## BRETTY

Hun Sen flies to India: Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen flew to India on Thursday for a three-day visit described as the opening of a new chapter in his 20-year relationship with the world's largest democracy. AP reports from

Phnom Penh. India was the only non-communist country that recognized Hun Sen's government after it was installed by a Vietnan 'se invasion in 1979. Diplomatic relations came in 1980, while Hun Sen was still foreign minister.

ROK president to visit Europe: South Korean President Kim Dae-jung will make a 10-day visit to Italy. France and Germany in March, his office said Thursday, AP reports from Seoul.

Kim will seek to promote economic and political ties in meetings with leaders of the three countries, the office said in a statement. During the trip, scheduled to begin on March 2, Kim will also visit the Vatican and meet Pope John Paul II.

Cholera claims 29 in Somalia: cholera epidemic has killed 29 people in two southern Somali towns during the past two days, a local doctor told AFP yester-

day in Mogadishu. Omar Nur Ali said the victims were residents of the towns of Janale and Golweyna in the southern Lower Shabelle region. The towns are situated on the banks of the Shabelle river and Ali attributed the cholera outbreak to the use of contaminated water

from the river. New PM named in Mali: President Alpha Oumar Konare has named an economist as the new prime minister of this West African nation, where the last premier resigned because of the country's economic woes, AP reports from

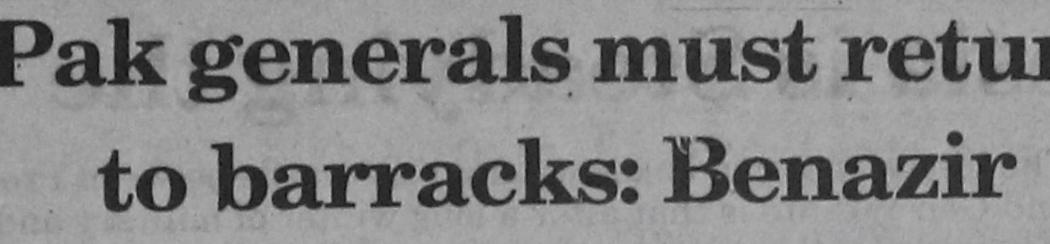
Bamako, Mali. Mande Sidibe, a 60-year-old aide to Konare and a former official with the International Monetary Fund, was named prime minister on Tuesday. His predecessor. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, and lawmakers allied with him resigned from Parliament on Monday. Keita had been under increasing public pressure to step down because of the faltering economy

Dissident jailed in China: A Chinese court has handed a six-year jail term to a dissident convicted of subversion for his part in organising a would-be opposition party, a human rights group said Thursday, AP reports from Beijing.

Liu Shizun, who worked as an assistant to dissident Xu Wenli, now also in jail, was sentenced Wednesday in the northeastern city of Dalian, the Hong Kong-based Information Center of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said. Liu's sentencing comes ahead of the annual session of the UN Human Rights Commission at Geneva. The United States plans to seek censure of China at the six-week meeting beginning in March because of what it says has been a steady deterioration in China's human rights record.

Mine blast kills 10 in Angola: Ten people died and 22 others were seriously wounded when an antitank landmine exploded under their vehicle on a road in central Angola, state television reported yesterday, AP reports from Lu-

The mine exploded Wednesday under a lorry carrying passengers and merchandise along the road between Catabola and Camacupa, in Bie province, 700 kilometres (434 miles) southeast of the capital Luanda. Most of the survivors lost legs in the explosion, including a young girl who lost both her legs. They were being treated in the main hospital at Kuito, the capital of Bie province.



Delhi, Islamabad urged to end war of words

LONDON, Feb 17: Former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has appealed to Islamabad and New Delhi to end their war of words and said army generals in Pakistan must return to barracks, hold elections and held build peace in the region, reports PTI.

"India and Pakistan must end their war of words and come to terms with each other. A lot of rhetoric has been used by both sides and it is time they rose above such rhetoric. would like to see men and women of goodwill on both sides of the border (India and Pakistan) together to put aside the poisonous past but the military regime in Islamabad makes it difficult," she told PTI here last

night. Instead of trying to run the municipality, revenue collection, and foreign office, the generals must go back to barracks and

order elections, Benazir said. The Pakistan People's Party Chief said as a patriotic Pakistani she is worried about the

internal situation in Pakistan which is quite complicated. That is why I and my party are urg-ing the generals to go back to barracks. Benazir, who attended a

function to celebrate publication of Zaiwalla and Co. solicitors' book, India: Colours of continent, said in reply to a question that negotiations between India and Pakistan suffered a serious setback because of Kargil episode.

