

International

Japanese reporter, his Peruvian translator freed from jail

BRIEFLY

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42 die as ferry capsizes in China: The death toll from a ferry capsized in the southwestern province of Sichuan has risen to 42, with the recovery of nine more bodies, press reports said Sunday.

The accident occurred January 3 in foggy conditions on the Tuojiang River when an overloaded ferry boat collided with a cargo barge. The ferry, licensed to carry 42 passengers, was loaded with 60 passengers and 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds) of oranges when it collided with the barge which was transporting nearly twice its cargo weight limit.

New FM appointed in Belarus: Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko appointed a new foreign minister on Saturday, the Interfax news agency reported.

Filipinos torch own homes to get aid: Villagers in the southern Philippines are setting fire to their own homes in order to avail of government aid funds, a local newspaper reported in Manila.

Noted British author dies: Writer Elspeth Huxley, who described her childhood in colonial East Africa in her best-known book, "The Flame Trees of Thika," has died at the age of 89.

Soldier kills 4 in Russia: Four people were killed and two seriously injured Saturday when a soldier went on the rampage in the central Russian city of Perm.

Blast hits police post in Ireland: An explosion on Saturday hit an unoccupied police post in Tempo village, in the southwest of northern Ireland.

Strong quake shakes Mexico: A strong earthquake shook Mexico City and other areas of the country Saturday but officials said there were no immediate reports of victims or damage.

US peace envoy due in Cyprus: A US peace envoy is to arrive in Nicosia yesterday in a bid to quell mounting tensions on the divided island over Turkish threats to attack if Greek Cypriots go ahead with plans to deploy Russian missiles.

Hashimoto pays tribute to Ho Chi Minh: Visiting Japanese Premier Ryutaro Hashimoto laid a wreath at the mausoleum of Vietnam's revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh yesterday at the end of a 24-hour trip to Hanoi.

Myanmar police halt supporters of Suu Kyi: More than 60 riot police in three light trucks were stationed around the junction.

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LIMA Jan 12: A Japanese reporter for the Asahi television network and his Peruvian translator were freed late Saturday after spending four days in jail for evading a police blockade, the network, and police said.

Reporter Hitomi Tsuyoshi, who's a Japanese, and translator Victor Borja, a Peruvian, were arrested Tuesday for entering the Japanese Embassy residence.

The two had been freed by the National Anti-Terrorism Police, police told AFP.

At this moment they are being freed. They are okay. They are fine," Dolly Mascarenas with Asahi television in Lima told AFP.

Mascarenas also said that the Japanese foreign minister was in possession of the four cassettes that police had seized from the two journalists and would give them to Asahi headquarters in Tokyo.

Peruvian Prime Minister Alberto Pandolfi had previously said that Japanese network had agreed to give up the taped interviews in what became a battle between the government and the international press.

Tsuyoshi and Borja had been picked up for questioning by Peru's National Anti-Terrorism Police for alleged "terrorist connections."

Under a state of emergency ordered for Lima on December 18, the day after the hostage crisis began, the two could have been held indefinitely without formal charges.

Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto has criticised the television crew and called their actions "extremely regrettable," Jiji Press reported.

Meanwhile, Nestor Cerpa Cartolini, the leader of rebels holding 74 hostages has bet the future of his dwindling Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement on the takeover of the Japanese ambassador's residence, Peruvian and US analysts say.

The pro-Cuban group, formed in 1983, has demanded the release of some 440 people jailed for ties to the rebel movement as the price of freeing prominent Peruvian, Bolivian and Japanese hostages.

Analysts say anything less would mean the end of Tupac Amaru-which has already been severely weakened during the 6 and half years since President Alberto Fujimori came into office.

An estimated 30,000 people have died in political violence since another rebel group, the Maoist Shining Path, first struck in 1980.

Since 1920, the founders of both the Shining Path, the stronger of the two, and the smaller Tupac Amaru have been captured and sentenced to life in prison.

Tupac Amaru rebels had planned to seize the Peruvian Congress but that plot was thwarted when security forces stormed a rebels safe house in a December 1995 shootout in Lima.

Formed in 1983, the group was most active in late 1980s and early 1990s.

