

## Muslim rebels kill nine in Kashmir

Srinagar, Dec 23: Suspected Muslim separatists in Kashmir have gunned down nine close relatives of former militants who switched sides to join pro-Indian government militia said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Unidentified gunmen forced their way overnight Monday into homes of former militants in three separate villages in Kulgam district — 65 kilometres — killing nine people.

Similar attacks claimed six lives at the weekend amid escalation of the bitter struggle between the Muslim separatists and their former brothers in arms.

The pro-government militia groups have been accused of particular brutality in Kashmir, especially over the torture and custodial killings of separatist suspects.

Senior police officer Farooq Ahmed said the stepped up attacks against the turncoats' families were probably a response to a recent series of successful anti-separatist operations, in which scores of militants have been shot dead.

## Blast inside Catholic church in Pakistan

KARACHI, Dec 23: At least three people were injured when a bomb exploded inside a Catholic church in the Pakistani port city of Karachi Tuesday, police said, reports AFP.

The home made device was planted under a seat at Saint Patrick's Church, located in the city's Saddar Bazar area, they said.

Police said the low intensity bomb containing about 200 grams of explosives, went off when prayers had just finished.

The explosion caused panic among some 150 worshippers, police said.

The blast was believed to be the first inside a church in Karachi, which is plagued by recurring political, sectarian and ethnic violence that has claimed 3,500 lives over the past three years.

"It is an act of terrorism," a senior police official AD Khawaja said.

However, he said it was "premature" to say whether any extremist group was involved. Another administration official said there was no indication to link the blast with the recent US-led air strikes against Iraq.

## Accidental blasts kill 12 senior LTTE cadres

COLOMBO, Dec 23: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas today said they lost 12 of their senior fighters in two accidental explosions in the north of the country, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said nine members of their group were killed in the district of Mannar while three more died in the Mullaitivu district.

The LTTE's clandestine Voice of Tigers radio said a self-styled Lieutenant Colonel of the movement was among those who perished in the Mannar district.

The rebel radio gave no further details of the explosions.

Tigers are leading a drawn out campaign for an independent homeland in the island's northern and eastern regions. More than 55,000 people have been killed in fighting in the past 26 years.

## Hezbollah rockets injure 8 in N Israel

KIRYAT SHEMONA, Israel, Dec 23: More than a dozen Katyusha rockets rained down on northern Israel early Wednesday, injuring at least eight people, Israeli media and witnesses said, reports AP.

Paramedics reported at least four injuries from the rockets that fell in and around the town of Kiryat Shemona near Israel's northeastern border with Lebanon.

Another four people were injured in the western Galilee region from about 120 rockets that fell there, the paramedics said.

Northern Israel had been braced for the attack in the wake of an Israeli air strike Tuesday against Lebanon that killed a woman and her six children. That was the highest civilian casualty toll this year in the war between Israel and Lebanese guerrillas.

Hezbollah guerrillas last fired rockets on Kiryat Shemona in August, after Israel killed a leading southern Lebanese guerrilla.

## Thai army to give up ownership of radio, TV stations

BANGKOK, Dec 23: In a move that should enhance freedom of expression, the Thai army will give up ownership of most of its radio frequencies and television stations, the office of the commander in chief said on Wednesday, reports AP.

The Thai army controls 128 radio frequencies and will probably retain only about 50 for military use and security, a spokesman for Army Commander in Chief Gen Gurayud Chulanan said.

In addition, the army will probably give up control of television Channel 7, but retain Channel 5.

The frequencies will be turned over to the government for privatisation.



One of the South Korean Buddhist monks pours petroleum over his body after slashing his belly with a knife to protest police raid on the third-floor balcony at the Chogye temple administration building in Seoul on Wednesday. Police, acting on a court order, stormed the temple holed up by about 100 dissident monks, hoping to end a prolonged leadership struggle between rival monks in South Korea's largest Buddhist order. — UNB/AP photo

## ROK police storm temple to quell monks' leadership struggle

SEOUL, Dec 23: Police, acting on a court order, stormed a temple in central Seoul today, hoping to end a prolonged leadership struggle between rival monks in South Korea's largest Buddhist order, reports AP.

At the order's headquarters inside Chogye temple in Seoul, 6,000 riot police, backed by bulldozers and water cannons, moved in before dawn to expel about 100 dissident monks holed up inside a five-story administrative building.

The police action came after court officials had twice failed to serve an expulsion notice to about 100 dissident monks who had been in control of the building since November 11.

A Seoul civil court, acting on a lawsuit filed by ousted mainstream monks, ordered the renegades to move out of the temple by Saturday. The occupants, however, refused to heed the order.

Another monk, also bare-chested, poured petroleum over his body and threatened to set himself on fire.

