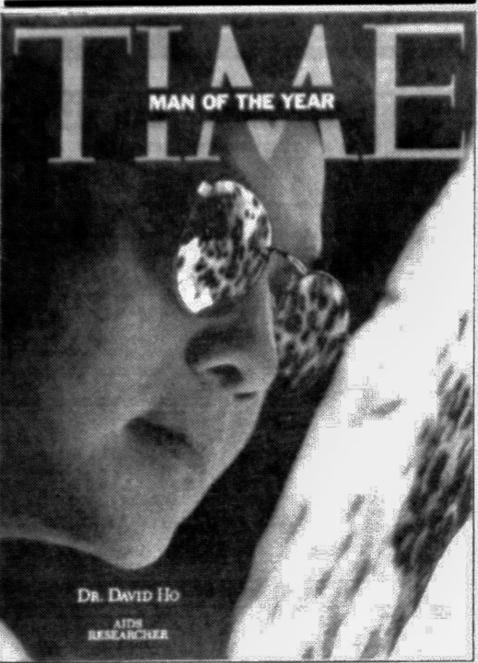


International

BRIEFLY



Pioneering AIDS researcher Dr. David Ho, whose novel use of protease inhibitors and other antiviral drugs in the earliest stages of infection has shown remarkable promise in beating back the AIDS virus, is TIME Magazine's 1996 Man of the Year. Ho is featured on the cover of the December 30 issue. — AFP/UNB photo

62 Christians held in Lebanon: Authorities have detained 62 Christians suspected of involvement in anti-government acts amid allegations that an opposition Christian leader held a secret meeting with Israel's prime minister, AP reports from Beirut.

Dory Chamoun, leader of the right-wing National Liberal Party, denied Saturday that he had met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He also dismissed as "nonsense" allegations that his followers set off bombs and fired on Syrian troops. Chamoun, 62, is the son of the late President Camille Chamoun.

Tigers free 16 fishermen: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a Christmas goodwill gesture have released 16 Sinhala fishermen who had been held captive for up to four years in north of Sri Lanka, according to ICRC sources in Colombo Saturday. Xinhua reports from Colombo.

The sources said that the fishermen were handed over to the ICRC at Mankulam town in north of the country and brought to Colombo and other places for a joyful reunion with their families.

3 drug dealers hanged in Iran: Iran has hanged three men in the western city of Khorramabad for dealing in drugs, a newspaper said yesterday. Reuters reports from Tehran.

The Hamshahri daily said the three convicted drug offenders were hanged in a detention camp for drug addicts in Khorramabad, 570 km (360 miles) southwest of Tehran. The report said the men were arrested last year for buying and selling illegal drugs. The sentence was carried out after Iran's Supreme Court confirmed the death sentence issued by a local court.

Blast kills schoolgirl in Algeria: One schoolgirl was killed and another wounded Saturday when a bomb exploded near a high school at Douaouda, 30 kilometers (20 miles) west of Algiers security services said. AFP reports from Algiers.

The device went off at 12:10 pm (1110 GMT), as school ended. Douaouda was the scene of a massacre early last month, in which an armed group slit the throats of 10 women and three children after lobbing hand grenades into their house.

Earthquake rocks China: An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.5 rocked a remote area of southwest China, an official said Sunday. AP reports from Beijing.

The quake struck at 4:39 p.m. (839 GMT) Saturday close to the border of Sichuan and Tibet provinces, in an area inhabited mostly by Tibetans. Casualties, if any, were expected to be light, said an official at the State Seismological Bureau who only gave his surname, Zhang.

More Russians reported killed in Chechnya

MOSCOW, Dec 22: Four members of a Russian family were reported killed in their home in Chechnya, the latest in a string of recent slayings that appear aimed at undermining a peace settlement in the breakaway republic, reports AP.

Independent NTV television reported Saturday night that unknown gunmen shot the family members overnight in their home in Grozny, the Chechen capital.

The killing spree began with the slayings of six Red Cross workers, who were shot in their beds before dawn Tuesday at a hospital compound in a Chechen village.

On Wednesday, six Russian residents were fatally shot at two nearby homes in Grozny, the Chechen capital. Police said they have held 18 people for questioning, but no arrests have been reported.

Chechen law enforcement officials said they detained sus-

pects Friday in the Red Cross murders, but they have given virtually no information about their identities or said what evidence implicated them.

Police officer Sultan Osmayev told The Associated Press on Saturday that three suspects were arrested in the Chechen town of Shali. He also refused to give further details.

