

Ground, air battles rage in Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 30 : Sri Lankan troops used helicopter gunships to pound Tamil Tiger positions in the north of the country where intense battles raged leaving heavy casualties on both sides, the defence ministry said today, reports AFP.
MI-24 gun ships were deployed as troops tried to dislodge members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam attacking the defences of the Elephant Pass military garrison.
The ministry said that eight guerrillas and two security personnel were killed in overnight fighting which initially flared on Christmas day.
Intense fighting was continuing near the northern army garrison of Elephant Pass located at the entrance to the Jaffna peninsula.
The guerrillas were attacking military positions at Ippatchchi and Thannankilappu in the Jaffna peninsula, defence officials said.
The upsurge in fighting comes after the December 18 assassination attempt on President Chandrika Kumaratunga who returned to the island Thursday after medical treatment in London.

Chandrika loses her eye, urges Tigers to give up 'fear of peace'

COLOMBO, Dec 30 : Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who has likely been blinded in one eye after an assassination bid blamed on Tamil Tiger rebels, urged her attackers Thursday to fight the "fear of peace" and enter talks, reports AFP.
Kumaratunga, 54, in her first television interview since surviving the December 18 suicide bomb attack here, told the BBC she has been told by doctors she was likely to be permanently lose the use of her right eye.
"Medically, (the doctors say) I can carry on, but probably I have lost the sight of one eye," she said in the interview in London, where she is being treated.
The president, whose right eye was shut throughout the interview with the BBC's former Colombo correspondent George Arney, said she was not "hysterical" about the wound caused by shrapnel.
A Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) woman suicide bomber detonated explosives strapped to her body as Kumaratunga was about to get into her armoured limousine, police said. The blast killed 26 people and wounded 110.
Kumaratunga, who was probably saved by her car, said she was the only leader who had "lived to tell the tale" after a LTTE suicide bombing.
She said she believed her life had been spared to bring about peace in Sri Lanka, where more than 55,000 people have been killed in the Tamil insurgency since 1972.
She said that since 1997 the government had tried to negotiate a peace with the help of the outgoing Commonwealth Secretary General Emeke Anyaoku, and more recently the Norwegian government. Both attempts proved fruitless.
LTTE's London-based ideologue Anton Balasingham told the Norwegians they would consider talks after the December 21 elections, Kumaratunga said, adding that at the time she feared the Tigers would try to eliminate her.
Kumaratunga, who three days after the bombing won reelection to a second term with 51 percent of the vote, said she was urging Sri Lanka's minority Tamils to force the guerrillas to the negotiating table.
"I talk with the wounds of my face... I am not telling them (Tamils) to hate their leader (Velupillai Prabhakaran). Force them to give up the politics of terror."

He (Prabhakaran) has to give up the fear of peace. He has an obsessive fear of peace. He has an obsessive fear of peace," Kumaratunga said. "I have no doubt that Prabhakaran does not want a peaceful settlement."
However, she maintained she was determined to continue negotiating with the LTTE despite the attempt on her life, saying everything short of an independent state was negotiable.
She said she intended to use her election mandate to devote power in Tamil-dominated areas, despite not having the necessary two-thirds majority in parliament.
There is an acceptable democratic, slightly extra-constitutional way of doing it. The mandate we have got is enough for that," she said.
She vowed to go ahead regardless of any legal challenges.



Taliban Islamic militia commandos head towards the hijacked Indian Airlines plane at Kandahar Airport in Afghanistan yesterday. Scores of commandos surrounded the hijacked plane while militia increased security measures by deploying tanks and Stinger missiles.

Two more killed in Ambon

JAKARTA, Dec 30 : Two more people have been killed and four others injured in Ambon, residents said Thursday as Indonesian troops attempted to quell sectarian violence in the eastern city, reports AFP.
The deaths, which included a two-year-old, bring to 65 the number of people killed in Ambon since fresh clashes between Muslims and Christians erupted on Sunday.
Christians armed with guns attacked the predominantly-Muslim area of Ponogoro on Thursday, leaving a Muslim killed and two others injured.
Mallik Selang of the Al Fatah emergency post told AFP.
The victims were taken to the Al Fatah maternity hospital, Selang said. Meanwhile, Siahaya of the Maranatha Protestant emergency post said security forces attacked a house in the Batugajah area on Wednesday night and shot dead a two-year-old child.
Our parishioners reported that one two-year child was shot to death inside her house in the presence of her parents," Siahaya told AFP by telephone.

