

Two Britons held in Nagaland

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: The Indian army has arrested two Britons for subversive activity in the Northeastern Nagaland state, a senior army official said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The Britons were engaged in anti-national activity detrimental to our interests, the official, who asked not to be named, said by telephone from Calcutta.

A spokeswoman for the British-based Naga Vigil group which monitors human rights in Nagaland said in London on Saturday that two of its activists — David Ward, 29 and Steve Hillman, 22 — were arrested on January 30 and had not been seen since.

The Indian army official said the two were found travelling with Nag tribal insurgents when they were captured.

They opened fire on our patrol, so obviously they were fully armed, the official said.

The official quoted the Britons as saying they were working for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and that they had been assigned to do a television feature on India's alleged ill treatment of the Nagas.

A BBC correspondent in New Delhi denied any knowledge of the Britons.

Our Delhi office has no knowledge of anyone from the BBC working or travelling in the northeast, he said.

The army official said Ward and Hillman had been captured with 30 video cassettes.

They told us they had earlier smuggled out some videos through Nepal. It will be interesting to see what all they have been recording, the official said.

As far as we are concerned there has been no action between the army and the rebels recently, so goodness knows what they have filmed, he said.

He said the army had asked the government to take charge of the investigations.

A British High Commission spokesman said the mission was investigating the incident with the Indian government.

We have been informed by the army in Calcutta that they have detained two British citizens after they tried to crash through a security cordon, the spokesman said. We were told that shots were exchanged in the incident.

Naga Vigil said the driver of the jeep carrying Ward and Hillman was shot dead in the encounter.

Italian parliament dissolved

ROME, Feb 2: Italian President Francesco Cossiga dissolved parliament today and called general elections on April 5 and 6, reports Reuter.

He said in a televised speech he had decided to call early elections because the present parliament was politically exhausted.

'92 year of reconciliation with India: Sharif

DAVOS (Switzerland), Feb 3: Indian Prime Minister PV Narashima Rao and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif met for a hour of talks here Sunday on the sidelines of a world economic conference, reports AFP.

Sharif, speaking at a joint press conference after the meeting, said he hoped 1992 would be the 'year of reconciliation' with India and said he would have further talks with Rao next June during a UN conference on the environment in Rio De Janeiro.

Rao said the India and Pakistani Foreign Ministers would be meeting next month in New Delhi.

Relations between the neighboring countries are strained, with tensions focused on the Indian state of Kashmir, where Indian authorities blame Pakistan for arming and encouraging a separatist drive.

The Pakistani leader stressed the need for continued dialogue with his Indian counterpart, saying it was 'important to keep talking to

each other to solve our problems.'

We know the issues, the difficulty is how to make progress, Sharif told journalists.

Rao said Kashmir was not the sole subject of their talks here, which also touched on other bilateral problems and the overall world situation.

I very much intend to visit Pakistan, Rao said, and Mr Sharif very much intends to visit India, but I can't tell you the dates.



Nawaz Sharif (L), Prime Minister of Pakistan welcomes P V Narashima Rao (R), Prime Minister of India during the Davis World Economic meeting February 2. — AFP photo.

Cheney rejects Yeltsin's offer for massive cut in N-arms

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney yesterday rejected Russian President Boris Yeltsin's call for massive cuts in long-range nuclear weapons beyond those already proposed by President George Bush, reports Reuter.

There's a level... we want to hold to hold at, Cheney said on a cable news networks weekly news programme.

Bush called for a 50 per cent cut in strategic nuclear arms last month beyond that already agreed to in July's Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between the United States and the former Soviet Union. That would bring the number of warheads on each side down to about 4,500.

But Yeltsin has since come out in favour of a much deeper reduction, to 2,500 warheads.

US Secretary of State James Baker will visit Moscow later this month to start in-depth negotiations with Yeltsin's government on strategic nuclear arms cuts.

There's no question we will go beyond start in terms of reducing the amount of strategic systems on both sides, Cheney said. I prefer our proposal.

Cheney pointed out that neither country had even ratified the START treaty yet and said that both sides had a 'limited capability' to dismantle warheads.

It's important to preserve an adequate level in terms of the number of submarines we have, Cheney added. That's stabilising, not destabilising.

He said the programme to reduce strategic nuclear arms would probably stretch out over eight to ten years.

It took the United States and the former Soviet Union nine years to hammer out agreement on the START treaty, but Cheney said the current talks should be wrapped up more quickly.

We are moving much more rapidly than we ever did with start, Cheney said.

