

# BRIEFLY

**King Hussein calls Arafat:** Jordan's King Hussein telephoned Yasser Arafat on Sunday to discuss a visit by the PLO leader to Jordan "very soon", Arafat's press adviser said. Reuter reports from Gaza.

The conversation, described by press aide Nabil Abu Rudeineh as "brotherly and friendly", was seen as an indication of a significant warming in relations between the two, who have quarrelled over claims to Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites.

**Fire in Russia claims 7:** A fire in a home for mental patients in the Ural Mountains killed seven patients and injured 18 others, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported on Monday. AP says from Moscow.

The fire at the home in the town of Kizel, 750 miles (1215 kilometers) northeast of Moscow, started due to a short circuit in the institution's worn-out electrical system. The blaze soon spread to other parts of the building, the agency said.

**Perry to visit Israel Jan 8:** US Defence

Secretary William Perry will visit Israel next month for talks on strategic cooperation between the Jewish state and its closest ally Washington, the Defence Ministry said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

The two-day trip beginning January 8 will include a visit to the northern border with Lebanon, the Israeli army's last active front, the ministry said in a statement.

**Saddam sacks agri minister:** Iraqi

President Saddam Hussein dismissed Agriculture Minister Karim Hasan Rida on Sunday. Reuter reports from Nicosia.

Iraqi radio, which reported the change, gave no explanation but food production and prices are major headaches for the government in Baghdad as its people struggle under the hardships of Gulf War trade sanctions.

**Arab shot near Rafah crossing:**

Israeli troops shot and wounded an Arab as he tried to cross from Egypt into the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip on Sunday, the army said. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

"The man was trying to enter near the Rafah border crossing, and an Israeli army forces opened fire, wounding him," an army spokeswoman said.

**Ecuador minister dies in mishap:**

Ecuador's Minister of Energy and Mining Gustavo Galindo was killed on Sunday when the car he was driving flipped over on a Pacific coast road, officials said on Sunday. AFP reports from Quito.

The crash occurred early Sunday, said government spokesman Enrique Proano. He did not immediately disclose the cause of the accident.

**Civilian shot dead in S Egypt:**

Suspected Muslim militants shot dead a civilian and wounded two police guards when they opened fire at a police station in southern Egypt on Sunday, security sources said. Reuter reports from Assuit.

They said the gunmen attacked the police station in Abu Qirqa village in Minya province, killing passerby Mohammed Fathi Atta, and wounding two policemen guarding the station. They then escaped.

**Landslides kill 12 Filipinos:** Twelve

people, including seven children, were buried alive by landslides triggered by strong rains brought on by tropical storm Axel, relief officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Manila.

The landslides occurred separately in two remote villages near Real, 60 kilometers (19 miles) east of Manila last week at the height of the storm, said Hazel Vasquez, a social welfare department official.

**Blast claims 8 in Peru:** A family of eight, including two children, died early Christmas morning when a gas tank exploded, firefighters and local news reports said, AP says from Lima.

The explosion and subsequent fire occurred about 6:30 am on Sunday in Lima's Magdalena district, a middle-class neighbourhood on the coast.

**2 LTTE rebels shot dead:** Sri Lankan

troops shot dead two more Tamil guerrillas on Christmas Day, raising to 11 the death toll in fresh violence over the weekend in the embattled northeast, officials said on Monday. AFP reports from Colombo.

Troops in northern Vettikerni gunned down two Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas trying to infiltrate the army's forward defences in the region late Sunday, a military spokesman said.

**4 Peruvian soldiers killed:** Suspected

Shining Path guerrillas ambushed an army patrol in a region in Peru's southeastern Andean highlands, killing four soldiers and wounding three other troops, military authorities said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Ayacucho.

The attack occurred on Saturday in Victor Fajardo province about 260 miles southeast of Lima but the dead and wounded could not be evacuated until Christmas Day due to bad weather, said officials at the regional military command.

**Gunmen kill 4 in Puerto Rico:**

Three armed men drove up to an outdoor party in the eastern beach town of Luquillo early Christmas Day and opened fire with AK-47s and pistols on the 100 guests, AP reports from San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The host, who was awaiting trial on drug charges, and three others died instantly of bullet wounds, breaking last year's record number of 951 killings in this US commonwealth. Another guest was hospitalised with a bullet in his thigh. The gunmen escaped from the scene, 15 miles (25 km) northeast of San Juan.

**Exploding Xmas tree kills 2:** A 30-year-old German woman and her 20-month-old daughter burned to death when their Christmas tree caught fire so fast that it virtually exploded, firefighters said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Bonn.

The tree and decorations were set alight by sparkler candles on Christmas Eve and blazed so suddenly that the eruption blasted out the windows of the family's small flat in the western city of Dusseldorf. The 29-year-old father suffered severe burns but escaped over the balcony along with an uninjured friend.

**Pastor slain in US:** A man sometimes fed by the local pastor has confessed to killing him. AP reports from Essex, Maryland.

Churchgoers knew something was wrong when the Rev Samuel Nathaniel Booth didn't show up for Christmas Eve services. They found his body in his trailer home behind their church. James Thomas Wood, 24, of Abingdon, confessed to the killing Christmas morning and was charged with robbery and murder, said State Police Sgt H E Watts.

**UK playwright Osborne dies:** Drama

list John Osborne, one of Britain's most influential playwrights, has died at the age of 65, according to his agent Gordon Dickson. The Daily Mail reported yesterday. AFP says from London.