Sectarian clashes claim 255 in Indonesian island

JAKARTA, Dec 30 : Sectarian clashes between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia's Spice Islands claimed 255 people were killed in just over two days on one island, reports AFP.
Details of the latest outbreak, the fourth in less than a week, emerged the day after the Indonesian government announced it had put the military in charge of security on the island of Ambon.
As well as the 255 people killed on Halmahera, the last week has seen 125 reported dead on Buru, 65 on Ambon and seven on Ternate.
More are feared dead on Morotai while hundreds have been injured, many seriously, as homes have been looted and churches and mosques razed.
More than 1,000 people have now died in the Spice Islands since Muslim-Christian clashes began in Ambon in January.
Captain Made Parsim, who heads the Tobelo sub-district military station on Halmahera, said the violence there had been caused by Thursday and about 12,000 people, Muslims and Christians, had sought refuge at a local army barracks.
I have been touring the region since last night and I can say that there is no longer the sound of explosives or gunshots," he said.
He said several houses were still burning after an estimated 50,000 people began rioting.
There has also been some looting in the south, with people mainly looking for food," Parsim said, adding that he had just 17 soldiers to ensure security in Tobelo.
Local police captain, Danny Momole, said the situation was under control but "tensions remain high".
A telephone operator asked to provide the phone numbers of mosques in Tobelo, said he believed these numbers were no longer operational as "those places have been burned down."
The operator added no shops were open and public transport had stopped.
The violence erupted on Monday after Christians received news that a Protestant church had been torched on Ambon.
During a rampage that did not subside until late Wednesday, they burned houses, businesses and places of worship belonging to Muslims in Tobelo, the neighbouring town of Galela and the surrounding villages, according to police and the military.
The Bisnis Indonesia daily reported that after the attack on Tobelo, the Christians had moved to attack Daruba on the neighbouring island of Morotai, which cannot be contacted by telephone.
In Ambon on Thursday, Christians armed with guns attacked the predominantly-Muslim area of Ponogoro in Ambon and the sounds of gunfire and exploding home-made bombs could be heard, despite the transfer of security from the police to the military.

Ukraine to close Chernobyl by Nov 15, 2000

KIEV, Dec 30 : Ukraine will close the notorious Chernobyl 1 nuclear power station by November 15, 2000 at the latest, the country's nuclear authority Energoatom said today, reports AFP.
This power station is no longer profitable and needs major repairs which would cost too much to keep it working," Energoatom's production director, Viktor Stovbun said.
Stovbun put the cost of repairs at 100,000 euros.
Reactor number three, the only reactor out of the four at the power station that is still working, was out of action for seven months this year.

India tight-lipped on hijack negotiations

NEW DELHI, Dec 30 : Indian officials clammed up today over the progress of negotiations with the hijackers of an Indian Airlines plane with 160 passengers and crew on board, reports AFP.
As the hijack drama entered its seventh day, Indian negotiators in Kandahar in southern Afghanistan -- where the plane has been standing since Saturday -- resumed direct talks with the hijackers.
In New Delhi, the Cabinet Committee on Security met Thursday morning for a special session chaired by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.
Senior officials attending the meeting, including Home Minister L.K. Advani, Defence Minister George Fernandes and the chiefs of the three wings of the armed forces, refused to speak to reporters afterwards.
The official silence regarding the negotiations over the hijackers' demands for the release of 35 pro-Kashmiri militants jailed in India, was broken only by a swift denial of reports that New Delhi had agreed to free some militants on the list.
There is no such agreement," said Foreign Ministry spokesman R.S. Jassal.
On Wednesday, the hijackers dropped two other key demands -- for 200 million dollars and the return of the body of a militant leader -- leading to optimistic hopes of a resolution.
While officials here refused to discuss the negotiations, they did try to ease concerns among relatives over the health of the 160 hostages on board.
From our reports, the passengers are all alright and if there is a passenger on board who is terribly sick, he will be let off," said Civil Aviation Secretary Ravinder Gupta.
We have no reason to believe any of the passengers are in a serious condition, other than suffering from stress, stiffness and other minor problems arising from the situation they are in," Gupta said.
Anil Khurana, a diabetic passenger who was released Sunday by the hijackers in Kandahar because of deteriorating health, was scheduled to return to India later Thursday.
Jagan Mohan Raju, whose wife is a crew member on the plane, said he was concerned that the drawn-out negotiating process was making people lose interest in the fate of the hostages.
Complacency has started setting in," Raju said.
It's not really news anymore. Interest will only return if they are released or killed."

Bin Laden left Kandahar

ISLAMABAD, Dec 30 : Alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden left Kandahar shortly after the hijacked Indian plane landed in the southern Afghan city on Christmas day, a Pakistani daily reported today, says AFP.
The Frontier Post, quoting a source close to the wealthy Saudi dissident, also claimed bin Laden had "denied any links to the hijacking of the plane."
The source branded any allegations to the contrary as "Indian propaganda" and "a pack of lies".
Bin Laden had not been aware of the hijacking nor had he any relationship with the hijackers, the source told the daily.

