45 villagers massacred in Mexico

ACTEAL, Mexico, Dec 24: A column of gunmen descended on an Indian village, opened fire with AK-47s and hunted down those who tried to flee. including terrified mothers with babies. In all, 45 people were killed in southern Mexico's worst violence since a leftist uprising four years ago, reports AP.

Word of the massacre, which occurred midday Monday, was spread Tuesday by survivors and peasant groups, who said about 70 gunmen loyal to a local faction of Mexico's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) some of them wearing state police uniforms marched in firing indiscriminately.

The attack came as villagers were in church, praying for an end to the violence that has festered in impoverished Chiapas

"We were in the church praying when he heard the shots and everyone went running in every direction," said Juan Vazquez Luna, 15, whose

mother, father and four sisters were killed. Three other sib-

lings were wounded. Villagers fled down the mountainside towards the river, they said. Women hauled babies in shawls. Men carried toddlers by the waist. People tripped on the undergrowth as they rushed down the hill.

The gunmen followed them. continuing to fire, witnesses said. Soon the packed earth along the. river was covered in

"They didn't respect anyone. Not old people, not children, nobody, said Ernesto Mendez Paciencia, an 18-year-old coffee farmer whose two brothers. 8 and 11, were killed.

Forty-five people were killed and 25 were wounded Monday in the massacre. Chiapas state Gov. Julio Cesar Ruiz said. making it the deadliest attack since rebels of the Zapatista National Liberation Army rebelled Jan 1, 1994, to demand rights for Indians. Before a ceasefire took hold two weeks later, 145 people had died in the

Mauricio Rosas, director of the Red Cross office in San Cristobal, said the 45 dead included 21 women, nine men, 14 children and an infant.

The bodies — taken Tuesday to Tuxtla Gutierrez - had been shot and hacked with machetes. He said. The survivors were being cared for in San Cristo-

Survivors said they recognised some of the gunmen as members of the ruling PRI. whose members have been fighting with rebel sympathisers in the area for months. At least 30 people - more than 20 of them from the PRI had been killed in previous violence in the area the past seven months.

Survivors said some of the gunmen wore state police uniforms, although insignias had been removed. For months, rebels have accused state officials of cooperating with or forming paramilitary groups to attack Zapatista supporters. The government denies the accusations.

further details were provided.

In a nationally broadcast address Tuesday, President Ernesto Zedillo called the massacre "an absurd criminal act." "There is no cause, no circumstance, that could justify this action," he said.

Zedillo directed the federal attorney general and the national human rights commission to investigate

State and federal government reports about suspects conflicted, with the state government announcing four arrests late Tuesday and the federal attorney general saying only that three people were being questioned. The state government also said one suspect was hospitalised in Tuxtla Gutierrez, the state capital. No

Historian Lorenzo Meyer, a prominent political analyst, said Zedillo is guilty of irresponsibility at the least: "The state in no way can allow Colombian -type groups to exist and pretend that a state of law

New Bosnian Serb parliament to meet Dec 27

BELGRADE, Dec 24: Hardliners called an inaugural session of the Bosnian Serb Republic's newly elected parliament on the December 27 deadline set by international mediators, the Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA said on Tuesday. reports Reuter.

Hardliners struggling to re-tain control of the parliament were called to order earlier in the day by the international community's high representative, Carlos Westendorp when they decided the parliament would not meet until Jan 12.

Their attempt to delay the session was seen as a snub to US President Bill Clinton who warned the hardliners during a visit to Sarajevo on Monday to stop obstructing the peace process.

SRNA said the session would be held in the northeastern town of Bijelinja which straddles the divide between eastern Bosnian controlled by the hardliners and the western sector of Serb-held territory which is under the way of Westernbacked President Biljana Playsic.



Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad (L) called on Nepalese King Birendra at the Royal Palace in Kathmandu Tuesday. - AP/UNB photo

said, reports AP.

2 sentenced to death in India: A judge sentenced two men to death for murdering four brothers during

religious riots that swept India following the 1884 assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, newspapers reported Wednesday. AP reports from New Delhi.

Judge OP Dwivedi on Tuesday ordered Manohar Lal and Jagdish to be hanged to death. He said they beat up four brothers with iron rods, then doused them with Kerosene and set them on fire as their mother watched helplessly. The sentence must be ratified by a higher court. Both of them can later appeal to the Supreme Court. Death sentences are rare in India.

2 N Koreans defect to ROK: south Korea's Foreign Ministry said yesterday that two North Korean defectors arrived in the country and more might follow, Reuter reports from Seoul.

