

BRIEFLY

Kashmir militants rocket cantt :

Muslim militants fired three rockets on the cantonment and two more localities Srinagar late Saturday, residents said. AFP reports from India. Militants fired on Badmi Bagh Cantonment, Rawalpura and Chatabal on the eve of a planned unfurling of India's national flag by the opposition Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP Indian People's Party), they said. The target at Rawalpura was apparently a paramilitary federal central reserve police force post. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage in the attack.

Plane crash claims 5 in Germany :

Five people were killed Saturday when an engine on their private Cessna aircraft caught fire and the plane crashed short of the runway at Munch-Riem Airport, police said. AFP reports from Germany. Police sources said four of the five — two couples — were returning from a vacation in Zurich which they had won in a lottery organized by their health insurance company. They said the pilot lost control of the plane after the engine caught fire, and crashed 100 meters (yards) short of the runway. The plane had been diverted to Munich from Augsburg, 40 kilometers (25 miles) away, because of heavy fog.

Jews open fire on Palestinians :

Jewish settlers in the West Bank city of Hebron opened fire on Palestinian stone-throwers Saturday, wounding four, military sources said. AP reports from Jerusalem. The settlers, from the Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba, opened fire on stone-throwers after they were pelted with stones and empty bottles, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The settlers, who were on a hike in the area, fled after they began shooting, the sources said. The settlers, who were on a hike in the area, fled after they began shooting, the sources said.

Rally against racism in France :

At least 50,000 people marched through the street of Paris Saturday, denouncing racism toward immigrants, AP reports from Paris. Some 70 organizations sponsored the protest including SOS Racism, the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, and the League of Human Rights. A main target of the march was the ultraconservative National Front, the political party of Jean-Marie Le Pen, which advocates expelling Arab immigrants. "Racism is a National Front," said one of the many banners carried by marchers. "Enough of Le Pen, and injustices too," read another. The protest was "not only against the National Front, but also political parties and their outrageous talk, as well as the government," said Harlem Desir, President of SOS Racism. There are about 3.7 million immigrants in France, most of them Muslims from France's former North African colonies. This does not include illegal aliens, for which figures vary widely. The protesters marched peacefully from Place de la Bastille, birthplace of the French Revolution, to Nation, another large plaza in eastern Paris.

Jordan to join Middle East talks :

The government on Saturday endorsed Jordanian participation in Middle East talks scheduled for this coming week in Moscow, AP reports from Jordan. The announcement was made by acting Information Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti after a biweekly meeting of the 29-man cabinet. The two-day discussions in Moscow will involve regional issues such as water, disarmament, the environment and the movement of refugees. More than 26 countries have been invited to the conference. King Hussein has urged Arab states to attend the meeting saying it achieves the long-standing Arab goal of an international peace conference on the Middle East. Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians — the three other parties that held face-to-face talks with Israel in Washington earlier this month — want Israel to agree to surrender occupied lands before they accept regional discussions. State-run Petra news agency said Foreign Minister Kamel Abu Jaber would lead an eight-man delegation to the Moscow meeting and would leave Jordan Sunday.

Polls in Mali postponed :

Legislative election scheduled for Sunday in Mali have been postponed, the two bodies running the west African country announced here Saturday, AFP reports from Bamako. In a communique, the transitional committee for the salvation of the people and the Mali government said the delay was because of "practical difficulties" and the Supreme Court's inability to rule on the validity of candidacies. The communique said however that "all measures would be taken to meet the deadline for the transition," by March 26, to a multi-party democracy.

9 killed as Tigers blow up bus in Lanka

COLOMBO, Jan 26: Tamil rebels detonated explosives under a bus carrying about 50 people in Eastern Sri Lanka on Sunday, killing at least nine people, military officials said, reports AP. Eight people on the bus died, along with an air force man who was part of a foot patrol on the road that winds past several military and police camps in the Ampara district's flat scrubland, the officials said. At least 31 people were wounded, including seven members of the patrol, the officials said, speaking on their customary condition of anonymity. The attack occurred at Arantalawa, about 195 kilometers (120 miles) east of Colombo. Some policemen and air men returning from leave were among the civilians on the privately owned bus, officials said. The explosion followed military intelligence reports that the Tamil Tigers have ordered their guerrillas to step up activities during the repatriation of Tamils who had fled to nearby India to escape the war in Sri Lanka. "They want to disrupt the returning of Tamil refugees from India," Col. Sarath Munasinghe, the army's spokesman, told reporters last week. Last Wednesday the 614 Tamil refugees, the first batch to return, arrived at the northeastern port of Trincomalee aboard an Indian Naval vessel. More than 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamils have fled to neighboring India, which wants to send them home.

