

**BRIEFLY**



South African President Nelson Mandela does an impromptu dance with the choir before addressing more than 1000 delegates and guests at the World Council of Churches 8th Assembly in the Zimbabwean capital Harare, Sunday. — AP/UNB photo

**4 killed in Pakistan shop blast:** At least four people were killed and 12 injured Sunday when an explosion ripped through a shop in an arms and ammunition market in a northwestern Pakistani tribal town on the border with Afghanistan, police said. AFP reports from Peshawar.

Some explosive material stored at a shop in Lendi Kotal town, 45-km northeast of here, exploded, killing its owner and three others, they added. The cause of the explosion was not immediately known, the police said.

**Youths riot in French town:** Rioting youths smashed a police station, burned cars and faced off police Sunday night in a working class district of this southern French city, trying to get even for the shooting death of a buddy the night before, AP reports from Toulouse.

Six policemen were slightly injured in clashes that started in the early evening and continued for several hours, police said. No youths were reported injured. Some 150 police faced off an estimated 180 youths in Toulouse's suburban Reynerie district.

**32 die in Chinese coal mine blast:** A gas explosion in an east China coal mine killed 32 miners and injured 10 others on Saturday, mine officials said yesterday. Reuters reports from Shanghai.

A spark touched off the explosion, said an official at the Changguang Mine in Zhejiang province.

**Ocalan severs ties with armed cadre:** Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan said on Sunday he was cutting off relations with the armed conflict his Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was fighting with Turkish security forces, Reuters reports from Tunceli, Turkey.

"If the guerrillas want to continue what they have been doing for 15 years, then I have nothing to do with them," he told the Kurdish Med TV channel.

**Puerto Ricans reject referendum:** By a thin margin, Puerto Rican voters on Sunday rejected a referendum option to become the 51st US state, according to official returns, AFP reports from San Juan.

With 97.7 per cent of the ballots counted, the option to remain a commonwealth had captured 50.6 per cent while the statehood campaign, fronted by Governor Pedro Rossello, trailed with 46.5 per cent, the state election commission said.

**Probe into Thai Airways crash**  
**Absence of landing system probably was not the cause**

SURAT THANI, Dec 14: Military helicopters began removing the wreckage of a Thai Airways jetliner from a swamp on Monday, while aviation officials said the absence of a state-of-the-art landing system should not have caused the crash that killed 101 people, reports AP.

"I want to reiterate that the systems we have in place are capable of guiding the plane in a similar manner," said Sawat Sitihon, director general of the Department of Aviation.

Both the pilot and aviation authorities have come under fire for the crash of Flight TG261 during a heavy rainstorm Friday evening in Surat Thani, 530 kilometres south-west of Bangkok.

An investigation by government officials and Airbus, the French manufacturer of the A310-200 plane, to determine what caused the accident, is already underway.

Several of the 45 survivors said the pilot, who died of his injuries after the crash, should never have made a third attempt to land after failing the first two times.

The spotlight has also fallen, however, on aviation authorities after they admitted that Surat Thani airport's instrument landing system had been removed during renovation work several months ago.

That meant the pilot would have had to land based only on what he could see of the runway or possibly with radio navigation aids less precise than an instrument landing system.

ILS systems make it possible for airliners to land in poor visibility. Many airports lack ILS systems, but that limits the kind of weather in which airliners can land safely.

Chamnong Sanarkorn, director of air navigation facilities at Surat Thani airport, said all airlines had been informed about the renovation work and absence of the ILS system.

He also refused to answer questions about reports that the air traffic controller on duty during the crash, who has not been produced by airport officials to answer reporters' questions, had been ordered to take leave.

"Because of the investigation, no one is supposed to tell you anything," he said.

Chamnong said that, in any event, it was the pilot's decision whether to try and land or fly to another airport where conditions were better, and aviation experts agreed.

"The pilot is always in charge," said an international aviation authority executive, who spoke to The Associated Press only on condition of anonymity.



