



US President Bill Clinton and First Lady and US Senator Hillary Clinton wave from the steps of Air Force One as snow falls around the Syracuse airport, New York, on Thursday. The two returned to Washington, DC after attending funeral services for Jack McAuliffe, 83, father of incoming Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe. —AFP photo

BJP warns govt to be on guard in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The leadership of India's ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party today backed the government's ceasefire in Kashmir but said it should not "drop its guard" against Pakistan-based Muslim militant outfits, reports AFP.

"The BJP national executive, while congratulating the government for its bold initiative, would like to draw attention to certain realities that cannot be wished away," the party's top decision-making body said in an official release.

The party noted there was a "decline in overall violence" in the state, but warned that "criminal" Pakistan-based organisations such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba had stepped up their activities.

"The government cannot afford to let down its guard against such organisations that continue to enjoy the patronage of the present regime in Islamabad," it said.

The BJP is the dominant partner in the multi-party coalition headed by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

New Delhi extended a ceasefire implemented during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan by four weeks on December 20.

The extension coincided with an increase of militant activities, particularly suicide attacks, by the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The party endorsed the government's view that "talks can be held with all parties and organisations in Kashmir" but stressed they must be "delinked" from any dialogue with Pakistan.

"The question of tripartite talks does not arise."

The national executive noted that while "some soft statements have emanated from Islamabad in recent days, there is little to suggest ... any efforts on the part of the Pakistani military regime to contain

terrorist outfits."

Pakistan should realise its "folly" and completely halt "cross-border terrorism," the release said.

The party said it would stand by the government to achieve peace in Kashmir but India's desire for peace should not be construed as a sign of weakness.

Pakistan and India have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, which is claimed by both.

A bilateral dialogue to solve the dispute has been frozen for more than a year.

New Delhi accuses Islamabad of fomenting insurgency in the Indian-administered zone of Kashmir, where the Muslim separatist movement has claimed more than 34,000 lives since 1989.

Pakistan denies the charge but extends moral and diplomatic support to what it terms the legitimate Kashmiri struggle for self-rule.

British doctor suspected of killing 265 patients

LONDON, Jan 5: Serial murderer Harold Shipman, a British doctor who is already serving life imprisonment for killing 15 patients, may have killed up to 265 people, Britain's Times reported today, citing a government dossier, reports AFP.

It said an independent audit of his clinical practice, due to be published later Friday, had found at least 250 more deaths during his career than other doctors in the same area at the same time. The 55-year-old was convicted on January 31 last year of killing 15 women patients by giving them overdoses of diomorphine, the legal term for heroin. Immediately after the conviction, Health Secretary Alan Milburn ordered a statistical audit of Shipman's clinical practice between 1974 and 1998. The findings of that study have now been passed to police amid fears that the

doctor, who operated in Manchester, northwest England, may have murdered far more patients than the 15 for which he was sentenced to life. Chief Medical Officer Professor Liam Donaldson asked Professor Richard Baker of the University of Leicester to carry out the study. He compared the number of patient deaths recorded by Shipman with those of other family doctors in the same area. The study compared trends such as the time of death and whether the doctor involved, or any relatives of the victims, were present at the time. He did not investigate individual cases during the 24-year period, but the 250 excess deaths appear to confirm fears that Shipman killed many more people than previously thought. The Times said the study found that a pattern in his killings had started early in his career and accelerated sharply.

Soon after Shipman's conviction, police announced they had opened inquiries into the deaths of another 39 of his patients and were investigating as many as 175 cases. Later, they said they had amassed sufficient evidence to charge the doctor with the murder of 23 more people. However, a new trial was ruled out for two main reasons. Victims' families did not think it would be in the public interest, as Shipman was in any case already serving life. Secondly, lawyers doubted whether he would get a fair trial because of the enormous publicity generated by the first hearing. Shipman has refused to reveal the true extent of his activities or to help police since beginning his sentence.

