Military operation likely

US may send as many as 4000 troops to NATO forces in Kosovo

WASHINGTON, Feb 4: The United States may contribute as many as 4,000 troops to a NATO ground force in Kosovo if the warring sides reach a peace settlement, the chairman of the joint chief of staff said Wednesday, reports agencies.

Army general Hanry Shelton said the size of the force will depend on what kind of peace agreement is reached between Belgrade and the KLA. but he said the US goal was to have the Europeans provide most of the troops and keep US troops to "the very minimum".

"If you get a smaller force, if they came out to be 20,000, our numbers could be very low. down may be, possibly as low as 2,000 to 4,000 and I would see that being the maximum number, we would be asked to contribute even if they decide go in with 30,000", he told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Shelton said no exit date should be set going into a deployment in Kosovo, as the administration initially did in Bosnia, raising the prospects that US troops could be stationed in the southern Serbian province the length of a three

says from Seoul.

economy and the army.

the command said.

from Washington.

political resolution of their conflict.

year interim agreement. His comments were the administration's most detailed public discussion yet of the options it faces in Kosovo, which

US officials warn is on the verge of a dramatic escalation in fighting between Serbian forces and ethnic Albanian Later, Shelton, US defence secretary William Cohen, secretary of state Madeleine Albright

briefed senators for two hours behind closed doors. Kosovo's rebel commanders said Wednesday they would not sign a peace accord with Serbia unless they were guaranteed a vote on independence for the

and national security advisers.

The announcement dimmed prospects that internationally sponsored talks scheduled to start Saturday in Rambouillet. France could end the 11-monthold war in the Serbian

In Belgrade, one government leader gave the strongest signal yet that Serbia might take part in the talks with the ethnic Albanian rebels, but said Kosovo independence was not

province.

BEREFE

US-DPRK talks make progress:

North Korea and the United States have made significant

progress in talks on allowing access to a suspect underground

site in the North, officials were quoted as saying yesterday, AFP

month. North Korea demanded food aid in return for allowing

two inspections visits to the Kumchangi facility, Yonhap news

Islamic law imposed in Chechnya: Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov on Wednesday imposed

Islamic law in the breakaway republic giving in to pressure

would be introduced throughout society, including schools, the

China jails dissident Wang Ce: China has jailed returned overseas dissident Wang Ce for four

years for helping to endanger state security, the Hong Kong

based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic

Movement in China said yesterday, AFP says from Beijing.
Wang Ce was accused of giving money to fledgling opposition
China Democracy Party (CDP) founder Wang Youcai and of ille-

gally entering China. information centre spokesman Frank Lu told AFP.

2 die in copter crash in ROK: A

US Army helicopter carrying five soldiers crashed north of Seoul Thursday, killing two and injuring two others, the US

military command said. AP reports from Seoul.

A fifth soldier was apparently unhurt and did not require treatment, it said. The UH-60A helicopter from 2-2 Aviation,

2nd Infantry Division, went down at the Twin Bridge Training Area, about 32 north of Seoul, shortly after noon (0300 GMT).

US envoy meets Taliban official:

A senior US official met in Pakistan with a ranking Taliban of-

ficial and reaffirmed the US view that suspected terrorist

Osama bin Ladin should be expelled from Afghanistan, AP says

Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth, in his meeting

with Taliban deputy foreign minister Jalil Akhund, raised a

series of issues of US concern. Rubin reaffirmed US support for

United Nations efforts to try to help the Afghan factions reach a

Anna Margrethe Soerensen (right), 93 poses with her

husband Peter Larsen, 25, in Copenhagen Tuesday.

Larsen married Soerensen to keep her from being put into

a home by her family. The couple were wed in October

1998 in a civil ceremony after a pastor refused to marry

them because of their age difference.

US State Department spokesman James P Rubin said

Maskhadov said Islamic sharia law based on the Quran

agency quoted diplomatic sources as saying.

from opposition groups. AFP says from Grozny.

During the third round of bilateral talks in Geneva last

up for discussion. A statement from Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist party also favoured attendance. saying Yugoslavia and Serbia the dominant Yugoslav republic
— supported solving the Kosovo issue "through political means."

