# BREFLY



An unidentified passenger (L) of the Turkish Black Sea ferry "Avrasya" laughs on Friday as "Muhammed" (R), one of the leaders of the pro-Chechen commando that seized January 16 the ship carrying some 200 passengers and crew in the harbor of Trabzon, cuddles her child shortly before the hostage-takers surrendered to Turkish police and handed over their hostages. - AFP/UNB photo

Burundi troops kill 20 Rwandans: Burundi government troops killed about 20 Rwandan Hutus and wounded scores in an attack on a refugee camp in northeast Burundi, witnesses said yesterday, Reuter reports from Tanzania.

The raid on Wednesday triggered the flight of nearly 15,000 refugees into Tanzania. "So many (Burundi) soldier came with guns and they started shooting at the people. 20 were killed and others were badly injured. I saw it with my own eyes," Donisi Nyilansabimana, a 23-year-old woman, told Reuters at a makeshift camp a few kms (miles) near the Tanzania-Burundi frontier.

Filipino family feud claims 15: Fifteen people have died in a clash between two feuding Muslim families in Lanao Del Sur in the southern Philippines, security officials said yesterday, Reuter reports from Lanao Del Sur.

Philippine Army spokesman Cesar Tiongson said the Tago and Ayaon families started attacking each other on Wednesday with high-powered firearms in the town of Balabagan, about 850 km south of the capital of Manila. Officials said the two clans, embroiled in a land dispute, owned firearms because both included members of a Muslim rebel group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

6 killed during Lahore kite-flying: Six people were killed and a hundred injured, most from electrocution or stray bullets, during an annual kite-flying festival in Lahore, witnesses and hospital sources said yesterday, AFP reports from Lahore.

One of the main attractions of Pendjab, is a kite fight where participants attempts to cut the line on other kites with their own kite. A successful coup-de-kite is traditionally followed by a shot in the air with a pistol or rifle. Two people were electrocuted when their kites hit power lines. Two others were killed by stray bullets and two others in traffic accidents.

Chernomyrdin may visit US soon: Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin is expected in Washington January 29-30 for talks with Vice President Al Gore on the political situation in Russia, White House sources said Friday, AFP reports from Washington.

Gore and Chernomyrdin will be meetings as heads of a bi-national commission that meets once a year to discuss issues of mutual interest, such as the environment, trade, business and energy. But this meeting comes amid growing US concern over a shift to the right by President Boris Yeltsin, who has forced the resignations of three influential reformers in recent weeks.

China executes 14 criminals: China executed 14 criminals on Friday in the southern city of Shenzhen, the semi-official China news Service

reported, Reuter reports from Hong Kong. The Shenzhen municipal intermediary people's court also handed down suspended death sentences to six other offenders and jail terms to a further 17, CNS said. A suspended death sentence may be commuted to life imprisonment after a period of time. The executions were carried out immediately after sentencing, as is customary in china.

French air force plane crashes: A French Air Force Mirage 2000-N nuclear bomber flew into a flock of birds and crashed as it was landing on Friday at its base in southern France, but no nuclear weapons were aboard, the air force said, Reuter reports from France.

The two-man crew ejected safely from the aircraft which was returning to its base at Istres, near the Mediterranean port of Marseille, after a training mission.

Ex-Singapore PM hospitalised:
Singapore's elder statesman Lee Kuan Yew has been hospitalized after complaining of chest pains and initial tests indicate a narrowing of his coronary arteries, an official statement said yesterday. AFP reports from Singapore.

The 72-year-old former premier, who sits as a senior minister in Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's cabinet, was admitted to the Singapore General Hospital on Friday evening for observation and further examination.

"Senior minister is expected to stay overnight in hospital following the investigations," a statement from Goh," office said.

Qatar's deposed ruler in Oman: Qatar's deposed ruler arrived in Oman on Friday on the latest stage of a tour of other Arab nations to seek support for his plans to regain power, officials said, AFP reports from Muscat.

Sheikh Khalifa Ibn Hamad Al-Thani, who was deposed by his son in June, was met by several ministers and Sayvid Thuwaini Ibn Shihab Al-Said, the personal representative of Sultan Qaboos, the official on a news agency said. Sheikh Khalifa has already visited Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Manama, Cairo and Damascus in his efforts to win support.