Pinochet refuses medical tests, interrogation

SANTIAGO, Jan 5: Former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet refused Thursday to submit to medical tests and an interrogation ordered by a judge seeking to put him on trial for murder and kidnapping, one of his attorneys said, reports AFP. The Pinochet family has followed the advice given by the legal defence team, "to ignore the order from Judge Juan Guzman Tapia, Pinochet lawyer Jose Maria Eyzaguirre told a press conference here. Later Thursday, the former dictator's lawyers, who have called the judge's investigation legal persecution, filed a formal disciplinary complaint against Guzman. They insisted Guzman was wrong to schedule Pinochet's deposition immediately after his medical tests and said the general should be deposed only after the results of his tests became known. A day earlier, Pinochet's lead defence lawyer Pablo Rodriguez described the judge's order as "disrespectful to the person of General Pinochet and to the armed forces." Meanwhile, Guzman promised to follow the law in dealing with Pinochet's refusal to follow his orders. "All these measures are

described in the Procedural Code," he told local radio. Guzman, investigating 202 complaints against Pinochet, ordered the ex-dictator undergo medical tests January 7 and 8 and appear for questioning January 9. Pinochet, 85, ruled Chile with an iron fist from 1973 to 1990 following a bloody military coup that overthrew socialist president Salvador Allende. The complaints against Pinochet stem from the deaths or disappearances of more than 3,000 people during his rule. Last month, Guzman issued an order for Pinochet's house arrest and charged him with murder and kidnapping in the deaths and disappearances of 75 opponents in the month after he took power. The arrest order and indictment concerning the so-called "Caravan of Death" were overturned by Chile's Supreme Court because Pinochet had not been questioned about the case. Prosecuting lawyer Carmen Hertz said Wednesday a refusal by Pinochet to submit to the order for medical tests and to answer questions from Guzman would amount to contempt of court. The two days of physical and psychological examinations had been fixed to determine

Pinochet's fitness to stand trial. Pinochet's lawyers maintain their client, who suffers from diabetes and a series of cardiovascular diseases, is not up to the stress of trial. Pinochet's protracted legal woes have prompted concern about potential unrest in the military. A meeting of Chile's National Security Council, made up of top military brass and the presidents of the Senate and Supreme Court, took place here earlier this week. Participants insisted, however, that Pinochet's legal woes were not discussed at the closed-door meeting. The medical tests are Pinochet's defence's last, best chance to establish that he is in no psychological shape to defend himself and get a fair trial. Under Chilean law, if the tests show signs of dementia or insanity, Pinochet would be deemed free from responsibility for the more than 3,000 foes or suspected opponents killed, or abducted and presumed killed, during his regime. An opinion poll by the Centre for Modern Studies showed 50 of Chileans were in favour of bringing Pinochet to trial, while 33 percent opposed the charges against him.

China shows more flexibility on Taiwan

WASHINGTON, Jan 5: Chinese Deputy Prime Minister Qian Qichen gave indications that his government would be more flexible in dealing with Taiwan, in an interview published today in The Washington Post, reports AFP. "Anything can be discussed," Qian told the daily in Beijing when asked if China would be willing to accept a loose confederation with the island.

He said Beijing has adopted a "pragmatic and more inclusive" version of its long-standing "One China" policy, which up to now considered Taiwan a breakaway province. Qian also warned the incoming US administration of President-elect George W. Bush that if it approves the sale of advanced Aegis radars to Taiwan, it would harm bilateral relations. However, he also said that "China and the United States have no need to begin a war against each other," over Taiwan. On Beijing's "One China" policy, Qian said China has modified it over time. He admitted Taiwanese leaders "were trapped" when China considered Taiwan a renegade province of Communist China, meaning Beijing's government was the only legal government. "In order to ease their doubts," Qian said in the interview, "we said 'one China' not only includes the mainland, but also Taiwan. We think of this China as an integral whole which can't be separated in sovereignty or territory. This is the true meaning of 'one China.'"

"And they had another doubt, ... They think that Taiwan being part of Chinese territory means Taiwan and China are not equal ... To ease this doubt, we said the mainland and Taiwan belong to the same one China. At least it shows some kind of equality. I think it can help ease their doubts." However, Qian also recognised that China's other formulation for Taiwan of "one country, two systems" faces opposition and resentment from people in Taiwan who do not want to be compared to former colonies Hong Kong and Macao. "There is much room (for negotiations) on this problem," Qian told the daily. Bush foreign policy advisers did not comment on Qian remarks but Asia specialists said his comments were aimed at the incoming administration. "They are sending signals that they are prepared to work with the administration and not make unreasonable demands," said Douglas Paal, president of Asia Pacific Policy Centre and a member of the National Security Council under former president George Bush, the current president-elect's father. Rather than acknowledge a policy change regarding Taiwan, Qian hinted at a semantic view of the issue.