Confirming the expected, Fehmi Agani, an adviser to Kosovo's moderate Albanian leader, Ibrahim Rugova, said that Rugova would attend. Agani said he would accompany Rugova, along with Idriz Ajeti. speaker of the Kosovo Albanian assembly, Bujar Bkoshi, another close Rugova associate. and Edita Tahiri, his advisor

for foreign affairs. The Kosovo Liberation Army's main spokesman said the rebels agreed to attend the conference because they believe that "the voice of the Albanian people, the voice of freedom, and the voice of the KLA should

Krasniqi, who will be one of five rebel representatives at the talks, is believed to be in the very top tier of the rebel command, which uses code names and operates behind a shroud of

WASHINGTON, Feb 4: Yasser

Arafat affirmed Wednesday he

intends to carry out the stalled

West Bank accord with Israel as

controversy enveloped the

Palestinian leader's brief visit

Arafat is due to discuss peace prospects with President Bill

Clinton at a prayer breakfast

Thursday. But the spokesman

for the breakfast chairman,

Rep. Steve Largent, said the

Oklahoma republican had

asked Clinton last Friday "not

to politicize the breakfast by

told The Associated Press that

Largent supported Arafat's at-

tendance, but disapproved of

the president taking up contro-

versial issues at the breakfast

ers plan to attend the 47th

breakfast sponsored by mem-

bers of Congress. But several

Christian and Jewish groups

have called for a boycott and

accused Arafat of an unrepen-

pected outside the hotel. Keena

called that evidence the break-

up the peace process." Arafat

meeting with Secretary of State

Madeleine Albright Wednesday.

Israel refusing to yield more

land until the Palestinian

Authority imposes tougher re-

straints on terrorism and pros-

The process is stalled, with

told reporters after a 40-minute

fast had been politicized.

Demonstrations are ex-

"I am insistent on following

tant terrorist past.

ecutes suspects.

Hundreds of Christian lead-

with the Palestinian leader.

The spokesman, Brad Keena,

here, reports AP.

having the meeting."

hard-line Parliament, under Milosevic's de facto control, it due to decide Thursday whether to accept the US and European summons to

negotiate. NATO is threatening attack if the two sides don't start talking by Saturday and strike a deal by Feb 19.

Serbia's state-run television gave hours of air time Tuesday evening to a moderate who supports the talks, a signal that the government is considering attending.

However, even Vuk Draskovic, a moderate deputy premier, said Serbia would never let Kosovo become either independent or a third republic within Yugoslavia, with Serbia and Montenegro.

Draskovic also said the idea of allowing ethnic Albanian police and courts in Kosovo was "unacceptable."

In Belgrade, US and European envoys for Kosovo expressed optimism Wednesday about the forthcoming peace conference, but warned reaching an agreement for the disputed province would not be

Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, left, Olympic gold medalist Jackie

Joyner-Kersee, centre, and photographer and film director Gordon Parks pose at the

Associated Black Charities annual Benefit Dinner Dance Wednesday in New York. The

Arafat keen to carry out stalled

West Bank accord with Israel

Arafat, in a brief exchange at

the doorway of the State

Department, did not say how he

thought the process could be re-

he said Palestinian leaders

were grappling with the ques-

tion of a Palestinian state.

"This can't be mentioned now,"

been urged by the Clinton ad-

ministration to stop declaring

his intention to set up a state

next May if negotiation with

Israel fail to produce what

Concerns about whether ter-

After 22 yrs of rule

Djibouti leader

to step down

President Hassan Gouled Apti-

don, 83, on Thursday an-

nounced that he would stand

down in April after leading this

tiny Horn of Africa nation for

fragile and who has to rest of-

ten, announced in a message

read to an extraordinary

congress of his Popular Rally

for Progress that he would not

contest the presidential elec-tions due to be held then.

of staff, Ismael Omar Guelleh,

as the party's official candidate.

Gouled's heir apparent.

The congress named his chief

He has long been considered

Gouled, whose health is

22 years, reports AFP.

DJIBOUTI, Feb 4: Djibouti

The Palestinian leader has

On another touchy subject.

three were honoured at the event with 1999 Black History Maker awards.

Arafat said.

Arafat wants.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council made no move Wednesday to respond to Yugoslavia's request for an urgent meeting on Kosovo to avert threatened NATO military

strikes. The council discussed the deteriorating security situation in Kosovo and Belgrade's request, but again put its backing behind diplomatic efforts to get the Yugoslav government to negotiate a peace deal with ethnic Albanians seeking indepen-

Canada, which holds the rotating council presidency, said further talks were expected Thursday. Western diplomats. speaking on condition of anonymity, said there had been no move, even from Russia, Yugoslavia's closest friend on the council, to push for a meeting while the diplomatic moves are under way.

Russia is part of the six-nation Contact Group which agreed last weekend to set a Saturday deadline for talks to start and a Feb 19 deadline for an autonomy deal to be concluded. NATO has vowed to take military action if either deadline is not met.

