

## BRIEFLY

**Five killed in US plane crash:** A private plane crashed in a wooded area in heavy fog early Saturday, killing all five persons aboard, reports AFP from Florida.

Doug Sarubbi, spokesman for the Orange County Sheriff's Department, said the twin-engine beech 65 went down shortly after taking off from nearby Sanford, Florida, on a flight to Fort Lauderdale.

Rescue teams found the bodies of two women, a man and a teen-age boy at the crash site. Another man was pronounced dead at a hospital.

**Two UN captives in Bosnia freed:** Two UN military observers seized by rebel Serb forces in the former Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia were freed on Saturday, a UN military official said, reports Reuters from Sarajevo.

Two men were taken hostage by the Serbs, either on Friday night or Saturday morning, but they were released on Saturday afternoon, said the officer, attached to United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) headquarters in Sarajevo.

The officer, who requested anonymity, said the two UN observers had been held hostage by Serb soldiers demanding the return of a dead comrade's body held by Bosnian government forces. He did not say where they were seized.

**Fahd-Sheikh Khalifa hold talks:** King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani of Qatar, whose two gulf states are involved in a border dispute, held unexpected talks Saturday in Medina, Saudi Television reported, says AFP from Jeddah.

Sheikh Khalifa was met at the airport in the holy city by both King Fahd and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who has been mediating in the dispute.

The talks, on which the television provided no details, boosted hopes that Qatar would take part in a summit meeting scheduled to open in Abu Dhabi Monday of the six-nation gulf cooperation council.

**US marines begin operations in Somalia:** US marines conducted their first operations raid and weapons "bust" since going ashore in Somalia, NBC news reported on Saturday, says Reuters from Washington.

The TV network said marines learned that a group of armed men -- so-called "technicals" had set up a road block on the outskirts of Baidoa and were extorting money from passers-by.

A force of 100 marines in light armoured vehicles with anti-tank weapons conducted a raid on the technicals headquarters in an abandoned prison four miles (six km) outside Baidoa.

They took 40 to 50 technicals by surprise, surrounding them, and confiscated fuel, weapons and trucks, but took no one into custody, according to NBC.

**4 British soldiers killed in accident:** Four British soldiers were killed and 11 injured when a truck crashed off a jungle road in the central American state of Belize, Britain's Ministry of Defence said on Saturday, reports Reuters from London.

A spokesman said the truck carrying the 15 men overturned on Friday between the army camp at Salamanca, near the border with Guatemala, and the headquarters of the resident infantry battalion, the royal highland fusiliers, at Rideau.

Three of the men died on Friday and the fourth died the following day after being taken to a military hospital in the former British colony.

## UN trucks with food leaves for Somalia

**MOGADISHU, Dec 20:** United Nations trucks carrying 300 tonnes of food left under armed UN escort for the Somali town of Baidoa today, reports Reuters.

Two helicopter gunships, hovered above the convoy of 20 white trucks, led by two US light armoured vehicles, as it left the port in the capital Mogadishu on its 250 km (150 mile) journey at 6 am (0300 GMT).

US marines in jeeps mounted with machineguns rode shotgun with the convoy, which carried enough wheat to feed 100,000 hungry mouths for a week.

The journey was expected to take about five-and-a-half hours.

It will be the first big convoy of food to reach Baidoa, the "city of death" at the epicentre of Somalia's starvation, since July.

The last convoy, on November 11, was hijacked by looting gunmen on the outskirts of the southern town. Only two of 32 trucks on that mission made it into Baidoa.

"We believe that this convoy is in fact the beginning of the end of the humanitarian crisis

**Menchu returns to Guatemala**

**GUATEMALA CITY (Guatemala), Dec 20:** Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu returned to Guatemala on Saturday to spend her first Christmas in over a decade in her native country, reports Reuters.

Menchu, who won the coveted prize in October for her human rights advocacy, told reporters upon her arrival here that continued civil war and human rights abuses would prevent her permanent return.

