

BRIEFLY

Blast kills 12 miners in Ukraine:

At least 12 miners were killed and six seriously injured in a gas explosion at a coal mine in Eastern Ukraine, mining officials said on Monday. Reuter reports from Kiev.

One miner was also missing and feared dead after the blast on Sunday in the Donetsk mining region. The officials gave no details.

The explosion during maintenance work was the latest in a series of mining accidents in Ukraine. The worst killed 157 miners in the Lugansk region in 1992.

Italy seizes 5.5 tonnes of cocaine:

Italian police confiscated 5.5 tonnes of cocaine from a truck in Europe's largest drug seizure yet, officials said Monday. AFP reports from Turin, Italy.

The cocaine, with a street value of around 300 million dollars, was found when truck was stopped on a road in Northern Italy overnight Saturday, police in Turin said.

First woman judge in Austria:

Austria on Monday appointed the first woman judge in its Constitutional Court, the country's highest court of appeal. Reuter reports from Vienna.

President Thomas Klestil named Lisbeth Lass, a 53-year-old lawyer from the western province of Tyrol, to the 12-member court panel, the President's office said in a statement.

Last week, Germany appointed its first woman judge to its top court.

Train mishap claims 7 in India:

A freight train derailed killing seven residents of a slum located near the tracks in the Bombay suburb of Thane, the United News of India reported Tuesday, AFP says from New Delhi.

Suburban train services were suspended and long-distance trains diverted following the accident Monday evening, the news agency said. Five women were among the seven dead.

2 Palestinians shot dead in Gaza:

Israeli soldiers shot dead two wanted Palestinians who refused an order to stop their car in the occupied Gaza Strip on Tuesday, Israel radio said. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Soldiers opened fire, killing two of the passengers, when the driver refused an order to stop near the Strip's main erez checkpoint early on Tuesday, the radio said.

"During an investigation it became clear they were wanted," the radio said. It offered no further details.

Ex-Vietnamese minister on trial:

Former Energy Minister Vu Ngoc Hai, deputy minister Le Liem, and seven other defendants have gone on trial in the Supreme People's Court on charges related to fraud and corruption, AP reports from Hanoi.

Hai and others from the ministry and VINAPOL Metals Supply Co are charged with fraud related to the supply of materials for the prestigious north-south 500 kilovolt high power transmission line.

Hai is charged with taking advantage of his position during the course of his work which resulted in heavy losses to the state budget. Hai's trial was originally scheduled for Jan 15, but was reportedly postponed after Hai threatened some unspecified surprises.

DPRK accuses ROK of N-waste dumping

TOKYO, Mar 8: North Korea has renewed charges that its rival South Korea dumped a large amount of nuclear waste in the sea in the seven years through 1992, the North's official media said Tuesday, reports AP.

The Korean Central News Agency, monitored in Tokyo, said the North's latest charges were made Monday by Hwang Sang Chun, chairman of the State Environmental Commission.

It said Hwang, speaking at a news conference in Pyongyang, alleged that South Korea dumped a total of 29,513 curies of liquid waste, 84,737 curies of

NASA plans 78 shuttle flights over next 9 years

WASHINGTON, Mar 8: NASA is planning 78 shuttle flights over the next nine years, including 10 visits to Russia's Mir space station and 30 missions devoted to building a future orbiting station, according to an internal report, says AP.

The first space station construction mission is to begin in December 1997 and will be followed by three to six flights a year, space news magazine reported Monday.

The publication released a report by the national aeronautics and space administration, which periodically reviews its long-range plans.

The space shuttle Discovery is stated to be the first to hook up with the Mir in January and will alternate visits to the Russian station with Atlantis until 1997. During four of those trips, the shuttles will dock at the station and exchange equipment.

40 feared dead in Lake Victoria ferry capsiz

NAIROBI, Mar 8: More than 40 people were feared drowned on Monday after a passenger ferry capsized on Lake Victoria in a storm, Kenyan television said, reports Reuter.

It said about 40 rescue vessels had arrived at the scene Sunday near Sikri Island, six km (four miles) from Shoma bay town on the Eastern Kenyan shore of the lake.

The report said 24 bodies had so far been recovered but it was feared that the death toll was at least 47.

International
Israel's official inquiry into Hebron carnage begins

JERUSALEM, Mar 8: Top army brass face questioning Tuesday when a committee of inquiry opens its investigation into the Hebron mosque massacre, reports AP.

The five-member independent commission is headed by President of the Supreme Court Meir Shamgar, and includes an Israeli Arab judge and a retired army chief-of-staff.

Senior military officers have reportedly sought legal advice on how to cooperate with the committee, according to Israeli television.

They apparently learned the lessons after a commission found in 1982 that top officers and ministers bore indirect

responsibility for a massacre of Palestinians in Beirut by Israel's Christian militia allies. It recommended some be dismissed.

While investigating commissions have no formal power to enforce their recommendations, Israeli governments traditionally have acted on their findings.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who also serves as defence minister, and Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, the military chief of staff, are expected to be summoned to testify.

