



Ethnic Albanian women cry in front of a coffin covered with the Albanian flag at a mosque in Racak, southern Kosovo, on Thursday. Hundreds of people later attended the funeral of 40 of the 45 victims of the January 15 Racak massacre, which was perpetrated by Serb forces, according to the OSCE. Only 40 corpses were released by Yugoslav authorities on Wednesday to family members. — AFP photo

International

UK accuses Serbs of holding up Kosovo peace talks

RAMBOUILLET, France: British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook accused the Serbs Thursday of holding up the Kosovo peace talks and praised the Kosovo Albanians for their cooperative attitude, reports AP.

Cook said the Serbs were wasting time by demanding that the two sides sign a basic set of principles guaranteeing that Yugoslavia's borders stay intact and that Kosovo never win independence.

"At the present time, what is holding up the negotiations is the current insistence by the Yugoslav side that there should first of all be agreement on the statement of principles," Cook said after six hours of meetings at a 14th-century chateau here.

Serbian President Milan Milutinovic, who came to the conference Thursday, defended the Serbian delegation's stance, telling Belgrade's pro-govern-

ment daily Politika that it was designed to "ensure a meaningful dialogue."

"The talks have been hard because the questions are so important," Milutinovic was quoted as saying in an interview which was to appear in Friday's edition of the newspaper.

The international mediators at the conference, led by American Christopher Hill, have persistently said the principles were agreed to by the mere fact that the parties turned up for the talks.

"I believe the Kosovo Albanians are engaged in trying to find a political settlement and I have asked them to continue to make progress," Cook said.

Serb sources close to the talks, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Serb side had signed the document unilaterally at the peace conference Thursday, but the ethnic Alba-

nians and mediators appeared uninterested.

Asked about the Serbian demand to sign the document, Albanian delegation member Vetou Surroi merely shrugged and said there were more important things to worry about. Conference spokesman Phil Reeker said he wouldn't comment on individual statements by delegations.

The mediators have persistently refused to deal with demands from both sides about what they consider their most important issues.

Cook said he and Vedrine conferred with Milutinovic and told him that it "can't be in the interest of Yugoslavia for it not to make progress."

"We know that they have prepared detailed comments on the framework document and we would like to get down to negotiations on these comments," he said.

Vedrine and Cook, co-hosts of the peace conference, returned here for the third time in six days in an effort to boost the talks along.

Cook tried to encourage the Albanians with the promise of NATO troops.

"If they want NATO troops to be deployed, first there has got to be a political agreement," he said.

Cook said that because of the difficulties in the talks, it is likely that the first deadline for an agreement — one week — will be extended by the six-nation Contact Group that organised the peace conference. That group is made up of the United States, Russia, France, Britain, Germany and Italy.

"There will be an interim assessment carried out this weekend and it is likely that this will result in an agreement that the talks would continue until the weekend after that," he said.

Congress prefers fresh polls in India

NEW DELHI, Feb 12: India's main opposition party has said it would prefer fresh national elections rather than from an alternative government if the ruling Hindu nationalist-led coalition collapses, reports AFP.

The Hindustan Times today quoted a Congress party leader, Sharad Pawar, as saying his party would opt for polls if the government lost its slender majority in parliament, "instead of putting together a new 'hotch potch' coalition."

Prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's 10-month-old coalition is backed by around 15 parties and has been rocked by infighting since coming to power.

The Congress, led by Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, has been increasing pressure on the government since trouncing Vajpayee's Hindu Nationalist Party in key state elections in November.

A government is elected for five years in India, but parliamentary elections can be held earlier if the government collapses and no party or group has the strength to provide a stable administration.

US jets renew attack on Iraqi defence sites

WASHINGTON, Feb 12: US warplanes attacked several Iraqi air defence sites Thursday after being targeted by radar or seeing Iraqi military planes violate "no-fly" zones, the Pentagon said, reports AP.