Russia to take whole of Chechnya soon

MOSCOW, Dec 30 : General Viktor Kazantsev, Commander of Russian troops in the north Caucasus, vowed that his troops would take over the whole of Chechnya, but refused to put a timescale on it, the daily Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported today, says AFP.
Kazantsev's reticence to put a deadline on the Russian troops' task, contrasted with comments made Tuesday by the country's deputy chief of staff Valery Milinov.
Milinov told a press conference then that "the capture of (the Chechen capital) Grozny is a matter of days, perhaps two to three days, perhaps seven to 10."
Russia says that Grozny and strongholds in the mountainous south of the breakaway republic are the only areas still under rebel control.
Kazantsev, while unwilling to answer a question about the timing of an eventual Russian victory, was nonetheless confident of the final outcome of the battle.
The most important thing is to cleanse the territory of bandits," he told the paper.
We plan to take complete control of the whole region of Chechnya... Most of Chechnya is already under the control of federal troops and operations to liberate the Chechen capital Grozny are being successfully carried out," he added.

Bad weather won't be a bar to world's biggest firework spectacular

SYDNEY, Dec 30 : Showers and strong winds are forecast for New Year's Eve in Sydney but the world's biggest firework spectacular, four years in the making, will blast off regardless, organisers said today, reports AFP.
The fireworks will go ahead in the rain, the lantern parade will go ahead in the rain, the party will go-ahead in the rain," said Ric Birch, executive producer of what is billed as the biggest outdoor event in Australian history.
More than 1.2 million people are expected to flock to 20 harbourside sites with a further 2.5 billion watching live broadcasts around the world.
In excess of 20 tonnes of fireworks will be ignited electronically on the night with four main firing platforms -- barges on the east and west of the Sydney Harbour Bridge -- nine rooftops and the sails of the famous Opera House.
That amounts to some 200,000 fireworks exploding across a six kilometre (3.7 mile) corridor. Most will be detonated in a 25-minute extravaganza at the stroke of midnight, although a smaller display is planned for 9 p.m. primarily for children.
A musical soundtrack will accompany the pyrotechnic show, featuring a history of pop music.

BRIEFLY

Turkmen gov't bans death penalty: The Turkmen government on Wednesday banned the death penalty, replacing it with a maximum 25-year prison term, AP reports from Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.
The People's Council, the Central Asian nation's top government body, also ruled that the predominantly Muslim republic would have an annual amnesty during an Islamic holiday.



A giant 300-meter (1000 feet) silk lantern in the shape of a dragon dwarfs the Hong Kong skyline behind it yesterday. The dragon is being prepared for the Hong Kong government's gala "Millennium Extravaganza" which will feature a giant dragon and lantern dance, a horse race, fireworks display and performances by international artistes.

Millennium celebrations with a difference

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 30 : Five Malaysian policemen who will join an international parachute jump over the South Pole to celebrate the new millennium are on their way to the Antarctic, an official said today, reports AFP.
They are due to arrive in Punta Arenas in Chile Friday, where they will join parachutists from seven other nations.
Siva Kumar, organising committee chairman, said in a statement the team would proceed to the South Pole via Patriot Hills and Vostock in Antarctica aboard a Russian aircraft. The team left Malaysia Wednesday.
Just minutes into January 1, 2000, the jump will take place," Jashpaul Singh, a committee member, told AFP.
Other members of the international team are due to make balloon flights in Antarctica to mark the dawn of the new millennium.
Siva said the international team would ride piggy back on a Russian expedition to scout a new supply route for Moscow's Vostock station.
The entire team would return to Punta Arenas on January 5. Officials said the millennium jump was expected to be televised live on a Malaysian private station.

US unveils hyper-accurate atomic clock

WASHINGTON, Dec 30 : Just in time for the new millennium, the US Commerce Department has unveiled a new cesium fountain clock, which shares with a similar device in Paris the distinction of being the most accurate atomic clock in the world, reports AFP.
The clock that began time-keeping Wednesday at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, in Boulder, Colorado, "will neither gain nor lose a second in nearly 20 million years," the department said in a statement.
NTIST F-1, as the clock is called, will contribute to an international pool of the world's atomic clocks used to define Coordinated Universal Time (known as UTC), the official world time, the statement added.
The new clock is approximately three times more accurate than the atomic clock it replaces, the NIST-7, also located in Boulder.

Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology Dhaka Tender Notice
D-1574 (2) Dt: 28.12.99
Sealed tenders are hereby invited by the undersigned in prescribed form from the bonafide and experienced PWD special class-I/class-I contractors who are enlisted with govt/semi-govt/autonomous bodies for (1) Vertical Extension of Ladies Hall (2) Snowcem works at Outside and White Wash at inside of Asanullah Hall (3) Snowcem works at Outside and White Wash at Inside of Gymnasium Building. Permission will be given up to 24-01-2000 for purchasing of schedule and tender documents will be sold up to 25-01-2000. Tender form may be purchased after taking permission from Engg. Office/P&D Office/ Comptroller Office/Civil Engg. Department office by the contractor/firm himself/himself or his/their representative on production of authorized letter bearing the signature of the representative duly attested by the contractor. Tender will be received by the undersigned/P&D office/Comptroller Office/Civil Engg. Department office of this university and Executive Engineer, PWD Eden-Building Division, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka up to 12:00 Noon on 26-01-2000 and will be opened on the same day at 12:15 PM in the abovementioned offices before the tenderers present. No tender papers will be sold on the opening day. For further detail information regarding purchasing and dropping the tender, the office of the undersigned and abovementioned offices may be contacted or the contractor may see the Notice Board of this Office.
GD-1253 University Engineer

Military Institute of Science and Technology (Technology for Advancement) Mirpur Cantonment Dhaka-1221 Tender Notice
1. Sealed tenders are hereby invited from the bonafide security firms to provide security guards to Military Institute of Science and Technology at Mirpur Cantonment, Dhaka in their respective company's letter head pad addressed to Commandant, Military Institute of Science and Technology.
2. Interested bidders are to submit registration certificate along with copy of up-to-date bank solvency certificate, income tax registration/TIN and VAT registration certificate at the time of dropping of the tenders. Tender scheduled can be collected from the office of the DAA&QMG, MIST on all working days during office time up to 04 January 2000 against a non-refundable cash payment of Tk 100/- (one hundred) only. The bidders must enclose 2.5% as earnest money of the total quoted price in the form of Pay Order/Bank Draft favouring the "Commandant MIST" from any scheduled bank.
3. The sealed tenders must be dropped in the tender box kept at the office of DAA&QMG, MIST latest by 11:15 hrs of 05 January, 2000. The offers will be opened on the same day at 1:30 hrs in the presence of the bidders, if any. No tender schedule will be sold on the day of opening of the tender. Successful bidders will only be communicated later on by confirmation letter.
4. MIST authority reserves the right to accept any tender or to reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason.
ISPR/Army/99/965 DFP-29401-29/12 G-2217 Director, Administration Military Institution of Science and Technology.

Invitation for Tender
Sub: Extension of Time for Bid Submission for Greater Chittagong Power Distribution Project, Phase-III, for Construction of Approximately 53 KM 132 KV Transmission Line.
The date of submission of technical and financial proposals for Greater Chittagong Power Distribution Project, Phase-III, for construction of approximately 53 KM 132 KV Transmission Line has been re-fixed on 26-1-2000 up to 11:00 AM local time instead of 16-1-2000. The tender will be opened at 11:30 AM on the same day.
All other terms and conditions will remain unchanged.
Biddut/Jana-1051(4)/99-2000 Director of Purchase BPDB, Dhaka. GD-1251

Invitation for Tender
Sub: Extension of Time for Bid Submission for Greater Chittagong Power Distribution Project, Phase-III, for Construction of 132/33 KV, 33/11 KV Sub-Stations.
The date of submission of technical and financial proposals for Greater Chittagong Power Distribution Project, Phase-III, for construction of 132/33 KV, 33/11 KV Sub-Stations has been re-fixed on 26-1-2000 up to 11:00 AM local time instead of 16-1-2000. The tender will be opened at 11:30 AM on the same day.
All other terms and conditions will remain unchanged.
Biddut/Jana-1050 (4) 99/2000 Director of Purchase BPDB, Dhaka. GD-1252

Khulna Shipyard Limited Bangladesh Navy, Khulna International Re-Tender Notice
Managing Director, Khulna Shipyard Ltd, BN, Khulna, invited sealed quotation for the following:
Table with 6 columns: SI No, Tender enquiry No & date, Description of materials, Price of tender documents, Terms of conditions, Opening date, Source of fund.
1. BABE(F)-31/Compressor/99-2000 dt 27-12-99 Air Compressor (Motor Driven) with accessories spares Tk 200.00 (Two hundred) (Non-refundable) C&F Mongla/Chittagong 09-02-2000 at 12-00 Noon Cash
Documents may be obtained during office hours on payment from:
1. Officer Incharge, Naval Store Sub Depot Dhaka, Naval Headquarters Complex, Banani, Dhaka-1213.
2. Naval Store Depot, Chittagong, New Mooring, Chittagong.
3. Officer Incharge, Naval Store Depot, Khulna, Town Khalishpur, Khulna.
4. Cash Section, Khulna Shipyard Ltd, BN, Khulna.
GD-1254 Managing Director