"Our policy of 'one China' has never changed, but to make it more accommodating, easier for them to understand, we made a clearer explanation."

Another Chinese official involved in Taiwan policy told the daily that China had significantly softened the policy, and no longer viewed Taiwan as a renegade province.

"Once we said we would liberate Taiwan," said the official who asked not to be identified, "then we said Taiwan was just a province of China, now we are saying Taiwan can be our equal."

"For the mainland to make these kinds of adjustments in policy is not an easy thing."

Britain under pressure in uranium shell controversy

LONDON, Jan 5: The British government came under pressure today to explain the effects of NATO's depleted uranium projectiles after it emerged that a British soldier had become ill after serving in the Balkans where the controversial weaponry was used, reports AFP. Kevin Rudland, 41, formerly of the Royal Engineers, served a six-month tour of duty in Bosnia in 1996 after which he developed osteoarthritis and tooth cavities, suffered from stress, lost hair and had to undergo psychiatric treatment.

"I think I'm owed an explanation for my benefit and that of other servicemen and women," he commented.

"This is a big problem that they've got and they need to look into it quickly," he added. "It may be the first in this country at the moment but I believe there are more that have not come forward or do not know yet." European ministers called on Thursday for an urgent inquiry into NATO's use of the weapons and the suspected health risks. So far eight Italian soldiers or civilians have died of leukaemia after serving in the Balkans, while the Belgian army reported five fatal cancer cases. Washington failed to allay growing European concern over the use of depleted uranium munitions in the Balkans as new cases of rare illnesses in former peacekeepers who served there were revealed today. The Pentagon said no adverse effects had been found in US personnel who handled the ammunition but Greece nevertheless announced that its 3,553 troops who served in Bosnia and Kosovo would undergo medical examinations.

Responding to the clamour from Europe's defence ministers over the rash of cancer cases in their troops, NATO Secretary General George Robertson asked the alliance's military officials to report on where depleted uranium (DU) munitions were used in Bosnia. There is no evidence to support any correlation between exposure to depleted uranium in Bosnia or elsewhere and subsequent radiation-linked ill health. Robertson said in a letter to Italy's ambassador to NATO. "In light of public concern, I have nevertheless asked that this information should be assembled urgently," he said. In a new development, a British soldier who developed arthritis, whose hair fell out and teeth began decaying after serving in the Balkans emerged as the first case of so-called Balkans Syndrome in England. In Italy, where six people who worked in the Balkans were reported to have died of leukaemia, a newspaper said two more former peacekeepers had died after developing rare tumours.

Bush prepares for move to White House

AUSTIN, Texas, Jan 5: Wrapping up his old life and preparing for his new one, President-elect George W. Bush is packing his belongings in Texas and working to fill top law enforcement and intelligence positions in his administration, reports AP.

Bush wants Louis Freeh, a Clinton appointee who is popular among Republicans, to stay on as director of the FBI, advisers said. Freeh has two more years left of his 10-year term. Bush may also offer a brief extension to CIA Director George Tenet, some

Bush advisers said Thursday. No other major personnel announcements were planned for Friday. Instead, Bush aimed to spend the day boxing up his belongings some will go to the White House later this month and others will be shipped to his nearly completed new ranch house in Crawford, Texas.

Bush planned to leave Friday for the ranch, where he'll spend the weekend and play host to a group of Republican governors on Saturday, said spokesman Dan Bartlett.

The governors' meeting is part policy gabfest and part thank-you party for state leaders who helped Bush get elected. They'll get a Bush-led tour of the remote 1,600-acre property, aides said.

Continuing a series of meetings to address his administration's top priorities, Bush has invited members of Congress who oversee military programmes to Austin on Monday for a forum on defense issues, Bartlett said.

On Tuesday he planned to visit

Washington, returning to Austin on Thursday.

Bush on Thursday named campaign manager Joe Albaugh to head the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He also selected campaign strategist Karl Rove as his senior White House adviser.

Rove was given control over the offices of political affairs, public liaison and strategic initiatives - an unusually broad portfolio.