



**Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov (L) shakes hands with his South Korean counterpart Cho Young-kil during a meeting at the defence ministry in Seoul on Thursday. Ivanov is here for a two-day visit to discuss ways of achieving a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear situation.**

## N Korea says no to nuke inspections

China, Russia block UN condemnation of Pyongyang

AFP, Seoul

Communist North Korea indicated Thursday it had no intention of allowing UN inspectors back into the country as it quietly tore up the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The Stalinist regime kicked out inspectors four months ago and served notice a month later that it was pulling out of the international arms control accord that has served as a gatekeeper to nuclear weapons proliferation for more than three decades.

The withdrawal became effective Thursday without official comment from North Korea.

Washington says that North Korea has already produced nuclear weapons and admitted in October that it was running a programme based on

enriched uranium to produce more, sparking the current nuclear crisis. The United States has demanded that North Korea scrap its nuclear programmes before dialogue on resolving the crisis can begin.

Without admitting outright that it possessed nuclear weapons, North Korea came close Thursday when it said allowing nuclear inspections would entail disarmament.

"The US demand for the DPRK's (North Korea's) scrapping of its 'nuclear weapons program before dialogue' would lead to inspection and the resultant disarmament spark a war," Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

KCNA said that North Korea had learned from the war in Iraq that it was a fatal mistake to bow to inspections as

Baghdad had learned to its cost.

"The only way of averting a war is to increase one's own just self-defensive means," KCNA said.

"The Iraqi war launched by the US preemptive attack clearly proves that a war can be prevented and the security of the country and the nation can be ensured only when one has physical deterrent force, a military deterrent force strong enough to decisively repel any attack of the enemy with any types of sophisticated weapons."

In the past North Korea has insisted that its nuclear programmes are for peaceful purposes. Russia Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov said Pyongyang should prove it by admitting inspectors.

Meanwhile, China and Russia blocked UN condemnation of North Korea as the Stalinist state on Thursday

was set to become the first country to withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

North Korea served notice three months ago that it was pulling out of the international arms control accord that has served as a gatekeeper to nuclear weapons proliferation for more than three decades.

In New York on Wednesday, the UN Security Council expressed concern at a closed-door meeting but failed to agree on a statement condemning the Stalinist state's nuclear weapons drive.

China, North Korea's main ally and a key supplier of aid and trade, and Russia, with significant economic interests in North East Asia, have argued that UN intervention could deepen the six-month-old standoff.

## India launches satellite successfully

PTI, Bangalore

In another significant milestone in India's space programme, multi-purpose satellite INSAT-3A was successfully launched on board the European Ariane-5 rocket from the French Guyanese spaceport of Kourou in South America in the early hours on Thursday.

The launch, delayed by a day after a minor anomaly was noticed in the satellite on Wednesday, went on with clockwork precision as the European consortium rocket lifted off according to launch window schedule, carrying INSAT-3A and an American satellite and injecting them into space, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) sources said here.

As Ariane-5 carried out its mission, ISRO Chairman Dr K Kasturirangan and other top space scientists, including Project Director R K Rajangam, who were present at Kourou, expressed their joy over the successful launch.

## Over 4000 opposition activists detained in Tamil Nadu

AFP, Madras

Police in India's southern Tamil Nadu state said they detained more than 4,000 opposition activists Thursday during a demonstration against the arrest of an opposition leader a day earlier.

The leader of Tamil Nadu's opposition DMK party, M.K. Stalin, was arrested late Wednesday after he visited a girls' college to support student protests against the state government's plan to demolish the 90-year-old heritage site.

Thousands of DMK supporters took to the streets of the state capital Madras Thursday to protest the arrest and tried to block traffic and force businesses and shops to close, police said.

Those who were taken into custody were expected to be released by evening. They were held at community centres and schools.

Stalin, a member of the state legislative assembly, was arrested with four other DMK lawmakers after the principal of the Queen Mary's Girls' College

laid a complaint against them.

They were produced before a magistrate and charged with trespassing and threatening the college watchman with murder. The men were remanded in custody for 15 days, police said.

The Tamil Nadu government says the college building must be demolished because it is unsafe.

Stalin, a former mayor of the state capital Madras, is the son of DMK president M. Karunanidhi. The party is one of the coalition partners in the federal government.

Karunanidhi claimed 10,000 activists had been detained Thursday. Stalin said the case was "bogus" and the state government was being vindictive.

