

# Wahid suspends Wiranto

JAKARTA, Feb 14: President Abdurrahman Wahid suspended General Wiranto from his cabinet post as security minister, a presidential spokesman said today, reports AFP.

"For the stability of the government, as well as for the sake of Wiranto's own interests, the president has decided to suspend General Wiranto as the coordinating minister for political and security affairs," spokesman Marsilam Simanjuntak said.

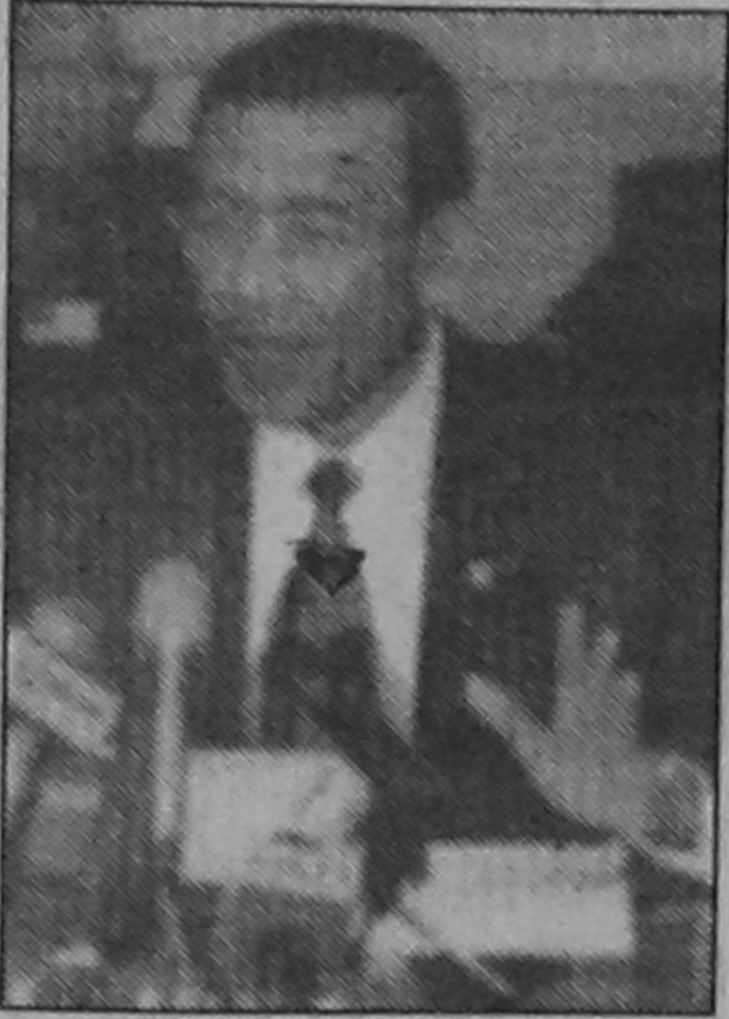
"He has replaced him with another minister as ad-interim Menkopolkam, (home minister) Surjadi Soedirja," Simanjuntak added, making the announcement at the presidential palace.

The announcement was a stunning reversal of an agreement reached between Wahid and Wiranto in two-hour talks on Sunday, just hours after the president returned from an extended tour of Europe and Asia.

Then it had been agreed that Wiranto would stay on as security minister pending an investigation by Attorney General

Marzuki Darusman into September's violence in East Timor.

Monday's move was the latest twist in a saga which began two weeks ago when Indonesian and UN inquiries implicated Wiranto in the destruction



Gen. Wiranto

which erupted after the East Timorese voted for independence from Indonesia.

The Indonesian inquiry found on January 31 that Wiranto as the then head of the armed forces was "morally responsible" for the violence.

Despite numerous calls from Wahid while abroad for Wiranto to resign, the tough general refused to quit saying he wanted to await the president's return.

Earlier Sunday Wahid had announced that he was retaining Wiranto in the cabinet pending a further inquiry into last year's human rights abuses in East Timor.

But the Kompas newspaper said several leading Indonesian journalists were informed of the president's change of mind at around midnight Sunday.