The ministry said in a statement that the two men were part of a group of North Koreans that had sought asylum in a South Korean embassy in a third country before being expelled to another country by the host government.

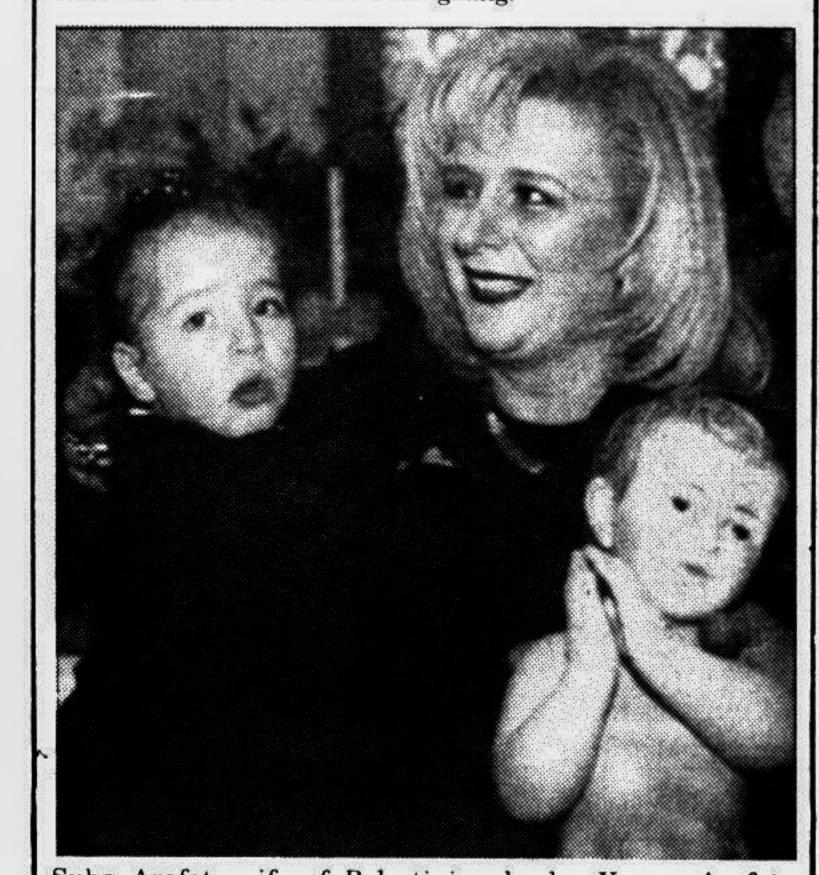
IRA bomber freed for X-mas: The IRA bomber who nearly succeeded in assassinating former

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1984, is one of the paramilitary prisoners released temporarily for the Christmas holidays, AP reports from Belfast

Patrick Magee's attack on the Grand Hotel in Brighton, England killed five prominent members of the Conservative Party and injured 31 people but narrowly missed the prime minister. He is serving eight life sentences with a minimum of 35 years to be served. His release is part of the government's practice of providing holiday breaks for many of Ulster's most feared criminals.

Air crash leaves 4 dead in US: A small plane plunged out of control into a cornfield, plowing a deep hole in the ground and killing two married couples heading home to Illinois from Florida, AP reports from

Hampshire. Two of the victims were thrown out of the Piper seven senter in Monday night's crash. The wreck was discovered Tuesday morning hear Hampshire Township, about 80 kilometres northwest of downtown Chicago, Sheriff Kenneth Ramsey said. The National Transportation Safety Board and Federal Aviation Administration were investigating.



Suha Arafat, wife of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, with a doll representing Jesus while holding her daughter, Zahwa, Tuesday at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Yasser Arafat and his wife arrived in Bethlehem to participate in the Christmas celebrations. - AP/UNB photo

Iran blamed for Luxor massacre

JERUSALEM, Dec 24: The new American ambassador to Egypt, an Israeli newspaper re-

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, Ambassador Edward Walker said the Iranian Embassy in Damascus was involved in the November 17 attack, the Jerusalem Post reported, quoting unidentified diplomatic sources.

Gunmen disguised as policemen attacked the tourists at Luxor, Egypt. Four Egyptians

Walker also said that although Washington believes Syria is seeking openings to the West. the United States finds its close relationship with Tehran unconstructive.

