### Milosevic claims 'heroic defence' against NATO

AFP, The Hague

Slobodan Milosevic told his war crimes trial Thursday that his country had mounted a "heroic defence" against NATO "aggression" in the 1999 war on Yugoslavia.

"I consider the defense a heroic defense from the aggression launched by NATO and the NATO pact," he said.

Milosevic opened his defence by showing a video based on a controversial German television report that raised questions about the massacre of 45 ethnic Albanians in the village of Racak by Serbs in

January 1999. "This terrible fabrication," Milosevic argued, was used to whip up public opinion in favour of the

#### Kidnapped US reporter is dead, Omar tells court

British-born Islamic militant Sheikh Omar on Thursday told a Pakistani court that abducted US journalist Daniel Pearl was dead and admitted responsibility for the kidnapping.

"I know he is dead. I will not defend the case," a source quoted Sheikh Omar as telling the antiterrorism court in this southern city during a brief remand hearing.

Prosecutor Raja Qureshi said Omar also admitted "that he abducted Pearl.

The 29-year-old London-born militant, handcuffed and hooded under a cloth, was brought in an armoured personnel carrier to the heavily-guarded court where he was remanded in police custody for

#### Nation of Islam opens 5-day convention in Los Angeles

**AFP,** Los Angeles

Amid tight security, the Nation of Islam, led by Louis Farrakhan, inaugurated its five-day world convention here on Wednesday.

Musician Stevie Wonder and basketball star Earvin "Magic' Johnson are scheduled to join the thousands of delegates from around the world, according to the Nation of

"In the wake of the tragic events that occurred in America since September 11, we felt Los Angeles offered us a unique opportunity to expand our outreach and message of world peace," said Nation of Islam spokesman Tony Muhammad.

### US country music legend Jennings dies

AFP, Nashville

US country music singer Waylon Jennings, who fatefully missed the 1959 flight that killed his friend and mentor Buddy Holly, has died at the age of 64, a spokesman said Wednesday.

"All I can say is that Waylon Jennings died peacefully at home today (Wednesday)," spokesman Mark Ross from Nashville, the spiritual home of country music.

A family spokesperson said in a statement issued here that the singer "died very peacefully in his sleep" in the southwestern US state of Arizona, but declined to reveal details surrounding his death at the request of his family

News reports said Jennings died of diabetes-related disorders in Chandler, Arizona, where he moved from Nashville as his health declined in recent years.

#### Koreas may resume talks in March

AFP, Seoul

North and South Korea will resume dialogue next month, with the agenda likely to include fertiliser aid for the communist North, press reports said Thursday.

"Although a specific date has yet to be determined, inter-Korean talks are to be resumed in March," a foreign ministry official was guoted as saying by Yonhap news agency.

The Seoul government is looking to a visit by US President George W. Bush next week to boost its efforts to improve relations with the com-

"We believe President Bush will agree with our government's position as he has already emphasised the importance of resolving pending issues through dialogue with the North," the official said.

# Attack on US base in Kandahar

Search on for attackers

A US base in Kandahar, Afghanistan, housing al-Qaida and Taliban detainees came under attack Wednesday, as a suspected member of Osama bin I aden's terror network was killed in a confrontation with police

The dramatic developments came as more detainees captured in Afghanistan arrived at US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where US intelligence experts are questioning suspected members of al-Qaida and the Taliban in hopes to thwart possible new terrorist attacks.

Intelligence obtained during these interrogations has led the Federal Bureau of Investigation to issue a new security alert Monday, naming Yemeni national Fawaz Yahya al-Rabeei as a possible mastermind of new terrorist attacks against the United States.

The incident in Kandahar began when unidentified assailants opened fire from small arms at US positions on the perimeter of the Kandahar airfield where more than 2,000 troops from the US Army's 101st Airborne Division are based, said Navy Commander Frank Merriman, a spokesman for the US

Central Command. US troops responded by firing mortar rounds to illuminate the area and then opened fire with machine guns, he said.

AH-64 Apache helicopter gunships also were sent aloft to search for the

No significant casualties were reported on either side in the firefight, he said. Two soldiers suffered scrapes and bruises.

"Only small arms fire was used in the attack, and that was not effective," Merriman said. "The perimeter was not penetrated."

US troops detained seven armed Afghans in an area outside the base perimeter where the shooting had occurred, according to Merriman.

