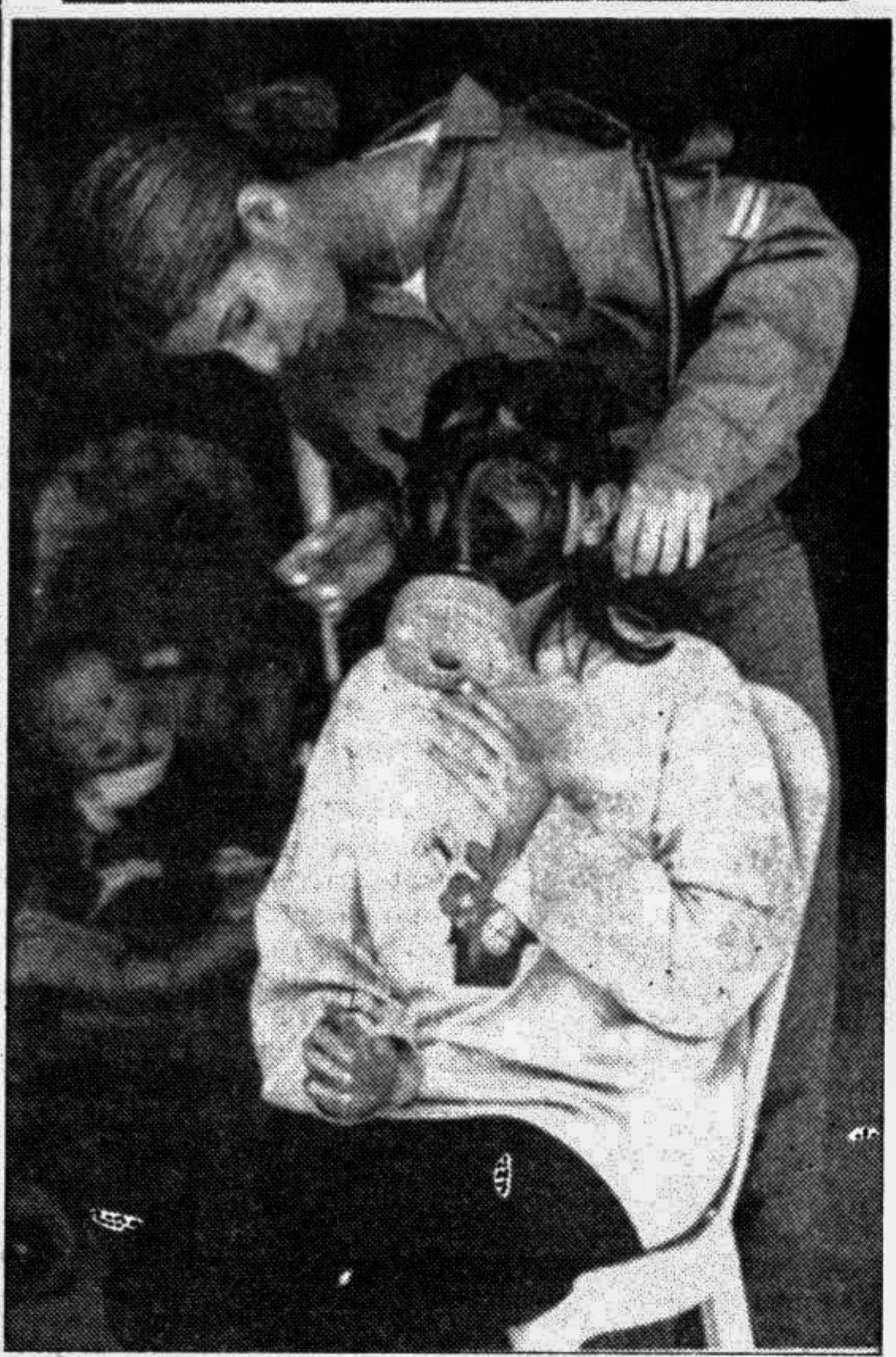


## International

## BRIEFLY



An Israeli soldier fits a girl with a gas mask at a distribution centre Thursday in Ramle near Tel Aviv. Gas mask distribution centres opened again across Israel hours after US-British joint military action in Iraq.

