

## BRIEFLY



UN Commander in Bosnia, Lt General Sir Michael Rose (L), poses for a photo with Muslim rebel leader Fikret Abdic on Wednesday before their meeting in Velika Kladuska. Abdic yesterday accepted a ceasefire which General Rose proposed to the rival factions in the Bihać enclave. — AFP photo

**Nepal frees 500 prisoners:** Nepal's Communist rulers yesterday released more than 500 prisoners in an amnesty to mark King Birendra's 50th birthday, officials said. Reuter reports from Kathmandu.

Bhuj Raj Pokharel, the most senior official in the Home Department, told Reuters all 538 prisoners released under the customary annual amnesty, had completed more than half of their jail terms.

**Italian politician dies:** Marcello Stefanini, treasurer of the former Communist Party, died Thursday after suffering a brain haemorrhage. He was 56. AP reports from Rome.

Stefanini, who had been in a coma since Saturday in a Rome hospital, was under investigation in corruption probes linked to his party, now called the Democratic Party of the Left, or PDS.

**China sentences 3 officers:** A court in northern China has jailed a former city police chief for five years and sentenced another officer to death for beating to death a schoolteacher falsely accused of making crank phone calls, the Legal Daily said yesterday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

The Zhangzhi Intermediate People's Court on Tuesday sentenced He Shikuan, a former chief of police in northern Shandong province, to five years on charges of malpractice for personal gain, the newspaper said. The Deputy Director of the Police General Office, Yu Liehai, was sentenced to death for extorting a confession and illegally detaining a citizen while another officer was jailed for life for extorting a confession, it said.

**Turkish newspaper HQ attacked:** Three gunmen attacked the Istanbul headquarters of a major Turkish newspaper and television channel on Wednesday. Turkish television said. Reuter reports from Ankara.

No one was hurt. The gunmen, in a stolen taxi, fired shots at the building in the Istanbul suburb of Bagcilar, breaking windows, television said.

**Road mishaps kill 13 Filipinos:** Accidents in the central and southern Philippines left 13 people dead and 30 injured, including 10 hitchhikers killed when a truck lost its brakes and plunged into a ravine, police and survivors said on Thursday. AFP reports from Manila.

A survivor said the hitchhikers were aboard a flatbed truck used to haul sugar cane when it hurtled down a mountain road in southern Makilala town, north Cotabato province on Wednesday night.

**France expels Tunisian imam:** France has expelled a Tunisian imam who worked at a Marseille mosque, an official source said on Wednesday. AFP reports from Marseille.

41-year-old Imam Maher El Hari was deported back to Tunisia in mid-December because of his extreme fundamentalist preachers, the source said. He had been under surveillance by secret police.

**Gunmen kill 3 in Philippines:** Three persons were killed and five wounded when armed men fired into a crowd during a post-Christmas party outside a northern city, police said yesterday. AFP reports from Laog.

Police said the attackers fled under cover of darkness after spraying automatic rifle fire on the revellers before dawn on Wednesday in Pinili town, Ilocos Norte province.

**Armenia suspends major party:** Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian went on national television on Wednesday night to announce he was suspending the activities of an influential traditionalist party, AP reports from Yerevan.

Ter-Petrosian accused the leadership of Dashnak Tsutyun of involvement in a series of political murders, including the assassination of ex-Yerevan Mayor Ambartsum Galstyan earlier this month. He also charged the party with active involvement in drug trafficking.

**7 rebels shot dead in Egypt:** Police killed six suspected Muslim extremists in a gun battle on Wednesday in southern Egypt, security officials said, AP reports from Cairo.

A truck driver who happened to be passing died in the crossfire, they said. Meanwhile, as seven suspected radicals were shot and killed by police in a separate incident.

**Plague claims 33 in Peru:** The growing rat population and poor garbage collection have caused the bubonic plague to spread through Peru, where some 33 people have died of the disease this year, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday. AFP reports from Lima.

More than 1,000 cases of the plague were reported in 1994, according to officials, who said rodent control was hindered in agricultural areas where there was inadequate storage for agricultural products.

**1 executed for selling panda skins:** China has executed a man for selling skins of the endangered giant panda, sentenced an associate to life in prison and jailed a third man for three years, the Xinhua Daily Telegraph said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

In May 1987, Wang Wenyu sold one giant panda skin in Sichuan province in the southwest, where most of China's 1,000 surviving giant pandas live. Later that year he caught and killed a second panda to sell its skin, the newspaper said.

**Israeli award for US actress:** Actress-comedian Whoopi Goldberg will receive a humanitarian award in January for her 'Comic Relief' specials, which have raised 25 million dollars for the homeless. AP reports from Los Angeles.

The award is from the Friends of the Sheba Medical Centre. Goldberg will be honoured Jan 22 at a Beverly Hills awards dinner.

**Nancy Kissinger released:** Nancy Kissinger, the wife of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, has gone home from the hospital after 17 days treatment for an intestinal ailment. AP reports from New York.

The 60-year-old Mrs Kissinger was released from New York Hospital on Tuesday. The hospital gave no details about her ailment. But she has a history of ulcers.

**400 HIV cases in Indian forces:** Nearly 400 confirmed HIV-positive cases have been detected among the personnel of the armed forces, according to Major General C S Dhawan, Deputy Director Medical Services, Southern Command. PTI reports from Pune.

