

# Blasts kill 3 in Karachi

KARACHI, Jan 28: Two bombs exploded in Karachi, southern Pakistan, today killing three people and leaving several injured, police and witnesses said, reports AFP.

At least three people died and 20 were injured when a bomb went off in Afghan Buidi, an area which is home to many Afghan refugees, they said.

"It was a huge blast, a police official, Ameer Uddin told AFP. Volunteers from Edhi Ambulance Service said at least 20 to 25 people were injured, some in critical condition.

"Few of them were hospitalised," the volunteer said, adding several ambulances were rushed to the site.

Witnesses said dozens of vehicles and hundreds of police, paramilitary troops thronged to the site where residents helped the victims.

It came just hours after another blast near a court building in the city, which injured seven people.

The first bomb was planted on a motorbike parked outside a court building, deputy commissioner Shoab Siddiqui said.

The building is around eight kilometers (five miles) away

from the site of an anti-terrorism court where deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif is on trial.

Siddiqui said the explosion was an "act of terrorism aimed at Shattering peace in the country's biggest city."

Police cordoned off the blast site as ambulances removed the injured to hospital. The blast also damaged several vehicles and windows of court offices, witnesses said.

"There was a loud explosion. The motorbike flew up and an adjacent vehicle caught fire," said Muzaffar Askari, a reporter at a local newspaper who witnessed the explosion.

Sindh governor Azim Daudpota was quick to point the blame at arch-rival India, which is often blamed for such explosions in Pakistan.

"A neighbouring country is involved," he said. "It is terrorism. It is a dastardly and cowardly act."

A senior police official, Manzoor Mughal, said paramilitary troops and police were already on alert after an explosion in Karachi last week in which eight people were killed and 22 injured.

# Clinton outlines foreign policy goals Final State of Union address

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: President Bill Clinton used his last State of the Union address here Thursday to spell out his key foreign policy goals: promoting stability and democracy in China and Russia, and preventing terrorists from acquiring high-tech weapons, reports AFP.

"We must continue to encourage our former adversaries, Russia and China, to emerge as stable, prosperous, democratic nations," the US leader said in a televised speech to a joint session of the US Congress.

"Both are being held back today from reaching their full potential: Russia by the legacy of communism, an economy in turmoil, a cruel and self-defeating war in Chechnya; China by the illusion that it can buy stability at the expense of freedom," he added.

While the future direction of those two countries was unclear, Clinton said "we must do everything in our power to increase the chance they will choose wisely, to be constructive members of the global community."

On China, the US leader urged Congress to back the agreement reached with Beijing last November on China's ad-

mission to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"That is why I believe Congress should support the agreement we negotiated to bring China into the WTO, by passing Permanent Normal Trade Relations as soon as possible this year," Clinton said.

NTR grants China privileges enjoyed by other US trading partners with the same status. The Clinton administration has been trying to enlist public support for permanent NTR for China, but has encountered stiff resistance from both Congress and organised labour.

"This agreement will open China's markets to us. It will advance the cause of peace in Asia and promote the cause of change in China," Clinton argued.

He also underscored the need to improve ties with Russia, which have soured in recent months over tit-for-tat espionage charges, concern in the United States about Russian corruption and harsh US criticism of the Russia's brutal campaign in Chechnya.

"That is why we must support those Russians struggling for a democratic, prosperous future; continue to reduce both

our nuclear arsenals; and help Russia safeguard weapons and material that remain," he noted.

The United States, Clinton said, must develop a missile defense system "while working to preserve our Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia."

