

# BRIEFLY

**4 foreigners held in Nepal:** Nepal police have arrested three United States citizens and one Polish national for alleged involvement in drug trafficking, officials and reports said Tuesday, AFP says from Kathmandu.

The Kathmandu Post identified the Americans as Harry Gerald Crespi, Steven Chishom and Charles Bradely French. The Pole's identity was unknown. A home ministry spokesman confirmed the arrests had taken place.

**Hun Sen to visit Japan in Feb:** Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen will visit Japan next month to attend a February 25-26 meeting of countries helping the southeast Asian nation rebuild its economy, a Japanese foreign ministry spokesman said on Tuesday, AP reports from Tokyo.

"It is true that Hun Sen will be coming to Japan for the meeting, but the date of his arrival has not yet been finalised," he added. Jiji news agency has reported that Hun Sen will come to Japan on February 23.

**US architect Luckman dead:** Charles Luckman, an industrialist and architect who helped design the Prudential Centre in Boston, New York's Madison Square Garden and several Los Angeles landmarks, died at 89 on Tuesday, AP reports from Los Angeles.

Luckman, whose architectural firm designed the original control tower at Los Angeles International Airport and his namesake 22 million dollars Arts Complex at California State University, Los Angeles, died in his sleep at his Los Angeles home, said Nancy Hogan, executive vice-president of Luckman Management Co.

**5 killed in ambush in Philippines:** Suspected Muslim rebels have killed four soldiers and the wife of one of the soldiers in an ambush in the southern Philippines, the military said yesterday, AP says from Zamboanga.

The 9-year-old son of one of the soldiers killed was seriously wounded in the attack late Tuesday in Tuburan town on Basilan Island, said Col Rafael Romero, spokesman of the military's Southern Command. Romero said no one has claimed responsibility for the attack but two Muslim rebel factions operate in the area.



Pope John Paul II and President Clinton claps hands as they leave the stage after they addressed the crowd in St. Louis, Tuesday. — UNB/AP photo

**5 die in chopper crash in Male:** Four foreign tourists and a Maldivian national died when a helicopter crashed in a shallow lagoon at one of the Maldives' resort islands, police said yesterday, Reuters says from Male.

They said the Russian-made helicopter carrying 20 people had crashed late on Tuesday. Among the dead were two Greeks, one Japanese and one Italian, police said. The bodies had been brought to the capital Male.

**Influenza on rise in S'pore:** Influenza has spread through Singapore over the last month, though some victims are reluctant to take leave from work for fear of losing their jobs in the midst of recession, a newspaper reported yesterday, AP says from Singapore.

Flu cases have increased by up to 50 per cent recently, said doctors interviewed by The Straits Times. Although no life-threatening cases have been reported, the influenza strains have been particularly virulent for tropical Singapore, debilitating victims for 10 to 14 days instead of the more common three to four day infection.

**4 run over by train in Malaysia:** Four Myanmarese men were run over by an express train and killed as they tried to cross railroad tracks early yesterday, according to the national news agency, Bernama. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The fatalities occurred near the railroad station in Gua Musang in the state of Kelantan, 300-km northeast of Kuala Lumpur. The four men used the route across the tracks as a short-cut to their homes, Bernama said.

## SC censures Chandrika for using emergency to delay local polls

**COLOMBO, Jan 27:** Sri Lanka's Supreme Court today censured President Chandrika Kumaratunga for using a state of emergency to postpone key local elections and ordered restoration of the indefinitely postponed vote, reports AFP.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice G P S De Silva said the president had no power to delay the provincial council elections and the election commissioner was also wrong to have gone along with her.

Kumaratunga declared a nation-wide state of emergency in early August and used the ex-

traordinary laws to indefinitely postpone elections to five provincial councils that were due to go to the polls on August 28.

A media rights activist, Sunanda Deshpriya, who challenged the poll postponement in court said they were vindicated and pleased the Supreme Court upheld their position.

What the court said today is that no one, not even the president, has the right to interfere with the people's freedom of expression," Deshpriya said. "From a media point of view this is a major decision."

The landmark judgement came hot on the heels of another provincial election the ruling people's alliance of Kumaratunga won amid allegations of widespread vote rigging and violence against opposition activists.

Kumaratunga last week announced she was prepared to hold the elections to the north-central, western, central and Uva and Sabaragamuwa provincial councils but has not given fresh dates.

The Supreme Court today ordered the elections commissioner to announce holding the delayed provincial council elections within three months. Provincial councils are the highest level of local government in Sri Lanka.

The main opposition United National Party (UNP) had accused the government of postponing the elections for fear of losing them.

**Analysts say Sonia, 52, is desperate to broaden her personal appeal by showing she is just as comfortable with India's Hindu traditions as with its secular ones.**

**Sonia tries to woo the Hindu majority**

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** Indian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi is shedding her Roman Catholic past and stressing Hindu values as she battles the country's ruling Hindu nationalists, reports AFP.

The Italian-born widow of former premier Rajiv Gandhi is increasingly wooing the majority community after cultivating minorities over the past year in a bid to undermine the Hindu nationalists.

