Landslide kills 4 in Malaysia: Heavy rains in eastern Malaysia flooded several farming villages and triggered a landslide that killed at least four people on

Thursday, police said, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur. The landslide occurred as many vegetable farmers in Kampung Raja district in Pahang state were still asleep, police offi-cer Sufian Zawawi said in a telephone interview from the area. Rescue personnel found four bodies in the mud which had buried the homes. Sufian said. Police believed one more person was still trapped. The area is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of Kuala Lumpur. Their identifies had yet to be confirmed, he said, but two of the dead were believed to be Bangladeshi workers.

DPRK-US talks resume Jan 20: North Korea and the United States are to resume talks on improving relations in Berlin around January 20, Japan's

Kyodo News agency said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The talks would involve North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-Gwan and US negotiator Charles Kartman, said the Kyodo News report from Seoul, quoting sources. The decision was made in working-level contacts between the two sides, the report said. US-North Korea talks in Berlin in September last year led to a freeze of the North Korean missile programme and an easing of 50-year US sanctions against Pyongyang.

Japan's nat'l police chief quits: The head of Japan's national police force on Thursday announced his intention to resign amid a series of scandals, a spokesman

said. AP reports from Tokyo.

National Police Agency chief Yuko Sekiguchi, 60, told a press conference that he will step down to restore public trust in Japanese law enforcement, an agency spokesman said on customary condition of anonymity. The relatively clean image of Japan's police was rocked last year after senior officials in the Kanagawa prefectural (state) police were accused of covering up drug abuse by an officer. Officers in Kanagawa, near Tokyo, were also allegedly involved in sexual harassment and bullying of colleagues. The prefectural police chief and several other officials have been arrested in the drug cover-up.

Freed Pak cleric claims hijackers are Indians

KARACHI, Jan 6: A Pakistani cleric, freed by India in a swap for hostages on a seized Indian Airlines jet, claimed today that the five hijackers were

Indians, reports AFP, Maulana Masood Azhar, bearded and wearing spectacles, faced journalists at a news conference for the first time since he was released from jail in Indian-controlled Kashmir last

"I kept on asking them who they were. They told me to pray for them and they said they are Indian citizens," Azhar told reporters at the news conference, held in an apartment block near an Islamic seminary in

Karachi. "I pay tribute to the hijackers," he said. "They said they were Indian citizens and they

will go back to their country. "They were masked and asked me who I was and then hugged me with eyes filled with

Azhar was one of three Kashmiri militants released by India last week after New Delhi gave in to the demands of the five hijackers who held 160 people hostage on the aircraft

for eight days. A second militant, Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar, returned to Pakistan-administered Kashmir late Tuesday, where he was given a rousing welcome by mil-

itant groups. They apologised for not taking off their masks and just kept on talking about Jihad

(holy war)," Azhar said. "I only know they were Indian citizens but do not know whether they are from Kashmir

or somewhere else." After releasing the hostages at Kandahar airport, in southern Afghanistan, the hijackers sped off with the three militants towards the Pakistani border, Azhar said. But after just 25 minutes

they split up and the three freed militants met with friends who were waiting, he said. The hilackers drove off. The Pakistan border is around three hours drive from

Kandahar and military analysts here said the hijackers likely slipped into Pakistan unnoticed. "We travelled for around 20-

25 minutes together. I felt happy to be with them. Then I was taken on one side as lots of friends were already waiting there, and the hijackers went off," Azhar said.

"I crossed the Pakistani border and did not delay it as it is my own land." He had not been debriefed by Pakistani intelligence, he said. India and Pakistan have

since traded accusations over who was responsible for the hijacking. The disputed Himalayan

state of Kashmir has already sparked two wars between the two countries since they won independence from the British

Azhar demanded India re-

lease all prisoners held by Kashmir "and immediately withdraw it forces from Kashmir and hold negotiations with Pakistan to solve the issue which has engulfed the whole

world." Azhar, an Islamic cleric, was arrested in Indian-controlled Kashmir in 1994. He said he was taken from his jail early on Friday last week and brought from Kashmir to New Delhi then flown to Kandahar,

