Gen Sir Philip Christison dead: Britain's oldest army general has died at the age of 100 after serving in two World Wars, the army said on Wednesday, Rcuter

reports from Edinburgh. General Sir Philip Christison, who won the military cross and a distinguished service order, was commander-in-chief of allied land forces in South East Asia in 1945 and took the surrender of the Japanese seventh area army and the South Seas Fleet at Singapore.

A distinguished military historian, he became Governor of Edinburgh Castle in 1947 and oversaw the first of the now world famous annual military tattoos in the Castle grounds.

NY Times reporter Raskin dies: A H Raskin, a reporter and editor who covered labour issues for the New York Times for four decades, died of cancer Wednesday. He was 82, AP reports from New York.

Raskin died at his home in the New York City borough of Manhattan, said his wife, Marge.

Raskin joined the Times as a reporter in 1934, during the worst of the Great Depression, and wrote about the hardships of people who sought work. After World War II he covered the growing strength of organised labour and the corruption that plagued some unions.

Four killed in Kabul blast: A mortar bomb hit a busy shopping street in central Kabul Wednesday, killing at least four people and wounding more than 30, doctors said, Reuter reports from Kabul.

Local officials and state-run Kabul radio blamed the followers of Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar for firing the lone shell, that exploded above the door of a restaurant in mid-

The casualties were mostly people who were in the crowded street at the time of the attack in the Mandavi area, not far from the Afghan capital's money market, witnesses said. Nobody in the restaurant was hurt.

ROK to free 1343 prisoners: south Korea said Thursday it would free 1,343 prisoners, including some teachers jailed for union and political activities, in a Christmas Eve amnesty, Reuter reports from Seoul.

A Justice Ministry officials said 174 teachers, members of the Chonkyojo Teachers' Union, were among those to be released.

About 1,500 teachers were sacked and many were arrested between 1989 and 1991 for joining a union and staging rallies demanding educational reforms from the military-backed government which ruled during that period.

Floods claim 6 in Malaysia: At least six people were reported drowned as annual monsoon rains caused floods in Kelantan state in northeast Malaysia, police said Thursday, reports AP.

In the worst incident three teen-age girls drowned and another was hospitalized in critical condition when the boat they were riding to school capsized in strong currents in a river near Kota Bahru, 400 kilometers (240 miles) northeast of here Wednesday.

Five girls were rescued by unlookers and the strong current swept away the other three.

Also in Kota Bahru one person was killed and two others likely drowned when their car was swept into another river in Jelli, near Kota Bahru, Wednesday.

Attack on army patrol in northern Iraq

WASHINGTON, Dec 23: An international military patrol came under machine gun fire while driving in a northern Iraq security zone established for minority Kurds, a Defence Department spokesman said Wednesday night, reports AP.

No one was reported injured, and it has not been confirmed that the attackers were Iraqi forces, said the spokesman, Marine Maj. Steve Manuel.

A four-vehicle convoy carrying 25 US, French, British, Turkish and Kurdish troops was 300 meters, about 1,000 feet, inside the security zone on Tuesday afternoon' when the

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia.

Dec 23: The Prime Minister

disclosed Thursday that he held

secret peace talks with the

Khmer Rouge guerilla group,

· Prince Norodom Ranariddh

would not specify what he dis-

cussed with Khmer-Rouge

President Khieu Samphan last

Friday, when Ranariddh

stopped over in Thailand en

Ranariddh said they ex-

changed proposals and that he

took the various suggestions to

Beijing to present to his father,

King Norodom Sihanouk. Si-

hanouk is being treated for

Ranariddh said he shared

Khieu Samphan's proposals

with National Assembly Presi-

dent Chea Sim and second

Prime Minister Hun Sen. Ra-

nariddh said he would send

their responses to Khieu Sam-

reports AP.

route to China

cancer in Beijing.

shots were fired near the town of Fayday, Manuel said. The fire was not returned.

In its Thursday editions, the Washington Post quoted an. unidentified spokesman for the US European Command as saying the shots originated about two kilometers (1.25 miles) from the patrol.