Chechnya's security chief Abu Movsayev, has accused Russian secret services of organizing the killings of the international aid workers and of the six Russians the following day.

The Russian Interior Ministry and Federal Security Service have denied any involvement in the slayings and accused the Chechen leadership of being unable to protect people from "rampant banditry."

Chechen and Russian leaders have said the killings appeared to be an attempt to wreck the peace process in Chechnya.

Hostage crisis takes uncertain turn as Fujimori rejects rebels' demands

LIMA, Dec 22: The hostage standoff at the Japanese ambassador's residence here took an uncertain turn today after Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori flatly rejected demands from leftist rebels holding hundreds captive, reports AFP.

The only solution to the standoff is that "the captors lay down their arms before a neutral commission and that they facilitate the evacuation of all the hostages, without exception," Fujimori said late Saturday in a brief taped, televised message.

But the president also said in his first public comments on the drama that no military force would be used against the residence compound. "We have not considered measures of force."

There was no immediate re-

sponse from the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) which is holding some 340 hostages at the embassy residence. Roughly 20 heavily armed members of the groups seized the place Tuesday in a well planned attack.

It was unclear whether they were even aware of the speech, since the electricity has been cut at the residence and the generator apparently ran out of fuel.

Using a firm tone during the televised broadcast, Fujimori rejected the possibility of releasing jailed members of the movement.

The rebels are seeking the release of 453 of their comrades whom the government is holding. The demand was the only condition the rebels have announced since seizing the compound.

But rebels said Friday in a statement read by released hostages that the "only possible solution to the crisis is to meet our demands."

Despite the hard tone of Fujimori's speech, he indicated that some negotiation was possible on the fate of the rebels. His proposal "discards the possibility of the use of force by the Peruvian government and... includes an exit that can be studied," Fujimori said in an apparent reference to a possible negotiation on the fate of the commando squad.

In a communique from MRTA headquarters apparently written before Fujimori's speech, the rebel group warned that commandos had been ordered to attack economic and military targets around the nation if the government orders a strike on the residence.

Fujimori's message came just hours after MRTA leader Nestor Cerpa Cartolini said in an almost conciliatory tone that the commando was willing to release more hostages depending on the government's actions.

The rebels have so far released 352 people since the hostage-taking and an estimated 340 remain captive.

The MRTA headquarters communicate said, however, that "the Peruvian government and some other governments are taking these shows of flexibility as weakness which... places the lives of their compatriots in danger."

"This grave error compromises the physical integrity of the prisoners of war," according to the faxed statement sent to AFP minutes after the end of Fujimori's speech.

LTTE kills 9 Lankan troops

COLOMBO, Dec 22: Tamil Tiger guerrillas ambushed an army vehicle in north-eastern Sri Lanka today, killing nine soldiers and wounding another, officials here said, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked the soldiers while they were on a routine patrol in the district of Trincomalee, the officials said.

There were no immediate reports of rebel casualties in the brief fire-fight following the guerrilla ambush at the village of Gomarakadawela.

The attack came two days after Tiger rebels fired rocket propelled grenades and ambushed an army convoy in the same region, killing 10 soldiers and a civilian.

The LTTE attacked the military convoy in the village of Kebithigollewa and destroyed four armoured trucks and a motorcycle, officials said. They said 12 other soldiers escaped with serious injuries.

Khmers capture several villages in northern Cambodia

SIEM REAP, Cambodia, Dec 22: Troops have been rushed into an area of northern Cambodia by helicopters after Khmer Rouge guerrillas occupied several villages and killed five government soldiers, a senior commander said Sunday, reports AP.

Gen Long Seret Rath said 200 soldiers were sent to recapture the villages after they fell to the Khmer Rouge Friday in the province of Preah Vihear. He said 10 government soldiers were also wounded in the guerrilla assaults.

The troops were airlifted into the battle zone Saturday and Sunday, the general told reporters in this northwestern provincial capital.

Details of the fighting were not immediately available. Mass defections from Khmer Rouge ranks have greatly sapped the strength of an ultra-Communist movement which originated in the late 1960s and inflicted a reign of terror on the country in the mid-1970s.

Khmer Rouge hardliners, led by Pol Pot, have been largely pushed into remote areas of northern and northwestern Cambodia bordering Thailand.

Khmer Rouge hardliners, led by Pol Pot, have been largely pushed into remote areas of northern and northwestern Cambodia bordering Thailand.

'Women in Turkey not as free as in Iran'

ANKARA, Dec 22: Faazeh Rafsanjani, the daughter of Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, suggested that Turkish women were not as "free" as Iranian women, in an interview published by the Turkish newspaper Sabah on Saturday, reports AFP.