'Carlos the Jackal' gets life term

ternational terrorist "Carlos the Jackal" was sentenced to life imprisonment early today for a triple murder in Paris in

The jury rendered their verdict at 01:20 am after deliberating for three hours and 50 min-

Carlos lifted his left fist and shouted: "Long live the revolution" followed by incomprehensible words which some people

Accused US spy allowed to leave

American telephone technician charged with spying in Russia has been allowed to return home for the holidays under an agreement with the Russian security service, the US State Department said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

State Department spoke-

Oklahoma bombing case

Nichols convicted of conspiracy

DENVER, Dec 24: A jury convicted Terry Nichols of conspiracy and manslaughter in the Oklahoma City bombing. branding him the junior partner to Army buddy Timothy McVeigh in the deadliest act of terrorism on US soil, reports

Nichols, who was cleared of murder but still could get the death penalty for conspiracy. was somber and frowned as the verdict was read. Two jurors wept softly along with several of the victims and relatives in the courtroom.

Jurors deliberated 41 hours over six days to conclude Tuesday that the circumstantial prosecution case built on fertiliser receipts, phone records and Ryder truck sightings was not enough to make Nichols a

"It's a very hollow and shallow victory," said Tom Kight,

mass murderer.

whose stepdaughter died in the bombing. 1 guess those 12 jurors saw something different than I saw. It's an empty feel-Nichols was safe in his

Kansas house more than 320 km away at the time of the blast and was portrayed by his lawyers as a family man "building a life, not a bomb.

death by injection.

"I'm damn sure not happy about this verdict," said Dan

McKinney, whose wife. Secret Service agent Linda McKinney. died in the bombing.

who lost her two grandsons in the blast: "I had more trust in the American people than heard today."

conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction and eight of involuntary counts manslaughter - for the eight federal agents who were among the 168 killed in the blast. He was acquitted of separate charges of using a weapon of mass destruction and destruction by explosive.

The split verdict came six months after McVeigh was convicted and sentenced to death on all murder, conspiracy

no official responsibilities. Hard labour for bigamy! COLOMBO: A judge has issued an arrest warrant against a

Off the Record

For holding wild party in

wildlife sanctuary....

governor for holding a wild party with hundreds of guests in a

wildlife sanctuary, a government statement issue Wednesday

north of Bangkok was investigated by the Ministry of Interior

in connection with the party in the Huay Kha Khaeng sanctu-

into the preserve by army helicopters, were taking part in an

environmental awareness programme.

Jarin Suankaew, governor of Uthai Thani province, 190 km

Jarin said that his 193 guests, many of whom were ferried

The ministry's investigation team, however, did not accept

his explanation, and the Cabinet transferred him to an inactive

post, where he will still collect his government salary but have

BANGKOK: Thailand's Cabinet has transferred a provincial

former presidential candidate living the United States after he was convicted of bigamy, officials said Wednesday, reports AP. Police are likely to ask the US government to extradite Hudson Samarasinghe if the doesn't return to serve his sentence' Samarasinghe was on bail when he went to the US. His lawyer represented him in the trial.

On Tuesday, a judge in Colombo, sentenced Samarasinghe, a Buddhist, to two years hard labour and to pay a fine for marrying a second time without divorcing his first wife.

The judge ordered him to arrested so that he could serve his jail term. Only Muslims are allowed to have more than one wife in wife in Sri Lanka.

Samarasighe ran for president as an independent candidate in 1994, but dropped out later.

A poor advertising person?

MOSCOW: Mikhail Gorbachev couldn't sell his country on capitalism. Now he can't sell them on pizza.

reports AP. Russian watching the news Tuesday got their first glimpse of a Pizza Hut ad starring their ex-president - but it was presented only as humour, not advertising.

In fact, despite the glossy production values and scenic views of central Moscow. Pizza Hut has no plans to use the and inside Russia. Here. Gorbachev is widely derided as the man who destroyed the Soviet Union.

"He was a poor president. He will be a poor advertising person" said parliament

deputy Alexei Podberezkin. Still, Russians are amused by the West's adulation of Gor-

bachev, and to them, the ad is uproariously preposterous - yet another example of outsiders' foolish interpretations of all things Russian.

nouncing him for creating "complete chaos" in the country, others praising him for bringing "hope." The dispute, which gradually grows louder, is resolved by an older woman who suggests a compromise: "Because of him, we

have many things - like Pizza Hut". The conflict is resolved and the patrons join in a chorus of "hail to Gorbachev!" Gorbachev does not say a word, although he responds to the

has said he is giving the money to his education foundation,

why the Soviet Union fell apart," said former presidential candidate Alexander Lebed.

