

File picture dated November 26, 1995 of Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou during a press conference in Athens. The health condition of the Prime Minister, hospitalized for more than a month for respiratory and kidney problems, was deteriorated in the past 24 hours, doctors at the Onassio heart clinic in Athens said on Saturday. It is the second time in four days that doctors have said the ailing Greek Premier's condition is worsening. — AFP/UNB photo

Preval wins Haitian polls: Rene Preval was declared president-elect of Halti on Saturday easily winning an election marred by a boycott by most Haitian voters, AP reports from Port Au-Prince.

Preval garnered 87.9 per cent of votes - 818,000 out of the 994,000 votes cast in the Dec. 17 election, the Provisional Electoral Council announced at a news conference.

DPRK soldier defects to ROK: An unarmed North Korean soldier has crossed over the heavily armed demilitarised zone and defected to South Korea, the Defense Ministry said Sunday, AP reports from

Seoul. Choe Kwang Hyuk, 25, crossed the border Saturday night near Injae, 100 kilometres (60 miles) northeast of Seoul, the ministry said.

Clinton rescheduling Japan tour: US President Bill Clinton is rescheduling a trip to Japan for April 16-18, a Japanese daily newspaper said yesterday, Reuter says from Tokyo.

The Sankei Shimbun quoted US government sources in Washington as saying Clinton's Tokyo itinerary might still change slightly, depending on the timing of a summit on nuclear power safety in Moscow.

Voting begins in Kazakhstan: Voters in Kazakhstan cast ballots Saturday in the second round of parliamentary elections following an inconclusive vote earlier this month that failed to produce a valid legislature, AP reports from Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Thirty-five of the 67 seats in parliament's lower chamber, the Majilis, remained empty after the initial. December 9 round.

Blast kills 2 in Bolivia: At least two people died when a tear gas canister exploded during a live TV show attended by 2,000 people. AP reports from La Paz, Bolivia.

The blast Saturday night set off panic and resulted in the crushing death of a teenager and a five-year-old child, police said.

12 more executed in China: Twelve people accused of various crimes were sentenced to death and executed Thursday in Tianjin, according to a press report, AFP reports from Beijing.

The condemned included a man accused of having committed nine murders, a woman who killed her husband and two currency traffickers, said a report in the Tianjin Evening News seen yesterday.

10 hurt in HK ferry collision: A double-decker ferry carrying 669 passengers collided with a Chinese container vessel in Hong Kong's harbor Saturday. injuring 10 people, police reported, AP reports from Hong Kong.

They said the accident occurred at 4:30 pm (0830 GMT) when the ferry was heading for a pier in downtown Hong Kong after a trip to outlying Lantau island.

Jose Naranjo dies: Jose Naranjo, who held senior posts in Cuba, a communist government for 35 years and was a close personal friend of President Fidel Castro, has died, sources said Saturday, AFP says from Ha-

Naranjo, a member of the communist party's powerful central committee who served as government minister from 1980 until his health began to fail in early 1995, died Friday of a heart attack, the sources said privately.

Flood kills 3 in Philippines: Three people were killed and three others missing when flash floods hit several towns in the northeastern Philippine province of Aurora, local officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Manila.

"Two days of rains caused the flash flood Saturday," Governor Eduardo Ong of Quezon said in an interview with radio station DZMM.

Chile plane crash leaves 22 wounded: An army plane crashed Saturday as it took off from a military airstrip south of Santiago, leaving all 22 people aboard injured, two of them in critical condition, police reported, AP reports from Santiago, Chile.

The army gave no details of the accident of its Casa 212 aircraft.

US renews call for an end to fighting in Chechnya

# Russian army kill 50 Chechens in Vedeno, seal off Gudermes

MOSCOW, Dec 24: Russian forces said they had killed around 50 Chechen separatists in fighting near Vedeno, in the south of the Russian breakaway republic. Interfax news agency reported vesterday, reports

The battler lasted seven hours on Saturday, the agency said. The army press service did not say whether there were any losses on the Russian side.

Fighting broke out when around 100 Chechens attacked a Russian reconnaissance unit in the mountainous region, which is still held by the separatists almost a year since Moscow sent in its troops to crush an independence bid.

