

## BRIEFLY

## Fishermen stranded in Russian lake:

About 1,000 ice-fishermen were stranded Sunday on drifting floes in Europe's largest lake and villagers set out in boats to rescue them, the news agency ITAR-Tass reported, AP reports from Moscow.

The report, citing the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations, said a rescue helicopter also was sent to the scene at Lake Ladoga, northeast of St. Petersburg. There were no immediate reports of casualties. Ice-fishing is highly popular in Russia, both for sport and as a food source, and thousands of anglers become stranded on drifting floes every year, many of them carried out to sea before being rescued.

**7 die in clashes in Yemen:** A territorial dispute in central Yemen has left seven dead and eight injured in nearly a week of tribal fighting, a security official said Sunday. AP reports from San'a.

Clashes between the Al-Ahli tribe and the Al-Diyah tribe broke out last week, with a dispute over a plot of land bordering their respective territories escalating to machine-gun shootouts, a tribal official said on condition of anonymity. On Saturday, government troops moved into the area in the southern province of Shabwa and put an end to the fighting, the security source said without elaborating.

**Pilot killed in Philippines:** A small plane with four people aboard crashed south of Manila after its pilot suffered a heart attack. Philippine aviation officials said, AFP reports from Manila.

Perfecto Maglinit lost consciousness and control of the privately owned Cessna 206 as it flew over Batangas province, the Air Transportation Office (ATO) said citing a distress call monitored by another aircraft.

## Red alert in Assam

**GUWAHATI, India, Feb 28:** Security forces in the eastern Indian state of Assam were put on maximum alert today, with state ministers and legislators told to restrict their movement after dusk, official sources said.

The government's decision to impose sunset laws, -- limiting the movement of government officials -- followed Saturday's landmine explosion in western Assam's Nalbari district, which killed the state forest and public works minister, Nagen Sharma, and four others.

The attack was blamed on the state's main separatist outfit, the United Liberation Front of Assam.

Specific instructions were issued after a high-level meeting asking all ministers and legislators not to travel after dusk and also avoid visiting remote areas at night without full proof security cover, a top Assam police official told AFP.

Army, police, and paramilitary soldiers, have launched a counter-insurgency offensive in various parts of Assam following Saturday's attack.

Troops are on full alert and a massive operation was launched to nab the killers and thwart attempts to create violence, the official said.

State politicians appeared to welcome the stepped up security.

"Yes there has been a considerable amount of tension after the incident and we should be more careful from now on," Revenue Minister Zoi Nath Sharma told AFP.

There was also anger at the perceived security lapse that led to Nagen Sharma's murder.

The entire security machinery needs to be reviewed and revamped. The approach of containing militancy and violence needs a thorough review, otherwise we could be in for more trouble, said a senior legislator from the state's ruling AGP.

## 'Israeli troop withdrawal offer still unsatisfactory'

**JERUSALEM, Feb 28:** Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak showed signs of flexibility Sunday in part of a dispute that has deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and kept a US mediator shuttling back and forth between the two sides, reports AFP.

The Palestinians, however, said that Israel's offers were still unsatisfactory and that US envoy Dennis Ross had so far failed to bridge the gaps.

Barak dropped his insistence that an additional West Bank troop pullback be folded into a final peace treaty rather than be finalised beforehand, his office said. Barak told his Cabinet Sunday in comments

released by his office that the was willing to set a date for the pullback before hammering out the treaty, slated for September.

Barak was optimistic, his office said, telling ministers that the government needs to ask the Israeli people if they are willing to make painful territorial concessions "so as not to control another people and not to be

Belfast or Bosnia."

He met with Ross late Sunday night to discuss bridging proposals to end a dispute over the location of an overdue troop withdrawal from 6.1 per cent of the West Bank, an Israeli official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In Puerto Rico, the largest of the territories, Bush won the primary Sunday with about 93 percent of the vote, his campaign said in a statement.

On Saturday, he won contests in the Pacific island territories of Guam and American Samoa, as well as in the Caribbean territory of the Virgin Islands.

The four territories will send a total of 26 delegates to the Republican convention later this year, where delegates from all the states and territories will choose the party's candidate for president.

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