Violent battles

in Grozny

lent battles raged throughout Grozny on Tuesday as federal

troops pushed into central dis-tricts of the Chechen capital and warplanes pounded rebel

bases in the mountainous south, the Russian military

Waves of ground attack air-

craft blasted guerrilla bases in

Kharachol and Vedeno, the base

of leading Chechen field com-

mander Shamil Basayev. Russian military officials

dismissed Chechen claims to

have seized four villages south-

west of Grozny, saying the vio-lent clashes there had been a

failed Chechen attempt to break

Federal forces meanwhile

were gradually moving into

downtown areas of the break-

away capital despite fierce re-

sistance from Chechen guerril-

las, NTV television reported cit-ing military officials in Moz-

dok, headquarters of the Rus-

Government forces had

launched a fresh bid to take the

Staropromyslovsky district of

northwestern Grozny and the

Staraya Sunzha suburb to the

tal. NTV said.

northeast of the Chechen capi-

istry soldiers said the Russian flag was flying over some dis-

tricts of Grozny, the television channel said, although mili-

tary headquarters in Mozdok

Rapist executed

in Philippines

raped his daughter more than

100 times was put to death by

lethal injection in the Philip-

pines on Tuesday in the world's

first known state execution of

the new millennium, officials

rights groups immediately con-

demned President Joseph

Estrada's government for the

execution of Alex Bartolome,

accusing it of starting the year

41 year-old unskilled worker

when he rejected appeals for a

Bartolome dead at 3:10 p.m.

(1310 BST), or 10 minutes after

he received the lethal injection.

victed by a lower court in 1995

of repeatedly raping his 14 year-old daughter over two

The father of six was con-

Bartolome had appealed his

conviction, claiming his sexual relations with his daughter

were the acts of "two consenting

adults." The Supreme Court re-

jected his plea and affirmed the

In its ruling the Supreme

Court said Bartolome's argu-

ment "could only be concocted

by a morally corrupt and men-

tally depraved sex maniac" and

added he "deserves to forfeit his

prisoner to be executed in the

Philippines this year and the

seventh since 1999, when the

government re-introduced capi-

tal punishment after a 23-year

Bartolome was the first

place in human society."

death sentence.

Estrada scaled the fate of the

Prison officials declared

with blood on its hands."

last-minute reprieve.

Church leaders and human

said, reports AFP.

MANILA, Jan 4: A man who

did not confirm the claim.

Elite OMON interior min-

sian operation in Chechnya.

out of the besieged capital.

said, reports AFP.

KISLYAR, Russia, Jan 4: Vio-

Pakistan promises to bring hijackers to book: US

SHEPHERDSTOWN, West Virginia, Jan 4: Pakistan has assured the United States that it will act in compliance with international aviation agreements and arrest the hijackers of an Indian Airlines jet should they be found on its soil, a US official said Monday, reports

"Pakistan has told us that it will meet its obligations under the international convention to apprehend the hijackers and bring them to justice." State Department spokesman James

Rubin told reporters. His comments came as tension between India and Pakistan mounted over the incident with officials in both capitals accusing each other of promoting terrorism.

The hijacking ended on New Year's Eve in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar with India bowing to the perpetrators demands to release three militants in exchange for the 160 passengers and crew of the

Commandos

on Indian

flights

begun deploying commandos on

select domestic flights operated

by state-owned Indian Airlines,

following the recent hijack

drama in Afghanistan, officials

tional Security Guards have be-

gun travelling on board select

domestic flights from Sunday,"

Indian Airlines spokesman

commando-carrying flights

were to the troubled northern

state of Jammu and Kashmir,

where Indian security forces

have been fighting Muslim sep-

aratists for more than a decade.

flights are not yet covered, but

they too could be in some time

and this may become a regular

ments for deploying comman-

dos, known as "sky marshals,"

were being co-ordinated by the

Bureau of Civil Aviation Secu-

Christmas Eve hijacking of a

The plane and 160 hostages

spent seven days on the tarmac

of Kandahar Airport in south-

passengers and crew were fi-

nally released in exchange for

finalised to fly commandos on

Indian politicians

own half of

confiscated pistols

NEW DELHI. Jan 4: About

militants jailed in India.