The state Antara news agency said Wahid had notified Wiranto late on Sunday night that he was temporarily suspended.

The new acting security min-

ister, Surjadi Soedirja, is a retired lieutenant general and a former Jakarta governor.

"I have taken this decision to facilitate the work of the attorney general's office in investigating alleged human rights violations," the daily Media Indonesia newspaper quoted Wahid as saying at midnight.

Asked if the dismissal was by presidential decree, the president replied "Yes," media said.

One of Wiranto's lawyers, Yan Juanda, told AFP he had heard the news of the about-face, but had not been officially notified.

"From what I have heard from (former justice minister) Mr. Muladi, who called me last night, he (Wiranto) has been replaced in an ad-interim way," Juanda said.

"We are going to hold a meeting and meet with Wiranto later on," he added.

Many Jakarta newspapers were caught by surprise by the sudden decision, and carried headlines saying Wiranto had been retained in his cabinet post.

## 500-yr-old Valentine's Day letter

LONDON, Feb 14: It has been more than 500 years since Margery Brews penned a Valentine's Day letter to her reluctant fiancé John Paston, but her message still resonates today: if you really loved me, you'd marry me, reports AP.

Written on Feb 14, 1477 in Norfolk, central England, Brews' letter was discovered in the British Library archives. It is to be displayed for the first time in March.

"It seems some things remain the same... Men still shy away from commitment, women, still take care of the nitty-gritty of wedding arrangements," said Dr Chris Fletcher, who found the letter in a 1930's collection of papers bought from the Paston family.

Brews' note begins pleasantly: "Right reverent and worshipful and my right well-beloved valentine, I recommend me unto you full heartedly, desiring to hear of your welfare, which I beseech Almighty God long for to preserve unto his pleasure and your hearts desire."

She explains that her mother is pressuring her father to increase her dowry. But with pleasantness aside, Brews then resorts to old-fashioned emotional blackmail.

It would seem Brews' message did the trick. She and Paston went on to marry and had two sons, said Fletcher.



Demonstrators carry heart-shaped protest placards outside the US embassy in Manila, during a rally yesterday against the ongoing US-Philippine wargames in the country. The protesters marked the Valentine's Day in a rally to demand the pullout of US troops. The joint US-Philippines military exercise is the first in five years after the Philippines ratified the Visiting Forces Agreement in May 1999.

— AFP photo

## Suharto fails to show up for corruption inquiry

JAKARTA, Feb 14: Indonesia's former president Suharto failed to show up Monday at an inquiry into high-level corruption because he is too ill to testify, his lawyers said, reports AP.

The attorney general's office has named the 78-year-old former dictator as a suspect in connection with allegations that he misused millions of dollars amassed by seven charitable foundations controlled by his family during his 32 years in power.

Suharto, who like many Indonesians uses only one name, has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

The investigation is regarded as crucial to the new government's campaign to replace endemic corruption with democracy and the rule of law, along with economic reform based on greater foreign investment.

State prosecutors contend they have uncovered new evidence that Suharto abused power by granting his children control over the lucrative trade in products such as clove and fruit.

"We have explained that based on doctors' suggestions, Suharto could not come as requested," said Denny Kalimang, one of Suharto's lawyers, as he left the Attorney General's office.

## Head of UN humanitarian programme in Iraq resigns

SINGAPORE, Feb 14: The UN Secretary-General on Monday said he had accepted the resignation of his controversial head of the humanitarian programme in Iraq who has repeatedly angered Washington and its allies by making pro-Baghdad statements, reports AP.

Kofi Annan told reporters that he had accepted Hans von Sponeck's resignation "with regret." He did not specify when he received von Sponeck's resignation letter.

"Hans von Sponeck has served the UN well for about 36 years," Annan said.

Annan, however, was scheduled to meet von Sponeck later this month, probably on February 28, said UN spokesman Fred Eckhard.

Annan is in Singapore to meet officials during an Asia tour. He returns to his New York headquarters later this month.

