Off the Record

GCC countries likely to spend

\$80b on defence in five yrs

# BRIEFLY



formance of Lord Attenborough's latest film "In Love and War" at London's Empire in Leicester Square on Wednesday. The screening was a charity of the British -AFP/UNB photo Red Cross.

Gunmen kill cop in Albania: An Albanian policeman was shot dead Wednesday by unknown gunmen in the southern town of Vlore, scene of violent anti-government riots earlier this week, the Interior Ministry announced, AFP reports from Tirana.

The incident came after the Albanian government decided not to foist a state of emergency on the southern port, despite a week of riots which have left three people dead and 150 injured. The rioting was touched off after a shady investment firm collapsed, taking with it the savings of thousands of already poor citizens.

84 merchants held in Iraq: The Iraqi opposition said Wednesday that the Iraqi authorities have arrested 84 merchants for allegedly extorting state funds. AFP reports from

"Eighty-four merchants in Baghdad, including Saad Tabra, were arrested last week," the Iraqi National Congress (INC) opposition coalition said in a statement received here. The London-based INC said the Iraqi presidency has prepared lists of names of other merchants and wealthy Iraqi businessmen... and the dictatorial regime is ready to carry out additional ar-

50 kg heroin seized in India: Fifty kilograms of smuggled heroin worth about 50 crore rupees in international market was seized from a house in village Malikpur, close to the indo-Pakistan border last night, customs and police officials said Wednesday. PTI reports from Amritsar.

Speaking at a press conference here, the additional collector of customs, MS Negi, the I G Police (border range), Bakshi Ram, and the DIG (border range), PS Sandhu, said the contraband was found from the house of one Ajaib Singh, who was absconding. His wife Manjit Kaur, allegedly in possession of this heroin, was arrested, they said.

Rock singer Brian Connolly dies: Brian Connolly, the once-hard-living singer of 1970s rock band sweet, died on Monday, a friend disclosed. He was 52, AFP reports from London.

Connolly, whose hits included "blockbuster," "ballroom blitz" and "Wing Wam Ban." died of renal failure in hospital in Slough, west of London, with his friends and family around him. Sweet, were one of the leading lights of the "glam rock" movement of the 1970s, with hits in Britain and the United States and sales of 50 million records worldwide.

## Pentagon will budget \$42b to develop new weapons

WASHINGTON, Feb 13: The Pentagon will budget 42 billion dollars to develop new weapons, which it considers a top priority, defence secretary William Cohen said Wednesday, reports

"The substantial reduction in force structure following the end of the cold war allowed us to terminate or defer many programmes within acceptable risks. But this trend must now be reversed," Cohen told the Committee on National Security of the House of Representa-

"The holiday is over, we have to start getting back into business," he said after a meeting on President Bill Clinton's proposed defence budget.

According to Cohen, the United States must be "much more selective and much more restrained" today in its choice of military operations abroad. "We should not be the world's

policeman," he emphasized. Joint chiefs Chairman General John Shalikashvili, who will leave his post in Septem-

from Israel

will acquire defence equipment from Israel through Russia, local newspaper The Hindustan Times quoted defence ministry sources as saying here today, reports Xinhua.

India wants the transfer of

ABU DHABI, Feb 13: Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Arab neighbours are planning to spend nearly 80 billion dollars on deeight billion dollars.

fence over the next five years, a senior United Arab Emirates (UAE) military official said today, reports AFP. Brigadier General Sultan

Obaid Bakhit said the Middle East and other Asian countries were among the biggest arms buyers in the world, accounting for nearly 10 per cent of the to-tal global defence spending. "The Gulf Cooperation

Council (GCC) countries are committed to spending around 80 billion dollars on defence projects in the next five years," Bakhit told the daily Al-Khaleej.