The attacks occurred in both the northern and southern no-fly zones. In the north, US fighter jets were targeted by radar in each incident. In the south, Air Force and Navy fighter jets struck two anti-aircraft missile sites, radar and equipment after a pair of Iraqi MiG-23s flew into the no-fly zone. It was the second clash in two days in the south.

Navy Capt. Michael Doubleday, a Pentagon spokesman, said US forces have had a "grave impact" on Iraq's integrated air defense system and pilots were choosing targets carefully. "We keep on eye on sites we feel are threatening to coalition forces," he said.

US pilots returned safely Thursday to their bases, according to the Pentagon, which denied a report by the official Iraqi News Agency that Iraqi

gunners hit an allied plane in the north.

"Such reports by the Iraqis in the past have been very questionable and I have no reason to believe this is anything other than their usual," said Col. Richard Bridges, a Pentagon spokesman.

Iraq claimed two civilians were killed and several others injured. The US European Command, which oversees the northern zone, said a damage assessment was being done.

An Air Force F-15E bombed an Iraqi surface-to-air missile communications site at about 12:30 pm Iraqi time, after its pilot saw anti-aircraft artillery fire and his plane was illuminated by radar near Mosul, US officials said. Two other F-15Es launched an AGM-130 missile and dropped four GBU-12 precision-guided bombs on the site.

About an hour later, US warplanes struck other Iraqi surface-to-air missile and communications sites near Mosul after being targeted three times by radar, US officials said.

Junta calls for uprooting dissent Supporters flock to Suu Kyi outside city-centre offices

YANGON, Feb 12: Hundreds of Yangon's poor flocked to democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi today, as Myanmar's junta leader used a national unity holiday to demand a patriotic drive to crush her political opposition, reports AP.

Aung San Suu Kyi handed out free rice to huge Union Day crowds thronging the headquarters of her National League for Democracy (NLD), witnesses said.

Teams of a security officials kept a close watch on the crowds, and official photographers snapped pictures of supporters outside the city-centre offices.

Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi refrained from making an address to avoid provoking authorities who had earlier tightened Yangon's visible security measures, witnesses said.

Across the city at an official ceremony marking the 52nd

anniversary of Union Day, a key step on the road to independence from Britain, junta leader than Shwe called for the stamping out of dissent.

"I oppose and crush destruction from inside and outside the nation who are disturbing and jeopardising the state, stability, peace and development."

His words were an apparent reference to Aung San Suu Kyi, who is frequently accused by the junta of conspiring with foreign powers against the government.

Than Shwe accused the opposition of disrupting government efforts to foster unity and prosperity.

"Internal destructive elements are blatantly transgressing, to break the national solidarity, using external compadre axe-handles, to wreck the stable, peaceful, tranquil and developing situation in the country," he said.

6 Tigers killed in N Lanka: At least six Tamil Tiger rebels were killed and seven government soldiers wounded in fresh clashes in northern Sri Lanka, the defence ministry said yesterday, AFP reports from Colombo.

Five members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed by army snipers in the Jaffna peninsula on Thursday, the ministry said, adding another rebel was killed the same day in Wannai. Seven soldiers were wounded when Tiger rebels fired a barrage of mortar bombs at army defences near the town of Oddusudana, the ministry said.

8 die in Brazilian boat capsizing: At least eight people died and dozens were missing, most of them children, after a crowded boat capsized on a turbulent stretch of a river in Brazil's Amazon, police officials said on Thursday, Reuters reports from Brasilia.

Police sources differed about the number missing, one official said. There were roughly 33 people unaccounted for. "The majority of those missing are children aged between 2 and 17," said a spokesman for the firefighting unit of the police in Amazonas state. Police were investigating the cause of the Wednesday night accident amid preliminary reports that the three-storey, 35-metre vessel, Ana Maria VIII, was overcrowded.

Japan's oldest person dies: Japan's oldest person died yesterday at the age of 113, Japanese media reported, Reuters says from Tokyo.

