

## International

## All hostages safe

## Russian elite commandos capture all kidnappers

MOSCOW, Dec 27 : All four kidnappers who escaped in a helicopter packed with explosives and 10 million dollar were captured early Monday after an intense manhunt in the mountains of southern Russia, police said, reports AP.

All of their hostages were safe. Police and elite commandos captured the four men after a brief shootout in the Caucasus Mountains, and most or all of the 10 million dollar ransom was recovered.

"The money is still being counted — what they had on them, plus what they left behind in the helicopter," Police Col. Yuri Reshetnik told The Associated Press. "I guess it was too much for them to carry and still run through the mountains."

In Russia, kidnappers face the death sentence.

Authorities did not immediately release the names of the captured men. The Interfax

news agency said the first two captured were from the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. One was 48 years old, and the other was 21, Interfax said.

The crisis began Thursday morning when the heavily-armed kidnappers seized a dozen students in Rostov-on-Don, 600 miles south of Moscow.

Russian authorities met all the hostages demands. They gave them the camouflage-painted Mi-8 military helicopter and 10 million dollars in U.S. currency.

The kidnappers released a few hostages at a time over the next few days. Eight hostages — seven teen-age girls and a teacher — were freed Friday. Two classmates, both boys were released Saturday at the Mineralnye Vody airport.

At 6:45 pm (1545 GMT) Sunday, the gunmen freed three more hostages.

## BRIEFLY

## Arafat arrives in Yemen: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived Monday to brief Yemen's leadership on the peace talks that his aides were to resume with the Israelis in Egypt later in the day, AP reports from San'a.

Yemen is a close supporter of the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and still harbors some 2,000 of the PLO fighters that Arafat wants to move as policemen to Jericho and Gaza.

In arrival statements, Arafat, who came from Cairo where he held advance talks Sunday with the Egyptian hosts, said the "most important obstacles" sprang from Israel's interpretation of the September 13 declaration of principles on Palestinian self-rule.

**37,000 children die in Peru:** An estimated 37,000 Peruvian children died this year of preventable diseases such as tetanus and diarrhoea, but even that figure marks as big improvement from 10 years ago, UNICEF said Sunday. AFP reports from Lima.

A decade ago, around 64,000 children under one year of age died of diseases that could have been prevented, United Nations Children's Fund representative Mario Talavera said.

He attributed the improvement to immunization campaigns and a population shift from the countryside to cities, where medical services are more widely available.

**Road mishap takes 5 in France:** A car travelling at high speed lost control on a curve and crashed into a minivan Sunday, killing five people and seriously injuring eight others, police said. AP reports from France.

The car was travelling on a highway near Chaulnes, 110 km (70 miles) north of Paris, when it slid and hit the oncoming van.

All four in the BMW — the driver, his wife, their child and a family friend — were killed. A 13-year-old child in the van also died.

The eight injured, including a 2-month-old infant, were air-lifted to hospitals in nearby Peronne and Amiens.

**Storm Nell claims 7 in Philippines:** Tropical storm Nell roared across the populous central Philippine Islands Monday, dumping heavy rains and buffeting the area with strong winds. At least seven people were reported killed. AP reports from Manila.

At 4 am (2100 GMT), the storm was reported over the city of Iloilo, about 500 kilometers (300 miles) south of Manila. Its maximum sustained winds had weakened to 110 kph (68 mph).

Nell, which was downgraded from typhoon status early Monday, was moving in a northwesterly course at 26 kph (16 mph), according to the Manila weather service.

**Abduzhalil Tajikistan's new PM:** The Tajikistan Parliament confirmed yesterday the appointment of Abduzhalil Samadov as the central Asian state's new Prime Minister, Itar-Tass news agency said. AFP reports from Moscow.

He replaces Abdulmalek Abdulazizhanov who resigned on December 18 amid disagreements with Tajik leader Emomali Rakhmonov on economic policy and allegations of corruption.

Samadov served previously as Deputy Prime Minister, Itar-Tass said, giving no further details.

**Plane crashes in Armenia, 11 die:** Eleven people died when a Russian cargo plane crashed while landing in heavy fog Monday at the Armenian town of Gyumri, officials said. AP reports from Moscow.

The An-26 turboprop was transporting two automobiles from Krasnodar in southern Russia, said Marina Ryklin, a spokeswoman for the Russian government emergency committee.

