

BRIEFLY

Ruling party wins Ugandan polls: The ruling party of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has won an absolute majority in elections to a new constituent assembly, according to official figures released Saturday, AFP reports from Kampala.

With all the results of the 214 elected seats announced, Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) has won 120 seats in the new assembly, according to counts by political groups, while 74 seats were won by opposition candidates.

Flood hits East Java: More than 100,000 Indonesians were forced to spend the holiday weekend away from their villages after floods caused by torrential rains hit several districts in East Java, an official said yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

A local government official said by telephone from Bojonegoro in East Java, 570 km (355 miles) east of Jakarta, that although flood waters had started to subside, residents from about 150 villages were still unable to return home.

Pope holds Easter prayer: Pope John Paul II held an Easter vigil service of hymn and prayer Saturday evening in St. Peter's Basilica, AP reports from Vatican.

The pontiff baptized 27 people from various countries during the ceremony. They came from Italy, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Guatemala, Peru, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland.

Russia to work for ME peace: Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad met in Damascus Saturday with Russian first Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who handed Al-Assad a message from Russian President Boris Yeltsin on the Middle East peace process, Xinhua reports from Damascus.

A Syrian presidency spokesman said after the meeting that the Russian envoy expressed his country's interest in the Middle East peace process, as well as its willingness to play an active role in this regard.

Fatah member killed in Gaza: A member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's mainstream Fatah faction was killed on Saturday when a bomb he was preparing exploded near an Israeli army camp in the occupied Gaza Strip, Arab sources said, Reuter reports from Gaza.

The Fatah hawks announced over loudspeakers that Khalid Al-Halabi, 28, was "a martyr" killed in action in the Khan Yunis refugee camp. The Israeli army said it was checking the report.

ROK FM in Tokyo: South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung Joo arrived in Tokyo yesterday, winding up talks with US leaders in Washington on North Korea's suspected nuclear development, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Mubarak okays deaths of 9: President Hosni Mubarak has approved the death sentences of nine Muslim extremists for trying to assassinate Prime Minister Atef Sedki, AP reports from Cairo.

Military sources said Mubarak upheld the sentences Saturday. It was not known when the hangings would be carried out.

Israel to free more Palestinians

JERUSALEM, Apr 3: An unspecified number of Palestinians will soon be allowed to return to the occupied territories and more prisoners will be set free, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin announced today, reports AP.

meanwhile state radio reported that the first 300 Palestinian policemen will be deployed in the second week of April as moves to implement the September 13 autonomy deal gathered pace.

"In the framework of negotiations on the implementation of autonomy in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, we are going to discuss the release of prisoners, the return of Palestinians who in the past were wanted or expelled," Rabin told state radio.

"These measures will concern only those who, wanted or expelled, do not have blood on their hands, grassroots militants and not frontline political leaders," Rabin explained.

The autonomy negotiations were due to resume in Cairo today after the rupture caused by the February 25 Hebron Mosque massacre.

The radio added that 32 Palestinians from PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement would be allowed to return home in the coming days. Among them would be Mohammad Dahlan, Arafat's adviser on the Gaza Strip, and Jibril Rajub, his West Bank adviser.

However, Rajub told army radio in an interview from PLO headquarters in Tunis that he and Dahlan would come back after two weeks.

"A first group of 46 Palestinians who were expelled or wanted will come back on Wednesday or Thursday," Rajub said.

State radio went on to say that six Palestinian policemen will cross into the Gaza Strip on Tuesday to be followed by 300 more the following week.

US official visits India, Pakistan this week to cool tension

WASHINGTON, Apr 3: Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott heads to India and Pakistan this week to cool smouldering tensions between Washington and South Asia over military and diplomatic matters, reports AFP.

It will be Talbott's first trip abroad as Deputy Secretary and is intended to show that the administration of President Bill Clinton has a keen interest in India, the world's biggest democracy and a burgeoning economy.

Talbott plans to spend two days in each country, arriving in New Delhi on Wednesday and Islamabad on Friday. He will then travel to Brussels, Poland and Slovakia.

Talbott will need deft diplomacy to quell India's ire over US plans to deliver 38 F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan and its indignation over Washington's slug-

gishness in naming an ambassador to such a key post.

Respected career diplomat and Undersecretary of Defence for Policy Frank Wisner has reportedly been tipped as the next Ambassador to India and the White House is preparing to announce it, a State Department official said.

