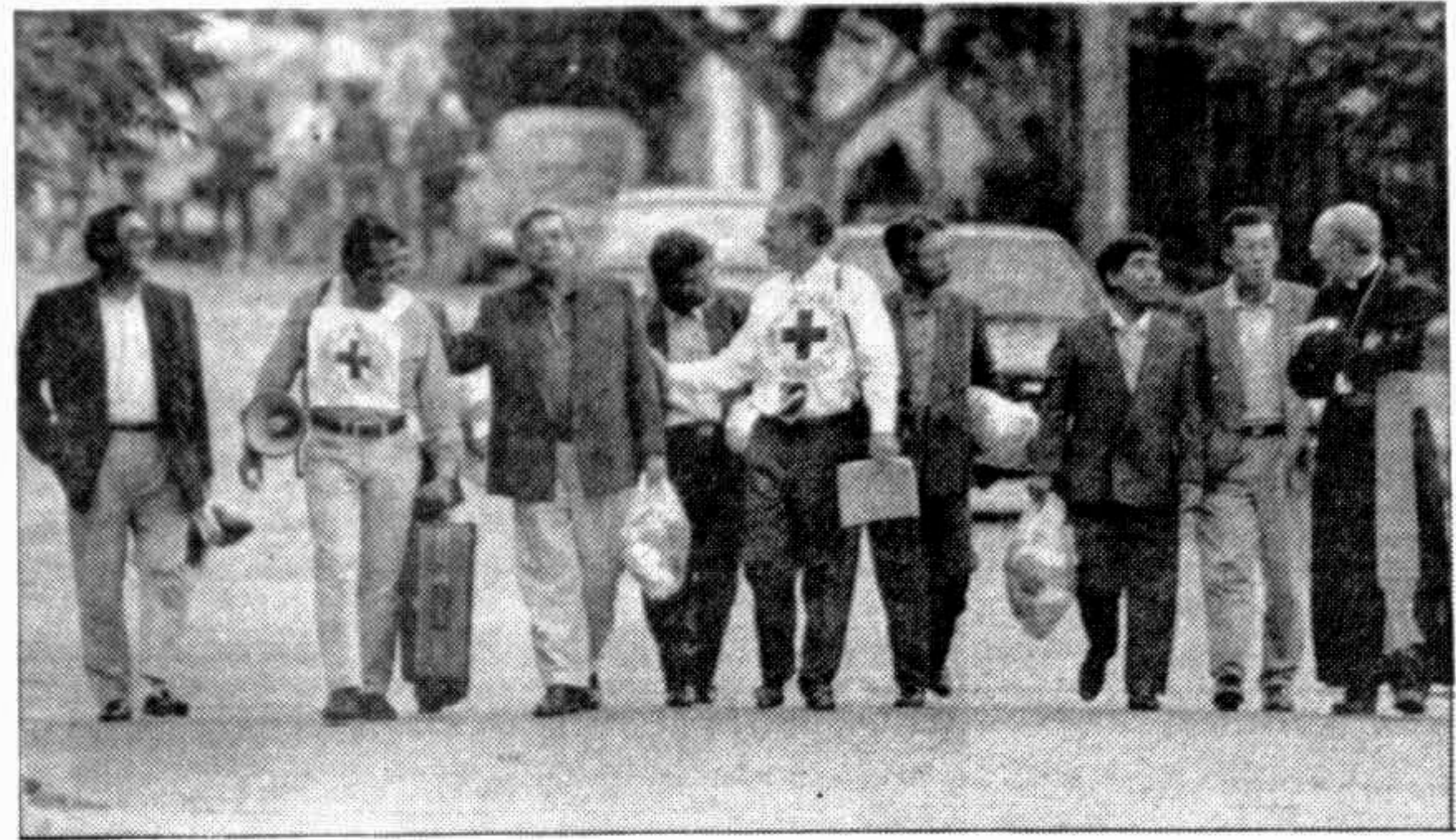


International



Officials of the International Red Cross and Peruvian Monsignor Juan Luis Cipriani (R) accompany the hostages released Wednesday by Peruvian rebels in Lima. The guerillas are still holding 74 people, demanding the release of jailed comrades. — AFP/UNB photo