Maharashtra road mishap claims 14: At least 14 people were killed and seven injured near Pune in the western Indian state of Maharashtra when a fourwheel-drive vehicle in which they were riding collided with a bus, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, Reuter reports from New Delhi.

## Cong hopes to get 'comfortable majority' in polls

## Rao faces serious threat ahead of crucial general elections

NEW DELHI, Jan 20: Minister Narasimha Rao faces a serious threat ahead of crucial general elections, with the opposition and sections of his own party joining hands over India's worst corruption scandal, reports AFP.

The 74-year-old prime minister has become a common target by ordering detectives to file bribery charges against three of his own ministers and opposition leaders, political sources say.

Rao's decision to effectively kill off the careers of the ministers for alleged involvement in the multi-million-dollar case has led to rumblings within his ruling Congress( I) party, the sources said.

"There is tremendous anger within the Congress," a party leader said. "Many MPs are unhappy that the PM has let down his own colleagues so brazenly."

Muslims urged to

give up claims on

Hindu religious

places at Ayodhya

Kendriya Marg Darshak Man-

dal has urged the Muslim

leaders to give up their

claims on Hindu religious

places at Ayodhya and

resolution at its meeting here

asking the central govern-

ment to revoke the 1947 act

for maintaining status quo of

the various political parties to

adopt the "Hindu agenda"

Hindu Parishad (VHP) work-

ing president. Ashok Singhal.

yesterday said construction

of Ramalla Temple at Ayodhya

was possible only after

bringing a legislation to this

effect, and the Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) was the

only party which can enact a

Why Lisa Marie,

Jackson getting

divorce?

OK, so what really happened

between Lisa Marie and

Michael Jackson? Don't cou-

nt on finding out. Not from

Lisa Marie Presley cited ir-

reconcilable differences this

week in filing for divorce

from Michael Jackson. And

under California's no-fault di-

vorce laws, that's all either of

them have to say publicly.

them, anyway, reports AP.

LOS ANGELES, Jan 20:

The Mandal passed a

The Mandal also asked

Meanwhile, the Vishwa

Mathura, reports PTI.

religious places.

law to this effect.

prepared by the BHP.

ALLAHABAD, Jan 20: The

Human resource Development Minister Madhavrao Scindia, one of the handful of Congress leaders with a reputation for honesty, quit on Wednesday along with two other ministers facing

charges in the payoff scandal. Rao's name has also figured in the case but Congress spokesman Vithal Nath Gadgil told reporters here Friday that the prime minister was "Mr. Clean."

"I know what my Prime Minister is... I am morally confident," he said, shortly after nearly 70 senior Congress members met Rao at his official residence to express their support.

The CBI accused the ministers and seven opposition leaders of taking huge payoffs from a business tycoon in a case which had been simmering since 1991. All of them have denied taking bribes.

The businessman al-

legedly paid more than 20 million dollars to 115 politicians and bureaucrats between 1988 and 1991 in return for favours. At least three more ministers are expected to face the axe.

Opposition leader Lal Krishna Advani, touted until recently as a prime ministerin-waiting, resigned from parliament immediately after he was named by the CBI on

Advani's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP. Indian People' Party) hit back at Rao, saying the prime minister himself had taken bribes

"The scandal only shows that Rao is presiding over a regime steeped in corruption and scandal," said Doraiswamy Raja, a communist leader." How can he claim to be fighting corruption?"

"Instead of uniting the ruling party for the coming elections, the PM has done

وقل أعماوا فسيبرى أبه عملام ورسوله والمؤمنون

PLO leader Yasser Arafat puts the first stone for the first international airport in Gaza

City on Friday. About one million Palestinians will go to the polls on Saturday, for the first

time in their history to elect a president and 88 members for the Palestinian self-rule

Lankan troops kill 15 Tigers,

destroy 25 LTTE camps

Batticaloa districts, about 50

miles (80 km) northwest of

Rivikirana captured several

large camps and many

smaller satellite camps with-

out encountering much resis-

tance from the Liberation

"They (guerillas) withdrew

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

from camps as troops ad-

vanced and began firing

mortars from far away," one

rebel anti-personnel mine

and eleven more have been

wounded since Rivikirana

was launched on Wednesday.

