

BRIEFLY

US freezes Libyan cash assets: The United States has frozen 260 million dollar in Libyan cash assets in US banks as part of its effort to punish the country for its support of international terrorism. US officials said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

The treasury blocked the money after a series of cash transfers through the New York branch of Arab Banking Corp were identified as linked to Libya, they said.

The United States imposed wide-ranging sanctions on Libya in 1986 for its alleged involvement in a bombing of a Berlin disco in which a US soldier died.

Some 950 million dollar in assets, including real estate and cash, have been frozen by the United States since that time. Arab Banking Corp. which is 25 per cent owned by the Libyan government, cooperated with the US investigation and is not being implicated for any improper actions, US officials said.

Rebels kill 5 in Colombia: Suspected Colombian rebels have killed four civilians and one policeman, set five cars ablaze and briefly took over a radio station, police reported Thursday, reports AFP from Santafe de Bogota.

Four prisoners, three of them brothers accused of murder, were killed in Antioquia department by suspected rebels as they were being transported by prison guards.

The guards were disarmed by the assailants but not injured, said police who speculated that the prisoners were targets of revenge killings.

In Vegachi, also in Antioquia, authorities reported having found the bullet-ridden body of a policeman who had been taken hostage by guerrillas on December 24.

Truck carrying missiles crashes: A flatbed truck carrying a dozen US Army surface-to-air Hawk missiles has crashed after swerving across an interstate highway, forcing the evacuation of about 1,000 people, police said, reports AP from Monroe.

An unknown amount of diesel fuel spilled from the truck after the Thursday crash, and firefighters covered it with dirt and sand to prevent a fire, Police Chief Joe Stewart said.

Despite the crash, which left the truck on its side, the cargo seemed relatively undamaged, Stewart said.

The driver and another person in the truck, apparently a backup driver, were injured, Stewart said. They were listed in stable condition at a hospital.

The shipment, with a driver and a backup driver, originated in Concord, Calif. and was enroute to the Red River Army Depot in Texarkana, Texas, Stewart said. The truck was owned by a private company contracted by the Army, he said.

Kenya's ruling party leading in polls: The ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) party was leading in parliamentary polls Friday, having won 66 seats in the 188-strong parliament, reports AFP from Nairobi.

That tally followed final counting in 111 constituencies after the country's first multi-party election in 26 years.

The Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD-Asili) trailed with 17 seats followed by FORD-Kenya with 15. Democratic party won 11 seats.

Though initial results of the parliamentary poll put KANU ahead of the nine opposition parties, there was a swing to the opposition as 14 of Mof's cabinet ministers lost their seats.

India rebuffs Pak request to cut consular staff

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: India rebuffed today a Pakistani request to slash the size of consular staff in Karachi in the latest diplomatic spat between the two countries triggered by the destruction of an Indian mosque, reports Reuter.

The Indian foreign ministry called the Pakistani demand unacceptable and illogical given the volume of visa work in Karachi, home to many who left India when Pakistan was carved out of the old British Raj at independence in 1947.

Officials said the statement did not amount to a rejection of Pakistan's demand on Tuesday that India reduce its consular staff in Karachi from 64 to 20 people by January 31.

"What we have done is putting the ball back in their court. It's up to them to decide whether they want to enforce their 'request,'" said one official.

The two neighbours have fought three wars since independence. Relations, already deeply strained since an anti-Indian rebellion erupted in Muslim Kashmir three years ago, plummeted again following the December 6 destruction of the mosque.

The rearing of the mosque in the north Indian town of Ayodhya, focus of a long campaign by Hindu Nationalists, triggered violence across Hindu-majority India and more than 1,100 people were killed.

China seeks cooperation from Taiwan, HK

BELJING, Jan 1: In a New Year's message to Chinese around the world, Chinese President Yang Shangkun called Friday for more cooperation from Hong Kong and Taiwan in 1993, reports AP.

China was incensed last year by Hong Kong Gov Chris Patten's proposal to slightly increase popular participation in legislative elections in the colony before Britain returns it to China in 1997.

In his annual speech, broadcast by China Radio International and published by national newspapers, Yang referred to Patten's proposal as a "barrier to Hong Kong's smooth transition."

"This is not to the liking of the Chinese people, including the Hong Kong compatriots," he said. "I hope the Hong Kong government will change its attitude and return to the path of cooperation."

