



Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, left, is received by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee before a ceremonial reception in New Delhi Monday. Kumaratunga is on a two-day visit to India. Usha Narayanan, wife of Indian President K R Narayanan, is at the centre. —AP/UNB photo

Cambodia defies pressure to try 2 KR defectors

PHNOM PENH, Dec 28: Prime Minister Hun Sen defied growing pressure Monday to bring two Khmer Rouge leaders to trial for genocide and said they would face neither an international tribunal nor a Cambodian court, reports AP.

"If we bring them to trial, it will not benefit the nation, it will only mean a return to civil war," Hun Sen said before a Cabinet meeting. "We should dig a hole and bury the past and look toward the future."

The Khmer Rouge leaders, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, remained holed up in the ex-rebel stronghold of Pailin in the northwest, where they were staying in guest houses under the protection of old comrades who defected to the government two years ago.

They agreed to defect — in effect, surrender — in a phone call with Hun Sen on Christmas, 20 years to the day after Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia to topple the bloodstained Khmer Rouge regime.

The government Monday rejected intense international demands that Khieu Samphan, the official leader though others held real power, and political chief Nuon Chea stand trial.

Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge official who fled bloody purges in 1978, said peace was

more important than prison. "This is a pure Cambodian solution," Hun Sen said. "We know the right medicine to use to cure this problem. If any foreigners try to add something, it will never go away."

Hun Sen said he had the support of King Norodom Sihamoni.

Earlier, government spokesman Khieu Kanharith had said that speculation about a trial was raising fears among the defectors that they would be arrested.

Hun Sen's assurances should make it easier for them to keep a scheduled meeting with him in the capital Tuesday.

Gen Meas Sophea, deputy army chief of staff, had said the trip was still on schedule and the rebels would receive tight security.

In Washington, the US State Department noted Sunday that the Cambodian government has repeatedly asked for — and received — help aimed at bringing two Khmer Rouge leaders to justice.

"We trust that no actions will be taken by any party that could preclude achieving this goal," spokesman Lee McClelleny said. "Justice in Cambodia has been long delayed, but must not now be denied."

1,200 troops deployed in New Delhi to check crime

NEW DELHI, Dec 28: Some 1,200 paramilitary troops have been deployed in the Indian capital in a desperate bid to check a growing crime wave, officials said today, reports AP.

The deployment was ordered late Sunday by Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani following a series of murders which the police have failed to solve.

It was not clear, however, if the paramilitary personnel would assist the local police crime investigations or take up fixed positions across the city of more than 10 million people.

New Delhi has recently seen an unprecedented crime wave involving murders, rape and robberies, and the city's police chief V N Singh said last week that the "culture of violence was increasing" in the city.

Singh said the city this year recorded 2,668 "heinous crimes," including 617 murders, 591 attempted murders, 767 robberies, 423 cases of rape, 188 riots and 23 kidnappings.

Singh also blamed unchecked population growth in the Indian capital for the ballooning crime.

Cold takes lives of 30 in Europe

LONDON, Dec 28: December cold has taken the lives of nearly 30 people in Europe during the Christmas holidays, reports AP.

Most were homeless or elderly, but one Scottish teenager died of hypothermia after leaving a party without a coat.

In Russia, where hundreds of people die of cold each year, nine froze to death in Moscow during the past week, raising the number of such deaths in the capital this winter to 69, city medical officials said Monday.

In addition, 178 people received hospital care for hypothermia and 30 were treated for frostbite during the same period, the officials said.

Most of those who die this way in Russia are elderly people living alone or alcoholics who pass out on the street at night.

In Hungary, where 30,000 people are homeless, 17 people died over the Christmas holiday. A few cases involved drunks who fell asleep before reaching home, Lt Col Hedi Nagy told The Associated Press.

Temperatures in Hungary have dipped to 16-20 below Celsius (plus 5 to minus 4 Fahrenheit) in parts of the country since cold weather set in at the beginning of December.

The total dead of cold this winter in Hungary is 76, police said.

