

# BRIEFLY

## Gunman kills 6 in New York:

Six people were killed on Tuesday when a gunman trying to steal a pair of boots opened fire in a shoe store, the second mass murder in New York city in 11 days police said, Reuter reports from New York.

A policeman at the scene said the gunman entered Little Chester's shoes near the Bronx Zoo Tuesday morning demanding boots for free opening fire within minutes.

## Abducted millionaire released:

Swiss police said on Tuesday that millionaire Geo Mantegazza, 67, who was abducted from his office in the Italian-speaking southern canton of Ticino, had been released, Reuter reports from Zurich.

A police communique said Mantegazza, who is one of Switzerland's richest men, was in satisfactory health. It gave no other details.

## Kenyan drug trafficker held:

Pakistani authorities said on Tuesday they arrested a Kenyan national leaving for Iran with 90 capsules of heroin in his stomach, Reuter reports from Quetta.

The Kenyan identified only as tajay was arrested while buying a bus ticket on Monday for the small border town of Taftan to cross into Iran, said the Anti Narcotics Force Director for Baluchistan province colonel Ehnasul Haa.

## Ashok working president of VHP:

Ashok Singhal was Tuesday appointed as working president of the Vishwa Hindu parishad, while Achary Giriraj Kishore was elevated as general secretary of the organisation, VHP sources said, PTI says from New Delhi.

Vishnu Hari Dalmia would continue to remain the VHP president, the sources added. Singhal was so far the general secretary of the VHP.

## Quake hits northern Guatemala:

A strong earthquake shook northern Guatemala on Tuesday, injuring more than a dozen people and knocking down homes, officials said, Reuter says from Guatemala City.

There were no immediate reports of deaths in the quake, which Mexican news agency Notimex said measured 5.3 on the Richter scale and struck shortly before 3 pm (2100 GMT), hitting the northern province of Alta Verapaz.

## 2 killed in Philadelphia gas blast:

Natural gas seeped from a broken main into a basement and exploded, engulfing the house in flames, killing two people and critically injuring a third, AP reports from Philadelphia.

The gas company later accepted the blame and apologized, saying its delay of nearly two hours in responding to a gas-odor report was "unacceptable and regrettable."

## Cuban investment minister removed:

The key figure in Cuba's drive for increased foreign investment has been replaced, the government announced Tuesday, AP reports from Mexico City.

The report carried by the Communist Party daily Granma gave no reason for the removal of Ernesto Melendez and the appointment of Ibrahim Ferradaz Garcia as Minister for foreign investment and economic collaboration.

## Attacks on diplomats rise in Kenya:

Carjackings and attacks on diplomats have accelerated in the last two weeks despite the arrest of 5,000 foreigners blamed for Kenya's runaway crime, AP reports from Nairobi.

"We continue to be concerned about the escalating level of crime targeting foreigners and Kenyans alike in this country," US Embassy spokesman Luis Segesvary said Tuesday. At least a dozen attacks have been staged on embassies, embassy officials or other foreigners since September.

## Russian daily stops publication:

A government-sponsored daily launched under Boris Yeltsin's order in 1990 indefinitely suspended publication on Tuesday, citing a lack of funds, AP reports from Moscow.

The daily Rossiiskaya Gazeta (Russian Newspaper) said different federal bodies owed the newspaper more than 10 billion roubles 2 million dollars. It said it needs an infusion of at least half that amount to resume circulation.

## 13 executed in China:

Authorities in south China gave a day off to more than 20,000 students, civil servants and workers to witness a mass trial which sentenced 13 men to death, Hong Kong newspapers said Tuesday, AP reports from Hong Kong.

The defendants, convicted of murder, rape, robbery, and forcing women into prostitution, were taken away on trucks and shot immediately after the Monday trial at a construction site in Shenzhen, on the Hong Kong border, the Ming Pao daily said. Armed police guarded the trial and prevented people from leaving early, it said.

## Arafat in UAE:

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat arrived in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) yesterday on his first visit to the oil-rich Gulf nation since the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, officials said, AFP reports from Abu Dhabi.

UAE President Sheikh Zayed Ibn Sultan Al-Nahayan was at Abu Dhabi international airport to greet Arafat, who flew in from Qatar, where he had talks with its new ruler Sheikh Hamad Ibn Khalifa Al-Thani.

