

## Teenager found 45 days after tsunami waves

AFP, Port Blair

A teenager who lived on wild fruits and coconuts for 45 days after tsunamis ravaged the Indian Ocean archipelago of Andamans in December has been rescued, police said yesterday.

The 18-year-old was evacuated Wednesday from Pillopanja, one of the southernmost islands of the archipelago ravaged by the giant waves on December 26, the police chief of nearby Campbell Bay island, Shaukat Hussain, told AFP.

He identified the woman only as Jessy and said her husband and her one-year-old child were missing and presumed dead.

"Jessy took to the forests when the waves came but by the time she came out after several days the rest of the population had been either evacuated to Campbell Bay or swept away by the waves," Hussain told AFP by telephone.

Fewer than 1,000 people lived on Pillopanja, one of the many islets where mainland settlers have built homes and farms, before the tsunami struck.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani pedestrians make their way through a downpour at a market in Islamabad yesterday. The death toll from a week of record heavy rain and snow across Pakistan hit 112 with many more missing after a dam in the remote southwest burst and swept whole villages into the sea, officials said.

## Netanyahu attacked at wedding

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Supporters of Jewish settlers attacked Benjamin Netanyahu at a wedding but the former Israeli prime minister escaped unhurt, police and media said yesterday.

A small group vehemently opposed to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw Israelis from the Gaza Strip shouted at Netanyahu: "Murderer, your day will come" in the Thursday evening incident, the daily YediothAchronoth said.

Reports said a plate was thrown at Netanyahu, now finance minister, at the wedding in the ultra-Orthodox village of Kfar Habad near Ben Gurion International Airport outside Tel Aviv and a police spokesman said a tire on his car was slashed.

Wedding guests held back the assailants as security guards whisked away Netanyahu, 55, in another vehicle.

"We believe that the heckling was carried out by up to three minors although nobody has been arrested yet," police spokesman Gil Kleiman told Reuters.

## Lanka blames rebel split for killings

Tigers praised for 'restraint'

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's government yesterday blamed splinter factions of the Tamil rebel movement for the slaying of a top guerrilla leader and praised it for the "restraint" it had shown since the killing.

Accusing "factions" of the killing, the government said the splinter groups oppose a Norwegian-brokered ceasefire between the government and the Tigers.

"There are factions working to sabotage the ceasefire agreement between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," government spokesman Mangala Samaraweera told reporters after a cabinet meeting.

"It's the work of those who want to see the ceasefire agreement come to an end. In a way, the ceasefire has been violated by such people."

A senior Tamil Tiger leader, E. Koushalyan, a former Tamil legislator and four other rebels were

gunned down Monday in the eastern Batticaloa district in a government-controlled area.

There has been no claim of responsibility but Tamil Tigers have blamed rebel renegades working with Sri Lanka's military.

Military officials say they suspect the attack was by a breakaway faction of the Tamil Tigers led by the former number two in the rebel leadership, known as Karuna.

Both Colombo and the Tigers have called the killings a breach of the truce in place since February 2002.

The government said it heightened fears of a return to war in the island nation. Over 60,000 people died in Sri Lanka's conflict between 1972 and 2002 when the ceasefire went into effect.

Koushalyan was the most senior Tiger to be gunned down since the truce started. Peace talks have remained deadlocked since April 2003.

## Fortune tellers predict happy marriage this time for Charles

AFP, Hong Kong

Prince Charles may have been unlucky in love in the past, but if Hong Kong's famed fortune tellers are anything to go by, his marriage to Camilla Parker Bowles will be a great success.

Chinese soothsayers Friday predicted a happy and long marriage for the heir to the British throne, who announced he would wed his long-time lover Parker Bowles on April 8.

"April 8 will be auspicious for people born in the Year of the Rat," feng shui Master Edwin Ma told AFP, referring to Charles' Chinese zodiac sign. "It is a good day to get married."

Chinese fortune tellers divine the future by consulting ancient Chinese almanacs based on astrological observations.

They also take into consideration the relative weights of forces that Chinese folklore believes emanate from all things, especially specific "elements" that are said to dominate different years.

