

6 die, 700 hurt during New Year's revelry in Philippines

MANILA (Philippines). Jan 1: Six people were reported killed and more than 700 injured during New Year's revelry, officials said Saturday. But the casualty figure was lower than in previous years, reports AP.

Radio stations said the six died from stabblings and gunshot wounds during New Year's celebrations in the Manila area. Hospitals treated 723 people for fireworks-related injuries, including burns and missing fingers.

At least 19 people were wounded by stray bullets and 12 were stabbed.

Last year, 10 people were killed and more than 1,000 injured in Manila alone. The government's Philippine General Hospital said it treated 69

1250 Iraqis flee to Iran

NICOSIA, Jan 1: Iran said today that 1,250 Iraqis had crossed into the country through the Huweizah border region fleeing attacks by the Iraqi army in the southern Marshes, reports Reuter.

The official IRNA news agency did not give a time period for the exodus but quoted a local Red Crescent Society official as saying 24 Iraqi families had arrived in the region bordering the Marshes over the past few days.

IRNA reported on Thursday that 114 Iraqis had crossed into Iran, driven from their homes by Iraqi artillery attacks.

The Red Crescent Society has provided the refugees with relief supplies but more assistance is needed as their numbers grow, IRNA quoted the official as saying.

About 5,000 Iraqi marsh Arabs have fled to Iran since July, saying they have been driven out by Iraqi army attacks.

firecracker injuries six stabblings and one gunshot wound; a 50 per cent drop from last year.

For the first time in memory no fires were reported in Manila on New Year's time in memory, no fires were reported in Manila on New Year's Eve. Ordinarily, errant fireworks trigger many fires in wooden shanty neighbourhoods.

"I have been a fireman for 30 years, and this is the first time this has ever happened," fireman Ador Giorisio said.

Another 88 people were injured in Cebu and two other provincial cities: Cagayan de Oro and Iligan.

"Maybe it's the media," said one doctor, who refused to give his name. Radio and television stations had been broadcasting appeals all week for people to avoid grandiose, private fireworks displays.

Among the most serious injuries was Rogelio Quillones, who lost a hand after betting his friends that he could hold and exploding firecracker, and 7-year-old Joseph Allen, whose eyes were seriously damaged when he picked up what he thought was a dud firecracker, radio stations reported.

Most Southeast Asians save their biggest celebrations for traditional lunar New Year. But Filipinos, 85 per cent of whom are Roman Catholic, follow the Western tradition.

Fireworks became a Philippine tradition with the arrival of Chinese immigrants in the 19th century. The noise and flashes are supposed to drive away evil spirits and guarantee a prosperous New Year.

Filipinos who earn only a few thousand pesos (hundreds of dollars) a month spend large sums of money on firecrackers, sparklers, skyrockets and other fireworks on New Year's.

BRIEFLY

6 killed in Indian road mishap:

Six persons—including the bus driver and two women were killed and 40 others injured, when a Nagpur-bound Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) bus rammed into a truck on national highway no. six near Tiwsa, about 40 kms from Amravati on Friday, PTI reports.

According to police, the mishap occurred when the bus driver tried to overtake a truck. In the process, the bus collided with another Bombay-bound truck coming from the opposite direction.

The bus driver and three passengers were killed on the spot while others succumbed to their injuries in general hospital here. Of the injured, the condition of three was stated to be serious.

12 murdered in Peru: Five gunmen murdered a peasant family of 12 including a five-year-old boy, apparently over a failed love affair. RCN radio reported Friday. Reuter reports from Bogota.

RCN quoted Guillermo Legon Lozano, Mayor of the Town of Cunday, 75 miles (120 km) southwest of Bogota, as saying the men arrived at the family's simple home in the nearby village of El Paramo Thursday night and asked for two young women.

When the family took them to the women, the five men turned their guns on the group and killed them all, the radio said. Initial reports said the two women had apparently had an affair with one or more of the men who killed them.

Visit Malaysia '94' launched:

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad officially launched "Visit Malaysia 1994" amid the new year celebrations last night. Xinhua reports from Kuala Lumpur.

When the clock struck for the beginning of 1994, Mahathir pushed a button on a stage to set off fireworks, shining thousands gathering at the independence square in Kuala Lumpur.

Various performances were presented to show Malaysia's virtues as a worthy tourist destination.

UFF to continue violence: The leading outlawed northern Ireland Protestant extremist group said on Friday it would continue its campaign of violence in 1994 despite efforts by the British and Irish governments to promote peace, Reuter reports from Belfast.

The Ulster Freedom Fighters said in a statement reported by British television it would press its campaign as long as there was what it called political coercion and a "pan-nationalist" campaign of terror in the British ruled province.

The UFF statement was the strongest rejection so far of the Anglo-Irish peace plan, which was intended mainly to persuade Irish Republican Army (IRA) guerrillas to lay down their arms in return for a place at negotiations on the political future of northern Ireland.

