# BDIFFIX

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, a UN

spokeswoman said. AFP reports from Tuzla The handover took place in the US-base of the NATO led Stabilisation Force (SFOR) Camp McGovern close to the disputed northeastern town of Breko Anddreas Angelli said. adding it's gesture of goodwill

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, PTI reports from Colombo According to reports reaching Colombo 15 injured children were rescued from the debris and efforts were on to rescue the

A religious class was in progress when the building col-lapsed. The reason for the collapse is yet to be known. Police sources said that the death toll is likely to go up

4 die during W Java rioting: Four people died during in Indonesia during which an angry Muslim mob went on rampage targeting Christian churches and ethnic Chinese businesses, a report said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

The death toll following the violence in the west Javan town of Tasikmalaya rose after it was found that a shop owner died of a heart attack while his shop was under attack, the Antara news agency said.

Anti-Taliban jets bomb Kabul: Central Kabul residential areas were bombed late Saturday night by anti-Taliban alliance jets, though no casualty figures or details of damage were immediately available. AFP reports from

In the first raid, houses in the former diplomatic enclave of Wazir Akbar Khan experienced multiple shock-waves from what appeared to be a cluster-bomb explosion, some losing win-

Ex-UP CM courted arrest: Former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalayan Singh on Saturday courted arrest along with BJP workers in Atrauli on the seventh day of BJP's "jail bharo" agitation in the state. PTI reports from Luc-

The state unit chief of party Kalraj Misra also courted arrest along with party workers in Varnasi, a party release said. The party claimed that so far over seven lakh party workers have courted arrest under the agitation launched for their demands including the removal of the Uttar Pradesh Governor Romesh Bhandari and the installation of a popular government soon.

5 Russian soldiers hurt in attack: Five Russian soldiers were wounded by unknown assailants who fired on their truck in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, officials said Sunday. AP reports from Dushanbe.

A search was launched for the assailants, who escaped after firing light weapons on the truck Saturday evening, law-enforcement officials told the ITAR-Tass and the Interfax news agencies. On Friday, a Russian soldier was wounded in another attack in 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, the Business News reported yesterday. Reuter reports from Shanghai.

India's most wanted bandit

tags amnesty to surrender

NEW DELHI. Dec 29: India's

most wanted bandit, blamed for 12

some 100 murders, has said he

would surrender provided he

was offered amnesty and paid

millions of dollars, the United

News of India (UNI) said today.

who is described as a 'menace to

humans, wildlife and the envi-

ronment,' said he was willing to

surrender before the Indian

President. Shankar Dayal

His offer, recorded in an au-

Veerappan has asked the

dio cassette, was mailed to a

weekly magazine in the south-

ern state of Tamil Nadu, the

Tamil Nadu state administra-

tion to broadcast the Indian

governments decision on his

demands with 10 days on a na-

tional radio station. UNI added

The 45-year-old Veerappan.

reports AFP.

news agency said.

# 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, following the first face-to-face talks between guerillas and the government's negotiator, reports

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 be-

ing called "terrorists." The communique did not refer to the original guerilla demand that jailed rebels be freed, but demanded that jail conditions be improved. Political prisoners are treated harshly in Peru. Some are sentenced to life in solitary confinement.

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

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.

Fahrenheit) in some regions of the country.

CAIRO, Egypt. Dec 29: Syria

is not willing to backtrack on

peace talks with Israel — which

already promised to withdraw

from the Golan Heights. Syrian

President Hafez Assad said in

an interview published Satur-

al-Ahram newspaper that Is-

raeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu was trying to renege

on deals Syria had reached with

previous prime ministers

Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon

the Americans told us that Ra-

bin was finally convinced of the

necessity of withdrawing from

all of the Golan." Assad said in

the interview. This was true.

and Peres confirmed it after

Rabin was assassinated in

"After four years (of talks).

Assad told Egypt's leading

day, reports AP.

Rabin."

including the ambassadors of Honduras, Japan and Bolivia. Among the 20 freed were

Dominican Republic Ambassador Jose Ramon Diaz and Malaysian Ambassador Ahmed Makhtar Sela.

The smiling hostages, many wearing suits without ties and looking haggard following their 12-day ordeal, were greeted by religious and Red Cross officials and they shook hands with each before their trip to a military hospital for checkups. Some carried small plastic bags of what appeared to be clothes as they boarded the bus.