She said she hoped mediation by the Catholic Church and by the United Nations would help alleviate the situation in Guatemala, whose army has the worst record of human rights abuses against Indians in the Hemisphere.

The Nobel laureate fled the country in 1981, two years after her parents and brother were killed, allegedly by security forces. Another brother was tortured and killed in 1983.

Menchu arrived here from Mexico City, where she has lived for the last 11 years and where she left the Nobel Medal on Friday, saying it would remain there until struggling peace talks brought an end to Guatemala's 32 years of civil war. Menchu said she was saddened that Guatemalan officials had rejected her invitation to the Nobel ceremony in Oslo.

Two unfolding scandals did not prevent the victory of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) — in power since 1955 — in July elections to the upper house of parliament. The opposition had made substantial gains in previous elections in the wake of the 1989 recruit scandal.

The year began with the arrest of former minister Fumio Abe, a close colleague of Prime

## Ghali says in interview

# Expulsion of Palestinians complicates ME peace process

**PARIS, Dec 20:** United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said in an interview released on Saturday that Israel's expulsion to Lebanon of more than 400 Palestinians had complicated the Middle East peace process, reports Reuters.

"These expulsions certainly complicate the peace process in a very serious manner," Boutros-Ghali told the French Sunday newspaper Le Journal Du Dimanche.

"It is certain that these expulsions are in flagrant violation of the Geneva convention and that this can only further complicate the peace process."

The UN Security Council voted a resolution on the matter which has moral and political value ... and which expresses the view of the international community.

"Since this is in the diplomatic arena, the idea is to obtain results through persuasion and dialogue," he said, adding that the United Nations was ready to help move the peace process forward again if it was asked to do so by the parties involved.

The Security Council resolution on Friday strongly condemned Israel's expulsion of the Palestinians from the occupied territories and de-

manded their immediate safe return.

The Council asked Boutros-Ghali to consider dispatching a representative to the area "to follow up with the Israeli government with regard to this serious situation."

Israel says the deportees are linked to radical Islamic groups which have killed five Israeli servicemen this month.

The Palestinians remain trapped in a no-man's-land north of Israel's self-declared security zone in southern Lebanon, with Lebanese troops barring their way forward and Israel refusing to take them back.



**BETHLEHEM, West Bank:** Wives of the Palestinian deportees, wait during a meeting held here Saturday to protest against the expulsion of their husbands. The united leadership of the uprising called for 10 days of violence in the Israeli occupied territories to protest against the deportation of 415 members of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. — AFP/UNB photo

## Tamils kill 8 soldiers

**COLOMBO, Dec 20:** Heavily armed Tamil guerrillas mounted a pre-dawn attack against army bunker lines in northwest Sri Lanka today killing eight soldiers and losing at least three of their own men, the military said, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fired automatic weapons and mortar bombs at the army's forward defence lines at Nannathan in Mannar district, triggering a heavy gunbattle, a military spokesman said.

"With the first break of light, troops moved out to clear the area. We have so far recovered three bodies of terrorists and recovered their weapons. We lost eight killed and four wounded in action, the spokesman said.

The Mannar attack by the guerrillas came a day after the military pushed back LTTE bunker lines outside the main northern military airbase at Palaly in the Jaffna peninsula.

## Israel to be in Y'slav style confusion: Arafat

**ROME, Dec 20:** The Middle East peace process has stalled and the region is threatened by Yugoslavia-style confusion, Palestine Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat warned in an interview published by the Catholic magazine "30 Giorni," reports AFP.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin aimed to "normalise" relations between Israel and the Arab world without taking the slightest step towards the Palestinians, Arafat said. "At the Madrid peace talks it was decided that autonomy for the occupied territories should begin within a year. The deadline passed on October 30, and we've had nothing."

If there was no solution to the Palestinian question, Arafat warned, "there will be a deluge of confusion."

AP Adds: The Islamic fundamentalist Hamas said Saturday it was considering a call by the PLO for buying inter-Palestinian differences to coordinate action against Israel.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was meeting Sunday at its headquarters in Tunis to discuss Israel's deportation of 415 suspected fundamentalists from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

PLO chairman Yasser Arafat has called on Hamas to participate.