India decides to ask 2 US diplomats to leave country

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: India has decided to ask two US diplomats to leave after an Indian intelligence official was accused of having unauthorised links with them, the Hindustan Times said today, reports Reuter. The newspaper did not name the diplomats but said one was the local station director of the Central Intelligence Agency. It was unclear if the Foreign Ministry had told US Ambassador Frank Wisner of the decision as Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haider was on leave, the daily said. "We see this as an internal Indian government matter," a US Embassy spokeswoman said, she declined to elaborate. "It is not the policy of the government to comment on such media reports," an Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman said. The Hindustan Times said the decision to ask "the

Americans to leave quietly" was taken at a meeting of senior civil servants, including the chief of the home (interior) and foreign intelligence departments and senior Home Ministry officials. AFP says, The US Embassy here declined today to comment on a news report that two senior diplomats had been asked to leave India for alleged espionage. "We see this as an internal Indian government matter," press officer Donna Roginsky told AFP, "there are no other comments." The mass-circulation Hindustan Times daily quoted official sources as saying two officials, including the station director of the Central Intelligence Agency were being deported. "The US government as a matter of policy does not comment on intelligence matters,"

CWC chooses Kesri as parliamentary leader

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Sitaram Kesri, who forced former Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao to quit the leadership of the Congress (I) Party, is set to strengthen his grip on the party, reports AFP. The Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's think-tank, said late Wednesday all its members, except former minister Rajesh Pilot, backed Kesri as their choice for parliamentary leader. Kesri, who replaced Rao as party president in September, last month engineered the resignation of the corruption-tainted leader as head of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP). "The CWC, except for one person, has requested Kesri to shoulder the responsibility of the CPP leadership,"

spokesman Vithal Narahari Gadgil told reporters. "All the members feel unity of command is necessary for the party Kesri has begun well and started rejuvenating the party. He represents social forces which have become conscious and assertive of their rights." Gadgil said a committee comprising Manmohan Singh, the architect of India's 1991 market reforms, and his former Cabinet colleague Nawal Kishore Sharma would meet CPP members on Friday. "This meeting will disclose how many people favour a 'consensus' candidate and how many want elections," he said. Rao, prime minister from 1991 until last year when Congress suffered its worst elec-

toral defeat, is currently charged over three corruption scandals but is still a member of the CPP and the CWC. Kesri, a party treasurer for 16 years whose links with the Congress cover five decades, now faces opposition as parliamentary leader only from Pilot who repeated late Tuesday: "I am firm in my stand. I am a candidate for the CPP post." But Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, a senior CPP member who led a campaign against Rao's leadership, told AFP on Thursday that Kesri would win. "It is a foregone conclusion that he will be chosen," Das Munshi said, adding that other contenders, including former defence minister Sharad Pawar, had withdrawn.

7 more captives freed in New Year's Day Lima hostage crisis shows no sign of ending soon

LIMA, Peru, Jan 2: It's starting to become a ritual: Waiting and guessing, then joyous relief when weary hostages, many still wearing their rumpled suits, emerge from weeks of captivity in the swank home of the Japanese ambassador. Leftist guerrillas have freed more than 400 captives — including seven on Wednesday — by 74 were still trapped in the cream-colored mansion Thursday, and Peru's hostage crisis showed no signs of ending soon. The rebels are demanding the release of about 300 of their jailed colleagues, but President Alberto Fujimori says he will not address their demands until all hostages are freed. It has been more than two weeks since rebels of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement crashed the stylish soiree at the ambassador's house and seized more than 500 guests — politicians, generals and Japanese executives. A Who's Who of Peru's rich and powerful suddenly found themselves under the control of

brazen and mostly youthful guerrillas armed with AK-47 rifles, grenades and explosives. From the outset, the masked guerrillas began releasing hostages, freeing about 200 — including all the women — on December 17, the night of the raid. There have been many other releases since — a batch of 20 on Saturday, two on New Year's Eve. Wednesday's events seemed almost a replay of past releases. The day began with journalists camped — as they have been for days — behind yellow police tape, while curious onlookers gaped down a ghostly embassy row sealed off by police. The officers sweated in their bullet-proof vests from the humidity of the Southern Hemisphere summer. Suddenly, 400 pro-government marchers arrived shouting "Enough of terrorism! We want peace!" as they waved white flags, marched to tinny tubas and released doves into the air.