## International

Another blow for party

# Tiwari to quit as Uttar Pradesh Congress chief

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: India's ruling Congress (I) Party in turmoil over a bitter leadership tussle, received another jolt on Wednesday when a senior leader said he was quitting his political post, reports AFP.

Narain Dutt Tiwari, who heads the party in Uttar Pradesh, said he decided to quit because he had failed to convince the Congress to withdraw legislative backing from the northern state's opposition-led coalition government.

Tiwari said he would resign on Sunday.

Tiwari backs a contention within the party which wants slain former Premier Rajiv Gandhi's widow to take over the helm of the 109-year-old party to give it a new image.

Sonia Gandhi, 47, who has previously turned down re-

quests to enter politics, has not commented on the reports.

The Nehru-Gandhi Dynasty governed India for four decades, beginning with Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first premier, his daughter, Indira Gandhi, and her son, Rajiv.

Reuters adds: Indian chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan said in a newspaper interview published today he would block state elections that are not properly organised regardless of constitutional scheduled for February unless the voters had identity cards.

A constitutional crisis is not my problem. My problem is to hold free and fair elections which are not possible without the cards. The Asian

Age quote him as saying.

The governments of Bihar and Orissa, two of the five states most likely holding elections in February, have been slow in responding to the independent election commission's demand to ready the identity cards before the polls.

Seshan has been using his independent office to combat violence, fraud and ballot-rigging that have marred many Indian elections, and has insisted on identity cards bearing photographs of voters to ensure honest ballots.

The rural areas in Bihar are notorious for election violence. Orissa, on the east coast, is one of India's poorest states. Both states are ruled by the centrist Janata Dal.

## Indian consulate in Karachi halts issuing visas

ISLAMABAD, Dec 29: The Indian consulate in Karachi has stopped issuing visas to Pakistani nationals as New Delhi has been asked by Islamabad to close down the mission, an official of the Indian High Commission said here on Wednesday, reports PTI.

A decision to halt issuing visas was taken immediately after Pakistan Foreign Secretary, Najmuddin Shaikh conveyed to the Indian High Commissioner S K Lambah on Monday of the move to shut down the Karachi consulate.

The high commission official told PTI, "We do not want to feel unwanted and the winding up process has started."

## Malaysian DPM denies rumours

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 29: Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, attempting to dispel talk of friction between him and Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, said he was very much a "Mahathir man", press reports said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Anwar, who is also Finance Minister, also quashed rumours that his supporters were pushing him to challenge the prime minister.

"I came in as deputy prime minister based on the endorsement of Mahathir Mohamad and the party and also because of the relationship I have with him," The Sun newspaper quoted him as saying after launching a housing project for the poor on Wednesday.

"I have supported his policies and have been consistently so from the beginning," he said.

## Aftershocks rattle N Japan

TOKYO, Dec 29: Strong aftershocks rattled northern Japan on Thursday, hours after a 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck, killing two and injuring 274, reports AP.

The undersea quake, which hit at 9:19 pm (1219 GMT) Wednesday, was centred in the Pacific Ocean about 625 km (390 miles) northeast of Tokyo.

It ripped roads, wrecked dozens of homes and buildings and forced thousands of coastal residents to flee during a short-lived tsunami alert. In the capital, the quake was felt as a long, low rumble that made some buildings sway.

Most of the injured were cut by broken glass or hit by falling objects. Police said most of those hurt — at least 179 — were in Hachinohe, a coastal city in northern Aomori prefecture.

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The tangled love life of the 33-year-old ex-model began to unravel last summer when one of the four women to whom he was simultaneously married sent police to Pierce's home to check up on him. The police found another wife knocking on his door.

"Obviously, there was a lot of lying going on. I did the best I could, but I still made mistakes," Pierce said on Tuesday before surrendering to police in this Phoenix suburb. He was on 1,500 dollars bail on Wednesday on bigamy charges.

Police found records of at least four marriages, one in

1989 and three this year.

Pierce said he was dating other women, keeping track of some of them on a 3-by-5-inch (7.5-by-13-cm) card labelled "Who to Marry." He also carried a little black book in his wallet to keep his stories straight.

Pierce said he told his wives that his job required him to travel. The truth, he said, was altogether different: "I didn't have a job. I didn't have time."

While some men might envy his escapades, Pierce said it wasn't always fun.

"People say guys fantasise about something like this, and I guess I did," he said. "But you don't have your own life."

## Off the Record

### Tangled love life of a 33-yr-old

GLENDALE, Arizona: Vernon Pierce needed a notebook to keep track of the stories he told his four wives and the other women he was dating. But even that wasn't enough, reports AP.

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### All because of her weight ...

IRVING, Texas: A 300-pound (135-kilogram) woman is accused of fatally shooting her husband as he slept Tuesday after he allegedly threatened to leave her or put her in a nursing home because of her weight, police said, reports AP.

Summer Nash, 60, was shot twice in the head, Capt Travis Hall said.

His wife, Gwendolyn Nash, called the police emergency number about 2:30 am to report the shooting and threatened to kill herself, police Sgt Richard Dix said.

"She is apparently an invalid due to overweight. He was either discussing leaving her or putting her in a nursing home. While he was asleep, she took a gun and put it to his head and shot him twice," Hall said.

Mrs Nash, 58, was in bed with her husband when he was shot and was unable to get out of the bed afterward, Hall said. She had not been formally charged late Tuesday morning.

The couple had been married about 30 years.

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