He did not elaborate on the But in the biggest air contract expected to be sealed by

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Seven

prisoners were allegedly

blinded in a western Indian

town after police applied a mix-

ture laced with chilli powder to

their eyes in a bid to extract

confessions, a newspaper said

mitted to a hospital in the town

of Rajkot Hospital Tuesday

with severely damaged eyes, the

police, was the first of its kind

since a similar police torture

case in 1980 which left 25 crim-

inals blinded by acid in the

tional furore, with then prime

minister Indira Gandhi break-

ing down in parliament. The

authorities ordered an investi-

gation yet no one was punished

for the crime, with many local

JERUSALEM, Feb 13: Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

said Wednesday that the United

States cannot force Syria to re-

sume peace talks with Israel

and he criticised Washington's

reported plan to sell F-16 fight

ers to Saudi Arabia reports

make Syria negotiate. If the

Syrians want peace they will

resume the talks. If they don't

want peace, they will find a

hundred excuses not to re-

launch the talks," Netanyahu

told Israel radio on his flight to

Washington, where is to meet

US President Bill Clinton to-

would not present a "precise

peace plan with Syria but gen-

eral principles" when he talks

with Clinton at the White

A series of discussions be-

House.

Netanyahu also said he

"The United States cannot

That incident caused a na-

eastern town of Bhagalpur.

The incident, denied by the

Indian Express reported.

Five of the victims were ad-

today, reports AFP.

2000, the UAE wants to buy almost 80 warplanes, at an estimated cost of between six and

France's Dassault which produces the Rafale is in competition with the F-16s of the US company Lockheed Martin.

The Émirates also plans to buy fast gunboats and replace six patrol vessels.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, is looking for between 150 and 225 battle tanks, in a deal contested by Giat industries of France, General Dynamics of the United States and the British firm Vickers.

The Saudi Kingdom has tilted toward buying F-16 fighter jests to replace aging warplanes.

"After we were offered several planes, our air force experts decided the F-16 is a good

7 Indian prisoners become blind

after police torture

people coming out in support of

as saying it would take a month

to see if any of the Rajkot vic-

tims regained some of their

men, arrested last week on

charges of gambling, were taken

to police headquarters and or-

dered to strip and slap each

other before being thrashed

took turns to apply a balm.

normally used for treating

aches but laced with chilli pow-

der, to the eyes of the seven

our eyes due to severe irritation.

they caught hold of us and ad-

ministered a second dose,"

Mangaladas Prabhudas was

quoted as saying. "I lost my vi-

US can't force Syria to resume

talks with Israel: Netanyahu

tween Israeli and Syrian mili-

tary officials held since the of-

ficial negotiations ended last

concrete results.

tanyahu said.

the F-5."

February have not yielded any

The Israeli leader also criti-

cised reported US plans to sell

100 F-16 warplanes to Saudin

"We consider this sale a very

Arabia, of the comment with

serious decision because by

equipping Saudi Arabia with

aircraft and modern arms the

strategic balance of the Middle

East is put into question," Ne-

Prince Sultan Ibn Abdel Aziz,

was quoted as saying in Saudi

newspapers Wednesday. "After

we were offered several planes,

our air force experts decided the

F-16 is a good replacement for

the Israelis is the extradition of

the political leader of the 1s-

Another delicate matter for

The Saudi Defence Minister.

"When we started rubbing

Policemen then allegedly

The daily said the seven

The Express quoted doctors

the blindings.

with belts.

replacement for the F-5," Defence Minister Prince Sultan Ibn Abdel Aziz was quoted as saying in Saudi newspapers to-

The United States said last month it has not received an "official request from Saudi Arabia to buy 100 F-16 fighter planes and missiles.

The six Gulf Arab states have sought to bolster their armies since Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

Official Arab figures showed Saudi Arabia had allocated more than 30 per cent of its annual expenditure to defence since 1990.

The Sultanate of Oman spent more than 40 per cent, while the level ranged between 25 and 35 per cent in the remaining mem-bers — Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait

and the UAE. High defence spending in the

Amina Gaffar, the wife of

another man, added: After (my

husband's) release, his eyes

were swollen and he could

hardly open them, and com-

Bharwad, who had both his eyes

bandaged in hospital, said: "The

police applied the balm twice.

The first time it caused severe

irritation and tears started

rolling out when I rubbed them.

able to open my eyes, they ap-

Rekha Gosalia as saying that

she had pleaded with the police

to stop "this brutality immedi-

PL Jani, however, denied the

incident. Another officer. KLN

Rao, said he was investigating

lamic Resistance Movement

(Hamas) from the United States.

vet made a decision on extradit-

ing Mussa Abu Marzuk.

per reported Wednesday.

to commit murder.

begin by mid-March.

Netanyahu said he has not

AP adds: Israel, Jordan and

the United States are secretly

working on a deal to send a.