## Clashes leave 27 killed in Burundi:

Twenty-seven people have been killed and several wounded in the latest clashes in Burundi's ethnic violence, state radio said Tuesday, Reuter says from Nairobi.

Eighteen people died in clashes between the Tutsi-dominated army and armed elements in Murwi commune in the northwest Cibitoke province, the radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, said, without giving a date. Nine more, including three soldiers, were killed on Monday in Buganda commune.

## Quake shakes northern Japan:

A strong earthquake, measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale, shook northern Japan yesterday, but there were no reports of damage or casualties, police and the Meteorological agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

## Kim appoints new finance minister

SEOUL, Dec 20: South Korean President Kim Young-Sam appointed a new finance minister today as part of a sweeping cabinet reshuffle that involved 11 posts, reports Reuter.

Outgoing Unification Minister Rha Woong-Bae was named Minister of Finance and Economy. The move was welcomed by investors, who pushed the stock index up in late morning trading.

Presidential spokesman Yoon-Yeo-Joo said Kwon O-Kie, president of the Dong-A Ilbo newspaper, was named new Unification Minister with special responsibilities for relations with North Korea.

The Dong-A is one of the three largest papers in South Korea and is politically middle-of-the-road.

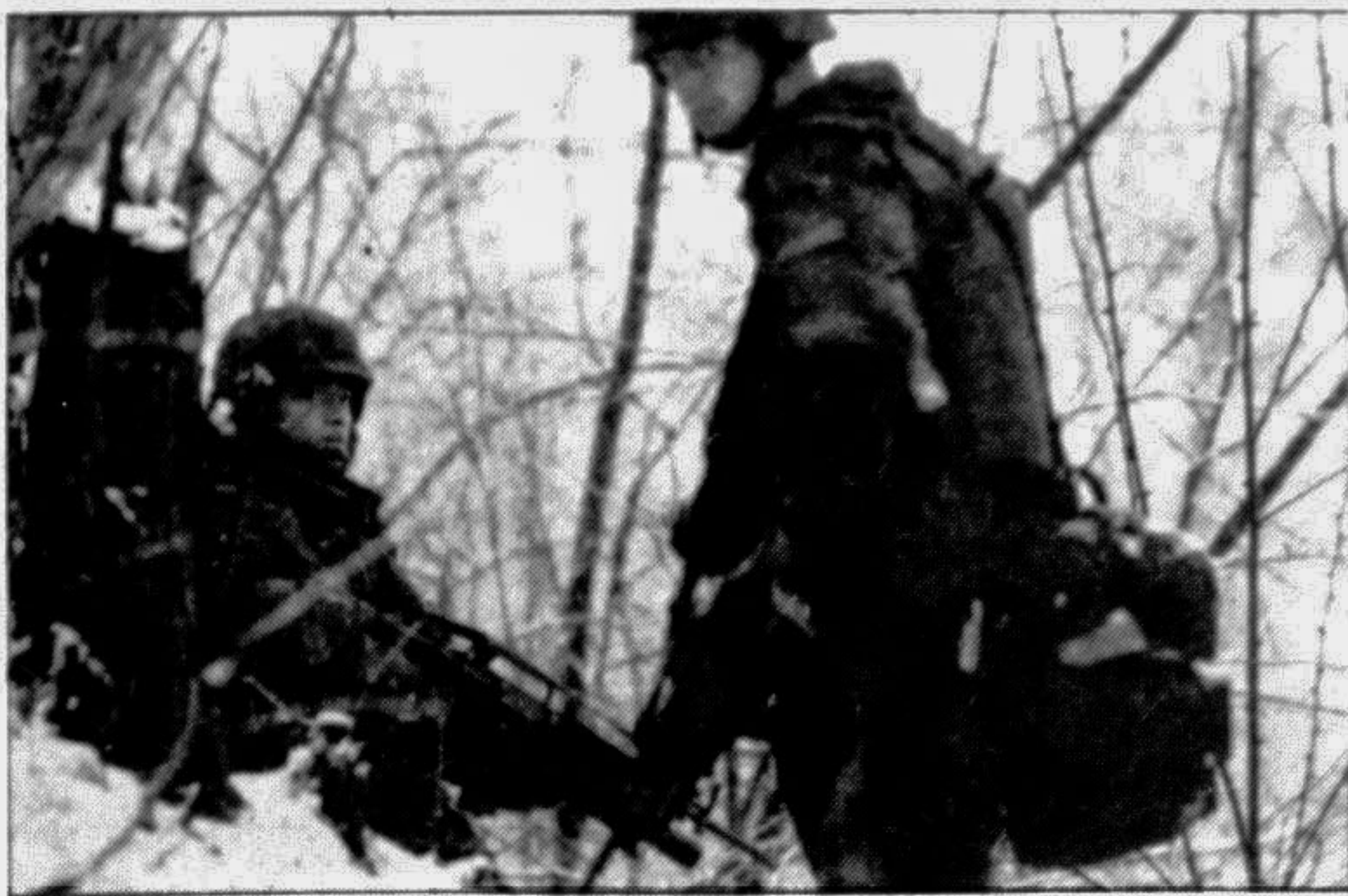
# Democracy faces threats from neo-communists, fundamentalists

