

De Klerk apologises for past racial injustice

DARLING, South Africa, Feb 18: President F W de Klerk apologised Friday for past racial injustice but accused the African National Congress of dwelling on it instead of working for a better future, reports AP.

"Fighting about that which is wrong in the past will not make a better future," de Klerk told about 300 people from the back of a flatbed truck in this rural town 100 kilometers (60 miles) outside Cape Town.

On a one-day campaign blitz through the western Cape region, de Klerk hammered away at the rival ANC's economic policies, which he said would destroy the nation's economy. The ANC, the nation's biggest black group and the expected winner of April 26-28 national elections, has released a manifesto calling for state interven-

tion and possibly nationalisation of some industries to help distribute wealth more evenly among blacks and whites.

De Klerk's National Party says the ANC plans widespread nationalisation.

"Only if the National Party does extremely well in this election will there be business confidence to attract investors. Foreign investors will not come and build factories if the threat of nationalisation hangs over them," he said at an earlier stop in the village of Mamre.

As in other campaign tours, de Klerk sought to portray the National Party as far different from the days when it instituted and enforced apartheid. "We say we are sorry about the mistakes of the past, but we broke the neck of apartheid. We are a new National Party," he told the crowd.

Convoys of artillery quitting hills around Sarajevo

Muslims won't welcome Russian troops to guard Serb weaponry

SARAJEVO, Feb 18: Bosnian Muslim Vice-president Ejup Ganic rejected on Thursday deployment of Russian UN troops to control Serb weaponry around Sarajevo, reports Reuters.

"As you know the Russians are not neutral in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina. They didn't go along with this NATO peace process. We're certainly not welcoming Russians to guard Serbian weapons. We would rather let them keep our weapons than let Serb weapons," he said.

Ganic was speaking to reporters after the Bosnian Serbs agreed to a Kremlin proposal to pull back their heavy

weaponry from around the city of Sarajevo, which they have besieged for the past 22 months.

Announcing Serb agreement, Moscow's special envoy Vitaly Churkin made no mention of Russian UN troops controlling Serb weaponry but spoke rather of Serbs pulling back from their siege positions.

AP adds, Convoys of Bosnian Serb artillery began withdrawing from the hills around Sarajevo in compliance with a NATO ultimatum to pull back or be bombed. "We do think the war in Sarajevo is finally over," Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic said.

Thursday's pullout reported by UN monitors followed a pledge by Karadzic to meet NATO's Sunday deadline. He made the concession under pressure from Russia.

Karadzic spoke with reporters after meeting with Vitaly Churkin, Russia's special envoy, in Pale, the Bosnian Serb stronghold southeast of Sarajevo.

Lt Col Bill Aikman, a UN spokesman in the shell-shattered Bosnian capital, would not specify what sort of equipment was being withdrawn, but said, "We're talking heavy weapons."

"Literally they're moving out in convoys, not in individual

vehicles," he said. "Clearly there's a major withdrawal going on."

He said UN monitors saw convoys of equipment moving off the hills, and UN commanders received information that withdrawals meeting NATO conditions would be completed within 36 hours.

Also Thursday, Moscow offered to send Russian UN peacekeeping troops to Sarajevo in a bid to head off NATO air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs. The offer was accepted, the United Nations said in New York.

Off the Record



Sylvester Stallone (L), co-owner of the Planet Hollywood restaurant chain, dots the eyes of a Chinese Lion to bring good luck during an inspection tour of the soon to open Planet Hollywood Hong Kong restaurant February 17. Planet Hollywood Hong Kong, billed as an experience inspired by film, food and fantasy, is due to open April '94. — AFP photo

Mandela, Arafat hold talks

THE HAGUE, Feb 18: Nelson Mandela, the ANC Chairman, and Yasser Arafat, leader of the PLO, held an hour-long meeting here this morning, official said, AFP reports.

Talks centred on a proposed visit by Mandela to Israel, according to a Dutch committee for the support of the democratic process in South Africa, quoting African National Congress (ANC) officials in Johannesburg.

Such a visit, however, would only take place once a peace accord was concluded between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the committee said.

The talks took place at the official residence here of Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers. Following the meeting, Arafat was to hold talks with Lubbers and deputy economic minister responsible for foreign trade Yvonne van Rooij on Dutch aid to the future autonomous Palestinian territories.



PLO leader Yasser Arafat (L) leaves the Catshuis with Secretary of State Yvonne van Rooij (C) and ANC leader Nelson Mandela (R), February 18. Mandela met Arafat for the first time in 1990 and the two met again after Arafat's arrival Thursday night in the Netherlands. — AFP photo

US fails to push Israel to quit Gaza, Jericho: Arafat

TUNIS, Feb 18: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat said on Thursday the United States had failed to push Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories and that the delay was dangerous, report Reuters.

"We are in need of a positive role from the American administration, not to leave us alone with the Israelis. Arafat told Reuters in an interview in his Tunis headquarters.

"I have clearly and repeatedly asked them to intervene many times, but they are interfering everywhere except with the Palestinians, he added.

