Separatist groups call strike in northeast India

GUWAHATI, Jan 15: Federal troops have been put on alert throughout of northeastern In-dia following a strike call by separatist militants on January 26. India's Republic Day, police said Saturday, reports AP.

"We have started aerial surveillance with helicopters to patrol vital roads, bridges, railway tracks and oil installations." a senior commander said. "Our troops are on maximum alert.

A group of eight outlawed guerilla organisations have called for an 18-hour strike beginning midnight January 25 to protest the "repressive and barbaric" rule of New Delhi. A statement by the rebels said the strike would be enforced in five of the seven northeastern

The northeast was never a part of India and so the question of celebrating Republic Day does not arise," the statement

The militants also threat ened "stern action" against people loyal to the Indian gov-

More than 50,000 army, police and paramilitary troops have been positioned in the five violence-wracked states - Manipur. Nagaland, Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya - to thwart attempts to disrupt the celebrations on January 26, the day 48 years ago when India's constitution came into force.

In the past, the guerillas have triggered explosions and carried out ambushes on security patrols on January 26.

The common compliant of the separatists is alienation. neglect by the federal government and the threat to indigenous cultures. More than 25,000 people have been killed since the fighting began 52 years ago.

Japan likely to resume food aid to N Korea

TOKYO, Jan 15: Japan is likely to resume food aid to North Korea in March, offering 100,000 tonnes of rice, Jiji Press said Saturday, reports

Food aid was suspended in August 1998 after North Korea fired a missile over Japan.

"In order to keep the dialogue between Japan and North Korea going, it would be necessary for Japan to provide a certain amount of rice," a foreign ministry official was quoted as say-

Jiji said Tokyo would provide the some 100,000 tonnes of rice via an international organisation such as the World Food Program even if there was no progress on the issue of Japanese nationals allegedly kidnapped by North Korean

If Pyongyang moves positively on the abduction issue, however. Tokyo would consider direct rice aid of several hundred of thousands of tonnes, the news agency said.

At a meeting of Red Cross officials of the two countries in Beijing in late December, North Korea said it was facing a food shortage of between 1.2 million and 1.5 million tonnes, according to Jiji.

The Red Cross officials signed an agreement committing Tokyo to consider resuming food aid to Pyongyang.

At a separate meeting between foreign ministry officials, held simultaneously with the Red Cross talks, the two countries agreed to resume efforts to establish bilateral diplomatic ties.

Diplomatic talks were also suspended after the missile launch, as well as chartered flights between the two countries, although those resumed in November last year.

758 candidates barred from Iran polls

TEHRAN, Jan 15: A conservative-controlled vetting body has barred 758 candidates, including nine sitting MPs. from standing in key parliamentary elections next month, Iran's reformist-led interior ministry said Saturday, reports AFP.

More half of those barred from the February 18 polls --402 candidates -- had passed a preliminary vetting by the interior ministry, the official IRNA news agency said.

The wholesale rejection of so many candidates -- most of them supporters of reformist President Mohammad Khatami or members of the tolerated opposition -- has sparked an outcry from the reformers who had hoped to end the conservatives' control of parliament which has blocked the president's re-

'Many loyal individuals, who have rendered valuable service to the revolution" have been disqualified, the head of the ministry's elections office. Javad Ghadimi-Zakeri, com-

plained Wednesday. The Guardians comprise six representatives of Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and six legal experts

appointed by the conservative controlled parliament. They are charged with ensuring candidates are committed to the principles of Iran's Islamic Republic, including the supremacy of the spiritual leader, and are "good Muslims".

Leading reformers had warned that the Guardians might use their powers to reject reformist candidates wholesale But Khamenel said it was "incorrect behaviour" to criticise the Guardians and insisted their rulings "must be accepted

by everyone."

US warns Indonesian military against coup plot

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 15: The United States has warned Indonesia's military not to overthrow the country's new president and to cooperate with rights abuses in East Timor, reports AP.

Failure to cooperate will only increase pressure for an international tribunal to try those accused of carrying out a wave of terror in East Timor, US Ambassador Richard Holbrooke said.