The new Bangladesh Ambassador to Iran Tufail K. Haider presented his credentials to President Seyed Mohammad Khatami in Tehran on December 6.

**BJP sparks debate over religious tolerance**

LUCKNOW, Dec 14: A new sign on a Lucknow street points to the future, as India's Hindu nationalists see it, reports AP.

By renaming the road Kothari Brothers Street, India's governing Hindu party honoured two Hindus from this north-central state capital who were shot to death by police in 1990 as they led a mob trying to tear down a Muslim mosque in nearby Ayodhya.

Two years later, another mob succeeded in destroying the mosque, setting off nationwide Hindu-Muslim rioting that killed 2,000 people. Today, India remains divided over Ayodhya, but the Bharatiya Janata Party envisions a day when a Hindu temple will rise on the mosque's rubble.

With steps like the October ceremony naming a street after the Kothari "Martyrs," suggesting education be "spiritualised" and challenging India's commitment to separation of church and state, the ruling party signalled its determination to put an assertively Hindu stamp on India.

The country has embraced ecumenism since the violence of partition in 1947, when Muslims splintered away from colonial India to form the Islamic state of Pakistan.

Navin Raj's yarn shop looks out at the end of Kothari Brothers Street, where a small park is dominated by a black-marble obelisk inscribed in gold with a short history of the "ultimate sacrifice" by Ram Kumar and Sharad Kothari. Raj says everyone in the neighbourhood embraces the new name because they want a temple at Ayodhya.

Not so, Dr Dinesh Darpan, who has his clinic and home just a few blocks from Raj's store, says politicians were wrong to erect a monument that recalls violence and divisiveness.

"They should not resurrect the issue. They should work toward Hindu-Muslim unity," he said.

Since Bharatiya Janata came to power at the federal level in March, its progress in remaking this vast and varied country has largely been confined to the symbolic — and to reopening a spirited debate among Indians about religion and power.

It's not a new debate. Soon after the break from Britain, revered independence leader Mohandas Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu militant who

objected to his calls for religious tolerance.

Since then, India has again and again grappled with questions about the nature of Hinduism and of how best to order a society woven of many beliefs. Bharatiya Janata's ascendancy has added new urgency to these issues.

A party pronouncement on the need to protect cows, for instance, can set two Hindu coworkers arguing about the extent to which cows are worshipped in India — some Hindus to eat beef.

That's because Hinduism as many Indians know it is not so much free of rules as having such a bewildering variety that no one authority can claim the last word.

Any homogenisation of Hinduism would be "something very disturbing, because it destroys the creative force within the religion," said K N Panikkar, a Hindu and a historian who has studied the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Separating church and state is the only way of both protecting Hinduism and ensuring Muslims, Christians and other minorities can live in India without fear, Panikkar said in an interview.

That idea is nonsense, sociologist T Madan writes in one of a shelf-full of new books on secularism, a publishing phenomenon that underlines the intensity of the debate sparked by the coming to power of the Hindu party.

Madan notes India has officially Islamic and officially Buddhist neighbours and accuses secularists of trying to impose a Western idea in a region where religion is crucial.

"In an open society, the state will reflect the character of the society," Madan says.

That society is predominantly Hindu. Eighty per cent of India's nearly 1 billion people are Hindu, while 12 per cent are Muslim, Christians, who are 2 per cent of the population, say violent attacks on members of their community have increased since the Hindu party came to power.

India's constitution declares the country secular and forbids religious discrimination. Article 30 seeks to protect adherents of minority religions by granting them the right to establish their own schools — a provision some Hindu militants consider discriminatory because it does

not also specifically grant that right to Hindus.

Bharatiya Janata has called for amending Article 30, but the party lacks the two-thirds majority in Parliament, needed to change the constitution.