She said all five crew members and all six passengers were killed in the crash at Gyumri, 85 kilometers (53 miles) northwest of Yerevan, the Armenian capital.

## Hamas offers ceasefire

JERUSALEM, Dec 27 : The main Muslim militant group in the occupied territories offered Sunday to halt attacks against Israelis if they agreed to withdraw forces from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, reports AP.

"Stop all manifestations of violence from the Israeli side and ... the Palestinian side will stop all the manifestations," Mahmoud Al-Zahar, a leader of the Hamas group, said on Israeli army radio.

It was an unusual offer given Hamas previous insistence that it would not lay down arms against Israel until the Jewish state is supplanted by an Islamic one.

Al-Zahar's remarks also were the latest in a series of indications that despite its opposition to the September 13 Israel-PLO accord, Hamas was moving toward accommodation with Israel.

A Gaza military commander revealed earlier this month he had held closed-door meetings with Hamas leaders.

Al-Zahar was among 400 activists Israel deported to Lebanon in December 1992 in retaliation for the slayings of six soldiers whose deaths were blamed on Hamas. He was also among the 197 of those deportees who were repatriated December 15, in the wake of Mideast peace moves.

In his unusual radio interview, Al-Zahar reiterated de-

## Implementation of Palestinian self-rule

## Arafat's concession can break deadlock: Peres

JERUSALEM, Dec 27 : Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres warned today that only concessions from the PLO leader Yasser Arafat could break a deadlock on implementing Palestinian self-rule, reports AFP.

"I really hope that Yasser Arafat will come back down to earth because I'm not taking anything new" to the Israeli-PLO negotiations opening later the same day in Cairo, Peres told the daily Yediot Acharonot.

Peres and PLO executive committee member Mahmud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, were to lead the two delegations in talks aimed at breaking the deadlock on implementing autonomy.

If Abu Mazen... does not have a mandate, I'm not sure we will be able to succeed" in Cairo, warned the Foreign Min-

ister.

But government spokesman and Health Minister Chaim Ramon said Sunday that an agreement on implementing autonomy in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho might be reached within 10 days.

And Israeli radio said the Jewish state would be ready of double the size of the future autonomous Jericho district — one of the key areas of dispute between the two sides.

High-level talks in Norway and France have failed to overcome the major stumbling blocks: control of border crossings linking Egypt to Gaza and Jordan to Jericho, the size of Jericho, and security for Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Implementation of the September 13 autonomy accord was to have started on December 13, but Arafat and Israeli

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin failed to reach agreement at a Cairo meeting on the eve of the deadline.

According to the radio, Israel is now ready to double the size of Jericho from 27 square kilometres (11 square miles) to around 50 square kilometers (20 square miles).

But the Gulf is still wide between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, which has lowered its sights from 345 square kilometres to 200 square kilometres.

Ahead of the latest Cairo negotiations, Israel's deputy chief of staff general Amnon Shahak met two PLO security officials in Rome on Sunday, military radio said.

It said they discussed intelligence cooperation to combat the Islamic resistance movement (Hamas), which has vowed to sabotage the autonomy deal.



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (r) meets PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in the Tahrir palace in Heliopolis Dec 26 in Cairo. Arafat and Mubarak are discussing new ways to break the impasse over Palestinian self rule ahead of the Israeli-PLO negotiations. — AFP photo

## Ghali believes DPRK has will to resolve disputes on N-issues

BEIJING, Dec 27 : UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said Monday he believes North Korea's leaders have the political will to resolve the international dispute over their suspected nuclear weapons programme, reports AP.

"There is a political will to solve peacefully this problem. This is the positive element," Boutros-Ghali said at a news conference one day after arriving from the North Korean capital of Pyongyang.

The political will to avoid an escalation. The political will to find a progressive way to co-existence and the beginning of a way to reunification between North and South," he said.

"The purpose of my mission was to encourage all the actors of this crisis to continue to negotiate," he said. "We believe through negotiations and more

negotiations we will be able to find a peaceful solution."

He also said he wanted to listen to the viewpoints of all sides in the dispute in case the United Nations is called on later to play a more active role. He travelled last week to Japan and South Korea, both of which are deeply concerned by the North's suspected weapons programme, before crossing the demilitarized zone into North Korea.

Asked about the latest report on North Korea's nuclear capability, a CIA analysis that North Korea may already have one or two nuclear bombs, Boutros-Ghali said he was not a military expert and could not comment.

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