# Nepal vows to foil Maoist blockade

### Troops hunt for 145 prisoners freed by rebels, US aid at risk

AFP, Kathmandu

Security forces scoured western Nepal yesterday for 145 prisoners sprung from jail by Maoists, as the army vowed to foil a road blockade threatened by the rebels to protest King Gyanendra's seizure of power 11 days ago.

The prisoners were freed when hundreds of Maoist rebels stormed the jail in the western Kailali region late Wednesday in their first big offensive since the king assumed absolute powers in the Himalayan outpost on February 1.

"An intense search is under way for the 145 escaped prisoners in the area," a security official said.

US military and other aid to Nepal is at risk following the seizure of absolute power by King Gyanendra,

Washington's top envoy to the Himalayan kingdom warned yesterday.

"There is pressure on US assistance here, that's undeniable," US ambassador James Moriarty told reporters when asked for Washington's response to the ongoing detention of Nepalese political leaders and human rights activists.

"That pressure will increase if we don't see movement in those areas," he said after inaugurating a South Asia Student Leader Conference sponsored by the US mission in Nepal.

Asked if US aid would be cut off, he said, "I think it's at risk, everything is at risk."

Five soldiers and at least one rebel died in the attack reported late Thursday in the kingdom, which has been under emergency rule since the monarch sacked the government

and declared emergency rule.

"Hundreds of Maoist rebels tried to attack various government offices," including those of the police and district administration, "but were bravely repulsed by security forces," the security official told AFP.

"Several hundred rebels first controlled the jail and set free 168 inmates including 60 Maoist rebels and ran away with some arms and ammunition," he said. Twenty-three of the prisoners had been put back behind bars, he said.

The official said the Maoists suffered heavy casualties but only one body was found because the rebels had carried away their dead. The militants routinely take away the bodies to avoid their identification and their network being uncovered.

## China building highways to link Myanmar

PTI, Beijing

Two high-grade highways linking China and Myanmar will be open to traffic in the next two years, the state media reported.

The highway linking Tengchong in China's Yunnan province with Myitkyina, Myanmar, will be finished by the end of this year, at a cost of USD 21.79 million, a commerce department official of the southwest province said.

Another highway, linking Zhangfeng to Bhamo, Myanmar, will be open to traffic by 2006, the official said. It will cost USD 3.39 million.

The construction of both the highways started in the second half of 2004, Xinhua news agency reported.

The official said the reconstruction of the two highways will help regional economic cooperation and development.

## Freezing cold kills 67 Afghan children

AFP, Kabul

At least 67 Afghans, mainly children, have died from freezing conditions as the war-battered country faces its coldest winter after years of droughts, an official said yesterday.

Most of the victims are children in rural areas as well as refugee camps in the capital Kabul, public health minister Mohammad Amin Fatemi told AFP.

"We have two types of reports -- one unconfirmed reports from the local authorities which is quite large - up to hundreds," he said. "And we have confirmed reports -- 67 children and mothers have died of cold weather."

He said that 39 of the casualties were reported from the Karwar district in Logar province, south of Kabul, while others were in remote villages in northern and central Afghanistan.

Authorities in Kabul had earlier said that at least six people had died of cold in a refugee camp near the capital, where the temperature has dropped to minus 18 degrees Celsius (minus 0.4 degrees

Fahrenheit) during the nights.

Three children died of cold weather last night in a refugee camp in southeastern Paktia province, local police chief Hay Gul Slimankhil told AFP. Another six or seven were taken to hospital.

Fatemi said his ministry was preparing for an emergency operation to take medicines and other supplies to the affected areas, some of which were inaccessible by road.

"We have to take the supplies by helicopters," the minister said.

The minister said that more than 900 children mainly suffering from respiratory infections, pneumonia and whooping cough were being treated in government-run hospitals in Kabul.

Meanwhile hundreds of people are thought to be stranded because of heavy snow, ice and avalanches affecting national highways, according to the authorities.

The US-led coalition, based in Afghanistan to hunt down militants after toppling the Taliban in 2001, said it was called in to help out after a pile-up on a snowbound road in northern Afghanistan, the military said.

## Prison inmates take 67 hostages in Argentina

### 8 die during prison riot

AFP, Buenos Aires

At least eight people have died during a prison riot in the city of Cordoba as hundreds of inmates held 20 guards and 42 other people hostage and threatened to throw some of them off the roof, officials said early yesterday.

