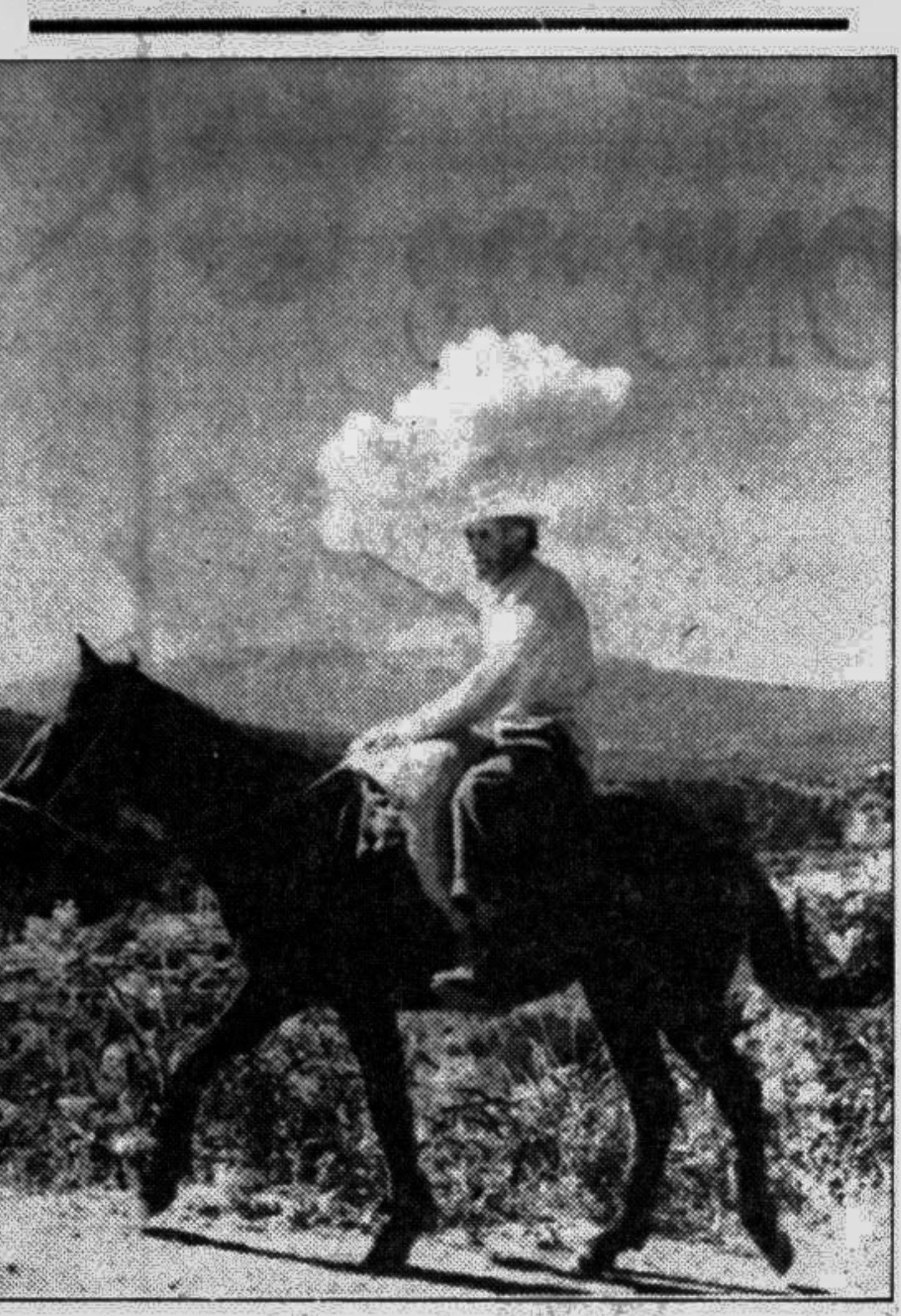


BRIEFLY

A man rides his horse in the Mexican town of Santiago Xalitzintla, as the volcano Popocatepetl spews steam in the background Tuesday. The volcano, located only 80 kms southeast of Mexico City, has been blasting steam and ash into the air several times a day during the past week, living up to its name — "Smoking Mountain" in the Aztec language. — AP/UNB photo

Israel to unveil upgraded MIG-21s:

Israel will unveil the first MIG-21 warplane upgraded by Israel's defence industry at the Aero-India airshow opening next week in Bangalore, the defence ministry said on Tuesday. AFP reports from Tel Aviv.

The Soviet-era fighter was upgraded by the state defence electronics firm Elbit working with Romania's aeroastar company, the ministry said.