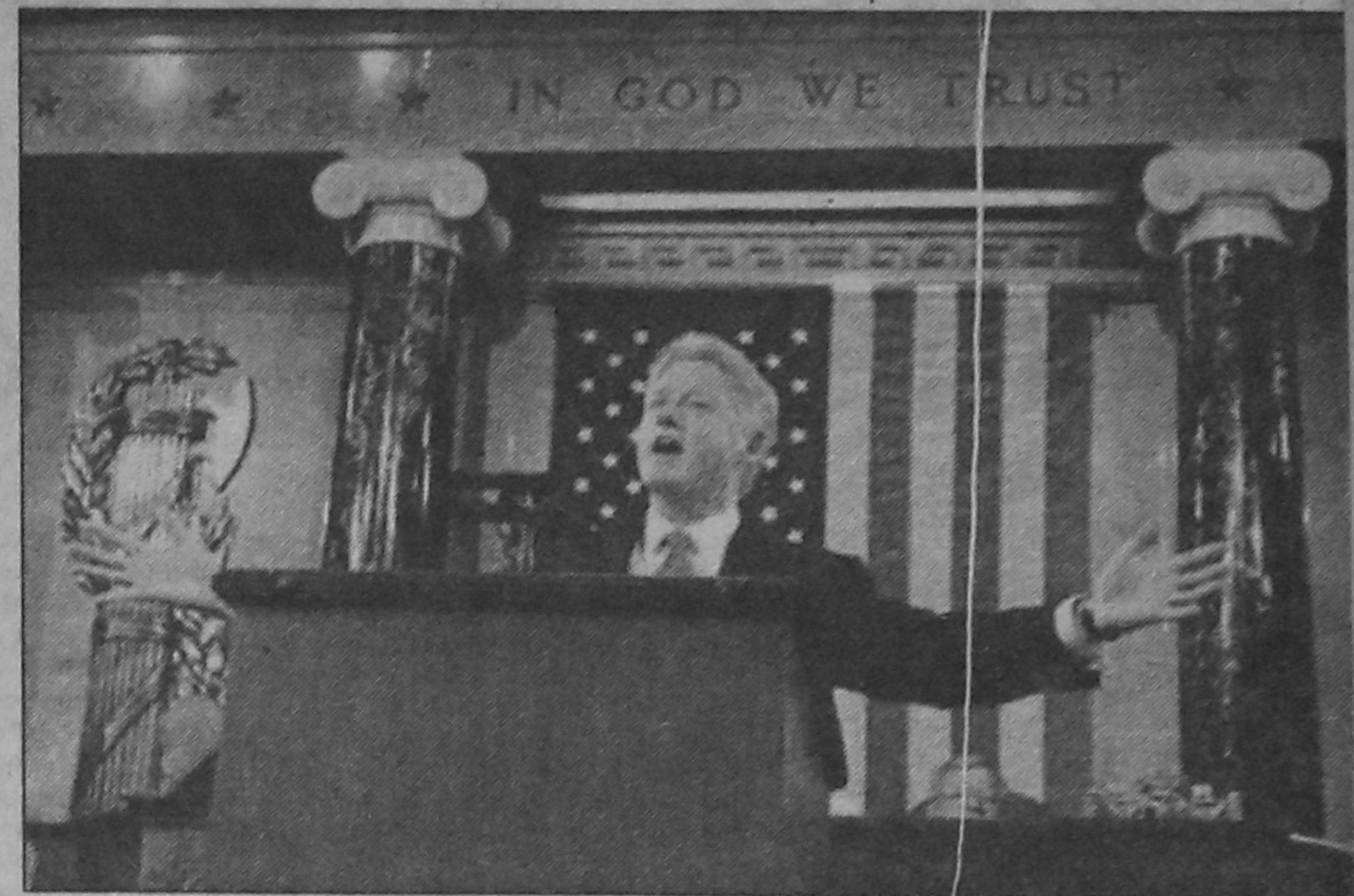
He called for a "constructive bipartisan dialogue" that could lead to Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The Republican-controlled Senate rejected the treaty last year despite an intensive lobbying effort by the Clinton administration.

Another key challenge for the United States, Clinton said, was fending off attempts by "terrorists and potentially hostile nations" to acquire high-tech weapons that could threaten US security.

"We must meet this threat by making effective agreements to restrain nuclear and missile programmes, in North Korea, curbing the flow of lethal technology to Iran," he said.

Clinton also stressed the need to prevent Iraq from threatening its neighbours; to increase US preparedness



US President Bill Clinton spreads his arms as he addresses the Congress late Thursday during his final State of the Union address in Washington, DC. — AFP photo

against chemical and biological attack, and protect US vital computer systems from hackers and criminals.

He urged speedy approval from Congress for 1.3 billion dollars in aid to Colombia to fight drug trafficking and warned against the dangerous threat posed by an alliance between narco-traffickers, terrorists and organised crime.

# Wahid goes on foreign trip amid coup rumours

JAKARTA, Jan 28: Indonesia's president began an ambitious 16-day foreign tour today leaving his untested vice president to cope with rising violence and rumours of a military coup, reports AP.

Before departing, President Abdurrahman Wahid said he had entrusted full authority to his deputy, Megawati Sukarnoputri, despite growing skepticism about her ability to govern.