- UNB/AP photo

rorist suspects are treated le-

niently by Palestinian authori-

ties also were raised by Albright

at her meeting with Arafat.

State Department spokesman

The also surveyed the stalled

West Bank process and agreed to

hold a meeting in mid-February

of a joint US-Palestinian

commission to develop trade.

scientific and cultural ties,

boost before arriving, though,

when the State Department an-

nounced it had no evidence to

support Israeli accusations that

suspects in attacks on

can tell, are simply not proven

by any evidence," Rubin said Tuesday.

assertion he said that "with re-

spect to other related issues of

larger numbers of people in the

revolving door, let me say that

erence to Israeli claims that

suspects are detained and them

Arafat's periodic declarations

that the Palestinians will es-

tablish a state whatever the

outcome of negotiations with

Ron Wyden, and several House

members said they introduce a

resolution of opposition to a

Sens. Sam Brownback and

The "revolving door" is a ref-

Another touchy issue is

we do have concerns.'

quietly let go.

Palestinian state.

"Those charges, so far as we

While Rubin disputed Israel's

Americans had been set free.

The Palestinian leader got a

James P Rubin said.

Rubin said.

Benazir sacks 2 NWFP leaders from PPP

ISLAMABAD, Feb 4: Former premier Benazir Bhutto on Thursday removed two leaders of her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) for creating an internal split in the North West Frontier Province, the party said, reports AFP.

The PPP chairperson sacked Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao from the post of central vicechairman and a senator. Masood Kausar, from the office of provincial president of the party, it said.

Bhutto has installed a new team in the northwestern province to run the party affairs, appointing Khawaja Muhammad Khan Hoti as provincial president.

The more than three-decades old party has ruled Pakistan three times. Its founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, father of Benazir, was ousted from power by the military in 1977 and hanged two years later. Bhutto has been the coun-

try's main opposition leader since her second government was dismissed in November 1996 by the then-president Farooq Alimed Leghari, who himself resigned in December 1997 in a tussle with current prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Kumaratunga orders probe into alleged vote fraud

COLOMBO, Feb 4: President Chandrika Kumaratunga Thursday ordered an investigation into alleged fraud in a recent provincial election, reports AP.

A government statement said a special committee will look into allegations by the opposition and independent groups that Kumaratunga's supporters intimidated voters and stuffed ballot boxes in her party's favour.

Kumaratunga earlier order a committee formed of members of her Peoples Alliance to investigate whether the party played any role in fraud. The new committed, whose members were not immediately announced, will look into the entire election process, including involvement of other political parties.

The statement by the information department said the committee will submit its report within six months.

The main opposition United National Party and independent monitors rejected the victory claimed by Kumaratunga's People's Alliance in the Jan 25 vote. The voting was in Northwestern Province, one of the country's eight regions.

The Northwest Province election was seen as a test of Kumaratunga's popularity.

Indian cleric warns of violence if Rushdie returns

NEW DELHI, Feb 4: A leading Indian Muslim cleric Thursday warned of nationwide protests and possible Hindu-Muslim violence if British writer Salman Rushdie returned to the country of his birth after being granted a visa. A visa official at the Indian High Commission in London told AFP over the telephone

that Rushdie had been granted the visa on Wednesday. "He came here and picked it up himself," the official said.

Syed Ahmad Bukhari, deputy priest of India's bestknown mosque, the medieval Jama Masjid in New Delhi, said the move was a ploy by the ruling Hindu nationalists to inflame religious passions.

"Here is a man who is hated and reviled by Muslim the world over for his book The Satanic Verses.' Why is the government giving him so much importance. Why is it lefting him come?

"We are not at all happy and we will react. We will show it plainly that those who cause us pain in our hearts are not welcome. There will be nationwide protests and demonstrations against this."

The cleric also raised the spectre of communal violence. Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, the number two in the Hindu nationalistled government, said last year he was an admirer of Rushdie.

to result in victory for ECOMOG in Sierra Leone help in training about 5,000 men recruited by Sierra Leone to beef up its current forces and

FREETOWN, Feb 4: A "decisive" military operation likely to result in final victory for West African ECOMOG troops in the war against rebels in Sierra Leone, is being prepared in the north of the country, converging military reports indicated late Wednesday, reports AFP.