Carlos Tapia a political analyst who believes the Tupac Amaru has fewer than 80 armed men in two groups outside the ambassador's residence, said that the rebels had gained spectacular propaganda (but) ... can't continue as guerrillas.

Carlos Degregoria Peruvian political scientist with the inter-American dialogue in Washington said that a negotiated settlement of the 25-day hostage-taking would reduce political tensions in Peru.

"This would be good for President Alberto Fujimori because it would give him democratic credentials and he would be able to say that he had changed and that he was no longer authoritarian," Degregoria told reporters in Washington last week.

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Serbian ultra-nationalist and opposition leader Vuk Draskovic (R) argues with a police officer during an anti-government rally in central Belgrade Saturday. The regime of strongman Slobodan Milosevic, seemingly bending to international pressure, announced a review of cancelled opposition municipal election victories, immediately criticised.

Mother Teresa won't contest for her post

CALCUTTA, Jan 12: Mother Teresa has virtually decided not to contest the post of superior general of her Roman Catholic order as hectic preparations are on for its elections on February 2, an aide said today, reports Reuters.

"It is the God, who will now decide my successor," the associate of the 86-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner quoted her as saying late last week.

The legendary nun founded her Calcutta-based Missionaries of Charity Order in 1948 and has led it since then with charisma but frail health has made it increasingly difficult for her to run the order anymore, her aide said.

Students hold protest march against Serbian govt

BELGRADE, Jan 12: Belgrade's students began a new protest march against the embattled Serbian government early this morning after police pulled out at the end of a face-off of more than four hours, reports AFP.

The 100 police quit around 1:00 am (0000 GMT) after blocking some 2,000 students in an atmosphere that was much more relaxed than previously.

The government of President Slobodan Milosevic said late Saturday that it would review the results of contested local elections, but the move did nothing to halt eight weeks of protests in the capital Belgrade.

The statement was the clearest sign yet that the regime would finally back down from its confrontation with adamant opposition protesters.

Yeltsin's condition stable: MOSCOW, Jan 12: Boris Yeltsin's condition stabilized Saturday, but the Kremlin stopped short of saying doctors had achieved a breakthrough in their battle with his pneumonia, reports AP.

The presidential press service described Yeltsin as "somewhat" more active on Saturday and said doctors were treating him with antibiotics.

The chief Kremlin doctor, Sergei Mironov, said Yeltsin caught a cold over the holidays that turned into pneumonia in both lungs. He said Yeltsin's lungs sounded clearer on Saturday.

Army turns down offer by LTTE to return 27 bodies

COLOMBO, Jan 12: Sri Lankan military authorities have turned down an offer by Tamil Tiger guerrillas to return the bodies of 27 people killed in a major confrontation three days ago, relief workers said, reports AFP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had agreed to give the bodies believed to be those of government soldiers to the local Red Cross but the military had turned it down saying identification was not possible.

Red cross officials said the scheduled handover of the bodies today could not take place because the military did not want to take charge of bodies that were beyond recognition.

Mass funeral for 140 rebels held Tigers mount fresh attack against army positions

COLOMBO, Jan 12: Tamil Tiger guerrillas launched a fresh attack against an army bunker line in northern Sri Lanka today, killing five soldiers and losing at least one of their own fighters, officials here said, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) mounted the attack against army positions at Chettikulam in the district of Vavuniya at dawn and the fighting went on for nearly four hours, officials said.

They said at least 16 soldiers were wounded in the attack and the army used artillery guns to beat off the Tiger onslaught.

It was the first big attack by the Tigers since a massive raid against two army camps further to the north of the country on Thursday. In that attack both sides lost hundreds of men killed and wounded.

Earlier report says, Tamil Tiger guerrillas held a mass funeral for over 140 rebels killed in a major assault against security forces while the military braced for more attacks, officials and rebel radio said today.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said over their clandestine radio that funerals were held on Saturday in the northern region of Wanni and the area was decorated with red and yellow flags as a sign of mourning.

Twenty-seven bodies of soldiers killed by the Tigers were also handed over to the local Red Cross to be returned to the military," the LTTE's Voice of Tigers radio said.

It said sombre music was played in areas under their control in the north of the country, as a sign of respect for the guerrillas killed in Thursday's pre-dawn raid against the Paranathan and Elephant Pass army camps.