The sources said the op-

eration began on the border

of the Polonnaruwa and Bat-

ticaloa districts, about 50

miles (80 km) northwest of

hideouts that have sprung up

regrouped in the area after

the fall of their northern

stronghold to the army last

in the east since the rebels

Its aim is to smash LTTE

One soldier lost his leg to a

the defence sources said.

Troops in operation

Batticaloa Town.

source said.

he said.

month.

Batticaloa town.

something that has led to fur ther divisions," said a Congress source. "The PM may benefit from this exercise but not the party."

The source said the disgraced ministers were expected to harm the ruling party's prospects in the elections in which the Congress faces the tough job of retaining power amid declining voter support.

PTI from Bhopal add, the Congress-I spokesman V N Gadgil said here today that the Congress (I) would get comfortable majority in the next Lok Sabha elections

I am not making any tall claims, its a realistic analysis, he said while replying to queries on the poll prospects of the ruling party in the forthcoming general election. following implication of several Congressmen in the sensational Hawala case.

- AFP/UNB photo

The army captured Jaffna

town, centre of a Tami

homeland in the north and

east for which the rebels are

fighting, after a seven-week

The rebels have since car-

Defence sources said one

ried out a series of attacks on

the military in the east while

cutting power supplies and

of the camps captured was a

hospital used by the rebels to

The military has launched

limited operations in other

parts of the east aimed at

cutting off the rebels' access

to towns and destroying their

The government says mo-

re than 50,000 people have

died in the 12-year-separatist

President Chandrika Ku-

maratunga Friday appealed to

doctors to treat thousands of

Tamil civilians displaced by

fighting between government

forces and Tamil Tiger

guerillas.

AFP adds, Sri Lankan

disrupting transport.

treat their wounded.

hideouts, they added.

offensive.

## Senate negotiators okay new \$ 265b defence bill

WASHINGTON, Jan 20: House Senate negotiators approved a new 265 billion dollar defence bill on Friday. stripping out a missile defence speedup and other provisions that caused President Bill Clinton to veto the

original bill, reports Reuter. The negotiators said Congress will likely approve the bill next week and they thought Defence Secretary William Perry would recommend that Clinton sign it into law. But they said they had no White House assurances that he would do so.

The negotiators stripped or revised a provisions that would have ordered construction of a defence against limited missile attacks starting in 2003 and restricted Clinton's power to commit US troops to international peacekeeping operations.

But they did not change other provisions to which Clinton objected that would prohibit most abortions in military hospitals and require dismissal of any troops who have the HIV virus, which causes AIDS. Republicans said they would try to win ap-

proval of the stricken items. which were part of their "contract with America" campaign pledge, as separate bills. The 265 billion dollar authorisation for US defence programmes next year is 7 billion dollar more than Clinton asked, carrying out a Republican pledge to restore

higher US defence spending. But removal of the order for a US anti-missile defence by 2003 from the bill damages chances for congressional approval. Supporters said the defence is needed to protect the United States from missile attacks from such hostile countries as Iran

in the next century Clinton said the missile defence speedup was not needed because US intelligence agencies foresee no missile attack threat for at least a decade. His policy is to continue research but not to begin building such a defence unless a specific threat begins to emerge.

He also said the US defence would undermine the 1972 US-Soviet Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty

## Off the Record

### Talking cabs

NEW YORK: While a number of New York City taxi drivers have trouble with English, by the end of the year their cabs might speak it fluently, reports AP.

In a pilot programme that could be expanded to the entire fleet, three taxis began giving an automated warning on Thursday: "Please remember to take your property, and don't forget to ask for a receipt.

In a city where people take more than half a million taxi rides a day, forgotten gloves, shopping bags and umbrellas are no small matter. In December alone, the taxi commission received 5,457 reports of items left in yellow cabs.

The voice devices cost 40 dirs to 70 dirs and taxi owners would pay for them.

## Party of dreams

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil: They're calling it the party of dreams, reports AP.

Gilberto Scarpa, a multi-billionaire Brazilian businessman, is throwing a 2 million dollar bash on Saturday at his mansion in the Uruguayan city of Punta del Este to celebrate his 20th wedding anniversary.