How can the American administration and President Clinton accept Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's statements that dates are not scared, he said, "dates are the main part of the agreement which was signed under President Clinton's auspices in

the White House." Under terms of a peace accord signed with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in Washington on September 13, Israel was to have begun a pullout of troops from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho on December 13 as a prelude to Palestinian self rule.

Numerous rounds of negotiations since then have failed to resolve all remaining obstacles to the Israeli pullout. Arafat warned that delay was dangerous.

"We are in the third month now after the December 13 deadline and nothing has been implemented on the ground," the frustrated PLO leader said.

"The Israeli government is not in a hurry," he said. "The delay by the Israelis is dangerous, it will lead to confusion and will spread to the whole

area." In an interview with the New York Times published on Friday, Arafat said he had lunched from one disappointment to another since the accord with Israel was signed.

"The Israeli government is not in a hurry to implement this agreement," Arafat told the newspaper during an interview in Tunis. "But this is a dangerous policy that could backfire."

Arafat, in a separate interview with the Jordan Times, also accused Israeli troops of aiding the spread of arms in the occupied territories in a plot to create chaos in Palestinian self-rule areas.

"There is a very terrible trade of arms going on under the auspices of some Israeli officers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," he said.

Iran wants to mediate in Kashmir crisis

NICOSIA, Feb 18: Iran is prepared to act as a mediator in conflicts in Kashmir and Georgia, the official IRNA news agency reported on Thursday, says Reuters.

"Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said that Tehran is willing to step up its efforts to settle the Kashmir issue in order to regain the rights of the oppressed people of Kashmir," IRNA reported.

The agency said Rafsanjani was speaking in Tehran to a personal envoy of Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Kashmir is a Muslim-majority Himalayan region two-thirds controlled by India and one-third by Pakistan.

IRNA also reported the Vice-Speaker of Iran's Majlis (parliament), Hassan Rowhani, as telling visiting Georgian Foreign Minister Alexander Chikvaдзе that Iran was ready to act as mediator in his country.

BRIEFLY

Clinton suffering from eye infection:



President Clinton's left eye was puffy and bloodshot Thursday and the White House said he was suffering from an infection known as conjunctivitis, Reuters reports from Washington. Spokesman Arthur Jones said Clinton's condition had been diagnosed as conjunctivitis, a fairly common eye infection. During a picture-taking session with members of groups representing the elderly, Clinton's eye was puffy and red.

Week-long polls begin in Fiji:

The South Pacific nation Fiji began its week-long general elections today, Xinhua says from Canberra.

The election has been called by Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka after his government's 1994 budget was defeated in the parliament last November.

Rabuka came into power 20 months ago after winning a national election in May 1992. In normal cases, a government in Fiji has a 5-year term.

Cresson arrives in Jakarta:

Former French Prime Minister Edith Cresson arrived in Jakarta today for a five-day visit as chairwoman of a group of French companies, a French embassy official said, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Cresson is scheduled to meet several ministers including Minister for Industry and Trade Hartarto Sasrounarto, Transportation Minister Hayanto Dhanutirto, and tourism, Post and Telecommunication Joop Ave.

Grenade kills 9 in Philippines:

An unidentified assailant hurled a grenade inside a carnival compound in the southern Philippines Friday, killing nine people and injuring 22 others, police said, AP reports from Manila.

The national police headquarters in Manila had no other details on the incident. No suspects have been arrested.

13 feared drowned in Tanzania:

Thirteen people were feared drowned after an overloaded boat capsized on Lake Victoria, state-run radio Tanzania reported today, reports Reuters from Dar es Salaam.

The boat, with a capacity of 10 passengers, had 32 on board, as well as a cargo of maize, the radio said. It was hit by a big wave and capsized on Thursday. Police were searching for survivors.

Hosokawa plans to visit China:

Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa plans to make an official visit to China for three days starting March 19, the Mainichi newspaper reported today, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The two governments will finalize Hosokawa's itinerary during Chinese Vice Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to Japan from February 23 to March 3, the daily said.

52 killed in stampede at Chinese rly station

HONG KONG, Feb 18: More than 50 people were reportedly killed in a stampede at a train station in southern China's Hunan Province in a rush to get back to work following the end of the Lunar New Year celebration, a report said today, reports AFP.

At least 52 people were confirmed killed and more than 40 seriously injured in a stampede at Hengyang station late Tuesday as migrant workers attempted to board a south-bound train for the booming Guangdong province, the Beijing-backed Wen Wei Po newspaper said.

Wang Keying Vice Governor of Hunan Province, told the Tin-Tin Daily News that initial investigations revealed that the stampede had broken out after a some people slipped in their

haste to board the train and fell on pavement made slippery by rain.

Tin Tin said at least 29 of the victims were women workers aged between 18 and 20.

It is believed to be the first tragedy of its kind during the Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations when millions of people rush home and later return to work in their droves after the week-long holidays.

Provincial authorities were urged to take precautions in the rush which strained the train services.

Since Sunday, the number of migrant workers taking trains for Guangdong Province at Hengyang has swollen to 160,000 daily, the Wen Wei Po said.