"Gen. Pervez Musharraf (the chief executive) is not trusted (by India) because of his perceived role (In Kargil)," Benazîr said.

Admitting that it was difficult to build confidence under the military rule, she said ever since the military coup, relations between India and Pak-

istan had deteriorated. She said during her prime ministership she had reached

five agreements with her Indian counterpart Rajiv Gandhi three published agreements and two draft agreements. While the published agree-

ments were non-attack on each other's nuclear facility, establishing hotlines and expansion of trade, the two draft agreements were for re-deployment of forces in Kargil and mutual troop reduction, she said.

Stating that the Pakistani economy was suffering, Benazir said the country had come to a standstill as it was mismanaged by successive finance ministers.

She said that as prime minister she had travelled worldwide to promote Pakistan as an attractive destination for investment but she was put behind bars under baseless charges.



COLOMBO, Feb 17: Norway's foreign minister said today the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tiger rebels have this island nation. shown a readiness to begin peace talks, and he accepted the task of bringing the two sides to the negotiating table.

The statement, issued after marathon talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, was the first concrete step in five years toward negotiations to end the 17-year ethnic conflict, in which some 61,000 people have been killed.

reports AP.

"The conflict in Sri Lanka can only be solved by political means. A basis for dialogue must be established," said Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Volleback before leaving Colombo early Thursday.

The meeting with Kumaratunga, originally planned for one hour, stretched to four. Before arriving in Sri Lanka. Vollebaek had met Anton Balasingham, the London representative of the Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam, the group waging a campaign for Tamil independence in the north and east of . the Tigers into peace talks, but

"I have today informed the president that Norway is willing to accept the challenging task of trying to bring the parties together in such a dialogue." the Norweigian said.

'This places a heavy responsibility on the parties themselves. I am encouraged by the expressed willingness to seek a political solution. However, this will take time. It will require courage and sacrifices and it will require the necessary politi-cal will from the parties," he

Volleback and the government, in a separate statement, said the two leaders discussed ways of getting the talks

The rebels say the country's stricted delivery of food and 3.2 million minority Tamils are , other supplies to these areas. discriminated against by the Sinhalese who comprise 14 million of the country's 18.6 million

Shortly after she was elected in 1994. Kumaratunga coaxed they broke down after three months amid mutual recriminations of bad faith, and the

war resumed with ever-increasing intensity. The Norwegian initiative is the most serious international peace effort in 13 years, since India's abortive attempt in the late 1980s. Some 1,200 Indian

soldiers died trying to impose a peace accord. It was not immediately known if either the government or the Tigers have set condition

for starting direct talks. Rebel sources earlier had said the guerillas would demand a military pullout from Tamil

majority areas before talks could begin. They also want travel restrictions eased and unre-

The government has said it wants the guerillas to at least partially disarm before starting

### India, Pakistan blame each other for border clash 4 Indian soldiers killed JAMMU, India, Feb 17: In-

dian and Pakistan blamed each other on Wednesday for a night-time clash on the Kashmir border in which at least four Indian soldiers were killed, reports Reuters.

Pakistan said its troops had repulsed an Indian attack on one of its forward posts, inflicting "heavy casualties."

An army statement said Tuesday night's attack was made in the Kotli sub-sector of the Pakistan-ruled part of Kashmir, along the United Nations -supervised military Line of Control (LOC) which divides the bitterly disputed Himalayan

"According to initial reports, the enemy has suffered heavy casualties and also left behind one body and a large number of weapons and ammunition," it

