

Britain planning major changes in police force

LONDON, Feb 18: Britain is planning the most radical shakeup of its police force in 30 years, ITN television news said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The changes, which will include a big reduction in local police forces which are to be more effectively managed with less bureaucracy, are expected to be announced by the government in about a month, ITN said.

Police authorities will also be taken out of local political control.

ITN said the current 43 police forces in England and Wales will be reduced to about 20 through a series of amalgamations. London will have its own police authority and will not be under the direct control of Home Secretary (Interior Minister) Kenneth

Clarke as at present. The Home Secretary has said that he is reviewing the structure of the police service. He will publish proposals in due course," a spokeswoman for the Home office said.

Although the moves are radical, ITN said some members of parliament wanted the government to establish a national police force.

"If we are going to have a few more amalgamations that will get us through a few more years but it won't solve any problems," Sir John Wheeler, the former chairman of parliament's Home Affairs committee, told ITN.

The police shakeup followed a call by Prime Minister John Major on Tuesday for a crackdown on crime which has increased ten fold in the past 40 years.

Open letter to Myanmar junta 13 Nobel laureates call for 'immediate' release of Suu Kyi

THAILAND, Feb 18: Thirteen Nobel Peace laureates today issued an open letter to the Myanmar junta calling for the "immediate and unconditional" release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar, reports AFP.

"We join the international community in calling for her immediate and unconditional release, and for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar," said the letter, whose signatories included former Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev, winner of the 1990 Nobel prize and Tibet's spiritual

leader The Dalai Lama. "Despite an indomitable spirit and courage, she languishes under house arrest — silenced for her desire to serve her people and imprisoned for her ability to do so," it said.

The letter, released here and in Hong Kong today, also called on the junta to free other imprisoned members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party and allow it to take power, and accused the junta of "violence, cruelty and torture."

It charged Myanmar's State Law and Order Restoration

Council (SLORC) — the official name of the junta — with holding hundreds of political prisoners as well as "our sister laureate," and said Suu Kyi had consistently followed "Gandhian principles of non-violence in the face of severe threats to her life."

Suu Kyi, daughter of Myanmar's independence hero Aung San and the mother of two teenage sons now living in Britain, won the 1991 Nobel prize. She has spent three and a half years under house arrest in Yangon since being detained in 1989.

"Despite the imprisonment

of their leader, the democratic party she led while in detention won an overwhelming majority of seats in the national parliament," the letter said.

The Nobel mission coincide with a massive national constitutional convention now under way in Yangon which the junta says will both ensure a transition to multi-party democracy in Myanmar and ensure a future leading role for the military.

The laureates said in their letter that the continued detention of Suu Kyi "believes the SLORC's declared intention to allow a return to civilian rule." Signatories to the letter were: The International Institute of Law, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1904, the American Friends Service Committee (1947), Linus Pauling of the United States (1962), Mairead McGuire and Betty Williams of Northern Ireland (1978), Amnesty International (1977), Adolfo Perez Esquivel of Argentina (1980), Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa (1984), International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (1985), Elie Wiesel of the USA (1986).

Former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias (1987), The Dalai Lama (1989), Russia's Mikhail Gorbachev (1990) and Mayan Indian rigobert a Menchu Tum of Guatemala, winner of the 1992 prize.

Seven of the laureates are currently visiting the Thai-Myanmar border to interview refugees from the SLORC regime, thousands of whom have fled here after a bloody military crackdown on an uprising against one man rule in Myanmar in 1988.

The group, who were denied visas to Myanmar, will present their findings to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva February 21-22.



Nobel Peace laureates holding a press conference in Bangkok Wednesday. — Star TV photo

Move to check illegal immigrants Germany to deploy 1300 border police

BERLIN, Feb 18: Germany has begun recruiting a new border police force to stem a rising flow of illegal immigrants, an official said Wednesday, reports AFP.

About 1,300 border police will be deployed along the borders with Poland and the

Czech republic and equipped with sophisticated infra-red radar devices, the official, Martin Buch said.

German customs officials stopped more than 57,000 illegal immigrants in 1992, most of them from Romania. About 250,000 immigrants succeeded in entering illegally last year, experts said.