Von Sponeck, who was appointed to the post in October 1998, has infuriated the United States and Britain by saying that the Security Council should treat Iraq's humanitarian needs separately from the council's aim to monitor Baghdad's disarmament.

He has publicly criticised the United Nations for promoting trade sanctions and the oil-for-food programme, which he says did not meet even the most basic needs of Iraq's 22 million people.

## Britain may send 74 Afghans to third countries

Other hostages arrive in Kandahar

LONDON, Feb 14: Some 74 asylum-seekers from a hijacked Afghan plane could be dispersed to the United States, India and Pakistan under a new plan being drafted by Britain, a foreign office spokesman said Monday, reports AP.

"We are in touch with a number of interested countries in case passengers want to go there," said the spokesman, on customary condition of anonymity.

The asylum-seekers were passengers on board a hijacked Ariana Airlines Boeing 727 jet diverted to Stansted airport, north of London, last week. The plane was en route from Kabul to the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif when it was hijacked at

gunpoint.

Britain's Home Office and Foreign Office have initiated informal discussions with a number of countries which have Afghan communities to which the refugees might be safely transferred, the spokesman said. Discussions were also underway with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Russia.

The spokesman denied reports that Britain had offered to pay expenses to countries who agreed to take the former Afghan hostages.

Thirteen men were to appear in court Monday charged with hijacking, Essex police said. An additional six men remained in police custody.

Meanwhile, a chartered plane carrying former hostages on an Afghan jet arrived in Kandahar today from London.

The plane carrying 73 of the hostages taxied across to a welcoming party including officials of the ruling Taliban Militia, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

An official from the International Organisation for Migration, which chartered the plane, said there were 73 passengers on board, including 13 children.

All those returning boarded an Ariana Afghan Airlines Boeing 727 on February 6, which was hijacked shortly after leaving Kabul on a domestic flight and flown to London.

## Kashmir CM for greater autonomy

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah gave an extra push today to his campaign for greater state autonomy, warning the Indian government to ignore the aspirations of Kashmiris at its peril, reports AFP.

In an interview with the Press Trust of India in New Delhi, Abdullah voiced disappointment at the "unfortunate noises" emanating from government circles over a special report that recommends greater political autonomy for insurgency-ridden Kashmir.

Abdullah warned that dismissing the findings of the report, which was commissioned by his state government, would have an "adverse impact" on the

Kashmiri people.

"We have not asked for something that is going to alienate the state from India... We have only asked them to study the report within the Constitution confines," Abdullah said.

The report recommends Muslim-majority Kashmir be given full autonomy except in matters related to finance, defence and communications.

The proposal would return Kashmir to the status it enjoyed before 1953, when it also had its own constitution.

Officials from Abdullah's ruling National Conference party argue that the step is crucial to finding a lasting solution to the 10-year Muslim separatist insurgency in Kashmir

that has claimed more than 25,000 lives.

"My government has always maintained that it wants autonomy while the separatists are for independence. Now it is for the central government to decide between the two," Abdullah said.

After the partition of the subcontinent into Pakistan and India in 1947, Kashmir's Hindu ruler acceded to India as Pakistani troops began to move in.

India and Pakistan still dispute ownership of the divided state, which has triggered two wars between the South Asian rivals.

Most of the rebel groups fighting in Kashmir favour accession to Pakistan.

## NY tycoon won't run for president

WASHINGTON, Feb 14: New York tycoon Donald Trump has decided against running for president, ending a lengthy flirtation with the notion that he could tap his political fortune to capture the White House as a third-party candidate. The Associated Press has learned.

Sources connected with New York's Independence Party movement, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Trump has told associates he will announce Monday that he is not mounting a presidential bid.

## Plot to kill Gaddafi UK denies involvement

LONDON, Feb 14: Foreign Secretary Robin Cook denied Monday that Britain was involved in a plot to kill Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi in 1996, report AP.

The Sunday Times reported that a supposed British intelligence document recently posted on the Internet purports to give details of contacts between Britain's secret services and the plotters.

An opposition lawmaker has called for an investigation of whether Cook told the truth when he said in 1998 that charges of British involvement were "pure fantasy."