Home owners shift through the debris of what was their house February 17. Which was leveled during a powerful earthquake in the south Sumatran province of Lampung, Indonesia February 16. The official death toll from the quake rose to 186, as road links reopened and medical personnel and relief supplies poured in. — AFP photo

Quake death toll rises to 186 in Indonesia

LIMA (Indonesia), Feb 18: The death toll from a strong earthquake which shook the south Sumatra Province of Lampung early Wednesday has risen to 186 people, with more than 2,000 injured, according to the relief centre here, reports AFP.

Statistics on the relief centre board show 186 dead and 2,389 others injured, 1,016 seriously.

The 'powerful quake also damaged 5,109 houses, 109 schools, 111 buildings of worship, 19 district health centres, destroyed 15 bridges and 34-kilometres (21 miles) of road.

West Lampung district chief, Umpu Singa, said that the damage was estimated to reach 117 billion rupiah (\$5 million dollars).

India extends ban on JKLF

NEW DELHI, Feb 18: India has extended the official ban on the separatist Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) for two more years, a government spokesman said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The government will soon issue a fresh notification re-declaring the JKLF as an unlawful organisation under the unlawful activities prevention act," he said.

The earlier notification banning the group was issued on February 18, 1992, and expires on Friday.

While all separatist groups in the strife-torn northern state remain banned, JKLF is the only group outlawed by the federal government. The others have been banned by the local government.

India has been battling a four-year old separatist movement in Jammu and Kashmir.



Liz to undergo hip replacement surgery

NEW YORK, Feb 18: Elizabeth Taylor, one of Hollywood's most glamorous super stars, will undergo hip replacement surgery and complete recovery may take up to two years, the surgeon conducting the operation said Thursday, reports Reuters.

Taylor will check into a Los Angeles hospital in early March for surgery to overcome an ailment which limits her ability to walk without pain for any considerable distance. Dr John Moreland said in a statement released by her publicist.

The operation, which will keep her on crutches or a walker for two months, adds to her life time of woes publicised in headline stories — eight marriages, weight problems, drugs and alcohol.

Taylor's hip ailment was aggravated when she slipped on the ice during a Swiss vacation in January.

Georgia confirms death of Gamsakhurdia

SENAKI (Georgia), Feb 18: Georgia confirmed the death of ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, saying his body was dug up on Thursday from a shallow grave in western Georgia for reburial in southern Russia, reports Reuters.

A joint commission from Georgia and Russia's Chechnya region, and accompanying journalists, identified the partially decomposed body, which had a gunshot wound through the head. It was the first confirmation that Gamsakhurdia was dead.

Asia being used as dumping place for toxic waste: Greenpeace

MANILA, Feb 18: Asian countries are being used as dumping grounds for toxic wastes by rich nations, the environmental group Greenpeace said Friday, reports AP.

Simon Divecha, toxic trade campaigner for Greenpeace, said such wastes are being exported to poor countries in the guise of harmless recyclable materials such as plastic.

"The reality of it is that these shipments are actually creating quite a substantial environmental, health and safety danger in less industrialised countries," Divecha said.

He said despite an interna-

tional convention which bans the transfer of toxic wastes from one country or another, the export continues because a "loophole" allows recycling or reprocessing by the importing country.

He also criticised the 1989 Basel Convention for setting a "double standard" by calling on poor nations to stop importing toxic wastes but failing to ban their export from rich countries.

Divecha said 24 of the richest countries, including the United States, Japan, Germany and Australia, produce 98 per cent of the world's hazardous

waste. These countries, looking for "easy, cheap disposal options," have promised large amounts of money to poor countries to accept their waste, he said.

Divecha is in the Philippines to prepare for a visit by the ship MV Greenpeace next week.

The ship has visited Singapore and Malaysia and is now in Indonesia to raise public awareness about hazardous waste.

Angie Brabant, chief of the Hazardous and Toxic Waste Unit of the Philippine Environmental Management Bureau,

said a law banning the import of toxic waste for any purpose was passed by the Philippines in 1990.

Ms Brabant said her agency has successfully blocked the entry of industrial sludge and electrical transformers that contained harmful substances, but monitoring other toxic waste imports was difficult.

She said one difficulty was caused by the Basel Convention's vague definition of hazardous waste.

"What is hazardous to one country may not be hazardous to another country," she said.

citing used petroleum that is reprocessed in the Philippines into bunker fuel.

Greenpeace says that in 1986 only three countries banned imports of toxic materials but the number has risen to 103, forcing waste exporters to look to Asia as a region largely open to waste imports.

"Asia is clearly the final frontier for western waste traders," Divecha said.

The group claims that between 1990 and 1993, Australia, Canada, Germany, Britain and the United States shipped more than 5.4 million

tons of toxic waste to Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand.

More than 50,000 tons of lead wastes have been shipped to the 11 Asian countries, with the Philippines and Indonesia being the main importers, it said.

Over 100,000 tons of plastic waste also went to the same 11 countries, with Hong Kong, India, Indonesia and the Philippines getting the most, the group said.