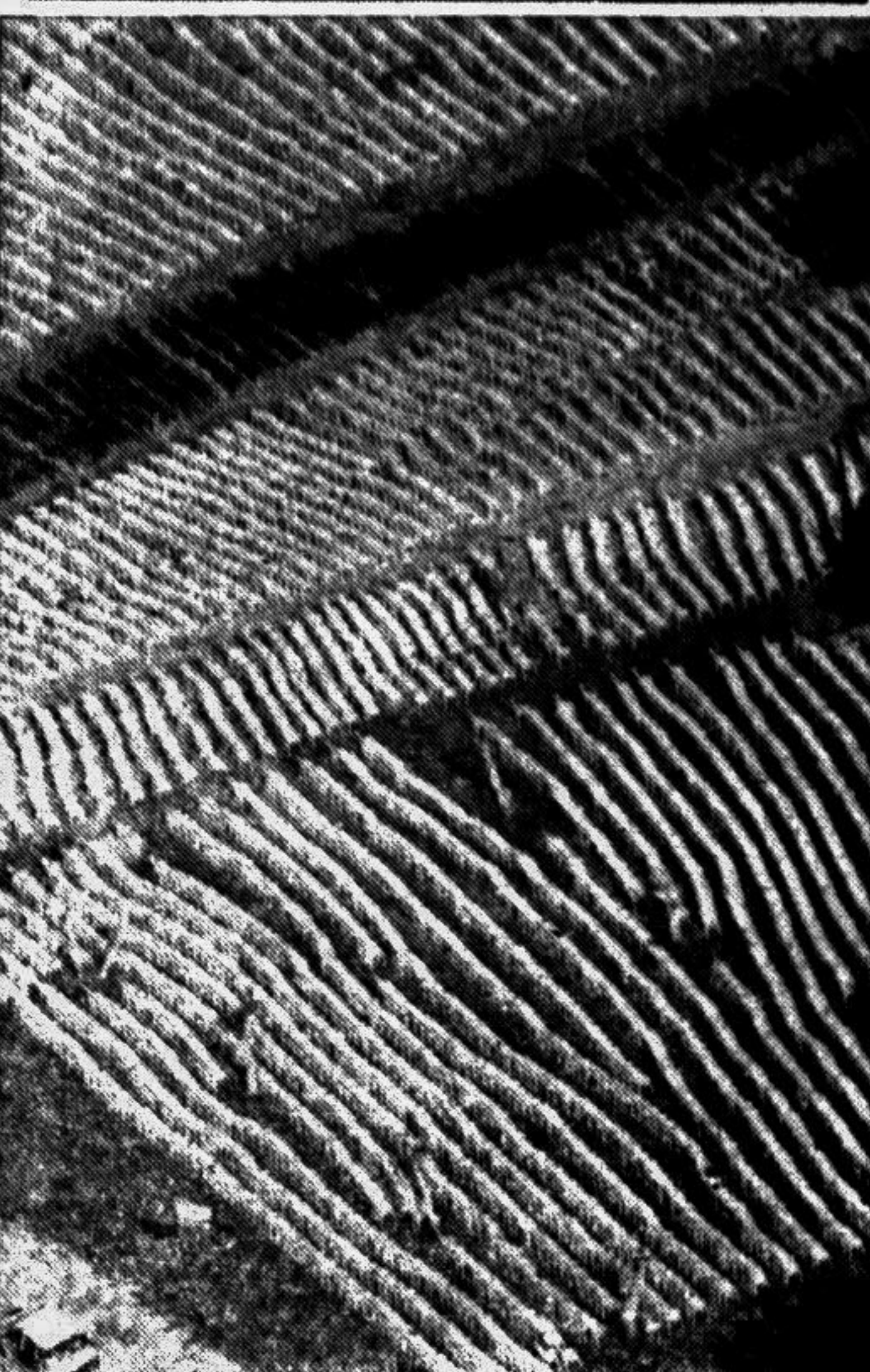


# BRIEFLY



An aerial view of part of the over 13,740 empty chairs representing the number of those killed in traffic accidents in Israel since 1948. The number of chairs placed next to the Tel Aviv-Haifa highway at Kibbutz Gaash on Tuesday, is greater than the total number of Israelis killed in military conflicts in the history of Israel. In a war against traffic accidents initiated by The World Belongs to Careful Association, Israel starts the New Year to commemorate a tragedy that faces people everywhere.

— AFP/UNB photo

**Japanese FM to visit Pakistan:** Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei Kono will visit Pakistan this month before a four-day official trip to Tokyo by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, a Foreign Ministry official said yesterday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

Kono will come in Islamabad from India and stay from January 12-14.