Analysts say Sonia, 52, is desperate to broaden her personal appeal by showing she is just as comfortable with India's Hindu traditions as with its secular ones.

## 59 RSS activists held in Kerala

**NEW DELHI, Jan 27:** Fifty-nine members of a Hindu group allied with India's ruling Hindu nationalists have been arrested for beating up three students from a Christian seminary, a spokesman said today, reports AFP.

The Christians were attacked in the communist-ruled southern state of Kerala on Sunday, and one of the victims was still in hospital, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

The police arrested 59 activists of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteer Corps), which counts Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi and scores of other Hindu nationalist politicians as members.

An RSS spokesman was quoted as saying the arrests were a "conspiracy" hatched by Christians and Kerala's ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M).

## 11yr old US boy faces murder charge

**ORLANDO, Fla, Jan 27:** An 11-year-old Florida boy faced first degree murder charges on Tuesday after police said he shot his 13-year-old sister in the back as she was eating breakfast, reports Reuter.

The body of constance Boykin was found on the kitchen floor on Monday after her brother, Patrick Boykin Jr. called a police emergency number and reported she had been shot, police said.

The boy used a gun that belonged to his father, was charged on Monday evening, police said.

"At this point there really is no known motive," said Sgt Nick Pallitto of the lake county sheriff's office. "That's something the defence attorney may come up with."

The killing occurred in the small town of Minneola, about 25 miles 40 km west of Orlando.

## Wiranto seeks Suharto's help to end unrest

**JAKARTA, Jan 27:** Indonesia's armed forces chief General Wiranto has asked former president Suharto to use his influence to stop the unrest created by his followers, the Jakarta Post reported today, reports Reuters.

The message was conveyed to Suharto by Abdurrahman Wahid, leader of the country's largest Muslim group, Nahdatul Ulama (NU).

"I conveyed Wiranto's hopes to (Suharto) that he would now be ready to use his influence to stop his terrifying followers making chaos," Wahid was quoted as saying.

"I also expressed to him my hope that the next general election would proceed well," he said.

Indonesia has been racked by violence, most recently in the eastern Island of Ambon where last week at least 50 people have been killed in the worst religious fighting in the country for 15 years.

There is widespread suspicion that at least some of the violence has been deliberately provoked, with some pointing the finger of blame at Suharto's followers.

## Hand transplant patient moves a finger!

**LOUISVILLE, Kentucky, Jan 27:** The man who received the first hand transplant in the United States had moved a finger, and doctors said there are no signs of rejection or infection, reports AP.

"His hand looks good," said Dr Warren Breidenbach, lead surgeon for the team that transplanted a hand to Matthew Scott's left wrist on Monday.

"We are very cautious and not encouraging movement at this point. Controlled motion of the fingers will begin sometime in the next few days to one week," he said Tuesday.

This week Scott traded a metal-and-plastic prosthesis for a human hand — the first transplant of its kind performed in the United States.

The price: a lifetime on anti-rejection drugs that will suppress his immune system, leaving him vulnerable to infection, disease, even death.

**KARACHI, Jan 27:** When



Relatives of a little girl cry as they wait for her recovery from under the rubble of the family's home destroyed by Monday's earthquake in Armenia, Colombia Tuesday. At least 1,000 have been killed by the worst temblor to strike this seismically active country in more than a century and hundreds are believed to be still buried beneath the rubble.

— UNB/AP photo

## Colombia earthquake

## Rain hinders rescue work, worsens survivors' woes

**ARMENIA, Colombia, Jan 27:** A heavy downpour has slowed the search for earthquake victims and worsened the suffering of survivors seeking shelter, food and medicine after one of the worst natural disasters in Colombia's history, reports AP.

The confirmed death toll from Monday's magnitude 6 quake in western Colombia reached 700, but officials said the number was sure to rise. Red Cross officials said about 500 bodies had been recovered in the provincial capital of Armenia alone, with many outlying towns yet to be canvassed.

Capt. Ciro Antonio Guiza, Armenia's deputy fire chief, said Tuesday he believed more than 1,000 had perished. Red Cross coordinator Carlos Giraldo also estimated the death toll at 1,000.

Schools and stadiums were turned into makeshift shelters, but there wasn't enough space to house the estimated 180,000 people left homeless.

Food and drinking water also were in dangerously short supply. And prices for another coveted commodity — coffins had risen, angering victims' relatives.

"We don't have enough coffins to bury the dead," said Quindio Gov. Henry Gomez. Relief workers wrapped bodies in black plastic or blankets and left them on the streets.

President Andres Pastrana cancelled a planned visit to Europe and declared much of western Colombia a disaster zone in

an effort to speed up rescue efforts.

On a flight over the region Tuesday, he was devastated towns and coffee plantations.

Pastrana promised an initial dollars 12.6 million to rebuild homes.

This is the moment in which all Colombians will pay back those who for years and with their own hands have collected the coffee beans and have generated for us peace, progress and work," he said.

Aid pledges came from around the world, including more than 1 million dollars from the European Union and 10 million more from the Inter-American Development Bank.

