

Tensions easing between Israelis and Palestinians

INTERNATIONAL
JERUSALEM — A Palestinian suicide bomber tried to carry out an attack in Gaza on Friday, the Israeli military said, the first such attempt since Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called for an end to attacks earlier this month. Meanwhile, in a sign of easing tension in the West Bank, Israel lifted its blockade around Bethlehem as a Christmas gesture early Friday, but kept a ban on Arafat entering the biblical town despite international protests. The Israeli military said the Palestinian attacker, carrying an assault rifle and an anti-tank missile, approached Israeli forces near the Netzarim junction in central Gaza. Soldiers shot and killed him, and found that he was wearing an explosives belt that did not deto-

ap news capsules

nate. Palestinian security officials had no comment.

On Dec. 16, Arafat called for an end to attacks against Israelis, saying he has always denounced suicide bombings. In response, the militant Hamas announced it was suspending suicide attacks in Israel but would continue targeting Israelis in the West Bank and Gaza. The other militant group, Islamic Jihad, did not say it would stop attacks.

SHIBERGAN, Afghanistan — Former Taliban fighters who have “simply changed their turban color” and melted into the population repre-

sent a threat to the stability of Afghanistan and its interim government, the newly appointed deputy defense minister warned.

“The Taliban cannot wage war against us, but they can still create huge problems like committing acts of terrorism and kidnapping our people,” Gen. Rashid Dostum said Thursday in northern Afghanistan. “There are still risks.”

Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek warlord, was a key member of the northern alliance that helped overthrow the Taliban and a major power broker in northern Afghanistan and its main city, Mazar-e-Sharif.

Dostum said he was willing to commit as many as 15,000 soldiers to hunt for terrorism suspect Osama bin Laden and members of his al-Qaida organization, blamed for the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

NATIONAL
CHICAGO (AP) — A Christmas nightmare finally ended for a mother when her 16-month-old daughter was found in West Virginia, days after being snatched from a Chicago bus station by a stranger. Jasmine Anderson was found Thursday after a nationwide search that led authorities a home in Williamson, W.Va., where the kidnapping suspect allegedly took the toddler after the Christmas Eve abduction, said Thomas J. Kneir, special agent in charge of the

FBI’s Chicago office.

The child was apparently in good health and in the custody of West Virginia authorities until she could be reunited with her parents.

Police arrested Sheila Matthews, 33, who has been charged with one count of federal kidnapping. She was taken into custody and was scheduled to appear in court in West Virginia on Friday.

A tip from a relative of Matthews’ boyfriend led to the arrest.

“We’re really grateful to everyone who helped,” said the child’s mother, Marcella Anderson, fighting back tears. “Especially the family members who were brave enough to come forward and had really good hearts, and God bless everyone.”

Police say Matthews took the child to cover up a lie she made to her boyfriend. Matthews told him she had a baby while he was in a California prison, and when the man was released, she told him her mother was caring for the baby in Chicago, police said.

BOSTON — Government officials say the explosives-laden sneakers an airline passenger allegedly tried to ignite appear to have no metal in them, which may have helped foil a suspected bombing attempt.

Testing showed indications of PETN, a material used to make the explosive Semtex, the same material used by Libyan terrorists to down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, the officials said.

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