Already 4,000 people have applied to join the new force, half of them women, said Buch. He said 300 members of the new force would begin helping German customs officials by March 15. The remaining 1,000 would be deployed during the summer, Buch said.

German authorities have not said whether the new force will carry firearms.

The number of foreigners in Germany surged by 10 per cent in 1992, mostly asylum seekers, the federal office of statistics said Wednesday.

Two Bosnian women sue Serb leader

NEW YORK, Feb 18: Two Bosnian women have filed a multi-million civil suit against the leader of the Bosnian-Serbs, charging him with rape and other human rights violations, reports Reuter.

The class action suit, filed in Manhattan Federal Court late on Thursday, alleges that Radovan Karadzic has legal responsibility for mass rapes.

German authorities have not said whether the new force will carry firearms.

Released China's student leader pledges to work for democracy

BEIJING, Feb 18: Released Chinese student dissident Wang Dan said Wednesday he had no regrets about leading the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests and pledged to continue working for the democratisation of China, reports Reuter.

Wang, speaking shortly after court officials ordered his early release from Beijing's number two prison, said he felt the decision to free him meant China's elderly leaders had realised they could not stand opposed to the trend of the times.

"It was a smart move by the Chinese government," Wang, 23, told reporters gathered at his mother's Beijing apartment.

"They realise the direction the world is going in."

Looking relaxed but pale, Wang said he had maintained his faith in the principles of democracy during his years in prison.

"My political views have never changed in the past and will not change in the future,"

he said. "I hope that someday I will be able to make more contributions. I don't regret a thing. In future, I have two plans.

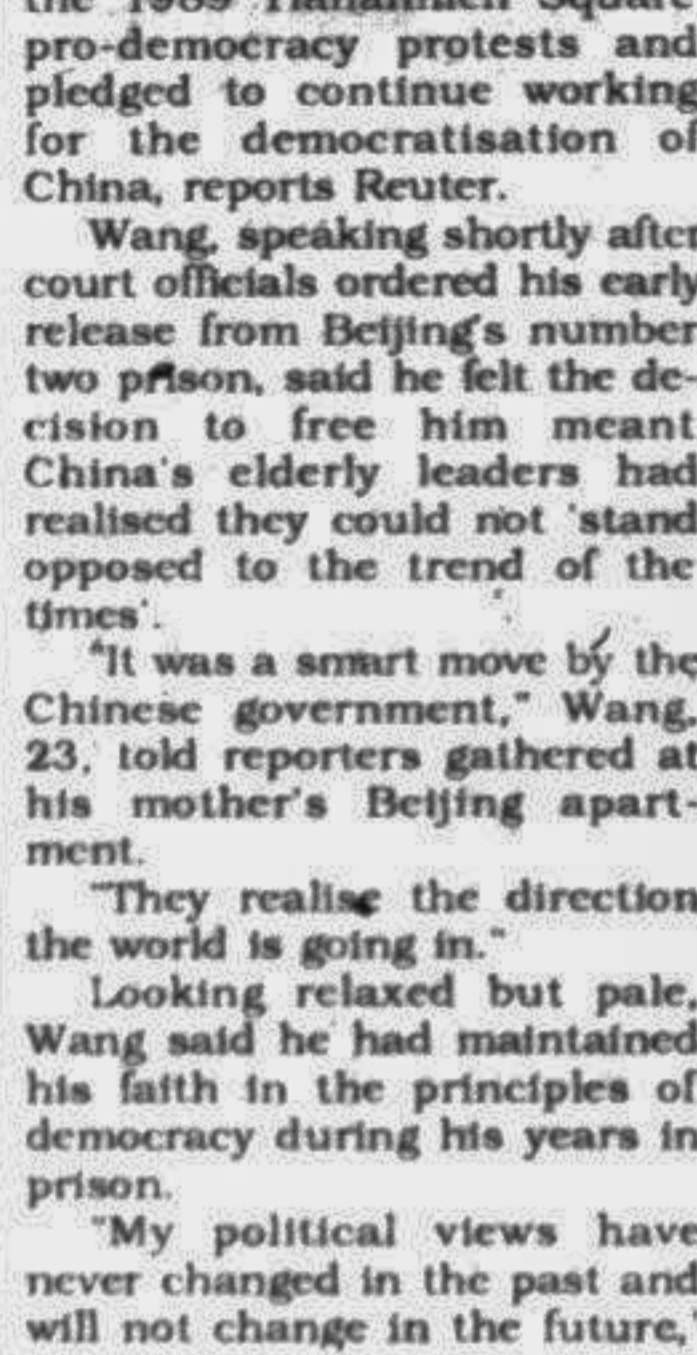
One is to try to get readmitted to Beijing University. The other is to try to continue working for democratisation."

