

Zardari, Sharif stay mum on Musharraf fate

THE DAWN, Islamabad
The Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-N have refused to give any assurance to the United States about the future of President Pervez Musharraf, saying that every matter would now be debated in parliament.

Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Ishaq Dar and Ahsan Iqbal at Punjab House.
Later, a PPP delegation comprising chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Rehman Malik visited the US embassy to meet the two officials.

Anne W Patterson, the US ambassador, was conspicuous by her absence from the meetings.
A US embassy official, however, said the ambassador did not attend the meetings because she was away from the capital.

to parliament," he said, adding that soon a parliamentary committee would be formed to review the policies of President Pervez Musharraf.
Sharif said the US officials had been told that there was no doubt in the minds of the people of Pakistan that President Musharraf used the war on terror only for his personal gains. He said as the president had never taken the parliament or the prime minister into confidence on the war on terror, he did not have the nation's support.



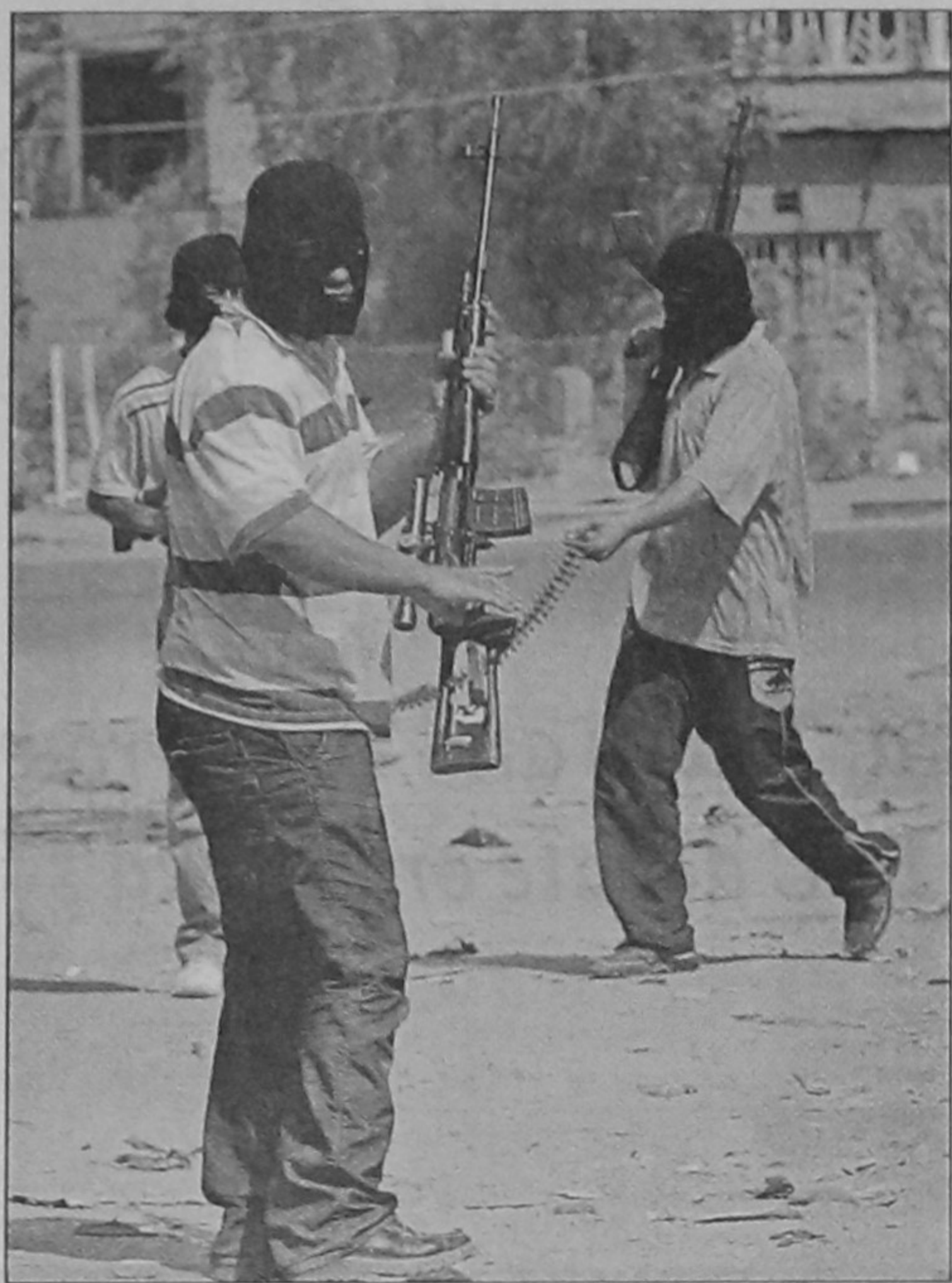
This handout picture taken on Tuesday shows Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf (R) speaking with US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte (C) and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher (L) during a meeting in Islamabad.