The operation which will involve ECOMOG air support as well as pro-government Kamajor traditional hunters, would be launched over the next three days, the sources said, without saying where it would take

Reports at the beginning of the week said large number of troops were being sent by Liberia to enable the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to launch a new offensive on Free-

A decisive victory for ECO-MOG before mid-February would allow Nigeria to speed up the withdrawal of its forces deployed in Sierra Leone. Nigerian leader general Abdulsalam Abubakar has said he wants the troops to return home before the end of May.

On Wednesday, in Lagos where he was on a brief visit. the commander-in-chief of the armed forces in Sierra Leone. Nigerian General Maxwell Khobe, said his country would

form a proper army. In the interior of Sierra Leone, the towns of Bo in the south and Makani in the southwest were considered Wednesday night to have been "secured," according to ECOMOG.

Over 200 students jailed in Myanmar last month

BANGKOK, Feb 4: More than 200 Myanmar university students were sentenced to 14 years in prison each late last month, a group of exiled Myanmar lawyers said on Thursday, reports AP.

Myanmar's military government did not immediately respond to requests for confirmation of the sentences.

The Burma Lawyers Council said it had received information from inside Myanmar, that the sentences were handed down on Jan. 18.

"Lengthy jail sentences are imposed to silence the opposition and do not reflect any crimes that are alleged to have been committed," the lawyers

Military accused of arming opponents of independence in East Timor

DILI. Indonesia, Feb 4: East Timor's spiritual leader on Thursday accused the Indonesian military of arming groups that oppose independence in the long-disputed ferritory, reports AP.

Roman Catholic Bishop Carlos Belo also said a vote on independence was crucial to the political future of the former Portuguese colony. But he suggested a referendum be delayed for between 10 and 15 years to allow for reconciliation between rival groups.

"Only through a plebiscite can we know who is for Indonesia, and who is against Indonesia," Belo said in a news conference at his home in Dili,

East Timor's coastal capital. Last week, Indonesia said it might consider independence for East Timor but ruled out a referendum, saying it could lead to civil war. When Indonesia invaded the territory of 800,000 people in 1975, East Timor was riven by internal conflict and there are fears that old antagonisms would resurface if Indonesian troops pull out. Tension has escalated in re-cent weeks, and hundreds of

refugees have sought shelter in Dili and the East Timorese town of Suai, claiming harassment by armed men. Belo said pro-Indonesian activists who favour autonomy,

rather than independence, for East Timor were behind the attacks. Citing church and village sources, he said the Indonesian military had been arming paramilitary groups. Indonésian Foreign

Minister Ali Alatas has denied that the military is giving weapons to supporters of union with Indonesia. He said, however, that weapons had been handed to trained civilian guards who act as auxiliaries for the police force.

Belo, who is co-winner of the 1996 Nobel peace prize

also said pro-Indonesian groups were manipulating villagers for their own political ends.

Punishment of genocidal group's leaders

Former Khmer Rouge leader slams efforts for trial has increased to bring senior

PHNOM PENH. Feb 4: Former Khmer Rouge chieftain leng Sary is attacking efforts to bring leaders of the genocidal group to trial, warning that Cambodia's newfound peace is being threatened by foreign powers with strategic interests in the country, reports AP.

leng Sary, deputy prime minister during the brutal Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979, acknowledged in a written statement obtained Thursday that they made 'mistakes' but repeated warnings made by other ex-members that convening a tribunal could spark civil war.

The statement was issued by the Democratic National Union of Cambodia, the nascent political party leng Sary founded after leading massive defections from the Khmer Rouge guerilla army in 1996 to make peace with the government. The defections crippled the Khmer Rouge and led to the surrender of its last remnants in December.

"When our country is not in a stable situation, and in the current political atmosphere, DNUM is of the view that a tribunal to prosecute this or that person is not a solution," leng Sary said.

The defections were allowed by the government largely on the understanding that leaders would not be tried in exchange for allowing peace to return to nearly all of Cambodia for the first time in three decades.

leaders of the regime to trial since two of late Khmer Rouge chief Pol Pot's top henchmen -Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea - emerged from hiding in leng Sary's stronghold of Pailin at Christmas. Clintons decry

magazine feature on Chelsea WASHINGTON, Feb 4: President Bill Clinton and his wife

say they are "profoundly saddened" by a decision by People magazine's editors to feature a story about their daughter, Chelsea, on its cover, reports

For over six years, the media has understood and respected the unique situation facing Chelsea as she grows up in the spotlight focused on her parents," the Clintons said in a prepared statement Wednesday. "We have been very grateful for the media's restraint in allowing Chelsea the privacy that any young person needs and deserves." The Clintons said People

chose to run the story "despite personal appeals with respect to her privacy and her security from her parents." The magazine is scheduled to

go on the street Friday with a cover photo of Chelsea with her mother and the headline: "Hillary and Chelsea - Grace

Anti-Catholic militants fear collapse of N Ireland peace deal

- AFP photo

BELFAST. Feb 4: Anti-Catholic militants warned Wednesday they have smuggled in new weaponry in expectation that Northern Ireland's peace agreement could collapse, reports AP.