Yang said nothing to indicate that China was willing to discuss any compromise. China has insisted that Patten's proposal violates Chinese-British agreements and has threatened to scrap Hong Kong's entire government and all its contracts in 1997 if he implements the plan.

Fire kills 4 Malaysian students

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 1: Fire early Friday killed four 14-year-old students spending the night at a friend's home, police said, reports AP.

Six other people escaped unhurt from the ground floor of the home in Sabak Bernam, 100 kilometers (60 miles) northwest of Kuala Lumpur, said Mazlan Ariffin, the local police chief.

The four students, who had been sleeping on the second floor, were found huddled together and police believe they were overcome by smoke.

Police said the fire was believed caused by a lighted incense coil used to repel mosquitoes.

The four students were staying with a friend for a school project to report on old buildings in the district.

Leaders of warring factions ready for face-to-face talks

Mitterrand for military intervention in Bosnia

PARIS, Jan 1: French President Francois Mitterrand says the United Nations, barring a peaceful settlement in former Yugoslavia, must allow the use of force in Bosnia, reports Reuter.

Force would be necessary to enforce a no-fly zone over Bosnia and clear routes to prison camps, Sarajevo and other besieged Bosnian towns, the French leader said in a televised new year message broadcast on Thursday.

"I wish current negotiations in Geneva to succeed as soon as possible. If not, I shall expect the Security Council to order to clear Bosnian airspace as well as routes to prison camps and such martyr cities as Sarajevo," he said.

Mitterrand called on the UN Security Council to boost peace-keeping forces in Kosovo and Macedonia to prevent the war in former

Yugoslavia from engulfing the Balkans.

"It is up to Serb authorities to understand that they must stop, he said.

As calls for armed intervention mounted at home, Mitterrand said France had sent 5,000 peace-keepers to

former Yugoslavia. Nine had been killed. Paris would not go any further without a UN mandate backed by France's western allies.

"Can we do more? he asked. 'I shall not accept it unless the United Nations take responsibility and Americans and Europeans commit themselves with US.'

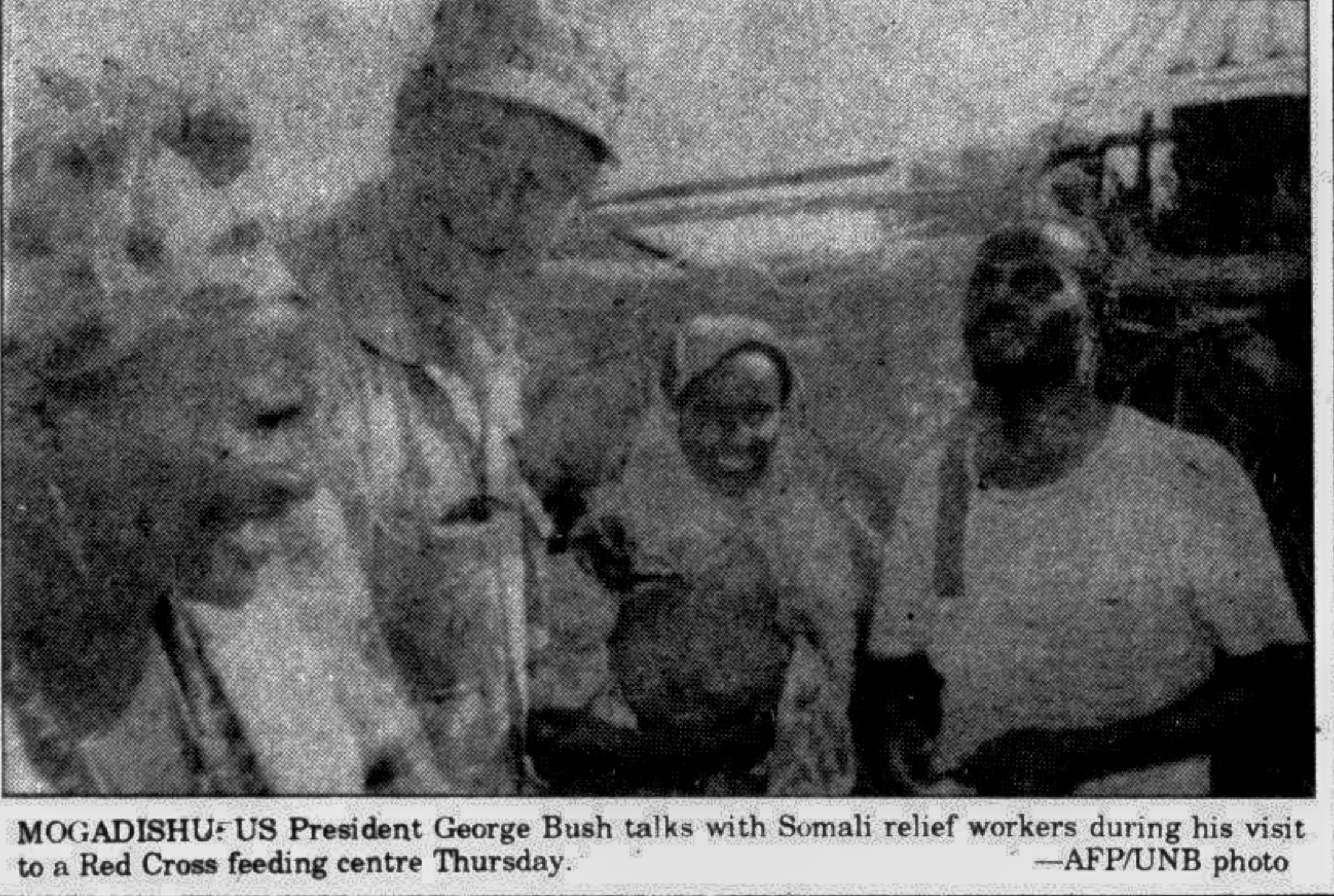
Disagreement between the United States and its European allies on how force should be used in Bosnia has so far prevented authorising enforcement of an air exclusion zone.