Kenyan AIDS patient kills himself: An AIDS patient jumped to his death at a hospital on Tuesday, World AIDS Day, the Kenya television Network (KTN) reported. AFP says from Nairobi.

Quoting a nurse, KTN said that the elderly man, who had been admitted to Nairobi's Kenyatta National Hospital on Tuesday morning, decided to end his life to curtail his long suffering.

Kanika Bandyopadhyay hospitalised: The ailing Rabindra Sangeet exponent Kanika Bandyopadhyay was shifted from Belpur subdivisional hospital to the SSKM Hospital in Calcutta on Tuesday for further investigation, PTI says from Shantiniketan.

A special medical team, sent by the West Bengal government, arrived Monday night and, after examining her, advised the transfer.

Clinton's ex-aide on trial: A federal jury began deliberations Tuesday on 30 corruption charges against President Bill Clinton's former agriculture secretary, Mike Espy, who has been the subject of a four-year investigation. Reuters says from Washington.

If found guilty on any of the charges, Espy would be the highest ranking Clinton aide to be convicted.

Russian press team in China: A Russian press delegation, led by B Ovchinnikov, political commentator of the Russian newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta, yesterday visited the Xinhua News Agency, Xinhua reports from Beijing.

Vice-president of the Xinhua news agency Gao Qiuju met and had a friendly conversation with the Russian delegation. They exchanged views on increasing bilateral cooperation.

Algeria backs Annan's initiatives: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan obtained the backing Tuesday of the Algerian government for his plan for resolving the conflict in western Sahara and the separatist Polisario Front, a UN official said. AFP reports from Algiers.

"Algeria supports the package" of proposals, including for a referendum, put forward by the United Nations chief, the official said after Annan had talks with Algerian officials.

Rebels kill 11 in Colombia: Marxist rebels stormed two towns and attacked key highways in western Colombia, killing at least 11 people and wounding 30 others, including civilians and security force members, authorities said on Tuesday. Reuters says from Bogota.

The raids came as President Andres Pastrana scrambled to break the deadlock in planned talks to end the South American nation's long-running civil conflict.

Police seizes explosives in Assam: Police in the north eastern Indian state of Assam said yesterday they had seized enough explosives to blow up half the state capital, Guwahati, in a series of raids. AFP reports from Guwahati.

The announcement came as a grenade explosion in downtown Guwahati yesterday morning killed two people and left two seriously injured.

Estonian general polls March 7: Estonian president Lennart Meri on Tuesday called a general parliamentary election for March 7, the Baltic nation's third since it gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Reuters says from Tallinn.

In a thinly-veiled criticism of Prime Minister Mart Siimann's four-party minority coalition government, Meri said he hoped voters would use the opportunity to elect politicians with fresh ideas and policies to re-invigorate the country.

International
Troops on guard in Jakarta

KUPANG, Indonesia Dec 2: Hundreds of troops and police Wednesday guarded a troubled provincial capital where rioters burned and ransacked 15 mosques, reports AP.

While security was heavy and there were no reports of new unrest in Christian-dominated Kupang, the latest site of religious violence in the world's most populous Muslim nation.

The riots on Monday raised fears that attacks on places of worship will escalate in Indonesia, which has already endured sporadic outbreaks of unrest because of economic and political turmoil.

In apparent retaliation, Muslim mobs on Tuesday smashed windows of two houses where Christians worshipped in Banjarsari, 155 miles (250 kilometres) south-

east of Jakarta.

The violence in Kupang, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara province, disrupted commerce as many traders shut their shops for fear of widespread looting.

Truck drivers stayed away from the docks, leaving sacks of rice unloaded in shipyards. The Christian-dominated city of 120,000 people lies 1,875 kilometers (1,172 miles) southeast of Jakarta in a poor, arid region.

The Kompas daily newspaper said staple foods such as rice and noodles where scarce and that shoppers in the marketplace could not find fresh vegetables.

Frightened Muslims with sickles and swords guarded their homes and mosques.

The attacks on Kupang's

mosques were in retaliation for the burning and ransacking of 22 churches by Muslim mobs in Jakarta on Nov. 22, when 14 people were killed, some hacked to death.

About 90 percent of Indonesia's 202 million people are Muslims, with the rest following Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or other faiths. Some cities in the sprawling archipelago nation have Christian majorities.

Police said they had detained alleged instigators of Monday's rioting, but did not say how many people were being questioned.

The military, its credibility sagging because of human rights abuses, is overstretched as it tries to keep order across the turbulent Southeast Asian nation.

Islamic leaders have urged

their followers not to retaliate with more violence.