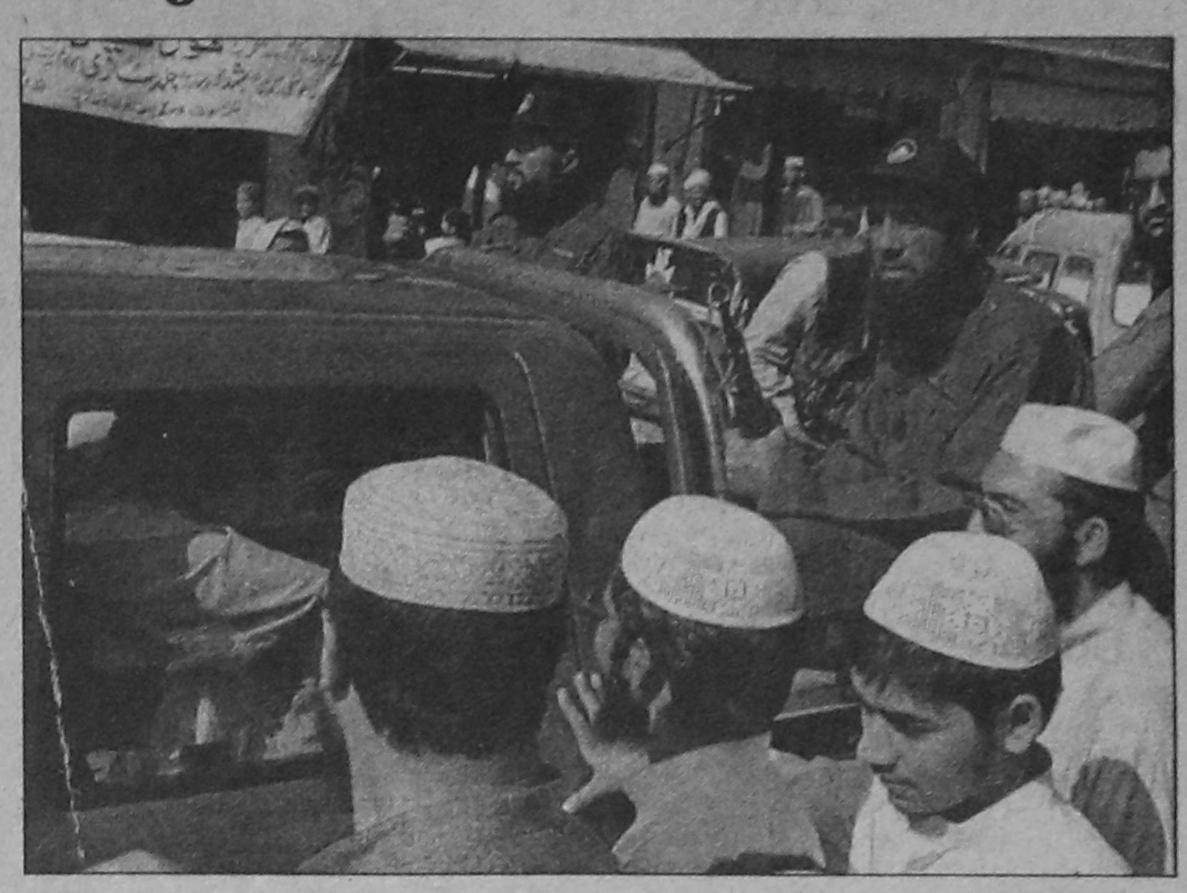
He pledged to continue fight-ing for the Kashmiri cause. "Kashmir is an integral part of Pakistan and we will go there whenever we want to go." he said. Late Wednesday Azhar ap-

peared before a crowd of thousands at an Islamic seminary. Dar-ul Ifta-wal Irshad, in central Karachi, and in a fiery speech rallied support for the Muslim and Kashmiri sepa-Tell Indians and those who

have suppressed Muslims that mujahideen (holy warriors) are a force of Allah and will hoist the flag of Islam in this world soon," he told the crowd.

The heavily-guarded seminary is considered to be the headquarters of Pakistanibased guerilla groups engaged in fighting in Kashmir. "I have only come here be-

cause I need colleagues. I need mujahideen who can fight for the liberation of Kashmir. I will not be at peace till Muslims get liberated," he said.