Other fighting had been going on today for more than

Woman killed in

Azad Kashmir as

Indians open fire

woman was killed and two

other people were seriously

injured when Indian troops

opened "indiscriminate" fire

on border villages in the

Pakistani administered part

of Kashmir, official sources

urday resorted to mortar and

small arms attack at several

places along the line of con-

trol that divides the northern

Himalayan state into Indian

and Pakistani administered

zones, the official Associated

in the Garam Chashma area

while two men suffered seri-

ous injuries in Hajipir and

Hamas leader

calls rally for

boycotting polls

24: A leader of the militant

Islamic group Hamas, ad-

dressing a rally in the Pales-

tinian-ruled Jenin refugee

camp on Saturday, called for

a boycott of the first Pales-

tinian elections next month,

About 3,000 Palestinians

attended the rally marking

the eighth anniversary of the

establishment of Hamas.

which views as a sell-out the

1993 self-rule deal between

"You must boycott the

the Palestine Liberation Or-

elections of the administra-

tive council whose main task

will be to recognise Israel

and its continued occupation

of Palestinian territories,'

said Sheikh Jamal Mansour, a

leading Hamas figure in the

week, the PLO failed to per-

suade Hamas to take part in

elections for an 83-member

council scheduled to be held

in the West Bank and Gaza on

Taliban rockets

kill 3 in Kabul

opposition Islamic Taliban

militia fired rockets at the

Afghan capital Kabul on Sat-

urday, killing at least three

people and wounding 12, an

Afghan news service in Pak-

(AIP) quoted reports from

Kabul as saying six rockets

landed around the presiden-

tial palace in central Kabul,

two at a nearby market and

one in the Wazir Akbar Khan

on Friday night, but there

was no information of any

Six rockets also hit Kabul

The Afghan Islamic Press

istan said, reports Reuter.

ISLAMABAD, Dec 24: The

In talks in Cairo this

West Bank.

January 20.

ganisation (PLO) and Israel.

reports Reuter.

JENIN, West Bank, Dec

It said a woman was killed

Press of Pakistan said.

Keran sectors.

The Indian troops on Sat-

said today, reports AFP.

ISLAMABAD, Dec 24: A

two hours near Sernovodsk on the border between Chechnya and neighbouring Ingushetia, the army press service said

Fighting has flared again in the Caucasus republic since the holding of local leadership elections by Moscow on December 17. which were boycotted by the separatists.

mes Saturday, blocking the light of terrified refugees while they continued to pound the besieged Chechen They refused to let inter-

AP adds from Grozny: Rus-

sian forces sealed off Guder-

national aid workers into the city to evacuate civilians. Civilian casualties are said

to be heavy after more than a week of heavy fighting in Gudermes, 30 kilometres (19

Only a handful of people managed to get out Saturday, according to independent NTV, which had reports on the scene. The refugees said the city was devastated.

A rebel field commander, Vashit Murdashev, told NTV that the guerillas had been pulling out of Gudermes for several days on orders from their high command.

Earlier in the day, the Russian side said its troops had taken the railway depot and had the rebels on the

Russian forces continued to shell the city and heavy fighting raged as helicopter gunships hovered overhead.

The rebels seized several key buildings in Gudermes. including the train station. on December 14 in a bid to

disrupt Moscow-imposed elections for a new Chechen leader and deputies to the new Russian parliament.

The ITAR-Tass news agency said 130 special forces troops had been trapped inside the terminal. It said they suffered casualties in the fighting Saturday, but gave no

Earlier Reuter says The United States has renewed its calls for an end to fighting in Chechnya, saying the Russian military operation in the region has been a big mis-

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns, commenting on reports of intensified fighting in the Chechen town of Gudermes, said on Friday that the US position on Chechnya was no

## Eritrea ready to free 195 Yemeni POWs for talks

DUBAL Dec 24: Eritrea said on Saturday it would release 195 Yemeni soldiers taken prisoner during a battle (POWs) for a disputed Red Sea Island, meeting one of Yemen's conditions for the opening of talks to resolve their week-old conflict, reports AFP.

The Eritrean government has begun consultations with the International Committee of the Red Cross on how the Yemeni prisoners will be released," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement issued by

the Eritrean Embassy here. Yemen has demanded the release of prisoners and the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Hanish Al-Kabir ahead of any negotiations on the status of the strategic island.

Eritrea captured Hanish al-Kabir, claimed by both countries, on Monday following a three day battle during which nine soldiers were killed.

Its conciliatory gesture

came as Thiopian Foreign Minister Seyum Mesfin mediated between the two countries

According to Sunday's edition of the Independent Yemen Times, Mesfin has proposed a three point plan involving the release of Yemeni prisoners to the Red Cross, the evacuation of the Hanish archipelago by both sides and arbitration by the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

The United States was backing the plan, the daily

Diplomats in Sanna said Mesfin, expected in Asmara after visiting Sanaa, would return to Yemen in the next few days to heart its response to his proposals.

