

Killer of 100 Pak children surrenders

LAHORE, Pakistan, Dec 31: A Pakistani man who has admitted to have killed 100 children surrendered late Thursday, police and witnesses said, bringing a dramatic end to a weeks-long manhunt, reports AFP.

Javed Iqbal, 38, who had been on the run since early this month, walked into the offices of Urdu language daily Jang and said, "I am giving up."

"Had I surrendered to the police I would not have been able to put across my point of view as to why I killed the children," he told reporters.

Police and military authorities cordoned off the newspaper building and whisked him away.

Iqbal in a letter to police said he had killed 100 children over the past six months and dissolved their bodies in acid-filled containers.

"I have no regrets over what I have done," he said.

Three cheers for the new millennium

SYDNEY, Dec 31: More than a million high-spirited revelers have moved into position around -- and onto -- Sydney harbour for the world's biggest firework spectacular as the sun sets here on the 20th century, reports AFP.

Sydney Water police said 100,000 people were aboard 6,000 boats comprising a vast flotilla, with the harbour "jam packed" with crafts in blustery conditions.

It is the biggest crowds Sydney has ever seen, and an enormous challenge for the city's police and emergency services. Rain is forecast for later in the evening.

Authorities estimate between 1.2 and 1.5 million people will be jostling for the best views of the 6 million dollar (3.8 million US) fireworks extravaganza, with the main display beginning at midnight. People have been staking

claims to pieces of grass since Thursday, with tent cities springing up around the shoreline.

"We've been planning this trip for five years. We've been here before and we absolutely love it and we just had to be here," said one English couple from Manchester.

AUCKLAND, Jan 1: Kiribati's Line Islands and Tonga are in the new millennium, reports AFP.

The Polynesian Kingdom of Tonga used daylight savings to put itself 14 hours ahead of GMT while Kiribati's Kiritimati (Christmas) and Millennium Islands are 14 hours ahead thanks to a redrawing three years ago of the international Dateline.

But while the crowds swarm into every available space, many of Sydney's best vantage points remained relatively quiet, fenced off for private

functions, with some punters paying up to 2,000 dollars for tickets.

Police said the crowds were generally well behaved.

Meanwhile, from a bleak atoll south of the Equator, a sacred mountain in New Zealand, a lonely island of tragedy to the majesty of Antarctica musical instruments are being tuned, babbly is on ice and people are arriving for the new millennium just hours away.

And in Fiji, among the first into the millennium, several hospitals were reporting they have women who might deliver the new millennium's first child -- including Lautoka Hospital which was warning they had "a whole ward of women" ready to give birth. Around 60 mothers in New Zealand are due to give birth early Saturday.

"If I get the millennium baby I will be very happy," Jiang told Television New Zealand.



A Thai couple kiss to celebrate their wedding day during start of the biggest mass wedding in Thailand yesterday. Thailand's biggest traditional mass wedding ceremony saw 2,000 Thai and foreign couples welcoming the new millennium with the possibility of making the event listed in the Guinness Book of world records. —AFP photo

'Artificial sun' to mark new millennium.

SEOUL, Dec 31: South Koreans, too impatient to wait for the first sun of the new millennium, are to light an "artificial sun" at midnight today, reports AFP.

The orb, a ball of magnesium powder three meters in diameter, will be ignited in downtown Seoul and will burn for the first minute of the third millennium, officials said.

"It will burn in our peoples dreams and hopes," said Song In-Sang, a spokesman of the Presidential Commission for the New Millennium.

The ball's luminosity would be the equivalent of 20 million candles, which Song said would give a brief sensation of daylight.

George Harrison recovering

LONDON, Dec 31: Ex-Beatles guitarist George Harrison was recovering in hospital today after being stabbed in the chest in what police described as a "vicious attack" by an intruder who broke into his luxury mansion, reports AFP.

Doctors treating Harrison, 56, said he had avoided life-threatening damage to his major organs only "by chance".

World's oldest person dies at 119

HARRISBURG, Pennsylvania, Dec 31: Sarah Knauss, listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's oldest person, was died at the age of 119, according to a spokeswoman at the Allentown nursing home where she lived, reports AP.

Knauss, who was 20 when the 20th century began, apparently died of natural causes at about 3 pm (2000 GMT) Thursday, two days before the start of 2000, said Marcella Moyer Schick, executive director of the Pheobe-Devitt Homes Foundation.

"She died quietly in her room. She was not ill," she said.

Chances are 50-50

WAITANGI, Chatham Islands, Dec 31: The Chatham Islands maybe the first populated region to see the dawn of the new millennium but the odds of seeing sun rise on January 1 were diminishing today, reports AFP.

Augie Auer, meteorologist for New Zealand's TV3, said a high pressure front that had been moving toward the islands late Thursday appeared to have deviated away, leaving the islands in the clouds on the edge of the weather pattern.

"I'm a bit surprised and disappointed," said Auer, a transplanted American who has a cult following in New Zealand. "I'm very displeased to see this here now."

BRIEFLY

5 executed, 1 to die in China: Chinese authorities have executed five men for murder and robbery and sentenced to death another convicted of knifing and pouring acid on a woman, a state-run media reported Friday, AP reports from Beijing.

The five were executed Wednesday in the northeastern city of Shenyang, in Liaoning province, after the provincial high court upheld their death sentences for armed robberies that resulted in the deaths of 16 people, the Beijing Morning Post reported.

Flash floods kill 6 in Philippines: Floods brought on by heavy rains have killed six people and left at least 5,700 homeless in the southern Philippine province of Misamis Oriental, the military said at Zamboanga, Philippines, AFP reports from Philippines.