Wang topped Beijing's list of most wanted student leaders after troops and tanks crushed the student-led pro-democracy demonstrations centred on Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 with heavy loss of life.

He was captured the same month and sentenced on January 26, 1991 to four years in prison and one year's deprivation of political rights for counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement. He was due for release on July 1, 1993.

Wang said he spent at total of four months in solitary confinement and was later transferred to cell with three other inmates, all jailed on criminal charges.

"They were all very good to me," Wang said. "In our country there is a special respect for political prisoners."



BEIJING: Chinese student leader Wang Dan, gestures during an interview at his Beijing apartment Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Christopher starts ME tour

WASHINGTON, Feb 18: US Secretary of State Warren M Christopher says Arabs and Israelis must reopen Mideast peace talks and be prepared to narrow their differences when they do, reports AP.

President Clinton will decide on the role his new administration will play in peacemaking based on Christopher's Middle East tour this week, US State Department officials said Wednesday. They spoke before Christopher took off on an overnight flight to Cairo, the start of his first overseas trip since taking office.

His first meetings will be Friday with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Christopher will then go on to

Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Israel, where he will meet also with Palestinian leaders.

His visit to six countries in seven days mirrors the shuttle diplomacy of his predecessors, who for 20 years have been trying to push Arabs and Israelis toward a settlement.

Christopher has said he did not expect a major breakthrough during his visit. Palestinians have been threatening to boycott peace talks that resume in April, protesting a US-Israeli agreement to repatriate by the end of the year some 400 Palestinians Israel exiled to Lebanon.

Palestinian leaders want them returned immediately.

A US State Department official said Christopher is looking

to find out if Arabs and Israelis are interested in a "meaningful engagement" and are willing to "narrow their differences at this particular stage of the negotiations."

The official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity, said a recent upsurge in fighting in south between Israeli-backed militiamen and pro-Iranian guerrillas would mar Christopher's visit.

Christopher was last in the area in 1979. He was then Deputy Secretary of State and his job was to brief leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan on the peace agreement. President Carter helped arrange between Israel and Egypt.

US urges China to release all prisoners

WASHINGTON, Feb 18: The United States on Wednesday welcomed the release of two Chinese students, including a top leader of the pro-democracy movement, and urged Beijing to release all prisoners held for peacefully expressing their views, reports AFP.

"We obviously welcome these releases, these two cases that figure prominently in our human rights discussions with the Chinese," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

At the same time, we'll continue to urge China to release all those people who are detained for the peaceful expression of their views," he said.

Myanmar junta reshuffles cabinet

BANGKOK, Feb 18: Myanmar's military government on Wednesday named Major General Mya Thin to the powerful post of Home Minister in a cabinet reshuffle, and split its Planning and Finance Ministry in two, radio Yangon reported, says AFP.

Mya Thin replaced Lieutenant General Phone Myint, the official radio said in a broadcast monitored here. It did not say if Phone Myint was given a new post.

The ruling junta also created the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and a separate Finance and Revenue Ministry in what was described as a move to more effectively develop Myanmar.

The new Planning Ministry will be headed by Brigadier General Win Tin and the Finance Ministry by Brigadier General David Able, it said. Civilian Than Hla was given Mya Thin's old post as Cooperatives Minister, it said.

Able had been Finance Minister, while Win Tin did not previously hold a cabinet post.

Quake jolts Iran: An earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale shook northeastern Iran on Thursday, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported, says AP from Nicosia.

The quake in Khorasan province near the border with Turkmenistan struck at 7:45 am (0415 GMT). Its epicentre was 240 kilometres (150 miles) northeast of Mashhad, the provincial capital, the agency said.

