

BRIEFLY

Two killed in Thai plane crash: A light plane seeding clouds to make rain crashed into a mountain in eastern Thailand, killing two people. The Bangkok Post said Saturday, reports AFP from Bangkok.

The twin-engine plane smashed into Takienthong mountain on Friday, Chanthaburi province governor Wimol Puangthong told the Post. Visibility was poor at the time.

He said rescue workers located the crash site some four hours later just before dusk, and a 50-man team was to comb the site yesterday.

Two other planes involved in the government-run cloud-seeding operation landed safely. The operation has been prompted by a lighter than usual rainy season, which has raised the threat of a severe water shortage in much of Thailand.

UK soldier wounded in Bosnia: A British soldier of the United Nations Protection Force in Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) was wounded on Thursday morning in Gornji Vakuf, in central Bosnia-Herzegovina, said the Belgrade UNPROFOR headquarters on Friday, reports Tanjug from Belgrade.

The UNPROFOR office did not say who wounded the soldier, but that he was hit by shrapnel from an anti-personnel mine. There were no reports of clashes in Gornji Vakuf on Thursday.

Until recently Gornji Vakuf was the scene of battles between members of the Croatian Council of Defence (HVO) the Bosnian Croats armed forces and Muslim forces loyal to Alija Izetbegovic.

Measles claims 96 in Manila: Ninety-six children, all below five years old, died of measles during the past two months at a hospital in metro Manila, Department of Health (DOH) said Friday, reports Xinhua from Manila.

During the period, at least 1,137 other children and infants afflicted with measles were admitted to the San Lazaro Hospital, the DOH reported.

Of the dead, about half were under one year old and 22 per cent under nine months old, the DOH said.

The DOH also said 88 per cent of the dead were not immunized. About 20 per cent children in the Philippines are not fully immunized because they live in areas which are infested with rebels and where medical workers are absent.

Syria invites Palestinians, Arabs: Syria invited the Palestinians and Arab countries involved in the Middle East peace talks to meet in Damascus later this month to discuss a common stand on the next round of talks, officials said, reports Reuter from Damascus.

They said Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara sent the invitations for the March 28-29 talks to his Jordanian, Lebanese and Egyptian counterparts and the PLO foreign affairs chief after consulting them in the past two days.

The United States and Russia, co-sponsors of the peace process which began in Madrid in October 1991, have issued invitations for the talks to resume in Washington on April 20.

But Arab participation is in doubt because of Israel's expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied territories.

Palestinian negotiators have refused the invitation and Syria, Jordan and Lebanon have delayed their replies until after the Damascus meeting.

Salvadoran Defence Minister quits: Salvadoran Defence Minister Rene Emilio Ponce resigned unexpectedly on Friday, three days before the release of a report listing human rights violators during the 12-year civil war, reports AP from San Salvador.

The report, drawn up by a three-member "Truth Commission" from Colombia, Venezuela and the United States, is to be released at the United Nations on Monday.

President Alfredo Cristiani did not say immediately if he would accept the resignation. He was inaugurating electrical turbines in the port city of Acajutla 80 kilometers (50 miles) southeast of the capital and said he would withhold comment "until the contents and arguments" are known.

The names have not been made public, although Ponce is widely believed to be on the list.

"I have taken this decision to put the post of defence minister at the disposition of the president so he may take appropriate steps when he deems it convenient," Ponce said at a press conference.

Nepali communists call general strike today

KATMANDU, Mar 13: The Nepali government will not allow troublemakers to destroy property during a communist-organised general strike on Sunday, Home Minister Sher Bahadur Deupa said, reports AFP.

"In a democracy everyone has the right to express, right to criticise, the government's mistakes and hold demonstrations peacefully, but no one has the right to take the law into their own hands and damage public or private property," Deupa said.

He vowed there would not be a repeat of the destruction caused during a similar strike in Kathmandu last summer.

Nepal's four communist factions have called for a general strike in the Kathmandu valley to express resentment at the government's decision to allow India to build part of the Tanakpur barrage in Nepal, and lengthy power cuts imposed on alternate days despite a recent 92 per cent rise in electricity price.

The strike was called by the Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist and Leninist) (NCP-UML), the Nepal Peasants and Workers Party (NPP), the United People's Front (UPF) and the NCP (Mashal Flaming-Torch). Deupa, responding to cla-

ims that crime had increased since the power cuts were introduced early this week, said "The government has planned for night patrolling on a regular basis during the power shedding period".

At a public rally following a demonstration march by 5,000 communist supporters in Kathmandu, party leaders criticised Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's government for the thirteen-hour long power cuts, and the Tanakpur agreement.