In another incident, police in Madras took into custody 43 opposition legislators who blocked traffic during a protest against the government's threat to invoke an "essential services" order to break strikes, and its alleged foisting of cases against politicians.

## 4 Pak Kashmiris killed in Indian shelling

AFP, Muzaffarabad

Four people including two children were killed in overnight shelling of Pakistani Kashmir by Indian troops, Pakistani officials said Thursday.

The casualties occurred in Nakyal sector in the southern Kotli district of Pakistani Kashmir, where shelling began Wednesday evening and continued till late in the night, district official Sayyed uz Zaman said.

"The shelling was sudden and targetted the civilian population," Zaman told AFP. "The shelling left a 13-year old girl and her 11-year old brother dead after their house in Turkandi village was hit by a mortar shell."

Two men, aged 70 and 40, were killed in the nearby Mohra Dharoti village, he added.

Zaman said Indian troops used mortars and medium artillery causing damage in two villages along the Line of Control, the de facto border splitting the disputed Himalayan region between nuclear rivals, Pakistan and India.

## 28 roasted alive at Russian school for deaf

AP, Makhachkala

A fire raged through a boarding school for the deaf in southern Russia early Thursday, killing 28 children and injuring about 100 others, the Emergency Situations Ministry said.

Rescue efforts at the school in Makhachkala were slowed by the need to wake the children individually because they could not hear alarms. Some of the children were found covering under furniture, officials said.

Firefighters saved 138 people from the blaze, said ministry spokeswoman Marina Rykina. Officials said the fire may have been caused by a short circuit when electricity was restored to the building after a blackout.

Some 100 sustained burns and smoke poisoning, the Interfax news agency reported. Emergency officials said 16 were in serious condition, instead of 39 as reported early by media.

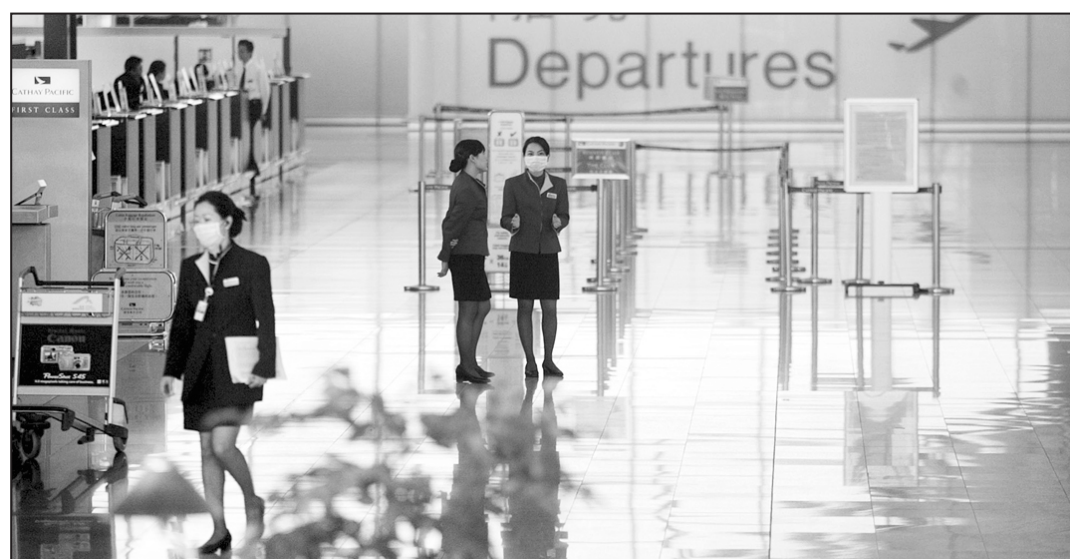
The children who died were mostly 6- and 7-year-old boys, emergency officials in Makhachkala said.

Emergency crews said in the rush to get the children to safety, some were thrown out windows and caught by rescuers standing outside. Winds hindered efforts to put out the blaze.

Television footage showed smoke pouring out of the barred windows of the yellow brick building hours after the fire broke out. The walls were charred, and all the windows had shattered.

An Emergency Situations Ministry plane left Moscow for Makhachkala with medications for the injured.

The fire came on the heels of a deadly school blaze in northern Siberia earlier this week. A two-story, old wooden school in a village in the republic of Yakutia was completely destroyed in the fire Monday, which killed 22 students between the ages of 11 and 18 and injured at least 10.