Pakistan detains 54 Indian fishermen

KARACHI, Dec 28: Pakistani authorities today detained 54 Indian fishermen for allegedly fishing in Pakistani waters and seized nine boats, the maritime security agency said, reports AP.

A day earlier, 149 Pakistani fishermen had returned home after being released by India in return for 191 Indian fishermen freed by Pakistan last month.

Smallest octuplet dies

HOUSTON, Dec 28: A week after she was born weighing just 10.3 ounces (292 grams), the smallest of the octuplets born this month to a Texas couple died from heart and lung failure, reports AP.

Chijindu Chidera, nicknamed Odera, was pronounced dead shortly before 3:30 am Sunday at Texas Children's Hospital after medication and chest compressions failed to save her.

"We are very saddened by the passing of our beloved baby Odera. Mother Nkem Chukwu and father Iyke Louis Udobi said in a statement.

The first baby was born Dec. 8, followed by the seven others 12 days later. They had been the world's only living octuplets. Odera was the fifth child.

International

UN denies report of Iraq's threat to curtail 'oil-for-food' deal

LONDON, Dec 28: Iraq vowed to shoot down any US and British aircraft over its territory, but amid the heightened tensions UN officials said they were unaware of reported threats by Baghdad to curtail the so-called 'oil-for-food' programme, reports Reuters.

UN officials said Iraq had not notified them of any curtailment of the oil-for-food deal and diplomats said they did not expect to hear anything on the issue for several months.

"We have not been informed officially of anything," UN programme spokesman John Mills said on Sunday.

He was responding to reports that Iraqi officials had threatened to reject a further extension of the programme, which allows Baghdad to sell 5.256 billion dollars of oil every six months to buy food, medicines and other supplies to ease the impact of the eight-year UN sanctions on ordinary Iraqis.

Baghdad has threatened to curtail the oil-for-food programme before each renewal except the last one at the end of November when the transition went smoothly.

Mills said the programme fell under a memorandum of understanding signed every six months between Iraq and the United Nations, based on Security Council resolutions.

Iraq's UN Ambassador Nizar Hamdoun signed the memorandum in late November extending the programme for 180 days, until late April.

Mills noted there had been no difficulty in several hundred UN humanitarian workers, who supervise the programme, entering or leaving the country and oil flows were at the same pace.

The programme is an exception to the sanctions imposed by the Security Council shortly after Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Iraq has disliked the plan since its inception, viewing it as a measure to keep sanctions in place.



Iraqi poet Sajida Al-Musawi reads a poem next to a portrait of President Saddam Hussein during a festival organised by the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad Sunday. —AP/UNB photo

US Senate Republicans say

Censure must only be considered after speedy impeachment trial

WASHINGTON, Dec 28: Key Senate Republicans said Sunday that censure should be considered only after a speedy impeachment trial — and perhaps only after a vote on whether to remove President Bill Clinton from office, reports AP.

"We ought to vote on these articles of impeachment, and then that is the appropriate time to consider a censure," Sen. Mitch McConnell said on Fox News Sunday.

"Assuming neither of those articles pass, which is what's widely expected will be the outcome... you sit down and you negotiate the censure alternative."

The Senate is set to consider two articles of impeachment passed this month by the House, but significant questions remain over whether a deal for censuring the president can be worked out before a trial begins.

Still, there is widespread agreement among Republicans and Democrats that any trial should be quick, given that senators of both parties widely

agree that there's little chance that the chamber will vote to convict and remove Clinton.

Internal surveys to see whether two-thirds of the Senate would vote for removal will not begin until after the trial opens, said Judiciary Chairman Orrin Hatch.

Without the 67 votes needed, Senate leaders then would "come up with the strongest censure resolution there is," Hatch said on CBS' "Face the Nation."

Democrats are pushing for a strongly worded censure to punish Clinton for trying to cover up his affair with Monica Lewinsky, perhaps adding a fine and admission of perjury.

Veteran Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York is leading what he described as a "bipartisan" drafting effort.

