



Mikhail Gorbachev, former Soviet leader, speaks at a signing ceremony of his latest book in a bookstore in Moscow, Tuesday. Gorbachev said that although the book, titled "Thoughts on the past and future," didn't reveal any hot secrets, future publications were sure to do so. Commenting on what some of those secrets might be, Gorbachev hinted that when the Soviet Union said it had a powerful response to Reagan's Star Wars, they were not kidding. Gorbachev's wife Raisa is at right (background).

— AP/UNB photo

Cyprus won't deploy Russian missiles

NICOSIA, Dec 30: Cyprus said on Tuesday it would not take delivery of Russian missiles Turkey has threatened to destroy, opting instead to negotiate with Moscow for the deployment on the Greek island of Crete, reports Reuters.

"I assume responsibility for this decision and I feel the obligation to underline that the sole factor taken into account is the good interests of Cyprus and of Hellenism," Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides said in a statement.

Western countries had expressed concern that deployment of the surface-to-air missiles could further escalate tension on the divided island and trigger a conflict between Greece and Turkey, allies in NATO but fiercely defensive of their ethnic kin on Cyprus.

Cyprus has been divided since Turkey invaded its northern third in 1974 after a brief Greek-inspired coup.

Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis described the missiles as "responsible" and said tension on Cyprus served only Turkey's interests.

He said he agreed with the plan to negotiate with Russia so the missile could be deployed on

Crete.

Greece bound to defend Cyprus under a 1993 defence pact, had feared the original plan could derail accession negotiations the island started with the European Union in March.

"The Greek Cypriot military cooperation will continue," Simitis said. "Greece guarantees the right of Greek Cypriots to live under conditions of security."

Greek backing was agreed early on Tuesday in a meeting between Simitis and Clerides in Athens. Clerides then flew back to Nicosia to chair the Cyprus National Council debate which approved the decision.

The 500 million US dollars anti-aircraft system is according to some reports, awaiting shipment in a Russian port, spending it to Crete instead of Cyprus would place Turkey well out of its 150 km range, meeting one of Ankara's key objectives.

Turkey had no immediate response but earlier Turkish statements suggested Ankara would still be concerned by the presence of the missiles on Crete.

BRIEFLY

Cold spell claims 24 in India: A cold spell sweeping northern India claimed 24 more lives overnight Monday, taking to 46 the number of exposure deaths so far this month, officials said Tuesday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

An Uttar Pradesh government spokesman reported 24 overnight cold-related deaths and said most of them were homeless people. Temperatures have dipped as low as minus 10 degrees Celsius in mountainous parts of Uttar Pradesh.

7 Maoist rebels killed in Nepal: Seven extreme left wing rebels were killed during a clash with police in western Nepal, a report said Tuesday. AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The rebels also attacked a Japanese aid office to loot cash and goods, the report said. The seven Maoist rebels were killed in Gorkha district. But the Maoists charged that their companions were rounded up by police and shot dead.

16 die in Indian road accident: A bus collided with a truck in western India on Tuesday, killing at least 16 people and injuring 13 others, Press Trust of India news agency said. AP says from New Delhi.

The bus passengers included some school children going for a picnic, PTI said. The collision took place near Aurangabad.

Gunbattle erupts in Dushanbe: Rival groups staged a fierce gunbattle in the centre of Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe on Wednesday, news reports said. AP says from Dushanbe.

There was no immediate word on casualties. Security guards from the National Reconciliation Commission traded fire with troops loyal to military commander, Rakhmon Sanginov, according to Russia's Interfax news agency.

Japanese filmmaker Kinoshita dies: Keisuke Kinoshita, a prominent Japanese director noted for tackling contemporary social problems and depicting the beauty of human weakness in his films, died of a stroke at his home in Tokyo on Wednesday, his family said. He was 86, AP reports from Tokyo.

Kinoshita, a native of Hamamatsu in central Japan, joined what is now Shochiku Co, one of Japan's major movie companies, in 1933. He made his directorial debut with "Hanasaki Minato" (The Port where Flowers Bloom) in 1943. His most successful and best known film was "Nijishu No Hitomi" (Twenty-four Eyes).

Malaysian court acquits member of ruling party

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 30: A Malaysian court has acquitted a senior member of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's political party of corruption charges, newspapers said today. reports Reuters.

Muhammad Taib, one of three vice presidents in Mahathir's United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), was acquitted on Tuesday of a charge of failing to declare his assets fully. The charge carries a sentence of one year in jail, a 2,000 ringgit fine or both.

Muhammad was charged under the Prevention of Corruption Act with failing to comply fully with a notice last year to declare his assets.

After the notice was issued, he declared assets worth 10,82 million ringgit (2.87 million dollars) and 3.46 million dollars at the time of acquisition. The prosecution said the amounts underestimated his true worth.

