

Polish court confronts communist-era investigator at torture trial

WARSAW, Poland (AP) - A notorious former communist army investigator charged with torturing prisoners refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing Tuesday at his trial, and when confronted with documents said he could not remember the details after 50 years.

Mikolaj Kulik, 74, is being tried in a Warsaw military court for physically and mentally torturing Polish sailors and navy officers during interrogations from 1949-53, when he was a military intelligence investigator in the Baltic port city of Gdynia. He has pleaded innocent and faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

Presiding Judge Capt. Piotr Racziewicz on Tuesday read documents from 1951 and 1952 indicating Kulik repeatedly interrogated prisoners for long hours at night, sent one person to a dark cell, and wrote and signed at least two indictments. Some of those indictments later led to death sentences.

Maintaining his innocence, Kulik repeatedly said his health is failing and he doesn't recall the details after 50 years.

"I don't remember whom I questioned of the people named in the indictment, there are so many

names there," Kulik said from his seat in front of the judge. He had asked to be moved from the normal defendant's bench so he could hear better.

Kulik admitted to questioning one person on the indictment "and that's it," he said.

"I once sent (another person) to a dark cell for one hour for spitting on my uniform," he said. "I never hit anyone and never used bad words. When they did not confess, I sent them back to their cells."

When the court asked what he was doing with inmates for so many hours, Kulik said: "I asked them their life stories to put in the files. You could spend a whole day on it."

Citing his health, he has also refused to come to the trial, forcing the court to have military police bring him for each session.

The trial is part of Poland's efforts since the collapse of communist rule in 1989 to investigate and punish crimes perpetrated by the old regime.

Charges were brought against Kulik after a historian mentioned him as a dreaded figure in a book on Stalinist-era trials. In 1994, he filed a lawsuit against the historian that is still pending.

The next hearing in Kulik's trial is scheduled Feb. 1.

What Bill Clinton left behind for George W. Bush

WASHINGTON (AP) - More like a new president than a retiring one, President Clinton has been working hectically - making speeches, making changes by executive fiat, trying to achieve an elusive Mideast peace - but on Saturday he still will leave behind an ambitious agenda - goals unreached, hopes unfulfilled.

The Middle East peace agreement Clinton said he "really wanted, with all my heart," proved elusive. With less than two weeks left in office, the president acknowledged "we've got a mess on our hands" and started speaking more in terms of closing gaps between Israelis and Palestinians than in closing a peace deal.

At home, Clinton's plans for devoting the federal surplus to Social Security and Medicare went unheeded by Congress, as did his appeals for tighter restrictions on handguns, sweeping reforms of the nation's campaign finance system and a hate crimes law that also covers attacks on gays.

No matter how much labor Clinton exerted in the final days, "it is, for the most part, over," said University of Wisconsin political scientist Charles O. Jones.

A Mideast peace accord - unachieved for half a century - was

Clinton's highest foreign policy priority, but he also leaves behind an incomplete peace processes in Northern Ireland and between India and Pakistan, where he had hoped that a ceasefire in Kashmir could somehow translate into a permanent peace.

Additionally, Clinton failed to make good on efforts to defuse a simmering situation in Africa - the incomplete peace talks among the African nations around Burundi, an effort he plunged into seriously just last August.

"Peace processes work on their own timetable, not on ours. I don't think they would be geared to our election schedule or our transition schedule," said national security spokesman P.J. Crowley.

So Clinton kept trying. He made a third trip to Ireland and Northern Ireland to give peace efforts there a boost, and only reluctantly abandoned hopes to visit communist North Korea. His desire was to see to fruition his efforts to halt nuclear weapon development there and thaw relations with South Korea.

"When I became president, I was told by my predecessors that it was the most serious national security problem we were facing at the time," Clinton said about North Korea in

a November interview with The Associated Press.

President-elect Bush left Clinton wide latitude to do what he wishes. "Until I'm the president, he is going to make those decisions," Bush said over and over.

Clinton also leaves behind the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty which was completed in 1996 but which cannot take effect until it has been approved by the United States and 43 other nations that have nuclear research or power reactors.

Britain, France and Russia have signed and ratified the accord. China has signed but has yet to ratify it. North Korea has not signed, and India and Pakistan, which have engaged in a nuclear arms race in South Asia, also have not.