"Whatever necessary policies she will take in security and other fields is up to her," Wahid told a news conference on Thursday to mark his first 100 days in office. "Nothing is hidden between me and her."

Several newspapers this week openly criticized Megawati's performance.

Of most concern has been her inability to quell bloody religious violence in the eastern Maluku islands, where at least 2,000 people have been killed in clashes between Muslims and Christians.

Weeks ago Wahid charged her with solving the crisis. However, the fighting continues.

At first she failed to visit the

strife-torn region. When she finally did lead a peace mission this week to the islands, also known as the Moluccas, the bloodshed actually worsened.

"The nation has yet to witness an effective step from her," The Jakarta Post lamented in an editorial.

Separately, Wahid said in a national television address that his visit to the Middle East, Europe and parts of Asia was aimed at boosting foreign investment for Indonesia, which was hit hardest by the Asian financial crisis.

"My overseas trip is not for fun but to encourage foreigners to invest in Indonesia," he said in reaction to critics who say he should stay at home to deal with domestic crises.

Wahid has also dismissed rumours that some sections of the military, upset over his curbing of its political influence and changes in the top brass, might stage a coup while he is abroad.

He maintains that most of the military, which exercised great power during Indonesia's recent authoritarian past, remains loyal to him.



Students hold portraits of Christian missionaries in Calcutta Thursday, who have been killed in the Indian state of Orissa last year. Members of the Christian community arranged this walk and a special service in memory of the missionaries. — AFP photo

# US blasts clampdown on Pak judiciary

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: The United States on Thursday delivered its strongest criticism yet of Pakistan's military government, blasting a clampdown on the country's judiciary amid growing concerns about Islamabad's support for alleged terrorists, reports AFP.

State Department spokesman James Rubin said the decision by General Pervez Musharraf's three-month-old regime to force judges to swear loyalty oaths contradicted promises from the ruler to democratise following last October's coup.

"The United States deplores General Musharraf's order," Rubin told reporters, adding that it "undermines the integrity and independence of the judiciary."

"This is contrary to the path of restoration of civilian rule the general pledged to follow when he took power in October and his compromise at the time to respect the constitutional order and human rights of Pak-

istan."

And, with US officials earlier this week publicly noting links between elements of the Pakistani government and known terrorist organisations, including the group believed responsible for last month's Indian Airlines hijacking, Rubin warned Islamabad of serious consequences.

"If the Secretary of State determines that a government has repeatedly provided support of international terrorism directly then she would be prepared to designate that country as a state sponsor of terrorism," he said.

Such a determination would render Pakistan, which has been under some restrictions since the coup, ineligible for nearly all US aid and would destroy what little chance there is left for a visit to the country by President Bill Clinton when he travels to the region later this year.

On Tuesday, while stressing they had no evidence implicat-

ing Pakistani officials in the Indian Airlines hijacking, US officials said they believed the perpetrators were affiliated with the Kashmiri separatist group Harkat ul-Mujahideen which Washington believes gets "general support" from agencies of the Pakistan government.

Harkat ul-Mujahideen, formerly Harkat ul-Ansar, has been on the State Department list of foreign terrorist groups since 1997.

In addition to support for that group, Rubin said Pakistan had not convinced the United States that it had severed ties to Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia which is harbouring Osama bin Laden, Washington's most-wanted terrorist.

"We do not believe that all ties between elements of Pakistan and the Taliban, who provide (Bin Laden) safe haven, have been cut," Rubin said.

"We haven't received the kind of concrete assurances of the steps they're going to take that we would like," Rubin said.

# BRIEFLY

**French FM to visit India in Feb:** French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine will visit India on February 17 and 18, a diplomatic source said in Paris on Thursday. AFP reports from Paris.

Vedrine's trip will precede a state visit to France by Indian President K R Narayanan planned for mid-April, the source added. India's national security adviser Brajesh Mishra will arrive in the French capital on February 7 for two days of talks on the "strategic dialogue" between the two countries.

**Clinton to meet Arafat:** President Bill Clinton will meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat this weekend when both are in Switzerland for an economic forum, the White House said Thursday. AFP reports from Washington.

Clinton is trying to speed peace negotiations between Arafat and Israeli leader Ehud Barak, who is not attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. White House national security adviser Samuel Berger said. Although he will be in Davos for less than a day, Clinton will also likely see Jordanian King Abdullah II and a number of other world leaders, in addition to giving a speech to the forum, the White House said.