But Republicans are insisting on trying Clinton on the perjury and obstruction of justice charges passed along party lines by the House. US Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist would preside; senators would act as the jury.

Senators of both parties agreed Sunday that they — like most Americans — want the matter disposed of swiftly.

But the timeliness of such a trial depends heavily on the definition of speed in a chamber that prides itself on careful, often lengthy, deliberations.

Several senators suggested Sunday that the trial conclude by March, the traditional starting time for the full Senate's legislative work.

"Nothing happens in that first two months anyway," Moynihan, who is retiring after 1999, said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Sen. Rick Santorum, one of the youngest and most outspoken conservatives in the Senate, agreed. A monthlong, full-blown trial would "not really impede the Senate," Santorum said on ABC's "This Week."

But one of Clinton's harshest Senate critics said the trial should be speedier.

"There's no reason for a long trial here. He deserves a speedy trial just like any other citizen."

Sen. John Ashcroft, said on ABC.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott has yet to weigh in on the length of a trial, but he has said the chamber has a constitutional responsibility to at least open such proceedings.

What the Senate will consider, and how much of the graphic sexual evidence will be reviewed in public, is still fodder for fierce debate.

House Majority Whip Tom Delay, a leading proponent of impeachment, suggested that the Senate examine evidence never released publicly. A senior House Republican official, who demanded anonymity, has said Delay is referring primarily to the conflicting accounts of a woman who accused Clinton of making an unwanted sexual advance toward her while he was Arkansas attorney general.

Several undecided House Republicans reviewed that sealed evidence in the days before the House impeached Clinton along party lines.

30 killed in violence in S Algeria

ALGIERS, Dec 28: At least 30 people died and 70 others were wounded in two simultaneous attacks in southern Algeria, hospital sources said Monday, reports AP.

Mortar shells and bombs were fired Sunday night at the town of Khenis-Milliana, about 100 kilometres south of Algiers. Fifteen people died and 40 were injured, the sources, who requested customary anonymity, said.

The newspaper Le Matin reported that a school and several homes were hit during the attack. It said the shells were fired from the nearby Merouana mountain range.

At the same time, 10 kilometres to the north, some 40 armed men burst into the village of Ain N'sour and killed 15 people. Most of them were stabbed to death, hospital sources said.

Another 30 were wounded, many of them by gunshot wounds. News reports said the army had launched a sweep in the area to hunt for the assailants.

The attacks came during the holy month of Ramadan, when militant activity usually intensifies in a nearly 7-year-old insurgency that has left 75,000 people dead.

Curfew imposed in Pak city after 4 die in rioting

ISLAMABAD, Dec 28: Pakistani authorities imposed a curfew in a northwestern city early today after at least four people were killed and 19 injured in rioting on Sunday, a government statement said, reports Reuters.

The statement, published in the English-language daily The News, said the curfew was imposed in the early hours of today and would remain in place in Bannu city in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) until the situation normalises.

Officials say rioting started in Bannu on Sunday after a policeman allegedly shot dead a schoolboy for refusing to be sodomised.

Troops were called in to keep the peace after police failed to control protesters who went on a rampage, attacking the main police station and setting at least eight police checkpoints ablaze.

The accused was caught by the residents soon after he shot the teenager and police say they have registered a formal case against him.

Fighting in Kosovo

Int'l monitors secure temporary truce

PRISTINA, Dec 28: A top US diplomat voiced hope that the latest round of fighting in northern Kosovo can be contained after international monitors secured a temporary truce agreement with both sides, reports AP.

But daily clashes between Serb forces and ethnic Albanian rebels over the last four days bode poorly for chances of peace in the Serbian province, where at least 13 people have been shot dead in the last four days.

In a sometimes-fierce battle Sunday, artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire sounded for hours across the snowy fields of rebel-controlled territory as the two sides fought from trenches, villages and dirt roads.

At least five people — three Serb policemen, a Serb civilian and a Kosovo Liberation Army fighter — were reported wounded as the worst period of violence in Kosovo in months continued.

