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The Space Shuttle Columbia blasts off from Kennedy Space Centre on Thursday. Columbia and her seven man crew will spend 14 days in orbit and deploy a tethered Italian - AFP/UNB photo Space Satellite.

18 killed in road mishap in India: Eighteen people were killed and 35 injured when their bus plunged into a river in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The bus carrying about 60 passengers fell into the River Parvathi. near Nazirabad, about 80 kilometers (49 miles) from the state's capital Bhopal, the PTI said. Seven of the injured were in a critical condition and two children were among those killed, the news agency said.

49 die of cholera in Niger since Nov: A cholera epidemic which began in Niger last November has killed a total of 49 people, the head of the national hospital Balama Oumarou said on Thursday, Reuter reports now Niamey.

A total of 946 cases have been registered. The west on the Niger River has been worst hit but the disease has killed seven people near the capital in the past three weeks. A military coup toppled the West African country's civilian president and government in January. Foreign donors halted aid.

14 rebels killed in Philippines:
Fourteen Muslim extremist rebels were killed and 13 wounded in a gunbattle with Philippine marines, the military said yesterday. Reuter reports from Zamboanga.

Several marines were also wounded in the fighting on Tuesday when the marines landed on the island of Jolo 950 km (590 miles) south of Manila, a report reaching the Philippine armed forces' southern command said. The rebels are members of the extremist Abu Sayyaf, the military said. The group has been responsible for a series of bomb attacks and kidnappings in the southern islands.

Int'l Onassis prizes may be cancelled: The International Onassis prizes may be cancelled for lack of a proper space for their star-studded awards ceremony, the Onassis foundation said on Thursday, Reuter reports from

The prizes, given every two years to international personalities from politics, art and the environmental movement, will be temporarily suspended because the only suitable hall in Athens cannot be booked in time. "As a result the administrative board of the foundation regretfully decided to temporarily suspend the International Onassis Awards," Onassis Foundation President Stelios Papadimitriou told a news conference.

8 killed as plane crashes in Romania: A plane crashed into a stone quarry in a snowstorm in north-west Romania on Thursday, killing all six people on board and two workers at the site. Another two people thought to have been aboard were feared dead, AP reports from Baia Mare, Romania.

The plane, a Soviet-made Antonov-24, crashed about 15 kilometres (9 miles) from the northwestern town of Baia Mare after attempting an emergency landing at the Satu Mare airport, then trying again 55 kilometres (34 miles) away at Baia Mare airport, said the commander of Baia Mare airport, Col Vasile Dale.

Blast kills 5 CRPF men in Guwahati: At least five CRPF men were killed on Wednesday when suspected Bodo security force personnel blew off their vehicle with a powerful remote control bomb at a place near Selakhati in lower Assam's Bongaigaon district, PTI reports from Guwahati.

Downing of plane in '88

#### US settles \$131.8m Iranian claims 61.8 million dollars will go to WASHINGTON, Feb 23: The

United States and Iran announced Thursday a 131.8 million dollars settlement of Iranian claims against the United States, including compensation for the 1988 shooting down of an Iranian airliner that killed 290 people, reports

The State Department said no US money would go to the Iranian government, but Tehran announced it as payment to Iran. The Iranian government news agency also reported that 30 million dollars of the payment was to compensate for the lost airlimer. although US officials mentioned no such payment.

Cases involved in the settlement before the International Court of Justice and the Iran-US Claims Tribunal were dismissed Thursday, officials

The State Department said

the families of Iranians killed in the downing of the airliner. The other 70 million in the

package will go into bank accounts that are used to pay off private US claims against Iran and Iran's expenses for the tribunal which is handling the claims. That portion was in settlement of Iranian claims involving banking matters, not the airliner, US officials said

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said the airliner settlement. which compensates families of those killed when the franian airliner was shot down over the Gulf on July 3, 1988, "does not signal any change in our

relations with Iran." The settlement of the bank claims portion of the package also has "no political significance," Burns said, noting that other claims have been settled periodically over the years.

capital, reports AP.

shift.

reconstruct a normal society in-

war-shattered Bosnia-Herze-

govina, could expect to meet

silence as they started their

The quiet likely to surround

the officers as they paced

streets where houses have

been stripped of doors and

window frames would come

not only from the early hour

and the muffling snow it would

Tens of thousands of Serbs

panicked at the thought of the

approach of those policemen

come from the emptiness.