Yasu Akino died from old age at her grandson's home in Shizuoka prefecture, Kyodo news agency said. Akino, born in 1885, married at the age of 20 and raised one son and three daughters. She had been mostly bedridden after fracturing her left leg trying to get out of bed five years ago.

Somoza family launches new party: A member of the once-powerful Somoza family announced the birth of a new Nicaraguan political party on Thursday, 20 years after the Sandinista revolution overthrew the family's dictatorship, Reuters reports from Managua.

Gustavo Javier Somoza, whose father, grandfather and uncle ruled Nicaragua for nearly five decades, announced the formation of the Democratic Nationalist Front at a news conference.

Death toll in Russian fire now 31: The death toll in one of Russia's worst post-Soviet fires reached 31 yesterday as rescue workers unearthed more bodies in the rubble of a gutted police station in the Volgograd city of Samara, AFP reports from Samara.

Another 27 people remained missing while 35 people were under treatment in hospital, including seven in critical condition. The blaze broke out early Wednesday evening and quickly engulfed the five-storey interior ministry building, sending several people jumping out of windows to their deaths. Some 230 firefighters spent some 12 hours battling the flames.

Arafat for political federation with Jordan

HEBRON, West Bank, Feb 12: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat told a mass rally of his supporters today that he was prepared to agree to a political federation of the Palestinian territories with Jordan if the Jordanians wanted it, reports AP.

"We have a decision from the Palestinian National Council. We are prepared to create a federal entity with Jordan if they want it," Arafat told some 2,000 supporters of his Fatah faction in Hebron in the south of the West Bank.

"We are twin brothers," Arafat said referring to Jordanians and Palestinians.

Jordan controlled the West Bank from 1948, when the British mandate ended, until 1967 when the territory was conquered by Israel while Egypt ruled the Gaza Strip.

It was only in 1988 that the late King Hussein formally renounced his claim to the West Bank and East Jerusalem in favour of Yasser Arafat's PLO although the Hashemite Kings of Jordan retain certain rights over the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem.

King Hussein died on Sunday after a long battle with cancer to be succeeded by his eldest son 37-year old Abdullah.

After returning from Hussein's funeral in Amman on Monday, Arafat gave the new king a strong vote of confidence.

Chief Minister of Orissa resigns

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 12: Orissa Chief Minister J B Patnaik has submitted his resignation to the state governor C Rangarajan this morning, reports PTI.

I have submitted my resignation to the governor and he has asked me to continue till alternative arrangements are made, Patnaik told waiting newsmen as he came out of the Raj Bhawan.

The Chief Minister, who has offered to quit office owing moral responsibility for a spate of violent incidents in the state recently, said he had a telephonic talk with Congress chief Sonia Gandhi in the morning following which he decided to submit his resignation letter to the state government.

Rushdie plans retreat for writers at ancestral home

NEW DELHI, Feb 12: Controversial author Salman Rushdie, who is likely to visit India in the near future, will set up a retreat for people from the field of arts and literature at his ancestral house at Solan in Himachal Pradesh, his lawyer said yesterday.

Advocate Vijay Shankardas, who collected Rushdie's visa from Indian High Commission at London recently, told PTI that though the author was keen to visit India, details of his tour were yet to be finalised.

Rushdie's priority was to visit his ancestral property at Solan and set up a retreat for people from the field of arts and literature irrespective of their nationality, Shankardas said.

He also plans to visit his friends and relatives, the lawyer said and added that it is not certain when he will visit India though it will be in the near future.

Impeachment trial Senators lambast Clinton as immoral, liar, self-indulgent

WASHINGTON, Feb 12: Disgraceful. Deplorable. Indulgent and immoral. Boorish. A disgrace upon the office of presidency. One by one, for three straight days, senators have stood in their closed chambers, where the cameras stopped rolling earlier this week, and heaped these scathing words upon the president of the United States. And these are Democrats who intended to vote Friday for his acquittal, reports AP.