Cheney described the atmosphere at Saturday's summit between Bush and Yeltsin as 'very good'.

It's the first time in May memory we've had this kind of relation with Russia, Cheney said.

He said that both countries share many of the same concerns including they are wary that some of the 2,000 Russian nuclear-weapons scientists will sell their expertise to other nations.

But he cautioned that Russia is going through a 'revolution' and the United States must necessarily be cautious given the uncertainties involved.

NAM meet begins

LARNACA, Cyprus, Feb 3: Third World foreign ministers meet today to debate the uncertain future and purpose of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in a world freed from superpower rivalry by the collapse of the Soviet bloc, reports Reuter.

About 20 ministers, including those from founder members India, Indonesia, and Egypt, and 185 delegates from 53 countries will attend the first NAM meeting since the demise of the Soviet Union.

It is a threshold that will make or break the movement, Egyptian foreign minister A M R Moussa told Reuter before the ministers began informal preparatory discussions on Sunday in the coastal tourist city of Larnaca.

The movement was founded in the 1950s at the height of the cold war between Washington and Moscow, as a grouping of mainly Third World countries which aimed to avoid alignment with either superpower although many members were drawn to one side or the other.

Lankan forces on alert

COLOMBO, Feb 3: Security was tightened in the Sri Lankan capital Monday ahead of celebrations here to mark the 44th anniversary of independence from Britain, police said, reports AFP.

Residents noticed a stepping up of road blocks and intensified checks on cars entering the city as well as those inside. Police said it was part of their security arrangements for Tuesday's celebrations.

The government is planning religious ceremonies, a military parade and a cultural show to mark the occasion.

Heavily armed security personnel supported police in keeping up the alert throughout Colombo, an official said.

Forced labour Roman Priest to testify Thursday

RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 3: A Roman Catholic priest who has worked for 15 years in the Amazon will testify before a United Nations panel in Geneva this week about widespread forced labour, violence and killings in rural Brazil, reports AFP.

Father Ricardo Resende, 39, who has been working in the south of the Amazon state of Para, told AFP Sunday that from 1984 to 1991, at least 1,681 people were killed in disputes between wealthy landowners and landless peasants of which there are 12 million or as a result of forced labour.

In 25 years there have only been 24 trials and 14 convictions, he said, accusing government officials of often being corrupt and accomplices of the large landowners and cocaine traffickers in the region.

Resende, who has received several death threats and survived an assassination attempt in August, will appear before the UN Human Rights Commission Thursday.

He said that between 1980 and 1991 he had reported to the Brazilian government that 3,144 men, women and children had been victims of forced labour in Para, and of those 53 had been killed.

Russia, Estonia fail to reach accord

MOSCOW, Feb 3: Russia has reached agreement with Lithuania and Latvia for the withdrawal of formerly Soviet troops from their territories, but has failed to strike a deal with Estonia, two news agencies said here Sunday, reports AFP.

The agreements with Lithuania and Latvia were signed respectively on Friday and Saturday.

Off the Record

'New kids on the block'

MELBOURNE, Australia: 'New Kids on the Block' is interrupting its tour Down Under to take on claims of lip-synching, reports AP.

The group has requested a one-day delay of a February 6 concert in Brisbane, publicist Dianna O'Neill said Saturday.

This postponement will allow them to return to Los Angeles and tackle head-on the accusations concerning their vocal contributions to their albums and in their live performances, she said.

New Kids arrived in Melbourne on Friday amid allegations they only sang about 20 per cent of the music on the 1988 album 'Hangin' Tough.'

It is so obvious that it's us singing on the record, that it's totally ridiculous, said New Kid Donnie Wahlberg. We really shouldn't even have to defend that.

Don't mummify Mummy studies

MADRID: International experts in the study of mummies want the world to know why they are wrapped up in their work and will meet in the Canary Islands next week in a conference billed as the first of its kind, reports AP.

We think this is a genuine area of science that has progressed to the point where it deserves such an event, said Dr Arthur Aufderheide, an organizer of the First World Congress on Mummy Studies.

Up to now a lot of people have viewed this as a hobby. The conference, scheduled to run Monday through Thursday, will bring together about 225 scientists from 20 countries with varying specialties.

Also on hand will be 25 mummies, ranging in age from 600 to 7,000 years.

The most eagerly awaited papers are those dealing with the first findings on DNA research in mummies.

Aufderheide said mummies offer clues to the evolution of diseases: Tuberculosis as we know it now may not have always been that way. Chemical studies of mummies tell us what they ate, and that can tell historians about behavior, he said.