Sushma Swaraj, a national party leader, says it doesn't seek a Hindu state, rather one in which citizens of all faiths live in harmony, acknowledging common values shaped by Hinduism. The party says its philosophy is "Hindutva," loosely translated as Hindu culture, which it insists is not a religion.

"We have never prayed as the Christians pray, we the Christians, or as the Muslims say, we the Muslims. We Indians are Hindu, while 12 per cent are Muslim, Christians, who are 2 per cent of the population, say violent attacks on members of their community have increased since the Hindu party came to power.

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**All because of love...**

LONDON, Dec 14: A couple are seeking refuge in Britain after their marriage across rival tribes led to rioting and killings in Pakistan, British newspaper reported, reports AP.

Kanwar Ahsan, 30 and Afridi, 19, who come from rival tribes, have formally asked the British government for help after receiving 6,000 death threats, the Sunday Telegraph said.

"We are existing, but we are not allowed to live because we defied our tradition and married for love," Ahsan was quoted as saying. "Now we want to live in peace without fear. I have no doubt that my wife's family will try to kill us — they have tried before."

The Telegraph said a bounty of 5,000 pounds (dhs 8,250) has been put on their heads. Ahsan, a clerical worker from the Mohajir community and Riffat, a member of a powerful family of the Pathan tribe, met four years ago and eloped in February after an illicit friendship.

Riffat's father led demonstrations in Karachi, claiming she had been kidnapped. Violence erupted between the two communities, sparking riots and killings before Riffat and her husband were sentenced to death by her father's tribe.

The couple were arrested when they returned to Karachi, and Ahsan had to appear before a Pakistani court on charges of kidnapping. He was shot at as he entered the courtroom. Riffat's father and brother now face charges of attempted murder.

Riffat appeared in court and declared that she had married for love. The two were found innocent and freed.

**Arms inspection in Iraq**  
**Confusion clouds last day of surprise checks**

BAGHDAD, Dec 14: Iraq and UNSCOM offered, conflicting stances on weapons inspection carried out Sunday, the last day of surprise checks designed to test Baghdad's cooperation ahead of a crucial UN review of sanctions against Iraq, reports AFP.

The chief Iraqi liaison with the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) on disarming Iraq, General Hussam Mohamad Amin, said an UNSCOM team unexpectedly cut short its work on Sunday and left Baghdad.

"The team of Australian Roger Hill cut short its mission on Sunday and left Iraq, although it had been expected to carry out a surprise inspection," said Amin.

The official INA news agency quoted Amin as saying that Hill did not give any reason for suspending his mission or for his precipitous departure for Bahrain, where UNSCOM has its rear base.

But UNSCOM spokeswoman Caroline Cross who had said earlier that Hill had left Baghdad told AFP that his team completed its work and carried out its inspections "exactly" according to instructions from UNSCOM headquarters in New York.

WASHINGTON, Dec 14: The full House will take up the four articles of impeachment against President Bill Clinton on Thursday in what is expected to be a long and contentious debate. House Republican aides say final votes could spill into Friday, reports AP.

The Judiciary Committee, which passed the articles, first must write a final report on its inquiry. House rules call for a waiting period of two legislative days — Sunday doesn't count — before the articles can come to the floor.

That means the articles will be available Wednesday, the same day that Speaker Newt Gingrich has notified lawmakers to return to Washington. Republican and Democratic leaders plan party caucuses that day, with debate on impeachment to begin Thursday morning.

Incoming Speaker Bob Livingston has tapped Rep Ray Lahood to preside over the debate. Judiciary committee chairman Henry Hyde of Illinois will act as GOP floor manager, and ranking Democrat John Conyers of Michigan is expected to manage the debate for his party.

Hyde said Sunday that he expects a "prolonged debate... I would be for expanding the time considerably so everyone can talk who wants to."