Religious students watch the van carrying Pakistani Scholar Maulana Masood Azhar, freed in a deal in the Indian plane hijack last week. He was being escorted back after a press conference in Karachi yesterday. Azhar, arrested in Indian-held Kashmir in 1994 was one of the three Kashmiri militants freed after the Indian Government bowed to the demands of hijackers in return for 160 hostages in Kandhar, Afghanistan. -AFP photo

First millennium baby undergoes heart surgery

AUCKLAND, Jan 6: The world's first millennium baby underwent heart surgery here today, New Zealand medical authorities said, but exact details of the boy's condition were kept confidential, reports AFP.

"It's early days yet but the baby has come through the procedure well and the surgical team says the operation went according to plan," Auckland Healthcare spokeswoman Brenda Saunders said in a statement.

The boy, with the first names of Tuatahi Manaakitunga, Maori for "the first blessing", was born at 12.01 am on January 1 at Waitakere Hospital, in Auckland's western sub-

Tuatahi was transferred to the paediatric cardiac unit at Green Lane Hospital in the city soon afterwards when he developed problems. Saunders said the child's

names were influenced by the birth at the beginning of the millennium and by the boy being the first son after three

The boy's surname and the identity of his parents have not been released.

SHEPHERDSTOWN, West

Virginia, Jan 6: Israel would

not oppose US military aid to

Syria as part of a peace deal

with Damascus as long as its own defence needs were met by

the United States, an Israeli of-

Wednesday, reports AFP.

ture Syrian conduct."

Minister Ehud Barak.

per in Tel Aviv.

dollars.

ficial at peace talks here said

the aid from the US than from

other countries," he said, ask-

ing not to be named. 'We hope

that US aid will influence fu-

a report that appeared earlier in

the day in the Haaretz newspa-

assistance is preferable to Rus-

sian or European assistance,"

added an aide to Israeli Prime

quested anonymity stressed

that his government's accep-

tance of US military aid to

Syria depended on Washing-

ton's agreement to meet certain

Israeli requests in a security

package estimated at 17 billion

pensation for an Israeli with-

drawal from the Golan Heights,

The total sum for US com-

"It is better for Syria to get

The official was confirming

"Syria's dependence on US

The Israeli official who re-

military aid to Syria

which Israel seized from Syria

in the 1967 Middle East war,

has been estimated by Israeli officials at 25 billion dollars.

Bill Clinton here for Toma-

hawk cruise missiles and other

aircraft and arms as part of a

security package, according to

an Israeli official, but Clinton

US State Department

spokesman James Rubin said

Wednesday that Israel and the

United States were holding

talks on the security package

symmetry in security arrange-

ments, which it is unlikely to

get. US and Israeli officials

have said privately. But Rubin

said the request was being con-

In addition to the Toma-

hawk missiles, Israel has asked

Washington for two wings of

Apache helicopters, Black

Hawk helicopters, new Hercules

cargo planes, three AWACS re-

connaissance aircraft, tanker

planes and a ground station for

downloading real time infor-

mation, an Israeli official told

Syria is seeking complete

but he declined to elaborate.

made no commitment.

Barak asked US President



the head of the official Chinese Catholic Bishops College, Liu Yuanren, at a church in Beijing yesterday, despite the Vatican registering disappointment at the move. Officials from the ruling Communist Party were among 300 people who attended the service which -AFP photo lasted just over two hours. Israel won't oppose US | Malaysia's ruling party

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 6:

Disciplinary chiefs in

Malaysia's ruling party have

called for the sacking of 69

members who backed the oppo-

sition in November polls --

mostly from one rogue division

-- and one loyalist said Thurs-

face action, reports AFP.

day that hundreds more may

of the United Malays National

Organisation on Wednesday

night recommended that UM-

NO's Supreme Council sack the

dullah Ahmad Badawi, who

chaired the committee, said it

would recommend that two of

them be expelled from the party

National Justice Party in state

assembly elections in Perak

and another contested a state

seat in Terengganu for the op-

position Parti Islam Se-

official news agency Bernama

Abdullah was quoted by the

Malaysia (PAS).

One stood for the opposition

Deputy Prime Minister Ab-

The disciplinary committee

may expel 69 for

Cold wave claims 241 in India

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: A biting cold wave sweeping parts of India has claimed 241 lives and paralysed road, rail and air traffic across many cities. newspapers and domestic news agencies said today, reports

The maximum number of 154 deaths have occurred in the eastern state of Bihar, followed by neighbouring Uttar Pradesh with 86 deaths, the United News of India (UNI) said.