Afghan jets bomb Taliban-held territory: 8 killed

· ISLAMABAD. Feb 23: An Alghan government jet bombed territory held by the rebel Taliban militia just south of Kabul on Thursday killing eight people and wounding several, a Taliban spokesman said, reports Reuter.

The spokesman contacted from Pakistan in the town of Charastyab 15 km (nine miles) south of Kabul, said the casualties from the raid on the Gardana area were civilians.

Government-controlled Kabul Radio mentioned no air raid, but said a Taliban warplane had appeared in the skies above the Afghan capital and had been chased off by government planes.

The radio monitored in Islamabad said rockets fired by Taliban fighters had wounded four civilians in Kabul:

No independent account of the fighting was available.

The Islamic Taliban has been entrenched in hills south and west of Kabul since October. Government officials say they expect a rebel offen-sive now that the Muslim feast of Eid-ul-Fitr a marking the end of the fasting of Ramadan

The Taliban, led by Muslim religious students want to overthrow President Burhanuddin Rabbani and impose their brand of purist Islam on the whole of Afghanistan.

#### Cuba blames US for backing opposition

HAVANA, Feb 23: Cuba accused the United States on Thursday of promoting and financing anti-government on the island and said it would never tolerate such interference in its internal affairs, reports Reuter.

Breaking the government's silence over reports of a campaign of detentions and harassment against Cuban political dissidents over the past week Cuban Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Marianela Ferriol said. This is a matter of internal order and that is now it is being treated."

Leading dissidents reported the police crackdown against dozens of opponents of Cuba's one party communist government who were planning to hold a meeting on Saturday Ferriol said such antigovernment initiatives were "conceived and financed by the US government.

#### Car bomb blast kills several people in Algeria

ALGIERS, Algeria, Feb 23: A car bomb reportedly exploded in a central Algerian town Thursday, destroying a fivestory building and killing an undetermined number of people. reports AP.

Authorities made no announcement on the report, based on eye-witness accounts to Algerian reporters. It was unclear how many people were killed and wounded.

The government has imposed a news blackout on all information related to terror attacks or its battle with extremist Islamic militants fighting to overthrow the secular

regime. The building in Djelfa, 250 kilometers (156 miles) south of Algiers, housed security forces and their families.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack, but the radical Armed Islamic Group left tracts in the area ordering security forces to resign under threat of death, according to

#### the reports. Prominent JKLF leader shot

SRINAGAR (India), Feb 23: A top Muslim separatist leader was shot and wounded Wednesday by suspected renegade militants in the northern, Indian state of Kashmir, his family said, reports AFP.

Yasin Malik, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was rushed to an army hospital after being shot in Anantnag, some 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of Srinagar, family members said. Malik was later shifted to

the main hospital in this summer capital of Kashmir, but doctors refused to give details. The JKLF is the premier separatist group in Kashmir. India's only Muslim-majority state where more than 12,000

people have died in a bloody

drive to end new Delhi's rule.

Islamabad accuses Delhi of 'unprovoked' firing

# Indo-Pak troops exchange fire along Kashmir border

JAMMU, India, Feb 23: Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy fire along the disputed Kashmir border after a lull of 13 days, officials said today, reports AFP.

Pakistani troops fired "over 2.000 rounds" on Indian troops late Thursday from south Charva Post in Sambah sector 45 kilometers (28 miles) from this winter capital of Jammu and Kashmir state, officials said.

A spokesman for India's Border Security Force (BSF) said the Pakistani gunfire involving medium and light machine guns was meant to provide cover "for Kashmiri militants and Pakistani terrorists

trying to enter Kashmir."
"No one was injured in the attack," the BSF spokesman

Indian and Pakistani troops last traded fire across the border on February 10, injuring a villager, at Chamliyal a holy site for both Hindus and Muslims who gather there every June to attend a fair. •

On January 27, tensions between the two nations soared

when Pakistan claimed that an Indian rocket attack had killed more than 20 people in the border town of Rawalakot. India rejected the Pakistani

charge as "baseless." Both parties exchange machine gun fire almost daily along the heavily militarised Kashmir border and India has accused Pakistani troops of opening fire some 3,000 times

on Indian positions last year. New Delhi also accuses Islamabad of arming and training Muslim militants fighting to end Indian rule over Kashmir. where a bitter separatist campaign has left more than 12,000 people dead since

Pakistan denies the charge but provides moral and diplomatic support to the insur-

Another AFP report from Islamabad says: istan today accused Indian troops of "unprovoked" firing on its troops along the tense Kashmir border.