Republican leaders plan separate, yes-or-no votes on each of the articles, said two GOP House aides who spoke on condition of anonymity. They do not plan a vote on the



Holding a stone from the Wye River, US President Bill Clinton, accompanied by Leah Rabin, right, and first lady Hillary Clinton, left, visits the grave of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Jerusalem's Mount Herzl cemetery Sunday. The stone comes from the Wye River in Maryland where the latest round of peace talks were held. Rabin's daughter and grand daughter are behind Clinton. — AP/UNB photo

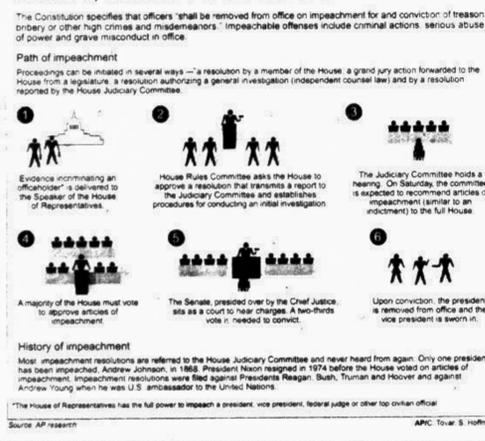
**Long debate expected during impeachment vote Dec 17**

Democratic alternative of censure. Democrats cannot amend the articles but they are entitled to a motion to reconvene the matter to the committee with instructions. House Democratic Leader Dick Gephardt of Missouri could use that motion as a vehicle to seek a vote on censure.

The House parliamentary already has decided that censure is not germane and would rule the Democratic motion out of order, the aides said. At that point, Gephardt could demand a vote appealing such a ruling. That, in effect, would then become the vote on whether censure should be considered.

Democrats have few other options to try to force a vote on censure. But they do have many other procedural ways to delay the impeachment votes, such as moving repeatedly that the House should adjourn. That could push the final votes to Friday or even later, the House aides said.

**Article II, Section 4 of the Constitution**



**Palestinian opposition against annulment of anti-Israel clauses in PLO Charter**

DAMASCUS, Dec 14: The Palestinian opposition on Sunday stressed its continued commitment to anti-Israel clauses in the PLO Charter despite today's scheduled meeting of PLO officials in Gaza in the presence of US President Bill Clinton to annul the clauses, reports AFP.

The annulment "does not represent the wishes of the Palestinian people but is an acceptance of American and Zionist conditions," the 10 opposition factions that advocate continued armed resistance to Israel said in a final statement after a two-day general national congress here.

"The annulment of the Palestinian National Charter is an annulment of the PLO and shatters the national unity of the Palestinian people, the statement said.

"Those who carried out this annulment are illegitimates and represent only themselves," it said.

The PLO's central council voted on Thursday to cancel the clauses ahead of today's historic visit from Clinton to witness their final annulment as called for by the Wye River Accord.

The statement condemned the United States for its "complete partiality towards the Zionist entity that has waged organised terrorism for 50 years and committed massacres of Palestinians and Lebanese."

It also called on the international community to support the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover its rights and said the right of resistance was a legal right according to international norms.

The two day general national congress was intended to upstage Clinton's visit but was marred by an open rift between moderates and hardliners over the question of breaking with the mainstream PLO.

**Reservation of seats for women**  
**Turmoil in Indian parliament delays debate on bill**

NEW DELHI, Dec 14: For the fourth time this year, turmoil in the Indian parliament delayed an attempt to debate a bill setting aside a third of the chamber's seats for women, reports AP.

The governing coalition had planned to table the bill Monday morning, but just a few minutes into the session, Speaker GMC Balayogi was forced to temporarily adjourn because of angry shouts from two dozen lawmakers protesting against a woman colleague who had scuffled with one of the bill's opponents last week.

Monday's protesters said Mamata Banerjee should be expelled from parliament because of her actions Friday, when she grabbed at the clothing of another lawmaker to try to stop him from joining a protest against the bill that ended with another early adjournment. Two other attempts in July to introduce the bill also failed amid scuffling and shouting.