His warning came amid' speculation that some of Indonesia's top generals, angered by efforts aimed at prosecuting them for human rights abuses, may be planning a move against President Abdurrahman Wahid.

"We would view with the greatest possible concern any

GROZNY, Jan 15: Russian

warplanes bombed Grozny on

Saturday, setting ablaze an oil

depot at the main refinery that

spewed thick black smoke over

the battered Chechen capital.

Russian soldiers continued

to pound the city with artillery

and mortar fire, and heavy

fighting was reported at a

canned meat factory and sev-

quoted Russian military au-

thorities as saying 180 bombing

raids had been carried out over

the past 24 hours, including

Isa Munayev, the rebel

commandant in Grozny, said 28

Russian scouts were killed in

the city Saturday morning.

Russia claimed it had killed 58

rebels from a group trying to

make its way overnight Friday

from Grozny to Chechen bases

raids over Grozny, Argun and

The Interfax news agency

eral other parts of the city.

Vedeno in the mountains.

reports AP.

such event. It would do Indonesia immense, perhaps irrepara-ble damage." Holbrooke said in a conference call with US and Indonesian reporters Friday morning.

On Thursday, Wahid fired armed forces spokesman Maj Gen Sudradjat, who had publicly denied that the military would carry out a "conventional coup," but confirmed that the generals intended to pressure the 3-month-old administration to stay out of military af-

Sudradjat is believed to be close ally of Gen Wiranto, the former military commander and now Wahid's senior security minister. There has recently been media speculation in Jakarta of a rift between Wiranto and Wahid.

Russian strikes on Grozny

continue, oil depot hit

in the southern mountains, the

ITAR-Tass news agency re-

launched heavy air and ar-

tillery strikes on Chechen rebel

positions and claimed to have

killed scores of fighters. The

Defence Ministry sharply de-

nied media reports of growing

gained its momentum after its

early this week in the face of

rebel attacks on Russian-held

towns and fierce resistance by

of high rebel deaths, news me-

dia have begun increasingly

questioning the Chechnya of-

rise in Russian casualties.

fensive amid reports of a sharp

ported only a few deaths each

day, but this week reports sur-

faced of tens of soldiers dying

Russia generally has re-

Despite the Russian reports

offensive in Chechnya stalled

Russia claims to have re-

Russian casualties.

fighters Grozny.

Russia on Friday had

Holbrooke later told reporters at the United Nations that it was vitally important for Wahid, Attorney General Marzuki Darusman and others to ensure that the generals responsible for the violence in East Timor be prosecuted.

"The Indonesian generals should know that their own efforts to thwart internal accountability and openness and inquiry are only going to result in greater pressure," for a tribunal similar to those for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, Holbrooke said.

A government human rights investigation has accused Wiranto and other top commanders of permitting the frenzy of violence that swept East Timor in September after the territory voted to secede

In a press release, the De-

Also Friday, a leader of pro-

Moscow Chechens, Malik

Saidullayev, reached agreement

with rebel field commanders to

surrender the area around

Nozhai-Yurt, a sizable village

in the southern mountains

where many rebels are based,

showing apparently high

morale and a commander said

Grozny was far from falling.

Nonetheless, rebels were

A helicopter carrying Tro-

shev, deputy commander of

Russian forces in the North

Caucasus, was fired on and se-

riously damaged while flying

near Grozny on Friday, but no

one aboard was injured, the

ITAR-Tass news agency re-

ported, citing military sources.

MADRID, Jan 15: Spanish

judge Baltasar Garzon on Fri-

day challenged Britain's moves

to release former Chilean dicta-

tor Augusto Pinochet and

sought new medical tests with

Spanish doctors taking part, le-

Garzon, who initiated the ex-

tradition demand that led to

Pinochet's detention in Britain

in October 1998, also sought

British permission to question

the 84-year-old former junta

early next week. Britain also

faced new pressure from other

governments and rights groups

over its moves to free Pinochet;

a few days after presidential

elections on Sunday, his chil-

dren told a Santiago newspaper. They said that if all went

well, their father would reach

Chile on Tuesday, in a military

airplane with a medical team,

Ultimas Noticias newspaper re-

But Garzon wants a new ex-

amination with court-ap-

pointed Spanish doctors taking

part, said Joan Garces, a lawyer

for victims of the Pinochet

deemed Pinochet, who has been

British medical experts

Pinochet will return to Chile

because of his health.

gal sources said, reports AFP.