**Israeli navy commander quits:** Admiral Ami Ayalon stepped down as Israeli navy commander on Monday to be replaced by Admiral Alex Tal, an army spokesman said. AFP reports from Haifa, Israel.

Ayalon, who is leaving the army after 32 years may be appointed as the head of Israel's internal security service Shin Beth or its intelligence service Mossad, according to state television.

**Clashes leave 9 killed in Sudan:** Nine people including a police officer, died in clashes between Islamic extremists and Sudanese security forces near Wad Medani city, the Interior Ministry said Monday, AFP reports from Khartoum.

The incidents Sunday pitted police against members of a hitherto unknown group in Sudan. Al Takfir Wal Higr (anathema and emigration) in Kambo Acharah village, the ministry said in a statement.

**British royals cut trips abroad:** Members of the British royal family cut their trips abroad by a third last year, the Times reported yesterday. AFP reports from London.

Basing its calculations on the Daily Curt Circular, the paper said the 14 leading royals went abroad a total of 977 times in 1993, compared with more than 1,500 in 1994.

**Fire kills 19 in China:** Nineteen people were killed when fire broke out at a factory dormitory in Shenzhen, south China, on New Year's day Hong Kong newspapers reported Monday. Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

## Peace efforts to continue despite death threat: Peres

JERUSALEM, Jan 2: Prime Minister Shimon Peres said today that his life remains threatened by violent opponents, but insisted this would not prevent him from pressing ahead with his peace efforts, reports AFP.

"I don't have any illusions, to change things you have to take decisions which are not always popular," he said during a television interview late Monday.

This is painful for some people, and there are lots of demented people around," said Peres, whose predecessor Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in November by a Jewish extremist opposed to the government's land-for-peace agreements with the Palestinians.

"I know that there are a lot of violent people with

their fingers on the trigger and me in their sights," he said.

"The situation doesn't scare me even though I know that it's impossible to have perfect security," he said.

Rabin was gunned down on November 4 after he and Peres, who was then foreign minister, attended a giant outdoor peace rally.

Rabin's confessed assassin, Yigal Amir, said he had also hoped to kill Peres, who at one moment passed within feet of the gunmen, but the two men left the rally separately and he chose to shoot only at Rabin.

The government security services have come under sharp attack for the lapse of protection around both men that night and security has been greatly increased around Peres since he was named prime minister.

## 5 killed in Lankan fighting

COLOMBO, Jan 2: An army trooper was among five people killed in sporadic clashes between security forces and Tamil Tiger guerrillas in eastern Sri Lanka, the military said today, reports AFP.

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He said two LTTE guerrillas were also shot dead by security forces in the same region overnight Monday.

The Tigers have stepped up their attacks in the island's eastern regions following the loss of their northern citadel of Jaffna to the army earlier last month.

The LTTE is leading a protracted campaign for an independent homeland for the island's two million Tamil

## New Yr's recovery takes on solemn tone with deaths, Pope's blessing

UNDATED, Jan 2: After all the bells and whistles, all the fireworks and all the carousing that welcomed in 1996 around the world, a more solemn tone resonated as recovery began on Monday, reports AP.

"It's truly important that we adults think about ensuring that children have a future of peace," Pope John Paul II said in his New Year's blessing to tourists and pilgrims filling St Peter's Square in Rome. "It's our task, our responsibility."

The pontiff dedicated 1996 to children, especially those suffering from war and violence, and after leaving the central altar of St Peter's he stopped to caress the cheek of a little girl who had given him a shy wave.

Celebration turned deadly

## Challenge to NATO peace mission Serbs seize 11 civilians in Sarajevo

SARAJEVO, Jan 2: The first hint of a challenge to the authority of the NATO peace mission to Bosnia emerged with a report that separatist Serbs had seized 11 civilians travelling on roads in Sarajevo opened by peacekeepers, reports Reuter.

Hasan Muratovic, a senior minister in the Muslim-led Bosnian government, said on Monday the civilians were dragged from their vehicles during the past week while travelling through Ilidza, a western suburb held by hard-line separatist Serbs.

In a separate incident one person was reported to have been shot dead in the divided city of Mostar in southern Bosnia when police tried to stop two cars in a Croat area and the drivers opened fire.

Bosnian Croat radio said it was not clear who the victim was or who had fired the fatal shot. Mostar's Muslim and Croat communities were foes at one stage in the Bosnian conflict.

The incidents in Sarajevo, which could not be immediately confirmed by the NATO-led Peace Implementation Force (IPFOR), were the first real challenge to the alliance's declared determination to ensure free movement for everyone in 11 days of otherwise trouble-free operation.

The report came just hours after Bosnians celebrated their first peaceful new year in four years with an exuberant barrage of firing into the air with guns used just weeks ago in a war that killed 200,000 people.