Foreign journalists allowed in Tibet

AP, Lhasa
China on Wednesday announced the surrender of hundreds of people over anti-government riots among Tibetans and allowed the first group of foreign journalists to visit the regional capital since the violence.
The moves appear calculated to bolster government claims that authorities are in control of the situation and that the protests that began peacefully were acts of destruction and murder.

8 civilians killed in Afghan blast

AFP, Kandahar
Eight Afghan civilians were killed when a bomb-filled car exploded near a crowded bazaar in southern Afghanistan on Wednesday, police said, in an attack claimed by the Taliban.
The blast took place in Gereshk district, in volatile Helmand province -- the country's biggest opium producing region which has seen much of the violence in the years-long Taliban insurgency.



Iraqi Mahdi Army fighters are seen during clashes in the southern city of Basra yesterday. Fighters loyal to Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr clashed again in Basra last morning, a day after running battles in Iraq's southern oil hub killed seven people.

Coalition partners still finalising cabinet size and portfolios

THE DAILY TIMES, Islamabad
The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and its coalition partners are still discussing the size of the new cabinet of federal ministers and the division of portfolios, sources privy to the developments told Daily Times on Tuesday.
The ministers will be sworn in after Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani takes the vote of confidence, likely on March 29. "Yes, there are differences among the coalition partners over portfolios, as they are pressing for the key ministries," a source told Daily Times. But the sources said the cabinet size and the portfolios were likely to be finalised a day or two before Gillani takes the vote of confidence.

The sources said important ministries that all coalition partners were eyeing included Foreign Affairs, Interior, Defence, Petroleum, Kashmir and Northern Areas, Water and Power, Religious Affairs and Planning Commission.
"Smaller partners: They said the smaller coalition partners, such as the Awami National Party and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl, were also demanding at least one federal ministry of their choice (excluding Foreign Affairs, Interior and Finance), complicating the situation. The coalition had no plans to include the Muttahida Qaumi Movement in the federal cabinet. "Talks are going on with them for cooperation at provincial level. The PPP-led Sindh government can give them ministries in Sindh to accommodate them," a source close to the developments told Daily Times.

India rejects US timeline for nuclear deal

AFP, Washington
India said Tuesday it could not commit to any US timeline for finalisation of a landmark nuclear deal caught in a deadlock among its ruling coalition partners.
Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee said New Delhi needed "more time" to forge an agreement on the deal despite a tight 2008 US legislative calendar ahead of the November presidential polls.
US President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed more than two years ago on the deal, in which Washington would provide India with nuclear fuel and technology even though the Asian nation has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

after talks with President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.
"We are trying to resolve the issues but it may take some more time."
The Bush administration and the US Congress has warned India about the limited time available for the civil nuclear deal to be approved by the legislature before Bush leaves the White House in January 2009.
"Will, we have a little bit of time before we have to say 'now or never,' White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said to a question Tuesday. "We've got several months to continue to work with them."
Could the deal clear Congress by mid-year?
"I think as that you get further and further into the Congressional calendar, I think it's fair to say it's more and more difficult just because of the political realities of the press of business," said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.
"The main issue now is the Indian government working its domestic politics," he said.
Senator Joseph Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs

Committee, had said the agreement had to come before the Senate for approval no later than July.
Asked about the time constraints, Mukherjee emphasized that unless the outstanding issues among India's coalition partners were resolved, "it would be difficult for us to (meet) any particular time frame."
The communist parties, who prop up the minority government in parliament, have threatened to withdraw their support of the government and force early elections if Indian leaders move to implement the deal.
The government had defended the pact as critical for providing new fuel sources to keep the energy-hungry nation's economy growing strongly.
Aside from resolving the political problem, India also needs approval from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to place its civilian nuclear reactors under UN safeguards as part of the atomic deal.
In addition, it also needs the green light from the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which regulates global civilian nuclear trade.

Britain rolls out red carpet as Sarkozy begins state visit

AFP, London
French President Nicolas Sarkozy vowed to open a new chapter in ties with Britain yesterday as he received a red-carpet welcome on a state visit to London with his glamorous new wife.
Sarkozy also hopes the two-day trip will help repair his image as a statesman, following a slump in opinion polls at home fueled by criticism of his style during his recent marital ups-and-downs.
But much attention was focused on model-turned-singer Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, who he married in February and who is accompanying him on a visit, which includes a formal banquet with Queen Elizabeth II.
On the political front, Sarkozy is expected to discuss increasing French military forces in Afghanistan with Prime Minister Gordon Brown as well as possible cooperation on bolstering Britain's nuclear energy industry.

Violence claims 22 in Lanka

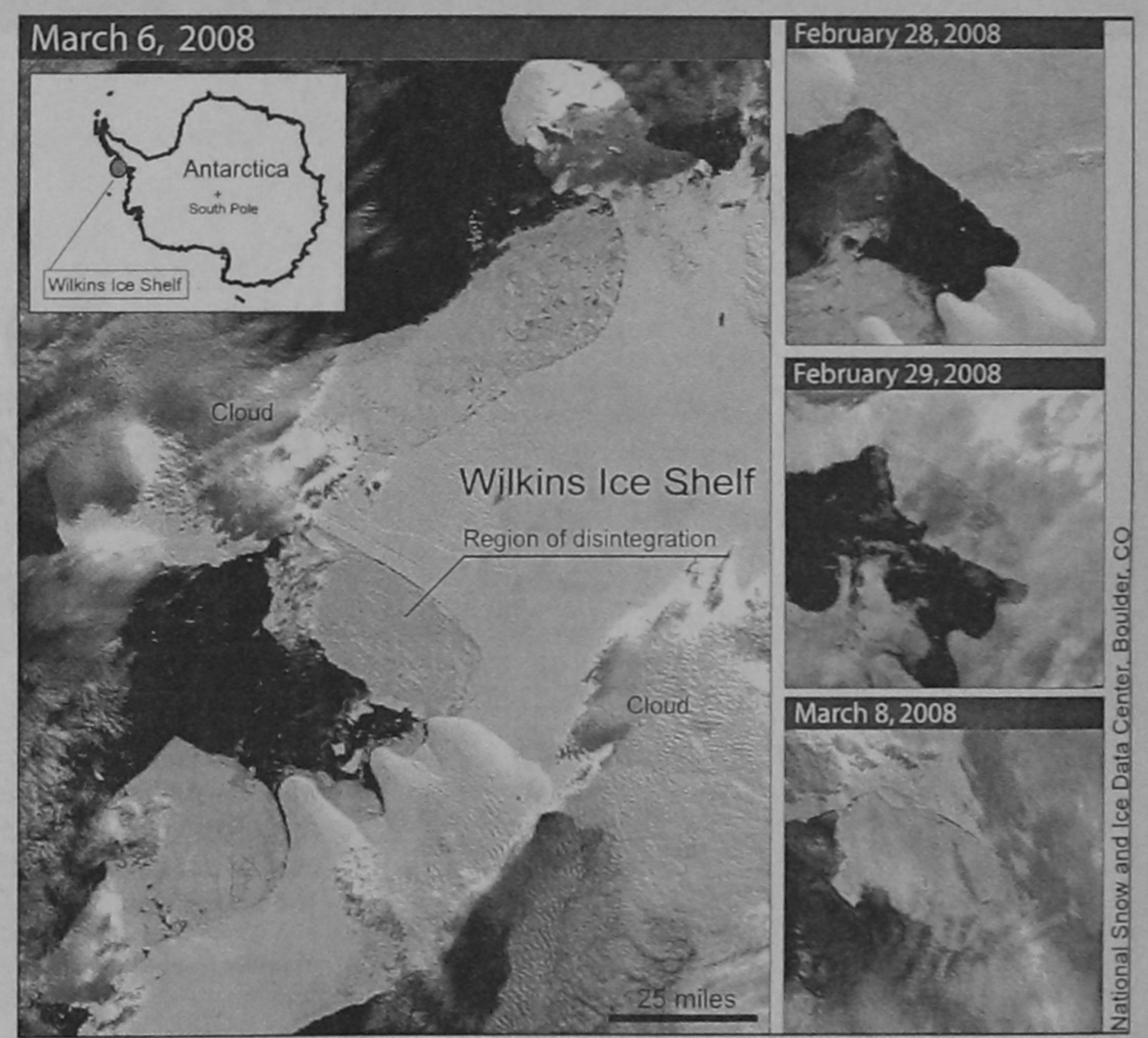
AFP, Colombo
A roadside blast in Sri Lanka's restive eastern region on Wednesday killed two policemen while fighting in the north left at least 19 rebels and one soldier dead, the government said.
A Japanese national visiting a Tokyo funded project in Batticaloa narrowly escaped the mine attack, but two policemen providing security for the group died in Wednesday's explosion, the Japanese embassy here said.
"Our national is safe, but we are saddened that two Sri Lankan policemen, died in the Claymore attack," an official said.
The mine attack in Batticaloa also injured five people, including a civilian and two elite police commanders, the defence ministry said, blaming the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
The government earlier held elections in Batticaloa, after ejecting the rebels from the east last year.
Tamil Tiger rebels, who have been fighting for a separate homeland since 1972, are now largely confined to the island's north.
Sri Lanka warplanes on