Police took away 40 dissident monks and their supporters before moving into the ad-

ministrative building. Monks poured water from hoses and threw down fire bombs, rocks, furniture and other items.

"We need to end this standoff quickly. For social stability, we can't allow it to go on too long," said police lieutenant Kim Sung-ho.

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The trouble began after the order's head, Song Wol-ju, sought a third four-year term.

Opponents occupied his office inside the Chogye temple, effectively blocking his reelection.

The rule stating the order's

chief monk cannot serve more than two terms was enacted in 1994 in an attempt to prevent the office from yielding too much power.

Song claimed that he was not subject to the rule, because he could not complete his first four-year term in 1980 because of disagreement with South Korea's then military government.

Song later resigned under pressure but the renegade monks refused to leave the temple. Instead, they stepped up their struggle and occupied a major temple near Taegu on Monday. Police there were also poised to intervene there on Wednesday.

Many religion experts agree that power and money are at the centre of the struggle.

The victorious faction gets to control an annual budget of drs 10 million, millions of dollars in property and appoint 1,700 monks to various duties.

The rule stating the order's

## BRIEFLY

### Akihito celebrates 65th birthday

Surrounded by his family and thousands of flag-waving citizens, Emperor Akihito celebrated his 65th birthday yesterday with a public address recalling difficulties Japan faced the past year, AP reports from Tokyo.

"This was a year of many pains," Akihito told a crowd of nearly 10,000 people gathered on the grounds of the sprawling Imperial Palace in central Tokyo. "I hope the next year is a good year for each and every one of us," he said. The palace is open to the public only on the emperor's birthday, which is a national holiday, and on Jan 2, one of a string of three consecutive national holidays that mark the beginning of the new year.

### US likely to expel 3 Cuban diplomats

The US State Department is considering expelling three Cuban diplomats attached to the communist island's UN delegation for alleged espionage, the Washington Post reported yesterday. AFP says from Washington.

The paper, citing unidentified diplomats, said the state department had told Cuba's UN mission late Monday that it intended to order the trio to leave immediately but that it gave the mission 24 hours to contest the decision.

### Elephants kill another in Vietnam

A trio of aggressive elephants has killed a villager in the southern Vietnamese province of Dong Nai, raising the death toll from the apparently hungry animals to three in just over a week, a local official said yesterday, AP reports from Hanoi.

Tran Thi Sinh, 46, went into the forest Dec 14 to harvest rice fields there and spent the night in a small observation post, said Nguyen Bach Mo, chief of the Dinh Quan district forest control bureau. Her body was found by her mother the next morning. Two other people were killed by elephants in the province nine days earlier, he said.

### Students exposed to radiation in Japan

Nine junior high school students were exposed to low levels of radiation while playing with radioactive cubes they found near a monitoring facility in northern Japan, an official said yesterday, AP reports from Tokyo.

The students were exposed again when workers from the small facility, said Mobutsu Sato, chief of the Miyagi prefectural or state, nuclear power safety office. Five teachers helping to search for the cubes, used to measure radioactivity, were also exposed, he said. The incident took place on Dec 2.

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### Construction workers clutter Bethlehem, not tourists

BETHLEHEM, Dec 23: In Manger Square, tourists are outnumbered by construction workers raising clouds of dust as they install new stone tiles in time for Christmas, reports AP.

With Mideast peace in crisis and tensions simmering in the Gulf, an expected pre-millennium surge in tourism to the city believed to be Jesus' birthplace has failed to materialise.

In fact, tourism has bottomed out. In past years, attendance at Christmas Eve celebrations has reached up to six figures; this year, Bethlehem officials don't expect more than a trick.

The situation in the region and with the peace process is so bad, "Mayor Hanna J. Nasser said Tuesday. "This year I do not expect that the number of tourists will exceed 20,000."

Israel's refusal last month to release Palestinians jailed for killing launched a wave of anti-Israel violence — including attacks on Israeli soldiers garrisoning the entrance to Bethlehem that were broadcast around the world.

In addition, the army will probably give up control of television Channel 7, but retain Channel 5.

The frequencies will be turned over to the government for privatisation.

US President Bill Clinton

visited the region last week in an effort to salvage the peace process. He lit the Christmas tree in Manger Square and joined carolers in song.

Days later, demonstrators were burning the US flag that had fluttered throughout the Palestinian-controlled city during the visit, protesting the US-British bombing of Iraq.

Anxious Palestinian police ordered journalists not to film the anti-US actions.

On Tuesday, officers belonging to the police department's tourist unit patrolled Manger Square, sidestepping the construction workers. They hadn't much to do — they, too, out-numbered the tourists.

A Manger Square vendor said Clinton was partly to blame for his lack of work.