Hamas leader failed in New

York to Jordan rather than ex-

tradite him to Israel, a newspa-

Hamas has threatened to carry

out new attacks should Mousa

Mohammed Abu Marzook be

extradited to Israel to stand

trial on charges of conspiracy

the Israeli-Palestinian peace

process, including talks on a fi-

nal peace agreement slated to

portedly recommended against

bringing Abu Marzook to Israel.

Such attacks could threaten

Israeli security officials re-

The Muslim militant group

"When they found that I was

The express quoted doctor

Rajkot Police Commissioner

A third man, Jeevan Mashru

sion immediately."

plained of blindness."

plied it again.

the charges.

volatile Middle East region has attracted hundreds of international arms producers to a key ground and naval arms exhibition in Abu Dhabi and an air show in Dubai over the past few

More than 700 companies from 40 countries will exhibit weapons at the third arms show in Abu Dhabi next month, said Bakhit, who heads an armed forces committee organising the march 16:20 fair.

"The figure includes the top 10 arms manufacturers in the world. The show will also feature the biggest naval presence since the (1991) Gulf war," the

General said. Aircraft carriers and other warships from France, Britain, the United States, Germany Italy and The Netherlands will dock at Port Zayed for the show

## Tripura

Shops, businesses and schools and colleges across the tiny state bordering Bangladesh

India-Marxist and the opposicapital Agartala.

lage, set fire to houses and then sprayed gunfire at non-tribal villagers. Sixteen people were killed instantly and two died on their way to hospital.

tribal villagers were massacred similarly in December.

sibility for Tuesday's attack. Police, however, said guerillas fighting for an independent Tripura, a state of about three

#### Yeltsin needs 2 more weeks to recover

sin is still "somewhat weak' after his bout with pneumonia and needs about two more weeks to fully recover, his heart surgeon said Wednesday, re-

Dr Renat Akchurin said that Yeltsin is "expanding his schedule" and taking walks, but he needs to gain the weight he lost after his November heart

matter, and recuperation should not be hurried," Akchurin was quoted as saying by the

cessful quintuple bypass operation on Yeltsin on Nov 5, several months after the president suffered a heart attack while campaigning for reelection.

back to work full time at the Kremlin, Yeltsin caught the flu, then came down with pneumonia. He is now recuperating at his country home outside

#### Caretaker PM in Bulgaria sworn in

SOFIA, Bulgaria, Feb 13 Bulgaria's president has sworn in a caretaker premier Wednesday and set elections for April 19 - bringing an end to two years of Socialist rule that ruined the nation's economy, reports AP.

New Premier Stefan Softyanski, a popular economist, built a solid reputation as mayor of Sofia despite the country's economic troubles. His interim government must now try to correct hyperinflation and a sharp drop in living standards, which brought street protests that helped bring down the socialists.

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: A oneday strike called by the ruling and opposition parties to protest the massacre of 18 people by tribal separatists paralysed the far-eastern Indian state of Tripura today, officials said reports AFP.

were closed, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Police were deployed th roughout the state to prevent

the ruling Communist Party of tion Congress (I) Party to denounce Tuesday's massacre by tribal guerillas near the state

It was the worst attack by

MOSCOW Feb 13: Boris Yelts

ports AP.

"Pneumonia is not a joking ITAR-Tass news agency.

Akchurin performed a suc-

Just two weeks after he went Moscow.

## he added. Strike cripples

possible violence. The shutdown was called by

The attackers raided a vil-

tribal militants since 25 non-

No one has claimed respon-

million people, were to blame.

#### More than a year after his death -TOKYO: The body of a reclusive Japanese man who had died

Baywatch television series.

Cruise and Robert Redford.

ever fulfilling their amorous dreams.

alone in his apartment more than a year ago was found last month by his sister - who lived next door, reports AP. The sister, who assumed that her brother had gone on an unannounced trip, found the badly emachated body January 18 after a relative asked her to go into the apartment to check the Buddhist altar inside, police said Thursday.

Rock music superstar David Bowie (R) and his wife, super-

model Iman smile as they pose for photos after Bowie

received a star on the world famous Walk of Fame

Wednesday in Hollywood, CA Bowie, whose changing

persona has marked him as one of rock music's most dy-

namic performers over the last three decades, recently re-

leased his latest album "Earthlings." —AFP/UNB photo

Brigitte Bardot sexier

than Pamela Anderson!