But a senior Hamas official said in Jordan the group was considering the call and awaiting an official invitation before replying.

Ibrahim Ghosheh, spokesman for Hamas in Amman, said: "We welcome the call by the PLO and we have repeatedly said that it is time for all the diverse Palestinian factions to unite ranks against the conspiracies of the Zionist enemy."

He added in an interview with the Associated Press: "If we receive a written and official invitation from Mr. Arafat, we will study it and, God willing, our response will be positive."



**MOGADISHU:** A French soldier guards an intersection as a troop of camels passes by Saturday. In recent days, random shootings and looting have increased in Mogadishu and in outlying areas as coalition forces push into the Somali interior. — AFP/UNB photo

## Israel defends expulsion of Palestinians

**WASHINGTON, Dec 20:** Israeli Ambassador Zelman Shoval on Saturday said he was still optimistic that the Middle East peace process would continue despite Israel's decision to expel over 400 suspected Islamic activists, reports Reuters.

The expulsion, which has left the group in a no-man's-land just outside Israel's self-declared security zone because Lebanon refused to accept them, has been condemned by the UN Security Council.

"I think the peace process is irreversible," Shoval said on Cable News Network's (CNN) newsmaker Saturday programme.

He defended his country's decision to expel the Palestinians. "Israel's dilemma is the dilemma of any democratic country how does it cope with people who want to destroy a democratic society by violence, by subversion, by terrorism and so forth," he said.

He said that Lebanon had an obligation to admit the Palestinians and that he believed the refusal to take them in was just a form of posturing.

But he said the deportees have the right to appeal their expulsion from Israel within 60 days and it was possible that the decision would be reconsidered in some cases.

## Rushdie seeks French support

**PARIS, Dec 20:** Author Salman Rushdie said on Saturday he hoped for official French support against the death sentence passed on him by Iranian religious authorities, reports Reuters.

"I would like to come to France as soon as possible because it is very important for me to ask the French government for support," he told France television in an interview filmed near London which will be aired on Wednesday, although the Text was released on Saturday.

"We would then have a powerful group including not only Britain but also France, Germany, Scandinavia and Canada. We would really be able to speak to Iran in a language they would be forced to listen to," he said.

"If I go to France I must meet senior government officials or else my visit will be useless," he said.

**Khmer Rouge orders release of UN peacekeepers**

**BANGKOK, Dec 20:** Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan has ordered the release of UN peacekeepers held hostage in Cambodia, reports Reuters.

A text of a telegram from Khieu Samphan to Sihanok's residence in Beijing, dated Saturday, said he had ordered his guerrilla forces in the province of Kratie to free the men "as soon as possible."

A text of the telegram was made available to Reuters today by Sihanok's Beijing office.

Earlier AFP reports says: The Khmer Rouge accused the United Nations of provocation today, and said they would not be responsible for the safety of UN peacekeepers if they continue to penetrate Khmer Rouge zones.

Calling the United Nations version of four hostage takings this month "propaganda aimed at turning public opinion" against the Khmer Rouge in order to force the UN Security Council to "impose erroneous sanctions," the faction said in a statement that UN peacekeepers were acting as "provocateurs."

The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), acting in league with Vietnam and its (Phnom Penh government) puppets, wants to "trick" the Khmer Rouge into playing down arms, "therefore putting the nation and people of Cambodia in peril."

The statement reiterated that the Khmer Rouge were ready to join a peace plan ending Cambodia's civil war and being implemented by UNTAC as soon as it is applied according to their interpretation.

between the conservative ruling party and right-wing gangsters — who act as intermediaries and henchmen within Japan's corridors of power — have existed since the end of World War II, this was almost the first time they had been made public.

The Japanese public was shocked to learn Kanemaru had resorted to intervention by the godfather of the second largest Yakuza group, the Inagawa Kai, to put an end to a campaign by the extreme right to prevent Noboru Takeshita's 1987 election to the LDP presidency and, in turn, the premiership.