However, allied planes enforcing "no-fly zones" in northern and southern Iraq have come under anti-aircrast sire several times since the protection programme for Kurds and Shi'ite Muslims began more than two years ago following the end of the Gulf War.

swer from the other side." Ra-

nariddh said. "I cannot tell you

more than this because Khieu

Samphan proposed that it is

better to keep it secret and pro-

would not meet with the Khmer

elected in a UN organised poll in

May, and has been trying to en-

tice the Khmer Rouge to join the

administration and end the in-

The government has pro-

posed giving the guerilla group

senior positions in the admin-

istration in exchange for its sur-

hundreds of thousands of Cam-

bodians during a reign of terror

in the 1970s, when it trans-

formed the country into a giant

agrarian commune. The group

The Khmer Rouge killed

Rouge president in Thailand.

Ranariddh earlier said he

Ranariddh's government was

cced step by step."

surgency.

render.

BRIFFY PLO-Israeli talks: No accord Offthe Record on border checkpoints

VERSAILLES, France, Dec. 23: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators made headway in talks Thursday, but failed to resolve all the disputes holding up an Israelt withdrawal from parts of the occupied territories, reports

The sides plan further talks

in Cairo next week. Negotiations have been stalled by disagreements over border checkpoints in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank region around Jericho, the two territories in which Palestinians will receive autonomy under the Israel-PLO peace accord. The two sides have also disagreed over the size of the Jericho region.

israeli soldiers were to begin pulling out December 13 but the withdrawal has since been put on hold.

The talks took on renewed urgency Wednesday, as violence aimed at derailing the accord again rocked the West Bank. Palestinian assailants fired dozens of bullets into a passing car, killing two Israelis.

Daniel Shek, a spokesman from the Israeli Embassy in France, said each side presented new ideas during talks Wednesday and Thursday at a luxury hotel in Versailles.

"On some of the issues there is agreement, while other still necessitate further talks, he said, reading a joint statement. from the two delegations. He did not elaborate.

Shek said the Israeli delegation was returning home Thursday for consultations, and planned to resume talks with the Palestinians in Cairo on Monday.

"We were speaking about everything - we were speaking about peace," said Ahmed Qurei'a, a PLO negotiator. He said at least some progress was made on every major issue.

Earlier reports had hinted at a compromise on the border

A Palestinian woman brandishes a gun as she dances to celebrate the release of her son Tallhat

Al-Shaher (L) in Khan Youness city in Gaza Dec 22. Tallhat was freed after he got an amnesty

Bosnian peace talks resume

cease-fire which was to start

Thursday, snipers were firing

heavily and numerous shells

signed in the 20-month Bosnian

war, immediately to be broken.

for any agreement were slim,

Bosnian Serb and Muslim offi-

cials exchanged accusations.

Several cease-fires have been

In a sign that the chances

"The Muslims simply don't

want peace," said Bosnian Scrb

leader Radovan Kradzic, They

think they will eventually get

what they want on the battle

field and not on the negotiating

Bosnian, UN ambassador

Muhamed Sacirbey accused the

Serbs of "rolling the talks back"

by reopening some issues, in-

were falling in Sarajevo.

checkpoints, but Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres suggested no final agreement had been reached. He said there were no plans yet for a summit between PLO chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

"I don't think that we plan right now to meet with Arafat," he told reporters Thursday morning. There is still a great deal of work yet to be done."

The negotiations were a continuation of weekend talks had in Norway. The two sides, led by Peres and senior PLO official Yasser Abed-Rabbo, met at a plush hotel in versailles, just west of Paris. .

Israel radio reported Wednesday that negotiators were developing a formula in which both sides would set up border stations.

Palestinians would be checked at both stations, but Israeli negotiators were insisting

- AFP photo

cluding a division of Sarajevo

and Muslim access to the Sava

River, which were tentatively

that Serbian President Slobo-

dan Milosevic and his Croatian

counterpart Franjo Tudjman,

the region's chief power brokers

whose armies are officially not

fighting in Bosnia, have agreed

their involvement in the war by

agreeing to a cease-fire," Sactr-

In an interview, Sacirbey ac-

cused the Russian envoy to the

talks, Vitally Churkin, of siding

with the Serbs on Wednesday

by accusing Muslims of stalling

a small percentage of votes but

acquired a reputation for irritat-

ing the government.