Taiwan eases visa requirements for foreigners

TAIPEI, Jan 1: Taiwan eased strict visa requirements for foreign visitors today in a bid to reverse a decline in its Tourism industry and obtain visa concessions from other nations, reports Reuter.

Citizens from 12 nations—Australia, Austria, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United States—can now visit the island for five-day periods without visas.

Taiwan had maintained tough visa regulations left over from its martial law period, which ended in 1987. Previously, almost all foreigners had to apply for visas before coming to Taiwan.

David Hong, director of the Foreign Ministry's department of consular affairs, said the reform would help tourism.

UNDATED, Jan 1: Nature led the way in hitting Asia with disasters in 1993, lashing out with earthquakes, floods and typhoons which claimed thousands of lives throughout the region, reports AP.

Movements of the earth's crust caused catastrophes in Japan, India, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea, with earthquakes registering magnitudes around and above 6.0 on the open-ended Richter scale—strong enough to cause severe damage in populated areas.

On July 12, the largest earthquake to hit Japan in the past 10 years devastated the northern island of Okushiri off Hokkaido, leaving some 250 people dead and 670 injured. The quake hit a high 7.8 on the Richter scale, which left six dead.

The Indian sub-continent suffered 3,000 dead in disasters caused by monsoon rains in India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

On September 30 a less intense earthquake flattened 35

villages in India's western Maharashtra state, on the coast of the Arabian Sea.

The trembler, registered 6.4 on the Richter scale, left 9,748 people dead by official count, while newspapers and state-run media estimated the death toll at more than 30,000.

Papua New Guinea was rocked by a trembler, reaching 6.8 on the Richter scale on October 13, and leaving 65 people dead and 10,000 homeless. Just over a month later, Pakistan's Baluchistan Province was the victim of a smaller quake, at 5.7 on the Richter scale, which left six dead.

The Indian sub-continent suffered 3,000 dead in disasters caused by monsoon rains in India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Some 1,100 people were killed in June-July floods

International

Thousands attend funeral of Wani

JLF stages demonstration against Indo-Pak talks

ISLAMABAD, Jan 1: About 200 Kashmiri militants staged a demonstration today against bilateral talks on Kashmir between India and Pakistan scheduled to begin here Sunday, reports AFP.

The activists of the Jammu

their fate."

Addressing the rally in the capital, JKLF Vice-Chairman Raja Muzaffar demanded Kashmiri representatives participate in any negotiations in a settlement of the Kashmir issue.

"It is for the people of Kashmir to decide whether they want to join India or Pakistan or become independent," he said.

Kashmiri would not accept the division of their homeland, the JKLF leader said.

Another rally against the talks was planned here for later in the day by Pakistani fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami party.

The demonstrators shouted "we want complete freedom" and "Only Kashmiris can decide

1947 with India and Pakistan spending billions of dollars on the issue.

Meanwhile, thousands of Kashmiri Muslims attended the funeral today of popular academic Abdul Ahad Wani as police attempted to identify his assassins.

Wani, 52, who headed the law faculty at Kashmir University, was buried here to chants of Islamic and independence slogans by the assembly of mourners who included several Kashmiri separatists, witnesses said.

His bullet-riddled body was found Friday on the campus of the university in Srinagar, the

Kashmiri summer capital and urban hub of Muslim militancy.

Wani was regarded as a sympathiser of the militant movement for Kashmir's secession from India.

Police linked his murder to internece rivalries between the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and the Hizbul Mujahideen, the two most powerful Muslim guerrilla groups.

Both organisations condemned the murder in separate statements released here today, and the Hizbul said it had set up a commission to probe the killing. The killers would be punished, the group said.

Arafat urges Palestinians to remain united

TUNIS, Jan 1: PLO leader Yasser Arafat said Friday he was "confident" an independent Palestinian state would become into existence with Jerusalem as its capital, reports AFP.

Arafat, in a message marking the 29th anniversary of the creation of his Fatah movement faction, called on the Palestinian people to remain united to achieve this "sacred goal."

He said the autonomy accord signed by the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel in September in Washington has carried the Palestinians to a new era that should witness the establishment of the "first Palestinian national authority" in the Gaza Strip and Jericho in the West Bank.

"We enter the new era with confidence and a lot of hope, but without any illusions," Arafat said, stressing that their were still many difficulties to surmount.

Israel and the PLO have not reached an agreement yet over details that have so far blocked the implementation of the autonomy agreement in the occupied territories.

Negotiations between the two sides have stumbled over the boundaries of Jericho, the security of Jewish settlements and the control of the international borders of the autonomous areas.

Arafat said the accord was just a first step towards peace which would not be completed before implementing all United Nations Security Council resolutions and regaining "all Arab rights at all the fronts."