Rajasthan state, in the north-west and bordering Pakistan, has recorded one death.

Chilly winds have been sweeping most of northern India and elsewhere since New Year's eve. The weather office says the spell is likely to continue in the coming days.

The winter has been accompanied by a dense fog which has seriously disrupted life in New Delhi and other areas, causing havoc with train and air traffic. Several domestic and international flights to New Delhi

have been diverted to Bombay. The fog has also resulted in dozens of road accidents in New. Delhi. Last week, one man was killed and some 20 others were injured when they were hit by a train while crossing a rail track in foggy conditions.

Authorities in Uttar Pradesh have closed down all schools

Newspapers said the cold wave had spread to parts of western and central India as well as the far-east. Officials said the coldest places in India were Kashmir and Rajasthan

MIAMI, Jan 6: A US ruling Wednesday that Elian Gonzalez should be reunited with his father has failed to end the international tug-of-war over whether the six-year-old survivor of a failed attempt to reach US shores should be repa-

in the United States announced

'It was an unconstitutional and unfair decision, that was reached mainly on the basis of secret meetings with Elian's father and not in accordance with due process of law," said Spencer Éig, an attorney for

was traveling in to reach US shores capsized. His mother and stepfather drowned in the incident. He has been staying with his

ruled Wednesday that the boy should be reunited with his Cuban father by January 14. But details as to how, when and said: "It will last two months where the boy will meet his faand then we will put our flag on ther, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, are Chechnya. This is the choice of still up in the air. INS commissioner Doris

Meissner said the father could travel to Miami to collect the boy, or his Miami relatives could accompany Elian back to Cuba.

Republican Senator Jesse "The Chechens themselves

enough to make decisions for ground invasion of Chechnya himself, he will be able to claim on October 1, according to figthe freedom his mother purures from Moscow chased for him with her life."

> no losses among civilians. Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov on Wednesday proposed a three-day ceasefire

Lanka: 160 Tamils held

Suicide bomb attack in

COLOMBO, Jan 6: Police raided small hotels early Thursday in the Sri Lankan capital and detained 160 Tamils for questioning regarding a suicide bomber attack outside the prime minister's office that killed 13 people, police and witnesses said, reports AP.

Those detained were visiting Colombo, the capital, from other parts of the island nation. Police began questioning them for possible involvement in Wednesday's attack.

Also Thursday, the government urged Parliament to extend emergency rule, accusing Tamil Tiger rebels of trying to destabilise the small island na-

"The government cannot take any chances and steps have to be taken in the national interest by extending the emergency rule," said Defence Minister General Anuruddha Ratwatte, who is coordinating the government's war efforts against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Ratwatte tabled a motion in Parliament a day after a Tamil rebel suicide bomber blew herself up outside the prime minister's office in a third major

days in Colombo, killing herself and 12 others.

"The LTTE terrorists continue to attack the security forces in order to destabilise (the island nation)," said Ratwatte, who himself had escaped two assassination attempts.

The emergency rule allows the armed forces to search any home and detain any person on suspicion of involvement with the rebels. It has been in force for more than two years across Sri Lanka and the government needs Parliament's approval every month.

Parliament is expected to approve the motion later Thursday.

There was unprecedented security in and around Parliament on Thursday. Antiterrorist commandos with sniffer dogs checked the area.

On Wednesday, a female assassin killed herself up as police tried to question her outside the office of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

It wasn't clear whether she wanted to attack the 82-yearold prime minister who mostly works from home because of poor health, but was expected to

Clintons arrive in new home

CHAPPAQUA. New York. Jan 6: First Lady Hillary Clinton arrived here Wednesday, accompanied by President Bill Clinton, to set up house in this posh New York City suburb and launch her own political career. reports AFP. Some 30 residents lined up

the road to greet the first couple as the presidential motorcade rode into town from the Westchester County airport around 6:30 pm (0530 BST). The Clintons, accompanied

by the first lady's mother, walked into the splendid white colonial-style home, nestled among trees, as agents of the first family's Secret Service security detail sealed off the area.

The first couple purchased the house for 1.7 million dollars on November 1. White House spokesman Joe

Lockhart said the Clintons would have dinner with friends in the evening and were to return to Washington early Thursday.