Faazeh Rafsanjani who is accompanying her father on a four-day official trip to Turkey, said the situation of Turkish women is similar to that of Iranian women before the revolution, before the Islamic revolution, Iranian women were not free. She added that she thought that Iranian women were "happier now."

She also praised the "greater integration" of Iranian women in social life and the "increasing education" of Iranian girls following the 1979 revolution which installed a regime based on Islamic principles in Iran.

She also praised the "greater integration" of Iranian women in social life and the "increasing education" of Iranian girls following the 1979 revolution which installed a regime based on Islamic principles in Iran.

She also praised the "greater integration" of Iranian women in social life and the "increasing education" of Iranian girls following the 1979 revolution which installed a regime based on Islamic principles in Iran.



Thousands of people take part in an open-air mass on Saturday in the Plaza de Armas in Lima, Peru for the welfare and quick release of the 340 hostages captive in the Japanese ambassador's residence. The rebels seized control of the ambassador's residence during a party on Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Ross defends US role in peace talks Clashes break out in Hebron

HEBRON, West Bank, Dec 22: Clashes broke out on Saturday between groups of Jewish settlers and Palestinian residents in the West Bank town of Hebron, witnesses said, reports AP.

Two Palestinian were slightly injured by blows from Israeli border guards witnesses said while seven Palestinians were questioned by the Israeli army which intervened in the scuffles.

The unrest erupted shortly before US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross is due in Jerusalem in an effort to break the deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians over the long delayed Israeli troop withdrawal from Hebron.

The most serious incident occurred in the old town of Hebron where several settler families live.

What began as a scuffled between children developed into a row between dozens of settlers and Palestinians who hurled rocks and insults at each other.

In an earlier incident, Muslims who had just signed up for a pilgrimage to Makka at the Palestinian Religious Affairs Office were pelted by set-

tlers with rocks and eggs, according to Palestinian witnesses.

Under the autonomy accords Israel was to have pulled out of four-fifths of Hebron in March, but the withdrawal as delayed after series of Palestinian Islamic suicide bombings in Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is seeking guarantees for the security of 400 Jewish settlers who live among 120,000 Palestinians in Hebron, the last major West Bank town under Israeli control.

AP adds: US mediator Dennis Ross said early Sunday that the United States has an important role to play in Middle East peace talks and he hoped his return to the region would help "energise" troubled Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Ross, who met with both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat upon his arrival late Saturday was responding to recent allegations by Arafat that he favors the Israelis.

Peace talks between the sides are deadlocked over the long-delayed Israeli troop withdrawal from Hebron, where 500 Jewish settlers live amid 130,000 Palestinians.

"My purpose right now is to have a chance to talk to the leaders to see what can be done to energise the process," Ross said after a midnight meeting with Arafat.

"I think the United States plays an instrumental role in the peace process for a long time. We play a role that reflects not only our view of what is important but also the fact that parties of the peace process want us to play that role," Ross said.

Ross' visit comes at a time of growing tensions in Hebron. On Saturday, a fight between settlers and schoolchildren escalated into a melee between hundreds of Israelis and Palestinians.

The fighting broke out along the main road running between the settlements in Hebron's Old City. Some 200 Jewish settlers, many of them armed, exchanged blows and insults with 100 Palestinian residents before Israeli troops intervened.



Deposed Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto (L) claps after signing her nomination papers for the national assembly seat from her native village Larkana Saturday. Benazir and her mother Nusrat Bhutto (R) filed their nomination paper to contest for the national assembly seats in election which are scheduled on February 3. — AFP/UNB photo

Netanyahu facing barrage of criticism after 6 months in power

JERUSALEM, Dec 22: After six months in power, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing a barrage of criticism contending he is talking too much about peace while doing too little to make it happen, reports AP.

Arab countries have put relations on hold. President Clinton is openly critical, and there are reports Washington might withhold \$2.7 billion in loan guarantees for Israel.

Yasser Arafat warns that Netanyahu's policy on Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas is a "declaration of war." Negotiations with Syria are in the form of military maneuvers and angry communique.

Even Netanyahu's own security chiefs are reportedly in revolt, fearing plans to expand Jewish settlements on the West Bank could trigger a new outbreak of violence by Palestinians.

Netanyahu's defenders argue he is merely giving the peace

process a reality check after excessive optimism of the preceding Labour Party government. They dismiss verbal attacks from Arab leaders as psychological warfare designed to test the mettle of the new government.