The marchers left. An hour later, the hostage release began. Red Cross workers — camped closest to the gates of the residence — suddenly stood. TV cameramen scampered up aluminum stepladders, focused, and local TV went live. Suddenly, the ashen-faced hostages appeared, with journalists shouting: "How are you?" and bystanders applauding. "Happy! Happy!" replied one. Peruvian Juan Assereto, breaking into a smile after he crossed the well-clipped lawn and passed through 10-foot walls ringing the residence. The bus sped away, four policemen on motorcycles leading the formation to a nearby hospital where the former hostages underwent brief medical check-ups. Then most were taken to a Peruvian-Japanese civic association for tearful hugs from loved ones.

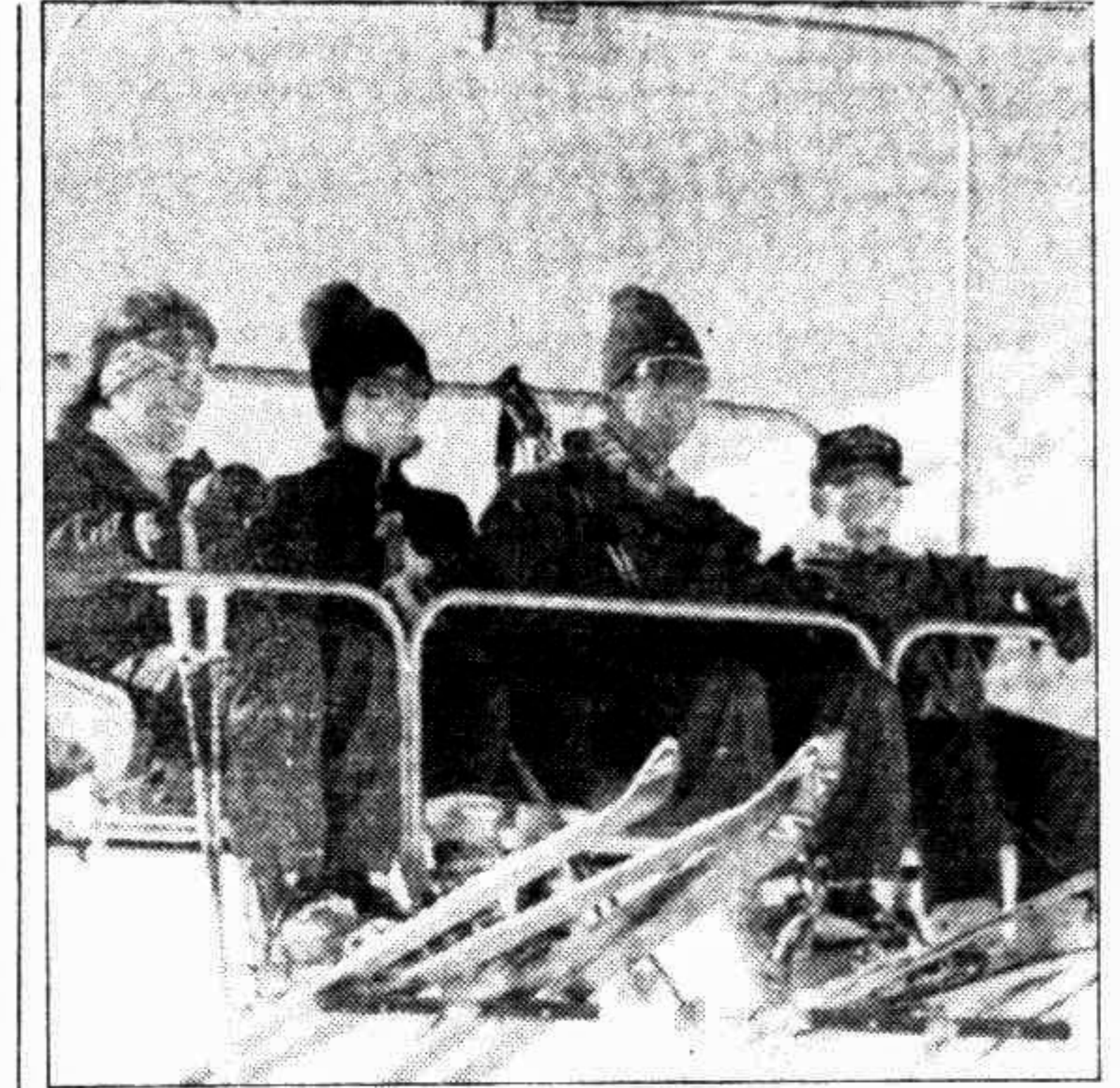
Journalists barred from meeting Suu Kyi at home