Freed hostage Arturo Pendavis said the hostages suffered no physical or psychological torture and were well-treated. They gave us all resources within the circumstances," he

Government negotiator Domingo Palermo, Peru's education minister, said he had an "casual conversation" with

Two residents of the southern Italian town of Campobasso shovel snow to free their car as

temperatures plunged to minus two degrees Celsius Saturday. A cold snap gripped Italy

Friday with temperatures plunging to as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22

Syria unwilling to backtrack

on peace talks with Israel

November 1995 and succeeded

by Peres: Netanyahu's hard-line

Likud Party beat Peres's Labour

confirmed that Rabin had tac-

itly agreed to give back all of the

Golan in exchange for a peace

agreement with Syria. But Ne-

tanyahu said he was not bound

by such "hypothetical state-

ments' that were not part of a

broke down early this year. As-

sad denied rumors that Syria

has had contacts with the Is-

Israeli-Syrian peace talks

There will not be any contact

between us and them unless

they agree that negotiations

start from where we stopped.

and not start from the begin-

Israel seized the Golan from

In September, Netanyahu

Party in May.

written deal

raeli government.

ning again," he said.

tion," said Palermo.

rebel leader Nestor Cerpa \*Advances were made for a solution to this serious situa-

The meeting won the free-dom 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) accompanied by two neutral mediators — Michel Minnig, the head of the International Red Cross in Peru, and the bishop of Ayacucho, Monsignor Juan Luis Cipriani.

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.

The hostage crisis started December 17, when about 20 members of the Tupac Amaru movement infiltrated a gala cocktail party in a wellplanned raid and seized more than 500 captives. The guerillas gradually released most hostages but still hold businessmen, police and govern ment officials

Peru's decision to send an official representative to meet

AFP/UNB photo

Syria in the 1967 Mideast war.

Syria demands that the plateau

be returned in exchange for a

peace accord with Israel. Ne-

tanyahu refuses to give up the

region, saying it is crucial to Is-

changed hostile rhetoric in re-

cent months and raised con-

cerns about military action. On

Wednesday, however, Ne-

tanyahu said he was certain the

two countries would make

that Syria has signaled it is

ready to resume peace talks at

the end of January. According

to the report. Syrian Foreign

Minister Farouk Shaara told

French President Jacques

Chirac during a visit to Paris

last week that Damascus was

willing to resume negotiations.

Israel radio reported Friday

Syria and Israel have ex-

rael security.

with the rebels marked the first time it had attempted face-toface contact, a significant advance in negotiations. It seemed to diminish the likelihood that force would be used to free the

The rebels' main demand is that Peru release their jailed comrades, who number about 300. So far, Fujimori's official position has been to refuse to negotiate with the rebels until they disarm and free all

Minnig and Cipriani spent about two hours inside the residence earlier Saturday, leaving and then returning with Palermo just before 1 pm Red Cross officials have said previously that Minnig goes in to receive or deliver messages. Cipriani has said his visits are

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

From the military hospital they left under police escort for undisclosed destinations.

Arafat to meet

Mubarak to wrap

up Hebron deal

with Israel

tinian 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, PLO

to visit Egypt today to brief

President Mubarak on the lat-

est developments on the Hebron

negotiations," said Palestinian

Arafat was also due to meet Is-

raeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu and Defence Minis-

ter Yftzhak Mordechai beiore

the accord was signed 'within

have said they expected Ne-

tanyahu and Arafat to sign an

agreement on the handover of

80 per cent of the West Bank city

of Hebron to Palestinian rule by

Storm death toll

rises to 137

in Malaysia

Dec 20: The death toll from

Malaysia's Christmas Day

storm disaster has risen to 137

and rescuers were pessimistic

about finding survivors among

them. More than 100 people are

still missing, newspapers said

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. They said, reports

locate survivors trapped

beneath the debris," Lieutenant

Wallen Gulak, a SMART section

commander, was reported as

saying by the New Sunday

Officials estimated that

The search would continue until all the missing were

Left-wing rebel

commanders back

to Guatemala

Left-wing rebel commanders re-

turned to Guatemala after years

greeted by hundreds of ecstatic

supporters hailing the end of a

brutal 36-year civil war, reports

peace treaty with the govern-

the Guatemalan National Revo-

On the eve of a landmark

Reuter.

GUATEMALA CITY, Dec 29

more than 100 people were still missing based on reports put in

by their family members.

located, the officials said.

Times newspaper.

"We no longer expect to

After a three-day search by

today, reports Reuter.

KOTA KINABALU, Malaysia,

Israeli and PLO officials

A senior Israeli official said

negotiator Hassan Asfour

the next day or two"

year's end.