The guest list is 850 names long and includes Pele. Ivana Trump, actress Elsa Martinelli and Argentine President Carlos Menem, the Rio daily Journal do Brasil reported on Thursday.

Scarpa hired 50 photographers, 100 security agents and as many waiters for the party at his "Pinduca Chalet' in Punta del Este, a coastal city known for its posh casinos and fancy restaurants.

The daily said a private plane with the first 70 quests left Sao Paulo on Thursday for the flight to Uruguay. Scarpa and his wife, Henriqueta, were to greet their guests at the airport.

## 'Too light' sentence for worst cruelty

WELLINGTON: A farmer who allowed more than 1,700 animals to die after inadvertently giving them a chemical overdose was sentenced of Friday to 200 hours of community service work, reports AP. Agriculture Ministry officials described the case as one

of the worst cruelty cases its animal welfare service had investigated.

The farmer was charged with three counts of animal cruelty after more than 1,700 sheep and cattle died following a livestock drenching programme on his farm at

Turangi on the central North Island.

Drenching uses pest control chemicals to kill everything from ticks and fleas to intestinal worms. Agriculture ministry prosecutor Ross McVicar said the

farmer had failed to monitor the drenching programme, and failed to call in a veterinarian when stock deteriorated and died in excessive numbers from drench overdose. The farmer will also have to US dlrs 6,325 in costs to

the Agriculture Ministry. New Zealand animal welfare group the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said the court sentence

was "too light." Director Bob Kerridge said the sentence meant the farmer would serve just seven minutes for each animal that had died on his farm.

Japan for an end to Chechen crisis Yeltsin defends military

action to crush Chechens

US President Bill Clinton (R) meets with Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda in the Oval Office in the White House on Friday. Ikeda and Clinton discussed the upcoming US-Japan summit in Tokyo and security issues. Earlier in the day Ikeda met with US national security advisor Anthony Lake then US Secretary of State Warren Christopher. — AFP/UNB photo

### No questioning by a judge, from camps as troops adno listing of peeves, no docvanced and began firing umentation at all as to what mortars from far away," one tore this coupling asunder. source said. In fact, as long as they The operational headquarters of the Ministry of Defence said in a

operation.

statement said.

council.

COLOMBO, Jan 20: Sri

Lankan troops killed at least

15 Tamil guerillas and de-

stroyed some 25 rebels

camps in their latest offen-

sive in the eastern part of

the Island, the Defence

Ministry and military sources

large camps and many

smaller satellite camps with-

out encountering much resis-

tance from the Liberation

"The guerillas withdrew

Twelve soldiers received

Military sources said the

minor injuries, the

operation began on the bor-

der of the Polonnaruwa and

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

the military sources said.

Troops captured several

said today, reports Reuter.

both make nice, the two can ask that all divorce documents be sealed, and they statement ground troops won't need to appear in court estimated that more than 15 rebels were killed and some at all. "If both sides are thinking 20 wounded in the

rationally, I don't see this being settled in anything but a private way.

## Indian newsmen threaten direct action, strike

NEW DELHI. Jan 20: Seven journalists unions yesterday threatened to launch a direct action and resort to a strike if the government does not announce 50 per cent interim relief for newspaper and news agency employees by the end of this month, reports PTI.

In a joint statement, they said the simmering discontent among newspaper and news agency employees. working journalists and nonjournalists alike, the delay in enhancing interim relief and then notifying it is now boil-

"We strongly warn the government that it is forcing industrial unrest in the newspaper establishments through its inaction...," the statement said.

They expressed concern that even four months after the Rajkumar Mainsana Singh Wage Board, sent their recommendations to the Union Labour Ministry is still dithering over the enhancement and notification.

tary operation to crush count after the assault on Pervomaiskoye ended a 10-Chechen rebels holding day rebel hostage saga, but dozens of hostages in south-

As Yeltsin justified the use of Russian military might, Turkish authorities persuaded a group of pro-Chechen gunmen to release around 200 passengers, most of them Russians, and the crew of a ferry they had

NEAR PREVOMAISKOYE.