The earthquake struck near Bojnurd, a city of more than 50,000. The city is some 580 kilometres (360 miles) northeast of Tehran and 120 kilometres (75 miles) southwest of Ashkhabad, the capital of Turkmenistan.

There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. An earthquake with an intensity of 5 of the Richter scale is capable of causing considerable damage in a populated area.

Palestinian shot dead in Gaza: Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian demonstrator and wounded eight others Wednesday in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian sources said, reports AFP from Jerusalem.

Salim El-Jazah, 18, was killed in the Askar refugee camp near Nablus when troops opened fire to disperse a demonstration, they said.

Israeli military sources said the demonstrators had stoned an Israeli bus and that unidentified gunmen had opened fire on an Israeli patrol on the outskirts of the Askar camp.

Jazah is the 1012th Palestinian killed by Israeli soldiers or settlers since the start of the uprising in December 1987, according to an AFP toll.

Pindi renews invitation to Mubarak: Pakistan said on Wednesday it had renewed an invitation to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak for a visit postponed last October after criticism in the local press, reports Reuter from Islamabad.

The invitation was renewed when an Egyptian envoy visited Pakistan from February 11 to 15 but no dates were set for the visit, expected in the near future, a foreign ministry spokesman told reporters.

Mubarak postponed the October visit after critical comments in Pakistani newspapers, which speculated that he might persuade Pakistan to recognise Israel and sign a peace agreement with arch-enemy India.

Pakistan said that the visit was put off by some unforeseen developments requiring Mubarak's presence in Cairo. Egypt in 1979 became the only Arab state to make peace with Israel.

Arafat, Mubarak talk deportee crisis: PLO chief Yasser Arafat and President Hosni Mubarak on Wednesday discussed efforts to resolve the deportee crisis ahead of a visit by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Egyptian officials said, reports AFP from Cairo.

Arafat and the Egyptian leader discussed "efforts to assure the return of all the Palestinians deported by Israel to south Lebanon," they said.

They also discussed "means likely to restart the Israeli-Arab peace process," which stalled after Israel deported 415 Palestinians to Lebanon on December 17.

Mubarak is expected to convey Arafat's views to Christopher when the two meet later in the week on the US Secretary of State's first leg of a Middle East tour.

180 Iranian MPs favour death sentence against Rushdie

NICOSIA, Feb 18: Two-thirds of the members of Iran's parliament said on Wednesday saying British author Salman Rushdie must be killed, Tehran radio reported, says Reuter.

"One hundred-eighty deputies stressed the need for the implementation of the Imam's (Khomeini's) decree on apostate Salman Rushdie," the radio said.

US may lose its leadership role in Asia, experts say

WASHINGTON, Feb 18: The United States may lose its leadership role in Asia because of its failure to develop coherent post-Cold War policies toward the region, experts told Congress, reports AP.

The two basic pillars of America's Cold War policy in Asia, economic supremacy and strategic engagement, are both in doubt, Hunter College Professor Donald S. Zagoria testified to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday.

The United States is losing its moral authority in the Pacific as many Asians con-

clude that the US is in decline, that resorting to scapegoating others, particularly Asians, for its own failures, he said.

Zagoria also warned against making deeper cuts in the 100,000 US troops stationed in Japan, South Korea and other areas of Asia and the Pacific.

He predicted that a reduced US military presence could lead to an arms race among Asian nations, rivalry between Japan and China similar to that of the 1930s and a bolder North Korea.

Edward Luttwak of the Centre for Strategic and

International Studies said US contributions to Asian security should be coupled by progress in resolving trade and human rights issues. Otherwise, he said, "we are acting like unpaid guards in front of someone else's bank."

Three of the four experts at the panel's hearing voiced strong reservations about isolating China by removing its most-favoured-nation trade status, which provides it the low tariff rates enjoyed by almost all US trading partners.

Terminating that status would hurt Chinese reformers and private businessmen, re-

duce American exports to China and do great damage to Hong Kong, through which passes 70 per cent of China's exports to the United States, said Harry Harding, a China expert with the Brookings Institution.

"We should threaten the revocation of MFN (most-favoured-nation status) only when fundamental US interests are at stake," he said.