In an interview with BBC radio Monday, Cook said he had "never misled the British public."

The foreign secretary, who took office in 1997, said he had found no evidence that Britain was involved in such a plot. "There is absolutely nothing in this supposed intelligence document that would suggest otherwise," he said.

Cook refused to say whether the document is genuine.

The Sunday Times quoted extracts that speak of contacts with plotters but not of an active British role.

## US considering defence pact with Israel

JERUSALEM, Feb 14: US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk is considering a US-Israeli defence pact in which an attack on Israel would be viewed as an attack on the United States, a US official said Sunday, reports AP.

Indyk has given the idea "considerable thought," embassy spokesman Larry Schwartz said, but it is not currently a US political initiative.

The issue is to be raised in Washington next week during talks on the future of Israeli-US defence relations.

Israel's army radio said that Indyk proposed the pact in private conversations with Israeli ministers, and that the idea was greeted with caution. The radio said that Indyk's proposal would likely reduce the amount of US military aid to Israel because it would give the United States more direct responsibility for Israel's defence.

Israel is the biggest recipient of US foreign aid, receiving \$13 billion annually, most of it for defence.

Israel and the United States also cooperate closely on strategic defence projects such as the Arrow surface-to-air

missile.

Under a defence pact like the one proposed, however, Israel would have to consult with the United States before carrying out military operations — an idea unpopular in Israeli military circles — and might even have to contribute supplies and soldiers to US campaigns.

Such a pact would provide for the "long-term coordination that Israel will require for responding to regional strategic threats, particularly, Iraq and Iran," said Gerald Steinberg, a strategic analyst at Bar Ilan University. It would also remove the uncertainty of long-term fluctuations in US-Israeli relations and help ensure US funding for Israeli military projects, he said.

The notion of an Israeli-US defence treaty dates back to the 1970s, when former US Senator William Fulbright suggested that the US deepen its commitment to the Jewish state in exchange for Israel withdrawing from territories conquered in the 1967 Mideast War. It was revived in 1996 under former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' brief tenure, but no concrete steps were taken.

## Aishwarya, Shah Rukh best-looking Indians



NEW DELHI, Feb 14: Former Miss World Aishwarya Rai and film actor Shah Rukh Khan were declared the best-looking Indians of the century in a poll published by the Times of India today, reports AP.

The survey, based on 140,000 votes polled on the Internet over 45 days for a special Valentine's Day feature, saw film stars and models voted the most beautiful Indians, apart from the sole choice of a former Indian queen.

Gayatri Devi, the dowager queen of the former Indian principality of Jaipur, who counted European royalty, the Kennedys and international socialites among her closest friends, was declared the fourth most beautiful Indian woman of the century.

Devi had been named among the world's 10 most beautiful women in her prime and photographed by celebrity photographers such as Cecil Beaton and Lord Snowdon.

Rai, who entered films after winning the Miss World title in 1994, was followed by actress Madhuri Dixit, late film star

Madhubala Gayatri Devi and film star Rekha.

Among the men, Shah Rukh Khan, a New Delhi-born actor who became the Bombay film industry's top hero, topped the list of the most handsome men, with the Times dubbing him "fortune's child."

He was followed by fellow actors Salman Khan, Vinod Khanna and Kabir Bedi, who created an international following by appearing in an Italian television series called "Sandokan" before embarking on a career in Hollywood.

The list of the dream boys included evergreen actor Dev Anand, who still plays leading roles despite being a septuagenarian and matinee idol Amitabh Bachchan, who was described as a "one-man industry" by French director Francois Truffaut.

Among the women, Zeenat Aman, who pioneered the western look in Indian films in the 1960s by wearing miniskirts and bikinis, was chosen as the sixth most beautiful woman followed by top actresses Dimple Kapadia and Sonali Bendre.

## Russian troops kill 600 Chechen rebels in a week

DUBA-YURT, Russia, Feb 14: Russian forces killed some 600 Chechen rebels in the breakaway republic over the past week, Russia's North Caucasus headquarters told the Russian AVN military news agency today, reports AP.