Bardot to be the sexiest woman on earth, a good two decades

since her name was synonymous with sexiness, a survey for the

Polish edition of Elle magazine revealed Wednesday, reports

Bardot, 62, ahead of Pamela Anderson, star of the American

The poll, conducted for Valentine's Day on Friday, placed

Next came Marilyn Monroe and two retired Polish news-

They survey favoured older stars since it asked respondents

The women questioned picked Polish actor Stanislaw

to name an object of their desire with whom they had no hope of

Mikulski as their ideal man, followed by US film stars Tom

WARSAW: Most Polish men still consider France's Brigitte

The man, single and living alone in a tiny apartment outside Tokyo, was believed to have died of some kind of illness, which was not identified in the autopsy, police said.

The 39-year-old man, whose name was withheld, had no record of serious chronic illness, but police said they did not suspect wrongdoing in the death, which they estimate happened

around November 1995. The man was a loner and had in the past disappeared suddenly for a few months without telling anyone, police

quoted the sister as saving. He lost his job at a janitorial company several months

before his death. He and his sister were living next to each other after inheriting the apartment complex from their parents in

## Taliban impose decree

#### Foreigners can no longer hire taxis or private cars symbols of tourism and to

ISLAMABAD, Feb 13: Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban militia has decreed that foreign journalists and other foreigners can no longer hire taxis or private cars and must use only tourism department vehicles. reports Reuter.

Taliban-controlled radio Afghanistan said on Wednesday night that the tourism department had announced that its vehicles would be at the disposal of foreigners and journal-"All owners of taxi and pri-

vate vehicles are hereby informed that henceforth they have no right to transport guests or foreign journalists anywhere from point A to B. '

The department of tourism. which possesses transport vehicles official licences and able interpreters, is at the service of journalists and foreign quests.

"Being a government institution, the department has the duty to provide vehicles carrying white (Taliban) flags and transport journalists and foreign tourists inside the city and around the country," it said. The radio, monitored in Islamabad did not say if the

handful of foreign journalists

permanently based in Kabul would be allowed to drive their own vehicles. The Taliban, who captured the Afghan capital on September 27, have already ruled that visiting journalists must stay at the rocket-scarred state-run

continental hotel. The radio gave no reason for the latest restriction, which appeared designed to keep a tighter rein on journalists movements and to generate revenue for the tourism depart-

The purist Taliban, who have taken over about three quarters of Afghanistan, want to impose their strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law throughout the war-ravaged country.

#### 2000 Karens cross into Thailand

BANGKOK, Feb 13: Two thousand ethnic Karens have crossed into Thailand to seek refuge from fighting between Karen rebels and Myanmar government forces, a senior Thai military officer said to-

day, reports AFP. The exodus across the border began Tuesday after clashes just inside Myanmar, as strongholds of the Karen National Union (KNU) came under pressure from troops of the ruling junta.

"About 2,000 Karen women, children and old people have crossed to Thailand in the last two days since the clashes occurred," said Colonel Suwit Maenmuen. Commander of Thailand's Fourth Regiment Task Force in the province of Tak 420 kilometres (250 miles) northwest of here.

#### Since 1989, the armed force have cut back the number of active servicemen by 700,000, or by about one-third, and they now stand at their lowest level since the Korean war. India to acquire

defence equipment

ber, told the committee that

there are now 42,000 American

soldiers deployed abroad in 14

different military missions

such as Bosnia.

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: India

technology in communication, command and control systems and intelligence gathering systems. Israelis have agreed to cooperate with Russia to supply the systems to India, the newspaper reported.



A group of demonstrators brandish posters condemning the Iranian Islamic government and shout slogans to show their support for British writer Salman Rushdie and oppressed people in Iran during a demonstration outside the Iranian Embassy in Oslo Wednesday. About 100 people gathered in front of the embassy when it was reported that the state-supported Iranian religious group Khordad-15 had increased the reward for Rushdie's death to 2.5 -AFP/UNB photo million US dollars.