And despite the criticism, there is little sign that Netanyahu is about to yield to the pressure or that he is in the kind of political trouble that could drive him from office. His Cabinet said Thursday that the government will go ahead with plans to expand settlements.

Editorials in Israel's predominantly liberal press have been savaging Netanyahu, and opinion polls indicate he trails opposition leader Ehud Barak in popularity.

After six months in power, he has used up enough words for half a term but has yet to reach a single decision, said Yoel Marcus, a columnist for the left-leaning newspaper Haaretz. Netanyahu aides dismiss the

grumbling. "It takes a while to get people used to a different mode of thinking," said David Bar-Ilan, a top aide. "The euphoric picture painted by the previous government of peace around the corner was very seductive, and it is hard to disabuse people of the notion that this is not so."

Netanyahu, at 47 the youngest premier in Israel's history, came to power in the May election on a have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too platform that promised both peace and security, with minimal territorial concessions.

He pledged to continue the peace process, the series of Israeli-Palestinian agreements that led to Israel's troop pullbacks in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the creation of Palestinian autonomy.

Under the accords, Israel is also committed to an army withdrawal from 80 per cent of the West Bank city of Hebron and the three further pullbacks

by the end of 1997. It must also hold final status talks on the big outstanding issues: the future of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements and final borders.

That agenda is at odds with the ideology of Netanyahu's Likud Party and its government partners. The coalition parties oppose allowing a Palestinian state and giving up the strategic Golan Heights to Syria while they favor expanding Jewish settlements.

Jewish settlements: in trying to please everyone, Netanyahu has had trouble pleasing anyone.

Many settlers are critical that the Likud leader has been unable to build any new settlements despite all the rhetorical support.

"It isn't always the pace we wanted," said Aharon Domb, spokesman for one settler group. Some peace supporters see hope in Netanyahu's public

musings about the nature of the eventual Palestinian entity, which he has said might be like the US commonwealth of Puerto Rico - a far more generous model than adopted by previous Likud leaders.

But Palestinian leaders see little hope in Netanyahu's current course, saying there has not been any forward movement for almost a year.

"Netanyahu must understand that he cannot lay the foundation for conflict, confrontation and explosion, and then claim verbally that he is committed to a peace process," said Hanan Ashrawi, the minister of higher education for the Palestinian autonomy zone.

The latest crunch came when a Jewish settler and her 12-year-old son were slain in a highway ambush claimed by a radical Palestinian faction.

Netanyahu responded in the manner of previous right-wing

governments, which expanded settlement activity in response to terrorism. He authorised government subsidies expected to total 30 million dirh to encourage settlement growth and proposed building 1,000 new housing units next to the Beit El settlement where the ambush took place.

But the head of Shin Bet security agency, Ami Ayalon, and the army chief of staff Lt Gen Amnon Shahak, objected to the plan. They warned it could bring a repeat of September's outbreak of violence in which 79 people died.

At the same time, an official who spoke on condition of anonymity confirmed news media reports that Foreign Minister David Levy and Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai were irritated with Netanyahu for using aides and back channels to negotiate with the Palestinians, leaving them in the dark.

Thousands file nominations for Feb 3 Pak polls

ISLAMABAD, Dec 22: Thousands of candidates have filed nomination papers for Pakistan's general elections scheduled for February 3, officials said today, reports AFP.

The major political parties filed nominees for some 700 national and provincial assembly seats, but no nominations were received from the interim government of Malik Meera Khalid, installed after the November 5 dismissal of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, they said.

Today was the last day for filing the nomination papers.

Bhutto was sacked on accusations of corruption and misrule during her three-year government.

Khalid said in Lahore today that he was trying to collect evidence of corruption but in most cases records had been removed by officials of the previous government.

Benazir Bhutto, her mother

Nusrat and sister-in-law Ghinva have also filed nomination papers in the family's stronghold Larkana in southern Sindh province.

Bhutto's jailed husband Asif Ali Zardari had decided not to contest the February elections, he has been booked in the murder of Benazir's brother Murtaza Bhutto, who died in a police shootout in Karachi on September 20.

Pakistan's cricket hero, Imran Khan is contesting in four constituencies including Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad.

He filed his candidacy against former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the deposed premier's Interior Minister Naseerullah Babar.

The cricket-turned-politician entered Pakistani politics nine months ago by forming his movement for justice (Tehreek-e-Insaf).

India to test new missile within two weeks

NEW DELHI, Dec 22: India will test a locally developed surface-to-surface missile - described as a superior version of the Soviet-built Scud - within two weeks, The Pioneer newspaper said today, reports AFP.