Republicans have been even more extreme. "The most accomplished, polished liar that we have ever had serving in the White House," Sen. Robert Bennett said of Bill Clinton.

He predicted that Clinton would become part of the lexicon as "a synonym for an elegant, well-crafted lie."

Such emotional, vitriolic name-calling never before tolerated on the floor of the senate on a normal day. Rules

and decorum wouldn't allow it. But this is no ordinary Senate proceeding. And the intensity of rebuke and disdain for Clinton behind closed doors has amazed even some who have participated in it.

"I have stood on the floor of the Senate as Senator (Robert) Byrd has rebuked senators who have called the president a liar. But it came today over and over and over again from both sides of the aisle," Bennett said after emerging from a third full day of private debate over whether to remove Clinton from office.

Though the president's acquittal has long been sure, the deliberations have been and extraordinary forum for senators — Republican and Democrat alike — to excise their anger toward a president who cast an entire nation into an impeachment crisis it did not want through infidelity and deceit.

Many senators have made their private floor statements public and further described their feelings outside the chamber.

It's a catharsis of sorts. A cleansing of some of the pent-up anger. And a chance for Democratic senators to inform future voters that their decision to acquit Clinton doesn't mean they condone his behavior.

Just listen to the words.

Clinton was "boorish, indefensible, even reprehensible," declared Richard Bryan.

Another Democrat, Bob Graham, laced together a string of stinging adjectives for his statement. The president's self-indulgent actions were immoral. Disgraceful. Reprehensible. History should — and, I suspect, will — judge that William Jefferson Clinton dishonored himself and the highest office in our American democracy," he said.



German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (L) and US President Bill Clinton (R) shake hands during a photo session Thursday in the Oval Office of the White House. The Chancellor is in Washington on an official working visit. — AFP photo

Australian Prime Minister says E Timor should choose autonomy within Indonesia, not independence

CANBERRA, Feb 12: East Timor should choose autonomy within Indonesia rather than independence otherwise it could become a burden on foreign aid donors, particularly Australia, Prime Minister John Howard said Friday, reports AP.

Howard warned the people of East Timor to think "very hard" about becoming an independent nation because it could lead to internal instability and economic weakness.

"If East Timor is left without much support as an independent country by Indonesia then there is only one country that the rest of the world is going to look principally to, and that is Australia," Howard said on commercial radio about the Australian national interest here and I'm asking people who are ready to engage in easy rhetoric about this issue to think through the consequences of too hasty a grant of independence to East Timor."

Indonesian President B J

Habibie indicated Thursday that he favoured independence for East Timor and said the disputed territory's political future could be determined by the end of the year.

Howard said Timor should become independent if that is what its people want.

"(But) if we just have an arbitrary grant of independence without much preparation or ongoing assistance, you can have a lot of internal collapse and turmoil, even more than now, and there would be an enormous potential burden thrust on Australia," Howard said.

Indonesia has offered to withdraw from East Timor and declare it independent if the East Timorese reject an alternative autonomy deal for the half-island territory.

The autonomy offer is now the subject of UN-sponsored negotiations between Indonesia and Portugal, East Timor's former colonial master.

Indonesia invaded in 1975 and declared East Timor its 27th province in 1976. Since then, the territory has been wracked by guerrilla war and human rights abuses.

East Timor could potentially become one of the world's better-off small states due to oil and gas reserves offshore in the Timor Sea.

But rights to the reserves are currently divided by treaty between Australia and Indonesia.

Reuters from UN adds: Secretary-General Kofi Annan said on Thursday it was too early to call negotiations on East Timor a success story despite Indonesia's new willingness to allow independence for the territory.

Talks have gone very well, and we made some progress, but we still have some major hurdles ahead," he said in answer to queries about a speech by Indonesian President B J Habibie in which he said he expected to resolve the problem by the end of the year.