The United States signed it in 1996. The Senate rejected its ratification in 1999. Bush has opposed the pact as unenforceable.

Defense Secretary-designate Donald Rumsfeld also opposes it, although Secretary of State-designate and former Joint Chiefs chairman Colin Powell, supports it.

There were some matters that Clinton was content to leave to his successor, such as a decision on creating a national missile defense

system. And there are others that he has willfully left undone, such as the report on U.S. race relations he promised to deliver two years ago.

Another front where Clinton hoped his hyperactivity will pay off is trade. He was able to secure his biggest trade priority, permanent normal trade relations with China. But for American companies to reap the benefits of China's market-opening offers, the Chinese must be admitted to the World Trade Organization, the Geneva-based organization that sets the rules for world trade.

Clinton also completed negotiations on a trade pact with Vietnam and a free trade agreement with Jordan. But it will be the new Congress, under a new president, that will debate whether to accept the agreements.

"The only thing that I'm feeling about this last year is that I just want to keep working, I never want to sleep," Clinton told The Washington Post last summer, looking ahead to his last months in office. "I just read and read and read, I just want to keep going."

"I can rest starting at noon on January 20. And that's what I intend to do."



Thirteen-year old twin brothers, and leaders of the Myanmar rebel group, God's Army, Luther (r) and Johnny Htoo (l) await a news conference at a police base in Ratchaburi province, Thailand, Wednesday, Jan. 17.

Htoo continued

variously reported to be hiding in villages on either side of the border, their ragtag army scattered.

On Tuesday, Johnny and Luther surrendered: Forced by hunger, fatigue and a fresh Thai clampdown at the border.

Thailand says it will consider giving the twins asylum if they are found to be legitimate refugees fleeing war. If so, they will likely join the more than 100,000 other Karens in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. Their mother is rumored to stay in such a camp; their father's whereabouts are unknown.

Other than a few whispered words into the reassuring ear of Prime Minister Chuan, the twins have kept their mouths shut. Their fate remains uncertain.

Canadian prof. continued

a tough stance on China's human rights record. Tackaberry said he is concerned, however, with what he calls the Canadian government's

unwillingness to put human rights before trade agendas like the one it will take to China next month.

"We will be doing a number of things in advance of the trade mission," Tackaberry said, adding they are waiting for the Canadian government to renew its commitment to ensuring they won't sacrifice principles for profit.

Quake continued

aftershocks continued to shake the area.

"Everything has already fallen," he said.

A few even decided to stay. Ovidio Osencio, 28, has been sleeping outside with his family since the quake destroyed their house. On Monday, the family hiked down the mountain to buy food, then returned.

As they walked along, a bus carrying five Taiwanese volunteers sent to look for survivors made its way up. Minutes later, it headed back down.

When asked why the bus had turned back, a soldier standing along the side of the road just shrugged.

"They were looking for survivors," he said. "There aren't any here."

Arsenic contaminates Amazon river tributaries

SAO PAULO, Brazil (AP) - Arsenic-laden runoff from a mining operation has contaminated three small Amazon river tributaries, putting thousands of people at risk, officials said Tuesday.

Arsenic from a now-defunct manganese processing plant seeped into the underground springs that feed the tributaries around the city of Santana, some 2,650 kilometers (1,640 miles) north of Sao Paulo, said Wagner Costa of the Amapa state Environmental Affairs Department.

Though the contamination likely began in the early 1970s, it was only detected last year after health officials began receiving reports of arsenic poisoning, Costa said.

"We know for sure that people and the environment have been contaminated. We just don't know the exact dimensions of the problem," Costa said by phone from his office Macapa, the state capital. No arsenic-related deaths have been reported.

Costa blamed the contamination on

poorly built decantation basins at the processing plant run by the Icomi mining company. The mine was shut down in 1997.

Repeated calls to Icomi were unanswered, but the Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper quoted one of its directors as saying the contamination could also have been caused by the numerous brick and charcoal factories in the region.

"More technical information is needed before it can be said that the people were contaminated by Icomi," Luiz Ortiz Vergolino told the newspaper.