Following weeks of campaign-like appearances and public speculation, the first lady registered as a candidate for the US Senate in New York's Westchester County on Decem-

ber 23. Hillary Clinton -- the first presidential spouse in US history to run for political office and the first to live officially in a separate residence -- must establish residency in New York by election day in order to be eligible.

84 Russian troops killed in Chechnya

MOSCOW, Jan 6: Eighty-four Russian soldiers were killed in Chechnya in the past 10 days and more than 180 others wounded in heavy fighting for control of the republic's capital, Grozny, Interfax news agency

The losses included 78 regular army soldiers and six special interior ministry troops who died in the past day alone, the agency said, quoting Russian defence sources. A special llyushin-76 trans-

said today, reports AFP.

port plane was dispatched to Mozdok, headquarters of the Russian military command in the north Caucasus, to evacuate the wounded to Moscow, the report said.

The defence sources quoted by Interfax attributed the recent surge in casualties to intense fighting taking place in and around Grozny, capital of the rebel republic and the symbolic prize of the conflict.

Russian officials said Wednesday that a total of 475 soldiers had been killed and nearly 1,350 wounded since the offensive in Chechnya was launched more than four months ago.

It was not clear if any of the latest casualties had been included in that toll or are in addition to it.

Securitymen kill four militants in Gauhati

GAUHATI. Jan 6: Securitymen killed four militants three of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and one of Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) - during separate encounters in Assam since Tuesday. Official sources said here today, reports

Army troops operating in Nalbari district today killed a hardcore BLT militant and recovered from his possession a .315 rifle along with several rounds of ammunition. Another BLT militant Ranjit Bodo was caught during the encounter.

In another encounter, pa-

trolling army troops killed two hardcore ULFA militants and seriously injured another in Tinsukia vesterday.

The slain militants were identified as Ananda Das alias Udipta Bhorali, chief of the publicity wing of the outfit's Dihing Unit, and Sumiron Moran Aliasso Umitra Baruah, Publicity Secretary of its Lakhang Daisa Unit.

'Black Tigers' keep suicide bomb fears alive in Lanka

COLOMBO, Jan 6: For Sri her target. Lanka's Tiger rebels suicide is a way of life, and their preferred weapon is the suicide bomber. When the third human bomb in as many weeks exploded Wednesday, Colombo was alert to the danger, reports AFP.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) regard their elite Black Tiger suicide squad as a protective armour in their fight for a separate state called Eelam in the island's northeast.

Authorities were searching for 10 suicide bombers when a woman Black Tiger detonated explosives strapped to her body while she was being searched by a woman constable putside the prime minister's office on

The Black Tiger who perished also killed 12 others, but may have missed her intended target -- possibly the motorcade of a senior government minis-

"We have averted a bigger disaster," a police spokesman declared.

The alert guards questioned her because of her suspicious behaviour. If not for the security staff, she would have hit

The suicide bombers usually strike with deadly accuracy, al though President Chandrika Kumaratunga survived an attack at a political rally on December 18 in which 26 were

Kumaratunga's life may have been saved by a bulletproof limousine parked be-

tween herself and the bomber. Although she may lose the sight in her right eye from a shrapnel wound, she has said she was fine otherwise.

Just before Kumaratunga's rally was bombed, a suicide bomber staged an attack at an opposition rally near here, killing 12 people and wounding more than 40 others. A retired army general was killed in that attack

The Tigers' formation of a suicide unit proved a major turning point in the armed struggle for an independent Tamil homeland.

Since a Tiger rebel known as Captain Miller drove an explosives-laden truck into an army camp and killed nearly 40 troopers on July 5, 1987, the list of LTTE suicide attacks has grown steadily.

spite efforts to step up security around senior political figures and key installations. The squads claimed their most prominent victim when former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi was killed in May 1991. Two years later, the then Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe

victims have been claimed by

Black Tigers over the years de-

In October 1994. Kumaratunga's main rival for president, Gamini Dissanayake, was killed at a public rally by a suspected female Black Tiger.

Premadasa was killed by a sui-

cide bomber in Colombo.

Ironically, the Tiger assassination squads have often targeted leaders who proposed or tried to open talks with the LTTE. Kumaratunga held talks with the LTTE in 1994.

After surviving the assassi-nation bid last month, Kumaratunga declared she was the only leader who had lived "to tell the tale" after a Tiger suicide attack. She said she tletested Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, but was willing

More and more top-ranking to talk with him to bring peace to the island.