UPF leader and parliamentarian Lilamant Pokharel denounced the government for failing to supply adequate drinking water and electricity to the general public.

"Is there any civilized country in the world where the power shedding lasts for thirteen hours in a 24-hour day on a regular basis?" Pokharel asked.

"The load shedding has virtually crippled the country's industries and caused inconvenience to the people," he added.

The Tanakpur agreement with India has clearly shown that the Prime Minister does not have any worries or anxieties for the country's future," he said.

3,000 embrace Islam in Ivory Coast

ABIDJAN, Mar 13: More than 3,000 persons in Ivory Coast announced their conversion to Islam during the month of Shaban 1413 H according to a report by a group of preachers who visited the country a few weeks ago, reports IINA.

The Muslims in Ivory Coast are a minority but their enthusiasm for preaching Islamic faith is commendable.

Muslim leaders have urged their coreligionist all over the world to extend their support to the Muslims of Ivory Coast.

North Korea's withdrawal from NPT dismays neighbours

TOKYO, Mar 13: North Korea's neighbours are voicing alarm at the communist state's abrupt withdrawal from an international nuclear accord, a move certain to increase suspicions the North is building weapons of mass destruction, reports AP.

The withdrawal on Friday came two weeks after the International Atomic Energy Agency gave North Korea a month to agree to inspections of two suspected nuclear sites.

The pullover deepened the isolation of the reclusive, hard-line North. It also increased tensions on the Korean peninsula, where the United States

and South Korea held joint military maneuvers this week. North Korea had denounced the maneuvers and declared itself on a "semi-war footing".

The US State Department said it deplored the North Korean treaty move and called on it to reverse the decision. Spokesman Richard Boucher refused to say whether the United States believes North Korea has nuclear weapons, but that there were "significant uncertainties".

North and South Korea, divided since World War II, fought a bloody war in 1950-53. More than 1.5 million troops, two-thirds of them

Communist, are on full alert on both sides of the border. The nations have worked on rapprochement during the past year, but reconciliation talks have deadlocked, largely over nuclear issues.

Word that the North had withdrawn from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty came from the official Korean Central News Agency, monitored in Tokyo.

The report said North Korea's move was a "well-justified, self-defensive measure against the nuclear war maneuvers of the United States and the unjust act" of the International Atomic Energy

Agency. "We joined the treaty in 1985 with a view to getting the nuclear weapons out of South Korea and removing the nuclear threat to us, and we are now withdrawing from it because it is being abused to destroy our republic," the reports quoted Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju as saying.

Only after seven years of balking had North Korea begun allowing inspections of its nuclear plants.

The North has always denied it was trying to build nuclear weapons. The CIA has said North Korea has enough

nuclear material to produce at least one weapon. In New York, China, North Korea's key ally, kept the UN Security Council from taking a strong stand Friday on North Korea's action, diplomats said.

North Korea's UN Mission said Pyongyang gave formal notice of its decision Friday to the council and the foreign ministers of about 45 other treaty signatory nations.

In private consultations among council nations, Japan called the North's decision a threat to international security, and so a problem for the council.

British Ambassador David Hannay and said Japan drew considerable support. Other diplomats at the meeting, speaking on condition of anonymity, reported that China vehemently opposed Japan's stand, however. They quoted China's Chen Jian as saying the issue was no concern of the Security Council.

That meant that at a scheduled news conference, Council President Terence Christopher O'Brien of New Zealand could say only that he received North Korea's official notification and relayed it.

Hannay said he believed the council would try again next week.

The national peace force, he said, would be linked to the multi-party national peace accord.

Above this common structure, would be a commander appointed by the United Nations.

Britain, Lanka condemn bomb attacks

Troops take up positions in parts of Bombay

BOMBAY, Mar 13: Indian army troops took up positions in parts of Bombay, traumatised today by a string of deadly bomb blasts, which killed more than 200 people and injured 1,100, police said, reports AFP.

"The army has been deployed in some parts of the city," a police spokesman said, describing the move as a precautionary measure aimed at instilling confidence in residents and quelling potential violence.

He said the army would secure more areas of the city during the day.

Federal Home Minister SB Chavan, who has blamed the explosions on an 'international conspiracy', and minister of State for Internal Security Rajesh Pilot arrived here on Friday night from New Delhi.

India remains under a nationwide state of alert, declared by New Delhi on Friday.

Bomb experts also reached the city and were studying samples of explosives used in Friday's blasts.

"Only after the study is over will be known who was responsible," the police spokesman said.

He said no group had so far claimed responsibility for the bombings, adding: "It seems local organisations are not involved".

