000 men and controlled the lion's share of the area's traffic in opium, the raw material for heroin. As time went by, however, rival opium armies sprang up, diminishing his power. More than 60 per cent of the heroin sold in the United States comes from the Golden Triangle. Burma was the world's largest heroin producer until 1997 when it was overtaken by Afghanistan. Khun Sa was indicted on heroin trafficking charges by a US court, and Myanmar's military government branded him a narco-terrorist, vowing to hang him if it captured him. Weakened by splits in his army, Khun Sa surrendered to the Burmese in January 1996. The government refused to extradite him to the US or to prosecute him under Myanmar's law. Instead, it pardoned the opium lord, installed him in a villa in Rangoon and granted him business concessions. Khun Sa, who is half-Chinese and also known as Chang Chifu, claimed his drug activities funded the Shan liberation struggle. Myanmar is one of the most ethnically diverse nations on earth, and the government has long struggled to bring unity — by negotiation or force — to the country. Many of Khun Sa's former soldiers were appalled by his decision to surrender. In small, separate bands they continued what seemed a futile fight against the Burmese army, which has grown from 185,000 in 1988 to more than 400,000 troops today. The three largest guerilla groups were the Shan United Revolutionary Army, which was not formerly controlled by Khun Sa, the Shan State Na-

China's move to support elderly population

BEIJING, Jan 14: Outlining the daunting task of caring for China's graying population, policymakers on Wednesday recommended turning to tradition: Make children support their elderly parents, reports AP. The 120 million Chinese aged 60 and older account for 10 per cent of the population — a proportion that is expected to rise to 25 per cent, or 410 million people, by 2050. At the same time, people are living longer, the official one-child policy means fewer children, the social welfare system is incomplete and incomes are still a fraction of those in developing countries, said Zhang Wenfan, president of the China National Committee on Aging. The problems of the aging are particularly acute in the countryside, home to about 75 per cent of the 60-and-over population. They are increasingly being left behind as the able-bodied young migrate to cities to find work, Zhang said. "Because the elderly population in our country is so large and the problems to solve so many, China cannot in the short term implement high welfare policies like some developed countries," Zhang said at a news conference. Encouraging families and communities to take care of their own will have to be the main thrust of Chinese policy, Zhang said. "China's traditional history and culture maintains that taking care of parents is the duty of children," Zhang said.

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