Sarajevo's sky at midnight on Sunday was lit up by machinegun tracer fire and flare bursts as its war-weary civilians and armed groups welcomed 1996 in a spirit of celebration and hope.

A Bosnian news agency said it had no information about the fate of the civilians reported missing in Ilidza.

NATO said it had no official knowledge of the inci-

dents and added that civilian police, not its heavily-armed troops sent in to enforce the Dayton peace agreement, were responsible for investigating such matters.

The 11 civilians reported seized were among many who have taken advantage of NATO's success in securing freedom of movement for people through areas held by their former enemies' journeys that would have been unthinkable a few weeks ago.

Muratovic's office said the government might be forced to ban its citizens from passing through Ilidza, a district that is due to revert to government control by mid-March under the Dayton accord, although it would see this as a setback in implementing the peace deal.

Diplomats said NATO risked being dragged into civilian policing problems because of a delay in the deployment of a huge international police force ordered in by the UN Security Council.

## Rao intervenes in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu water dispute

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao intervened on Monday to try to settle a bitter dispute between two southern states over water for crops, reports Reuter.

Rao asked the government of Karnataka state to release six billion cubic feet (169.9 million cubic metres) of water to neighbouring Tamil Nadu state, which had claimed its parched crops were withering and in jeopardy, news agencies said.

The prime minister, who spent much of the past three days trying to mediate in the mounting row, set up a three-member committee to assess the condition of crops in both states. The panel was asked to submit a report by January 10.

Rao also called a meeting

of a water resources commission for February to draw up policy guidelines to govern inter-state water disputes.

"I do believe that this is the only viable process by which complications such as we are dealing with could be resolved," the Press Trust of India quoted Rao as saying.

Tamil Nadu had requested 11 billion cubic feet (311.5 million cubic metres) of water from the Cauvery river, which flows between the two states. Last month the Supreme Court told Rao to seek a solution to the festering dispute.

All-India Radio said Rao's decision to ask Karnataka to release six billion cubic feet of water at the rate of 1 billion cubic feet (28.32 million cubic metres) per day was a provisional measure to save the standing crops in Tamil Nadu.

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## Russia misses New Yr deadline for destroying weaponry

MOSCOW, Jan 2: Russia confirmed on Monday that it had missed a New Year deadline for destroying thousands of tanks and other military hardware beyond the Ural Mountains and said three other former Soviet republics also failed to meet the treaty commitment, reports Reuter.

General Dmitry Kharchenko told Interfax news agency, Moscow wanted to push the December 31 1995 deadline pledged by the Soviet Union in 1991 back to the end of 1998.

The delay was purely economic, said Kharchenko, who

is the army staff officer responsible for international military cooperation. "About 100 billion rubles (20 million dollars) in today's money is needed to destroy the weapons transported beyond the Urals," he said.

Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan also missed the deadline because of a shortage of funds, he said. With Russia, they were responsible for destroying a total of 10,000 tanks.

The Soviet Union agreed to the deadline on June 14, 1991 in a compromise which cleared the way to ratification of the Conventional Forces in

Europe (CFE) treaty.

The fate of the treaty, providing for the destruction of large amounts of weaponry in Europe, had been in doubt because Moscow had suddenly moved some of its military equipment beyond the Urals and out of the scope of the treaty.

But under the compromise, Moscow agreed to include the weapons beyond the Urals in the treaty's overall limits.

Kharchenko said the equipment to be destroyed beyond the Urals included 6,000 tanks, 1,500 armoured vehicles and 7,000 artillery systems.



Supermodels Kathy Ireland (L), Vendela (C) and Naomi Campbell wave to the crowd while riding on a float based on the children's "Jack and the Beanstalk" during the 107th Tournament of Roses Parade on Monday in Pasadena, California. The theme of this year's parade was "Kids, Laughter and Dreams."

— AFP/UNB photo

## Thackeray vows to block Pak artistes from performing in India

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: A right-wing Hindu politician whose party rules the western state of Maharashtra has vowed to block Pakistani artistes from performing in India to protect the nation's honour, a newspaper said today, reports AFP.

Bal Thackeray, the founder of the Shiv Sena (Shivaji's Army) Party, said in the Maharashtra capital, Bombay, on Monday that the ban was a "matter of policy."

"Why should we welcome Pakistani artistes when they have imposed a ban on our artistes performing there?" he said. "I believe in a tit-for-tat policy. I'm not scared of anyone and will not sell the nation's self-respect for any gain."

Thackeray said he would request Indian screen legend Amitabh Bachchan to drop plans for a string of concerts by Pakistani singers and actors in India. The event is being organised by a media company owned by Bachchan.

## KSA, Djibuti urged to demarcate maritime border with Eritrea

DUBAI, Jan 2: Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki called on Saudi Arabia and Djibouti to demarcate their maritime boundary with this country, in an interview published Monday by the Arab weekly Al Wasat, reports AFP.