India has strongly objected to the Clinton administration waiving its US policy barring weapons to be sold to Pakistan while it is suspected of developing nuclear weapons.

To ease India's anxiety, Washington will insist that Islamabad agree to a verifiable cap on the production of nuclear weapons materials before it gets the jets, said a State Department official who asked not to be identified.

India worries the sale of advanced fighters to its historic rival will change the region's

power equation, and it wants any kind of regional nuclear agreements to include China.

Both India and Pakistan are suspected of developing nuclear weapons and have refused to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty.

It is hoped the caps will "go a long way in improving the nuclear situation in South Asia," said the official. "We're talking to the Indians about it. We hope they see this as a step forward."

India has a two-to-one air superiority over Pakistan and the delivery of the F-16 fighter jets, which Islamabad ordered five years ago and has since been making payments on, would not erode India's supremacy, the official said.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947, two of them over Kashmir. Nearly 9,000 people, includ-

ing some 3,800 suspected militants, have died in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, since Muslim militants launched a campaign for an end to Indian rule in 1989.

Washington has not changed its position on Kashmir, the State Department official insisted, despite reports that Washington had leaned on Pakistan for supporting terrorists in Kashmir and questioned India's sovereignty there.

The United States considers Kashmir to be disputed territory and will not press any solution, the official said, adding that India and Pakistan must bilaterally resolve the conflict.

But any solution, the official said, "has to, in some way, take into account the wishes of the Kashmir people."

Foreign Investment and Trade will also figure prominently on Talbott's agenda.



Afghan children outside the Presidential Palace in Kabul protest the factional war on Saturday — currently in its 13th consecutive week — on the occasion of the visit of United Nations special peace envoy Mahmud Al-Mestiri. — AFP photo

Rabbani ready to accept permanent ceasefire

ISLAMABAD, APR 3: Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani said yesterday in Kabul that he is ready to accept a permanent and unconditional ceasefire, reports Xinhua.

The Afghan president made the remarks after talks with UN special envoy Mahmud Mestiri who arrived in the Afghan capital yesterday as the head of a UN special mission in a bid to seek an end to the factional fighting in Afghanistan, said a report from Kabul.

Rabbani said he hoped the other side, led by his main rival Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, would follow his lead on the ceasefire, stop their bombardment of Kabul and allow the passage of relief supplies to the city.

But he did not mention whether he will resign or not, which Hekmatyar has been insisting as a pre-condition for a permanent ceasefire.

The UN special mission will spend three days in Kabul.

'North Korea nearly doubles its plutonium production'

WASHINGTON, Apr 3: North Korea nearly doubled its plutonium capacity while keeping international inspectors at bay during protracted negotiations at the United Nations, the Washington Post reported, says AFP.

North Korea is "poised to go forward" with its ambition to develop a nuclear power, the newspaper's Saturday edition quoted a US official as saying.

North Koreans have been steadily constructing at its Yongbyon site a new reprocessing line — from which plutonium is extracted from spent nuclear fuel — and are expected to finish it in about six months, sources told the Post.

Once finished, the new line would effectively double North Korea's plutonium production, though North Korea's efforts could be delayed by the difficulty in importing the instruments needed to complete the line, the Post reported.

The State Department spokeswoman Sondra McCarty called the Post report "disturbing," though she said it "doesn't come as a surprise."

But she added, "we don't have evidence that North Korea has, in fact, reprocessed additional plutonium."

Evidence that the programme is expanding was collected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors during their March visit to Yongbyon and disclosed in a closed-door session of the UN Security Council, the Post said.

However, IAEA Director Hans Blix left out key details from the written public report because of the agency's uncertainty about Pyongyang's motivations, officials told the Post.

placement load of nuclear fuel, according to the Post.

The IAEA has demanded that the spent fuel be withdrawn no later than July and has asked that it be allowed to inspect the procedure to ensure that plutonium has not been extracted from the fuel.

The Central Intelligence Agency believes that North Korea has enough plutonium for at least one nuclear weapon. Pyongyang had denied it is building a nuclear weapon.

Some US officials said North Korea's strategy was to pursue its nuclear programme as negotiations continue at the United Nations, while other contended Pyongyang wanted to increase its bargaining power, the Post said.

"This clearly is a signal that should various things not be forthcoming, North Korea will, just go down this particular 'bomb-building road', a diplomatic official told the Post.