But the seven turned out to be members of an Afghan security force that

An Indonesian man holds his shoes as he tries to escape from his flooded

village in Jakarta on Thursday. Thousands of people were forced to flee their

homes for the second time in a month as the floods returned Thursday to

many parts of the Indonesian capital, officials said

had been contracted to patrol the area outside the base perimeter and were

Three other people were seen leaving the scene in a vehicle but it was unclear whether they were assailants, the spokesman said The confrontation was similar to one on January 10 when assailants

probed the base's defences in an attack that coincided with the first flight from Kandahar carrying prisoners to the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay

In addition to the airfield, the base includes a detention center that holds most of the 186 al-Qaida and Taliban prisoners in the hands of the US military in Afghanistan

The skirmish in Kandahar occurred as a Yemeni man suspected of belonging to al-Qaida was killed in the Yemeni capital Sanaa late Wednesday when he tried to throw a grenade at police who surrounded him in a residential neighbourhood.

Authorities had been watching Samir Ahmed Mohamed Al-Hada, 25, for some time before trying to arrest him when he attempted to hide, a police

Hada had "visited Afghanistan where he trained to carry out acts of

terrorism" and was suspected of "carrying out terrorist acts," police said, without specifying whether the attacks were carried out inside Yemen or Meanwhile, US and Canadian troops were searching Thursday for

unidentified attackers who fired on soldiers guarding the perimeter of the coalition base here in southern Afghanistan.

The incident began around 1515 GMT Wednesday when the assailants fired small arms at US positions on the perimeter of the Kandahar airfield, where more than 2,000 troops from the US Army's 101st Airborne Division are based, a military spokesman said.

## Bush keeps options wide open on Iraq **US preparing mission to oust Saddam**

REUTERS, Washington

US President George W Bush, speaking as his administration considered ways to oust Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, said yesterday he reserved all his options to act would not disclose them at this time.

"I will reserve whatever options I have. I'll keep them close to my vest. Saddam Hussein needs to understand that I'm serious about defending our country," Bush said during a news conference with Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf. Bush has named Iraq, Iran and

of evil" developing weapons of mass destruction and backing international terrorism. He said he would take action against them if they threatened the United States. "I think one of the worst things that could happen in the world is terrorist organizations mating up

North Korea as members of an "axis

weapons of mass destruction," he "Make no mistake about it, if we need to, we will take necessary

action to defend the American

with nations which have had a bad

history and nations which develop

Citing unnamed officials and sources, ABC News reported Bush has ordered the State Department. Pentagon and CIA to finalize plans for a move against Saddam.

ABC said it was told that the CIA was spending money trying to encourage insurrection from within Iraq and that the goal was to have locals do much of the fighting.

A CIA spokesman said the agency had no comment on the AFP adds: The Pentagon and

the CIA have begun preparations for an assault on Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power later this year according to US and diplomatic sources, a British daily said on "The blueprint for a campaign

against Iraq has evolved from a contingency plan drawn up by the joint chiefs of staff," The Guardian

The campaign would probably be led by a 200,000-strong force which would invade from Kuwait. the paper said adding that number may be less with a larger emphasis on covert and special forces opera-



conference in the Grand Foyer of the White House on Wednesday. Bush and Musharraf earlier met in the Oval Office.

# Musharraf gets pat on his back from Bush

### Blames go to India for stalemate in talks

US President George W. Bush praised Pakistan President Pervez . Musharraf for showing "great courage and vision" in the war against terrorism and pledged to help trim his nation's dlrs 3 billion

But Bush on Wednesday dashed Musharraf's hopes for trade benefits, fighter jets and a US commitment to mediate disputes between Pakistan and India.

Musharraf said Pakistan needed high-tech aircraft as a deterrent to more powerful India.

He also pledged to keep Pakistan on the US side in the war against terrorism, although Musharraf said on PBS' "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" that siding with the United States posed a danger for him.

Returning Bush's compliments, the Pakistani president said terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden was not using Pakistan as a refuge. "I would certainly think that he is in Afghanistan, either dead or alive." the Pakistani leader said

conducted beneath a presidential seal in the White House's marble fover, Bush also addressed possible threats from Iraq and said he was considering all options to keep Saddam Hussein in check. US officials say the president

has directed his war council to develop and refine a full range of alternatives on Iraq -- including military action -- that could be used to topple Saddam. "I'm serious about defending

our country," Bush said. He has accused Iraq of working to develop weapons of mass destruction that could be used by terrorists.

Musharraf was questioned about the kidnapping of an American journalist in Pakistan. He said he was "reasonably sure" Daniel Pearl was alive, expressed hope that Pearl would be released soon and said Pakistan's steps to 'crush extremism" among Islamic fundamentalists may have given a motive to the kidnappers

But later, in the PBS television interview, he said Pakistan had no evidence that Pearl was still alive.