Interfax reported.

fence Ministry called media re-

ports of higher casualties "con-

scious lies."

from Indonesia, which occupied it in 1975.

A separate UN human rights commission has also submitted a report on atrocities in East Timor, while UN human rights investigators have recommended the Security Council es-tablish a tribunal if Indonesia

fails to carry out effective trials. Holbrooke accused the military of hampering both probes, and of aiding militias that contime to prevent many of the esin inciona dan-controlled West Timorese refugee camps from returning home.

"The Indonesian military is still paying these people, still encouraging them," said Holbrooke, who visited the camps late last year. "These are real thugs and they have to be dealt

Tamil leader assassinated

COLOMBO, Jan 15: Suspected Tamil Tiger guerillas have assassinated a regional Tamil politician and his bodyguard in northern Sri Lanka, officials

said Saturday, reports AFP. The head of the Point Pedro urban council, Vadiweli Wijeratnam, was shot dead near his council office on Friday night. officials said, adding that his body guard died of gunshot injuries Saturday.

Wijeratnam was a member of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and was believed to have been killed by the rival Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

A suspected Tiger rebel committed suicide by swallowing a cyanide capsule worn round his neck when he was about to be arrested in the northern town of Vavuniya on Friday, police said.

They said a pistol and two grenades were recovered from

decision next Tuesday after hearing from all the parties in-

to the British minister, the

by AFP, said Spanish law re-

quired a copy of a medical re-

Spanish legal sources said.

port to end its own case.

doctors." Garces said.

Garzon has sent his request

A copy of his document, seen

"Given that the British au-

thorities are not in a position to

transmit the details to the

Spanish courts, the judge re-

quested a second medical exam-

Man builds

church alone

Radivojevic took 17 years to

build a church single-handed in

his village southeast of Bel-

grade, the daily Politika Ek-

spres reported Saturday, says

plan, built the walls, did the

structural work and decorated

the interior of the church in Gr-

cac near Smederevska Palanka

70 kilometres from the capital

The work would have taken

the newspaper said.

Radivojevic drew up the

BELGRADE, Jan 15: Dragisa

Spanish judge seeks fresh

volved.

medical tests for Pinochet

that Pinochet could fly home of court-appointed Spanish



DILI, East Timor, Jan 15: Vi- prepare East Timor for selfolence broke out in Dili on Sat- government. urday when thousands of poor and unemployed East Timorese scrambled to apply for jobs offered by the United Nations administration, reports AP.

Some in the crowd of about 7.000 threw rocks at a small group of international peacekeeping troops and UN police

Witnesses said they were frustrated that their applications for about 2,000 available positions with the world body had been rejected.

About 70 foreign, mainly Australian, peacekeepers and UN civilian police protected UN administrative officials. Many took shelter behind walls.

One Australian soldier and a television cameramen were injured by flying rocks.

Thousands of applicants had been waiting at Dill's main sports stadium since dawn to apply for a range of jobs with the United Nations, which has a two to three-year mandate to

A UN officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said many of the applicants became angry when told they needed at least a basic understanding of

Australian peacekeepers and UN civilian police push back some of the thousands of East

Timorese waiting to submit their application forms for jobs with UN administration in Dili

yesterday. The crowd later turned rowdy and pelted the soldiers with stones, injuring one.

English, which some didn't have. Indonesian and Portuguese are mainly spoken in East Timor along with the local Tetum language. "They are angry that their

applications were rejected because of their lack of skills," he

About an hour after the violence started, Nobel Peace laureate Jose Ramos-Horta arrived at the stadium and appealed for calm.