Wednesday bombed two suspected rebel targets in the north, the ministry said.
Russian built Mi24 helicopter gunships provided air cover for troops in northern Mannar, while fighter jets later pounded a building used by rebels to build boats in the guerrilla-controlled Kilinochchi area.
"Pilots have confirmed the targets were accurately hit," the statement said.
Fighting across the war-ravaged northern district, meanwhile, killed at least one soldier and 19 rebels on Tuesday, the defence ministry said.
There was no immediate comment from the LTTE, who are fighting to carve out an independent state for minority Tamils in the north and east of the majority Sinhalese island.
Security forces have killed at least 2,375 rebels since January while some 137 soldiers have died, according to the ministry.
Casualty figures cannot be independently verified because journalists and rights groups are not allowed access to the embattled areas.

Bhutan's new leader vows to serve the king and people

AFP, Thimphu
The man set to become Bhutan's first elected prime minister after the country's historic parliamentary polls said on Tuesday that he would look to guidance from the king who ordered the vote.
Jigmi Thinley's party staged a stunning victory in the election proposed by the monarchy in a move to transform the tiny Buddhist nation, wedged between giant neighbours India and China, into a constitutional monarchy.
In his first address to the nation after his party won, Thinley indicated his group would continue to seek guidance from the revered royal family, which was expected to retain strong influence over the government.
"I will endeavour to serve the king, the country and people with the deepest of commitment and loyalty," Thinley said in a statement published in a special evening edition of weekly newspaper Bhutan Observer.
Thinley, 55, said his party will

"look to the future with confidence and knowledge that we will have the guidance and wisdom" of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.
Earlier Tuesday, the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) or Bhutan United Party, which won 44 of the 47 seats in the lower house said it will continue with the policies laid down by the royal rulers.
"We will be guided by the past but now the process will be a democratic process," said Yeshey Zimba, one of the party's winning candidates from the capital Thimphu.
The sweep stunned even the DPT, but the party refrained from big celebrations in the deeply traditional and religious kingdom.
Bhutan's election body is expected to certify the victory on April 5, giving the party the go-ahead to form a government.
The kingdom's move to democracy began in 2001, when former king Jigme Singye Wangchuck handed over the tasks of daily government to a council of ministers and stepped down in favour of his son in late 2006.