Pathak said the arrange-

affair," Pathak said.

Airlines flight.

"So far the other domestic

Pathak said most of the

Robin Pathak told AFP.

"Commandos from the Na-

said today.

BOMBAY, Jan 4: India has

Airbus A300.

The hijackers then disappeared and while Islamabad has denied they have entered Pakistan, few analysts doubt they have slipped undetected through remote mountain passes into the country.

Rubin said Washington was not aware of the current location of the hijackers but called for any country having information on their whereabouts to act appropriately.

We continue to work with countries in the region, we think they must be brought to justice to remind all countries of their international obligations associated with the convention on hijacking." Rubin

'We continue to urge in the strongest possible terms that any and all states involved take action to ensure that the hijackers are prosecuted, or extradite the hijackers to a-place where they can apprehended and prosecuted."

YANGON, Jan 4: Myanmar's

ruling military today lashed

out at the opposition party of

Aung San Suu Kyi at a cere-

mony marking the 52nd an-

niversary of independence,

branding them "terrorists" and

calling on the people to destroy

of government-sponsored asso-

ciations gathered in Yangon's

People's Park to listen to the

Independence Day message

and remove with the people's

might the destructive danger of

the terrorist and destructive

group heading for utter devas-

tation," said the message read

by Yangon's military comman-

In the speech, read out fol-

lowing a flag-hoisting cere-

der and run in all state media.

from junta chairman General

"It is imperative to oppose

More than 15,000 members

them, reports AFP.

Than Shwe.

"The Pakistanis have told us that they condemn these acts of terrorism and that they will meet their obligation to appre-hend the hijackers and bring them to justice."

Meanwhile, Pakistan said Monday Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's accusations it was involved in the recent hijacking of an Indian airliner were meant to calm domestic anger and influence the United States.

The latest accusations appeared designed to divert domestic denunciations for delay. inefficiency and insensitivity of the Indian government to the pain and suffering of hijacked Indian airliner," Foreign Minister Abdus Sattar said in Islamabad.

"The Indian premier's statement also points to a preconceived objective of building a strategic relationship with the United States on trumpedup charges of terrorism against

Myanmar junta brands

Suu Kyi a 'terrorist'

mony, Than Shwe also called

for people "to oppose the neo-

colonialists from abroad" who

were assisting "internal na-

Aung San Suu Kyi and her Na-

tional League for Democracy

(NLD) were not named, the lan-

guage used was that typically

reserved for them by the junta

which has repeatedly accused

them of having foreign backing.

by the Nobel peace prize winner

and daughter of independence

hero General Aung San in a

message delivered after her re-

lease from house arrest by the

The NLD, which won 1990

junta in 1995, observers said.

elections but were never al-

lowed to take power, were

scheduled to release a message

at a meeting attended by Aung

San Suu Kyi later Tuesday.

It also echoed language used

Although Nobel laureate

tional traitors.

Pakistan," He told the Associated Press of Pakistan.

"In doing so, India no doubt wants world opinion to ignore India's abhorrent record of state terrorism," Sattar said.

He said said Fakistan's conduct in dealing with the hijacked Indian plane was transparent and was based on international law."

The safety of passengers and crew had been Pakistan's primary concern in dealing with the hijacked plane. Sattar

Vajpayee said Pakistan's "active and sustained role in fomenting terrorism in India is now too obvious to be overlooked by the international community.'

"India, therefore, strongly urges major nations of the world to declare Pakistan a terrorist state. Our government will work systematically towards this objective."



Lebanese policemen fire at a building near the Russian embassy in Beirut where a sniper was hiding after three grenades were fired at the Russian embassy compound and a nearby -AFP photo police barracks on Monday.