Aliens may stay in US while fighting deportation orders

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 12: Thousands of illegal immigrants who are longtime US residents can remain in the country while fighting deportation orders, a federal appeals court ruled, reports AP.

In a 2 to 1 decision Thursday, the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a judge's injunction blocking deportations during a lawsuit over a new law severely limiting eligibility for future legal residency.

The ruling applies only to the 9th circuit, which covers nine western US states. Similar deportations have taken place elsewhere.

The ruling probably affects several thousand immigrants in the United States for more than seven years who claim they are eligible for suspension of deportation orders, said Marc Van Der Hout, a National Lawyers Guild attorney representing the immigrants.

Since the case started in 1997, Congress has changed the law to exempt immigrants from Nicaragua, El Salvador,

Guatemala, Cuba and some eastern European countries from the limits at issue in the case.

An illegal immigrant who has lived in the United States continuously for seven years can get a deportation order suspended by showing good moral character and the prospect of extreme hardship if deported. Suspension of deportation makes an immigrant eligible for legal residency.

A 1996 federal law placed a 4,000 annual limit on the number of immigrants eligible for suspension of deportation and transfer to legal residency status.

The limit covers the period from one October to the next. After 3,900 deportation orders were suspended between October 1996 and February 1997, the chief federal immigration judge and the chairman of the Board of Immigration Appeals ordered immigration courts not to approve any more suspensions until at least April 1997.

Lockerbie bombing Progress made in starting trial of Libyan suspects

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 12: Further progress has been made towards starting the trial of two Libyans accused of the Lockerbie bombing, South African envoy Jakes Gerwel told AFP after returning from Tripoli on Thursday.

"There is progress every time we go there," Gerwel said, declining to give further details.

"We are expecting a statement from Tripoli sometime and after that I will be prepared to comment," he said.

Gerwel, a senior aide to President Nelson Mandela, has been involved in talks to end the stalemate over the trial of the two Libyans accused of involvement in the 1988 bombing of a PanAm flight over Lockerbie, Scotland.

The blast killed all 259 people aboard the plane and 11

others on the ground.

Tripoli has accepted a proposal for the trial to be held in the Netherlands under Scottish law, but the agreement has foundered on Libya's demand that if convicted, the two men serve their sentence in a Dutch prison.

London and Washington demand that the men should be jailed in Scotland if found guilty.

Meanwhile, Britain has offered to station UN monitors inside a Scottish prison where the two Libyans suspects would be held if convicted, the Guardian reported today.

The paper said London was asking United Nations chief Kofi Annan to supply monitors to work inside the prison, in a bid to reassure Libya and get it to hand the men over.

Off the Record Protest in jeans

ROME: Women lawmakers wore jeans in Parliament and charges of sexism flew Thursday after Italy's male-dominated appeals court said it is impossible to rape a woman wearing jeans, reports AP.

"If we go on like this, every woman that doesn't wear a chastity belt will have the 'right' to be raped," said Sonia Viale of Parliament's equal opportunities commission.

"Jeans: An alibi for rape," read a sign held up in Parliament by five jeans-clad lawmakers.

It seemed as though everyone in Italy, from the prime minister on down, was up in arms over a decision Wednesday by Italy's highest appeals court.

The Court of Cassation said it's impossible to take off tight pants like jeans "without the cooperation of the person wearing them." It said the girl must have consented to sex and sent the case back for retrial.

The ruling came in the 1998 conviction of a 45-year-old driving instructor in southern Italy, Carmine Cristiano, for raping an 18-year-old student. A lower court had sentenced Cristiano to two years and eight months in prison.

Protesting lawmakers called on women all over Italy to join a "skirt strike" and wear jeans — a call promptly heeded on-air by the anchor of a popular television show known for her chic dresses.

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The 'royal float' with the giant Heracles rolls through the streets of Nice, southern France, on Thursday to the delight of thousands of spectators on the opening night of the 115th Nice carnival. — AFP photo