The LTTE said it killed over 200 army soldiers in both attacks but the Defence Ministry here said the military death toll was 161 while another 232 escaped.

However, the ministry claimed that more than 350 Tigers were killed.

Charles, Di agree to bury the hatchet: LONDON: Prince Charles and his divorced wife Princess Diana want to bury the hatchet for the sake of their children and the monarchy, according to the Sunday Times, quoting "a senior royal source," reports AFP.

The paper said the couple had even decided to attend an official ceremony together later this year, provided their separate agendas allowed it, the paper said.

The prince has reportedly complained in the past that his ex-wife had deliberately undertaken official engagements on the same day as he had in order to put him in the shade.

Last week it was reported that a strategy group had decided to launch a long-term programme to groom Charles for the throne including taking on more of the queen's official duties.

The group reflects concern over his negative public image, following his divorce last year from Princess Diana.

A recent controversial television show conducted a mammoth straw poll of 2.6 million people which indicated that half the population felt the monarchy would not last another 50 years, though two-thirds of them said they supported it as an institution.

The BBC reported that the plan for what was being termed a "people's prince," was also designed to dispel any suggestion that he might stand down as heir to the throne in favour of his eldest son, Prince William, or even his sister, Princess Anne.



A dancer from China's far west Xinjiang Province performs at a restaurant in Beijing on Saturday entertaining guests with a traditional Xinjiang belly dance. Beijing, once known for its quiet nightlife, is now on an upswing with the latest discos, nightclubs and various other entertainment outlets.

Example for would-be hoaxers

BEIJING: A Chinese woman who joked that she had a bomb in her bag prior to boarding a plane was detained for 10 days under China's tight airline security regulations, a report said Sunday, reports AFP.

The woman, identified only as Liang, was about to board a flight at Guangzhou's Baiyun Airport on December 28, when she became concerned that another passenger had designs on her hand baggage, the Xinmin Evening News said.

"Don't touch my bag, there's a bomb inside," Liang shouted at the passenger as they started to board.

Her comment was taken seriously by airport security staff, who insisted on searching Liang's belongings.

Although the search revealed nothing and despite Liang's protestations that she was only joking, the airport decided to detain her for 10 days as an example to other would-be hoaxers, the newspaper said.

Violence claimed 1000 in Assam last year

GAUHATI, India, Jan 12: Nearly 1,000 people were killed in 1996 in the northeastern Indian state of Assam where secessionist movements and tribal warfare maintained a steady cadence of violence, reports AP.

According to figure released Friday by state authorities, 734 people were killed by anti-India militants, and about 200 people were killed in clashes among rival tribes in the isolated and underdeveloped corner of India.

On Saturday, suspected rebels of the Bodo tribe detonated a land mine on a road as a poe bus was passing. Two federal policemen were killed and 13 people, including five civilians were injured, police said.

The attack occurred near Kokrajhar, 200 kilometres (160 miles) west of Gauhati.

The worst incident was the bombing of a New Delhi-bound train December 30 that killed at least 34 people, said the report.

A militant group of the Bodo tribe, the Bodoland Liberation Tiger Force, claimed responsibility for the train bombing.

In recent years, troubles in the northeastern states bordering China and Burma have been overshadowed by the uprising in Kashmir, largely because of the support for the Muslim Kashmiri rebels by Pakistan and the potential for a fourth India-Pakistan war.

But the insurgencies in the northeast are equally deadly.

At least three groups are fighting the Indian government in Assam, the largest state in the region and the center of India's tea and oil industries.

Nationalist Assamese, the dominant ethnic group have been fighting since the 1970s for independence from India

which they say failed to stop hundreds of thousands of poor migrants illegally crossing from Bangladesh, threatening the ethnic balance.

Naga tribesman have been fighting against India since the 1940s. Extremists want an independent country for the Nagas, who are spread over four northeastern Indian states and Burma.

The most recent uprising, by Bodo militants, proved the most deadly last year, said government reports, attributing more than 225 deaths to the Bodos. Most Bodo groups would be satisfied with their own state within India that would give them control over their own lives and resources.

Among the casualties of the various insurgencies were 119 troops of Indian security forces and police, the report said.