— AP/UNB photo

A keeper at the Hamburg Zoo in Germany measures the tusks of an old walrus, named Lady Antje, the mascot of a local TV station, during the annual inventory Tuesday, when many of the zoo's 2,488 animals were weighed and measured.

— AP/UNB photo

3 beheaded in Karachi

KARACHI, Dec 30: Two men and a woman were beheaded today by unidentified assailants in Pakistan's troubled port city of Karachi, police said. reports AFP.

The motive for the slaying in the eastern neighbourhood of Saabab was not known, they said. Meanwhile tension prevailed in the city's central district where an angry mob torched six vehicles on Tuesday as authorities demolished houses suspected to be sheltering alleged terrorists.

Militants opened fire on police at several places in the district, but no one was hurt, according to the police.

Police said the militants of the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) were behind Tuesday's shooting and arson.

A senior police official said two MQM activists were arrested and illegal arms including several Kalashnikov rifles and pistols were seized in the disturbed areas by the security personnel.

Jakarta rejects request for Suharto's extradition

JAKARTA, Dec 30: The government on Wednesday ruled out a Portuguese lawmaker's request for the extradition of former President Suharto because of atrocities in East Timor, reports AP.

Justice Minister, Muladi said there was no extradition treaty with Portugal, East Timor's former colonial master, and that Suharto should be held accountable in Indonesia for any wrongdoing.

Indonesian state prosecutors are investigating corruption allegations against Suharto, who quit in May after riots and student protests against his 32-year authoritarian rule.

The Portuguese attorney general's office has said that Portugal's law provided no legal grounds to pursue the request for the extradition of Suharto.

A Portuguese lawmaker, Nuno Correia da Silva, had based his appeal on human rights abuses committed by the Indonesian military in East Timor during and after its 1975 invasion.

Albright to visit Moscow Jan 25-27

WASHINGTON, Dec 30: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will visit Moscow on January 25 to 27 and officials hope planes to launch long-delayed new strategic arms reduction talks can go forward despite US-Russia differences over Iraq, reports Reuters.

Albright had said earlier this month that she planned a trip to Russia in January, but specific dates had not been set until Tuesday's announcement by the state department.

When she first revealed plans for a Russia trip, an upbeat Albright said she expected to launch long-delayed new strategic arms reduction talks while in Moscow.

That was based on assurances by Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov that Russia's Duma or Parliament would ratify the end of December the START-2 (Strategic Arms Reduction) treaty that is a prerequisite to negotiations on deeper arms cuts.

King Hussein completes cancer treatment

ROCHESTER, Minnesota, Dec 30: Jordan's King Hussein was discharged from the Mayo Clinic on Tuesday morning after completing treatment for lymphatic cancer, reports AP.

Clinic spokeswoman Jane Jacobs said she couldn't say if Hussein would return to the clinic in southeastern Minnesota for any follow-up visits.

Hussein had been at the Mayo Clinic since July, when he started treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He said in November that there was no trace of cancer in his lymph nodes but he would undergo a bone marrow transplant to ensure the cancer would not recur.

He also predicted last month that he would return to Jordan either in late December or early January. He was believed to have gone to his residence near Washington, DC, after leaving the clinic Tuesday.

Malaysian court acquits member of ruling party

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— AP/UNB photo

International

Clinton's impeachment

Republicans plan to call witnesses in Senate trial

WASHINGTON, Dec 30: Republicans planning the impeachment case against President Bill Clinton in the US Senate said on Tuesday they planned to call witnesses in the Senate trial that could end in Clinton's removal from office, report Reuters.

This opened the way for the possible spectacle of Monica Lewinsky, whose affair with Clinton was at the heart of the crisis, and other key figures in the scandal, being grilled in the well of the August Senate chamber.

House members stressed this was their intention, but it was up to the Senate, which will adjudicate on the articles of impeachment handed up by the House, to decide on the trial procedures.

As the country prepared for what could be one of the biggest dramas in American political history, Republican members of the House of Representatives met behind closed doors to map out their approach to prosecuting the president.

The House voted on party lines on Dec 19 to impeach Clinton, approving two articles alleging perjury and obstruction of justice in his attempt to keep his affair secret.

Thirteen House members, acting as "managers" of the process, agreed witnesses should be called. Asked if Lewinsky might be called, Representative James

Grogan of California said: "May be."

Other key figures, including Lewinsky's one-time friend Linda Tripp, who secretly recorded their telephone calls, Clinton confidante Vernon Jordan and other key White House figures could be questioned in public.

Opinion polls show a majority is against removing Clinton from office and few believe that a necessary two-thirds majority in the Senate, where Republicans have 55 seats and Democrats 45, will vote to oust him.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott made clear in an interview with the Los Angeles Times on Tuesday he wanted an airing of the evidence before the Senate takes any action.