Teams of earthquake specialists from the United States, Japan and France travelled to Colombia to aid the search for survivors. Mexico said it would send an army search team with sniffer dogs and power generators.

Armenia's Red Cross chief, Gloria Echeverri de Roman, appealed for tents and tarps to shelter the homeless, many of whom set up makeshift camps in the streets in front of their homes. More than 2,000 city residents were injured by the quake, she said.

The National Federation of Coffee Growers said it would assess crop losses over the next several days. Coffee exports earn Colombia roughly 2.2 billion dollars.



Former White House intern Monica Lewinsky departs the Mayflower Hotel in downtown Washington Tuesday, on her way out of town. At right is George Cook, manager of the hotel. In a surprise move, House prosecutors asked the Senate to "request the appearance" of President Clinton at a deposition for his impeachment trial. They also sought subpoenas to question Lewinsky, presidential friend Vernon Jordan and White House aide Sidney Blumenthal.

— UNB/AP photo

## People complain of abuse while police struggle to keep crime rate down in violence-torn Karachi

stitution and undermine the judiciary.

Gharibabad, like most low-income localities, is a stronghold of the MQM, which represents Urdu-speaking Indians who migrated to Pakistan when British rule ended in 1947.

Opposition parties and human rights groups say the moves weren't necessary.

"This is all part of the government's campaign to eliminate the party," said Kanwar Khalid Younis, an MQM lawmaker in Parliament. "We are being targeted because our leaders belong to the lower-middle class and speak for the poor. We don't indulge in violence."

The government launched the crackdown to quell violence in Karachi after it dismissed the provincial government on Oct 30. It suspended civil rights and set up military courts to try those responsible for "terrorism."

Police say crime in this violence-plagued port city has dropped since the government's actions.

"Compared to 65 deaths by terrorism in October when we started the operation, there were only 10 in November," said Karachi Police Chief Farooq Ameen Qureshi.

But police say crime has declined by almost 60 per cent since the start of the operation.

"There is lot of corruption in the police force and it doesn't enjoy the confidence of the people," he said. "There hasn't been a change in their attitude."

## Off the Record

### Of monkeys and cows

**NEW DELHI:** A growing menace from monkeys which snatch food packets and briefcases from officers in Delhi's corridors of power is getting out of control, a top official has admitted, reports IANS.

Municipal chief V.K. Duggal said the simian population has been on the rise because none was willing to catch the animals and it has become increasingly difficult to control the problem. He said tenders have been placed in newspapers inviting bids from contractors to catch the monkeys but the response has been poor.

According to one estimate, nearly 5,000 monkeys are on the prowl in the government secretariat area looking for food and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

"We have tried putting them back in forests around Delhi but they come back because of the easy food," Chief Wildlife Warden H.C. Dhawan told the Indian Express.

Fed up with the monkeys on the loose, who seem to have taken a particular fancy to its offices in the downtown area, the government had finalised a plan to deal with them. Discussed at a high-level meeting of several federal ministries and city municipal bodies, the plan includes hiring monkey catchers and building special enclosures for the strays where they will be kept for three months before they are transferred to forests in the neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. And since building the enclosures will take some time, the Delhi Zoo will house the primates in the meantime.

Monkeys in India have deep religious links and are identified with Hindu deity Hanuman. There are about 500,000 rhesus monkeys in the country of which 50 per cent are found around human habitation.

Cows, also revered by Hindus for its milk-giving qualities, are another source of concern for municipal authorities who spend thousands of rupees every year in rounding them up from Delhi roads and returning them to cow shelters and dairies.

## Habibie orders 4.1m govt workers to get out of politics

**JAKARTA, Jan 27:** In what could prove to be a major blow to the ruling Golkar Party, President B.J. Habibie has ordered Indonesia's 4.1 million government workers to get out of politics before a June 7 parliamentary election, reports AP.

State Administrative Reform Minister Hartarto said Wednesday that Habibie has signed a presidential decree that bans state employees from being members or executives of political parties.

Under Habibie's predecessor, ex-President Suharto, civil servants were obliged to vote for his ruling Golkar Party, which dominated the tightly controlled political system and propped up his authoritarian rule for three decades.

Many have been card-carrying members and leaders of Golkar, which garnered more than 70 per cent of the vote in the most recent election in 1997.

The decree signed by Habibie on Wednesday automatically nullifies their membership. If they wish to stay members of a party, they must leave the bureaucracy.

As of Wednesday, the factions had also agreed that size of the highest legislative body, the People's Consultative Assembly, which will elect a president later this year, be cut from 1,000 to 700 members.

The assembly will consist of 500 parliamentarians and 200 government appointees.

Golkar is already bracing for a major downturn in support at the ballot box with the establishment of dozens of new political parties.

Under Suharto, only Golkar and two other parties were allowed to contest elections.

Golkar is also trying hard to distance itself from the legacy of Suharto's autocratic era as the old president fends off allegations of corruption and human rights abuses.

Several political reform laws are expected to be passed on Thursday to lay the foundation for the election.