The presidents of federal Yugoslavia, Croatia and Bosnia as well as leaders of Bosnia's Serbs and Croats are to meet on Saturday in Geneva in a new round of the international peace talks sponsored by the UN and the European Community.

Mitterrand made no mention of his earlier proposal to



Mitterrand made no mention of his earlier proposal to turn the besieged Bosnian capital into a neutral city.



MOGADISHU: US President George Bush talks with Somali relief workers during his visit to a Red Cross feeding centre Thursday. —AFP/UNB photo

Gaddafi suspects IRA, West behind plane crash

NICOSIA, Jan 1: The Irish Republican Army (IRA), or the West generally, could have been behind the Libyan plane disaster in which 157 people died, Libyan Leader Colonel Moammer Gaddafi said on state television Thursday, reports AFP.

Gaddafi said he had three theories explaining the December 22 crash, including possible IRA retaliation for Tripoli's decision to give the British authorities information about the banned organisation, a former Libyan ally.

In the broadcast, monitored here, Gaddafi also said the disaster could have been an "act of sabotage" by "western intelligence services" in revenge for the 1988 bombing of a Pan-Am jet over the Scottish town of Lockerbie.

Election of Rabbani denounced

Mujahideen factions hint at possible military action

KABUL, Jan 1: Leaders of opposition Mujahideen factions here were quick to denounce Thursday the election of Burhanuddin Rabbani as Afghanistan's new President and hinted at possible military action, reports AFP.

Wednesday's vote during a traditional 'Shooraa Hal-Va-Aqd' was "illegal and undemocratic," said the son of Pir Sayyad Ahmad Gailani, head of the Mahazi-I-Milli faction, on behalf of his father.

"Our non-participation in the Shooraa was due to the misconduct of the commissions supervising the election of Shooraa delegates and the fraud and irregularities of the ruling Jamiat-I-Islami party," said Homid Gailani.

Pir Gailani had been touted as a candidate for the presidency but at the election — boycotted by five of nine Mujahideen factions — ruling Jamiat-I-Islami faction leader Rabbani was the sole candidate.

Homid Gailani said his father "withdrew his candidacy because the whole game was a set-up to allow Rabbani to win."

He said his father's faction had submitted a written list of 12 objections to the election procedures in the run-up to the vote, adding that Yunus Khalles' Hezb-I-Islami faction and Sitghatullah Mojaddedi's Jabha Nezi-I-Milli had submit-

ted similar written complaints.

Chief Justice Maulavi Fazli had not investigated the alleged irregularities as was announced, the younger Gailani said, alleging that delegates from the Jamiat faction — Rabbani was interim President going into the election — had dominated the voting process through the fraudulent allotment of 17 of the 29 Afghan provinces.