Musharraf, 58, might seem an unlikely ally for the administration. He took power in a coup in 1999

and was viewed with deep suspicion by both the Clinton and Bush administrations. When Bush ran for president, he couldn't answer when asked to identify Pakistan's leader. The relationship was trans-

formed after terrorists attacked Sept. 11. Bush went to war against the al-Qaida network based in Afghanistan, which borders Pakistan, and forced Musharraf to choose between the United States and militant anti-American factions n his own country

Reuters adds: Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on Wednesday blamed nuclear rival India for a stalemate in talks to end a military stand-off that has raised fears of war. "It's not going on because of the

rigidity and obstinacy of India, Musharraf said in an interview when asked why the two neighbours were not engaged in a dialogue over the massive troop

## Israeli tanks play cat and mouse with Palestinians

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli tanks played cat and mouse with Palestinian militants Thursday, leaving and re-entering Gaza Strip towns, as Yasser Arafat, showing signs strain after 10 weeks of Israeli siege, told Washington he takes responsibility for an arms smuggling scandal.

Meanwhile Europe bolstered its role in the 16-month crisis as British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who said Arafat can and must control the violence in the region, was set to pass the baton to his German counterpart, Joschka Fischer.

Israeli forces which killed six Palestinians in a two-day hunt for militants behind the firing of rockets and mortars from the Gaza Strip pulled out of the town of Beit Hanoun Thursday, which they had occupied on Tuesday night and then quit again the next day before returning for a second time in 24

The massive deployments in the Gaza Strip, designed to send a stern

warning to the radical Islamic group Hamas not to repeat its first use of home-made Qassam 2 rockets against Israel, met with criticism from Israeli commentators.

Israel's get-tough government had promised a radically new and much harsher response to any attack by the Qassam 2 missiles, which could hit Israeli towns if fired from the West Bank.

But after Hamas called the bluff and fired them at farmland in southern Israel on Sunday, Israeli commentators saw little sign of military innovation in the oftrepeated air strikes, followed up three days later by a lumbering invasion of three towns which left five Palestinians, four of them policemen, dead.

Another Palestinian was shot dead near a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip in unclear circumstances late Wednesday.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's policy of keeping Arafat cooped up in Ramallah in the West Bank for 10 weeks appeared to be

having an effect on the nerves of the hitherto defiant Palestinian leader.

Arafat was reported to have threatened his West Bank security chief Jibril Rajoub, a high-ranking member of his own Fatah movement and tipped as a potential successor to the 72-year-old leader, with a pistol in a blazing row Monday

. Arafat was enraged that Rajoub's police had failed to prevent a mob taking over the Hebron jail in the southern West Bank and releasing Islamic radicals at a time when Arafat is trying to convince Washington he is tough on terror.

The crowd took the prison with little resistance amid fears that Israel would bomb the jail and rid itself of the hardliners in its cells, after Israeli warplanes blasted security offices in Gaza's own jail compound Monday.

Israel said its policy of cutting Arafat off from the world and encouraging other leaders to step forward was taking effect.

## Subdued Valentine's in Asia

Hearts and flowers took a back seat to handcuffs, angry protests and text messages on Thursday as Asia celebrated a volatile Valentine's Day. Passions were running highest in India where hardline Hindu activists

attempted to disrupt celebrations in Bombay, calling on the government

to ban the traditional day of lovers as a corrupting Western influence. Valentine's Day, named after a Christian patron saint, has become increasingly popular among young Indians, often overshadowing many

This year some 60 members of Bombay's ruling Shiv Sena party gathered in New Delhi to protest, waving placards, shouting slogans and ripping up Valentine's Day cards.

Another hardline Hindu group, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, or the World Hindu Council) warned young women against accepting "It is not at all possible to express one's love through greeting cards,

send greeting cards, "VHP general secretary Praveen Togadia said. Young lovers hoping to steal a few moments of illicit pleasure in Thailand were more likely to have their pulses set racing by a brush with the law on Valentine's Day as special vice-busting teams were deployed to crack down on underage sex and other "immoral" behaviour.

as love is the language of the heart and only those who don't know it will

Up to 500 police were mounting patrols at 21 targeted sites, including shopping centres and motels, to prevent "unpleasant incidents", according to the education ministry's Student Patrol Division Director Nikhom

"We will give them a warning if they are found smoking, drinking or carrying out other inappropriate public acts such as kissing and hugging," he told AFP.

In Hong Kong, where a recent survey showed that most people thought shopping was a more preferable pastime to sex, Valentine's Day was also proving a bit of a let down.