Police said five inmates, two prison guards and one police officer had been killed in the rioting so far in Cordoba's maximum-security prison of San Martin, 700 kilometers (435 miles) northwest of here.

Unconfirmed television reports put the casualty toll since the riot began Thursday afternoon at nine dead and 30 injured, including nine police officers.

More than 1,000 police and army troops joined by inmates' relatives surrounded the facility as officials negotiated with riot leaders who are demanding reduced sentences and improved living conditions.

Television images showed dozens of armed inmates atop the

prison roof threatening to throw some wardens to the pavement below. One guard, stripped to the waist, was being held as knives sliced across his arms and legs. Smoke was billowing from inside the jail.

Provincial Penitentiary Service director Graciela Lucientes de Funes told reporters the convicts were also threatening to slash the throat of prison Warden Emilio Corso.

Cordoba Province Police Chief Jorge Rodriguez said early Friday that in addition to Corso, the hostages included 25 prison guards and 50 people, mostly women and children, who were visiting the prison when the riot broke out.

But 13 hostages were later released, including five prison guards, five women and three children, authorities said. That would leave 62 hostages in the prison.

## Green solution to dengue peril

AFP, Paris

Dengue fever, a growing threat in poor tropical countries in Asia and Africa, is being gradually rolled back in Vietnam thanks to a low-tech, grassroots and environmentally friendly strategy, a study says.

Dengue, of which there are some 50 million infections per year, is transmitted to humans by a day-biting mosquito, Aedes aegypti.

The disease is proliferating in shanty towns in many poor tropical countries, mainly because lack of a reliable piped-water supply forces people to keep water in barrels and tanks, and this is where the mosquitoes breed.

In research published on Saturday in the British medical weekly The Lancet, an Australian-Vietnamese team believe they are making inroads into the problem without having to resort to expensive and potentially damaging insecticides.

Their approach is based on a microscopic water predator called a Mesocyclops copepod, which feasts on mosquito larvae.

## 2004 was the fourth warmest year for Earth on record

AFP, Washington

Greenhouse gases and to a lesser extent the El Nino current in the Pacific Ocean contributed to making 2004 the fourth warmest year on Earth since temperature measurements began worldwide at the end of the 19th century, Nasa scientists said.

"There has been a strong warming trend over the past 30 years, a trend that has been shown to be due primarily to increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere," said James Hansen, a climatologist at Nasa's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, outside Washington.

The warmest years on record were, in descending order, 1998, 2002 and 2003, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration said on its website.

In 2004, the average global temperature was 14 degrees Celsius (57 Fahrenheit), or 0.48 Celsius (0.86 Fahrenheit) warmer than any year between 1951 and 1980, Hansen said.

## N Korea demands talks with US to defuse row

AP, Seoul

North Korea has demanded bilateral talks with the United States to defuse tension created by its announcement that it is a nuclear power, the communist state's UN envoy said in a South Korean newspaper interview published yesterday.

Han Sung Ryol, a senior diplomat at North Korea's UN delegation in New York, was the first North Korean official to speak to outside news media since Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry defied the United States and its allies by declaring Thursday that it has nuclear weapons, its first public announcement that it has weapons.

North Korea said the weapons are a deterrent against a US invasion and that it doesn't intend to join six-nation disarmament talks any time soon.

"We will return to the six-nation

talks when we see a reason to do so and the conditions are ripe," Han told Seoul's Hankyoreh newspaper in a Thursday interview in New York. "If the United States moves to have direct dialogue with us, we can take that as a signal that the United States is changing its hostile policy toward us."

Han's suggestion came as the two-year-old standoff over North Korea's nuclear weapons programs plummeted to a new low with Pyongyang's statement Thursday.

It's a long-running North Korean strategy to try to engage the United States in bilateral talks, believing that such meetings would boost the isolated country's international status and help it win bigger concessions. In the current six-nation talks, North Korea has increasingly found itself surrounded by countries, including its allies China and Russia, who are critical of its nuclear ambitions.



PHOTO: AFP

Rioting inmates at San Martin jail in the Argentine province of Cordoba, threaten to throw a prison guard from a roof Thursday. Around 2,000 inmates at San Martin jail were involved in the mutiny, where some 67 people were taken hostage, including the high security prison's chief, while eight people have died in a jail-break attempt, according to officials and media.