Rabbani ally Rasul Sayyaf of the Ittihad-I-Islami faction had been allotted six provinces, Gailani said.

He ruled out the use of military force against the government, saying his father's faction would instead mount a "strong political opposition," and a spokesman for Mojaddedi's faction said it would do the same — for the time being.

"We oppose the rocketing of Kabul but we do not rule out the use of military force" if necessary, the Mojaddedi spokesman said.

Sea erosion threatens Maldivian islands

COLOMBO, Jan 1: About 200 people have been evacuated from a small island threatened by sea erosion in the Noonu Atoll of the Maldives archipelago, a Maldivian high commission spokesman said in Colombo on Thursday, reports Reuter.

He said Wednesday's evacuation was part of a Maldivian government scheme to relocate people from small, thinly populated islands threatened by rising sea levels onto bigger islands where living standards are better.

The spokesman said altogether 3,000-4,000 people will be evacuated from six islands in the Atoll affected by

extensive coastal and land erosion, and resettled.

The Maldives consists of about 1,200 low-lying islands — the highest point in the archipelago is two metres (six feet) — in the Indian ocean of the southern tip of the sub-continent.

Many of the islands are endangered not only by erosion but by the potential threat of rising sea levels caused by global warming, Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom earlier this year at the Earth Summit appealed for international help to save the Maldivian islands from being washed away.

5 non-permanent members of UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 1: Brazil, Djibouti, New Zealand, Pakistan and Spain join the UN Security Council today for two-year stints as non-permanent members, reports AFP.

The five countries replace Austria, Belgium, Ecuador, India and Zimbabwe.

The 15-strong Security Council has five permanent members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — with the right to veto resolutions and 10 non-permanent members chosen by secret ballot in the UN general assembly in October.

Cape Verde, Hungary, Japan, Morocco and Venezuela, which joined the council last New Year's day, will remain on the panel until December 31, 1993.

Germany, Japan and several non-aligned nations have pushed for permanent seats on the Security Council.

Lebanon rejects French proposal for deportees

BEIRUT, Jan 1: Lebanon rejected on Thursday a French proposal for more than 400 Palestinians expelled by Israel to be put temporarily under the responsibility of UN peacekeepers, reports Reuter.

Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri told US Ambassador Ryan Crocker and Russian Ambassador Guennadi Illichev the international community had to force Israel to take back the deportees.

Off the Record

Clinton ushers in New Year out of public eye

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. President-elect Clinton ushered in 1993 out of the public eye, celebrating with his wife, daughter and hundreds of friends, reports AP.

The Clintons joined other participants at the "Renaissance Weekend" here as revelers hoisted champagne glasses to mark the New Year.

Clinton rose early Thursday, taking a jog on the beach as a hint of sun squinted through the clouds over the Atlantic Ocean.

Under the watchful eye of Secret Service agents, he ran for 3.2 miles (5 kms) before walking a bit to cool down. Not far from his beach house, Clinton stopped to talk to passersby and do some calisthenics.

He, wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea later went to the hotel where the conference is being held. Clinton wore jeans and a blue blazer in keeping with the casual style encouraged at the annual assembly devoted to recreation and rumination.

White boy to portray Michael Jackson

NEW YORK: Michael Jackson chose a white boy over a black one to portray him as a youngster in an upcoming Pepsi commercial, a newspaper reported Thursday, reports AP.

Producers wanted the ad to show Jackson performing his classic tune "I'll Be There" opposite footage of himself as a member of The Jackson Five singing the same song, the New York Post said.

But the idea was scrapped at least in part because the pictures would make Jackson's plastic surgery and skin-bleaching makeover too obvious, the newspaper said, quoting anonymous "insiders."

After several months of auditions, the producers, with Jackson's approval, selected a young black boy to play him.

"Michael then changed his mind. He decided he wanted to cast a white boy who'd tried out," the Post said, quoting an unidentified source.

Rare panda dead but 100 eggs saved

WASHINGTON: Ling-Ling, the National Zoo's female giant panda, died of heart failure, and about 100 of her eggs were saved for possible test-tube fertilization, zoo officials said, reports AP.

Ling-Ling was found dead in her enclosure Wednesday afternoon at feeding time.

She and her companion, Hsing-Hsing, had delighted an estimated 63 million visitors since their arrival 20 years ago as gifts of state from China.