This series of satellite images released by the University of Colorado's National Snow and Ice Data centre on Tuesday shows the Wilkins Ice Shelf as it began to break up because of rapid climate change in a fast-warming region of Antarctica. The large image is from March 6; the images at right, from top to bottom, are from February 28, February 29, and March 8, 2008.

Big chunk of Antarctic ice shelf falling apart

AFP, Washington
Antarctica's massive Wilkins Ice Shelf has begun disintegrating under the effects of global warming, satellite images by the University of Colorado's National Snow and Ice Data Centre showed.
The collapse of a substantial section of the shelf was triggered February 28 when an iceberg measuring 41 by 2.4 kilometres (25.5 by 1.5 miles) broke off its southwestern front.
That movement led to disintegration of the shelf's interior, of which 414 square kilometres (160 square miles) have already disappeared, scientists say.
The Wilkins Ice Shelf is a broad plate of permanent floating ice 1,609 kilometres (1,000 miles)

south of South America, on the southwest Antarctic Peninsula.
Now, as a result of recent losses, a large part of the 12,950-square-kilometer (5,000-square-mile) shelf is supported by a narrow 5.6-kilometer (3.5-mile) strip of ice between two islands, scientists said.
"If there is a little bit more retreat, this last 'ice buttress' could collapse and we'd likely lose about half the total ice shelf area in the next few years," NSIDC lead scientist Ted Scambos said in a statement.
"Wilkins is the largest ice shelf on West Antarctica yet to be threatened. This shelf is hanging by a thread," echoed David Vaughan of the British Antarctic Survey, which contributed data on

the break-up.
Jim Elliott, who was onboard a British Antarctic Survey Twin Otter aircraft sent to video the extent of the damage, said the scene looked like a bomb site.
"I've never seen anything like this before -- it was awesome," he said in a BAS statement.
"We flew along the main crack and observed the sheer scale of movement from the breakage.
"Big hefty chunks of ice, the size of small houses, look as though they've been thrown around like rubble -- it's like an explosion."
Antarctica has suffered unprecedented warming in the last 50 years -- with several ice shelves retreating and six of them collapsing since the 1970s.



A Comoran soldier (L) shoots at the positions of supporters of renegade Anjouan leader Mohamed Bacar in Mutsumadu, the Anjouan capital Tuesday. A coalition of Comoran and African Union troops invaded the rebel island of Anjouan Wednesday hunting for its renegade leader and exchanging fire with his supporters along the way.

Hillary's tough slog getting tougher

AFP, Washington
White House hopeful Hillary Clinton's uphill road to the Democratic nomination looks to be getting steeper, but the gritty survivor of many a political war shows no sign of surrendering.
The former first lady is behind on an array of fronts in her nominating battle against Barack Obama -- delegates, states won, the popular vote and fundraising.
Hillary Clinton suffered a body-blow last week when Michigan joined Florida in all but ruling out a repeat of its January primary, leaving the states' delegates in limbo owing to a scheduling dispute with the national Democratic Party.
Since then, the New York senator has been mired in controversy after apparently exaggerating her record of service, encouraging the Obama campaign to raise doubts about her trustworthiness.
"I do think it is curious that as

their campaign continues, the definition for how one wins the nomination does continue to morph and change from the previous definition, which doesn't satisfy their needs, to some other definition that might satisfy their needs," Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs said.
On the frenetic approach to the Democrats' nominating convention in August, Clinton's latest definition of success hinges on the national electoral vote used to elect the president in November.
On that measure, she is ahead by up to 70 electoral votes based on her triumphs over Obama in big states like California and New York, her supporters say.
Heading into the Pennsylvania primary on April 22, Hillary Clinton backers say if she continues to win the heftier states, Democratic elders will have to take stock of who is best equipped to challenge Republican John McCain in November.