But William Walker, the American diplomat who heads the Kosovo Verification Mission, countered assumptions that a return to war is inevitable by stressing that the scope of violence remains limited.

"This is what I would call sporadic fighting," he told CNN after Sunday's clash ended.

"Both sides are being relatively cautious" and not using full firepower, he said.

"We're trying to talk to both sides, get them to stand down, show some humanity one with the other in terms of getting the wounded out," the diplomat said.

Verifiers from the 54-nation peace mission, led by the Organ-

isation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, mediated the evacuation of two wounded Serbs and one ethnic Albanian after the fire fight.

But the truce may be nothing more than a brief pause, based on past violation of pledges and the evidence on the ground.

Both the guerrillas and a substantial number of Serb troops and armour remain entrenched in their standoff near the northern town of Podujevo, and there was no indication the shooting in several surrounding villages was over.

Sunday's clash was attributed to the funeral of a Serb farmer whom the rebels killed the previous day.

The Serb said they needed to ensure the safety of other civilians while evacuating the body. The KLA complained that the heavy Serb buildup was a provocation that prevented civilians who fled the previous fighting from returning.

A new trouble spot emerged Sunday night when Serb police sealed off a suburb of Kosovska Mitrovica and began searching for "terrorists," their term for the rebels.

The Serb-run Media Centre said men in KLA uniforms had shot dead three Roma men, also known as Gypsies, in the town 40 kilometres northwest of the capital Pristina.

Talks on forming new govt begin in Turkey

ANKARA, Dec 28: Starting with the head of an Islamic party, Turkey's new premier-designate began talks Monday with party leaders to seek support for a new coalition government, reports AP.

Yalim Erez, an independent lawmaker appointed last week, is trying to form a broad-based coalition that would include Cabinet members from several parties to run the country until elections set for April.

Turkey has been trying to form a new government since a coalition government led by Mesut Yilmaz collapsed last month over allegations that the acting premier rigged the sale of a bank.

Arafat accuses Israel of freezing peace process

GAZA CITY, Dec 28: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Sunday that Israel had "frozen completely" the peace process and was refusing to implement the latest land-for-security accord, reports AP.

The accusation came despite assurances from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel would continue carrying out the agreement regardless of Israeli national elections expected in spring or early summer.

Arafat was quoted by Egypt's Middle East News Agency as saying in Cairo earlier Sunday that Israel was using the elections as an excuse not to withdraw troops from the West Bank.

But when asked upon his arrival in Gaza, he would only say that Israel "must respect (the accord) as they respect all their commitments with all other countries."

Asked if he believed Israel had frozen the implementation of the Wye accord, Arafat told reporters in Gaza: "No doubt. The Israeli side has completely

frozen everything."

On Dec. 2, Israel postponed the withdrawal of troops from parts of the West Bank as outlined in the Wye River agreement until the Palestinians fulfil several conditions.

Israel withdrew in November from two per cent of the West Bank under the Wye accord and was slated to pull out of 11 per cent more in two phases by the end of January.

The Israeli demands include Palestinian agreement to stop saying they will declare a state on May 4, 1999, regardless of the state of the negotiations, to crack down on anti-Israeli incitement and rein in Islamic militants.

Netanyahu said Friday that despite the Israeli election campaign, if the Palestinians fulfil the conditions Israel will carry out its part of the agreement signed on Oct. 23 at the White House.

The Palestinian Cabinet repeated its insistence on Friday that it will declare a state in May.

An Arafat spokesman, Nabil

Abourdeneh, called on the United States Sunday to pressure Israel to continue fulfilling its part of the Wye agreement despite the elections.