The paper quoted Dickson as saying Osborne, who won an Oscar for best screenplay with the 1964 film *Tom Jones*, suffered heart failure on Christmas Eve while in hospital in Shropshire.

**Quakes hit Colorado, California:**

A mild earthquake shook parts of Colorado on Christmas Day hours after an earlier quake struck the high desert near Death Valley, California. No injuries or major damage was reported in either quake. AP says from New York.

The quake centred in Castle Rock, about 30 miles (45 kilometers) southeast of Denver, hit at 8:06 am local time (1506 GMT), said Stuart Koyanagi of the US Geological Survey's National Earthquake Information Centre in Golden, Colorado.

## International

Grozny willing to discuss confederation

# Russia ready to end military campaign in Chechnya

MOSCOW, Dec 26: President Boris Yeltsin said on Monday that Russia was ready to withdraw its forces from the outskirts of the Chechen capital and said it was time to end Moscow's military campaign in the breakaway Russian republic, reports AP.

Yeltsin appeared to be indicating that he was prepared to resume peace talks with Chechen leaders who have so far rejected his demands that they disarm their supporters and abandon their drive for independence.

"We have reached the stage of restoration of constitutional, legal order," he said, according to the Interfax news agency.

Yeltsin said that the army could be withdrawn to temporary points on the borders of

the Chechen republic. Another report by AFP adds: Chechnya's leaders are ready to discuss a confederation with Russia if Moscow ends its military intervention in the breakaway republic. Interfax quoted the Chechen vice-president as saying today.

Zelimkhan Yandarbiev told Interfax that the Grozny government accepted "the principle" of talks on a confederation with Russia, provided Moscow "really wants to create confederal links without putting

pressure by force" on Chechnya.

"The Chechens have more interests in Russia than Russia has in Chechnya, and we don't want to lose Russia," said Yandarbiev, who had been considered a hardliner among Chechnya's leadership.

He also said Chechen leaders were ready to negotiate with Moscow without setting the departure of the Russian expeditionary corps as a precondition.

"The situation can be frozen and talks can begin with the first stage devoted to the issue of the presence of (Russian) troops," Yandarbiev said.

Chechen leaders had until now insisted on the withdrawal of the estimated 40,000 troops sent by Moscow December 11 to put down the secessionist rebellion in the Caucasus republic as a precondition to any negotiations.

Previous talks between the two sides all broke down over the Chechens' refusal to give up their three-year-old drive for independence.

Russians and Chechens should try to agree on a communiqué on the situation, to map out an agenda for the talks and resolve the outstanding issues step by step," Yandarbiev said.

Yandarbiev's conciliatory remarks came as Russian and Chechen lawmakers were to hold talks in the neighbouring republic of Daghestan.



Residents carry a wounded Chechen fighter to a car after shelling in the town of Argun, near Grozny on Saturday.

— AFP photo



US President Bill Clinton (C), First Lady Hillary Clinton (R), and daughter Chelsea leave church after Christmas morning services on Sunday in Washington. — AFP photo

## Pakistan orders India to close Karachi consulate

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, Dec 26: Pakistan ordered India on Monday to close its consulate in Karachi, saying it was a hotbed for fomenting violence in the city, reports AP.

Foreign Secretary Najmuddin Sheikh said police arrested 14 people in the past week who claim they were recruited by India's secret service to create trouble in Karachi. He said one had confessed being responsible for a shooting that claimed 15 lives last year.

"India should be treated as a state that is sponsoring terrorism," Sheikh claimed the government had evidence that India was behind the strife that has nearly crippled Pakistan's largest city, a port of 9 million people.

"India should be treated as a state that is sponsoring terrorism," Sheikh claimed the government's allegations were "completely unfounded." He briefed reporters on condition he not be named.

Several months ago, Pakistan ordered the Karachi con-

sulate's staff cut from 64 to 20, sating most of the staff were intelligence agents.

Earlier Monday, Pakistan expelled an Indian Embassy employee, Deepak Thakur, on charges of spying. India expelled a Pakistani diplomat on similar charges a few days earlier.

These expulsions are not going to accomplish anything and they are certainly not going to improve relations," said Partha Sarathi, a spokesman at the Indian High Commission in Islamabad.

India and Pakistan routinely trade accusations and fit for fit expulsions of diplomats are a common occurrence.

Muslims, Buddhists clash in Myanmar: 3 killed

MAE SOT, Thailand, Dec 26: Myanmar military authorities have imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew in a western town after a violent clash between Muslims and Buddhists which left at least three dead, an Islamic opponent of the Myanmar regime said today. reports Reuter.

The violent clash broke out two weeks ago in Sittwe in western Myanmar's Arakan state when hundreds of angry Buddhists burned down three mosques.

The attack on the mosque was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Government soldiers fired into the air to disperse the crowds and military authorities imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew, the source said. The situation had since calmed down but the curfew remained in force, he said.

Armenian soldiers killed into the air to disperse the crowds and military authorities imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew, the source said. The situation had since calmed down but the curfew remained in force, he said.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Government soldiers fired into the air to disperse the crowds and military authorities imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew, the source said. The situation had since calmed down but the curfew remained in force, he said.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.

Both people and history was apparently sparked by a private dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim. Three Muslims were killed and a number of other injured in subsequent clashes, a member of the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front told Reuters.