Havel in political trouble

PRAGUE, Jan 26: Vaclav Havel is in political trouble two years after the "velvet revolution" swept him to the presidency. By midsummer, he may be out of power and the nation could disintegrate, reports AP. Havel's failure to achieve constitutional reform increase the chances that the federation of 10 million Czechs and 5 million Slovaks will dissolve. The two tough politicians likely to win leadership of the regions in June elections are seen as improbable partners for Havel, who was a dissident playwright before communism fell.

Yeltsin no longer considers US a potential enemy

NEW YORK, Jan 26: Russian President Boris Yeltsin said he intends to stop targeting US cities with nuclear missiles and no longer considers the United States a potential enemy, reports AP. Yeltsin told the television network ABC News on Saturday that "we want to change our military doctrine" and "turn our intercontinental ballistic missiles away from all cities of the United States." Yeltsin said he has informed President Bush of his intentions, will make a statement on the matter Monday and will do so again Friday at the United Nations Security Council in New York. The military posture of Russian leaders will be to "no longer consider the United States our potential adversary," Yeltsin told ABC. However, Yeltsin did not address the issue of Russian nuclear missiles pointed at US military targets. The network broadcast only a portion of what it billed as an exclusive interview on Saturday, saying the full interview would be aired on an evening news magazine show next Friday.



Yeltsin's move would be the latest step signaling a stand-down from the Cold War era of nuclear confrontation between the United States and the former Soviet Union.

The Bush administration has decided to halt the nation's nuclear bomb-building indefinitely. The Washington Post reported Saturday. It will cancel production of the only nuclear warhead remaining on the US military's order books, said the newspaper. Other steps: Bush intends to move toward eliminating the nation's force of 50 MX ballistic missiles, eliminate plans for single-warhead Midgetman missile and scale back the Minuteman III missile force. Defence Department sources have said in confirming recent published reports. A US military advisory panel urges cutting the nuclear arsenal in half. The study prepared for an Air Force general says the United States should target a scaled-down nuclear force on potential foes other than the former Soviet Union. At least one critic of the study says the cuts should be even deeper. The existence of the study was disclosed earlier this month by The Washington Post and The Los Angeles Times and subsequently confirmed by military experts who had seen the study. In military spending: President Bush will call for \$4 billion in reductions in current military programmes in next year's budget. Draft documents target such items as a planned upgrade of the Army's M-1 tank, the Navy's F-14 jet fighter and money earmarked for scientific research at universities. A draft list of this year's proposed cuts was reported in Friday's Washington Post and later obtained by The Associated Press. The Russian parliament approved a budget that the deputy prime minister said would slash arms purchases to less than one-seventh of last year's level.

Kazakhstan wants to retain N-arms on its territory

ALMA ATAJAN, Jan 26: Kazakhstan President Nursu-Itan Nazarbayev Saturday hinted that he intends to retain strategic nuclear weapons on his territory until these are scrapped in line with international treaties, reports AP. Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the new Commonwealth of Independent States, earlier this week told visiting French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas that all strategic weapons in the former Soviet Union would be repatriated to Russia by 1994 at the latest. Addressing a joint press conference here with Dumas, Nazarbayev said Kazakhstan was prepared to "ratify international agreements on the reduction of strategic armaments and carry out new reductions as new accords are signed."

Clashes leave 2,500 dead in Nigeria

LAGOS, Jan 26: Up to 2,500 people have been killed in communal fighting over farmland in Nigeria's remote north-eastern state of Taraba since last October, according to reports from the area on Saturday, reports Reuter. Western diplomats said missionaries who reached the northern city of Kaduna from Taraba, Wukari region had reported between 2,000 and 2,500 deaths in clashes involving the mainly Christian Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups, at Loggerheads for nearly 40 years.

NLD chief, 10 others expelled from party

BANGKOK, Jan 26: Myanmar's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) expelled 11 senior members including its chairman yesterday, an officials Myanmar Radio report said, reports AP. The official Yangon Radio report, monitored here, quoted a statement the current NLD leadership submitted to the Election Commission as saying that 11 senior NLD members including its detained former chairman Tin Oo were stripped off their party membership. Analysts said that the expulsions were likely to have been done under pressure from Myanmar military junta. They were dismissed from the party on the grounds that they had been imprisoned for criminal offences, according to the report. Tin Oo, former Myanmar armed forces Commander in Chief was imprisoned by the military junta in 1989. The other 10 NLD members were also jailed for various criminal charges by authorities after they were elected as representatives of people's assemblies in the 1990 general elections, it said.