Kenneth S. Courlis, a senior economist with Deutsche Bank Capital Markets in Hong Kong and Tokyo, said there was no example of a country becoming more democratic when living

standards were falling a likely outcome of a trade war with China. And Zagoria said isolating China and other Communist states, "will only feed the cause of radicalism."

However, Luttwak said most-favoured-nation status "should become much more conditional." Americans are not aware of the enormous leverage that the United States has as China's biggest market, he said. "We must not walk away from upholding our vision of human rights."

He said the release Wednesday of two prominent

Off the Record

'Dangerous' getting a boost

LOS ANGELES: Michael Jackson's high-profile television appearances capped off by the Oprah Winfrey interview have reinvigorated his career, sending sales soaring for his 14-month-old "Dangerous" album, reports AP.

Jackson fans snapped up 60,000 "Dangerous" albums last week, compared with 8,000 the week of January 10-17, according to SoundScan sales data released Wednesday.

"Dangerous" which debuted at No. 1 on December 14, 1991, also is leaping back up the Billboard 200 in its 63rd week. After bottoming out at No. 149 last November, the album reached No. 26 in this week's chart.

"I can't remember an album that opened that big and staged this sort of resurgence this late in its shelf life," said Geoff Mayfield, who manages the Billboard 200.

"Dangerous" has sold more than 4 million copies domestically. Jackson's other albums also are getting a boost. "Thriller" is moving up a special chart for older albums, and even Jackson's old Motown albums are doing better, said Mayfield.

The sales surge is attributed to Jackson's media blitz this year, including TV appearances at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's 25th annual Image Awards, the Clinton inauguration, American Music Awards and the Super Bowl halftime show.

Dog rescues errant toddler

MIDLAND, Ontario: A three-year-old boy who wandered a half mile (a kilometer) from home in the cold — apparently wanting to visit his mother and newborn sister — was rescued by a dog who kept the child warm and led him to safety, reports AP.

Police called the six-year-old German shepherd dog a hero.

"It's isolated, it is a rural area. Had he wandered in the bush, it could have been a whole different scenario," said Midland Police officer Kirk Wood.

The boy's mother, who gave birth Saturday, was at a hospital 40 kilometres (25 miles) away and his father was sleeping in the house when the three-year-old decided to head out by himself on Tuesday morning.

"The young lad got up and figured 'Oh well, I'm going to visit mom and the new baby,'" said Wood.

Samantha the dog came across the shivering child on a road. The child was dressed in sweat pants, a T-shirt and an unzipped jacket.

"It was a shock when I looked out and saw her bring a little child home," said Brian Holmes, Samantha's owner. "The child was hanging on to the dog for warmth, he was shaking like a leaf."

"I took him and put him in front of the fire and gave him a cookie."

Seeing no adult outside, Holmes called police. A short while later, the father appeared.

\$ 300 fine for cruelty to animals

SINGAPORE: A Singapore company executive who whipped a stray cat to death and hung it from a tree as a warning to other cats was fined Singapore dollar 500 (300 US dollar), court officials said today, reports Reuter.

A court on Wednesday convicted Lim Geok Soo, 43, a managing director of an interior design company, of cruelty to animals.

Lim pleaded guilty to whipping the stray cat to death with his belt last July when he saw it sniffing at his baby son, then hanging it by its neck from a tree in his back garden.

"I hung the cat on the tree in the back garden, near where the stray cats came in, because I wanted to scare them," he said.



TENERIFE ISLANDS: Carlota Bibiana Sosa Borges, 16, representing the Queen of the Carnival, was elected Wednesday "Queen of the Carnival". The local beauty is wearing a costume titled "Pim, Pam, Pum, Fuego" (roughly translates as "Fire-Works"). — AFP/UNB photo

Iran accuses Afghan rebels of raping, looting

NICOSIA, Feb 18: Iran accused members of a Saudi-backed Afghan guerrilla faction on Wednesday of raping large numbers of women and looting homes in Kabul, reports Reuter.

Iran's Irna news agency quoted a foreign ministry spokesman as saying men of Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf's Ittehad-i-Islami "plundered hundreds of residential houses and raped scores of Muslim women and girls" in Kabul.