23 killed in Lebanon clashes

Rocket attack on Russian embassy hour-long shootout, police said.

BEIRUT, Jan 4: Twentythree people -- civilians, soldiers and Islamic fundamental ists -- died in Lebanon Monday in clashes that pitted Sunni Muslim extremists against Lebanese security forces in Beirut and in the north of the country, reports AFP.

As fighting continued in the north for the fourth day running between the army and the fundamentalists, some of them trained in Afghanistan, a lone militant attacked the Russian embassy in the heart of Beirut.

The suicide attacker. Palestinian, named by security services as Ahmad Raja Abu Kharub, 30, was finally killed when a special police squad stormed the building under construction from where he had fired rocket-propelled grenades. just 20 metres from the embassy, an official statement

killed and seven people were wounded, two seriously, in the

No one in the embassy was hurt. State-owned television station Tele-Liban said a statement was found in Kharub's pocket saying he wanted to be "a martyr for Grozny," the capital of Muslim majority Chechnya where Russian forces are engaged in a bloody military cam-

Police sources told AFP that Kharub was carrying a Palestinian refugee's identity card, saying he had been born in the Nabativeh refugee camp in southern Lebanon, which was destroyed by an Israeli air at-

tack in 1972. Security sources said Kharub -- also known as Abu Obeida -lived in a part of Lebanon's largest Palestinian refugee camp. Ain el-Helweh, that is the stronghold of the League of Partisans, an outlawed Sunni Muslim militant group led by Abu

A hand grenade was thrown late Monday at a Lebanese army

road block at the main entrance to the Ain el-Helweh camp. po-

No one was hurt in the incident and it was not known who threw the grenade.

Police said the army had not brought in reinforcements and the situation had returned to

Meanwhile at least 11 Sunni Muslim rebels were killed Monday when the Lebanese army seized the rebel-held vil lage of Kfarhabu in northern Lebanon, witnesses said.

The dead included one of the rebel leaders, Abdullah Hazim, and first aid workers who went to help take out the bodies said rebel losses "could well be

Security forces said they had already killed about 30 rebels since the operation against them began Friday in the Denniyeh plateau 45 km east of the northern city of Tripoli, and its

surrounding mountains. Kumaratunga accuses LTTE rebels as failed assassins

closed from an assassination peared on Television to publicly accuse the Tamil Tiger rebels for the first time for

Kumaratunga, 54, suffered a serious eve injury in a suicide bombing Dec 21 that killed 23 people just two days before presidential elections. Doctors have said she may lose the sight in the injured eye.

"After they failed to kill me on Dec 21, they went village to village with hailers telling people I have suffered brain damage." she said in a televised

With one eye shut, Mrs. Kumaratunga looked assertive on the broadcast. Wearing spectacles, she often thumped her desk to emphasize a point.

Tamil Elam "wanted to kill me but it was God who saved me, the president said.

This is the first time the Sri

maratunga. The rebels are fighting for an independent homeland for Sri Lanka's 3.2 million minority Tamils, saying they can only prosper away from the domination of Sinhalese majority who make up 14 million of the country's 18.6

"We have proof that the LTTE campaigned for the UNP.

cadres went from village to village telling people that they should vote for UNP. They also told people that if they are

cide bomb blast which wounded President Chandrika Kumaratunga, government officials said yesterday.

"The United States has helped in the past after previous bomb blasts," said an officials who declined to be identified.

He said the US team would help local experts investigate the blast at Kumaratunga's elf ion rally as well as a s rate blast at main opposition United National Party meeting in a Colombo suburb.

Moon illusion

WASHINGTON, Jan 4: The illusion that the full moon seen near the horizon is bigger than the moon seen overhead is a trick the brain plays when it perceives distance to a far object, according to new research by a father-son team. reports

In a study appearing Tuesday in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Lloyd Kaufman and his son. James Kaufman, report that a test with artificial, identically sized moons showed that viewers of a horizon moon perceived it as being farther

The researchers said that when the moon is on the horizon, the brain apparently picks up distance cues from the surrounding terrain and interprets the moon as being more distant. This, in turn, causes the brain to perceive the moon as larger, the researchers said.