Bihar today as a second phase

of staggered state elections was

police chief KA Jacob officials

said polling was relatively

"peaceful" compared to the first

leg of voting on Saturday when

14 security personnel and six

others were killed in large-scale

because we have deployed suf-

ficient security personnel to pre-

vent a repeat of last Saturday's

tary troops backing the state's

70,000-member police force

were patrolling the state along

with special squads to detect

landmine booby-traps, Jacob

ing Bangladesh and Nepal were

closed and soldiers with orders

to shoot troublemakers on sight

were patrolling the sprawling

state, which is often dubbed as

was killed by his political rivals

in Siwan district, while armed

men beat up a police patrol

and stole six rifles in Raghupur

just as voting began at 7:00 am

papers were snatched and

polling stations attacked at "20

other places," despite the heavy

security. They described early

Bihar Health Minister Munsi

Lal Rai escaped unhurt when

he was fired on by supporters

of his main rival, who is

contesting the elections while in

prison, officials said in the state

capital of Patna. Around 178

candidates are either wanted by

the police or have long criminal

records, including Dhumal

Singh who is wanted for more

voter turnout as "thin."

Election officials said ballot

(7:30 am BST).

Jacob said one party activist

India's most lawless region.

Bihar's borders with adjoin-

More than 30,000 paramili-

bloodletting." Jacob told AFP.

"It is so far quite peaceful

held in India, reports AFP.

violence.

Voting relatively

peaceful in Bihar

Low turnout in Orissa

least one person was killed and ... Manist guerillas, who were

police and polling stations at- responsible for most of Satur-

lacked in the eastern state of day's killings, have threatened

PATNA. India, Feb 17: At robbery and abduction.

Despite the violence, Bihar populous state.

There was no word of any Pakistani casualties.

On the other side, Major General PPS Bindra of the Northern Command said at least four Indian soldiers were killed when a party on routine patrol came under heavy fire from across the LOC in the Mendhar sector.

Mendhar lies 210 km north of Jammu, the winter capital of India's insurgency-torn state of Jammu and Kashmir.

> Violence flares up in Srinagar

Separately, suspected separatist guerillas shot dead three Indian security force personnel in the heart of Jammu and Kashmir state's main city, Srinagar, on Wednesday, police

violence against anyone ignoring

their call for an election boycott

in Bihar, India's second most

sembly seats in eastern Orissa

state, where a powerful cyclone

last October killed 10,000

people and led to charges of lo-

Early turnout was also low in

cal and federal government in-

Orissa, where the main opposi-

tion Congress Party of Sonia

Gandhi and Prime Minister Atal

Behari Vajpayee's Hindu Na-

tionalist BJP are locked in a

adding that the voting so far

tions, at Bellary in southern

Karnataka state, was ordered

after Sonia Gandhi vacated the

constituency following her victory

in northern India's Amethi seat

in last year's general elections.

seen as an acid test for the

Italian-born Sonia, whose lead-

ership of the Congress Party

has been under scrutiny since it

contested in the first round.

A third and final round of

voting in Bihar will be held on

The ongoing state polls are

One of the federal by-elec-

Some 22 million voters are

fierce electoral battle.

was peaceful.

difference.

Voting also began in 70 as-

Musharraf was diverted to Nawabshah

Aviation official testifies

Plane carrying

KARACHI, Feb 17: A Civil Aviation official testified today that aircraft were diverted to Nawabshah in interior Sindh after the airport in south n Karachi was closed to prevent Army Chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf from landing there, reports AP.

However, officials in Nawab shah were not given any explirnation for the diversion. Nawabshah Airport Manager. Mohammed Salmam Athier, testified at the trial of deposed premier Nawaz Sharif. Sharif and his six coaccused,

including his younger brother Shahbaz, are charged with hijacking, attempted murder. kidnapping and terrorism in connection with the October 12 incident in which they allegedly denied Musharraf's plane permission to land, enclangering the lives of those on board. On the same day the mili-

tary overthrew Sharif's government and seized power. Sharif pleaded innocent.

Ather said he was asked whether there was enough fuel to refuel the aircraft returning Musharraf to Pakistan should it land in Nawabshah. After refuelling the aircraft was to take off again, he said.

Ather said that no passenger was to be allowed off the aircraft in Nawabshah. But before the aircrast arrived in Nawabshah the army took control of the airport.

By this time the army also was in control in Karachi and ordered the aircraft to return to Karachi.

