

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

New England Final

Boston: Partly sunny, highs in the upper 40's. Tonight, windy with showers arriving, low near 40. Tomorrow, windy and wet, highs in the low 40's. Weather map appears on page 28.

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SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 1999

THREE DOLLARS

Balloon History, and in Only 20 Days



At 4:54 A.M. E.S.T. yesterday Dr. Bertrand Piccard of Switzerland and Brian Jones of England, piloting the Breitling Orbiter 3, became the first balloonists to travel around the globe nonstop, as they headed for a landing in Egypt.



The New York Times

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE

GENEVA, March 20 — Dr. Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones sailed into history today when their Breitling Orbiter 3 completed the first nonstop balloon trip around the world — a goal many had sought but never achieved.

At 10:54 this morning (4:54 A.M. Eastern time) at an altitude of 36,000 feet, their balloon sped past the finish line at 9 degrees 27 minutes west longitude over Mauritania, the longitude from which they began their 20-day voyage.

The harrowing trip had taken the pilots over Europe, Africa, Asia, the Pacific Ocean, Central America and the Atlantic Ocean.

When they crossed the finish line, their mission control team at Geneva airport broke into cheers and sprayed a forest of news television cameras with champagne.

"I am with the angels and just completely happy," Dr. Piccard, 41, told them by satellite telephone after attaining one of aviation's most elusive goals.

His partner, Mr. Jones, 51, asked by the crew whether they were celebrating their achievement, replied, "The first thing I'll do is phone my wife, and then, like the good Englishman I am, I'll have a cup of tea."

Dr. Piccard, who comes from a

2-Man Crew Rounds the World to Grab the Elusive Prize

long line of accomplished scientific adventurers, added that he felt that an "invisible hand" had guided the balloon along its "fantastic voyage."

After flying over the equally invisible finish point, the Breitling pilots decided to continue on for another day at high speed, intending to land in Egypt on Sunday morning.

(After the balloon took off from Château-d'Oex in the Swiss Alps on March 1, the pilots flew southwest to North Africa to catch a favorable jet stream going eastward. The official beginning of their trip was therefore the westernmost point the balloon reached before heading east.)

Before reaching Egypt, the balloon

is expected to fly over Libya, a nation that has sometimes barred balloonists from its airspace.

"But for us, Libya has been extremely helpful and cooperative," said Alan Noble, an English balloonist and engineer who was the team's flight director. He said the Breitling Orbiter 3's lifting gas would cool on Saturday night and the balloon would be allowed to descend slowly to the ground on Sunday morning, provided all continues to go well.

A team is waiting to pick up the two aeronauts. With more than one day's supply of propane fuel still aboard, the balloonists said they would try to reach the Nile desert before landing just after dawn on Sunday.

They had hoped to set down near the Pyramids in Cairo, but the winds will take them too far south, their meteorologists said.

In any case, the Swiss Post Office

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On a Once Forlorn Avenue, Tax Preparers Now Flourish

By JASON DePARLE

MILWAUKEE, March 20 — It slopes up from the old Schlitz Brewery, past empty lots, storefront churches, Victory over Violence Park,

LIFE AFTER WELFARE

First-Time Filers

the same: tough welfare laws are good for business. "With welfare being cut off and everything, everybody's got to go back to work," said Lorenzo Cartman, who manages the H & R

Russian With Many Faces May Get Lift in U.S. Visit

Promise of Aid Could Make Primakov a Hero

By MICHAEL R. GORDON

MOSCOW, March 20 — In his long and somewhat mysterious political career, Yevgeny M. Primakov has dealt with the United States in many guises: reform Communist, intelligence chief and an occasionally quarrelsome Foreign Minister.

But now, as Prime Minister and effective leader of the Russian Government under an erratic, ailing and jealous President Boris N. Yeltsin, Mr. Primakov is facing one of his most important challenges.

In Washington next week, his goal will be to win several billion dollars in credits from a skeptical International Monetary Fund. The prize would help Russia to regain a modicum of respectability on the world financial markets and to restructure its colossal foreign debt.

It would also make Mr. Primakov a conquering hero at home, with greatly improved chances of succeeding Mr. Yeltsin.

It is a testimony to his dogged persistence — and the anxiety of the West about Russia's stability — that he is likely, eventually, to prevail, despite an economic policy that is little more than a vague and sometimes contradictory prescription for muddling through.

His supporters say this is all the West can expect from a nation exhausted by its tainted experiment with capitalism. With Mr. Yeltsin's health fading by the day and Russia's market reformers in political exile, they say, the United States would be wise to recognize Mr. Primakov as its best bet.

"The fact is we have had a more or less stable situation," said Yuri Kobaladze, the deputy director of the

Itar-Tass Government news agency, who also worked for Mr. Primakov when he ran the nation's intelligence service. "Nobody else could have achieved this very small positive result."

To his critics, however, Mr. Primakov is a classic Soviet apparatchik, an official who has established a political equilibrium largely by avoiding the tough decisions needed to yank Russia out of its economic mire.

"He is part Andropov and part Brezhnev," said Andrei Piontkovsky, one of Russia's leading political ana-

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Associated Press

Yevgeny M. Primakov may try to succeed Boris N. Yeltsin.

KOSOVO SITUATION WORSENS AS SERBS PRESS OFFENSIVE

CLINTON MEETS ADVISERS

Thousands of Refugees Fleeing
an Outbreak of Violence as
Foreign Monitors Leave

By JANE PERLEZ

WASHINGTON, March 20 — As hundreds of foreign monitors left Kosovo and President Clinton met his national security advisers to discuss the worsening situation there, Serbian forces took advantage of the vacuum today to press a heavy offensive against the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army.

After Mr. Clinton met his advisers, a senior official said it appeared that the Yugoslav leader, Slobodan Milosevic, was preparing for a major offensive.

In Belgium, Gen. Wesley C. Clark, the Supreme Commander of NATO, described the situation in Kosovo in much starker terms. He said in a telephone interview today that the offensive was well under way and that "all sources indicate that the situation has dramatically deteriorated on the ground in Kosovo as the verifiers have departed."

In Kosovo, thousands of panicked refugees fled their homes, many for the second time this week. Reporters who reached the town of Srbica said Serbian forces dressed in snow-white camouflage and black masks were seen driving through the streets, with tanks and troops deployed all around the town, which is in the Drenica region, the heart of the ethnic Albanians' revolt. [Page 10.]

A senior NATO diplomat said Mr. Milosevic appeared to be taking advantage of the departure today of the international monitors, sometimes referred to as verifiers, and intensifying an offensive aimed at crushing the forces of the ethnic Albanians.

At the White House, a day after warning that the Serbs had crossed