For the non-scientist, the fascination with mummies is they are tangible, real people who look like us, a sample of where we came from. That's hard to get from a skeleton.

Conference on camel

DUBAI: Camel scientists from 32 countries are meeting in Dubai to discuss the breeding, feeding and ailments that rule the long-legged humpback's success in racing, reports Reuter.

Organisers say the five-day conference is the first concerned exclusively with the king of the desert as a racing animal.

Dubai's Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Defence Minister of the United Arab Emirates, said the aim was to revive interest in this fantastic creature forgotten by science.

He is a wonder of creation, Sheikh Mohammad said in opening remarks on Sunday to 250 experts, some from as far a field as Mali, China and the United States. Dr Ahmad Bilal, who runs the world's most advanced camel institute in Dubai, told Reuter the conference would treat the camel not as a beast of burden but as a noble animal.

It is part of the culture and heritage of the people here, he said of the Gulf Arabs who were primarily nomadic Beduins before oil was discovered a few decades ago.

'There she is' dead

LA JOLLA (California): Bert Parks, the TV game show host and beauty pageant emcee who serenaded Miss America for 25 years with his trademark song, 'There She Is,' died Sunday. He was 77, reports AP.

Parks, who was diagnosed recently with an inoperable lung disease, died at Scripps Memorial Hospital in his sleep, with his wife and children at his side, said Mark Howell, a family friend.

Parks served as emcee of the Miss America pageant for 25 years. He also worked in radio, television and films. His stage credits include the starring role in a Broadway production of 'The Music Man.'

Born in Atlanta, Parks began his career while still very young. He landed his first job as a singer on the 'Eddie Cantor Show.' He later worked as a staff announcer for CBS from 1933 until 1939.

Parks was fired as the Miss America Pageant emcee in 1980. Pageant officials said they wanted to give the show a younger look. His firing generated nationwide sympathy and a letter-writing campaign organised by Johnny Carson.

Prayer for unborns

WARSAW: Half of Poland's 100-member Senate (upper house) and about 90 members of the 460-seat Sejm (lower house) made a pilgrimage to the country's holiest shrine on Sunday as part of an anti-abortion drive, reports Reuter.

Many of the lawmakers joined hundreds of high school students in an all-night prayer vigil for unborn infants, said a spokesman for the Jasna Gora shrine in the southern city of Czestochowa.

Similar prayer vigils were held in churches across Poland on Saturday and Sunday in response to an appeal by the country's Roman Catholic Bishops.

The party's draft law would jail doctors caught performing abortions. The present law was adopted by the now-defunct Communist regime in 1956.

Romania's democracy faces another test

BUCHAREST, Feb 3: Romania's shaky democracy, often buffeted by political violence, faces another test when the country holds triple elections this year, reports Reuter.

The United States and other countries are watching Romania closely to see whether they should drop

reservations about the country, where ex-Communists remain politically influential.

The first hurdle is on February 9, when Romanians are due to elect Mayors and District Councils in their first democratic local polls in more than half a century.

Local polling will be followed two or three months later by national parliamentary and presidential elections.

The international republican institute a Washington based democracy watchdog body, surveyed the political scene this month and predicted the local polls would also be flawed.

It cited ambiguities in the electoral law, restricted access to the media and funds for campaigning, the power of unelected incumbent mayors impeding to free voting by students and soldiers, and poor ballot box security.

The institute said such issues raised serious questions about whether the February 9 elections will be free and fair.

Romania needs a good international verdict on the polls if it is to be admitted to such organisations as the Council of Europe and the European Community or to secure foreign credits and American trading privileges.

BRIEFLY

8 die in S African feud: Fierce clashes between rival Black factions claimed eight lives at Umlazi Black township near Durban Sunday, police said, reports AFP from South Africa.

The African National Congress (ANC) said residents of a squatter camp in Umlazi were attacked by heavily-armed men escorted by police of the self-governing KwaZulu tribal homeland, and that 300 homes were set alight.

KwaZulu police spokesman M L Khanyila said police found eight bodies at the squatter camp after rival groups clashed.

Yugoslav soldier kills 6 in Belgrade: A Yugoslav army reservist went on a drunken rampage on Sunday, killing six people including his girlfriend's mother, father and brother before he was arrested, Tanjug news agency reported, says Reuter from Belgrade.

Police said Drago Milicic, from the village of Modran in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, shot three fellow soldiers as they slept in a converted nursery school used as a barracks in nearby Bijeljina. Other soldiers sleeping in the same room escaped by jumping out of a window.