They implicitly admitted

Sacirbey called it "ironic"

agreed in September.

to the cease-fire.

the negotiations.

bey said,

Israelis receive the same treatment only at the Isreali sta-

Israel has been concerned Palestinian-controlled checkpoints could allow militants and weapons to slip into the west Bank and Gaza.

Another disputed issue is Isracl's demand for access to Palestinian-controlled areas when chasing suspected guerrillas.

Israeli soldiers were to begin withdrawing December 13, three months after the signing of the accord in Washington. The withdrawal was to be completed by April 13.

But the pullout was delayed by the disputes, which Rabin and Arafat failed to bridge in a meeting December 12. They had pledged to meet again in 10 days, but both sides are reluctant to go ahead with another summit unless success is assured.

Myanmar rejects UN resolution

JAKARTA, Dec 23: Myanmar's Foreign Minister on Wednesday rejected a UN resolution condemning its human rights record and said there was no chance that detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyt would be freed from house arrest, reports Reuter.

Ohn Gyaw told reporters during a visit to Indonesia that Yangon regarded Monday's General Assembly resolution, which called for the restoration of democracy and respect for human rights, as interference in Myanmar's internal affairs.

The resolution also called for the immediate release of Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi, but Ohn Gyaw said: "She is re-. stricted according to the law.

The only restriction that we imposed on her is that she has no right to contact with outside people. She was put under restriction because she transgressed the law."

Fighting leaves 68 killed in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Dec 28: At least 68 people were reported killed on Wednesday in central Bosnia's worst fighting for months - hours before a Christmas truce was due to take effect, reports Reuter.

Leaders of Bosnia's warning Scrbs, Croats and Muslims pledged to uphold a holiday truce from today during a meeting with EC foreign ministers in Brussels.

As leaders negotiated, the battle casualties included at least 24 people killed as Muslim forces launched six separate attacks on Croat defenders in central Bosnia's Lasva river valley in what UN sources described as a well-coordinated offensive.

85 rebels killed in Sierra Leone since Dec 1

FREETOWN, Dec 23: Sierra Leone's army had killed 85 rebels in self-defence since the government unilaterally declared a ceasefire on December 1, Under-Secretary for Defence Komba Kambo said Wednesday, reports AFP.

In all 91 people have been killed in Sierra Leone since the government's truce in the war against rebels in the south and east of the country, Kambo dis-

He said 85 were members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) which has been fighting the government for two years. Kamba said RUF forces had

violated the ceasefire 14 times in Pujehun and Koindu districts near the border with Liberia. He said government soldiers were under orders not to attack but only to retaliate against aggres-



A 1400 year-old gilt-bronze incense burner from the 6th century Paekchae Kingdom (18 BC 660 AD) excavated at Puyo, South Chungchong Province in South Korea, along with 400 other rare artifacts including a halo from a Buddhist statue, a gilt-bronze bracelet, gilt-bronze bells, tiles and - AFP photo

Sex proposition on hotline

MANILA: Police say their switchboards have been lighting up since they installed a new hotline, but instead of reporting crimes most callers insult officers or proposition them for sex, reports AP.

Earlier this year, the telephone company inaugurated a "166" number, corresponding to the "911" emergency line in the United States, to allow police to respond quickly to crimes or other emergencies.

Instead, those manning the hotline complain that most of the callers simply vent their anger at the police force, which many Filipinos believe is corrupt and inefficient.

"These numbers are used more by people with nothing better to do," Chief Inspector Abaro Ronas, head of Operation Reaction 166. He estimated half the calls were insults, 30 per cent were pranksters and the rest women and male homosexuals offering

He said the most frequent message from callers was: "Damn you policemen, you're all thieves." .

Officials said there was no plan, however, to discontinue the service."

Britons to eat 1.60 lakh tonnes of X-mas pudding

LONDON: The British will eat 160,000 tonnes of Christmas pudding over the next week, and roast 13 million turkeys, Data Group Mediawise Statistics, UK, said Wednesday, reports AFP. Along with the 300 tonnes of Stilton cheese and 150 million mince pies, they will drink 117.5 million litres of beer, open 35

million bottles of wine and 10 million bottles of spirits. They will spend a total of 750 million pounds (1.12 billion

dollars) on alcohol, spending an average of 83 pounds on food and 43 pounds on drinks per person for Christmas. Thirty-eight and a half million Britons, or three in four, think

they will eat too much during the festivities.