WASHINGTON, Dec 20: Democracy is making strides around the globe but faces threats from neo-communists in the former Soviet bloc, Islamic fundamentalism, and authoritarian transitions to free markets in Asia, the annual human rights report by Freedom House says, reports AFP.

Entitled "Freedom in the world" and released today, the report says that 117 of the world's 191 countries — more than 61 per cent — are "free or partly free democracies."

That figure is 19 per cent up on the figure decade ago. Today, 3.1 billion of the world's 5.7 billion people, or 54 per cent, live under democratically elected governments, Freedom House says.

"Many free societies are



US NATO soldiers patrol the perimeter at Tuzla airbase on Tuesday. After a rough night outdoor in the cold and snowy Bosnian winter weather, they did their first patrol together with a Swedish UN soldier as guide in the area. UN will hand over the command of the base to Task Force Eagle on Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

## NATO forces begin peace mission in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Dec 20: NATO forces formally began their year-long mission to cement peace in Bosnia taking over from the United Nations at a ceremony at Sarajevo's shrapnel-scattered airport, reports Reuter.

The transfer marked an official end of the UN's ill-fated 3-1/2 year peacekeeping mission and the start of the alliance's sternest challenge, to be sealed in a formal ceremony in the afternoon. Some 60,000 troops will take part in the unprecedented NATO operation.

Plans were changed when US Admiral Leighton Smith, commander of the heavily-armed mission, was unable to land by air because of fog. He

arranged to come later to sign a certificate giving NATO responsibility for international military operations in Bosnia.

The formal handover was announced by UN Commander General Bertrand Janvier and Lieutenant-General Sir Michael Walker, head of NATO's ground forces in Bosnia. They read out matching statements in French and English saying the handover took place at 1000 GMT and a formal signing would be held later.

Thousands of troops with heavy equipment will now flow across Bosnia setting up bases, separating the combatants and supervising a transfer of territory in the hope

that it will lead to a lasting peace.

Earlier, senior officers of the US first armoured division met Bosnia's former foes on Tuesday to discuss deployment of NATO's peace-makers.

Army sources said Brigadier General Stanley F. Cherrie, divisional deputy commander, held separate meetings in Tuzla with officers of three Bosnian military forces.

He first met Brigadier Sead Delic, Commander of the Bosnian government army's 2nd corps which controls the area in which US troops will soon deploy. He then met Bosnian Croat commanders and later talked to Bosnian Serb army officers.

## India denies preparation for nuclear test

NEW DELHI, Dec 20: Affirming its nuclear capability, India denied Tuesday it is preparing a nuclear test, reports AP.

The question arose after a two-day meeting of foreign ministers of the seven South Asian countries, including arch-rivals India and Pakistan.

Last week, news reports said spy satellites had spotted what could be preparations for a nuclear test in India's Rajasthan desert.

"My answer is no," Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee told a press conference when asked if India was preparing a test. "The reports are speculative and baseless."

India conducted its only nuclear test 21 years ago. It has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, saying it discrimi-

nates against nations that do not already have a nuclear arsenal.

"Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao has formulated India's policy that we have (the nuclear) capability, but we deliberately opted not to manufacture nuclear weapons. Our programme is for peaceful purposes," Mukherjee said.

In Washington, the White House said last week that the United States, which supports the goal of a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, would oppose nuclear testing in India.