"Clinton lit the tree here a few days ago, and then he went back to Washington and lit the sky of Baghdad," said Samir Metri, bearing a stack of post-cards and rosaries in his arms. "It was much better last year, this year it is awful."

Nasser, the mayor, says the renovations will drag the little town of 24,000 into the 21st century.

## Koirala to stake claim to form new govt

KATHMANDU, Dec 23: Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has secured enough support to stay in power despite resigning as government leader on Monday, his party said on Tuesday, reports AP.

Koirala resigned from the government led by his Nepali Congress (NC) Party on Monday evening, but party sources said King Birendra had asked him when accepting his resignation to stake his claim to form the next government within 48 hours.

Koirala will go to the Royal Palace Wednesday evening around 5 pm to stake his claim to the next government, armed with the signatures of at least 103 MPs in the lower house of Parliament, an NC source said.

Under the constitution the support of at least 103 legislators in the 205-member House of Representatives is needed to form a government.

"But Koirala has more than the necessary number of votes to form the next government," Koirala, 74, resigned to head a new three-party coalition following a political crisis sparked by a split between his party and its previous coalition partner.

The NC with 88 MPs, the main opposition Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) with 49 legislators, and the pro-India Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) supported by three lawmakers, agreed on Sunday to form a new coalition government headed by Koirala.

In a statement sent from Jordan, former Lt Gen Prabowo Subianto, a son-in-law of Suharto, had successfully sought citizenship in Jordan, where he has close ties with military officers with whom he once conducted joint training exercises.

But in a statement sent from Jordan, former Lt Gen Prabowo Subianto, said he was visiting the country in order to pursue business opportunities and denied any wrongdoing.

Jordan said Tuesday it had granted honorary citizenship to Prabowo.

In a letter to the daily Kompas newspaper, Prabowo said he was offered Jordanian

citizenship, "but I was forced to reject it because Indonesia does not recognise dual citizenship."

Justice Minister Muladi said that if Prabowo accepts Jordanian citizenship, his Indonesian citizenship will automatically be revoked.

Prabowo, who for many Indonesians represents the worst excesses of the Suharto era, denied allegations that he engineered riots that preceded Suharto's downfall.

Prabowo, who was not charged but was suspected of engineering the abductions and the military, which is trying to clean up its human rights record, had said it might court-martial him.

In Jakarta, the soldiers accused of kidnapping stood impotently in green uniforms and red berets as a military prosecutor read a 27-page document outlining the charges.

Col. Haron Wijaya, a military prosecutor, said the suspects abducted nine activists in a series of operations between February and April and interrogated them at the Jakarta headquarters of Kopassus, the military's elite force.

He said the suspects kidnapped their victims at a Jakarta legal aid office, a hospital, an amusement park and the clandestine headquarters of

## International

### US to resist any move to revise UNSCOM

## 'Saddam more concerned about internal threats to his regime'

PRINCE SULTAN AIR BASE, KSA, Dec 23: Evidence collected by US intelligence indicates Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was more concerned about internal threats to his regime than about the damage he faced last week from impending air strikes, the commander of US forces in the Gulf said today, reports AP.

The repositioning of Iraqi ground forces and last-minute shifts in their commanding officers indicated Saddam wanted to make sure the US and British air attack did not spark a revolt in the ranks, said Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni, head of the US Central Command.

Zinni, visiting this desert base with Defence Secretary William Cohen, described the separation of Iraq's ground forces into four sectors under the command of ruthless officers loyal to Saddam.

"That decentralisation was done so they insured they had control," Zinni said. "I think it was done more for internal reasons and internal military problems they thought they might have than for any military preparations they had for us."

Zinni and Cohen arrived at this sprawling air base, focal

point for the Deny Flight mission over southern Iraq, on a morale-boosting pre-Christmas visit with the troops.

British and American forces that participated in the four days of strikes on Iraq suffered no casualties. But Zinni, for the first time, said anti-aircraft fire was heavy enough in some places to cause combat pilots to abandon their targets.

As the strikes approached, Saddam appeared preoccupied with maintaining order within his own ranks, Zinni said. Shifts in unit commanding officers and a trend toward putting Saddam's closest lieutenants in charge was the "to prevent loyalties from being created and to prevent plotting," Zinni said.

US Secretary of Defence William Cohen ordered a halt on Tuesday to additional emergency deployment of US forces to the region in anticipation of a possible military counter-attack from Iraq that never materialised.

Cohen approved the return to their US bases of the six B-52 bombers, 10 A-10 anti-tank aircraft, 10 KC-10 tankers now on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, and 13 of 15 B-52 bombers, also on Diego Garcia.

Even with these departures, a force of between 17,000 and 20,000 will remain stationed in the region