"President Arafat is expected

officials said, reports Reuter:

JERUSALEM, Dec 29: Pales-



celebrate the survival of Uday Saddam Hussein, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's eldest son. The Iraqi regime arrested about 600 people since the December 12 assassination attempt on Uday, General Wafic Samarrai, former chief of Iraqi military intelligence announced AFP/UNB photo Saturday.

# 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, reports AFP. This day and vanguard newspapers announced that their boards of editors had respectively chosen "Mr. Assassin" and

"violence" as man of the year. Many prominent as well as ordinary Nigerians have been brutally killed by "Mr. Assassin, that faceless, nameless, unidentifiable personality who leaves no clues' after striking. this day wrote.

"This beast, this spirit, kills with braw ado 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 elan." the daily added, which carried a drawing of a masked assassin, gun to the ready, on its

In its five page report, the vanguard listed a litany of violent events which ended in tragedy. One noted victim was Ibrahim, the first child of general Sani Abacha, who died with 13 others when a presidential plane crashed last January near Kano. northern Nigeria.

## 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, reports

Chinese Embassy spokesman Hao Yinpiao said the two countries have an understanding on jointly developing the area and shelving conflicting territorial claims, and that the Philippines should abide by the agreement.

Last Wednesday, Philippine military chief Gen. Arnulfo Acedera opened a renovated airstrip on a Philippine-controlled island in the Spratlys. boosting Manila's capability to send troops and equipment to

The 1.3-kilometer (.8-mile) airstrip on freedom Island. which formerly accommodated

proved to allow use by cargo planes hike the C d 30 on which ... Acedera flew to the island. The 32-hectare (79-acre) island is one of eight islands and islets where the Philippines has stationed troops.

only light planes, has been im-

Acedera, who took provisions and Christmas presents for the Filipino soldiers, told reporters more improvements were planned on the island.

The islands, claimed in whole or in part by China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei, are believed to be sitting atop vast deposits of oil and gas.

peaceful settlement of claims

through consultations.

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

# 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, reports AP.

was to start, some 15,000 workers shouting anti-government slogans had already gathered at Yoido plaza near the center of Seoul. Organisers expected a crowd of up to 200,000.

ployed to prevent possible violence. Police authorized the rally but banned street demonstrations the protesters were planning to stage after the rally.

saying it was years since they "I am profoundly moved to the depths of my soul by such a warm reception," Carlos Gonzalez one of the URNG leaders, told an airport news conferin a show of protests.

They blared their car horns and hung out small red flags to mark their motorcades. Some workers leaned out of windows waving to other cars passing by The workers were demand

Half an hour before the rally

About 15,000 police were de-

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

ing the abolition of a law they fear would threaten their job security. The law was passed four days ago by ruling party legislators in a secretive. predawn parliamentary session, with no opposition members present.

> Strikes by a total of 373,000 workers at hundreds of automobile, shipbuilding and other

export plants have since snowballed into the country's largest labor protest ever. On Sunday, unionized subway workers in the southern city of Pusan joined their col-

leagues in Seoul who walked off their jobs a day earlier, forcing trains to run late. Nonunion workers were called in to help.

Illegal immigrants

#### Besides seeking amnesty, the from hideout to hideout. 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. which triggered a deadly manhunt, reports AP.

In a two-sentence apology, using wording agreed upon at a US-North Korea meeting in New York early Sunday, the Communist state also promised to prevent similar incidents from recurring in the future.

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.

But facing a severe food shortage, the North was seen as having no other option. It is asking for outside help to ease its economic crisis, exacerbated by devastating floods this year

More than 150 North Koreans have defected to South Korea in the past three years, including 50 so far this year. All reported widespread hunger in the country.

accused poacher-turned killer

has also demanded 285 million

dollars in cash as a pre-condi-

tion to his surrender. UNI said.

Karnataka formed a 800-mem-

ber taskforce last year to hunt

down Veerappan in the forests

shotgun and carries a reward of

33,000 dollars for murder, ele-

phant poaching and sandal-

wood smuggling, has evaded the

dragnet, the largest and costli-

est police action in India's his-

100 security personnel and for-

est guards during almost a

decade in the rugged southern

In 1993, Veerappan allegedly strangled his 22-day-old daugh-

ter because the infant was slow-

ing down the gang as it moved

Indian hills.

He is accused of killing some

Veerappan, who sports a

and hills of the two states.

Police in Tamil Nadu and

The apology became formal when it was carried by the North's official Korean Central News Agency, as agreed at the New York meeting.