Although connections be-

The Yakuza intervention was reportedly arranged on Kanemaru's behalf by Hiroyasu Watanabe, former president of Sagawa Kyubin, which — besides its payoffs to politicians — had made loans to the Inagawa Kai.

Despite its magnitude and the dramatic drop in the LDP's opinion poll ratings, Kenji Ino, author of a book on Links Between Japan's Right-Wing and the Yakuza, doubted the latest scandal would lead to an effective clean up of Japanese politics.

"As long as the present style of politics remains unchanged and it costs hundreds of millions of yen to get a newcomer

## Off the Record

### The comic genius was a serious, brooding man

**NEW YORK:** Charlie Chaplin was the most graceful and poignant of screen comedians, but watching him these days is hard work, reports AP.

The world has become so much more cynical, and filmmaking so much more sophisticated since Chaplin's prime. Comedians can't get away with the raw emotion of "The Kid," when Chaplin tearfully embraces young Jackie Coogan, or the aimless storylines of his early short films.

The great funnyman of the post-silent era, from Groucho Marx to Woody Allen to Robin Williams, have thrived on sheer verbal energy, information overload. They draw on references to race, religion and pop culture. They're tougher, hipper, sharing the anger and confusion of their fans.

Chaplin's comedy came from something more basic. His best work didn't depend on knowledge of yesterday's headlines or of the latest hit record. He made jokes out of flirting with women, being yelled at by his boss or being trapped in a laundry bin with a piece of rancid cheese. The laughs were at the expense of himself, and by extension, his audience.

As shown in "Chaplin," the latest film biography from Academy Award-winning director Richard Attenborough ("Gandhi"), the comic genius was a serious, often brooding man in his private life and an obsessive worker on the set. If his spirit and imagination enabled him to find laughter in the most dire of situations, the poverty and loneliness of his childhood made him approach the simplest two-reelers with a near religious sense of purpose.

With Robert Downey Jr. in the starring role, the film tracks Chaplin's life from his Dickensian youth in London to his emotional appearance at the 1972 Academy Awards ceremony, when he returned to the country that had banished him 20 years earlier for his left-wing views. (Chaplin died in 1977 at age 88).

### The Muppet Movie

**NEW YORK, Dec 20:** It's 6:15 pm. Lots of kids. They wander and whine, squirm and giggle, all winter coats and popcorn, reports AP.

"Tell me exactly how much longer," a blond-haired cutie demands of her father. "I want you to tell me exactly."

6:35. The Muppet movie is five minutes late. Great. Chats rock.

Well it's about time! But hold up. Kermit's not really a frog. Michael Caine, jowly and grinning, is a scary Scrooge. Where's Miss Piggy?

With the dim of the lights and a whoop from the young audience comes the march of the Christmas movie season and the Muppets first feature-length outing since the death of their creator, Jim Henson.

The Muppets doing "A Christmas Carol"? A musical, no less. I mean, they're acting.

Curl-beaked Gonzo narrates as a sincere Charles Dickens, with ever-hungry Rizzo the rat as sidekick and comic relief. The frog is Bob Cratchit. Later, Miss Piggy pops up as Bob's loving, though short-tempered wife and mom to two froggy sons, including Tiny Tim, and twin piggy daughters.

C'mon. Why not just make another zany Muppet adventure like the first one, "The Muppet Movie" in 1978, or "The Great Muppet Caper" in 1981, or "The Muppets Take Manhattan" from 1985? They were good.

"We wanted to take the Muppets in a new direction, which is the way my father would have felt," said Brian Henson, who directed "The Muppet Christmas Carol" and is the eldest son in Jim's brood of five.

### Queen and Princess together in public

**LONDON:** Britain's Queen Elizabeth and her daughter-in-law Princess Diana appeared in public together on Saturday just over a week after the announcement that Diana was separating from the Queen's eldest son Prince Charles, reports Reuters.