N-impasse at 'crucial point': ROK President

SEOUL, Dec 23: An impasse over North Korea's suspected development of nuclear weapons has reached an absolutely "crucial point" South Korea's President said Thursday, reports AP.

President Kim Young-sam told a Cabinet meeting that the North's 'nuclear programme must be stopped "at any cost," South Korea's news agency, Yonhap, reported.

North Korea's nuclear programme later Thursday in a meeting with UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who is visiting South Korea for three days of talks before crossing the heavily armed border with North Korea on Friday.

Boutros-Ghali has offered to convey any messages between the two rival Korean states in hopes of defusing the nuclear

Communist North Korea has

refused to allow international inspections of two alleged nuclear sites, reinforcing suspicions that it is developing nuclear weapons. The North maintains that its nuclear programme is for peaceful pur-

Kim was expected to discuss

"We are at an absolutely crucial point where we have to stop North Korea's nuclear programme at any cost," Yonhap quoted Kim as telling his Cabi-

Boutros-Ghali's trip, the first to South and North Korea by a UN Secretary-General since 1979, comes as North Korea and the United States are reportedly making some progress

in talks on nuclear inspections. The United States has asked North Korea to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency, a UN organization, to conduct unimpeded inspections of seven

suspected nuclear sites,

enclaves

JERUSALEM, Dec 23: Jewish settlers of occupied Arab lands unveiled a plan on Wednesday to establish shadow enclaves next to 130 existing settlements, hoping to make it harder for Israel's government

to withdraw, reports Reuter. Organisers told a news conference that Jewish settlers of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights would be joined by residents of Israel in setting up the new points.

Shmuel Sackett said September's Isreal-PLO peace deal, giving Palestinians interim self-rule and a police force, was the foundation of a Palestinian state that would endanger Israel's survival.

Ranariddh admits holding secret talks with Khmers We have to wait for the an-

said Thursday, reports AP.

from the Israeli army.

BRUSSELS, Dec 23: Leaders

of Bosnia's warring sides re-

sumed peace talks Thursday

amid a flurry of accusations,

leaving little hope of breaking

the deadlock ahead of Christ-

EC negotiator Lord Owen

said he would try to build on

the slight progress made

Wednesday during renewed

talks with the Bosnian Serb.

Community Foreign Ministers

failed to force a breakthrough in

the negotiations despite warn-

ing the Serbs they face tighter

sanctions if they do not provide

had agreed to a Christmas

Although the warring parties

a viable state for the Muslims.

On Wednesday, 12 European

Croat and Muslim leaders

mas, officials said, reports AP.

hanouk's royal government.

He called The Times article "unfortunate and very unfair."

creasingly sensitive to such press reports. Allegations about the country's ties to the guerilla group have complicated relations with Cambodia's new government.

ment, advice and sanctuary to the guerrillas during the civil

Thailand denies aiding Khmers

BANGKOK, Dec 23: The government has protested a Dec 19 article in The New York Times that said Thailand supports Khmer Rouge rebels in Cambodia, the Foreign Ministry

United Nations Ambassador Nit Pibulsongkram denied in a letter to the editor that his country supports the ultra-left guerrilla group, and said it recognizes King Norodom Si-

"Allegations contained in the article are all groundless," Nit

Thailand has become in-

, Thailand provided equip-

Megawati Sukarnoputri elected PDI Chairperson but chequered history won only

JAKARTA, Dec 23: Megawati Sukarnoputri has triumphed over weeks of bickering and government manipulation to head Indonesia's smallest political party but observers say the late president's usughter has a long road ahead of her, reports

Megawati, daughter of Sukarno, was chosen late on Wednesday at a congress in Jakarta as leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party, PDI, ending a month-long tug of war with party rebels and a government apparently suspicious of her popularity.

"(Her election) may increase the degree of competitiveness within the political system but Megawati will face numerous challenges before the PDI could become a significant political party," said one diplomat.