ANC President Nelson Mandela greets enthusiastic Muslim supporters in Cape Town on Saturday during the tricentenary celebrations of Islam in South Africa. — AFP photo

Former Nazi guard ordered to leave US

MILWAUKEE, Apr 3: A man already stripped of his US citizenship for trying to hide his past as a Nazi guard has been ordered to leave the country, reports AP.

Anton Tittjung, 69, of Greenfield has until April 29 to choose a country to which he will be deported, according to an order Friday by US Immigration Judge G. MacKenzie Rast in Chicago.

If Tittjung doesn't choose a country, he will be deported to Croatia, where he was born.

Tittjung was stripped of his citizenship in December 1990 after a federal judge in Milwaukee ruled he had lied about his background to gain entry to the United States in 1952. He became a citizen in 1974.

Tittjung, was an armed guard at the Mauthausen concentration camp near Linz, Austria, during World War II, according to the US Justice Department. Tittjung denies he was a Nazi.

Pakistan expelled 3000 Arabs last year

ISLAMABAD, Apr 3: Pakistan expelled some 3,000 Arabs including 500 Egyptians last year, reports Xinhua.

This was disclosed by federal Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Syed Iqbal Haider in Karachi, capital of Sindh province, yesterday on his return from an official visit to Egypt.

"There exists no justification for their presence in the country," he said while talking to newsmen.

A large number of Arabs came to Pakistan during the war in neighbouring Afghanistan against the invasion of the former Soviet Union, and the majority participated in the war.

After the end of the war in 1989, most of these Arabs continued to stay in Pakistan's

Northwest Frontier Province and some were accused of involvement in terrorist activities.

Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia have urged Pakistan to hand over their nationals to them for prosecution which Pakistan did not accept as it has no extradition treaties with these countries.

However, the government has ordered the deportation of these illegal foreigners.

"Pakistan denounces terrorism in all forms," the Law Minister said.

According to him, Pakistan and Egypt have agreed to sign an extradition treaty shortly to extradite illegal Egyptians living in Pakistan who are accused by the Egyptian government of ordering and financing Islamic militant attacks on Egypt over the last two years.

Georgia may sign truce accord today

LONDON, Apr 3: Georgian authorities and rebels from the breakaway region of Abkhazia are expected to sign a ceasefire agreement tomorrow, the BBC monitoring service reported here Saturday quoting Russian television, says AFP.

The two sides have agreed to a ceasefire in an area of eastern Abkhazia.

Following talks mediated by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Pastukhov in Moscow this week, the two sides would sign an accord on Monday.

Arab, Jewish women living in fear in the heart of Hebron

HEBRON, Apr 3: Widad Jaabari and Shelli Karzen are two mothers, an Arab and a Jew, living in fear in the heart of Hebron, reports Reuter.

Jaabari lost her husband in the Hebron Mosque massacre on February 25, one of 30 Muslim worshippers gunned down by Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein.

Karzen is one of 400 Jews settled among 110,000 Arabs in the occupied West Bank town. Arab gunmen have killed Jews there. Arab youngsters stone her children.

The two women have not met, but both say that living in

fear is unbearable. I live with my children in terror for being surrounded by settlers, said Jaabari, a mother of eight still mourning her husband.

I gather my children around me at night and we all sleep in the corridor, not in our bedrooms. We are afraid they might barge in and kill us, she said.

The Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba, where Goldstein lived, is only 100 metres (yards) from her house. A fence separates the settlement from her garden. She said a Kiryat Arba road was built on land belonging to her husband's family.

Since the massacre Jaabari has kept her window shutters overlooking the settlement firmly shut.

Last week as Jaabari walked in her garden, a Jewish woman holding a baby looked at her from an apartment window and motioned with a finger across her neck as if to signal the Arab woman would be better off dead.

I have not been able to sleep ever since from fear, Jaabari said with tears welling up.

The PLO suspended peace talks over the massacre, demanding international protection, a dismantling of settlers and

the dismantling of some settlements.

Karzen immigrated to Israel from the United States 10 years ago and moved a short time later with her family to the Jewish enclave of Tel Rumeida, home to only seven families, in the heart of Hebron.

"I'm not happy, Palestinians are suffering but I wish the Arab population can say the same thing," she said while her husband Uri walked into the room with a rifle strapped over his shoulder.