Because giant pandas are so rare and reproduction in captivity has proven difficult, zoo officials said Thursday they took the step of removing eggs from Ling-Ling's body during an autopsy shortly after her death.

Dr Benjamin B Beck, acting director of the zoo, said zoo officials plan to fertilize and freeze them in hopes of eventually using them to impregnate another female giant panda.

"They are currently trying to grow these, to mature them artificially in culture dishes," Beck said. "If some reach a sufficient state of maturity, then some semen of Hsing-Hsing which we have frozen will be thawed, and we will attempt to inseminate these ova."

UN imposes trade sanctions on Khmer Rouge

PHNOM PENH, Jan 1: Trade sanctions against the Khmer Rouge came into effect today, one day after the guerrilla faction launched its most serious attack on UN peacekeepers since they deployed in Cambodia, reports Reuter.

The sanctions were imposed by the UN Security Council in November because of the hardline guerrilla group's refusal to comply with the peace accord signed in Paris in October 1991 to end 13 years of civil war.

Log exports from Khmer Rouge border enclaves are banned and supplies of oil will not be allowed in.

The Thai military, backers of the guerrillas during the war, have promised to seal Thailand's border with Khmer Rouge-held southwest Cambodia.

But Bangkok and the Khmer Rouge have refused to allow UN peacekeepers to set up checkpoints on that stretch of the frontier.

The latest developments emphasize just how far relations between the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) peace-keeping force and the Khmer Rouge have deteriorated.

On Thursday the Khmer Rouge fired more than 80 mortar rounds at UN positions in Svay Leu, in northwest Siem

30 killed, hundreds injured in New Year revelry

HONG KONG, Jan 1: A stampede of revelers killed 20 people and injured 69 others in the early minutes of the New Year Friday in a downtown Hong Kong bar and nightclub district, reports AP.

The crowd was very jocular and the people were enjoying themselves. Suddenly there was a rush and people were trampled underfoot, said district police commander Justin Cunningham.

After a special meeting with top security advisers, Hong Kong Gov Chris Patten announced that he has ordered an independent inquiry into the tragedy. He said the inquiry, to be headed by a High Court judge, should produce some conclusions and recommendations before the Chinese Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan 23.

Witness said the crush in the Lan Kawi Fong area developed after people surged out



Relative narrates the tragic accident occurred on a steep and slippery street of Hong Kong nightclub district during New Year's celebration in which 20 people lost their lives. —Star TV photo

street. Shoes and boots littered the street after the accident.

Hong Kong television showed scenes of chaos following the stampede, with people weeping and screaming. It also showed ambulance men trying desperately to resuscitate those lying unconscious on the street.

In Manila ten people were killed and more than 1,000 injured as Filipinos greeted the New Year with fireworks and gunshots into the air, authorities said Friday.

Most of the dead were victims of fires caused by fire-crackers, investigators said. The injured suffered from burns, blasted fingers and gunshot and stab wounds, hospital officials said.

Meanwhile, nine inmates escaped from a jail in Manila, apparently slipping past guards exhausted from New Year's revelry, authorities said.

Police said four major fires and 10 minor fires hit the capital during the frenzied celebrations to greet 1993.

Five residents were killed in a fire that razed shanties in a slum area in Manila's Malabon district, Police said.

Three others were killed in the San Andres district when a stray firecracker ignited a leaking kitchen gas tank, said police Lt Jaime Molina.

At least one person was killed by a stray bullet in Manila and another died in nearby Bulacan province when a giant firecracker exploded in his face as he was lighting it and drinking beer, police said.

A check with 30 private and government hospitals in Manila showed 764 people, including children, were treated for injuries from explosions in the provinces of Bulacan, Zambales and Tarlac. 274 firecracker victims were treated.

64pc Japanese feel affluent

TOKYO, Jan 1: Some 64 per cent of Japanese in a recent poll think they are leading an affluent life, up from 56 per cent in a 1986 poll, the national newspaper Asahi reported Friday, reports AP.

It said 29 per cent of those responding did not feel affluent, down from 34 per cent six years ago.

The Asahi said its poll also found 85 per cent of those responding believe that resource-poor but cash-rich Japan consumes too much of the world's resources and energy.

On that point, 73 per cent of those responding, up from 48 per cent in a 1984 poll, expressed a willingness to accept inconvenience to help preserve the world's environment. Those who were unwilling accounted for 22 per cent, down from 44 per cent, it added.