China blasts Hollywood for movies on Tibet

warned Hollywood today that it would "never be forgiven" for a recent series of movies on Tibet,

"These films have totally distorted historical facts and events," said the officials English-language China Daily in the most virulent in a series of attacks on the US film industry.

tion," said the commentary, "no world entitles it to create new audiences, especially when these unscrupulous creations hurt a nation's feelings. They will never be forgiven."

campaign against Tibet's exiled

Beijing has kept strict control over religious life in Tibet banning pictures of the Nobel peace laureate in temples and monasteries.

"There is absolutely no dispute in history that Tibet has always been China's sovereign territory," said the China Daily attack.

The authorities have in recent months threatened reprisals against Hollywood over the films as well launched regular attacks through the media and the Foreign Ministry.

Earlier this month, however, Jack Valenti, president of the US Motion Picture Association, said in Beijing that the war of words would only be "temporary."

China on Tuesday rejected an offer by the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists (IJC) to organise a self-determination referendum in Ti-

"Self-determination is out of the question. Tibet is part of China," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Tang Guoqiang.

ported today, says AP.

Israel says Iran was behind last month's massacre of 58 foreign tourists by Islamic militants in At a meeting Tuesday with

ministry Foreign spokesman Aviv Shiron could not confirm whether Walker made the statements. US Embassy spokesman Richard Scroza refused comment.

the Temple of Hatshepsut in and six attackers also died. According to the newspaper.

PARIS, Dec 24: Former in-

1975, reports AFP. Carlos, 48, a Venezuelan whose real name is Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, was found guilty of shooting dead two French secret service agents and a Lebanese informer. He was handed over to France by Sudan in 1994 after almost 25 years on the run.

When he heard the verdict said included "Allah Akbar"

Russia temporarily WASHINGTON, Dec 24: An

Richard Bliss, an employee of Qualcomm Inc. a telecommunications firm based in San Diego, California, was arrested in Russia on November 25 and accused of gathering secret information while performing surveillance work using satellite equipment.

sman James Foley said Bliss was to leave Roston-on-Don Russia, on Tuesday and head back to the United States on a Qualcomm-chartered aircraft. - the security situation was im-

When the seven-women, five-man panel returns for the sentencing phase Monday. Nichols is expected to rely heavily on that family to help him get life behind bars rather than

Added Jannie Coverdale.

Nichols 42 was convicted of

and weapons charges.



Ousted Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, (L) meets with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Prime Minister House, Islamabad, Tuesday. Rabbani was flown from Mazar-e-Sharif, in northern Afghanistan, to Islamabad on Sharif's official aircraft. Rabbani said war is not the solution and called for negotiated end to the bloodletting that is ripping his homeland apart. - AP/UNB photo

Clinton hopeful of progress in ME peace process in '98

WASHINGTON. Dec 24: Presproving. ident Bill Clinton said on Tuesday he was hopeful that there would be progress in the peace process both between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and Syria next

year, reports Reuter. "I'm actual quite hopeful that in the coming year we'll. have progress not only between the Israelis and Palestinians but between Israel and Syria," Clinton told reporters during a ceremony to mark the first night of Hanukkah. "I think the openness is there and I think that people are sobered by the

consequences of the absence of a viable peace process." As he held an Oval Office ceremony to mark the start of the Jewish holiday, Clinton said his hopefulness was based in part on a growing view that

"I'm actually quite hopeful," he said, "I think there is a general belief that the Palestinian Authority has redoubled its efforts on security and the Israeli cabinet seem to have adopted a provision that said that they would be for another with-

drawal, consistent with the

Oslo accords. Clinton is expected to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat early next year in separate Washington meetings to give a

East next month to push Israel

and the Palestinians to make

Washington, the State Depart-

ment said Tuesday.

Turkey and Israel are planning push to the peace process.

AFP adds: US envoy Dennis to jointly produce 500-kilome-Ross will travel to the Middle

port for PGSUS, a joint venture between Lockheed Martin Electronics and Missiles, a unit of Lockheed Martin Corp, and Israeli Defence firm, Raphael, Xinhua from Ankara adds:

US likely to

sell missiles

to Israel

US defence department on

Tuesday announced the possi-

ble sale of 45 AGM142D air-to-

ground missiles to Israel for 41

million US dollars saying the

deal would help improve Israel's

The proposed sale also in-cluded production start-up sup-

security, reports Reuter.

WASHINGTON, Dec 24: The

tre-range Arrow missiles, the Anatolia News Agency reported. The production of the Arrow progress ahead of talks in missiles is aimed at dealing with the "growing missile threats" from Iran and Syria.