Urging Democrats pressing for a negotiated censure motion to "calm down," he said, "We need to go forward and do our constitutional duty to hear the evidence."

The White House will have up to a month to prepare its defense. Legal experts say that after the "managers" present their case, there will probably be an attempt by the White House to have the case dismissed.

If that fails to draw a simple majority of 51 senators, a full trial will proceed.

But the shape of that process will be up to the Senate — it could last anything from a few days to months, and could be ended at any time if a majority decided to do so, perhaps if some form of censure was agreed.

Off the Record



A father and son write a letter to Santa Claus (Ded Moroz in Russian), which they will put in a special post box, in the background, in Moscow Tuesday. On Sunday, Ded Moroz "officially" arrived in Moscow from Veliky Ustyug, a city in northern Russia, where he has his residence.

— AP/UNB photo

Where scientists beat filmstars

BEIJING: More than half of the young people in Beijing think scientists have made greater contributions to society than entrepreneurs, according to a recent survey, reports Xinhua.

The survey, conducted by the Beijing Shaohei Market Research Company revealed that scientists are the professionals most respected by Beijing youth followed by soldiers and middle and primary school teachers. Journalists, workers and movie stars have the lowest esteem among this group.

The survey, conducted among Beijing residents aged between 14 and 35, found that 53.2 percent of the respondents believe scientists make greater contributions to society than entrepreneurs.

Where 'God' may be erased

BNEI BRAK, Israel: A leading Orthodox rabbi has ruled that the word "God" may be erased from a computer screen or disk, because the pixels do not constitute real letters, reports AP.

According to Jewish law, printed matter with the word "elohim" in Hebrew, and its manifestations in any other language — must be stored or ritually buried.

Rabbi Moshe Shaal Klein published his ruling this week in a computer magazine aimed at Orthodox Jews. "Mahsheva Tova" Klein was responding to a question from a reader who was anxious about whether the ban on erasing the variations on the word "God" applied to computers.

The rabbi, prominent in ultra-Orthodox circles in this Tel Aviv suburb, ruled that the letters may be erased.

"Letters on a computer screen are an assemblage of pixels, dots of light, what have you," the rabbi's assistant, Yossef Hayad explained Tuesday.

"Even when you save it to disk, it's not like you're throwing anything more than a sequence of ones and zeroes away."

Villagers torture, kill 8 soldiers in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Dec 30: A mob of 200 villagers, some armed with machetes, tortured and killed eight Indonesian soldiers after stopping a public bus in a northwestern province. Two dozen people were arrested, the military said Wednesday, reports AP.

The Tuesday incident in Aceh province was likely to raise tensions in a region where the Indonesian military recently ended a decade-long campaign against separatist rebels. Officials suspect guerrilla followers were behind the attack.

Accused of widespread atrocities in Aceh, the military apologised and withdrew some troops in a conciliatory gesture after the resignation in May of former President Suharto. However, resentment toward the military remains deep.

In Jakarta, armed forces

assassins forced the victims to get off a bus in the village of Lhok Nibung that was heading to the nearby city of Medan. Ten other soldiers reported to their superiors, who dispatched hundreds of troops to search for the killers.

Wiranto said eight soldiers were killed and that 25 people accused of provoking the mob attack were arrested.

Aceh, about 1,750 kilometers northwest of Jakarta, is a staunchly Muslim province where rebels have been fighting for an Islamic state for decades.

The military has acknowledged that 760 people died in fighting since the late 1980s, although human rights groups put the death toll higher.

Commercialisation of Ramadan in US

WASHINGTON, Dec 30: For America's six million Muslims, finding the right gift around Ramadan has gotten easier as Islamic products find their way into US stores, mail-order catalogues and on the Internet, reports AFP.

As the gift-giving season takes American shoppers by storm, Islam seems to be joining the wave of commercialisation that has engulfed Christian and Jewish religious celebrations.

Islamic greeting cards, books about Muslim heroes, and computer software featuring animated stories from the Quran are now offered by businesses seeking to attract an expanding Muslim market.

Ramadan, the Islamic holy month which began December 19, is one of the most profitable times of the year for companies specialising in Islamic products, according to Arvind Kajaria, co-founder of 123 Greetings, a web site that sells more than 7,000 Muslim greeting cards per day during the month.

"Products made overseas have little relevance to local Muslim communities," said Shakeel Syed, Sound Vision's marketing director.

Less than a decade ago, most American Muslims were recent immigrants. Today, Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States and more than 60 per cent of Muslims are US-born.

This largely untapped market has provided lucrative incentives for Islamic companies to create products addressing the specific needs of Muslims growing up in the United States,



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