Iran condemns Israel-China relations

TEHRAN, Jan 26: Iran yesterday denounced China's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and said the move could hurt Beijing's ties with the Muslim world, reports AP. "Muslims who know the Zionist regime as their enemy denounce this relationship," Tehran radio said in a commentary about the announcement Friday of the establishment of Israel-China ties. The move "certainly does not benefit Beijing's future relations with the Islamic world," Iran's official radio said. "This decision from China is the result of the capitulatory attitude of the Arabs before the Zionist regime," the radio added. The recognition of Israel by certain countries like China is also the consequence of the divisions in the Arab world, particularly after the war in the Persian Gulf.

Taya reelected President of Mauritania

NOUAKCHOTT, Jan 26: Colonel Maoutya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya was re-elected President of Mauritania in the first round of voting Friday in the country's first multi-candidate elections since independence, the Interior Ministry said Saturday, reports AP. Taya received 61 percent of the votes, the Ministry said, adding that the result was virtually final.

US, Soviet military aid helped Iraq to invade Kuwait : NY Times

NEW YORK, Jan 26: The Reagan administration decided to give highly classified intelligence to Iraq in the spring of 1982, two years earlier than previously disclosed, a newspaper reported, says AP. The United States also allowed the sale of American-made arms to Baghdad to help Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein avoid defeat in the Iran-Iraq war, the New York Times reported Sunday. Assistance from the United States and later the Soviet Union helped Iraq go on to become the regional power that invaded Kuwait in August 1990, sparking the Persian Gulf War, the newspaper quoted officials as saying. The report by investigative journalist Seymour M Hersh was attributed to current and former White House, intelligence and State Department officials interviewed over the past two months. It didn't name the officials. The decision to help Iraq was made after American intelligence agencies warned that Iraq could be overrun by Iran, the Times said. Iran's army was strengthened the year before by covert shipments of American-made weapons. The Times and other news organizations reported last year that in 1981 the Reagan administration secretly allowed billion dollars worth of American arms and spare parts to Iran. Evidence that the United States was helping arm both sides indicates that the administration had more of a hand in the lengthy Iran-Iraq war than previously known. In the early 1980s the administration insisted that it was neutral in the war.

Jewish settlements to hinder peace process: King Hussein

AMMAN, Jan 26: King Hussein on Saturday criticized Israel's construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories and said its continuation would obstruct the Middle East peace process, reports AP. Meeting with a delegation of US Jewish leaders, Hussein also reiterated Jordan's determination for a "peaceful settlement with Israel based on international legitimacy," the state-run Petra news agency reported. Eight members of the New York-based American Jewish Congress arrived Friday as the first Jewish group officially hosted by Jordan. There have been previous informal encounters between Jordanian officials and Jewish groups. Petra's report was the first official mention of the group's visit to Jordan. It said Hussein told the group that Israel's "continuation of Jewish settlements" construction in the occupied Arab territories is based on rotten beliefs. If it continues this policy, Israel will abort the peace process and destroy the great hopes tied to this last opportunity to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region," Hussein reportedly added.

Iran to back Libya over Pan Am, UTA disputes

TEHRAN, Jan 26: Iran on Saturday pledged its full support for Libya in its confrontation with the United States, Britain and France over the bombing of two passenger planes, television reported, says AFP. The pledges were made by President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ahmad Khomeini, the son of Iran's late spiritual guide, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in separate talks with the Libyan second-in-command, Major Abdelasalam Jalloud. Jalloud briefed the Iranian leaders on the results of Tuesday's UN Security Council resolution 731 which urged Tripoli to cooperate in an international probe on the bombings. Rafsanjani said Iran supported Libya against American threats and backed Tripoli's request that a neutral international court investigate the blowing up of Pan Am flight 103 in 1988 and a French UTA plane in 1989. The Iranian President also stressed that this problem will be solved the support of Muslim forces and those seeking justice. A total of 440 people were killed in the Pan Am bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland and in the UTA explosion over Niger. The United States, Britain and France are accusing Libyans of involvement in the bombings and submitted the resolution which the Security Council endorsed asking Libya to cooperate fully in the investigations.