In the spot, Gorbachev is show leading his granddaughter Anastasia into a Pizza Hut restaurant presumably located on red Square. Inside, his presence causes a stir among patrons, some de-

adulation by raising a slice of pizza in salute. The spot, scheduled for release in the United States on Jan 1, earned Gorbachev a reported dlrs 160,000. And even though he

among Russians the hefty payment has reinforced his reputation for money-grubbing. "It's just further proof of the greed and lack of principles from the former leadership of the Soviet Union. That's exactly

BEIJING. Dec 24: China troubled region. which attack Chinese rule, reports AFP.

"Given Hollywood's reputamotion picture code in the truth, in other words, to deceive

The editorial picked out the movies "Seven Years in Tibet," starring Brad Pitt, "Red Corner," which has Richard Gere, "Kundun," which is distributed by Walt Disney, "Wind Horse," and "Free Tibet."

China has been waging a spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, whom Beijing accuses of seeking independence for the

1997—The year of 'people's princess' LONDON, Dec 24: In the hearts, minds and headlines of the world, this was the year of Princess Diana, reports Reuter.

More historically signifi-

cant stories hit the news in

1997 — global warming, the

crash of Asian financial markets or fears that science, having cloned an adult sheep could now turn out carbon copy humans. But for billions of people around the world, the event that put its stamp on the year was the Paris car crash that killed

Diana, Britain's beautiful, di-

vorced Princess of Wales after a

high speed clash to escape press photographers. The televised funeral of world's most photographed, most envied woman held more people in solemn thrall than almost any moment in history and demonstrated the global reach of the mass media one of the defining changes of a cen-

tury drawing towards its close. Within weeks of her death one of her favourite causes the campaign to ban landmines - was honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize. By early December. 125 countries had signed a Canadian-sponsored treaty to abolish anti-personnel mines.

The magic of her memory did not, however, melt the and the West, it was a year of hearts of those who use land- stubborn gestures, suicide mines most — Russia, China the United States and a number of smaller states with dicey borders did not join the club.

For the burial of Princess Diana, the adoring public craved ceremony and show of grief. Britain's new young Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, caught the mood with a self-assurance that made Queen Elizabeth and the royal family seem as stiff, uncertain and ripe for change as the Conservative government he defeated in May. Forward too went the post

Cold War projects of extending NATO and the European Union to the east, while EÛ diplomats had the tricky task of holding Turkey at arm's length without stressing the cultural fault line between the world of Mohammad and the world of Christ. The advance of Muslim purists to control most of

Afghanistan, the slaughter of

58 tourists visiting the ruins of

Egypt's pharaonic splendours and a horrific string of massacres in Algeria all seemed to widen that historic Gulf. In the holy land and Jerusalem the symbolic centre

of all quarrels between Islam bombs and stalemate between the Palestinians and Israel.

But there were signs that

hostility might be easing be-

tween Iran, the home of Islamic

Revolution and United States

which has denounced it as a terrorist state for 17 unbending years. And a year-end crisis over weapons inspections in Iraq showed that Washington was finding it harder to sustain the international alliance against Iraq's Saddam Hussein that ral-

lied to rescue Kuwait in 1991's Gulf War. Rescue of the year in 1997 was in Lima, Peru, where, after a siege of 126 days, President Alberto Fujimori's troops stormed the Japanese ambassador's residence in April and killed the Marxist guerillas holding dozens of VIP captives. All but one of the 72 hostages

American relived the horror of terrorism at home with the conviction and death sentence of Timothy McVeih for the 1995 bombing of Federal government offices in Oklahoma City which killed 168 people and injured

came out alive.

Celebrities whose deaths shocked their admirers included fashion designer Gianni Versace, murdered outside his Miami home in July, and Australian rock star Michael Hutchence, found hanged in a

Mother Teressa, the missionary nun who devoted her life to Calcutta's poor, died a few days after Diana. The princess fans put them on a par, although there was little enough to compare in their lives or their qualification for sainthood.

The most venerable of the year's dead was surely Deng Xiaoping a veteran revolutionary who endured purges and disgrace during Etmao Zedong's chaotic cultural revolution. bounced back to power and reestablished the rule of law.

His death in February at 93 denied him the sight of dream fulfilled - the end of British rule in Hong Kong at the stroke of midnight on June 30, with Diana's ex-husband Prince Charles completing the great imperial retreat that began with the independence of India and Pakistan 50 years before.