Eritrea demanded Friday that both sides withdrew their troops from the Hanish archipelago of nine islands before taking their dispute to international arbitration.

Off the Record

Van Gogh on display

AMSTERDAM: A Van Gogh painting dating from a sex scandal in the artist's life is being shown to the public for the first time, reports AP.

"Peasant Woman Digging Potatoes" was known to exist but had been in private collections until recently donated to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

The museum did not identify the donor but said the person has lived in the Netherlands for several decades. The oil painting, measuring 31 centimetres by 41

centimetres, shows a black-clad and somber-faced woman working in the fields with a pitchfork. Painted against a gray and brown background, the pic-

ture was likely executed in 1885 during the potato harvest, which started around the beginning of August and ended in September. But experts have ruled out September, since by then

Van Gogh had been forbidden to use peasant women as models after one became pregnant.

> No scope to get married again

LONDON: Saying he doesn't want to get married again is not enough - Prince Charles has to dump his paramour. elders of the Church of England said in interviews published Sunday, reports AP. Trrespective of whether it



is a prince or pauper, that sort of relationship outside marriage is absolutely against the teachings of the church," the Archa acon of Blackburn, David Robinson told The Mail on Sunday newspaper.

Queen Elizabeth last week urged her eldest son and Princess Diana, separated three years, to finalise their status with a divorce. Charles immediately agreed, adding that he did not intend to remarry.

The unprompted declaration probably was made to assure the public that he would not seek to make his longtime mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles, queen. Polls have shown that would be unpopular.

It also was intended to assuage the Church of England, which accepts divorce but generally frowns on remarriage. As reigning monarch, Charles will be the temporal head of the church.

## Iran slams US for adopting covert action programme

TEHRAN, Dec 24: Iran today slammed the United States for adopting a programme of covert action against the Islamic republic, warning it would encourage "terrorism," the official news agency IRNA said, reports

Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmud Mohammadi said: "This type of plan against popular and legitimate regimes violates international laws recognised by civilised nations. "The American plan of ac-

tion is aimed at encouraging the actions of terrorists," he said, adding that "the United States must expect the consequences of their flagrant support for terrorism." The White House has ac-

cepted a covert action plan aimed at moderating Iran's Islamic regime approved on Thursday by the House of Representatives.

The 20-million-dollar an-

ti-Iranian programme was a modified version of an original one intended to overthrow the Tehran government, which was steadfastly opposed by Clinton and the Senate.

The bill was pushed through at the insistence of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who has described Iran as "the most dangerous country in the world."

But Mohammadi said the plan violated the first clause of the declaration of Algiers signed in January 1981 to end the crisis caused when US diplomats were held hostage in Iran for 444 days by militant students.

It sets out that neither country should interfere in the affairs of the other.

AP adds: Iran's paramilitary revolutionary guards staged naval maneuvers in the Gulf waters Saturday to test missile units.

## Peru recalls envoy to US to protest

#### Pro-independence groups may form party in Taiwan

groups may form a political party in response to cooperation talks between the main opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and a pro-reunification party, the United Daily News reported today, says Reuter.

the Taiwan Association of University Professors and several pro DPP civil groups may form the Taiwan Independence Party in protest in parliament.

### BETHLEHEM, West Bank,

Dec 24: Thousands of cheer-TAIPEI, Dec 24: Tai- ing Palestinians welcomed wanese pro-independence PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat the land of peace, I tell the to Manger Square on Saturday, as their leader declared the newly autonomous Bethlehem "Liberated" and vowed continue toward Jerusalem, reports AP.

Arafat, wearing his traditional military uniform and Arabic headdress, appeared The newspaper quoted on the rooftop of the Church unnamed sources as saying of Nativity — built on the spot where tradition says Jesus was born — a day before Christmas eve.

Church bells tolled as he waved and held up his fingers against the DPP's attempt to to form a '(V)' for victory. cooperate with the New Party Hundreds shouted, "In blood and spirit we will redeem

you, oh Palestine."

casualties, it said.

"From Bethlehem, from the Church of Nativity, from whole world, Christians around the world, that the city of Bethlehem that is liberated is the city of peace." Arafat said to roaring cheers.

In the city holy to the 15,000 Christian residents but with a majority of 35,000 Muslim residents, Arafat sought to ensure that the city would be an example of national unity.