Before coming to the New Delhi conference, Pakistan Foreign Minister Sardar Assef Ali warned India that a nuclear test would jeopardize peace and stability in South Asia.

Mukherjee said, however,

the issue was not raised at the conference. There were no bilateral meetings between the Indian and Pakistani ministers.

Asked about the Western countries concern over India's missile programme, Mukherjee said the deployment of the medium-range Prithvi missile, now under development, would depend on the border situation.

The long-range Agni missile testing was a technical demonstration project. "That aspect was already completed," he said.

AFP adds: Pakistan has expressed concern over a report that India intended to test its surface-to-surface Prithvi missile, which followed an earlier reported Indian plan to conduct a nuclear test, the Associated Press of Pakistan said today.



Santa Claus Mark Thompson is caressed by models Kia Corbet (L) and Eva Matusik (R) adorned in a 4 million USD diamond-encrusted gold Piaget jewellery at the Cartier Christmas show on Wednesday. The Piaget Manchette works are in Australia as part of the French design house's special Christmas collection. — AFP/UNB photo

## 4 killed in Karachi mosque attack

KARACHI, Dec 20: Four people were killed in an attack on a Shia mosque in the eastern part of the Pakistani port city of Karachi early today, police said, reports AFP.

Five assailants sprayed the mosque with Kalashnikov fire, killing two and injuring three, including a Shia cleric. Two of the assailants were killed during an exchange of fire with the police and two were arrested.

Initial reports said the assailants belong to Sip-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), an extremist party belonging to the Sunni Muslim majority.

It is the first sectarian incident for several months in the city, where more than 1,750 people have died this year in political violence.

In February this year, an attack against two Shia mosques left 25 people dead.

## Chun, Roh to be indicted today

SEOUL, Dec 20: South Korean state prosecutors will formally charge former presidents Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo on Thursday with mutiny stemming from a military coup in 1979, state television reported today, says Reuter.

Both Chun and Roh will be indicted on Thursday, the television said. This follows the passage of a law on Tuesday that alters the statute of limitations to allow prosecution of the former presidents.

Chun was detained on December 3 in connection with the coup that was followed by an army massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators in the city of Kwangju in 1980.

## Assassin of Rabin sent to top-security prison

JERUSALEM, Dec 20: Yigal Amir, the Jewish extremist and confessed assassin of Yitzhak Rabin, has been jailed at a top-security prison in the Negev desert pending resumption of his trial next month, officials said today, reports AP.

Amir was transferred from Tel Aviv to the Beersheba prison Tuesday following the opening session of his trial on charges of premeditated murder.

The trial was adjourned until January 23 to give Amir's attorney more time to prepare his defense.

A special isolation cell was prepared at the prison for Amir, a 25-year-old law student and rightwing nationalist who claims he shot Rabin as an act of "divine justice" to derail the Israeli premier's policy of handing over the "Biblical lands" of Israel to Palestinian self-rule.

## Lanka lifts censorship on war news

COLOMBO, Dec 20: Sri Lankan government yesterday announced lifting of censorship on military related news imposed on the Sri Lankan media, reports PTI.

Censorship restrictions will be lifted from midnight today, an announcement by the presidential secretariat said.

The government had imposed curbs on publications of military news on both Sri Lanka and foreign media on September 21. The foreign media, however, was exempted from the censorship a week later but restrictions continued on the Sri Lankan media.

The government had said that censorship had to be clamped in view of irresponsible behaviour by a section of the local press.

## Lankan troops destroy 2 LTTE boats

COLOMBO, Dec 20: Sri Lankan troops destroyed two boats carrying Tamil Tiger rebels off the northern Jaffna Peninsula, the military said today, reports Reuter.

Two rebel boats were completely destroyed while others escaped with damages, the operational headquarters of the defence ministry said in a statement.

The navy took on six rebel boats at sea north of Pooneryn as they approached Jaffna on Tuesday afternoon, it said.

The rebels, fighting for a homeland for minority Tamils in the north and east of majority Sinhalese Sri Lanka, were ousted from their Jaffna Town stronghold 15 days ago by the army in its biggest offensive of a 12-year ethnic war.

The military says guerrillas of the Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are regrouping in the Vanni area south of Jaffna Lagoon and in the east.

Fleeing rebels have littered Jaffna with mines, which has made it difficult for the government to get the town ready for people to return.