He also referred to the importance of "Arab coordination" to boost the Arab stand against Israel in the bilateral negotiations.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin gets some advice from his public relations assistant Ludmilla Bikhoya (R), as they prepare the recording of Yeltsin's New Year address to the nation in the Kremlin, late Dec 30. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Boeing makes emergency landing to save cat and dog

SPokane, Washington: A United Airlines Boeing 727 made an emergency landing to save a dog and a cat stored in an unheated cargo bay, reports AFP.

The jet had just taken off from Chicago for Spokane when ground control told the cockpit crew that the two animals—a golden retriever and a cat—had been stored in the unheated section of the cargo compartment, pilot Mark Sebby said.

Temperatures at 9,000 metres (30,000 feet), can reach minus 48 degrees Celsius (minus 55 degrees Fahrenheit).

Sebby said he dump land safely in Madison, Wisconsin. The pets were taken off the plane, warmed up and then put in the heated part of the cargo hold. The rescue delayed the flight by two hours.

Row over "designer babies"

LONDON: A row erupted in Britain on Friday over "designer babies" following reports that a black woman is to have a white woman's egg implanted in her to ensure the child is of mixed race, reports Reuter.

It is the second time in a week that genetic manipulation has prompted protests from doctors, churchmen and politicians after a 59-year-old British woman gave birth to twins on Christmas Day after artificial insemination at a Rome clinic.

The latest case involves a man of mixed race and a black woman who are keen the child should resemble its father. The couple are being treated at a pioneering test-tube baby clinic at Bourn Hall, Cambridge.

The woman, unable to produce eggs of her own because of a tumour, has opted to have the eggs of a white donor fertilised by her husband's sperm.

Man with 3 tongues

KATHMANDU: A man has been found in a remote hill region of eastern Nepal who has three tongues, 30 fingers and toes and 60 teeth, an English-language newspaper said Saturday, reports AFP.

The Kathmandu post said pictures of 50-year-old Taranath Kharel's "amazing physique" were "selling like hotcakes."

Most human beings have 32 teeth, including their wisdom teeth.

4-mile-long greeting card

NEW DELHI: An army officer in India's capital mailed his boss a New Year card, but it required several letter carriers to just lift it, reports AP.

Lt. Col. OP. Sindhu sent President Shankar Dayal Sharma, the commander-in-chief of India's defence services, a greeting made from 21,300 sheets of paper folded together, newspapers reported Saturday. The card weighed 65 kilograms (143 pounds).

Sharma will have to take Sindhu's word that it says "Happy New Year to the President of India." The card is 6.5 kilometers (four miles long).

Syria denies secret contacts with Israel

DAMASCUS, Jan 1: Syria on Friday denied having had secret informal contacts with Israel in European capitals in a search for peace, reports AFP.

An Information Ministry spokesman said that reports of contacts between Syrian and Israeli experts were "unfounded and false."

US and Arab sources said in Washington on Thursday that five meetings had taken place in Oslo, London and Rome since May.

A draft "declaration of intentions" had been drawn up on the Golan Heights, which Israel seized in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and the Syrians had dropped demands for reciprocity on all security measures in any peace accord, the sources said.

Israel's US ambassador Itamar Rabinovich said Friday

scenic hillside, overlooking Kuala Lumpur, collapsed after a landslide, burying 72 people in the rubble.

Of an estimated 500 religious pilgrims in the Philippines, who were clambering onto a floating Roman Catholic shrine during a river procession in the town of Bocage, 279 drowned when the craft capsized.

South Korea did not escape with three major air, land and sea transportation disasters killing about 440 people.

On March 28, 78 died and 113 were injured when a passenger train derailed in the southern port town of Pusan, and on July 26 an Asian airlines flight crashed into a hill side while trying to land in fog and heavy rain, claiming 66 lives and injuring 44—the country's worst ever domestic air disaster.

China suffered two major factory fires during the year, one at a textile plant in Fuzhou south east China on December 13 in which 60 people died and another at a toy factory in Shenzhen, southern China, November 19 which claimed 80 lives.

Malaysia was hit by its worst building disaster on December 11 when a 12-storey luxury apartment block perched on a

93 was a year of disasters for Asia

which inundated 4,741 villages and 44 towns in 13 of India's 25 states. The flooding—which experts called the worst in 50 years—caused hundreds of millions of dollars damage and crippled Punjab, the country's grain bowl.

More than 3,300 people lost their lives in floods in China this year, that caused damage estimated at 11 billion dollars, destroyed 17 million hectares of land and affected 1.8 million homes.

Unseasonal rain and a series of typhoons struck Japan throughout the summer, resulting in an estimated 8.4 billion dollars damage to the rice harvest. Typhoon Yancy hit the Archipelago in early September, leaving 50 dead in its wake.

Two typhoons of moderate strength struck the Philippines in early December, and relief operations were still

continuing as the search for the unexpectedly high number of dead continued. The official combined toll from ty