A young Thai couple poses for a romantic Valentines Day photo in the middle of a heart made of pink and white balloons in a downtown shopping centre in Bangkok on Thursday. Popular teen hangouts in Bangkkok will be under close watch on Valentines Day by police and teachers to keep youngsters from prematurely losing their virginity.

## Millions vote in Indian state polls

India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, went to the polls Thursday amid tight security and concerns for the central government that a bad result could undermine the stability of the multi-party coalition in New

Voting was also held in the relatively small states of Manipur and Uttaranchal, but all eyes were on Uttar Pradesh -- politically the most important state in the country and known as India's "Hindu heart-

Uttar Pradesh elections are viewed as a popularity test for the federal government of the day and in the case of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's coalition, the outlook is none too bright.

Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party currently controls the Uttar Pradesh assembly, but opinion polls suggest it might not only lose power but also be overtaken as the single largest party by the rival Samajwadi

The final days of campaigning saw Vajpayee addressing a series of rallies in an effort to encourage the party faithful and reach out for

His coalition is stable but fractious, and a bad result in Uttar Pradesh could prompt some key BJP allies in New Delhi to start searching for greener political

While playing down suggestions that the poll amounts to a referendum on his government, Vajpayee has campaigned not on local issues but on the broader issue of terrorism and how the BJP is best-equipped to protect the country.



Samata Party leader and former Manipur chief minister Radhabinod Koijam (L) has his finger marked with ink by a polling officer before casting his vote in the Manipur state elections on Thursday in Imphal, capital of India's northeast Manipur state

### **Number of Nobel Peace** Prize nominees soar

AFP, Oslo

One hundred and fifty one people have been nominated for the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize, a substantial increase from the 136 candidates put up last year, the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo

announced Wednesday.
The September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States led to a large number of nominations for those involved in the fight against terrorism, the Norwegian press agency NTB said.

US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair are among them, the agency added. The populist Norwegian deputy Tom Nesvik, from the right-wing Progress Party (FRP), put forward the two candidacies to mark their

NTB said the Salvation Army, a regular nominee but never a winner, has again been put forward for the The committee, while not releas-

ing names of the nominees, said

that 117 of them were individuals

efforts to combat terror and promote

peace, said NTB.

Last year the prize went jointly to the United Nations and its Secretary General Kofi Annan

According to Nobel representa-

ve Olav Njoelstad, quoted by NTB,

67 of the candidates are first-time

nominees with a larger proportion of women in the running for the prestigious prize. The 100-year-old peace prize has only been awarded to ten women, including Burmese opposi-

tion leader Aung San Suu Kyi (1991) and Mother Teresa (1979). Parliamentarians, members of government, former peace laureates and some universities are allowed to nominate candidates for

the annual peace prize. The winner of this year's Nobel Peace Prize, which consists of a gold medal, a diploma and a cheque worth around 10 million Swedish kronor (just under a million dollars), will be announced in mid-October.

Tradition dictates that the Nobel institute never reveals the names of the candidates, which have to be submitted before February 1. terror" language to describe Iran.

### 'Russians close to backing UN sanctions against Iraq

AFP, London

US Secretary of State Colin Powell believes he is within a whisker of winning Russian support for UN 'smart sanctions" against Iraq, a British daily reported Thursday.

"We are this close," Powell said, squeezing his forefinger and thumb together, in an interview with the Financial Times "We believe that Iraq would be

better served with a different leadership, with a different regime," Powell told the paper. Powell said he saw no inconsistency between his UN-focused

approach and US President George W. Bush's determination to confront Saddam Hussein on weapons inspections. "Sanctions and the pressure of sanctions are part of a strategy of regime change, (along with) support

for the opposition, and reviewing additional options that might be available of a unilateral or multilateral nature," he told the FT. The US secretary of state was unapologetic about Bush's "axis of Iraq and North Korea, which has received criticism from leading European political figures. Powell questioned the logic of European governments who are

keen to solve the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict, but appear reluctant to challenge Iran over the shipment of arms to the Palestinian authority. "How can we ignore the fact that they are complicit in shipping arms

of a very escalatory nature to the Middle East?" he asked. Ahead of his and Bush's joint trip to Seoul. Tokyo and Beijing next week, Powell said that Bush would

applaud the "outreach that the

South (Korea) has made to the

North. "But at the same time as that encouragement we can't shrink from the nature of the regime in Pyongyang.

Another British daily reported Thursday that the Pentagon and the CIA had begun preparations for an assault on Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power later this year according to US and diplomatic