— AP/UNB photo

**ROK troops sink DPRK spy vessel:** South Korean troops on Friday sank a North Korean spy vessel in a fierce firefight in South Korean waters which left at least one suspected infiltrator dead, military officials said today. AFP reports from Seoul.

The shootout erupted in the early hours as South Korean military and coast guard vessels pursued a fleeing North Korean semi-submersible vessel carrying up to four commandos, the joint chiefs of staff said.

**10 die as boat capsizes in China:** A boat carrying farm families capsized on a river in rural southwestern China, killing 10 people, a newspaper reported. AP reports from Shanghai.

Four victims in the accident on the Jingping River in Guizhou province Sunday were children under age 10, the Xinhua Evening News said Thursday. The wooden motorboat was carrying 33 people and freight when it capsized at about 2 am near the village of Xizhai. The cause of the accident is under investigation.

**Pope John Paul indisposed:** Pope John Paul II has come down with the flu at the start of the busy Christmas season and cancelled his audiences Friday, the Vatican said. AP reports from Vatican City.

The Vatican described the pontiff's illness as a mild case of influenza. The illness struck the frail 78-year-old pope at the start of the busy holiday period.

**11 killed in Siberian bus blast:** A bus exploded in central Siberia, killing at least 11 people, police investigating the incident said Friday. AP reports from Moscow.

Police did not know how many people were on the bus, but had confirmed there were no survivors, according to the Interfax News Agency. Investigators speculate that a faulty fuel cylinder in the bus caused the explosion, which occurred as it passed a gas station in Kiselyovsk, about 3,000 km east of Moscow.

**New Lebanese cabinet approved:** The "salvation and change" Cabinet put together by Lebanon's new prime minister, Salim Hoss, won a vote of confidence from the Parliament after a two-day debate, AP reports from Beirut.

Eighty-five legislators voted late Thursday for the new government and 31 abstained. Twelve Parliament members were absent. Hoss, a US-educated economist who served as prime minister four times in the past, announced his 16-member Cabinet on December 4. Hoss was named to the post after Rafik Hariri, the previous premier, declined reappointment by Lebanon's new president, Emile Lahoud.

**Lankan underworld leader killed:** A notorious Sri Lankan underworld leader, ADU Ranjith, alias Sothi Upali, was killed Thursday in the suburbs of Colombo, police said today. Xinhua reports from Colombo.

Police said a group of unidentified people had shot the victim at least four times when he alighted from a bus at Bokundara junction. Upali was accused of assassinating Lalith Athulathmudali, former minister and leader of the Democratic United National Front (DUNF) in April 1993.

**Roman remains found in London:** Archaeologists have unearthed two significant pieces of Roman history in central London — the foundations of a massive arch, and a wide river channel, long-buried in the heart of the capital. reports AP from London.

The foundations of the arch date back to the first or second century AD and are evidence that Roman London was a wealthy and sophisticated place, archaeologist Bruce Watson said Thursday. About 25 metres wide and 8 metres deep the river channel was found near the Old Bailey courthouse and is thought to have been a major tributary of the river Fleet, which still exists under the streets of London and is used as a sewer.

**ROK bans funds for research in human cloning**

SEOUL, Dec 18: South Korea banned funding for research into human cloning Friday, but admitted it can not stop "maverick doctors" from forging ahead with the controversial procedure, reports AP.

The move came after a medical team at Seoul's Kyunghee University announced earlier this week that it had successfully cloned a human embryo in its initial stage of development.

The announcement caught the government off guard and sparked protest rallies in South Korea, whose deep-rooted Confucian beliefs were shaken by the news.

"We were not given any prior information about the experiments by the Kyunghee University doctors," said Kim Ho-sung, an official at the Science and Technology Ministry. "Our position is firm and clear: There will be no funding for any such research."

But Kim added the government planned no legal action against the scientists.

"There will always be maverick scientists. We cannot do anything to stop them," he said. "They will be few in number and you do not burn down the whole house to kill a few fleas."

At the National Assembly, legislators prepared to pass a new law next month banning research on human cloning except for research on cancer or other diseases.