An estimated 200,000 Tamils have fled the Jaffna Peninsula since the latest fighting began in October and they are now caught in a tug of war between the government, which wants them to go home.

The government says more than 50,000 people have been killed since the LTTE launched its campaign in 1983.

Military and civilian sources said earlier today the Tamil Tigers were regrouping their fighting units in the east.

## Russia massing troops in Gudermes to oust rebels

GROZNY, Dec 20: Russian forces were reported Tuesday to be massing troops and weaponry for an assault on Gudermes in the next few days to break the rebel hold on Chechnya's second largest city, reports AP.

Chechen insurgents have encircled more than 150 Russian troops in the town, 30 kilometres (20 miles) east of the capital, Grozny, in some of the fiercest fighting in months in the breakaway republic.

But fearing an imminent Russian offensive, rebel fighters have begun leaving the city and have eased their attacks on federal troops, Russian news agencies reported Tuesday, quoting Russian commanders.

Residents have been streaming out of Gudermes since

rebels attacked it Thursday in an attempt to thwart Moscow-imposed elections for a new Chechen leader.

They report that the city where 400,000 people used to live lay in ruins after five days of shelling.

"They have destroyed almost everything," said Ramzan Khadisov, who abandoned his home in Gudermes and came to Grozny to escape the fighting.

"The shells have ruined the entire district (where I lived), there are bodies of civilians strewn in the streets, and no one can bury them," he told The Associated Press.

Reuter adds: Chechen separatists were dug in at strategic points in Chechnya's second city against an onslaught by Russian troops.

## Off the Record

### High blood pressure can cause memory loss

CHICAGO: High blood pressure left untreated in midlife appears to cause memory loss later, a link that should serve as a health care warning as the population ages, international researchers said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

A team led by researchers from Erasmus University Medical School in the Netherlands found that for every increase of 10 points of systolic blood pressure, there was at least a 7 per cent greater risk of diminished cognitive skills. A systolic blood pressure of 140 or less is considered normal in middle-age adults.

"As the elderly population in the United States is expected to double by the year 2030, the number of persons with reduced cognitive function will increase," study author Lenore Launer wrote in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

### Trick of nature

LONDON: It's official — that baby really does look like her dad, and it could be a trick of nature, scientists from California reported on Wednesday, says Reuter.

They found that children in general bear no specific resemblance to either parent, with one exception — one-year-old babies tend to look like their fathers.

Nicholas Christenfeld and Emily Hill of the University of California at San Diego asked 122 people to look at family pictures submitted by strangers.

They included snaps taken of both parents at various ages and of their children at age one, 10 and 20.

"The 20-year and 10-year-old children were no more similar to their actual mothers and fathers than to random parents," they wrote in the scientific journal Nature.

"One-year-olds could not be matched to their mothers. In fact, the only reliable similarity was between one-year-olds (both boys and girls) and their fathers."

The reason could be down to evolution, they said.

"While a mother can be quite sure that the baby is hers, no matter what it looks like, the father cannot," they said.

"It could then be to a baby's advantage to look like the father to encourage paternal investment."

### After three decades...

PRETORIA: President Nelson Mandela relived a bit of his past Tuesday, receiving a pair of combat boots he left in Tanzania more than three decades ago, reports AP.

The brown boots were among several items Mandela left at the home of Nsilo Swai, then Tanganyika's minister of communication and industry, in 1962.

At the time, Mandela was soliciting support for his banned African National Congress. After returning to South Africa later in 1962, Mandela was arrested and sentenced to life in prison for plotting to overthrow the apartheid government. He was freed in 1990 and led the ANC to victory in last year's all-race elections that ended apartheid.

"I hope they still fit," Mandela, 77, said when given the boots by Swai's widow, Vicky.

## PLO, Hamas agree to avoid use of force

CAIRO, Dec 20: Yasser Arafat Palestinian authority and its hardline opponents Hamas agreed Tuesday to avoid the use of force in settling their differences, a delegate to talks here said, reports AFP.

Mohammad Nazzal, a member of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), said the agreement was reached on the second day of reconciliation talks between the two sides in the Egyptian capital.

They pledged to "prohibit any inter-Palestinian armed conflict and to use all their power to prevent the damage of a civil war among the Palestinian people," Nazzal said.