"We are the ones being threatened, and have protection and hide behind plastic win-

African Muslims celebrate 300 years of culture

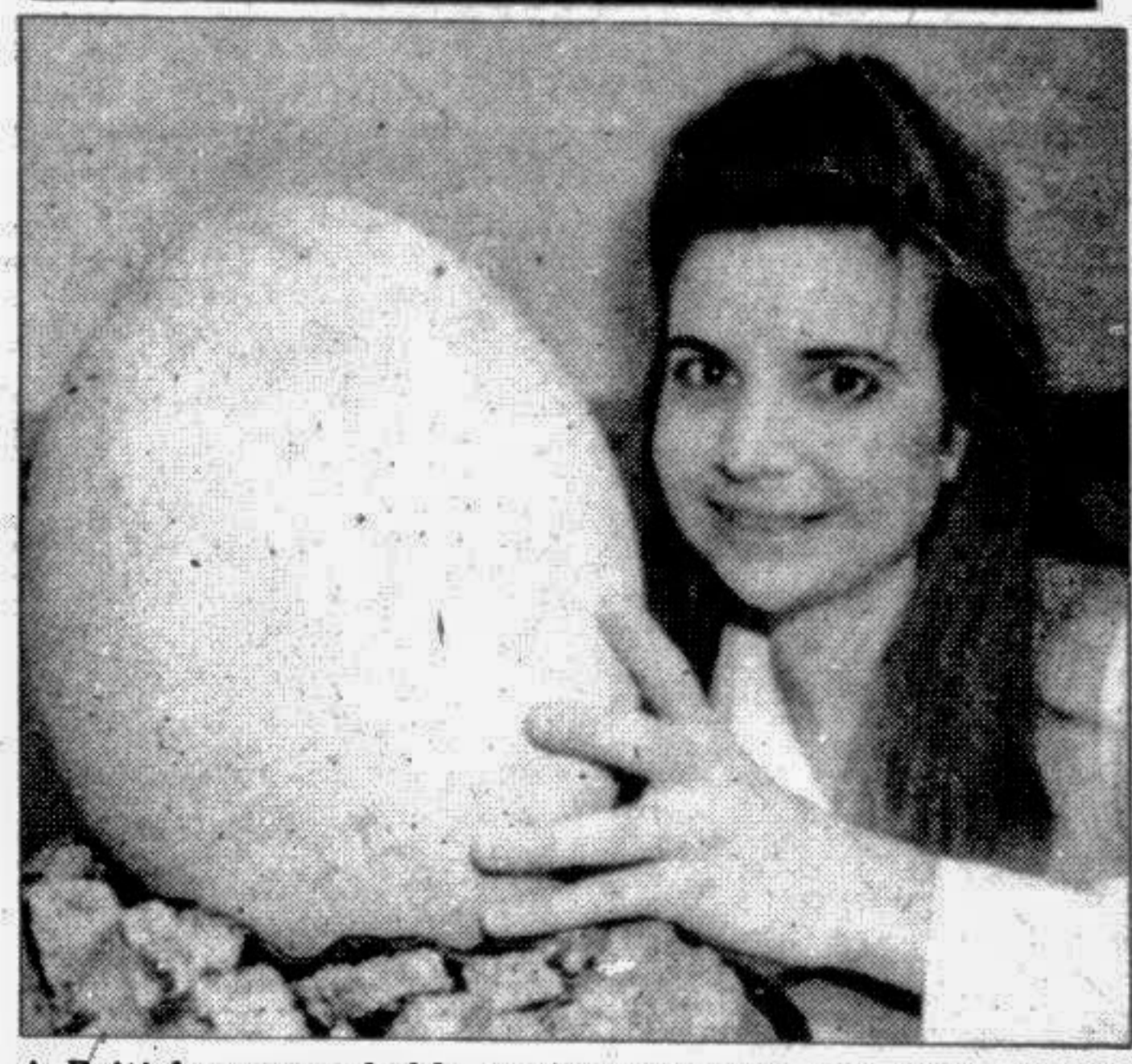
CAPE TOWN, Apr 3: African National Congress President Nelson Mandela pledged on Saturday to safeguard religious freedom in South Africa under ANC rule, reports Reuter.

Addressing 10,000 Muslims celebrating 300 years of their culture in South Africa, Mandela, who is expected to be the country's first black president after all-race elections this month, said:

"All invasions on the rights of Muslims in South Africa freely to practise their religion must be zealously resisted in the new South Africa."

He said the descendants of Sheikh Yusuf, who arrived on April 2, 1694, should be liberated from the restrictions placed on their religion by a racist government.