The peacekeepers dispersed the crowd after UN officials postponed its job interview program by a week.

Unemployment is chronic in East Timor after its devastation last year by militia gangs who opposed independence for the territory from Indonesia.

Lankan ruling party mulls defection law to win opposition MPs

Lanka's main ruling party plans to legislate to enable opposition MPs to defect to the government and bolster its bid to end the country's ethnic war.

reports Reuters. Party will table a "defection bill" which, if passed, would enable the defectors, possibly dozens of them, to sit with the With expectations mounting ination with the participation government without the need for fresh elections, party officials and state media said on

Saturday. Under the constitution, MPs

The ruling People's Alliance is seeking a two-thirds parliamentary majority -enough to push through constitutional reforms aimed at ending 16 years of war with ethnic Tamil sepa-

If the defection bill fails, the government will call early parcials said.

The ruling coalition wants

has been stuck in parliament for more than two years.

Five MPs from the main op-(UNP) decided to support the by the incumbent Chandrika Kumaratunga. The five — two of whom were

made ministers last month are in the process of negotiating with several other UNP law-The Sri Lanka Freedom makers to bring them into the government fold.

to switch sides.

The People's Alliance, which alread has the support of some mine Tamil Parties in Parliam.... needs 16 more votes in the 225-member House to reach

The Freedom Party's plan for a defection bill was approved by party chiefs at a meeting on Friday, party offi-

At least one party in the seven-member coalition - the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress had voiced its opposition to the bill, but government sources said it was likely to change its

killed in the fighting.

Crackdown on monastery

COLOMBO. Jan 15: Sri. month's residential polls won

are barred from switching parties once elected.

ratists.

liamentary elections and fight the campaign on the issue of constitutional reform, the offi-

to change the constitution to devolve more powers to regional councils, including one run by minority Tamils, to partly meet the demand by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for a separate homeland. But the draft constitution

position United National Party

government just before last

BEIJING, Jan 15: At least

been detained by Chinese police

investigating the apparent es-

cape of Tibet's Karmapa Lama

to India. as China continued to-

day to send mixed signals over

its stance on the incident, re-

Armed police descended on

the Tsurphu Monastery days af-

ter the Karmapa Lama, one of

Tibet's most revered "Living

Buddhas," left on December 28,

the London-based Tibet Infor-

mation Network said in a faxed

monastery told the network

that Tsurphu monks were con-

fined to the premises, indicat-

ing that some were being inter-

rogated, while at least two

monks were taken away to the

the 14-year-old Karmapa has

China officially maintains

Sources close to the

statement to Beijing.

ports AFP.

county seat.

One of them, Special Assignments Minister Sarath

Amunugama, says more than 30 UNP lawmakers are willing

a two-third majority.

cials said.

mind. The executive committee of

the People's Alliance also met on Friday, but it was not immediately known if a consensus was formed on the defection bill. It is likely the government will table the bill in parliament when it meets on Tuesday.

The LTTE has been fighting for a homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east since 1983. Tens of thousands of people have been

Israel-Syria talks to resume amid uncertainty

third round of Israel-Syria peace talks is set to kick off next week amid growing uncertainty as to whether progress is possible on the key border issue and unease from the US hosts over the leak of a draft treaty to

an Israeli newspaper, reports The negotiations are to resume on Wednesday after having left off in Shepherdstown.

West Virginia on January 11

be an "act of vendetta."

with few concrete results other than the presentation to the delegations of a US-created "working document" outlining areas of agreement and dispute

between the two sides. However, the seven-page document which is designed to be a blueprint for a final peace treaty, indicates apparent intractability between the two sides on the most sensitive issues -- particularly on Israel's withdrawal from the Golan

Mother,4 children killed in Pakistan:

Attackers brutally backed to death a divorced woman and her

four young children in a rural town in central Pakistan, police

Chowkazam in the district of Leiya in central Punjab province.