#### Testimony not needed: Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 17: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said today that he would testify at the sex trial of his former deputy Anwar Ibrahim if required but he did not think his appearance in court was necessary, reports

eligible to chose from 1,318 "If I am required at the candidates in Bihar and Orissa court and it is relevant, I supin the second phase of the local pose I will have to go. That is the law. There is nothing I can Simultaneous polling in bydo about it," Mahathir said elections for two parliamentary constituencies, and 30 assembly when asked to comment on a defence request for his testiseats across 11 states was also mony in the landmark trial on Thursday, officials said,

that has split Malaysia. "But I wouldn't like it to be a kind of political stunt," Mahathir told reporters. "I hope it is relevant to the

case. If it is not relevant to the case and they just want to make a political show of it, I don't think it is being very

The prosecution in the 8-1/2-month trial on Wednesday objected to the defence request that Mahathir take the stand, saying the prime minister's testimony would not be relevant to the charge that Anwar

suffered its worst-ever rout in the September-October national sodomised his family's former Exit polls in Bihar after Saturday's voting predicted that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vaj-Asked if he felt it was necessary for him to testify in the payee's Hindu Nationalist BJPled alliance would pick up around 65 of the first 108 seats

case, Mahathir said: "I don't think it is necessary. I think all the evidence has already been given but apparently there are some political nuances in their desire to put me on the stand."



British Premier Tony Blair (C) with Irish Tsciaoch (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern (R) and Minister for Northern Ireland Peter Mandelson (L) hold a press conference in 10 Downing Street Wednesday following further peace : greement to rescue talks. - AFP photo

### 30,000 ROK doctors poised to strike against new rules

SEOUL, Feb 17: Around 30,000 South Korean doctors were today poised to rally in the streets of Seoul to protest rules banning the lucrative sale of medicines to the general public, a doctors' group said, reports

The giant demonstration against the regulation, which doctors fear will force health facilities to close, was expected to paralyse the national health down two-thirds of the country's

"We want the government to offer a proper financial support to hospitals for the losses stemming from the introduction of the new rules," said Cho Sang-Duck, a spokesman for the Korea Medical Association.

More than 30,000 medical doctors out 45,000 registered by the KMA nationwide will take part in the rally in a move that will see most of the country's 18,000 hospitals closed for half a day, the association said. Government statistics, however, indicate there are 65,400 doctors in South Korea.

The rally would be the largest protest by doctors in the nation's history, heading one attended by 20,000 doctors in November, also to protest the new rule banning the sale of drugs to outpatients.

To prevent possible chaos in the medical system, the ministry of health and welfare said all state-run public health censystem, effectively shutting ters, and around a third of the same vehicle were instantly hospitals were ordered to remain open during the rally.

The protest was sparked by fears of financial troubles for hospitals following the introduction of the new rules slated for July which doctors worry will cause closures and medical job cuts, spokesman Cho said.

Cho said hospitals have traditionally relied heavily on selling medicine to not only inpatients but also outpatients to bolster their finances, but the new rules — aimed at preventing drug abuse — had hit hospitals

#### Pro-Indian militia supremo killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Feb 17: The supremo of Kashmir's largest militia group and a civilian were killed in a powerful landmine ambush in Kashmir

today, reports AFP. A car carrying Fayaz Ahmad Mir, the chief of the Ikhwane-ul-Muslimoon militia force, was blown to pieces when it drove over a landmine in Sumbhal, a tiny town some 30 km from Srinagar city, the police said. Mir and a civilian travelling on' killed, the police in Srinagar said and blamed the attack on Muslim separatist guerillas who are spearheading a decade-old

campaign against Indian rule. Mir's two guards were also critically wounded. The Ikhawne-ul-Muslimoon is

the largest militia force in Kashmir which has picked up the gun in support of Ind 1 in the fight against the Muslim separatist groups.

More than 25,000 people have died in the separatist violence in the Himalayan territory since 1989.

## 5,000 die yearly from infections caught in British hospitals

LONDON, Feb 17: As many as 5.000 people a year are dying from infections they catch while in hospital in Britain, according to an official report released today, says AFP.

Inadequate hand-washing especially by doctors - and unsanitary conditions were cited among the causes of the infections in the report by the National Audit Office (NAO).

The report, based on a study of 219 acute-care hospitals, said stricter hygiene controls and better procedures for managing the spread of infection could reduce the rate of hospital-acquired infections (HAIs) by 15 per cent.

Treating HAIs costs the National Health Service about one billion pounds (1.6 billion dollars) a year in England, the report found.