When the moon is overhead in an empty sky, there are no distant cues and the moon is perceived as being closer and - smaller, the researchers said.

Kumaratunga also accused Monica hopes history will forget her scandal

Renewed religious clashes in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Jan 4: Clashes between Muslims and Christians in eastern Indonesia's Maluku islands raged on Tuesday, the military said, sending cated pistols. the death toll from two weeks of 3 Lankans violence soaring to more than

> Muslims and Christians battled for the third straight day in Masohi, the main town on Seram Island, leaving dozens dead, First Sergeant Lanursani of the local military office told

"I can hear sounds of gunfire and bomb explosions here and there." Lanursani said.

"I can say that dozens of people have died although I don't know the precise number," he He said the violence had con-

tinued unabated despite the deployment of hundreds of security personnel, including reinforcements from Java Island. "Soldiers have been forced to

shoot at the warring mobs," the officer said.

Sectarian clashes on the northern Maluku Island of Halmahera have killed at least 400 people since December 27,

the official Antara news agency said, quoting the North Maluku police chief Lieutenant Colonel Didik Prijantono.

The figure includes more than 250 killed during three days of violence in the island's Tobelo sub-district starting on December 27 when Christians angered by the burning of a church on Ambon island the previous day went on a rampage and attacked Muslim residents.

At least 63 more people died last week in similar clashes in Ambon, the main city of Maluku. Another outbreak of sectarian violence killed 165 on

Thousands of people from Halmahera, mostly Muslims, have sought refuge in neighouring Ternate island, the agency

forcements from East Java province and 15 doctors from Jakarta arrived on Monday in Ternate, the main city of the newly-formed province of

North Maluku The military headquarters in Jakarta said a total of 8,000

been deployed in North Maluku to support some 1,000 police and soldiers there.

The military on December 29 assumed responsibility for security in Maluku, known as the Spice Islands during colonial times, allowing security forces to search houses, conduct checks, and arrest suspects.

A year of conflict between Muslims and Christians in Maluku has left 1,134 dead. over 2,300 injured and more than 8,500 buildings, including more than 122 places of worship, either damaged or burned. Many of those killed and

wounded have been shot by security forces caught in the middle of warring mobs. The clashes first erupted on

January 19, 1999 on the Island of Ambon following a dispute between a public transport driver and a migrant. The violence has since spread to at least five other islands in the Malukus.

The violence forced tens of thousands to flee their homes and seek refuge in local military installations or elsewhere in Indonesia.



Monica Lewinsky (R), the newest spokesperson for weight loss organisation "Jenny Craig," appears in her first live prime-time television interview with talk-show host Larry King (L) on the CNN programme "Larry King Live" in Los Angeles on Monday. The former White House intern stated that she was trying to move her life ahead, take control of her problems with food and her weight, and attempting to pay off her legal bills. -AFP photo

LOS ANGELES, Jan 4: The young woman at the heart of the sex scandal that almost drove President Bill Clinton from office said Monday she hopes she will become "a smaller and smaller footnote" in US political history, reports AFP.

Monica Lewinsky told Larry King on CNN she thought of herself "as a young woman who made some mistakes, some private mistakes, but was part of something larger than herself." "I'm not blameless," the for-

mer White House intern said. "I completely recognise that I bear some responsibility in what happened. But I certainly didn't chose to become a public

figure," she added. svelte after losing 14 kilos (31 pounds) on a Jenny Craig commercial diet and has become a

spokeswoman for the firm. She also has a new Internet

company www.therealmonicainc.com -where she sells handbags and accessories.