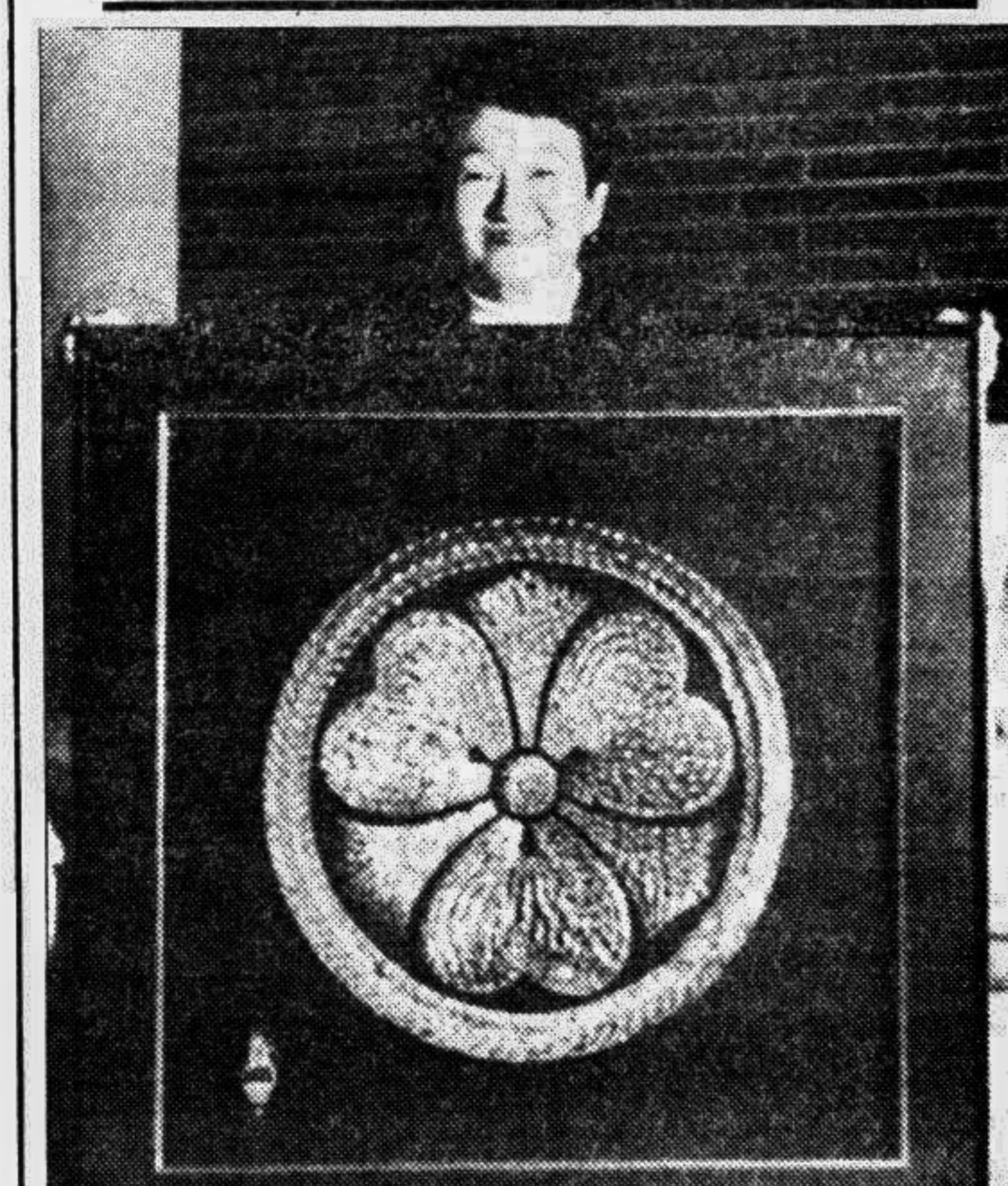
"We signed an agreement with the Israeli government and not with the Likud Party," Abourdeneh said in reference to Netanyahu's party.

Meanwhile, Israel's airport authority accused the Palestinians of violating the Wye accord by refusing to allow its security officials to inspect an Egyptian plane that landed at the newly opened Gaza International Airport Sunday, Israel TV said.

Israel retains security supervision over flights arriving at the Palestinian-run airport. In a sign of heightened tensions, Israeli soldiers shot rubber bullets and tear gas Sunday at Palestinians who threw rocks at them and Israeli vehicles near the Kalandia refugee camp north of Jerusalem.

