

WorldWatch

by Staff

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Weather

» As the new year began, several major storms hit the Northwest in less than a week. Two feet of snow, avalanches and mudslides blocked major highways. Because of rain and melting snow, officials have posted flood warnings for parts of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada and California.

» On December 29, a tropical storm lashed northern Borneo. High winds and flash floods killed 163, and more than 25,000 people lost their homes.

Germany

Chancellor Helmut Kohl insists, "We need the euro now and not whenever," repeating his government's determination to meet the currency union criteria. He is confident that the introduction of the euro in 1999 will considerably strengthen Germany's international competitiveness.

Russia

A new axis among Russia, Iran and India bears watching, and China may also be involved in the future. Russia is endeavoring to recoup lost influence in the Middle East through arms sales to Iran and India, and it has also proposed a new trade route between India and Russia across Iran. China is also selling weaponry and chemicals to Iran.

Israel

» Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip now have 40,000 firearms. Israeli intelligence sources also say they are arming themselves with anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. In future uprisings, rocket launchers and missiles may replace slings and rocks.

» Yassir Arafat said in a radio interview in France on November 22, 1996: "As soon as the interim period is over, we shall declare our Palestinian state, in two year's time." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Arafat that doing so would be a serious mistake. The five-year interim period began when Arafat and former Israeli Prime Minister Yitshak Rabin signed the Oslo Accords in September 1993.

Ecumenism

Pope John Paul II is planning a mass gathering of Christian and other religious leaders in Israel for a "millennium party" to mark 2000 years since the birth of Christ. The event, scheduled for the final two weeks of 1999, is intended to stage a concerted show of spiritual worship to contrast with hedonistic, secular parties planned around the globe. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, was delighted: "This is an opportunity to bring together the world leaders to make a spiritual statement for the future."

Disease

In a rare governmental acknowledgment, Gabon state radio on December 28 announced a new outbreak of the deadly *Ebola* virus. Nine people have already died. This is the third outbreak in 1996, the first two having killed 30 people. *Ebola* kills 80% of those infected, and there is no treatment or cure.

New World Order

Mikhail Gorbachev opened the five-day "State of the World Forum" in San Francisco on October 2, 1996. Speaking on education, he noted: "As the Bible said, 'In the beginning was the word'—the word that would generalize and summarize the powerful achievements of intellectual forces. . . . This word should be spoken out. The 'counsel of the wise' will lay the ground rules for resolving disputes and problems around the world, focusing on principles, values and actions that guide humanity to the next phase of human development. Planning sessions will define the rights, responsibilities, beliefs, and values of the 21st-century world citizenry—behind doors closed to all but the chosen few."