Milicic then drove a stolen army vehicle 20 km to his village, stopped outside his girlfriend's house and shot down her father, mother and brother on the doorstep.

Military police arrived soon afterwards and arrested him. Local police said Milicic was drunk.

One shot dead in Tbilisi: One person was shot dead and several were injured when supporters of ousted Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia clashed with police in the Georgian capital Tbilisi on Sunday, a local journalist said, reports Reuter from Moscow.

He quoted the ruling military council as saying pistol shots were fired from within a crowd of about 5,000 Gamsakhurdia supporters when police tried to break up the demonstration with water canon.

Another local journalist said the police also fired in the air to try to break up the crowd.

India holds Chinese steamer: Indian coastguards have detained a Chinese and a Taiwan steamer, with a combined crew of 32, for illegally entering Indian territorial waters, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said Sunday, reports AFP from New Delhi.

The two sophisticated mini steamers, equipped with radars and the capacity to store 400-500 tonnes of fish, were intercepted Saturday off the port of Jakhau in the western state of Gujarat.

After being taken into custody, the crew members were questioned, PTI said without elaborating.

Salvadoran rebels get ovation: Rebel leaders received a standing ovation from churchgoers Sunday after a night of festivities celebrating the end of the nation's 12-year civil war, AP reports from San Salvador.

The Mass was led by the archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Arturo Rivera Damas, who said El Salvador must work tirelessly to assure peace.

A peace accord signed last month led to a formal cease-fire Saturday. An estimated 75,000 died in the war between leftist rebels and a succession of US-backed governments.

Minor tremor rocks Tokyo: A minor earthquake with an intensity of 4.5 on the Richter scale rocked Tokyo and its vicinity early Monday, the meteorological agency said, reports AFP from Tokyo.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage from the quake, which occurred at 7.47 am (2247 GMT Sunday), police said.

Its epicentre was estimated some 100 kilometres under-sea in Tokyo Bay, the agency said.

The tremor followed Sunday's earthquake with 5.7 on the Richter scale, which shook central and northern Japan.

5 more killed in Punjab violence

CHANDIGARH, Feb 3: Five militants were killed in Punjab since last night, reports PTI.

While four militants were killed in separate encounters in Taran Taran police district another was killed in Batala police district.

Three unidentified militants were killed in an encounter with security forces near Dhand Kasels village while another was killed in village Suga bridge area of Taran Taran police district. Some arms and ammunition were recovered from the site of the encounters.

In Batala police district, an unidentified Pakistani intruder was killed in an encounter with the BSF on the Indo-Pak border area of Dera Baba Nanak.

CIS be maintained and Yeltsin must work as initiator: Gorb

MOSCOW, Feb 2: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has made his voice increasingly heard on major domestic and international issues in the past few weeks showing he has no intention of quietly fading into history, reports AFP.

The father of the perestroika reforms made headlines on January 14 — three weeks after he was forced to resign — when he returned to Moscow and met with another star of recent history and Nobel peace laureate, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Since then Gorbachev, now head of a Moscow-based research institute, has not missed a chance to voice his point of view, both on the evolution of the Commonwealth of

Independent States (CIS) and on foreign affairs, where he excelled when he was Soviet leader.



Boris Yeltsin

Gorbachev, 60, has held a series of meetings with top-ranking foreign officials, while at the same time giving interviews to CIS media. Widely admired in the West for among other qualities his ease with reporters and in front of television cameras, Gorbachev has promised to give monthly interviews to the popular daily Komsomolskaya Pravda.

On Saturday, in the first of these interviews, the former Soviet leader said states of the new CIS urgently needed to create joint political structures to deal with their acute economic and military problems.

The 11-member CIS must be maintained and Russian President Boris Yeltsin must carry on his role as initiator or there would be a crisis, he said.

The principal goal was to create common legal norms, and the main danger was nationalism added Gorbachev, who to the last had called for a reformed Soviet Union to be kept intact and now wants the same for its successor, the CIS.

Gorbachev has kept his promise not to play the part of opponent to his former political rival, Russian leader Boris Yeltsin, but he is not shy about giving Yeltsin advice.

Yeltsin must under no circumstances drop his role as initiator in the CIS, Gorbachev told the newspaper, 'if this happens, there will be a crash, a crisis,' he said.

However he said he was generally satisfied with Yeltsin's initiatives on disarmament, adding that the

Russian leader was 'pursuing former Soviet policies — in other words, Gorbachev's — in this domain.



Mikhail Gorbachev