Russia, Jan 20: President

Boris Yeltsin on Friday

brushed off public criticism

and defended a bloody mili-

ern Russian village, reports

Reuter.

economic growth

seized — without a single shot being fired. Yeltsin shrugged off media criticism that the huge Russian force used to pound guerillas in the village of Per-

vomaiskove had been unnec-"The operation was

planned and carried out cor-

rectly," he told a Kremlin news conference after a Commonwealth of Independent States summit. Russia finished the body

nearly half the "Lone Wolft"

Chechen guerillas appeared to have escaped. Gunman who hijacked a ferry in the Black Sea port of Trabzon in support of

Chechen rebels surrendered on Friday to Turkish authorities, the ship's captain said. He said there were about seven or eight hijackers, mainly ethnic Turks.

The Hijackers, protesting at Russia's assault, won the support of around 1,000 Turks who marched through Istanbul chanting "long live our Chechen rebellion.

## Hillary's gift to Jayalalitha

CHICAGO, Jan 20: America's First Lady Hillary Clinton has presented an autographed copy of her just published book to the World Federation of Tamil Youth for handing over to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha in recognition of her innovative child welfare programmes, reports PTI.

Jayalalitha's 15-point programme and her cradle baby scheme has been receiving a lot of acclaim here and recently Chicago based South Asian Family Services, a voluntary organisation, had honoured her with International Woman of the Year award.

# JERUSALEM, Jan 20: Many

developed nations worry that high immigration contributes to unemployment, but in Israel the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union has helped fuel exceptional economic growth and slashed joblessness in half, officials say, reports AFP. Since the ex-Soviet Union

opened its doors to Jewish emigration in 1989, more than 700,000 people have flooded into Israel, increasing its overall population by 12 per cent.

During the same period, economic growth averaged six per cent per year and

reached seven per cent in real terms in 1995, when 77,000 immigrants moved to the country, according to the government's central statistics office.

Unemployment, meanwhile, dropped by half to 5.9 per cent of the working pop-

ulation last year. "Immigration has had an almost miraculous impact because it gives us an extraordinary capital in human talent," Yair Tsaban, the Minis-

ter for Immigrant Absorption, told AFP. He said recent immigrants

included 58,000 engineers, 10,000 scientists and 14,000 doctors. Although some of these

professionals had to accept employment in other fields due to a lack of demand for their expertise, they nevertheless represent a human resource with a level of formal education far above the Israeli average.

High immigration in Israel helps fuel

"The cost of this specialised workforce is far lower than in the developed countries and this has given us a boost in our export industries, especially in hightechnology sectors," said Tsipi Galiam of the finance ministry's research depart-

ment. She said the ex-Soviet immigrants also arrived at just the right time: as the

peace process and the easing of the Arab boycott against Israel coincided with the expansion of export markets. notably in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe.

The mass arrival of immigrants has been felt in virtually every sector of the econ-Last year, new housing

among recent arrivals fell

starts hit a record 40,000 In addition, explains David units, nearly half of them re-Brodet, general director at served for immigrants, while the Finance Ministry, the household consumption has also soared. Both phenomena con-

task of helping immigrants settle costs the state about 3.5 billion dollars per year. tributed to creating jobs for dren, for example, receives Israelis and the new immigrants alike. Unemployment 13,000 dollars from the gov-

A couple with two chil-

ernment during their first

less than 10 per cent last

year, according to govern-

that these new workers are

also buying imported goods,

from cars to appliances,

sending Israel's trade deficit

to a record 10.2 billion dol-

The flip-side of the coin is

ment statistics.

lars last year.

from 38 per cent in 1990 to year in the country. New immigrants can also receive subsidised loans to buy their first homes. To meet these expenses,

Israel has had to increase its borrowing abroad, notably thanks to guarantees provided by the United States. During the first three years of the decade, Israel raised five billion dollars on US financial markets.

The borrowing pushed israel's foreign debt up from 16 billion dollars to 18 billion dollars, or about 25 per cent of gross national product, a figure Galiam insists "remains within the realm of the rea-

### Christopher, Ikeda talk reforms in Russia

Secretary of State Warren Christopher and new Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda had a long conversation Friday on the uncertain future of reforms in Russia, the state department said. reports AFP.

WASHINGTON, Jan 20:

The two men, meeting for the first time, agreed that the recent resignations of three influential reformers from President Boris Yeltsin's cabinet marked 'a critical time for Russian reform. state department spokesman Nicholas Burns said.