"I also tell you that the center of national unity will be Bethlehem," Arafat said.

Just eight kilometres (five miles) south of Jerusalem. Bethlehem is the Palestiniancontrolled city closest to the controversial Israeli capital. The Palestinians want

control over East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel claims the entire city as its capital.

Standing on the roof, under a canopy sandwiched between two decorated Christmas trees. Arafat called for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

He said that holy sites in Jerusalem, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where tradition says Jesus died, would soon be under Palestinian control.

"In the name of nationalism, in the name of this holy place, I call upon you to help build the Palestinian state so

we can fly the Palestinian flag month-old daughter Zahwa everywhere," Arafat said.

Church of Nativity and to- switching on the Christmas morrow we shall embrace in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem," he added.

Palestinians welcome Arafat to newly 'liberated' Bethlehem

Residents filled Manger Square, festooned with pictures of Arafat and Palestinian flags, including a 30-foot-long tah Party. (9.1-metre-long) flag hanging down the side of the Church of Nativity.

Arafat, who was to preside over Christmas celebrations in the city, was to convene his Cabinet in Bethlehem later Saturday and to address the people again from the rooftop on Christmas Eve.

in the mostly-Muslim city. the holiday celebrations are Arafat's wife Soha and 5-

Arafat's arrival

tree lights.

A large banner in the

square said "Congratulations

to our people for the depar-

ture of the occupation. May it

never return." It was signed

by the PLO's mainstream Fa-

Israeli troops pulled out of

Bethlehem on Thursday, and

were replaced by about 850

Palestinian police. Another

180 arrived Saturday as po-

licemen came out in force to

control the crowd upon

being viewed by many as nationalistic, rather than reliarrived Friday and ushered in "Today we embrace in the the Christmas celebrations by gious festivities.

to Jesus as a Palestinian.

Christians in the city said they were not concerned that the mostly Muslim Palestinian Authority was now in control and that Arafat was to preside over the festivities.

Arafat urged Palestinians to participate in elections for the Palestinian governing council, which will take place on January 20, and promised they would be democratic. He also praised the pris-

oners and martyrs of the Palestinian cause, saying that their sacrifices and patience brought about the day's historic events.

## jet sale to Ecuador LIMA. Dec 24: Peru has

recalled its ambassador to Arafat, a Muslim referred the United States to protest Washington's support for the sale of Israeli war planes to neighbouring Ecuador, reports AP.

> Peru and Ecuador fought a five week border war earlier this year. Ecuador is seeking to buy

> four Israeli Kfir war planes. which contain motors made in the United States and thus require US approval for the In a communique dis-

tributed late Friday night, the Foreign Ministry expressed the government's "deep concern" over US authorisation of the sale.



- AFP/UNB photo Kwasniewski's wife, Dolanta (L). 93 Tigers, troops killed in

#### encounter in eastern Lanka COLOMBO, Dec 24: The toll in a Tamil Tiger guerilla attack against security forces in eastern Sri Lanka rose to at least 93 killed on both

sides, the military said today, reports AFP. Dozens of gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ambushed the army soldiers at Shanthiveli in the coastal district of Batticaloa and fought a two-hour gunbattle on Saturday, a military spokesman

"There was a very heavy exchange of fire," the spokesman said. "We lost one officer and 32 men killed

while another 34 were ad-

mitted to hospital. LTTE radio communica

tions speak of at least 60 rebels getting killed. He said army reinforcement had been rushed to the

camps to carry out a major cordon and search operation after the daring LTTE assault shortly after noon Saturday. The attack was the worst against the army in eastern Sri Lanka since an identical ambush left 38 soldiers dead

ago while soldiers were guarding the railway track.

Defence officials said that the LTTE had taken over vast areas of the Island's east after

in the same area a month

tadel of Jaffna in the north of the country to security forces earlier this month. Just as Jaffna fell on De-

the fall of their former ci-

cember 2, the LTTE launarea from two nearby military ched a kamikaze-style attack on police commandos in the east, killing at least 23 security personnel and six civilians. The army claimed killing an equal number of

> The latest gunbattle came as the army claimed killing one Tiger guerilla and discovering an abandoned rebel munitions factory near the town of Jaffna during a

clearing operation.



Orthodox Christian priests offer Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat a replica of the Nativity Church during his visit to Bethelhem, where according to Christian tradition Jesus was born. Arafat will attend the Christmas ceremonies in the birth town - AFP/UNB photo of Jesus for the first time.