# Will China live up to its promise to keep HK capitalist?

HONG KONG, Feb 13: When a float sponsored by a pro-China organisation ran out of control during a Chinese New Year parade and killed a British spectator, some saw more in it than

just an accident, reports AP. A citizen of the departing colonial power run down by a symbol of the incoming regime on the most auspicious day in the calendar - the tragedy sent a tremor through superstitious Hong Kong, and a Chinese official was quick to deny it was a bad omen for the British colony's return to China on

With so many uncertainties looming over the momentous change of sovereignty, it's not surprising to find Hong Kong people reading hidden mean-

ings into anything. The big uncertainty remains, as ever, whether Communist China will live up to its promise to keep Hong Kong capitalist and free. Another is whether Tung Chee-hwa, leader-in-waiting of semiautonomous, post-colonial Hong Kong, will stand up to China in defence of the

promised freedoms. Although he is still more than four months away from taking office, the 59-year-old shipping tycoon already is feeling the heat.

Hong Kong's pro-democracy camp, deeply skeptical that the future chief could be anything but Beijing's yes man, has leaped on Tung for endorsing China's moves to disband the elected legislature and roll back some of Hong Kong's civil liber-

Tung has argued strenuously

that these are largely technical

changes whose overall effect

will be negligible. He says the

proposed controls on the right

to demonstrate and to establish

links between Hong Kong and

ing the public mood through the change of sovereignty, says his surveys find many people believing that Tung "has bent over far too much in favour of Bei-

foreign organisations are little

different from those imposed in

American analyst who is track-

But Michael DeGolyer, an

many western societies.

jing's views. Tung seems to think the curbs are a small price to pay for winning Beijing's trust and dissuading it from imposing its own restrictions, which would probably be much harsher. But Professor Joseph Cheng

be negotiable. "We believe that they are part and parcel of the Hong Kong way of life," he says. But China sees them as practicalities to be preserved as long as they are useful, and "sacrificed when more important considerations

of City University of Hong Kong

asks whether freedoms can ever

come into the foreground. Nihal Jayawickrama, a law professor, notes that many of the freedoms now under threat were legislated when Tung was a

member of Gov. Chris Patten's cabinet. Therefore, he must have supported them. "Mr Tung is now marching to the beat of a different drummer

when he should be beating his own drum," Jayawickrama wrote in the Hong Kong Stan-Tung's advocacy of "Chinese

Chan, Patten's popular deputy,

has given Tung a valuable cred-

ibility boost by agreeing to stay

values," and his exhortations to Hong Kong to focus on its economy rather than on politics. strike some critics as coded support for China's view that politics cause instability and that economic prosperity outweighs individual rights. Tung's problems don't end with the democrats. Anson

on in his government. But her continuing criticism of the moves against civil liberties put any long-term partnership with Tung into question. Even some members of the

pro-Beijing camp, taken aback by the outcry, say they are having second thoughts about changing the laws. Tung has also risked alienating powerful rural conserva-

tives by refusing to back the abolition of a law granting women equal inheritance rights. Tung doesn't shy away from controversy. He faces the media almost every day. When a dozen chanting, banner-waving

democracy campaigners occupied the lobby of his office building, he did what no Chinese official has done in recent memory: he came down and talked to them. Tung, who lived in the

United States for 10 years, also

backing. US officials speak warmly of him, and although they publicly criticize the rollback of the legislature and civil liberties, they acknowledge that he's partially right in arguing that the issues are much more complicated than they may appear to the West.

seems to enjoy quiet American

US Consul Richard Boucher calls Tung "a man of integrity" who will "try to keep Hong Kong the way it is as much as possible ... He's certainly a person we can work with."

"He has an extremely difficult task ahead," analyst De-Golver said on Hong Kong radio. "There's no way he can make everybody happy."

But Tung says he's determined to try. He happens to have been born in the Year of the Ox, and in a TV broadcast welcoming its return last week, he promised to "to work like an ox" for Hong Kong.

## NATO troops moving ahead to control Brcko

SARAJEVO, Feb 13: NATO troops are bracing ahead of a potentially explosive ruling Friday on control of the strategically vital town of Brcko, with both Muslims and Serbs marking ominous predictions of what will happen if they are not awarded the town, reports

Force (SFOR), nervous at the belligerent warnings, have announced a complete ban on troop movements and training after both Muslims and Serbs called up reservists. On Wednesday, SFOR seized

The NATO-led Stabilisation

a Serb tank that was roaming the countryside south of the town. SFOR forces throughout Bosnia will be on alert over the weekend.