Police said the 15 blasts, which ripped through the stock exchange, a packed cin-

ema, luxury hotels and shopping centres, left at least 199 people dead and 1,108 injured, according to a police tally.

Hospital sources put the death toll at more than 200. The Press Trust of India (PTI) said no untoward incident took place Friday night in

the city of 12 million people, India's commercial capital. City police said they seized seven AK-47 assault rifles and 700 live cartridges from an abandoned car in central Bombay during Friday night.

Meanwhile, PTI reports from London: the John Major government and members of the British Parliament have deplored terrorist violence in India.

The issue came up in the House of Commons during question hour in the context of human rights situation in India.

Tobey Jessel, a Conservative MP and Chairman of the Indo-British parliamentary group, drew attention of the House to the acts of terrorism in India.

Another AFP report adds: Shri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa condemned today a wave of bomb attacks that killed more than 200 in the Indian city of Bombay.

Premadasa said in a brief message to Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao that he was "greatly distressed" to hear about the series of bomb explosions and the consequent loss of life and injuries to more than 1,000.

"My government and I, whilst condemning these acts of violence, would like to convey through you, our profound sympathies to the families of the bereaved, Premadasa said.



BOMBAY: Fire at Air India building in Bombay after a powerful car bomb explosion on Friday. The explosion was one of a series of blasts. — AFP/UNB photo

UN threatens action against UNITA

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 13: The Security Council on Friday threatened unspecified action against Angola's UNITA rebels for creating mayhem in the southern African nation through renewed fighting and failing to participate seriously in peace talks, reports Reuter.

A resolution, adopted unanimously, also asks Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to organise a meeting between the government and UNITA at the highest possible level before April 30.

Diplomats said Boutros-Ghali might arrange a session between Angolan President Eduardo Dos Santos and UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in London in early April en route to a tentatively planned trip to Cambodia.

But the resolution was care-

ful not to set a place and venue following UNITA's demand that the Secretary-General negotiate personally in New York or Geneva rather than his envoy, Margaret Anstee of Britain.

The resolution made clear that Anstee, whom Savimbi wants removed from her post, had the full backing of the Security Council and condemned all attacks against her.

The council threatened any party that jeopardises the peace accords with 'all appropriate measures' a veiled reference to sanctions against UNITA and diplomatic isolation of any government it might form.

UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, returned to the battle field after rejecting its defeat

by the government party in UN-run elections last September.

Anstee, the Chief UN representative in Angola has told the Security Council she thought Savimbi had about 60,000 armed men and controlled 105 out of 120 provinces or about 70 per cent of the country.

The United States and South Africa had supported and armed Savimbi almost since the country gained independence from Portugal against the government backed by the Soviet Union.

The mandate of the UN-Angola verification mission, which now has only 224 personnel in Angola expires at the end of April and the council must decide then whether to beef up the force or pull it out

and concentrate on medication only.

The resolution strongly condemns violations by UNITA of the peace accords, the results of the September elections, its failure to take part in political institutions, its withdrawal from the new Angolan armed forces and its seizure by force of provincial capital and municipalities.

It demands UNITA accept the results of the elections, and immediate ceasefire and the resumption of a "meaningful dialogue" under UN auspices.

UNITA and the ruling Popular movement for the liberation of Angola (MPLA) signed a 1991 accord in Rome pledging to end their 15-year-old civil war.

Clinton to meet Amato Apr 26

WASHINGTON, Mar 13: President Clinton will meet with Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato on April 26 in a visit that "underscores the importance of the close friendship" between the two countries, the White House said Friday, reports AP.

The president looks forward to welcoming Prime Minister Amato to Washington and to strengthening the ties between our two people," the announcement said.

29 billion rials spent for expansion of Haram Sharif

MAKKAH, Mar 13: Over 29 billion rials have so far been spent by the Kingdom on implementation of the grand expansion projects underway at the Haram Makki Sharif in Makkah and the Prophet's mosque in Medina, reports IINA.

This was stated by the minister of pilgrimage and endowments Shaikh Abdul Wahab Abdul Wasel to Saudi Daily Okaz recently. The minister said during the last 15 years the Kingdom extended financial aid plus unrepayable loans worth 77 billion US dollars to 35 Islamic states.

Prince Naruhito weds Owada June 9

TOKYO, Mar 13: Tokyo has set June 9 as the day when Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito weds commoner Masako Owada in the imperial palace, Japanese press reports said today, reports AFP.

The government has said it may declare the day a national holiday.

The Japanese public has waited with traditional patience for years for Prince Naruhito, 33, and marrying very late by Japanese norms, to find a suitable bride, then months for the official wedding date to be announced.