**Cathay Pacific staff wear masks at an empty departure hall on Thursday at Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok airport to protect against a killer outbreak of pneumonia which so far has infected over 900 people and killed 28 in Hong Kong. Pilots and flight attendants from several major international airlines have expressed fears of flying to the territory following the outbreak of the disease known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).**

## SARS to stay in Asia: Expert

REUTERS, Singapore/Washington

Singapore scientists were searching for the source of growing SARS infections at the nation's largest hospital on Thursday after a US expert warned that the virus was probably in Asia for keeps.

There are more questions than answers about Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) because doctors are still collecting data about the virus that has spread across the world from southern China in months, infecting nearly 3,000 people and killing more than 100.

"I think we have to assume that the

virus is in Asia to stay," said Dr Jim Hughes, head of infectious diseases at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"In terms of its introduction into North America, whether it is here to stay I think remains to be seen but I think we should assume that it may well be."

The disease has already delivered a heavy economic blow across Asia, hitting hotels, airlines, restaurants, taxi companies and other tourist services.

The flu-like disease has reached 20 countries with at least 1,290 cases in China and 970 in Hong Kong where a US

teacher was confirmed dead on Wednesday after arriving by ambulance from China.

The United States has 148 cases "under investigation" but has reported no deaths.

Singapore has the world's fourth-highest number of cases at 126, and the Ministry of Health reported its highest number of new infections in two weeks on Wednesday. Eight people were newly diagnosed with the illness -- five staff, one patient and one visitor at the sprawling Singapore General Hospital.



**A Turkish woman checks her collapsed house's window after an earthquake measuring 5.6 points on the open-ended Richter scale caused several injuries and panic in and around the western Turkish town of Izmir, early on Thursday. Most of the injuries occurred when local residents jumped out of their windows in panic, which the Istanbul seismological institute timed at 0040 GMT.**

## Prithvi, Agni missiles to be inducted, says Fernandes

PTI, New Delhi

Prithvi and Agni strategic class missiles in different versions are being inducted, while Akash, Nag and Trishul are in advanced stage of development, Defence Minister George Fernandes told the Lok Sabha on Thursday.

Funds of Rs 1771.43 crore have been sanctioned for development of missiles under The Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme, he said in a written answer, adding that Brahmos supersonic cruise missile is being developed jointly with Russia.

Tibet: The 118-km Gormo-Lhasa railway line being constructed to connect Qinghai province in China with Tibet is likely to enhance the induction

and sustenance capability of the Chinese troops in Tibet autonomous region, he said.

Krivak: The Krivak version of warship from Russia is expected next month subject to successful trials, he said.

Licence: The government has no proposal to re-impose licence fees on TV and radio sets, Information And Broadcasting Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

IOC: Indian Oil Corporation has plans to enter the aviation business in Sri Lanka through its wholly owned subsidiary, Lanka IOC Private Ltd, Minister of State for Petroleum SK Gangwar said.

DTH: The government has received three applications for permission to start DTH services, Prasad said.

## UN 'deeply concerned' over Israeli raid in Gaza

2 more Palestinians, 2 Israelis killed

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said Wednesday he was "deeply concerned" following an Israeli air raid on Gaza City that left seven Palestinians dead and dozens wounded.

"He deplores the use of excessive force in a densely populated area and reiterates his opposition to extrajudicial killings," said a statement read by Annan's spokesman.

"While he recognizes Israel's right of self-defence, the secretary general again call on Israel to conduct itself in a manner fully consistent with its obligations under international humanitarian law," it said.

Israel defended the missile strike by an F-16 fighter-bomber and two Apache helicopters, which killed seven Palestinians, including three Hamas Islamists and four civilians.

Shortly after the F-16 strike, two Apache helicopters fired two missiles at the same area, witnesses said. That second attack raised the death toll and doubled the number of injured as it hit emergency service workers and onlook-

ers staring at the wreckage from the first missile.

Meanwhile, two Palestinians and two Israelis were killed Thursday morning in an exchange of fire in the Jordan Valley in the West Bank, military sources said.

A Palestinian commando opened automatic gunfire on a "group of Israelis" who returned fire, the source said, without saying whether the Israelis were settlers or soldiers.

Six Israelis were also injured in the gunfight and some of the assailants managed to flee, the sources said, adding the army had launched a manhunt in the area.

The deaths brought to 3,149 the number of people killed since the September 2000 start of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, including 2,370 Palestinians and 721 Israelis.

Earlier, the Israeli army on Wednesday used dynamite to blow up the West Bank home of a militant from the radical Islamic movement Hamas, Palestinian security sources said.