Afewerki said Eritrea's conflict with Yemen over the disputed Red Sea island of Hanah Al Kabir, which Asmara seized on December after a three day battle involved all nearby countries.

Our conflict with Yemen will not be settled for good until all the maritime borders between the two countries are fixed, Afewerki told the newspaper.

## 14 GIA members face trial in Morocco

RABAT, Jan 2: Fourteen alleged arms smugglers for Algeria's underground Armed Islamic Groups (GIA) faced secret trial before a military court here today, reports AFP.

The ten Moroccans and four Algerians were arrested in mid-October at Oujda, near Morocco's border with Algeria, and in Casablanca. Two other Moroccans and one Algerian were also picked up but freed without charge by the examining magistrate.

Defence lawyer Mustafa Ramid said three more of those on trial should also have been released as there was virtually no evidence against them.

## Offices of media group torched in Nigeria

LAGOS, Jan 2: The offices of a media group whose publications are highly critical of the Nigerian military regime were destroyed in an arson attack. The fire will force the group to suspend publication, reports AP.

It was the third attack in three weeks on the independent press in the West African country.

A spokesman for AM News Management said in a statement Monday that unidentified men set fire to its offices Sunday. The building, which houses the daily newspaper AM News and a weekly newsmagazine called Tempo, was destroyed.

The news group has been highly critical of the military regime, which drove its publications underground for several months last year during a manhunt for their editors.

## Off the Record



A balloon caricature of cartoon bird Woody Woodpecker is marched past Big Ben on Monday during New Year's day celebrations in London. The 10th London Parade also included an attempt to beat the world record for the world's largest band simultaneously marching and playing.

— AFP/UNB photo

## Mass wedding in bathroom!

TAIPEI: A Taiwanese couple plans to marry in a luxurious 27 million Taiwan dollar (US 1 million dollars) public bathroom that they built themselves, the China Post newspaper reported Tuesday, says Reuter.

The pair and five other couples will marry in the bathroom, lavishly decorated and located in a park in central Taiwan, on January 14 in the hope of setting a world record for a mass bathroom wedding, the newspaper reported.

It said the groom and bride, Lee Wang-Feng and Chiu Chiu Kuei, had designed and built the bathroom.

Lee and Chiu said they wanted to marry in a bathroom because it is a room everyone visits often.

## Plan going on for New Year 2000

WELLINGTON, While many of us are still recovering from the arrival of 1996, tiny communities in the South Pacific are planning big parties for New Year 2000, which will start hours before the rest of the world, reports AP.

Just west of the international dateline, where each new day begins, tiny island states such as the Kingdom of Tonga and Republic of Kiribati are planning national midnight celebrations, even though purists insist that the new millennium won't start until 2001.

Further south tiny windswept Pitt Island, in New Zealand's remote Chatham Islands, claims the Earth's curvature will make it the first inhabited land to see the first sunrise of 2000.

Its rays will touch the island at 4.04 am local time on January 1, 2000, said Brad Roberts of Firstlight Limited, a promotions company organising celebrations there.

Roberts said Tuesday the company has negotiated access to three coastal headlands to "witness the first light of the new age."

## Myanmar troops capture Khun Sa headquarters

BANGKOK, Jan 2: About 1,500 Myanmar troops have taken over the jungle headquarters of drug warlord Khun Sa in the opium growing Golden Triangle region, civilian sources in the town said today.

A source in Ho Mong said more armed Myanmar troops kept moving into the town today.

"Myanmar troops are being deployed at camps where MTA soldiers used to live but they do not disturb villagers," a civilian source said.

The sources said it was unclear if Khun Sa and his senior officers were still in Ho Mong.

Khun Sa, 61, an ethnic Chinese Shan who has been indicted by a US court on various narcotic trafficking charges, announced his retirement as MTA commander in November.

The MTA have claimed to be fighting for a Shan state autonomous from Myanmar's government in Yangon.

## 4 more killed in Karachi

KARACHI, Jan 2: At least four people were killed in a gunbattle with Pakistani police today in Karachi, raising the violence-torn city's death toll in the New Year to 22, police and ambulance workers said, reports Reuter.

Police said the four were killed in a gun-battle at Sharifabad in District Central after a night-long search of the area for suspects in Monday's killing of four soldiers and one policeman.

More than 20 suspects of Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) were detained, police said.

More than 1,950 people died in 1995 in ethnic, sectarian and political violence that has wracked Pakistan's commercial capital.

The government blames the MQM for most of the violence while the MQM accuses security forces of the bloodshed.

## 5 killed in Lankan fighting

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He said two LTTE guerrillas were also shot dead by security forces in the same region overnight Monday.

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