The clash which took place in the Sambah sector, 45 kilometers (28 - miles) from

Jammu in the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir late Thursday, was triggered when Indian troops tried to "violate" the status of the working boundary, a defence ministry official said.

"It was unprovoked firing." he said, adding the exchange of gunfire lasting for about two and a half hours occurred on two different occasions in the same area. "There were no casualties on our side," he said.

The official stressed that the clash was not between regular troops of the mutually hostile countries. The skirmishes involved Pakistan's paramilitary rangers and the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), he added.

A BSF spokesman in Jammu, blaming Pakistani troops, earlier said the shooting involved only medium and light machine guns and was a exercise to provide cover "for Kashmiri militants and Pakistani terrorists trying to enter

"No one was injured in the attack," the BSF spokesman

# Off the Record

### New 'cocktail' to fight breast cancer

LONDON: A new "cocktail" of drugs that includes a common lung cancer treatment works better for breast cancer victims than the standard mix, British scientists reported on Thursday, says Reuter.

The cancer research campaign said the new mix improved survival by 13 per cent over five years.

The experimental treatment included epirubicin, which is manufactured by Sweden's Pharmacia and Upjohn Inc under the name farmorubicin and was originally marketed to treat lung cancer.

But Charles Coombes, an oncologist at London's Charging Cross Hospital, and colleagues tried it out on two groups of women with malignant breast cancer. One group got the standard, three-drug mixture known

as CMF, which has been used to treat breast cancer for 20 years. The second group got a cocktail that included epirubicin.

#### 'Nasty' as mayoral candidate

BUCHAREST, Romania: Former tennis star llie Nastase, known for his sharp shot-making and on-court antics that earned him the nickname "Nasty," formally announced his candidacy for mayor of Bucharest, reports AP. "I'm running for mayor because I want to bring the joy of

living to Bucharest's people," the state news agency Rompres quoted Nastase as saying on Saturday.

Nastase made the official announcement at a meeting of

Bucharest's ruling Social Democracy Party, which appointed Nastase a leading member last year.

Nastase, 49, won the US Open championship in 1972. He won the French Open in 1973, the year he was ranked No. 1

in the world. He won the three Grand Slam doubles titles and was a great Davis Cup player for Romania.

## France may cut size of its Nuclear arsenal: Chirac

PARIS, Feb 23: President Jacques Chirac announced on Thursday that France would cut the size of its nuclear arsenal and stop producing fissile material since it had now completed its bitterly disputed series of Atomic tests, reports Reuter.

Chirac seeking to recapture the moral high ground after a worldwide outery over the nuclear tests he ordered in French polynesia, said they had been technically perfect. As a result, we are going to

be able to reduce our nuclear arsenal, he said in a television interview outlining a far reaching shakeup of the armed forces.

Chirac said 18 ageing landbased Nuclear missiles in silos on the southern plateau d' albion would be scrapped and France would henceforth rely on four new missile firing submarines and on aircraft to carry its nuclear deterrent.

In a gesture to reassure Germany he said he decided after talks with Chancellor Helmut Kohl to dismantle Hades missiles, mothballed since 1991. The missiles had disturbed Bonn because they could hit only German soil if fired from France. Since the fall of the

Berlinwall, Chirac said, the mobile Nuclear missiles no longer served any real purpose "and worried the Germans very

The Conservative Gaullist President said he had decided to close a plant at Pierrelatte. south of Lyon, the only one in France producing plutonium and weapons grade enriched

# 'US faces host of post-Cold War security threats'

Princess of Wales lady Diana (R) and Jemima Khan, wife of Pakistani cricketer Imran

Khan attend a variety show in Lahore on Thursday. Diana visited the cancer hospital of

WASHINGTON, Feb 23: The United States faces a host of post-Cold War security threats from nations and groups around the world, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director John Deutch, warned Congress on Thursday, reports

Imran Khan and spent the day with cancer patients.