"The spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK (North Korea) is authorised to express deep regret for the submarine incident in the coastal waters of Kangnung, South Korea, in September, 1996 that caused the tragic loss of human life," the apology said

in English. "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," it added.



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. This prayer is usually performed in Islamic countries when the rainfall is late during winter season. - AFP/UNB photo

### 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

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

It occurred in the Himalayan mountains of Pakistan's northern Azad Kashmir province, the flashpoint of two wars between Pakistan and India in the past 49 years said the independent newspaper. The News.

Thousands of Pakistani and Indian soldiers face off against each other along the disputed border between the two coun-

It wasn't immediately clear what triggered the mudslide.

# 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, reports

Afterward, mourners marched Saturday into the streets leading from Belgrade's main cemetery, blowing whistles and small horns as they have during the past six weeks of protests. The victim, 39-yearold Predrag Starcevic, died Tuesday from a beating by Milosevic supporters.

Protests have continued daily since Milosevic annulled the results of November 17 local elections that opposition candidates had won. On Friday, the 38th day of protests, international mediators in Geneva urged Milosevic to concede defeat. He has not done so.

The protests pose the biggest challenge to Milosevic since he rose to power nine years ago. and the authoritarian president has seemed intent on crushing them, at the risk of losing international support.

No police were visible during the post-funeral march, but in downtown Belgrade, riot police formed tight ranks to prevent 15,000 students from leaving a pedestrian zone for their daily march through the city.

The front line of students stood about 15 yards (14 meters) from helmeted police carrying shields. Other students walked in circles, with their hands behind their heads, as if they were in a prison yard.

"The cordon is the only answer to everything," Cedomir Mihajlovic, a student organiser, told independent Radio Index.

The students called for the resignation of Serbian Interior Minister Zoran Sokolovic, saying that he was "the most responsible" for police behaviour. In an open letter to the Serbian and Yugoslav interior ministers. 41 Belgrade University law professors protested the police's over-reaction" to protests

The premier of Montenegro, Serbia's tiny partner in the Yugoslav federation, sent a message of support to Belgrade students on Saturday. Montenegro has always supported prodemocracy tendencies and is now supporting you," Premier Milo Djukanovic said in his message.

Also Saturday, domestic support for the protesters spread to the head of Serbia's Orthodox church, and hundreds of leading intellectuals.

In an early message for Orthodox Christmas, celebrated on January 7. Patriarch Pavle urged a peaceful solution and acceptance of the elections.

"The respect of law and justice obliges us all to respect the freely expressed will of people, to prevent autocracy and violence that never can and never will bring any good to people and state," Pavle said.

Hundreds of writers, artists, doctors and other intellectuals signed a petition declaring their opposition to Milosevic's regime, which they called a "totalitarian system — the last of its kind in Europe." The Fonet independent news agency published the petition as an open letter.

Serbia's middle class has dwindled as five years of war drove many professionals and young men into exile and draft-

dodging. The petition indicated that many people once wary of the opposition have now come out against Milosevic

At the funeral Saturday, opposition leaders Vuk Draskovic, Zoran Djindjic and Vesna Pesic walked slowly behind the black hearse, with the victim's widow, 10 Orthodox priests and about 50 mourners carrying wreaths

"One day, when Belgrade becomes the way you wanted it to be, a street will be named after you," Draskovic said, addressing the deceased

On Friday, about 60,000 opposition supporters defied riot police to rally in celebration of the report from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe which upheld their electoral triumph

The OSCE said the opposition coalition Zajedno, or "To-

#### gether." won elections in 13 communities, including Serbia's second-largest city of Nis, and in nine districts of Belgrade. In an indication Milosevic

would ignore the group's findings, the electoral commission said it will call for new elections for 17 city council seats in Nis, originally won by the opposition but later given to the ruling party.

Draskovic said that was unacceptable. "No reruns, no repetition of elections there where we won," he told a news confer-

Doctors from Belgrade's main hospital said 18 people sought treatment after Milosevic's police clubbed small groups of protesters after rallies ended Friday. At least three people were arrested.

# fleeing from KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 29: II

legal immigrants who came to Malaysia to work are fleeing the country ahead of a December 31 deadline for deportation of those without entry permits. newspapers today quoted police and officials as saying, reports Reuter

Police have also stepped up patrols near Kuala Lumpur embassies to prevent the immigrants from going their to seek political asylum to avoid being sent home, the New Sunday Times newspaper said.
It quoted Perlis State immi-

gration director Raja Yahya Aziz as saying 15 Myanmars and five Bangladeshis were caught while trying to cross in to Thailand Perlis State is next to southern Thailand.