# Life goes on for Bill Clinton

WASHINGTON, Dec 18: Yes, Thursday marked Day 2 of the airstrikes and the eve of the House impeachment debate. But at the White House, it was also "Wright Brothers Day." And a time to firm up next year's budget. And an occasion to don black tie in celebration of the Special Olympics, reports AP.

Life goes on for President Bill Clinton.

"It would be an understatement to say the president has been tested over the last week," spokesman Joe Lockhart said. "But I think what you can see — and what he has demonstrated — is that he is up to the challenge."

A temporary suspension of White House lobbying against impeachment — in deference to the military action against Iraq — was announced in the morning but didn't last through the day. Republican leaders said they would open House debate on the impeachment vote on Friday.

Much like her efforts at earlier crisis points in the Monica Lewinsky affair, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton joined the telephone campaign to beat back mounting support for the president's removal from office. She also consulted with historians and constitutional experts, her spokeswoman said, but was not preparing to make any public appeal on the matter.

"She has talked to members



Bill and Hillary in happier times. — File photo

of Congress, said spokeswoman Marsha Berry. "She has talked to folks who are experts on our Constitution and historians, other folks in that area. She is concerned. It is an issue she takes seriously. She is one who

likes to have a lot of information."

Once President Al Gore also went back to the phones lobbying House members, an aide said, for "a good chunk of the morning." Clinton himself called a handful of House Democrats to discuss their strategy for the debate and vote. The president would not concede defeat in the House until the final roll call, Lockhart said. "On a vote this important and this solemn, yes, there's always a chance."

The president's attention, meanwhile, was stretched to the bursting.

After a morning "bomb damage assessment" briefing by National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, Gen. Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and others, Clinton worked the phones trying to hold together world support for his attacks on Iraq's Saddam Hussein for defying United Nations weapons inspectors. The president had "constructive and productive" conversations with the leaders of France, Egypt, Jordan and Israel.

By afternoon, he and Gore were huddled with economic advisers working through a list

of budget items that must be decided before Clinton's Jan. 19 State of the Union address, which speechwriters worked on in their separate meeting Thursday.

In among the tumble of activity, Clinton released 102.2 million dollars in emergency aid to a half-dozen states and territories cleaning up from Hurricane Georges. He signed a proclamation declaring Thursday, the 95th anniversary of Wilbur and Orville Wright's first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, "Wright Brothers Day."

And both of the Clintons headlined a black-tie gala honoring the Special Olympics' 30th anniversary under a giant, heated pavilion on the South Lawn. Hillary Clinton glowingly introduced the president to the star-studded crowd — including Whoopi Goldberg, Sheryl Crow, Eric Clapton and Tracy Chapman — as "my husband, my partner and our president."

On Friday, Clinton was scheduled to join a regular summit of European Union leaders to review trade tensions, confer again with his budget team and meet with his AIDS advisory panel.

# Americans protest attacks on Iraq

gathered in downtown Iowa City.

Two protesters in Hartford, Conn., were arrested outside the federal courthouse as they demonstrated with about 30 others. The pair were charged with criminal trespassing.

About 600 protesters marched from Times Square to Grand Central Terminal during the evening rush hour in Manhattan while a brass band played "When the Saints Go Marching In."

"

find it ridiculous that

people are worried about

Christmas shopping when children are dying in another country because of us," said Cindy Wright, 28. "It makes me nuts."

In Cleveland, about 40 people braved freezing temperatures and biting winds to march outside the federal courthouse downtown. They shouted "No more sanctions, no more war!" and held signs that said "USA out of the Middle East" and "Clinton and Pentagon are the real terrorists."

"

I think Clinton should be

impeached for killing Iraqi

children," said Areilla Ghanoomi, a University of Iowa student among 50 protesters

gathered in front of Chaldean.

Three-fourths of Americans support the bombing, according to a handful of polls released Thursday.

"We all hope our family is safe. We hope for the best."

Telephones at the Chaldean

Federation of America office in Southfield, Michigan were ringing with calls from people frantic

for information about the US attack and their loved ones in Iraq. Iraqi Catholics are known as Chaldeans.

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