"We face in the post-Cold War era, new threats to our security. Preminent among these is the growth of international terrorism, drugs and crime, Deutch told the Senate intelligence committee.

We have seen during the past years a steady growth in terrorism both state sponsored, for example the Hezbollah, and from sub national groups such as the cult

in Japan that released chemical agents in the subway system. In our view, these terrorist threats will continue to grow both against the United States and other nations.

Free nations of the world are threatened by rogue states - Iran, Iraq, North Korea and Libya — that have built up significant military forces and seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction nuclear chemical and biological, he added.

Deutch said none of the threats was as serious as the one from the former Soviet Union, but that together they posed major challenges that showed the need for strong intelligence.

He also confirmed that the CIA uses American journalists as intelligence sources but only in rare circumstances when American lives are at stake. "The police says that we

will not use American journal-

- AFP/UNB photo

ists except under very, very rare circumstances where we would consider the information to be of such importance or the access to be of such tremendous importance to the interests of the United States and to American citizens that they would waive consideration and use an American journal-

ist," he said. . He said another growing concern was the threat to the security of government and business computer system.

#### Jyoti demands early Lok Sabha polls CALCUTTA, Feb 23: The ters on various issues, but it

West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu yesterday demanded immediate holding of Lok Sabha polls in view of multiscore rupee Hawala scandal and the subsequent resignations of several ministers from the union cabinet because of their involvement, reports PTI

Commenting on the resignation of seven union ministers the CBI sought to prosecute, Basu asked, "why only seven? the entire cabinet

should resign". Asked by newsmen whether the resignations would lead to a crisis at the centre, he retorted, "is there any govern-

ment at the centre? We have

been consistently writing let-

does not bother to reply." Another PTI report from Santi-Niketan says:

The West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu yesterday said that the present parliament might not survive its next session in view of the recent spate of resignations of ministers from the union cabinet. reports PTI.

Laying the foundation of a road bridge over the River Ajay near Bolpur, Basu, said seven ministers had already resigned and several others would follow suit within a week. In this situation running of parliament would be difficult, the said.

### New York Times report says US wants to punish China with selective sanctions

BEIJING, Feb 23: The United States intends to punish China with selective sanctions for supplying Nuclear materials to Pakistan, the New York Times reported in Wednesday's editions, reports Reuter.

The newspaper quoted unidentified senior officials as saying the sanctions were intended to hurt China without damaging US companies that do business there. Chinese officials celebrating

the lunar new year were not available to comment on Wednesday. However, a foreign ministry spokesman last week denied the US tions and warned would hurt bilateral

"If the US side in justified sanctions against China, that would only worsen relations," spokesman Shen Guofang said on February 15 in

response to reports trade sanctions might be in the works.

The New York Times quoted the US officials as saying the United States would impose limited sanctions to punish China for supplying Pakistan with 5,000 ring magnets late last year to enrich uranium for weapons use. President Bill Clinton

ormally impose broad as first but waive them e grounds of national inrest and then order narrower sanctions, the newspa-

Selective sanctions were an ternative to the stiffer penals prescribed by law for ntries that violate internaal arms trading rules. ithout the waiver, the

ns could cut off 10 bilon dollars in loan guarantees to US companies.

#### Turkey recalls its Ambassador from Greece

ANKARA, Feb 23: Turkey has recalled its ambassador from Athens for consultations amid rising tension with Greece and said it will oppose what it terms Greek hostility. reports Reuter.

Traditional foes Greece and Turkey raised the temperature last month in a stand off over a rocky outcrop in the eastern aegean that was resolved by a US brokered compromise.

Greece raised a threat to Ankara's hard won customs pact with the EU, saying it would block a five year 375 million European currency unit (487 million) aid package designed to help Turkey adjust to the union.

Athens meanwhile shrugged off Turkey's recall of its ambassador.

