

## Russians unleash rocket attack after losing hope for hostages

PERVOMAYSKAYA, Russia — Russian forces gave up hope of saving any hostages and unleashed a scorching barrage of rockets Wednesday on the tiny village that ground troops had failed to wrest from Chechen rebels.

One hostage — an old man whose name was not given — escaped from the village after dark Wednesday night and said he did not see anyone alive, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

The assault came despite new terrorist threats by Chechen sympathizers, including gunmen who hijacked a Black Sea ferry in Turkey carrying 200 people and said they would blow it up unless the Russians stopped the battle at Pervomayskaya.

In the blowing snow, hundreds of weary Russian troops pulled back Wednesday on the steppes around the ruined village, allowing their comrades to fire volley after volley from Grad rocket-launchers. Pervomayskaya's cluster of small buildings was also rocketed by helicopter gunships and struck by rounds of artillery shells.

Heavy machine-gun fire in the late afternoon indicated that the Chechens were still resisting. The last Russian

rocket attack came shortly after 8 p.m., ITAR-Tass said.

Reporters were expelled by Russian military authorities from Pervomayskaya and neighboring villages earlier Wednesday. The region, in the republic of Dagestan, is just across the border from Chechnya.

The Russians began storming the village Monday, breaking a five-day standoff and refusing the Chechens' demands for safe passage to their homeland. At the time, authorities said they resorted to force because the gunmen were killing hostages — a charge denied by separatist leaders in Chechnya.

In Washington, Defense Secretary William Perry said Russia was justified in using military force in response to hostage-takings.

"We reject the right of any group to take hostages as a means of implementing their policies, so therefore we believe the Russian government is entirely correct in resisting this hostage-taking effort and resisting it very strongly," he said.

On Wednesday, Russian officials again claimed they escalated the conflict because hostages were being killed. Maj. Gen. Alexander

*"We reject the right of any group to take hostages as a means of implementing their policies."*

**WILLIAM PERRY**  
Defense secretary

Mikhailov, a spokesman for the Federal Security Service, said the gunmen planned to execute the captives and try to escape.

Asked about the hostages, he said, "We have little hope for them."

Before the Russian assault, the Chechens were estimated to be holding 70 to 120 hostages, including women and children.

The hostages were among up to 3,000 seized Jan. 9 when Chechen gunmen raided a hospital in the nearby city of Kizlyar. At least 40 people were killed. Taking some hostages with them, the gunmen set out for Chechnya the next day, but were stopped by Russian troops at Pervomayskaya.

## GOP cancels session, seeks new budget offer

WASHINGTON — Republican congressional leaders abruptly canceled a budget-bargaining session with President Clinton Wednesday, saying there was no reason to meet until the administration presents a serious new offer.

The decision, further clouding already troubled prospects for a budget deal, followed a 40-minute telephone conversation among Clinton, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, House Speaker Newt Gingrich and House Majority Leader Richard Armitage.

Afterward, the GOP leaders issued a statement calling the talk "frank and useful," and saying they would meet the president "once he proposes a firm budget offer that moves in the direction" of the plan Republicans offered last week. No new meeting was scheduled.

But Wednesday's session was also called off at a time that several GOP congressional strategists, speaking on condition of anonymity, describe as one of confusion for the party.

They say many Republicans

want to end the talks immediately because they believe Clinton is merely using them to portray himself as serious about balancing the budget. But halting the sessions, they fear, would let the president blame them for walking away from the negotiations, which could alienate voters and roil financial markets.

Illustrating their internal indecision, Gingrich, R-Ga., wanted GOP leaders to attend Wednesday's White House session while Dole, R-Kan., wanted to forgo it, said Republican participants.

The two sides are separated chiefly by differences over Medicare, Medicaid and other domestic programs and by a dispute over cutting taxes.

Though the two sides have not met since Jan. 9, neither would characterize Wednesday's cancellation as evidence that the long-running talks were dead.

"It's a recess," said White House spokesman Mike McCurry. "The bell has rung, and the Democrats are back in class. We don't know where the Republicans are."

### Daily Nebraskan

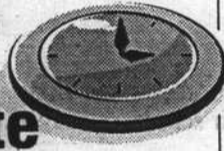
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### News

in a  
Minute



### Planet has 'broth' thought ideal for life

SAN ANTONIO — Astronomers have discovered two huge planets, only the second and third found outside the solar system, and at least one could have a warm, watery "broth" perhaps ideal for the chemistry of life.

Geoffrey Marcy, professor of physics and astronomy at San Francisco State University, announced Wednesday that one each has been found orbiting the stars 70 Virginis, in the constellation Virgo, and 47 Ursae Majoris, a star within the Big Dipper.

He told a national meeting of the American Astronomical Society that the discoveries open a new era in which scientists can seriously address, for the first time, a real possibility of other worlds like the Earth existing around stars other than the sun.

"We are at a watershed," said Marcy. "There is a dawning of a new field in science. These new planets offer a challenge to us to compare them with those in our solar system."

### Abusive man gets real slap on wrist

STANTON, Mich. — A judge told a man convicted of spousal abuse to roll up his shirt sleeve, then punished him with a three-finger "slap" on the wrist and said "don't do that."

District Court Judge Joel Gehrke said the real crime was adultery, committed by Stewart Marshall's wife. She acknowledged having an affair with her husband's brother, which led to the birth of a child.

Marshall, 38, of Vestaburg was convicted of misdemeanor spousal abuse after pushing his wife and throwing her to the ground Oct. 31 when he heard what she had done. Gehrke noted that Marshall had no history of violence.

"In the laws of Israel, if Mr. Marshall had come home and found his wife in this situation, the question would not be, 'Did you strike her?' It would have been, 'Well, are you ready to publicly be the first one to stone her?'" Gehrke said at the Jan. 4 sentencing, referring to the Old Testament.

### IRS offers Web site for tax questions

WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service is on the World Wide Web, giving 40 million Americans with access to the Internet a new way to look for answers to their tax questions.

The agency announced Wednesday that its home page has been up and running since last week and that 220,000 computer users visited it during its first 24 hours and more than a million in its first week — even before the debut was officially announced.

Features of the IRS home page include a summary of changes in tax rules for 1995, an interactive session called "Tax Trails" in which users answer basic questions to identify their particular circumstances, and addresses for where taxes should be filed.

The IRS also is exploring the possibility of offering filing over the Internet but hasn't announced whether that will be available this year.

The World Wide Web address of the IRS home page is <http://www.irs.ustreas.gov>.

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