Masked members of the outlawed Ulster Volunteer Force displayed to journalists what they said were weapons acquired in recent months, including a 66 mm anti-tank weapon that the gang could use to attack Catholic social spots if last year's accord unravels.

The threat directly challenged the agreement's expectation that Northern Ireland's rival armed groups should disarm by May 2000 in cooperation with a Canadian-led com-

mission. The refusal of major outlawed groups - the Irish Republican Army on the Catholic side, the UVF and Ulster Defence Association on the Protestant side - to start disarming has helped delay the formation of a new joint Catholic-Protestant government for Northern Ireland.

Politicians face a March 10 deadline for overcoming the dispute.

Wednesday's UVF press conference was the first time any of the groups had claimed to be actually increasing their weapons stockpiles.

In a related development the IRA — by far the best-armed group admitted in a statement that dissidents who refuse to adhere to its July 1997 truce have stolen weaponry from the group's network of underground arms dumps.

In a statement published in the weekly IRA-Sinn Fein newspaper. Republican News. the IRA said it "will continue its investigations until all the missing weaponry has been re-

The IRA has killed about 1.800 people in hopes of abolishing Northern Ireland as a Protestant-majority state. The UDA and UVF have killed more than 800 Catholics in hopes of thwarting that goal.

The weapons issue is complicating efforts to form a local Northern freland government

because both the IRA-allied Sinn Fein party and UVF-allied Progressive Unionist Party have members elected to Belfast's new legislative Assembly, from which a government is supposed to be drawn.

> Sinn Fein is demanding two positions in the envisioned 10seat cabinet, but mainstream Protestant politicians are demanding a start to IRA disarmament first, and the UVF's claims will only complicate that argument.

"We make no secret of the fact that the UVF is continually recruiting, rearming and training throughout the whole of North Ulster," the masked spokesman said at a secret location within the unit's area, which includes the predominantly Catholic city of Londonderry.

A range of weapons, including the alleged 66mm anti-tank gun, were displayed on a table in front of the masked men. There was no independent way to determine whether the weapons were genuine or repli-

British anti-terrorist officers have thwarted previous major efforts by the UVF to smuggle weapons into Northern Ireland. In 1993 they seized a Polish boat packed with tons of guns, plastic explosives, detonators and grenades in a northern English port.

Also Wednesday, police statisticians said the IRA, UVF and UDA had combined to commit 40 so-called "punishment" attacks in January, more than in any previous month since 1994.

The usually non-lethal attacks - used by the outlawed groups to control their working-class power bases and to deter rival criminals from operating in them - leave victims temporarily or permanently crippled with broken or shot

In the latest attack blamed on the IRA, several men bludgeoned a 44-year-old Catholic man late Tuesday in the border town of Lisnaskea. One attacker shot him point blank in the stomach affer he thwarted their efforts to pin him to the ground,

Violence claims 8 in Agartala AGARTALA. Feb 4: Eight

persons were killed, two severely injured, several more reported missing and at least 200 huts set on fire in violence by insurgents and irate mobs of Kanchanmala and neighbouring villages, about 12 km from here on Tuesday according to police, reports PTI.

Four non-tribals were killed and two others seriously injured when a group of about 25 of the banned National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) swooped down upon Kanchanmala market Tuesday night, police said.

In retaliation, a group of non-tribals attacked neighbouring Marak Basti, a tribal hamlet and set ablaze at least 100 huts. Police recovered two bodies, including that of a woman, from there on Tuesday. Several others of the basti have been reported to be miss-

said. Police said soon after news spread of arson in Marak Basti. a large group of tribal people at-tacked Rajmangal, Telorban and some neighbouring nontribal dominated villages and set ablaze nearly 100 cottages charring to death two more per-



Colombia's First Lady Nohora Puyana, right, visits earthquake survivor Marleny Canales and her son at a tent in southern Armenia, Wednesday. The government set up a tent city with a capacity of 2,600 people for survivors of last week's earthquake in the hopes of building a model for the city's recovery. Most of the survivors have refused to go the facility and preferred to make their own tents. - UNB/AP photo