Balayogi planned to reconvene Monday afternoon. But with emotions running so high, it is doubtful the women's quota bill will ever even be officially debated, let alone put to vote.

The bill, meant to increase women's participation in India's democracy, was first introduced in 1986 by a previous government, but met with similar opposition and never came to a vote in a country where religion



A model with a white shell in her hands presents a red and violet hair-do by Maestro Lux's salon designer from Eastern Ukraine during "Londa Show-98" in Kiev, Ukraine, on Saturday. — AP/UNB photo

**After the dress, the mattress**

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 14: The sex and corruption trial of former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim took a sensational turn today when the prosecution said it would exhibit a semen-stained mattress to prove Anwar had indulged in illegal sex, reports AP.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Azahar Mohamed told the court that the mattress, seized by police in July from an apartment here, had already been examined by the police laboratory.

He did not disclose the findings, but said the mattress would be shown to the court tomorrow.

In the Clinton Lewinsky case, a semen-stained blue cocktail dress was produced as a key evidence by Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr.

Anwar, the Southeast Asian country's deputy premier before being sacked in September, currently faces abuse of power charges and will be tried separately for allegedly having engaged in illegal sex acts.

The prosecutor made the statement after Assistant Commissioner of Police Musa Hassan, the 13th witness in the

trial, said he had ordered the mattress and pillow to be taken when he was investigating whether Anwar had an affair with his former secretary's wife.

"I saw a few patches of seminal fluid on the mattress," Musa told the court.

Earlier, Musa said Anwar could have been prosecuted for sexual misconduct as early as last year had he not forced police to coerce retractions from two people who made accusations against him.

Musa testified police detectives were unaware last year that the retractions had been drafted and obtained by colleagues in the police department's special branch — allegedly on Anwar's orders.

Otherwise, charges would have been brought against the former deputy prime minister on the basis of initial allegations made by Ummi Hafida Ali and Azizan Abu Bakar, the prosecution witness said.

"I suggested no further action because I was influenced by the retraction letters," Musa told the court today.

Azizan, the former driver of the jailed politician's wife, has testified that Anwar repeatedly sodomised him in 1992, while Ummi has accused Anwar of sleeping with her brother's wife, Shamsida Taharin.

The original allegations were contained in a letter Ummi, the sister of Anwar's former secretary, sent to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

Last week, Musa said regular police officers were prevented from interrogating Ummi and Azizan, who belongs to the criminal investigation department, conducted a probe against Anwar this year after the accusations resurfaced in a book.

**Afghan opposition launch new offensive : 33 killed**

KABUL, Dec 14: Dozens of fighters and civilians were killed today as Afghan opposition forces launched a new offensive across three frontlines and pounded Kabul with light rockets, reports AFP.

Combined reports from the opposition, residents and aid workers said at least 33 civilians were killed and 50 wounded and hundreds forced to flee their homes.

Another 42 Taliban militia troops died in the fighting and 162 were captured by the opposition.

The latest offensive was timed to take advantage of the last days of fine weather as the Taliban and forces loyal to opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood continued attempts to secure northern supply routes ahead of winter.

Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted Taliban sources as saying 21 civilians died and 27 were injured in Kabul after 12 Russian-made BM-21 light rockets were launched by Masood.

AIP said Taliban spokesman Wakil Ahmad, condemning the rocket attack, accused forces of Masood of targeting Kabul's residential areas in a bid to continue pressure on the Afghan government.

"What's he doing? Why is he destroying the country?" an irate resident here asked.

Masood rejects charges that civilian areas are deliberately targeted, claiming the rockets strikes were aimed at Kabul Airport, where the Taliban stages air raids across opposition strongholds in northern Afghanistan.

Opposition spokesman Abdullah said the strikes coincided with a three pronged offensive in Kunduz, Baghlan and Parwan provinces in north and central Afghanistan.