Off the Record

Bush books a day for the boys

WASHINGTON: President Bush had a pair of ritual visits to all-male social clubs on his agenda, and his spokesman defended the groups as "totally appropriate" although they exclude women, says AP. As in many other years, Bush's schedule Saturday included lunch with the Alibi Club, an organization of about 50 businessmen, and dinner with the larger Alfalfa Club, which holds an annual men-only gala. "He has gone every year and he intends to keep going. And he believes these clubs are totally appropriate," Bush spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said. However, Harriet Woods, president of the National Women's Political Caucus, said Bush's participation in such clubs demonstrated "a lack of awareness." Bush is no newcomer to male-only clubs. He belongs to California's Bohemian Club, which holds an annual retreat for luminaries such as former President Reagan and other powerful political and business leaders. However, Bush hasn't attended the retreat since becoming president.

Enquirer saved from a lawsuit

LOS ANGELES: Roseanne and Tom Arnold on Friday dropped the National Enquirer from a lawsuit over a story that said the couple turned a rented Beverly Hills mansion into a 'pigsty'. The Santa Monica Superior Court lawsuit filed in August sought unspecified damages from the supermarket tabloid and the mansion's owner, Spencer Proffer. It accused them of conspiring to concoct the story. The Arnolds dropped the National Enquirer from the lawsuit Friday, saying they had based their claims against it on information from alleged tabloid insider James Cruse, which they now believe probably was false. Cruse said in a sworn deposition that an Enquirer editor ordered reporters to dump trash in the mansion, then photograph it. "Once it became apparent to our counsel that Cruse was unreliable, we felt morally obligated to immediately dismiss our claim against the Enquirer," the Arnolds said in a statement. "The Enquirer was also misled," Enquirer editor Iain Calder said Friday. He said Cruse was a former freelance writer who was consistently inaccurate. Cruse denied making any false statements. In a telephone interview from New York, he disputed Calder's statements about him, saying he was successful at the tabloid and was offered a promotion.

Fill up forms to have safe sex

TORONTO: Roses, Chocolates and adult sexual consent forms may become the way to woo hearts in the 1990s, says Reuter. Warning that dating can be dangerous, a Toronto woman is taking orders for forms which can be signed to give formal consent for sex, to be used by people chilled by the William Kennedy Smith rape trial and stories of sexual abuse. The forms, which come in a discreet, black booklet about the size of a wallet, have a place for people to sign their consent to sex. Co-signers can also list where sex occurred, birth control method, and if either partner was using drugs or alcohol. "Men are getting afraid to go up to women in a social situation anymore," said the form's designer Deborah Gallo, 37. "They're just going home and playing with their cats and changing their Budgie (bird) cages." Gallo has begun running newspaper advertisements warning: "Dating today can be dangerous. Protect yourself." "This is for decent, upstanding people," who want to take precautions "other than having someone standing there while you're having sex," she said.

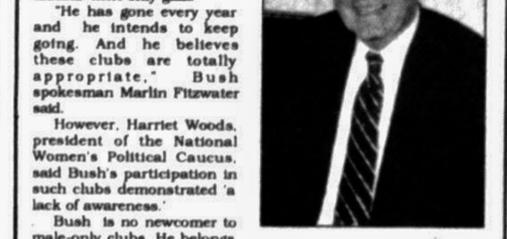
No more surprise to astronauts from candid camera

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida: There won't be any more candid pictures beamed to earth from the astronauts on the US space shuttle Discovery, reports Reuter. Astronaut Ulf Merbold of Germany got caught with his pants down on live television on Thursday. Merbold, 50, apparently was unaware the cameras were beaming pictures back to earth as he undressed for bed at the end of his first day in orbit. He took off his pants and floated around in his underwear — finally drifting off camera after some one radioed up from mission control that the cameras were on. Now, flight officials back on earth are asking the crew's permission before using the shuttle's remote-controlled cameras, and can be heard warning the astronauts, "we have live video from the module" whenever the pictures are broadcast. Merbold, a German Physicist, is one of two non-US citizens accompanying five American astronauts on a weeklong scientific research mission that began on Wednesday.

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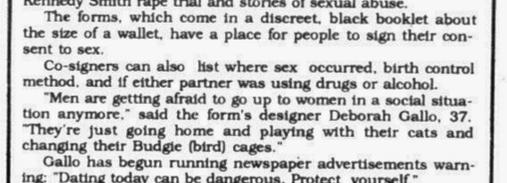
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