She appeared on "Larry King Live" on Monday to promote the diet -- but also to begin the process of returning to a normal life, after a year-and-a-half of being the centre of media attention and the butt of jokes on

late-night television. "It can be somewhat embarrassing sometimes. But I'm

trying to be on track of being a 26-year-old ... trying to do the things that someone my age

She is also working out some "issues" in psychotherapy and is casually dating. She still draws looks when she goes out

in public, she said. "Sometimes I pretend that I don't know that anybody notices me. Most of the time that

works," she said. She said she recognises that she has become a part of American history as Clinton's sometime lover.

"I try to not to pay attention to it because it's too awesome. But ... as time goes on I hope it will be come a shorter and Lewinsky, now 26, looks shorter footnote," Lewinsky

> She has been living in Los Angeles for most of the time since Clinton's 1998 impeachment. She plans to move to New York, where Hillary Clinton is running for a US Senate seat.

> Lewinsky said she had "a lot of personal remorse for what she (the First Lady) has gone through and I'm sure ... for what Chelsea has gone through."

But wouldn't say if she would vote for her in the Senate race, and dodged all other political questions.

Lewissky said she didn't want to return to the public eye.

rity. The new policy follows the Kathmandu-New Delhi Indian ern Afghanistan, before all the three pro-Kashmiri Muslim Officials at India's stateowned international airline Air India said plans were being board some of its international

The leader of the opposition Croatian Social Democratic Party (SDP) Ivica Racan (R) and the leader of the opposition Social-Liberal Party (HSLS) Drazen Budisa celebrate their victory in the legislative elections early -AFP photo

yesterday in Zagreb.

Zemin to visit Israel: Chinese President Jiang

Zemin is to make an official visit to Israel in the spring, the

first ever by a Chinese head of state, Israel's Deputy Foreign

Minister Nawaf Masalha said Tuesday, AFP reports from

Jiang will come to Israel in the spring," Masalha told AFP,

without giving a precise date. He said Jiang would probably also

visit Palestinian self-rule areas where he would meet Pales-

Fire claims 7 lives in Tokyo: Fire tore

through a timber two storey home in Japan yesterday, killing

all seven occupants including four young children, police said,

flames shooting into the sky over the home in the city of Shi-

moda, 130 kilometers (80 miles) southwest of Tokyo. We have

found seven bodies at the site," said a Shimoda police official.

The blaze left only a blackened shell and destroyed most of the

Firefighters were shown on national television battling

"The Chinese authorities have informed us that President

half of the foreign-made pistols confiscated by the police in the national capital are purchased by politicians, while a meagre 10 per cent go to ordinary citizens having threat to their life, BRIFFIY home ministry sources have said, reports PTI.

Jerusalem.

tinian leader Yasser Arafat.

AFP reports from Tokyo.

neighbouring house's roof.

While 20 per cent of them are sold to central and state government ministers, 15 per cent are bought by members of parliament and state legislatures and 10 per cent by members of municipal bodies, the sources

said. The rest of the pistols are sold to serving and retired goverament officials (25 per cent). serving and retired personnel of paramilitary forces, home ministry and ordinary citizens who have a threat to their life (10 per cent each).

Out of 29 foreign pistols which were sold by the government agency during the past five years, 11 were purchased by elected representatives including former chief minister Sahib Singh Verma, former Delhi finance minister and leader of the opposition in Delhi assembly Jagdish Mukhi and city welfare minister and Congress leader Krishna

Tirath, the sources said. The law enforcing agency had recovered 2,102 countrymade pistols and 713-foreignmade pistols between 1995 and 1999, they said, adding while country-made pistols are destroyed, foreign-made ones are sold as per home ministry

guidelines. Former BJP Minister SP Ratawal and Harsharan Singh Balli, MLAS Sahib Singh Chauhan and Matin Ahmed are other elected representatives of Delhi who purchased confis-

arrested in India

NEW DELHI, Jan 4: Three Sri Lankans have been arrested in southern India for attempting | AFP. to smuggle communication equipment to Tamil guerillas in neighbouring Sri Lanka, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said Tuesday, reports AFP. The arrests were made at

Ramanathanpuram in the

coastal state of Tamil Nadu, PTI said. They allegedly tried to smuggle a dish antenna, a receiver and clothes to the guerillas late Monday. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) 'are fighting to carve out an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu, separated from Sri Lanka by a strip of sea, is home to some 60 million Indian Tamils.