The two arrived together at a tiny village church in southern England to attend the wedding of the son of the Queen's racing manager. Both looked relaxed and they chatted happily with wedding guests in the rain-soaked churchyard.

But they left in separate cars. The announcement that Charles and Diana were to separate was made to parliament by Prime Minister John Major earlier this month, ending months of newspapers speculation that the royal marriage had collapsed.

Diana, who plans to continue the life of a royal, attending public functions and supporting charities, has been careful to stress her warm relations with the Queen and Prince Philip.

In November, she issued an unprecedented statement to the press denying reports that she had had bitter disagreements with her parents-in-law.

## Maximum security alert in Jammu

**JAMMU, Dec 20:** Kashmir authorities sounded a maximum security alert in Jammu, the states winter capital, and its neighbouring towns today after suspected Muslim militants shot and killed a prominent Hindu leader, reports AFP.

Patrols were increased and security reinforced for leaders of prominent Hindu organisations blamed for the December 6 destruction of a Muslim shrine at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh state, officials said here.

Santosh Kumar Thakur, a leader of the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was gunned down in the town of Doda near Jammu late Saturday by suspected Muslim militants fighting for Kashmir's secession from India.

An indefinite curfew was immediately clamped on the town to prevent a Hindu backlash, police said.

But BJP activists staged street demonstrations here to protest the murder, charging that Thakur had been killed

because police had not given him adequate protection. The BJP has been at the forefront of a crusade for a temple on the site of the Ayodhya Mosque, which Hindu fundamentalists claim stood on the birthplace of their warrior-god Rama.

Thousands of Hindu zealots in the presence of senior BJP leaders tore down the mosque, sparking communal violence across India which left more than 1,150 people dead. The demolition of the mosque also sparked non-violent Muslim street protests in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, wracked by a four-year-old Muslim insurgency.

**800 Islamic fundamentalists held in Egypt**

**CAIRO, Dec 20:** Egyptian authorities have rounded up more than 800 Islamic fundamentalists over the two weeks, police said Saturday, reports AP.

In the latest swoop against Islamic militants suspected of plotting against state security, police arrested 120 people on Friday in the Imbaba district of Cairo — a hotbed of fundamentalism — and in two outlying provinces.

In one raid, 50 people were taken into custody near Fayad, a desert region located along the Suez Canal, as they were reportedly receiving training in automatic weapons.

These terrorists were planning to set fire to video shops in Ismailia, a police official charged, referring to the nearby Suez Canal city.

In Alexandria, 50 members of the fundamentalist organization Al-Jihad were taken into custody Friday as they were preparing to distribute anti-government tracts, according to police.

## Scandals knocking popularity of ruling party in Japan

**TOKYO, Dec 20:** After the relative calm of the previous two years, scandals returned to the forefront of Japanese politics in 1992, knocking the popularity of the ruling party but failing to undo its grip on power, reports AFP.

Two unfolding scandals did not prevent the victory of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) — in power since 1955 — in July elections to the upper house of parliament. The opposition had made substantial gains in previous elections in the wake of the 1989 recruit scandal.

The year began with the arrest of former minister Fumio Abe, a close colleague of Prime

Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, for taking bribes worth 700,000 dollars from the steel manufacturer Kyowa. He was charged in February.

At around the same time, the Japanese press began to uncover a second scandal of unprecedented magnitude. It is reported in the press to have involved 700 million dollars of payoffs made by the Tokyo Sagawa Kyubin Trucking Company to some 200 politicians, mainly from the LDP.

After several weeks the scandal disappeared from the headlines, only to reemerge with force in August with former LDP kingmaker Shin

Kanemaru's dramatic admission he had received money from Sagawa Kyubin.

In a hastily organised press conference, Kanemaru, 78, resigned his position as vice president of the LDP after admitting to taking 500 million yen (4.2 million dollars) in undeclared political funds from the firm shortly before the 1990 elections.

Two months later, he bowed to outraged public opinion by resigning all his other posts including his parliamentary seat as continuing revelations pointed to links between the LDP and the Yakuza, or Japanese underworld.

Although connections be-