

International

20 more hostages freed in Lima following govt-rebel talks

LIMA, Peru, Dec 29: Leftist rebels released 20 more hostages including two ambassadors, from Japan's Embassy residence Saturday...

The meeting won the freedom for 20 and those that remain are in good health, Palermo said. In what became a prelude to the release, Palermo — appointed by President Alberto Fujimori — entered the residence at about 1 pm (1800 GMT)...

The mass release came after three hostages were freed and one read a rebel communique in which the group restated demands and said it resented being called "terrorists."

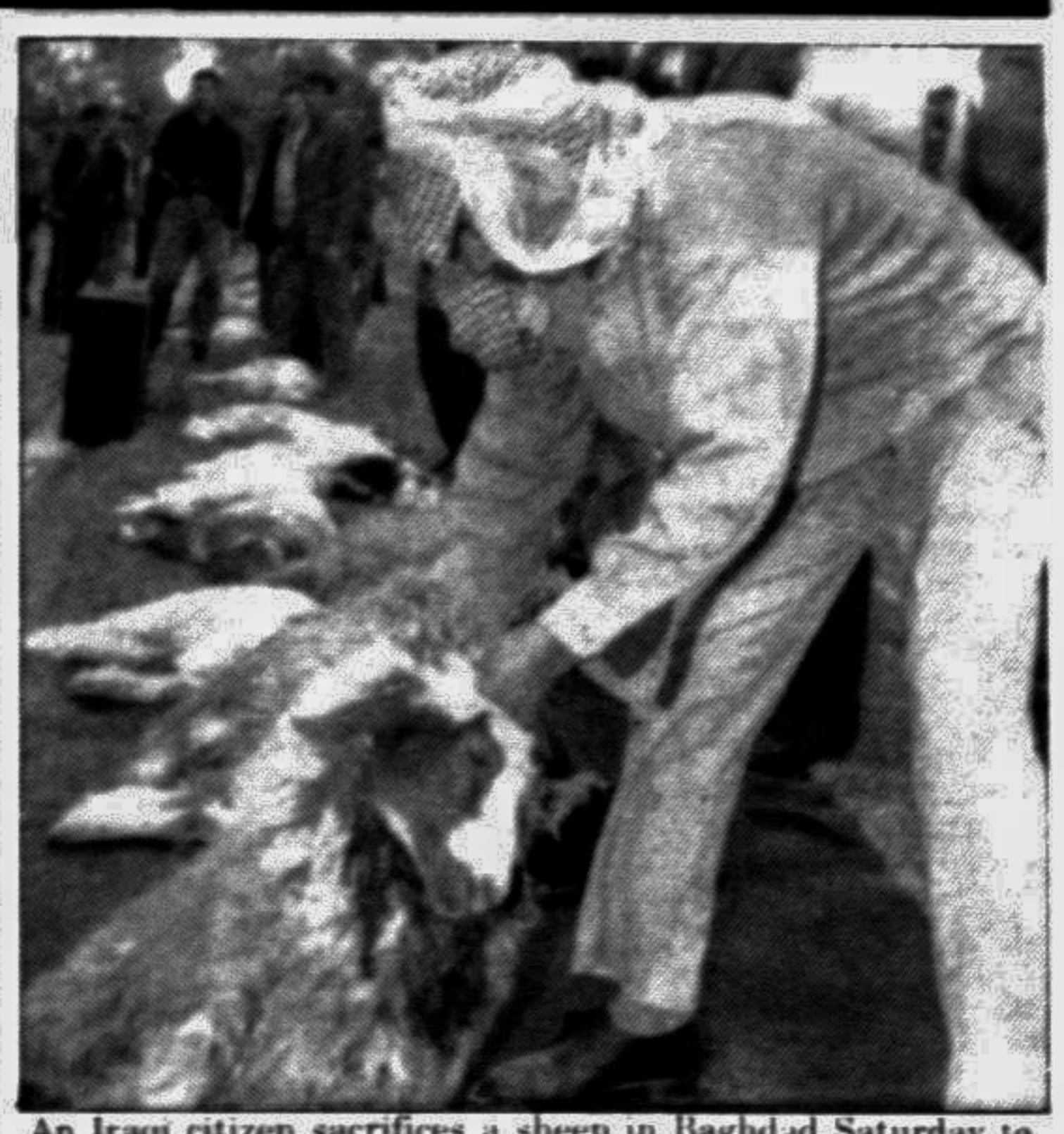
All previous contact has been through the Red Cross, and a spokesman for the aid agency said Saturday it was eager for the government to establish direct contact with the rebels.

Shortly after the release of the three, 17 more left the residence. The 20 men walked together to a waiting blue and white school bus just outside the compound.

The freed hostages, most of whom were of Japanese ancestry, bowed to Cipriani at the door of the bus before they boarded.

With the release, which began at 5 pm (2200 GMT) and was one of several since the rebels stormed the residence, 83 people remained in rebel hands.

Peru's decision to send an official representative to meet with the rebels marked the first time it had attempted face-to-face contact, a significant advance in negotiations...



An Iraqi citizen sacrifices a sheep in Baghdad Saturday to celebrate the survival of Uday Saddam Hussein, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's eldest son...

BRIEFLY

Serbs free 2 Muslims, 1 Croat: Bosnian Serbs on Saturday in a goodwill gesture freed two Muslims and a Croat after holding them for many months...

6 pupils buried alive in Lanka: Six school children were buried alive and 28 others still trapped in debris when a school building collapsed at Chilaw about 100 km from Colombo last afternoon...