Religious diversity based on a belief in God is enshrined in the national philosophy, known as Pancasila, adopted when Indonesia declared independence from Dutch colonial rule in 1945.

The upsurge in religious violence follows months of riots and protests in many parts of Indonesia.

Social tensions in Indonesia, fueled by widespread unemployment, have intensified amid the worst economic crisis in decades.

There is also political turmoil as students protesters demand greater democracy after 32 years of authoritarian rule by former President Suharto, who was forced to quit following deadly riots in May.

Reporters should be viewed as routine.

Brigadier D K Babbar said

soldiers were being trained in nuclear and chemical warfare, "but this is not something new since we have known about Pakistan's nuclear capability for ten years now."

Other Indian military officers said on condition of anonymity that Pakistan has mobilised nearly 20,000 troops into defensive positions across the border. Indian and Pakistani troops were more than 130 kilometres apart in keeping with international norms for military exercises, the officers said.

Eleven years ago, India held a similarly large exercise, "Operation Brasstracks," that brought Indian and Pakistani troops eyeball-to-eyeball, raising fears of another war between the hostile neighbors.

Khanha said he had heard

a similarly large exercise, "Operation Brasstracks," that brought Indian and Pakistani troops eyeball-to-eyeball, raising fears of another war between the hostile neighbors.

The project, funded by the ministry along with the southern development authority, aims to protect historic fishing gear and related artifacts, the report said.

The museum will be housed in the historic Marteole tower in Hambantota town, the former residence of historian Leonard Woolfe, the author of *History in the jungle*.

The museum will display the chronology of fishing industry in the country and other historical information related to fishing in southern province, said the report.

A sum of 15,000 US dollars has already been spent on this project, specially in collecting historical artifacts, the report added.

Off the Record**Prize money to catch a 'big foot'**

BEIJING: Shennongjia in central China's Hubei province, home of the legendary and elusive creature known as "Big Foot," has announced that any tourist or adventurer who catches one of the shaggy wild men will get a prize of 500,000 yuan (60,240 US dollars), reports Xinhua.

The tourism department in Shennongjia is issuing a special card at home and abroad which reveals the secrets of "Big Foot" in a bid to promote local tourism.

It said that anyone who purchases this card will be provided with a tent, campaign equipment, food and other daily necessities.

The sponsor announced that anyone snaring a live "Big Foot" will be awarded 500,000 yuan, if a dead body is found, the discoverer will be rewarded with 50,000 yuan.

Those who take photos or videos of "Big Foot", or collect its fur or excrement will also win prizes ranging from 10,000 to 30,000 yuan, the sponsors said.

Code of ethics to keep Muslims and Jews at peace!

LOS ANGELES: American Jewish Muslim leaders in Southern California are developing a code of ethics to encourage civility and respect in arguments over issues such as religion, Middle East peace and terrorism, reports AP.

The code's authors said Monday they hope it will serve as a positive example as tensions rise between Palestinians and Israelis.

The document urges people to focus on issues, to verify rumors before making public pronouncements, to avoid stereotypes and words that can incite and to repudiate individuals who appeal to prejudice or violence.

"I think this is a step in the right direction where these two communities decided to offer a better model and a better alternative for the way people might disagree," said Dr. Maher Hathout, head of the Islamic Center of Southern California, which represents about 500,000 Muslims.

Fisheries museum in Lanka

COLOMBO: The fisheries and aquatic resources development ministry of Sri Lanka will set up its first fishery museum next month in the deep south, the official Daily News reported, says Xinhua.

The project, funded by the ministry along with the southern development authority, aims to protect historic fishing gear and related artifacts, the report said.

The museum will be housed in the historic Marteole tower in Hambantota town, the former residence of historian Leonard Woolfe, the author of *History in the jungle*.

The museum will display the chronology of fishing industry in the country and other historical information related to fishing in southern province, said the report.

A sum of 15,000 US dollars has already been spent on this project, specially in collecting historical artifacts, the report added.

Japanese newspaper reports**DPRK preparing to launch another missile**

TOKYO, Dec 2: US spy satellites have detected North Koreans preparing to launch another missile and Tokyo has been warned, a Japanese newspaper reported Wednesday, reports AP.

The North Koreans have been moving parts of their new Taepo Dong missile from storage to the launch pad since about Nov. 20, the Yomiuri newspaper reported, citing Japanese government sources that had received word from the United States.

Japan is worried that the North is likely to launch another missile later this year, said the Yomiuri, Japan's largest daily, in a front-page article.

Government spokesman Hiroshi Nonaka acknowledged Wednesday that Tokyo was aware of "some kind of movement" in North Korea. He would not elaborate.

Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi

confirmed Japan had received "various information" about a North Korean launch in the works, but Kyodo News agency

quoted him as saying, "I have not heard that it has been confirmed."

The Defense Agency would not comment on the Yomiuri report.

Japanese were unnerved by the firing of a rocket by North Korea on Aug. 31. Believed to be a test of its Taepo Dong, the rocket flew over Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean, proving the communist nation can strike any part of the country.

Japan has a peaceful rocket programme but no spy satellite of its own and must rely on the United States for information about the threat from North Korean missiles.

A joint missile defense system with the United States has been proposed, and Japan approved a plan to put four spy satellites into orbit by 2002.

North Korea, which says it put a satellite in orbit with the August firing, has denounced Japan's spy satellite plan, calling it a "dangerous military action."

US, France may start jt**mission to mars in 2005**

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, Dec 2: The United States and France are examining the possibility of a joint mission to Mars in 2005, but no formal agreement is signed or imminent, a NASA official said, reports AFP.

"There are exploratory studies

"taking place at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California and at the National Centre for Space Studies in Toulouse, France,"

said Roger Bourke, international cooperation manager at Mars projects at JPL.

"Both sides are hopeful," he added, but this "kind of cooperative undertaking is technically complex."

To carry out such a mission, a French orbiter sent into space by an Ariane-5 rocket would have to meet up with a US lander carrying rock samples from Mars and bring everything back to earth.

"We are at the dating stage, not the getting married stage," said Bourke in a telephone conversation with AFP.

"The nature of the agreement is we will get together and study it (to) see if we can make a sensible agreement about this," said Bourke, who added that no deadline had been set.



Australian swimsuit model Suzi takes advantage of a water display to bring attention to the bikini she models for a Brisbane designer Monday. As summer warms up in Australia those in the Northern Hemisphere will have to wait out the cold winter before trying these fashions on for size. — AP/UNB photo



Maria Figueroa, left, and Emma Jardin, right, join a group of a thousand members of several Miami-Dade Christian churches as they demonstrate against an ordinance banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation at the Miami-Dade Government Centre Tuesday. The Miami-Dade Commission voted 7-6 to approve the ordinance after nearly four hours of public testimony. — AP/UNB photo

US backs Annan's visit to Libya

WASHINGTON, Dec 2: The United States backed Tuesday UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's plan to travel to Libya but stated he should not offer concessions to Tripoli over the Lockerbie trial, reports AP.

This is not a negotiation we are expecting a prompt response from Libya to the Security Council's demands," said State Department spokesman James Rubin.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan will be in a position presumably to advance this issue," he added.

Annan may visit Libya this weekend to discuss the extradition of two suspects in the bombing of a US airliner over Lockerbie ten years ago, according to sources in Algiers.

The sources said Annan may meet Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi in one of his villas close to the Egyptian border to push forward plans to extradite the suspects, Abdel Basset Ali El-Megrahi and Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah to the Netherlands.

Once there they would stand trial for the bombing of the Pan Am Jet over Lockerbie, Scotland, which claimed 270 lives on December 21, 1988.

UN officials travelling with Annan in North Africa were unable to confirm the report.

Dissidents in China demand release of jailed activists

BEIJING, Dec 2: Calling China deceitful for signing human rights treaties while stifling dissent, 190 dissidents demanded Wednesday the government release campaigners trying to set up an opposition party, reports AP.

Police freed two campaigners Wednesday morning after their second night in detention, but kept in custody three of China's most prominent dissidents — Xu Wenli, Qin Yongmin and Wang Youqian, all outspoken organisers of the would-be China Democracy Party.

Xu and Qin were taken away by police Monday night in co-ordinated raids in two cities that delivered the sternest blow to the 5-month campaign to establish the party and challenge the ruling Communist Party's ban on opposition politics.

Xu was arrested for plotting to overthrow the government, a crime that could land him in jail for life. Xu was taken away on warrants that identified him

as a criminal suspect, while Wang, detained a month ago, was also formally arrested Monday although his family has not been told the charge.

Their campaign drew inspiration from China's signing of key UN human rights treaties, partly done to improve relations with the United States and other Western countries.

"By these acts China's government and relevant authorities have brazenly violated international treaties and universal human rights principles," said an open letter signed by 190 dissidents in 22 provinces and cities and faxed to foreign news agencies.

"On the one hand, they are deceiving and cheating international public opinion, while on the other hand they are suppressing and persecuting democratic political dissidents," said the letter.

The letter demanded the release of Xu, Qin, Wang and any others taken into custody.