Defence officials told the daily the "Prithvi" (Earth) missile, boasting a 300-millimeter (180-mile) range and capable of carrying a warhead of 450 kilograms (990 pounds), would be tested in a fortnight for use by the air force.

They said scientists were also working on navy and army versions of the missile, which cost about 30 million rupees (857,142 dollars) each.

Scientists are working on cutting down the deployment time of the Prithvi's army variant. Currently it takes 45 min-

utes for the missile to be launched but scientists would like it to be 30 minutes, The Pioneer said.

The total command-to-command operation time for the missile is about two hours. The Prithvi has a maximum speed of 3,600 kilometres (2,232 miles) per hour.

The Prithvi, part of India's ambitious missile development programme launched in 1983, was first test fired on February 25, 1988.

The United States and other western countries have opposed India's production of ballistic missiles, saying an arms race would destabilise the South Asian region already troubled by tension between rivals India and Pakistan.

Off the Record

Judge her art, not her life

LOS ANGELES: Say hello to mama Madonna: form-fitting dress, cut low enough to reveal a bit of the newly maternal bosom, reports AP.

Perfect hair and makeup hiding any trace of fatigue from late-night feedings.

And breezy irreverence still obvious, if anyone feared it, might wobble in a baby-power whitout.

"The milk truck is back!" Madonna calls out as she returns to an interview interrupted for the task of breastfeeding her 2-month-old daughter, Lourdes Maria Ciccone Leon.

In the public eye almost nonstop since scoring with her first hit record, 1984's "Like a Virgin," Madonna has reached a new level of fame with motherhood and her starring role in the movie musical "Evita."

She's eager to talk about her potential breakthrough film after a string of disappointing movies. The role of Argentina's flamboyant first lady, the late Eva Peron, seems as perfectly tailored for Madonna as the couture suits and the spotlight favored by both.

Her personal life also has hit a high with the arrival of her first child by boyfriend Carlos Leon.

The pop singer seems to dote on her daughter, who remains out of sight in a hotel room while her mother meets reporters. After Lourdes' snack session, she explains, "I do sometimes give her bottles, but I don't like her to drink too many. I don't like my nanny feeding her all the time. I want to do it."

But all is not perfect in Madonna's world. In two interviews at a Los Angeles area hotel, she railed against media scrutiny of her life, and lamented the state of US movie-making and the perils of fame.

Throughout, her words were carefully chosen and she remained the picture of poise. The first lady of popular culture knows just how to act the part.

Carter's confession

LOS ANGELES: Jimmy Carter confesses in his new book that he could have been a better family man, reports AP.

"It was a very difficult book for me to write, intensely personal," Carter said of his 11th book, "Living Faith."

At a book-signing last week, Carter says he made major life decisions without consulting his wife, Rosalynn, and was estranged from his son Jack in the late 1980s.

Like his earlier decision to leave the Navy, Carter's 1962 decision to run for the Georgia Senate came as a surprise to his wife.

"I decided to run and Rosalynn never knew about it until I got up on Tuesday morning and put on my dress trousers instead of blue jeans or khakis," Carter said.

With his son, the situation got more emotional. "Jack turned around and said to me with tears running down his cheeks that I almost destroyed his life when he was a child. All I felt was, 'This is an ingrate,'" Carter said. "All we've done for this boy - he didn't appreciate it. And I went home and shared my displeasure with Rosalynn, and it took us literally a couple of years to become reconciled with Jack."

One dozen of roses for each of her 50 years

TULSA, Oklahoma: For her birthday Virginia Cohlma's husband gave her roses, reports AP.

Lots of roses - 600, to be exact. One dozen for each of her 50 years.

The American Beauty tea roses, bouquet by bouquet, started coming at 7 am and didn't stop until 5:30 pm Thursday.

"He'll never top this," a stunned Mrs Cohlma said. "It's impossible."

It was quite a delivery for a man who told her he would never send her flowers again after she turned down his first invitation for a date.

The next day I sent her a dozen roses, but she still wouldn't go out with me. Charlie Cohlma recalled. The day after that I sent her a bouquet with a bird of paradise in it, and the card I enclosed said, 'May the Bird of Paradise Fly. See if I ever send you flowers again.'

That did it. The night of their first date was Mrs Cohlma's 20th birthday. And as a reminder, the 50th bouquet sent Thursday included bird of paradise flowers.

Charlie Cohlma fortunately had the resources for this year's present. The Cohlmas own a plant nursery and a shop that sells dried flowers.

He had to get a little help for her 40th: That day, she awoke to find a high school marching band playing in the front yard.