Both Prince Naruhito and Owada, 29, are to wear full ceremonial court robes.

The prince, elder son of Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and Owada, a Harvard-educated former diplomat will pay formal respects to the Emperor and Empress just after the ceremony.

The newly weds will then travel by limousine from the emperors palace to the princes palace in a procession through the streets of Tokyo in their first public appearance as man and wife.

The schedule is to be confirmed at an upcoming cabinet meeting, Jiji press said.

Their engagement, formalised at an imperial meeting in January.

US to shut down 31 military bases

WASHINGTON, Mar 13: Defence Secretary Les Aspin on Friday recommended the closure of 31 domestic military bases and a major realignment of other defence facilities in the United States and abroad, reports AFP.

Aspin said his proposal would save some 3.1 billion dollars a year beginning in 2000. The latest list combined with the base closings which began in 1988 would mean an annual savings of 5.6 billion dollars, he said.

Failure to close bases in line with reductions in budgets and personnel constitutes a double hit: resources are drained into bases we don't need, and therefore are not available to buy the things we need, Aspin said.

In addition to those all the closing list, 134 domestic facilities were slated for cut-backs or realignment over the next six years. Additionally, the Pentagon said it would end or reduce operations at 29 sites overseas.

The proposed cuts would shut a military base at Okinawa, Japan, and affect 28 sites in Europe: four in the Netherlands, two in Britain, eight in Greece and 14 in Germany.

Domestically, the cuts are expected to generate considerable political heat.

Accord a reasonable solution: Hekmatyar

ISLAMABAD, Mar 13: Afghan Prime Minister Designate Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has said that the Afghan peace accord is a reasonable solution to the Afghan issue, reports Xinhua.

Speaking on board the special plane of Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif while returning to Pakistan from Saudi Arabia, hardline Mujahideen leader Hekmatyar said the Afghan leadership will leave no stone unturned to ensure that it is abided by all.

He said he was particularly happy that polls for the constituent assembly will be held in six to eight months which will frame constitution for Afghanistan.

He expressed his optimism that Jamiat-Islami Commander Ahmed Shah Masood will abide by the accord signed by eight Mujahideen leaders including Afghan president Rabbani and Hezb-i-Islami chief Hekmatyar here on March 7.

He said he will complete formation of his cabinet within the stipulated period of two weeks.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who returned to Pakistan from Saudi Arabia together Friday, said the reiteration of com-

Unemployment problem acute in Morocco

RABAT, Mar 13: A slowing economy and a growing population mean Morocco's soaring unemployment may worsen over the coming decade, reports Reuter.

Unemployment has climbed from 8.8 per cent of the workforce in 1971 to 20.6 per cent in 1990-91, representing 1.1 million people, 800,000 of them in urban areas.

The situation is exacerbated by signs of slowing economic growth. According to the most optimistic official forecasts, more than 5.8 million job-seekers are expected in urban areas by the year 2000, but openings will not exceed 4.9 million.

ANC wants new army uniting political factions

PIETERMARITZBURG, South Africa, Mar 13: ANC President Nelson Mandela Friday called for a new South African army uniting warring political factions and commanded by a UN appointed general, reports AFP.

The national peace force, he said, would be linked to the multi-party national peace accord.

Above this common structure, would be a commander appointed by the United Nations.

Her gallic beauty makes Romeo a thief

LONDON: A lovesick British teenager rowed himself into hot water and a court appearance after stealing an inflatable dinghy in a bid to rejoin a French school girl with whom he had fallen in love, reports AFP.

The lovesick Romeo was ordered by a Cornwall court, in southwestern England, to complete 120 hours of community service after being convicted of theft.

The 18-year-old fell in love during an educational exchange visit by the French girl in the area. Inspired by her gallic beauty, he stole a three-metre (15-foot) inflatable dinghy fitted with an outboard motor and set off for France, equipped only with an tiny world map by which to navigate.

Musician jailed for sex without condom

COPENHAGEN, Mar 13: A street musician who carries the virus that causes AIDS was sentenced to prison Friday for failing to use a condom during sex acts with 23 women and two girls, reports AP.

It was the first time that Denmark's law against recklessly endangering another person's life was used in AIDS-related case.

None of the victims has contracted the HIV virus, which can lie dormant for many years before causing the fatal Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or AIDS.

Birth rate in Brazil has dropped dramatically

Birth rate in Brazil has dropped dramatically from usual six to three per married woman, because of sterilisation, in some cases under duress. Many unmarried girls were also sterilised by force. Picture shows a mother of four children eulogises the efficacy of sterilisation without which she would have given birth to 10 children, she claims.

Star TV photo



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