Yangon, Jan 2: The military regime told journalists Thursday that they will not be allowed to meet pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi at her home, openly confirming restrictions on whom she can meet and where, reports AP. Diplomats and members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy will be permitted to enter her lakeside compound, which is sealed off by roadblocks, provided they secure prior permission from the government, officials said. "Journalists can meet her at other places," said spokesman Col Thein Swe at the government's monthly news conference. Asked when the roadblocks would be removed, he said: "Depends on the situation." The statement was the most formal admission made by the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) that the relative ease Suu Kyi enjoyed in meeting journalists since her release from six years of house arrest in July 1995 through mid-1996 has ended. Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace prize for her non-violent promotion of democracy, has met only rarely with

journalists since November, and only at the homes of friends or social functions. Most recently, she gave a short news conference New Year's Eve at the home of Kyi Maung, an NLD vice chairman. Since blocking her from holding a party congress in May 1996, the SLORC has steadily increased pressure on Suu Kyi and her party, detaining and releasing hundreds of members and sentencing scores to prison. The only occasions she was permitted to meet ordinary Burmese, in weekend rallies before thousands outside her home, were halted in late September when the regime started putting roadblocks outside her home. The restrictions culminated last month when authorities told her not to leave her home for her own safety — and blocked her trying at one point with riot police — amid demonstrations by hundreds of students demanding an independent union and greater freedoms. She has been able to leave with greater ease over the past week.

Polling begins in Singapore

SINGAPORE, Jan 2: Singapore voters went to the polls today in what has turned into a referendum on Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's track record, with the ruling party already assured of a clear majority, reports AFP. After an unexpectedly heated campaign, about 765,000 voters were eligible to cast their ballots for 36 parliamentary seats being contested by opposition and independent candidates in the 83-member Parliament. The People's Action Party (PAP), in power for 37 years now, won without a fight in 47 seats but aggressively campaigned in remaining constituencies to prevent the opposition from enlarging its presence in parliament. Four opposition candidates won in the tightly governed islands 1991 elections, their best showing ever, and the PAP had expressed concern about the possibility of losing further ground in Thursday's vote. "This election is watched not just by Singapore but by other countries. It is a very important election because it is the first time I am fighting as PM with a full track record, so they will want to see how I perform," Goh said on the eve of the vote.



Prince Charles (2nd from right) and his younger son Prince Harry (R) ride in a chair-lift to Mt Gotschna near Klosters, Wednesday. They are accompanied by Santa (L) and Tara Palmer-Tomkinson, daughters of Prince Charles' friend Charly Palmer-Tomkinson. Prince Charles and his son Harry arrived in Klosters on Tuesday for their traditional skiing holidays there. — Reuters/UNB photo

8 Libyans to die for spying

CAIRO, Jan 2: Libya's supreme Military Court has sentenced six officers and two civilians to death for spying, alleging they used equipment supplied by the US Central Intelligence Agency, reports AP. Reporting the convictions, Wednesday, state-controlled Libyan television said: "The agent-spies... supplied agents of foreign governments with information relating to the country's defence secrets, for espionage purposes, by exploiting their membership of the Libyan army." The television said they belonged to a banned organisation linked to agents of foreign governments, but it did not name the governments or say when the incidents took place. The broadcasts were monitored by the British Broadcasting Corp.

Curfew imposed in Indonesian town

JAKARTA, Indonesia, Jan 2: Fighting among young people killed five people in a Borneo town early this week, and authorities sent in hundreds of troops and imposed a curfew, Indonesia's official Antara news agency reported Thursday, reports AP. "We are still investigating the cause of the violence," Antara quoted Col. Zainuri Hasyim, military commander of the town of Sanggau Ledo, as saying of fighting that broke out Monday. He said calm has been restored. Hasyim said hundreds of soldiers and military police had been deployed in the town of 12,000 people in Indonesia's West Kalimantan province, Antara reported.