Off the Record



A British woman holds on Saturday the egg of the Great Elephant Bird of Madagascar which is more than 30 cms long and big enough to hold seven ostrich eggs or 180 chicken eggs. The 3-metre bird was last reported on the Indian Ocean island in 1658. Bonhams of London will auction the egg April 8. — AFP photo

Woman strip-searched in public!

TORONTO: Canadian authorities will launch an investigation into allegations that a Jamaican tourist was publicly strip-searched by police on a street corner, reports AP.

Audrey Smith, 39, will be flown to Toronto from her home in Jamaica at taxpayers' expense because she is required to be at the inquiry beginning April 25, said a spokesman for Ontario police complaints commissioner Clare Lewis.

Smith, a mother of four, alleged she was strip-searched on a street corner in full view of passers-by last August 10 after police accused her of drug possession.

She said she was handcuffed, thrown into a police cruiser, taken out, ordered against a wall and searched by a female officer.

Three officers face discreditable conduct and other allegations. They deny the accusations.

Toronto police chief William McCormack said last October he would refer the matter to a public inquiry after reading a confidential 108-page police report on the incident.

Bees chase BJP men

NEW DELHI: At least 25 opposition activists were stung by bees during a rally Saturday in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, says AFP.

The bees attacked scores of members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), (Indian People's Party) at a village some 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the town of Raghogarh, the news agency said.

Local BJP leader Sundar Lal Patwa escaped by covering himself with a blanket, while his guards huddled under a cot. Several BJP members fled, chased by hundreds of bees. At least 25 of them were stung, PTI said.

On Thursday, a swarm of bees swooped down on a stadium in the northern city of Jammu while a local field hockey match was in progress, stinging players and spectators and forcing the tie's cancellation amid chaos.

Meanwhile Reuter reports from Mexico City: A swarm of African bees attacked more than 20 bathers on a Pacific beach in the northwestern Mexican state of Sinaloa, the state news agency Notimex said Sunday.

Low-key royal marriage

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth's youngest son Prince Edward will marry his girlfriend, Sophie Rhys-Jones, in a low-key ceremony this summer, the Sunday Express reported, says Reuter.

The newspaper said senior palace sources say preparations are well advanced for a wedding in late July or early August. "It will be a low-key wedding and will take place before the first leaves fall," the Sunday Express quoted an unnamed peer with close connection to the royal family as saying.

There was no immediate comment from Buckingham Palace. On Saturday, the couple were reported on their way to Windsor Castle, west of London, where the Queen and family traditionally spend several weeks at Easter.

Edward, 30, is the queen's only unmarried child. The other three — her Prince Charles, Princess Anne and Prince Andrew — have had troubled marriages.

South Korean women daily

SEOUL: One in 10 married South Korean women is beaten by her husband almost every day, according to a survey published Sunday, reports Reuter.

About 30 per cent of the 340 respondents said they were suffering violence at the hands of their spouses once a month on the average.

The survey, conducted by the Korea women's hotline, was published by the Korea Times.

The newspaper said women's groups in South Korea's male-oriented society were staging a campaign to "save the life of Lee Sun-Sim".

Lee, 41, has recently been charged with the murder of her husband, who is alleged to have beaten her for 20 years since their marriage, the newspaper said.

Sculpture taken for recycling?

SAN FRANCISCO: Art, like junk, is often in the eyes of the beholder, reports AP.

That's exactly what worries sculptor William Wareham, whose 800-pound (360-kilo) sculpture made out of junk metal has vanished.

The 9-foot (2.7-meter) tall piece, Salmon Run, was built from crushed water heaters and a ship's ladder. It was placed on a steel pedestal outside the offices of Norcal Waste Systems, but disappeared three weeks ago.

Wareham fears that garbage collectors may have carted it off for the city's extensive scrap metal recycling programme. "It may have been cut up by now," he said.

Norcal workers didn't tell police the statue was missing right away because they mistakenly thought it had been taken away to be cleaned.

On Friday, Wareham offered a 1,000 dollars reward for the artwork's return in good condition. It has been valued at 18,000 dollars.

Guatemalan court president gunned down

GUATEMALA CITY, Apr 3: The president of Guatemala's constitutional court, gunned down here around midnight in a drive-by shooting, died Saturday, officials said, reports AFP.

Eduardo Epanimonondas Gonzalez, 62, died in surgery at hospital where he was taken after five gunmen in a red car opened fire on him as he was driving in downtown Guatemala City, said his wife Wendy, who was in the car with their son.