The attackers broke into the house Friday night and fled after

the attack, a Punjabi police official said. He said an

invesigation was under way into the killings which appeared to

New President of Guatemala:

Alfonso Portillo was sworn in as Guatemala's president Friday,

becoming the first elected president to take office since a

December 1996 peace agreement ended the 36-year-old civil

Portillo succeeds Alvaro Arzu, who was elected president in

January 1996 and who played a key role in concluding the peace

agreement. Portillo received the sash of office from the newly

elected president of Congress, retired general Efrain Rios Monti.

who led a de facto government for 18 months in 1982-1983.

The victims' mutilated bodies were found in their home in

said Saturday. AFP reports from Multan, Pakistan,

war. AFP reports from Guatemala City.

Heights and the fate of Jewish settlers on the strategic plateau. Israel has not proposed a

specific boundary line for its

withdrawal but insists that it be

decided with its security inter-

mands a return to the pre-1967 border before Israel seized the Golan. Security guarantees in themselves are thorny issues with Israel demanding a presence at an early warning station on the Golan and Syria

dead-set opposed. Israel also wants settlers who have taken up residence on the plateau since 1967 to be able to remain there even after the area is returned while Damascus is in vehement opposition to any such suggestion.

The nine-article US document does not detail the proposed frontier, saying only that a joint boundary commission would be established upon the signing of the treaty to create a "permanent, secure and recognised boundary" which supersedes any previous border or

line of demarcation. Neither does it offer "bridging proposals" on any issue, and since the details were made public on Thursday when the Israeli newspaper Haaretz published a leaked copy of the US draft document, both Israel and Syria have further hardened their stances, weakening

chances of compromise. In addition, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who is

leading his delegation, has stepped up calls that Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, represented at the talks by his foreign minister, Faruq al-Shara, take an active role in the negoests in mind, while Syria de- tiations.

"President Assad will have to come to meet with us and President (Bill) Clinton in order to solve some of the toughest issues that might remain," he said Wednesday, adding that he could not "conceive" of a deal being struck until a meeting between himself Assad and Clin-

Assad has yet to show any indication of interest in becoming involved although he and Clinton did speak by phone on Thursday, agreeing on the importance of success.

Haaretz.

gone abroad to retrieve Bud-US officials have said they dhist musical instruments and believe Shara has the authority has not defected to the Dalai to negotiate for Damascus, but Lama's exiled Tibetan governhave agreed that a direct role by ment in Dharmasala, India. the authoritarian Assad will be Such a position is believed to necessary for a final agreement. be linked to hopes in Beijing As the Israelis and Syrians

that the 17th Karmapa Lama, further entrenched their posipreviously loyal to Beijing and tions at home during the break whose monastic seat served as a in talks, in Washington, offi-"patriotic monastery," would cials were seething over the return to Tibet and work to keep leak of their document to Tibet a part of Chinese control. However the Karmapa

Despite the fact that the na-Lama's arrival to the northern ture of the wide gaps between Indian hill town of Dharamthe two sides were known in sala on January 5, has signalled general well before the talks behis defection to the exiled gan in earnest on January 3, Tibetan community led by the State Department spokesman Dalai Lama, Tibet's most James Rubin said the leak had revered spiritual figure, but a damaged the peace process.

of Karmapa Lama "splittist" in the eyes of China's

government. two monks are believed to have On Friday, India's foreign ministry called on China to provide specific details regarding the Karmapa's departure from Tibet, including the route taken and other details, Indian officials said.

The demand was seen as an attempt by New Delhi to further probe Beijing's actual stance on the matter and possibly an attempt by India to seek a mediating role between Beijing and the Karmapa, analysts said.

The Karmapa, born Ugyen Trinley Dorji, has been recognised by both the Chinese government as well as the Dalai

Meanwhile China's top religious affairs leaders met in Beijing last Monday and while refraining from speaking publicly about the Karmapa's flight sternly warned "foreign hostile forces" from using religion to foment separatism in China.

"(We will) according to law strengthen the management of religious affairs while respecting the religious beliefs of ethnic minorities and will firmly prevent and oppose hostile foreign forces from using religious issues to engage in ethnic splittist activities," State Councillor Ismail Amat said.