Last July, the LTTE announced it had lost 147 suicide cadres up to the 12th Black Tiger anniversary.

Military commanders say most of the major attacks against army bases in the island's northeast are led by waves of suicide cadres. The Black Tigers sea-going unit known as "Black Sea Tigers' have also inflicted heavy losses on the Sri Lankan navy.

Suicide is venerated within the LTTE, and members of the Black Tigers see it is a privilege to be chosen for missions. Ordinary rebels are also encouraged by their leaders to

commit suicide by chewing

Colombo who concede that a

committed suicide bomber is

one of the hardest threats to de-

fend against.

cyanide capsules worn around their pecks rather than be cap-Guerillas have told visiting journalists they must draw lots to decide who is lucky enough one to join the suicide squad, a terrible image for authorities in

backing opposition as saying that the other 67 members were found to have betrayed the party in the parlia-

mentary and state elections. Three were from the northeastern state of Terengganu --two had left to join PAS and one had campaigned for the same

The remaining 64 members were all from the UMNO division in Sepang south of the cap-

Ramli Karim, strategic officer with the Sepang division, told AFP another 100 members there had also collaborated with the opposition.

"Most of them are teachers and they aided the opposition machinery during the election. We will forward their names to party headquarters next week,

he said. Karim said they were motivated by personal differences with the local leadership or a belief that Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad should step down after almost 19 years at the helm.

Battle over Cuban boy rages despite INS ruling

triated to Cuba, reports AFP. A lawyer for the boy's family

that he is asking US Attorney General Janet Reno to revoke the INS decision, which touched off a firestorm of protest from Republicans and opponents of Cuban President Fidel Castro.

Elian's relatives in Miami. Elian was found by fishermen on November 25 clinging to a inner tube, after the boat he

Miami relatives and they have sought to keep him in the United States, which has sparked a tug-of-war between the two countries. Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) officials

Helms called the INS decision "unwise" and said he intended to introduce a bill that would grant Elian citizenship. "That way, when he is old

Helms said. The Republican National Committee accused the Clinton administration of caving in to Castro by deciding the case without a court hearing and Eig said he intends to file a court challenge to the INS decision.

attend the office on Wednesday. guerilla attack in the past 18

Vladimir Shevtchenko (L), an assistant to Boris Yeltsin (R), adjusts a chain after the former Russian President was awarded with the Order of Chevalier of the Holy Sepulchre in the Greek patriarchate of Jerusalem on yesterday. Boris 'Yeltsin will take part here in the Orthodox Christmas celebrations during his stay.

—AFP photo

Yeltsin in Jerusalem Russian flag will fly over Chechnya in two months'

age to the Holy Land, said today he believed the Russian flag would be flying over Chechnya in two months, as fighting raged on in the rebel republic, reports AFP. Asked during a visit to Jerusalem's Old City how long the conflict would last, Yeltsin

JERUSALEM, Jan 6: Former

Russian president Boris

Yeltsin, on a historic pilgrim-

the Chechen people and then there will be peace. There will be a member of the (Russian) federation which will be at peace and a Chechen republic without bandits," he told journalists in Russian.

want to clean up Grozny with their own hands At least 500 Russian troops have died and well over 1,000 wounded since the launch of the

But Yeltsin, travelling as "first president" of Russia despite his shock resignation New Year's Eve, said: 'There will be

Wednesday but it was dismissed

for Chechen rebel fighters to regroup in the face of a heavy onslaught on Grozny, the capital of the republic. Yeltsin is in the Holy Land to join celebrations for the first

Christian Orthodox Christmas

in the new millennium, his

first overseas trip since decid-

by Russia as a ploy to gain time

ing to relinquish power after eight years at the helm of the world's largest country. But the 68-year-old, whose health is of constant concern. looked pale as he received a special decoration from the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Diodoros I at a reception in the

Land ... because Russians came here centuries ago and gave life to this land," Yeltsin said. "I will come back and do everything for peace," said Yeltsin, whose country is a cosponsor of the Middle East peace process, although it was

Old City, part of Israeli-occu-

"I am happy to be in the Holy

pied east Jerusalem.

unclear exactly what he was referring to. On his arrival Wednesday Yeltsin said: "We support Palestine and will continue to support it, so that the process of rapprochement between the two

Asked how he felt to be in the Holy Land, he said "I feel holy."

states moves faster."