**Nigerian state imposes Islamic law:** Islamic law was officially imposed on northern Zamfara state Thursday, prompting joyous street marches by Muslims celebrating a major victory for their faith in this religiously and ethnically divided nation. AP reports from Abuja Nigeria.

State governor Ahmed Sani signed two bills establishing 24 Islamic law, or Sharia, courts and a Sharia penal code. Islamic judges were expected to be sworn in later in the day.

**Albright leaves for Russia:** Secretary of State Madeleine Albright left Washington for the start of a five-day trip to Switzerland and Russia early yesterday after hearing President Bill Clinton deliver his final State of the Union address. Reuters reports from Washington.

Albright was scheduled to address the World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos on Sunday before departing for Moscow, and to co-chair multilateral Middle East talks in Moscow with her foreign minister counterpart.



Japan's Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi (R) wipes perspiration from his head after his key policy speech at a lower house plenary session that was boycotted by the opposition camp Friday in Tokyo while Finance Minister, Kiuchi Miyazawa (L) looks on. Opposition parties launched the boycott to protest the ruling coalition's decision to pass through a law cutting the number of seats in the lower house of the Diet. — AFP photo

# Uprising in Ecuador 4 colonels, hundreds of officers detained for coup

QUITO, Ecuador, Jan 28: Four colonels have been arrested and hundreds of other officers detained for their part in the uprising that led to President Jamil Mahuad's overthrow, reports AP.

Gen. Felmo Sandoval, who ascended to armed forces commander in last week's power shuffle, confirmed the arrests Thursday of colonels Lucho Gutierrez, Fausto Cobo, Gustavo Lalama and Jorge Brito.

Sandoval said the junior officers would receive fair trials and assured "full respect for their physical safety."

Under Ecuador's military law, the officers face between six to eight years in prison if found guilty of charges ranging from insurrection to insubordination.

Together with hundreds of Indians, the four colonels led an insurrection of as many as 120 young army officers last week to seize Congress and proclaim a new governing junta to fight corruption and work to improve the lives of the poor.

The junta was composed of Gutierrez, Indian leader Antonio Vargas, and a former Supreme Court president.

The military high command threw its support to the civilian-military "Parliament of the People," with armed forces Chief Gen. Carlos Mendoza tak-

ing Gutierrez's spot on the ruling council.

Mahuad was forced to abandon power.

But the next day, under pressure from Washington and more than 20 regional commanders who rejected the overthrow of civilian rule, Mendoza disbanded the junta, turned over his post to Sandoval and ceded power to Vice President Gustavo Noboa.

Gutierrez was arrested Saturday when the rebellion was put down. The other attempted coup leaders were taken into custody three days later by military officials, family members and local newspapers said.

**Vajpayee receives screen videocon award**

NEW DELHI, Jan 28: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee received the screen videocon award for lyrics in the non-film category here yesterday, reports PTI.

The award, sixth in series, was presented to Vajpayee at his residence by Indian Express group deputy Chairperson Ananya Goenka and Videcon managing director RN Dhoot.

The prime minister was honoured for his collection of Hindi poems Nai Dishah.

# Another parcel bomb found, defused in Lanka

COLOMBO, Jan 28: Government forces found and defused a parcel bomb in eastern Sri Lanka today, a day after a blast at a post office in north of the country killed 11 people and wounded 73, officials said, reports AFP.

Troops on a route clearing patrol found the explosive device at Kathankudy in the district of Batticaloa, officials said, adding that no one was hurt and the bomb was defused.

On Thursday, a parcel bomb exploded in the post office in Vavuniya, 360-km north of the capital Colombo.

# Indian Airlines pays damage to widow of hijack victim

NEW DELHI, Jan 28: India's state-run carrier Indian Airlines has paid damages to the widow of a passenger killed by the hijackers of one of its Airbus on Christmas eve, an airline spokesman said here today, reports AFP.

Spokesman RN Pathak said the airline paid 20,000 dollars to the 20-year-old widow of Rupin Katyal who was fatally stabbed after an Indian Airlines Kathmandu-Delhi flight was hijacked by five armed men on December 24.

# Lanka to recruit 15,000 more soldiers for war

COLOMBO, Jan 28: The Sri Lankan army will launch next month a major campaign to recruit about 15,000 soldiers to bolster its campaign against Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels, local media reported today, says Reuters.