A further 15,000 deaths could be partly attributable to HAIs, according to some esti-

David Davis, Chairman of Parliament's Committee of Public Accounts, said: "Of course, some level of infection is inevitable but there are simple things that some hospitals do not get right. There is no excuse for poor hand-washing practice where doctors seem to be the worst culprits. More generally, at too many hospitals the problem is not taken seriously enough"

More than 100,000 people a year are being infected by potentially fatal bugs they pick up while being treated in hospital, the NAO study found. Increasing resistance to an-

tibiotics by "superbugs" is part of the problem, but some hospitals are not doing enough to prevent infections, experts said. At any one time, nine per

the length of stay and affect treatment of their original con-

The most common bugs are urinary tract infections, which often follow invasive surgery. Potentially deadly bacteria

may also infect surgical wounds, skin and the blood-Strains of the superbug Me-

thicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) have become more virulent and easier to catch, with outbreaks increasingly frequent in Britain's hospitals as a result of over-reli nce on antibiotics.

The baterium is harmless unless it enters the body through a surgical wound, where it can cause blood poison-

ing and pneumonia. The NAO report criticised hospitals for failing to allocate funds to protect against infection, saying that death rates can be up to three times higher where such spending is inade-

Costs of treating HAIs far outweigh expenditure on preventing them, the report said. citing the Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Hospital Trust in London where two extra nurses were hired to concentrate on infection control, resulting in savings of one million pounds (1.6 million dollars) a year.

One-fifth of NHS Trusts do not have an infection control programme and only 40 per cent have a designated budget for HAIs, the report said, stressing that control measures vary widely from one hospital to

Sir John Bourn, head of the National Audit Office, made 29 recommendations for reducing infection, including improving cent of patients are suffering control programmes and from an HAI, which can add to staffing levels.



Chechen capital, could be razed from existence by the Russians, who are refusing to allocate one kopeck to rebuilding a city which is a potent symbol of resistance to Moscow's rule. Since they seized control of Grozny more than a week ago, the Russian military has been blowing up buildings, most of them minded by Chechen rebels, and has declared the capital completely off-limits to civilians until March 1. - AFP photo



George W. Bush addresses the Aiken County Republican Women's Presidential Rally late Wednesday in Aiken, South Carolina. Bush is travelling across the state of South Carolina looking for votes in the state's primary on February 19. - AFP photo

1,600 Kosovars still

held by Serbs UNITED NATIONS, Feb 17: An estimated 1,600 people from Kosovo are still being detained in other parts of Serbia while about 3,500 inhabitants of the mainly ethnic Albanian Serb province are listed as missing,

the Security Council was told on

Wednesday, reports Reuters. UN Assistant-Secretary-General for peacekeeping operations Hedi Annabi, who gave these figures during a closed-door briefing for council members. added that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, former Irish President Mary Robinson, was considering appointing a special envoy to deal with the issue of detainees and

the missing. "The status of people from Kosovo detained in Serbia

proper remains a matter of concern," Annabi said, accord-

The most accurate count of Kosovo detainees in Serbia proper is approximately 1,600." he said, citing a survey by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of all civilian

and some military prisons. He also said there were "approximately 3,000 missing persons from the NATO bombing period and 400 to 500 persons reported missing since mid-

NATO conducted 11 weeks of air strikes against targets in Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, from March to June last year to force Belgrade to halt the op-

pression of ethnic Albanians.

## UN vows to help rebuild

DILI, Feb 17: In an emo-

church last April.

# E Timor: Annan

tionally charged visit today to a massacre site in East Trimor, ing to his briefing notes obtained UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan promised that the world body was committed to rebuilding the shattered territory, reports AP.

> prelude to a wave of bloody violence that followed an overwhelming vote for independence by East Timorese in September. Annan arrived in East Timor as the world body's peacekeep-

During a 24-hour stay in East Timor, Annan stopped over at the town of Liquica. where at least 50 people shot and hacked to death by pro-Indonesian militia thugs at a

The brutal attack was a ers prepared to assume full

control of the territory.

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (C), accompanied by top UN East Timor administrator Sergio de Mello (R) and East Timorese independence leader Xanana Gusmao (L), waves after giving as speech in the Liquisa district of East Timor Thursday. Liquisa is the site of gruesome massacres attributed to pro-Indonesian militia during an orgy of violence in the territory last year. Annan is on a two-day visit to East Timor .- AFP photo