The clashes broke out after an Israeli police car hit and injured a Palestinian in the refugee camp, witnesses said.

Off the Record



Betty Miura poses with her son-in-law's family crest, which she made using 1,001 tiny origami cranes arranged and glued in place, in Portland, USA, recently. Oregon Nikkei Legacy Centre is exhibiting a collection of family heirlooms centering on the crane or tsuru, a traditional Japanese symbol of long life and happiness. —AP/UNB photo

For something more in life...

MOSCOW: Give this much to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the bad boy of Russian politics: He has an impeccable sense of timing, reports AP.

As the year of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky drew near its close, Zhirinovskiy took over a Moscow nightclub Sunday to unveil his new book: "The A to Z of Sex."

Zhirinovskiy, an extreme nationalist with a taste for the outrageous, was once considered a potentially strong candidate for president of Russia. Today, he is better known for the sort of political burlesque that he demonstrated on the packed floor of "Dolls" nightclub.

"Man needs something more in life," Zhirinovskiy said, explaining how he came to write about sex. "Man doesn't live for the factory whistle, nor for the machine gun fire, nor for stocks and shares, nor for revolution and reform... It's our nature."

Zhirinovskiy's new book, written with sexologist Vladimir Yarovitsky, combines advice on sex with nationalist political ruminations. Zhirinovskiy heads the Liberal Democratic party, which supports a return to Russia's great power status and presents a staunchly anti-Western attitude.

Speaking of the book, his foreign affairs spokesman, Alexander Mitrofanov said: "It's a new method of political technology. We must connect with those who will vote for us in next year's parliamentary elections. And I think young people will understand this book. It's more political than about sex."

Victoria's secrets

LONDON: Love letters exchanged between Queen Victoria and her gamekeeper, John Brown, have been discovered in an attic in Scotland, a British newspaper reported Monday, reports AP.

The cache, which also included photographs of the couple, had been stored for many years in a trunk belonging to one of Brown's descendants at a home near Balmoral Castle, the royal estate in Scotland, The Times said.

The unusual relationship between Queen Victoria, who was mourning the death of her husband Albert, and her servant sparked many rumours in the mid-1860s — and was also the focus of the hit 1997 movie, "Mrs Brown."

While researching the movie, the executive producer Douglas Rae and writer Jeremy Brooks were alerted about the letters by one of Brown's descendants, who is now living in Canada, the newspaper said. The woman, who was not named, gave the filmmaker access to the letters.

Discord over defence stalls Japanese coalition talks

TOKYO, Dec 28: Cracks widened in a deal to form a coalition government in Japan on Monday, when a top opposition leader said the ruling party was not serious about cutting a deal, and a government spokesman said a disagreement over defence could torpedo the alliance plan, reports AP.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the opposition Liberal Party had been expected to soon wrap up a coalition plan in the works for weeks that would bolster the LDP's standing in parliament.

But the talks have snagged over how far to expand the participation of Japanese troops in UN missions, the LDP wants to limit Japan's military to logistical support, while the Liberals are pushing for a broader interpretation of the constitution allowing troops to fully participate in UN-backed multinational operations.

The dispute blocked progress in talks on Sunday and forced the postponement of a meeting between Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and Liberal Party leader Ichiro Ozawa scheduled for

Monday morning. Ozawa on Monday suggested the LDP lacked the will to follow through on its deal with the opposition.

"There is little eagerness (on the part of the government) to definitely implement the agreement. That's where the situation stands today," Ozawa said. He said that unless the government demonstrated more willingness to go ahead with the deal, it would be useless to have talks between the heads of the two parties.

The government, meanwhile, stood by its refusal to change its interpretation of the US-written constitution, which restricts the Japanese military to defence operations and prohibits offensive military action abroad.

"We've already reached agreement with Ozawa that there will be no change in the interpretation of the constitution," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka told reporters in Okinawa on Monday. "If the Liberal Party insists on more, we'll have to go back to square one."