Pounding rains since Monday caused rivers in the province to overflow, destroying 300 houses, said military southern command spokesman Colonel Fredesvindo Covarrubias.

Y2K problems US, Russia monitoring missile systems

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colorado, Dec 31: US and Russian military on Thursday started surveying their strategic missile control systems to prepare for the year 2000 and to assure one another they will function fine, but they have already encountered communication problems, reports AFP.

"All our systems have been checked and we are sure they will work well," Colonel Sergey Kaplin, chief of the Y2K department of the Armed Force of the Russian Federation, said at a news conference at Peterson

Air Force Base here. The US Army has spent 3.6 billion dollars to have its systems Y2K ready, said US Navy Captain Michael Luginbuhl, vice-director of operations at the US Space Command.

But the crucial moment for the Center for Y2K Strategic Stability (CY2KSS) here will begin at 5:00 a.m. Friday (6:00 am BST) when the first US military bases in the west Pacific on the islands of Kwajalein -- one of the Marshall Islands -- and Guam will change over to January 1, 2000.

India puts anti-hijack squads on 'sensitive' flights

NEW DELHI, Dec 31: India has started deploying anti-hijack squads on both its domestic and international carriers flying "sensitive" routes, the Hindustan Times reported today, says AFP.

Top officials told the daily that "sky marshals" were put on eight international flights from India to the Middle East, Bangkok and Colombo on Friday.

The new arrangement covers 22 domestic and international sectors which the civil aviation ministry had short-listed in consultation with the ministry of home affairs and the Bureau of Civil Aviation and Security, a source said.

An Indian Airlines plane

was hijacked on Christmas Eve, shortly after take-off from Kathmandu.

The plane was still parked Friday with 160 hostages in the southern Afghanistan town of Kandahar, as negotiations with the hijackers showed no signs of a breakthrough.

Indian Airlines has already suspended flights to Nepal following the hijack while international carrier Air India is also beefing up security checks.

Officials said anti-hijack personnel would be deployed in the domestic sector in flights to insurgency-ridden states such as the northern Himalayan state of Kashmir and the troubled north-eastern provinces of Assam and Manipur.

FBI works round-the-clock to pre-empt terrorist attacks

WASHINGTON, Dec 31: FBI agents made several arrests, including a possible accomplice of a suspected Algerian bomb-smuggler, in their efforts to pre-empt a possible terrorist attack on the eve of the new millennium, reports AFP.

Law enforcement officials said federal and local police on Thursday arrested five Algerians in Boston and detained another four men in New York, one of whom was linked to accused bomb-smuggler Ahmed Ressam, arrested at a US-Canadian border crossing in Seattle on December 14.

That fourth man arrested in New York, Abdel Ghani, 31, was charged with "concealing his

material support of Ressam's efforts to violate federal explosives laws in Seattle, Washington, and with conspiring with others to traffic in and use fraudulent credit and bank cards," US district attorney Mary Jo White said in a statement.

Police questioned Ghani and three others early Thursday after picking them up in Brooklyn. Their investigations showed he was in Seattle from December 11-16 under the assumed name Eduardo Rocha and was to meet up with Ressam there, White said.

Two of the four people picked up in New York with Ghani were released.

UN envoy optimistic of end to hijack drama

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan, Dec 31: UN Coordinator for Afghanistan Erick De Mul said today he was optimistic of an end to the eight-day hijacking of an Indian Airlines jet, reports AFP.

Asked when he thought the stand off at Kandahar airport, in southern Afghanistan, would end he said: "Hopefully within hours, but at least within days."

He was again asked if the hijacking might be over before the New Year.

"I am hopeful but I don't think so," he told reporters as he stood by the edge of the run-

way, with the white Airbus A300 standing 500 metres (yards) behind him.

Negotiations between the Indian delegation and the five armed Muslim militant hijackers were continuing, he said.

"We heard yesterday there was reason for being optimistic. This was confirmed by the leader of the Indian delegation," De Mul said.

"That means there may be a light at the end of the tunnel."

De Mul said the United Nations was providing meals and water to those on board the plane and journalists and

diplomats waiting at airport.

Some of the food was being flown in from Islamabad, the rest was being prepared in Kandahar, although stocks in the city were running low, he said.

"The most important thing is to create a situation whereby it is possible for the Indian delegation to continue their conversation without any interruption," he said.

De Mul said he was very impressed by the way Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia, who few countries recognise as the country's legitimate rulers, had responded.

Russia destroys several Chechen strongholds

MOSCOW, Dec 31: Russian aircraft made 83 sorties in Chechnya and destroyed several rebel strongholds in the past day, Interfax news agency said today, reports AFP.

Air raids were concentrated on rebel bases in the mountainous south of the breakaway Caucasus republic, the agency said, quoting a Russian military statement.

Preliminary damage assessments showed 25 rebel fortifications were destroyed, along with some artillery pieces and communications hardware. Meanwhile, Russia threat-

ened to use more powerful weapons against Chechen rebels Thursday, betraying impatience with its campaign as its troops clashed on the streets of Grozny for the sixth day.

Moscow's warning mentioned no specific arms but, according to analysts, implied use of either aerosol bombs or missiles that destroy even those hiding under ground. It was quickly condemned by Washington, which again reminded Russia of the human cost of the nearly four-month war.

"Our concerns rest with the use of indiscriminate force that

results in the loss of life of innocent civilians," White House spokesman Jim Fallin said.

The heaviest fighting in Grozny, where an estimated 2,000 fighters are thought to be dug in, came in the western districts of the city as the well as the suburb of Staraya Sunzha, where rebels claimed to have made gains.

Russian Uragan and Grad rocket launchers rained down artillery shells on the city center while Russian warplanes pummeled the edges of the shellied-out capital from the air.

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