#### Thousands of Serbs flee Vogosca as police take over VOGOSCA, Bosnia-Herzegohave fled during the past few it was unclear who would take will provide safety for those Some of those who fled in vina, Feb 23; For the first time days with everything they charge of the federal governwho will have to prolong the freezing temperatures lest in almost four years, Bosnian could carry, from the pieces of

government, policemen were their houses to the bodies of setting out before dawn Friday their dead. to patrol this suburb of the "What can we expect but revenge ?" said Dragan Maslo-The 44 federal policemen, varic, a Serb stuck on a narand the 90 UN monitors that row, mud-covered road out of were to watch them take and Sarajevo. "The Muslims would other step in the attempt to

shoot us like rabbits. The NATO-led force insisted that the Serbs had nothing to fear. There will be two interna-

tional police monitors looking over the shoulders of every police officer," said Alexander Ivanko, a spokesman for the force deploying at 6 am ( 0500 GMT). The monitors are Danish, Irish and Polish officers. Meanwhile, with 70-year

old Bosnian president Alija

Izetbegovic hospitalised

Thursday for examination and

treatment of heart problems,

ment. Bosnia's collective presidency convened an emergency session to make that decision but made no announcement.

Bosnian Serb leaders who oversaw the brutal purge of Muslims and Croats from much of eastern and northers Bosnia lost the five Serb-held districts around Sarajevo in the negotiations that produced the USbrokered Dayton peace accord. Bosnian Serb leader

Radovan Karadzic, blamed by UN and Bosnian government officials for inciting the panic, denied he has called on Serbs to leave Sarajevo, and said they have a right to be protected whether they go or stay. "We are convinced that the international community will secure all refugees convoys

from Sarajevo and that they

evacuation (until) after Muslim police come in." Karadzic said Thursday in a statement to the Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA.

Republican presidential candidate US Senator Bob Dole (C) greets supporters at an airport

rally in Colorado Springs, Colorado on Thursday. Senator Dole is making a multi-state

campaign tour after finishing second in the New Hampshire primary February 20.

Convoys of Serb trucks, buses and cars followed Italian soldiers with the NATO-led force driving in and out of the city on Thursday in tracked, armored vehicles. The Italians also stationed an armoured car on an overpass overlooking the sole Bosnian government checkpoint on the road the convoys were using.

"It may have the appearance of an escorted convoy, with Serb trucks or buses travelling in line with NATO vehicles. but it is not," said NATO spokesman Maj. Herve Gourmelon. NATO had said it would not assist in the evacua-

their houses ablaze to make sure there was nothing left for the Muslims.

- AFP/UNB photo

In Serb-held Sokolac, 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of Sarajevo, Serbs who had driven 10 hours through the night hacked at the frozen mud with pickaxes and shovels at dawn Thursday, frantic to rebury their relatives, some 40 Serb soldiers whose bodies had been exhumed from graves in Vogosca.

"This is what matters to me the most, my husband deserves this," said Milomirka Savic, 28, whose husband Dragan was killed in Vogosca in "I left my apartment behind.

I can't find a truck to go back and move my things out of Vogosca. This is unbearable," she whispered, the snowstorm

deepening her sorrow. Even the Lord has turned his back on us," said Savic, sobbing as she sat by a wooden

In Vogosca, the NATO-led force distributed pamphlets saying: "Don't believe the rumours! You can stay in your homes!

But a spokesman for the Bosnian ruling Party of Democratic Action, Ismet Grbo, complained that it wasn't enough: "The international community is not actively doing anything to make the Serbs stay in their homes. We only see them observing and describing, although we think they have the means to prevent such a crime against

And at the United Nations in New York, spokesman Sylvina Foa said the international police force is moving in.

#### Half-brother of Sihanouk jailed for 10 years PHNOM PENH, Feb 23: A

Phnom Penh court yesterday sentenced Prince Norodom Sirivudh, the half-brother of King Norodom Sihanouk, to 10 years jail in absentia for criminal conspiracy and illegal possession of weapons, reports

Phnom Penh municipal

court judge Ya Sakhon sentenced the 44-year old prince. who was exiled to France in December after being arrested in November, on charges relating to an alleged plot to assassinate co-premier Hun Sen. The prince, who has maintained his innocence, said he

would not return to face the trial which he termed a " parody of justice." Heavily armed military and

riot police surrounded the court