It quoted top army officials as saying the army needed additional soldiers to defeat the LTTE, which had been weakened after its failure to capture the key Elephant Pass base in the country's north.

The Independent Island newspaper quoted Army Commander Lieutenant-General Siril Weerasooriya as saying recent reports about LTTE attacks had demoralised the army and the country's youth.

"As such the army has organised a campaign to go from house-to-house encouraging the youth to render their service to the nation at this crucial point," Weerasooriya said.

Last November, the LTTE launched a major attack on government troops and captured several military camps in the northern Wanni region before shelling Elephant Pass base.

The army has lost some areas around the military base, which it says has been vacated for tactical reasons.

The fall of the Elephant Pass, an isthmus linking the northern Jaffna Peninsula

with the rest of the island, would open an easy route for the rebels to their former stronghold of Jaffna.

Officials said the latest recruitment drive will begin on February 1 and continue till March 5 at 144 centres across the island.

The Sri Lankan Army's current strength is approximately 100,000. It is unclear what the LTTE's total strength is, but military officials have in the past put it at between 5,000 and 6,000.

The army has in recent years found it difficult to recruit soldiers and has been hit by desertions that typically rise following military setbacks.

# Death toll of CPI-M and TC clashes rises to 16

MIDNAPORE, West Bengal, Jan 28: The toll in the week-long clashes between CPI-M and Trinamool Congress (TC) supporters in Keshpur areas of Midnapore district rose to 16 with the recovery of five more bodies yesterday, according to police sources here, reports PTI.

Police said of the 16 dead, 12 belonged to CPI-M and the rest to TC.

# Clinton hopes to mend Indo-Pak rift during trip to S Asia

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: US President Bill Clinton hopes to mend the rowing rift between New Delhi and Islamabad during his upcoming trip to South Asia, but his administration is unable to decide whether he should include Pakistan in his itinerary, reports PTI.

The Clinton Administration is locked in a tough debate over whether President Clinton should visit Islamabad during an expected trip to South Asia this March, the Wall Street Journal has reported.

One step he has already taken and that is to lay down the sanctity of the Line of Control in his joint statement with then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, and which is binding on his successors, analysts said.

**Maoists kill 3 in Nepal**

KATHMANDU, Jan 28: At least three policemen were killed and another 14 injured in a violent clash with Maoist guerrillas at a remote area in Nepal's far west, police said today, reports AFP.

Local press reports said 10 Maoists were also killed or injured in the gun battle but Maoists escaped carrying the bodies and the injured.

# Russia's war in Chechnya self-defeating: Clinton

Moscow ponders move to seize Grozny

WASHINGTON, Jan 28: President Bill Clinton on Thursday warned Russia that its four-month war in the separatist Chechnya was "self-defeating," reports AFP.

Russia, he said, was being held back from achieving its full potential by "the legacy of communism, economic turmoil, a cruel and self-defeating war in Chechnya."

Moscow has been leading a brutal war against the breakaway republic, which has caused heavy casualties on both sides, with thousands of civilians trapped in the middle of the conflict.

But, Clinton added in his annual State of the Union address, the last of his presidency, much has changed for the better in the last 10 years.

"Thousands of former Soviet nuclear weapons eliminated, Russian soldiers serving with ours in the Balkans; Russian people electing their leaders for the first time a thousand years," he elaborated.

"No one can know for sure what direction these great countries (Russia and China) will choose," he cautioned.

"But we must do everything in our power to increase the chance they will choose wisely, to be constructive members of the global community," he told a crowded House chamber.

"That is why we must support those Russians struggling for a democratic, prosperous future; continue to reduce both our nuclear arsenals; and help Russia safeguard weapons and materials that remain," Clinton said.

Earlier Reuter says: Russia's military pondered how to wear down Chechen fighters and proceed with its apparently stalled drive to secure control over the capital of Chechnya and rebel mountain strongholds to the south.

Russian diplomats got a breathing space after the Parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe postponed a move to suspend Moscow's



Army troops evacuate a soldier wounded in a bomb attack Thursday in the northern Sri Lankan town of Vavuniya. At least 11 people were killed and 70 wounded in the bomb attack amid a Norwegian move to broker peace between the Tamil Tiger guerrillas and the Sri Lankan government. — AFP photo