Amat's statement was seen as a direct warning to both the extled Tibetan government and to separatist forces in Tibet to refrain from using the Karmapa's flight as a springboard to religious unrest and ethnic separatist activity in Tibet.

US Marine arrested for attempted rape in Japan

- AFP photo

TOKYO, Jan 15: A US Marine arrested in Japan for attempted rape was questioned by prosecutors Saturday, as tensions over the presence of American soldiers on the southern island of Okinawa were further heightened, reports AFP.

Lance Corporal Oswald Mc-Donald was arrested nearly five years after relations with the US military were plunged into crisis in 1995 when three US Marines raped a 12-year-old girl on Okinawa.

"He was arrested on suspicion of attempting to rape the woman," said Hiroji Toma, a spokesman for Okinawa Police Department.

The suspect is back to the police station now, after being questioned at Okinawa prosecutors' Office in the morning," he

The police spokesman said McDonald denied charges. "He still denies the charges, saying that he was just trying to touch the woman. The arrest came as the US

government was trying to soothe relations by negotiating to return the major Futenma air base and as Ókinawa prepared to host the prestigious Group of Eight summit in July.

Israel to buy 50 F-16s from US

WASHINGTON, Jan 15: The US defence group Lockheed Martin on Friday said Israel had officially confirmed its intention to buy 50 of its F-16 fighter planes in a deal worth 1.8 billion dollars to the company, reports AFP.

"We are grateful to the government of Israel for this continued expression of confidence in the F-16, and our company, and we look forward to extending our mutually beneficial relationship with Israel for many years to come," said Dain Hancock, president of Texas-based Lockheed Martin Tactical Aircraft Systems.

The US Defence Department also announced the award but estimated its value at 1.341 billion dollars. There was no immediate explanation for the difference in figures. During a visit to Washington

in July, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak told President Bill Clinton that Israel had decided to buy the F-16 fighter rather than the F-15, manufactured by Lockheed rival Boeing. Lockheed on Friday put the

value of the total program for suppliers of the aircraft, mission equipment and support at 2.5 billion dollars. It said deliveries of the air-

craft would begin about three

and a half years after the con-

tract is signed, expected later this year. Albright offers olive branch to Colombian president

CARTAGENA. Colombia, Jan 15: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met Colombian President Andres Pastrana in this balmy Colombian resort for a working dinner on Friday in a demonstration of Washington's support for his government and its campaign to defeat drug traffickers, reports Reuters.

The highest-level US official to visit Colombia in a decade. Albright and Pastrana embraced for the cameras outside a government guest house before a working dinner to discuss a multi-billion-dollar plan aimed at ending a drug war and a conflict that has claimed more than 35,000 lives in 10

This is the first trip that I have taken in the 21st century and I hope that it will in fact signal that in this new millennium there is a new relationship in the Americas," she said at the start of a 20-hour visit.

Washington is so impressed with Pastrana's "Plan Colombia" - a wide-ranging project to forge peace with rebels, eliminate the drug trade and boost the economy - that it is proposing to Congress a \$1.6 billion aid package as a central plank to it which would treble to three the number of anti-drug battalions trained by US forces in

Colombia.

On Tuesday, President Bill Clinton unveiled the aid proposal which his Republican opponents support but some Democrats feel focuses too much on the military side.

less time had Radivojevic not under house arrest in a manencountered some administrasion near London since his de-Characters from "The Simpsons" -- (from left) Homer, Bart, tive problems with the thentention, unfit to stand trial. Lisa, Marge and baby Maggie -- stand next to the star communist regime, which did Britain's Home Secretary not look kindly on his enterthey received on Friday on the famous Hollywood Walk of Jack Straw said this week he Fame in Hollywood, California. The show is the longestwas "minded" to release But Radivojevic said: "I had Pinochet for health reasons running animated series and sitcom currently on prime faith from the very first day though the contents of the medtime television and has been honoured with numerous Without that faith I could never ical exams were not released. awards, including 15 Emmies. - AFP photo have done all that. Straw is to announce a final