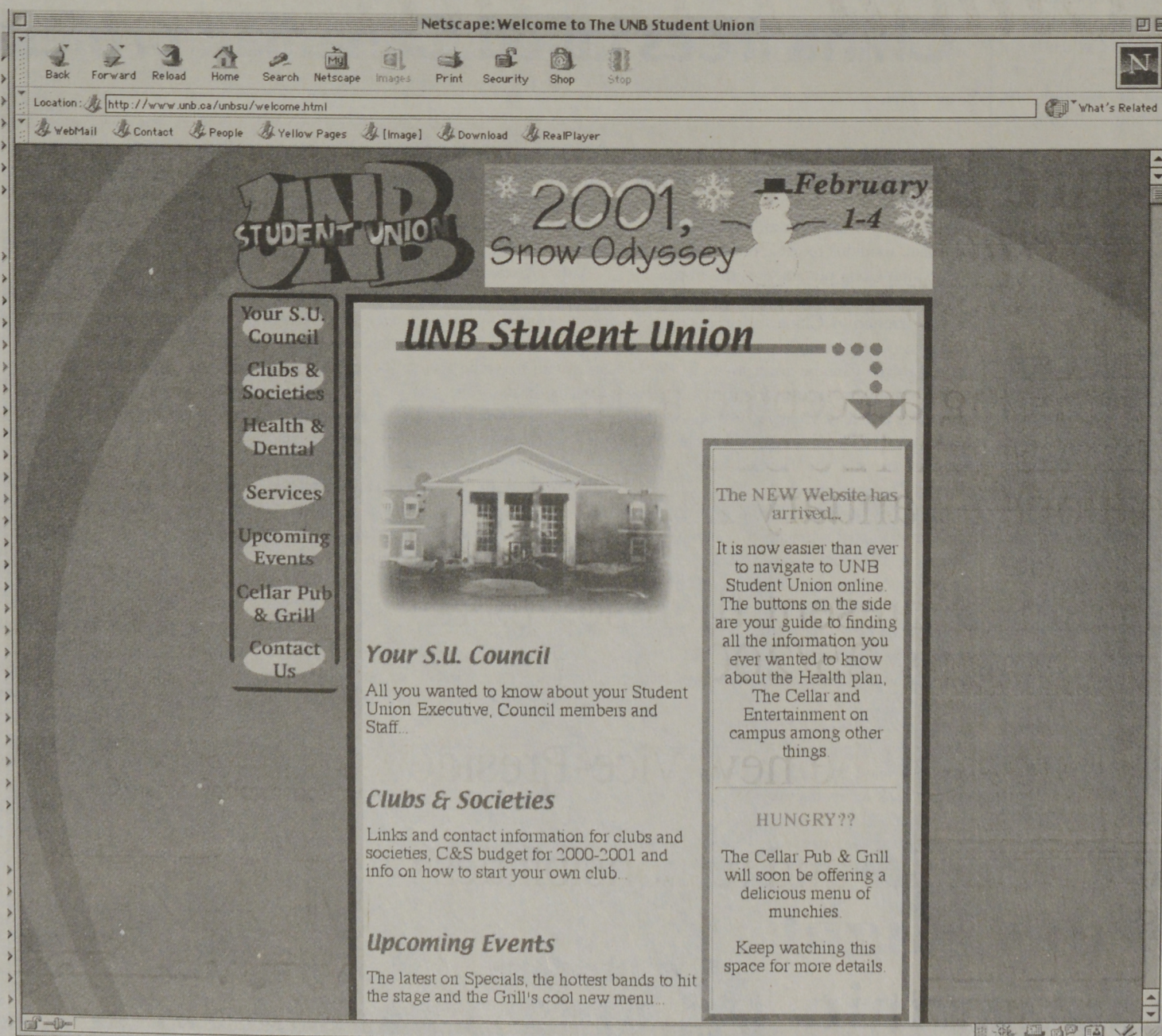
Arsenic poisoning symptoms include skin rashes, respiratory problems, headaches and the premature birth of deformed babies.

In July, health officials examined 100 people and 98 of them had some form of arsenic poisoning, Costa said. Traces of arsenic were also found in the river water, fish and shrimp.

Officials plan to test 2,000 more people living near the contaminated tributaries.

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