The landing of Russian paratroopers, rocket launchers and other heavy equipment in the southern mountains caught the rebels by surprise and resulted in heavy losses on their side, a spokesman at the headquarters told AVN.

The Russians are mounting a pincer movement against the 7,000-8,000 Chechen fighters who retreated into the mountain strongholds after the fall of Grozny on February 6 and are centered in the Shatal region.

Moscow is said to have poured 50,000 men into the battle for the mountains.

Russia strengthened its positions near Itum-Kale, a rebel stronghold which federal paratroopers captured on Thursday, and Duba-Yurt, a Russian military spokesman said.

along the Argun gorge — a key access route to the southern mountains — on either side of Shatoi.

In Duba-Yurt, soldiers are guarding the entrance of the Argun gorge to keep Chechen rebels from returning to the northern plains.

"We fear that the rebels have descended to the plains and will hide as civilians," a Russian officer who gave his name as Sergei told AFP.

Shooting is heard every night near Russian positions in the foothills north of Duba-Yurt, but there have been no victims, the Russian officer said.

"The partisan war already has been unleashed and is going on," he said referring to reports on Friday that Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov had declared the use of a partisan war throughout the rebel republic.

On Saturday, Maskhadov said the Chechens would fight a "regular war" against the Russians.

Russian headquarters meanwhile denied having used

1.5-tonne bombs in their bombing campaign in the mountainous southern region.

On Wednesday, Russian military officials said they had used the heavier bombs for the first time since the air raids started against Chechnya on September 5.

Russian headquarters told AVN they may use the 1.5-tonne bombs in the future. Russian had previously used bombs of up to 500 kilogram (1,100 pounds).

The heavier bombs were thought to be especially effective in destroying tunnels, caves and other places where rebel bases are located.

Russian warplanes on Monday bombed the key Argun and Vedeno gorges, flying some 100 sorties in a 24-hour period, AVN quoted the Russian spokesman as saying.

Russian Su-24 and Su-25 warplanes and Mi-24 gunship helicopters carried out the bombing, which was lighter than last week's campaign in the southern region.

## Off the Record

### A heart of gold

PHILADELPHIA, Feb 14: For the past 23 Valentine's Days, Judge Bernard Goodheart has managed to put a smile on many of the faces of those who appear before him, reports AP.

Each Feb 14, Goodheart, a judge of common pleas court, has honoured his name by marrying couples in his courtroom at City Hall. He began this tradition somewhat accidentally, during his first year on the bench.

Monday marks his final ceremony. He plans to retire later this year, when he turns 70.

The first ceremony interrupted a jury trial as an unsuspecting couple wandered into Goodheart's courtroom on Feb 14, 1977. The judge watched as a court officer turned them away. Minutes later, with testimony over, Goodheart asked why.

When the judge discovered that his couple had hoped to find a marrying judge, Goodheart issued an informal order of the court: Go find them.

"How could I turn them down?" he says. "I wouldn't be worthy of my name."

Since then, Goodheart's name has attracted more than 500 couples, including Norman Madsen and Charlene Brockington of northeast Philadelphia, who plan to be married Monday.

Much like the first couple, Madsen and his bride-to-be stumbled to the opportunity. Marriage license in hand, they saw Goodheart's name on the door, joked, paused, stopped laughing and asked: Is this a marrying judge?

"We thought it was perfect for Valentine's Day," Madsen says. After officiating at their first ceremony decades ago, Goodheart began receiving At first, he managed to cope fine the marrying to lunch but at he concedes, "it grew and it grew... it got too big."



Prof. Jamal Nazrul Islam is talking to Prof. Sir Michael Atiyah at the Conference on Mathematics in the 21st Century in Cairo, Egypt recently. Sir Michael is a former President of the Royal Society, London, former Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and recipient of the Order of Merit, Britain's highest civil award. Looking on is Prof. Jacob Palis from Brazil, President of the International Mathematical Union. Sir Michael gave the Millennium Lecture: Mathematics over a thousand years; Prof. Palis and Prof. Islam gave invited lectures.