Death toll crosses 600

neighbouring Buru island.

Some 1,500 troop rein-

additional army troops have

eign power," the statement said using the junta's official name. The NCGUB lamented the military's takeover of power in 1962 saying it did nothing to restore peace and stability and

The exiled "government" of Myanmar said earlier in a statement issued in neighbouring Thailand that colonial rule by Britain had been preferable to that of the military.
The National Coalition Gov-

ernment of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) said the country had been in a state of "civil war" since independence on January 4, 1948, and called for talks with the military.

"The deprivation of freedom under the State Peace and Development Council is much worse than the deprivation of liberty under the rule of the for-

One policeman was also urged people to rise up against

Tudjman's party suffers stunning defeat in Croatia polls

ZAGREB, Jan 4: Croatia's opposition centre-left secured a stunning general election vic-tory over late President Franjo Tudiman's HDZ party to take control of the country's parliament, according to preliminary results released early today, reports Reuters.

With 27 per cent of the vote counted, the main opposition bloc headed by former Communist Party leader Ivica Racan was clearly ahead in nine out of 10 multi-member constituen-Racan, eager to win back the

support of Western governments that have shunned Croatia in protest over Tudiman's autocratic rule, said he was confident he could form a solid majority. "As things stand at the moment we have achieved a better

result than that forecast by the opinion polls. It is proof that the people want change and recognise that we can bring it about," the 55-year-old career politician said.

"I am ready to become prime minister and I am aware it is not going to be easy.

The nationalist HDZ, which has governed the former Yugoslav republic since 1990 and had never previously lost at the ballot box, did not wait for the full results before conceding

but I swear we shall be a very serious and firm opposition. Foreign Minister Mate Granic told reporters in the early hours of today.

"We have lost the election,

her top rival, Ranil Wick-Lanka's president, her right eye remesinghe of the Untied National Party, of joining hands attempt last month, has ap- with the Tamil rebels to defeat her in the elections. trying to kill, then discredit Mrs. Kamaratunga said. "LTTE her, reports AP.

address to the nation on Mon-

The Liberation Tigers of

Lankan government has publicly blamed the Tamil rebels for the assassination attempt. A three-member team of investigators is seeking to establish who was behind the blast and how a suicide bomber managed to get close to Mrs Ku-

found to be voting for her, they Reuter adds: US technical experts arrive in Sri Lanka this week to help investigate a sui-

may get killed," she said.

million people.

Chinese official jailed for 'leaking state secrets'

BEIJING. Jan 4: A highranking bureaucrat in northern China has been sentenced to four years in prison for leaking the government's plan to ban the Falungong spiritual group. his wife said today.

Xu Xinmu, a former assistant director of Hebei province's personnel department, was sentenced on Monday by the Qiaoxi District People's Court in the city of Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, for leaking state secrets, his wife, Xi Ai, told AFP. Xu, 45, in June gained access

to a document released by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in which Jiang said Falungong was a threat to society, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said. Jiang ordered police de-

wrongdoings by Falungong members for use in a crackdown on the group, the information

centre said. At that time, the government had not given any hints to the public that it planned to ban the

Xu, a Falungong practi-tioner, informed the Falungong chapter in Shijiazhuang about the contents of Jiang's docu-

The chapter then sent a petition with 13,000 names to Jiang, questioning his plans to outlaw the spiritual movement. Xu was arrested on July 20 and was not tried until late De-

"The sentence is unfair. My husband did not intentionally leak state secrets," Xu's wife

partments to gather evidence of