4 die during W Java rioting: Four people died during rioting in Indonesia during which an angry Muslim mob went on rampage targeting Christian churches and ethnic Chinese businesses...

Anti-Taliban jets bomb Kabul: Central Kabul residential areas were bombed late Saturday night by anti-Taliban alliance jets...

Ex-UP CM courted arrest: Former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalay Singh on Saturday courted arrest along with BJP workers in Atrali on the seventh day of BJP's 'jail bharo' agitation in the state...

5 Russian soldiers hurt in attack: Five Russian soldiers were wounded by unknown assailants who fired on their truck in the Tajik capital Dushanbe...

4 jailed for using fake money in China: A Shanghai court has sentenced a local businessman to 13 years jail and three others to terms of six months to four years for buying and using fake money...



Two residents of the southern Italian town of Campobasso shovel snow to free their car as temperatures plunged to minus two degrees Celsius Saturday...

Arafat to meet Mubarak to wrap up Hebron deal with Israel

JERUSALEM, Dec 29: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat travels today to Cairo to consult with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak amid a flurry of diplomatic activity to wrap up a Hebron deal with Israel...

Arafat is expected to visit Egypt today to brief President Mubarak on the latest developments on the Hebron negotiations...

Israeli and PLO officials have said they expected Netanyahu and Arafat to sign an agreement on the handover of 80 per cent of the West Bank city of Hebron to Palestinian rule by year's end.

Off the Record

Violence — Man Of The Year!

LAGOS. Two Nigerian private newspapers on Saturday voted violence as their 'man of the year', an exceptional choice because the press usually nominates individuals who have taken major steps affecting humanity for the title...

This beast, this spirit, kills with braw adro and daring and ruthlessness in the process defying the agents of law and order, breaking every security cordon, and hitting his target noiselessly but with professional plan...

India's most wanted bandit tags amnesty to surrender

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: India's most wanted bandit, blamed for some 100 murders, has said he would surrender provided he was offered amnesty and paid millions of dollars...

The 45-year-old Veerappan, who is described as a 'menace to humans, wildlife and the environment', said he was willing to surrender before the Indian President, Shankar Dayal Sharma...

His offer, recorded in an audio cassette, was made to a weekly magazine in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, the news agency said.

Syria unwilling to backtrack on peace talks with Israel

CAIRO, Egypt, Dec 29: Syria is not willing to backtrack on peace talks with Israel — which already promised to withdraw from the Golan Heights...

Assad told Egypt's leading al-Ahram newspaper that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was trying to renege on deals Syria had reached with previous prime ministers...

After four years of talks, the Americans told us that Rabin was finally convinced of the necessity of withdrawing from all of the Golan, Assad said in the interview...

Storm death toll rises to 137 in Malaysia

KOTA KINABALU, Malaysia, Dec 29: The death toll from Malaysia's Christmas Day storm disaster has risen to 137 and rescuers were pessimistic about finding survivors among them...

After a three-day search by about 500 rescue workers led by the elite Special Malaysian Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (SMART), the chances of finding any survivors in the mud and debris-filled villages were slim...

Officials estimated that more than 100 people were still missing based on reports put in by their family members.

China's 'no' to Philippine plan to develop Spratly islands

MANILA, Dec 29: China on Sunday opposed a Philippine plan to develop one of the South China Sea's disputed Spratly islands, saying it hoped Manila would refrain from moves that might harm relations...

Chinese Embassy spokesman Hao Yunpiao said the two countries have an understanding on jointly developing the area and shelving conflicting territorial claims...

Hao said in a statement that China has 'indisputable sovereignty' over the Spratlys, which it calls the Nansha Islands, and adjacent waters...

Bloody submarine incident DPRK apologises to ROK

SEOUL, Dec 29: In its first official apology ever to its southern rival, North Korea expressed 'deep regret' Sunday over sending a spy submarine into South Korea in September...

The apology was seen as a major concession by North Korea, which does not recognise South Korea as a dialogue partner. It regards the Seoul government as a US puppet.

The DPRK will make efforts to ensure that such an incident will not recur and will work with others for durable peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula...



A group of Jordanian women participate in rain prayer in Amman on Saturday. Around 4000 participants gathered to attend the prayer which was called by the government to ask for rainfall which is the country's main source of water...

Thousands of workers join anti-govt rally in ROK

SEOUL, Dec 29: Tens of thousands of workers, honking their car horns in a show of protest, converged in Seoul for a rally Sunday as South Korea's largest-ever labor strike entered its fourth day...

Police reported severe traffic jams on the nation's major turnpikes overnight as unionists across the nation drove their buses and cars at tediously slow speed on their way to Seoul in a show of protests.

Mudslide kills 8 Pak soldiers

ISLAMABAD, Dec 29: A mountain of mud buried eight Pakistani soldiers as they slept and injured another six, news reports said Sunday, reports AP.

The mudslide which occurred overnight Thursday was reported late because of the remoteness of the region.

Thousands mourn at the burial of 1st victim in Belgrade

BELGRADE, Dec 29: As a brass band played, at least 10,000 opposition protesters grieved at the burial of the first person killed in demonstrations against the government of Slobodan Milosevic...

The students called for the resignation of Serbian Interior Minister Zoran Sokolovic, saying that he was 'the most responsible' for police behaviour.

Illegal immigrants fleeing from Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 29: Illegal immigrants who came to Malaysia to work are fleeing the country ahead of a December 31 deadline for deportation of those without entry permits...

Police have also stepped up patrols near Kuala Lumpur embassies to prevent the immigrants from going there to seek political asylum to avoid being sent home...