The PDI was meeting today to choose an executive board the final obstacle to regenerat-

President Suharto in July rejected the Fiery Surjadi as leader of the party, forcing the PDI to hold another congress

was ousted in 1978, sparking the civil war. ing a party that had in its brief war. last month. Jewish settlers to set up shadow Clinton says state troopers' allegations outrageous 6 drug smugglers held in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, Dec 23: Allegations that President Clinton used his security detail while governor of Arkansas to help arrange extramarital affairs drew an angry denial. "They're outrageous and they're not so," he said of the accusations,

reports AP "We have not done anything wrong," the President told the Associated Press on Wednesday, It was his first public comment on charges by two Arkansas state troopers that they helped Clinton meet women, booked hotel rooms for liaisons and sneaked a woman into the governor's mansion after he was

elected President. He denied that he tried to buy the silence of one trooper by offering him a job before the allegations became public. "The

allegations on abuse of the state or the federal positions I have it's not true," Clinton said. "That absolutely did not happen," Clinton said firmly.

Questions about the troopers' allegations dominated three separate interviews Clinton conducted as year-end assessments with reporters from news agencies, radio networks and the Arkansas media.

"It's a painful thing, especially at holiday time," the president said. At times, he seemed uncomfortable talking about the charges.

In his interview with AP Broadcast and other radio networks, the president was asked directly by one reporter, "So rione of this ever happened?"

"I have nothing else to say," Clinton said. Groping for words

from his chair in the Cabinet Room, he hesitated and then continued: "We ... we did, if, the, the, I, I, the stories are just as they have been said. They're outrageous and they're not so."

In Little Rock, troopers Roger Perry and Larry Patterson also met with reporters, and they stood by their charges. "I'm telling the truth," Paterson said. "I've told the complete truth. I have no reason to lie." He said he was willing to take a lie detector test "or any other test you can come up with," although his attorney said otherwise.

Perry said, "I'm scared to death. I've never felt so alone in my life." He said he decided to come forward because "I sat and watched him (Clinton) being packaged, groomed and polished for this job. I thought the

American people ought to know

A third trooper, Danny Ferguson, issued a statement through his attorney saying that "President Clinton never offered or indicated a willingness to offer any trooper a job in exchange for silence or help in shaping their stories."

The attorney for Perry and Patterson, Cliff Jackson, has said Ferguson was one of the troopers to whom Clinton offered jobs. Clinton refused to discuss the sexual charges in any detail,

saying he did not want to go beyond a statement issued carlier by adviser Bruce Lindsey calling the allegations "ridiculous. Hillary Rodham Clinton, in

an interview a day earlier, told

AP the accusations against her husband were "outrageous, terrible stories that people plant for political and financial rea-

Declining to respond specifically on Wednesday, Clinton said, "we put out a very strong statement about it and I don't really have anything to add to what has been said in our written statement or what Hillary said yesterday."

Asked if he had enemies in Little Rock who were trying to destroy him, the president chuckled and said, "I don't have anything to say to add to what's been said. I think what should do is keep working, doing the best I can at my job. just - I have nothing to add to what's been said."

Asked why he didn't deny all

the allegations in "simple, clear language," the president said, think we have cleared it up. ... I just think it is not appropriate in a situation like this for me to do much more than I am doing. What I need to do is just keep working at my job and keep going on. Apparently in the world we live in things like this hap-

One questioner asked Clinton, "Specifically, was there an abuse of your authority, your power as governor?" "No," the president said, "and I have nothing to add to what I said in my statement."

Asked if Secret Service agents had ever been asked "to do any of the things the troopers have alleged," Clinton said,

held in Ukraine

LONDON, Dec 23: Ukrainfan authorities have arrested six people involved in a plot to smuggle 300 grams of a "highly" radioactive material" out of Ukraine, Ukrainian Radio said Wednesday, citing the Interior Ministry, reports AFP.

In a report monitored here by the BBC, the radio said an elite anti-terrorist unit from Odessa, together with Black Sea security forces, seized 60 scaled glass ampoules worth more than one million dollars

Several weapons and 100 kilograms of mercury were also found, the report said, although it did not say where the raid took place, did not specify what kind of radioactive material was involved, and did not say where it was bound.