Govt firm to end ethnic war within 3 months Heavy fighting leaves 29 killed in Lanka

COLOMBO, Jan 2: Heavy fighting raged in eastern Sri Lanka as security forces smashed a jungle base of the Tamil Tiger guerrillas Wednesday, killing at least 20 rebels, officials said Wednesday, reports AP. Government soldiers backed by helicopter gun ships destroyed a jungle base of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) near the village of Rukam in the eastern district of Batticaloa, officials said. A simultaneous military offensive was underway in the Vadamarachchi sector of the northern Peninsula of Jaffna where a top Tiger leader identified as major Rajeev was killed, officials said. The LTTE's clandestine voice of Tigers radio confirmed the death of Rajeev in a confrontation with security forces in Vadamarachchi and said he was one of their leaders from the eastern district of Batticaloa. The LTTE in a statement from its London office on Tuesday said that air force bombers pounded heavily populated Tamil villages in the Batticaloa district. At least one civilian was killed, the LTTE said. It said ground troops also launched an artillery attack on villages forcing hundreds of civilians to flee their homes. AP adds, Tamil rebels killed six soldiers and three Tamil civilians Thursday, the military said, and the government promised to complete within three months its package to end the 13-year ethnic war. The soldiers, riding on a tractor, were blown up by a land mine at Thurunaveli, a village in the northern Jaffna Peninsula, said Brigadier Tissa Jay-

President promises new constitution to end war in Sudan

KHARTOUM, Jan 2: In a speech marking Sudan's Independence Day, president Omar el-Bashir on Wednesday promised a new constitution aimed at ending the country's 14-year civil war, reports AP. He also said Sudan would not tolerate aggression on its borders, an apparent reference to recent problems with Eritrea. The new constitution will "express a new era and a new line of thought, where freedom will be the main pillar," he said in a speech carried nationwide on radio and television. "All will be based on citizenship that will not differentiate between people on grounds of religion or race," he said. Meanwhile, Sudan's former prime minister, Sadeq el-Mahdi, said in a speech in Cairo, Egypt, that the most dangerous thing to the unity of Sudan is the current regime of el-Bashir.

Basu comes under fire for slating party decision

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu came under attack today for criticising his party's decision not to join the United Front government, reports PTL. In a rare and significant move, the CPI (M) Politburo, reacting to Basu's remarks during a newspaper interview, chose to issue a statement today stating that the subject of joining the UF government was 'settled and closed' after it was discussed at the party's central committee meeting in May last year. The West Bengal Chief Minister 'old the Asian Age' daily that the central committee's decision not to join government was a 'historic political blunder'. Basu, himself a Politburo member, also said the central committee had in a majority decision over-ruled the minority view in favour of joining government. "The question of joining the central government was fully discussed by the central committee of the party in May 1996. The central committee decided against joining the government. With this, the issue was settled and closed," said the Politburo's carefully worded statement. Kerala Chief Minister EK Nayanar said time has come for the CPI (M) to seriously consider if Basu could air his views in public after the party had taken its stand on the question of joining the UF government. "It is a matter for our party to consider seriously whether Basu should have openly made his remark," observed the veteran Marxist leader from Kerala.

US lawmakers turning their attention to immigration

WASHINGTON, Jan 1: With more border police and new sanctions against illegal aliens in place, some lawmakers are turning their attention to how many and what kind of legal immigrants the United States should welcome, reports AP. Despite the prominence immigration played in the 1996 political campaign, it's unclear what will be accomplished on the issue this year. Rep Lamar Smith, who sponsored immigration legislation debated in the US House of Representatives last year, said he hasn't yet decided what, if anything, he'll propose when the new Congress convenes next week. "Any immigration reform that will go forward will be a bipartisan effort," Smith said cautiously. "I don't think there will be nearly the same opposition to anything that we'll do." Eighteen months ago, a commission on immigration reform recommended cutting the number of new legal immigrants from 675,000 to 550,000 a year and giving priority to spouses and children of permanent US residents. President Clinton endorsed the idea, but it died last fall under a barrage of attacks from immigration advocacy groups and their allies in Congress. Instead, lawmakers got tougher with illegal immigrants. This time around, several business, labour and social service groups ranging across the liberal-conservative gamut have formed a loose alliance to fight any proposed changes in the legal immigration framework. They're leavening their arguments with the passionate images described at the base of the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