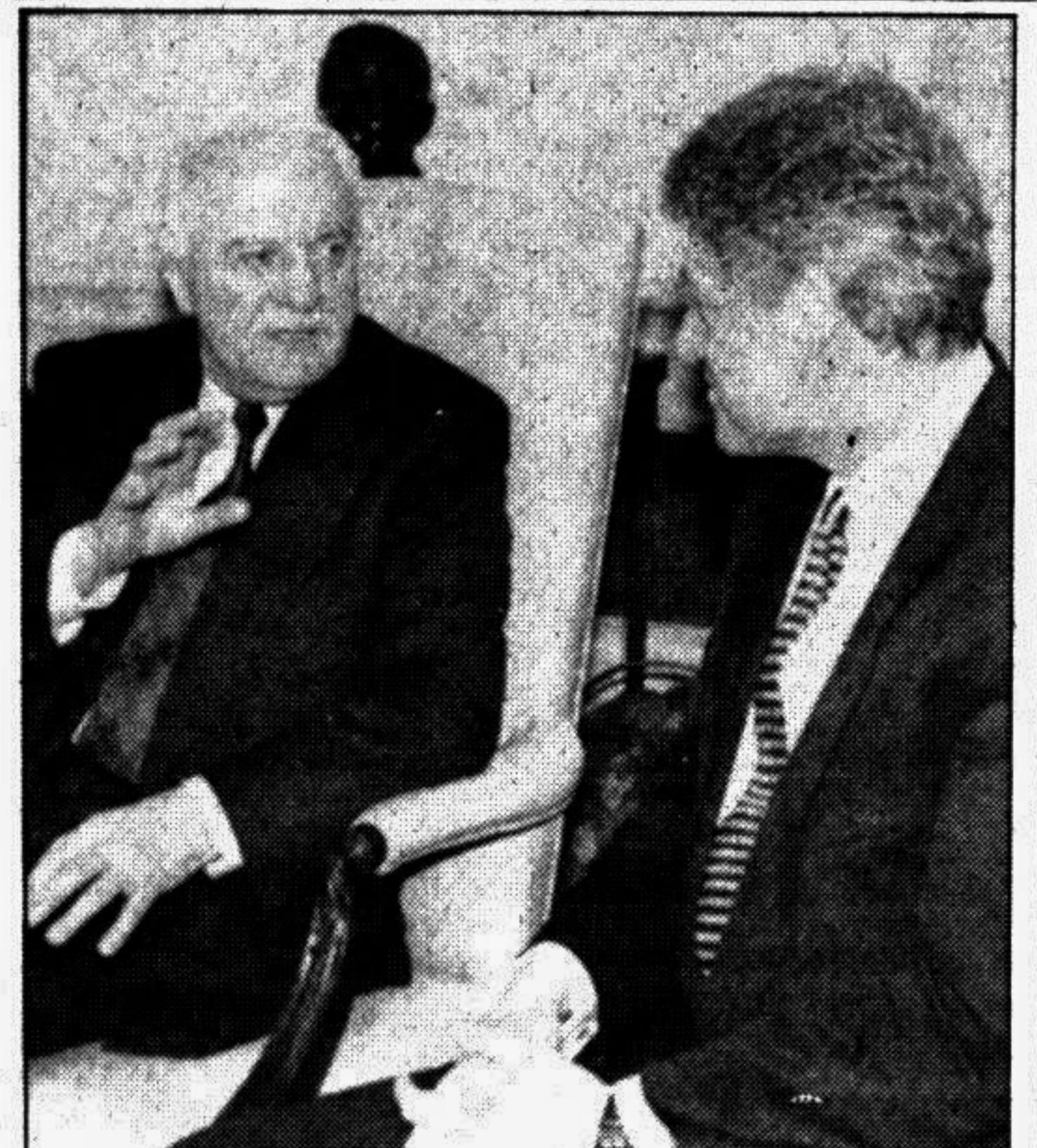
The committee of inquiry began collecting documents last week and printed advertisements in local newspapers seeking witnesses to the

February 25 attack, in which a Jewish settler cut down 30 Muslims as they prayed in the Cave of the Patriarch, a site holy to both Jews and Muslims.

The attack was the bloodiest since Israel captured the territories in 1967. Another 29 people, all but two Palestinians, have been killed since the massacre. More than 450 people, nearly all Arabs have been wounded.

The committee requested and received Monday a copy of the army's own investigation into the Hebron massacre, the TV said.

Maj. Gen. Dani Yatom, head of the army's central command, will testify and is likely to be asked to explain the



US President Bill Clinton (R) meets with Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze (L) in the Oval Office at the White House March 7. President Clinton offered 70 million USD in humanitarian and technical assistance to help the former Soviet republic. — AFP photo

Kashmiris observe strike during visit by envoys

SRINAGAR, Mar 8: War-torn Kashmir valley held a general strike Tuesday in an effort to show 11 visiting ambassadors that the people all want independence from India, reports AP.

The one-day strike, which closed stores, schools and businesses, also was called to demand that India allow the ambassadors to meet with Kashmiris and their separatist leaders.

The diplomats arrived Monday on a three-day visit to Jammu-Kashmir state, where more than 8,200 people have died in a guerrilla war for independence in the last four years.

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As the New Delhi-based ambassadors arrived in Srinagar on Monday, police used batons and rifle butts to attack a group of lawyers who sought to meet the ambassadors. Witnesses said about 15 people, including some news photographers, were injured.

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