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Actors Chris Farley and Nicollette Sheridan, stars of the new film "Beverly Hills Ninja" pose at the film's premiere Saturday in Los Angeles. Farley plays the title role.

Myanmar police halt supporters of Suu Kyi

YANGON, Jan 12: Pro-democracy activists hoping to hear weekend speeches by their leaders dispersed Saturday after seeing they were outnumbered and surrounded by security forces, reports AP.

About 50 supporters of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been largely silenced by the military regime in recent months, waited briefly at an intersection near her home in hopes of hearing her speak.

The vice chairman of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, Tin Oo, then met with the group at the Goodlife Junction, conveying a message from Suu Kyi thanking them for waiting for her. Then he asked them to leave.

More than 60 riot police in three light trucks were stationed around the junction. Plainclothes members of Myanmar's powerful intelligence service were also seen in the area.

Still largely confined to her home, Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi has been sending her senior party leaders to speak to supporters she normally addressed at weekend rallies at her home.

By cordoning off her house, the military has forced the now much smaller crowds to gather at a nearby intersection.

Suu Kyi, who was released from a six-year house arrest in July 1995, last spoke at the intersection on Nov 23.

Prospect of face-to-face talks raises hopes for end to Lima crisis

LIMA Jan 12: The prospect of a face-to-face meeting this weekend between government negotiators and rebels holding 74 hostages has boosted hopes that the four-week standoff at the Japanese ambassador's residence can be resolved peacefully, reports AP.

Talks to end the crises stalled after the Tupac Amaru rebels spoke to reporters on December 31, violating an agreement with the government.

Peruvian negotiator Domingo Palermo broke the silence Friday, speaking with rebel leader Nestor Cerpa over a two-way radio. They agreed that Palermo and another key intermediary, Roman Catholic Archbishop Juan Luis Cipriani, would visit the residence.

Cipriani spent more than two hours inside the residence Saturday, accompanied by a Red Cross worker. He left without speaking to reporters but waved and flashed a smile, fueling speculation that he and Palermo might return Sunday.

Peruvian police Saturday evening released a Japanese reporter and his Peruvian interpreter who had been in custody since they sneaked inside the compound for two hours Tuesday to interview the rebels.

TV Asahi reporter Tsuyoshi Hitomi and his Peruvian interpreter Victor Borja were detained after they left the residence.

Hitomi was to leave Peru Saturday night and would not make any comment, TV Asahi correspondent Junichi Kitasei said. He confirmed that Borja was also released, but he did not provide details.

Another TV Asahi representative said the video tape the two recorded inside the compound was turned over to Japanese Embassy officials in Lima and had not yet been returned to the company. A spokesman at the Japanese Embassy said the tape would be sent TV Asahi headquarters in Tokyo.

Palermo's convation with Cerpa on Friday ended with a bit of banter.

"OK, Nestor, sir, then probably we'll meet for a while this weekend. How does that sound?" Palermo asked the rebel leader.

"No problem," Cerpa replied. "We aren't going anywhere." With that, both men laughed. A recording of their conversation was broadcast on local TV and radio.

UNSCOM resumes search for banned missile parts in Iraq

BAGHDAD, Jan 12: United Nations weapons inspectors resumed on Saturday their search for banned missile components in Iraq, officials said.

"The experts are pursuing their mission, an official with the United Nations Special Commission on Disarming Iraq (UNSCOM) told AFP.

The official released no details on the results of the latest search mission which began five days ago.

Goran Wallen, director of the UNSCOM monitoring and verification centre, here, said on Monday that the inspectors were monitoring Iraqi excavations at one site outside Baghdad.

He said they were looking for new missile remains and documents.

The searches are aimed at finding engine parts from Soviet-made Scud missiles which were not included in an inventory Iraq gave to UNSCOM, prompting suspicions Baghdad is still hiding between six and 16 missiles.

The 10 member inspection team is expected to stay until the end of January.

The UN Security Council last month urged Iraq to stop preventing UN inspectors from transferring nearly 130 engines for Scud missiles to the United States for study.

The analysis would allow UNSCOM to deduce how many Scuds Iraq retained after determining whether the engines not stockpiled at UNSCOM offices in Baghdad were imported from Russia or made in Iraq.