'97 may become a key year for many Asian countries

HONG KONG, Jan 2: Asia embarked on New Year festivities with a mix of celebration and trepidation over what could be a key year for many countries, reports AFP. One person was shot dead in celebratory gunfire that erupts each year in the Philippines and five more were killed and dozens injured in traffic accidents. Seven people were killed in accidents in the Indonesian capital and 35 people injured, 13 seriously, when a balcony where a party was being held near Perth, Australia collapsed. But end of year revelry took on key political significance in Hong Kong, the Korean Peninsula, Pakistan and other places that dominated headlines in 1996. Hong Kong marked the final six months of British sovereignty with a huge fireworks party while diehard supporters of colonial rule listened to the Jardine cannon at midnight on the other side of

Victoria harbour. The fireworks display which drew 170,000 people was one of many events planned in the runup to Hong Kong's historic return to Chinese rule on July 1. Around 50 pro-democracy activists held their own vigil while around 400 people in Tuxedos and Ballgowns sipped champagne at the ball for the firing of Hong Kong's famous cannon — owned by the Jardine Matheson trading group which pressed for the British government to take military action against China 150 years ago. In Seoul, President Kim Young Sam of South Korea expressed hope that 1997 would mark a 'turning point' in relations with the Stalinist North. Tension has eased considerably between the rival states since North Korea apologised this week for a submarine incursion in September. To mark the new year, the North's reclusive leader, Kim Jong Il paid a midnight visit to mausoleum of his late father,

Kim Il Sung, in Pyongyang, the official Korean Central News Agency reported. Barely a month from crucial legislative elections in Pakistan, police used teargas and truncheons against Islamic fundamentalist activists trying to prevent revellers from seeing in the new year on a Karachi beach. Religious groups had said they would halt dance parties and concerts on December 31st but security personnel stood guard at large hotels. Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi attended a new year's eve celebration outside her home. Myanmar also faces a key year because of international condemnation of a new clampdown on the NLD. Much attention will be focused on whether the military junta manages to get membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations this year — ASEAN's 30th anniversary.

India to be affected if Agni missile project put on hold

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: India's decision to put the Agni missile project on hold will not only affect its strategic interests but also demoralise the scientific community working on the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP), warn defence experts, reports PTL. With countries around India having ballistic missiles which can reach most of our cities, it is not advisable to shelve the Agni missile project, says C Uday Bhaskar, Deputy Director at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA). Agni is a re-entry technology demonstration project, which has been successfully completed and all objectives have been met. The Agni project did not envisage development of a missile system, the government told the parliamentary standing committee on defence last month. The Agni, the crown of the IGMDP, has been designed to carry a one-ton nuclear or conventional warhead and was first tested on May 22, 1989. The missile, which was tested successfully on three occasions, has a range of 2,500 km.

A decision to develop and produce a missile system based on Agni missile technology can be taken at an appropriate time consistent with prevailing threat perception, global and regional security, the standing committee report said. If the government is going to give up the Agni missile, then we are literally giving up the nuclear option and there is no point in opposing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), said Rahul Roy Chaudhury, a research officer at IDSA. However, the Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, reacting to mounting opposition, reportedly assured that the missile programme was not completely shelved. The Defence Ministry said research on the rocket had been completed after three tests ending in early 1994 and there were no plans to produce the 14-tonne, 19-metre Agni. If India wants to develop an Inter Continental Ballistic Missile, then Agni programme has to be pursued and tested at least 20 times before it is deployed, the experts say.



Israeli border police try to keep order as protests erupt after Israeli soldier Noam Friedman, fired on a crowded Palestinian market in the West Bank town of Hebron Wednesday. Seven Palestinians were wounded in the attack by the non-combat soldier whose aim was to torpedo the imminent Israel-Palestinian deal on a redeployment in Hebron. Israeli PM Netanyahu has condemned the attack and underlined the need for an agreement on handing the West Bank city over to Palestinian rule. — AFP/UNB photo