

BRIEFLY

De Klerk goes to Britain May 18:

South Africa's new Deputy President, Frederik de Klerk, will meet Prime Minister John Major as part of a four-day visit to Britain that starts on May 18, his office said on Wednesday. AFP reports from Pretoria.

De Klerk was invited to Britain in his capacity as joint Nobel Peace Prize to give a lecture at the Royal Albert Hall on May 20, said his spokesman.

De Klerk, and the man who replaced him Tuesday as President, Nelson Mandela, received the award for 1993.

Chinese dissident freed on parole:

Zhang Ruiyu, a Chinese dissident sentenced to four years jail in 1991, has been released on parole, the official news agency Xinhua said Thursday. AFP reports from Beijing.

Zhang, a physical education teacher and Roman Catholic, had been arrested in August 1990 on charges of seeking to overthrow the government through her religious activities, it said.

She was released from jail in Fujian province, Southeastern China, for good behaviour, it said.

Christopher to visit ME:

Secretary of State Warren Christopher plans another visit to the Middle East for more talks with Syria and Israel but expects no imminent breakthrough in the peace process, the State Department said Wednesday. AFP reports from Washington.

State Department spokesman Michael McCurry gave no date for Christopher's next round of discussions nor his itinerary.

After his last visit to the region, Christopher said he believed Syria and Israel were moving into a new phase in their discussions despite the lack of an accord on the Golan Heights, which Israel seized in 1967 and later annexed.

Quakes shake W Sumatra:

Two earthquakes measuring 6.2 and 5.9 on the open-ended Richter scale have rocked Indonesia's West Sumatra province but there were no reports of casualties, an official said yesterday. Reuter reports from Jakarta.

Both quakes were centred in the Indian Ocean southeast of Padang, the capital city of west Sumatra province, which was jolted by two big quakes earlier this month. Saudi, a meteorological and geophysical agency official in West Sumatra's Padangpanjang, told Reuter.

"There are no problems as far as the main province of West Sumatra is concerned. But all communication with Siberut Island, which lies closer to the epicentre of both quakes, has been cut off," he said by telephone.

Serbs to free 11 Frenchmen:

French aid workers detained by Bosnian Serbs will be released soon, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic was quoted as saying Thursday. AP reports from Belgrade.

The Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA quoted him as promising the release of the 11 after appeals by Lord David Owen, the European Union mediator for Bosnian peace talks.

The 11 detainees were working for the private relief group Premiere Urgence.



Haiti's Supreme Court President Emile Jonassaint takes the oath as he is sworn in as Haiti's interim president Wednesday during a solemn ceremony at Parliament. Jonassaint, 81, was appointed by a Senate faction opposed to the return of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. — AFP photo

UN may airlift 5500 troops to Rwanda

UNITED NATIONS, May 12: Horrified by genocide in Rwanda, the United Nations is considering airlifting at least 5,500 troops into the country to ensure the safety of refugees and delivery of humanitarian aid, reports AP.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced that Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania had offered the troops and the 15-nation Security Council began discussing the plan Wednesday evening. A final decision was not expected until week's end.

Despite the urgency, the troops will be able to do nothing to stop the slaughter, which has already claimed up

to 200,000 lives in month. In making recommendations to the Security Council, Boutros-Ghali said the UN troops would not be authorised to use force to stop the fighting, only to defend themselves. And under the best-case plan, the troops would not begin arriving for a month.

The United Nations withdrew all but a token force of about 400 peacekeepers from Rwanda last month when fighting made their mission — monitoring a cease-fire and peace accord — futile.

Boutros-Ghali said the new troops would put the airport at Kigali, Rwanda's capital and lifeline for supplies, under exclusive UN control.

Major powers' meet to end war in Bosnia today

GENEVA, May 12: Major powers long divided on how best to end the war in Bosnia will try on Friday to hammer out a common strategy to press Serbs, Croats and Muslims into finally making peace, reports Reuter.

The foreign ministers of the United States, Russia and five European Union nations will meet in Geneva, home for the past 20 months to the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia.

The meeting comes at a low point for mediation efforts, with divisions between Western powers laid bare and the Bosnians themselves apparently preparing to fight on.

And in an ironic symbol of the failure of the Geneva conference, the ministers will meet not at the UN's grandiose Palais Des Nations but in the nearby US mission.

US Secretary of State Wa-

rren Christopher, Russian envoy Vitaly Churkin and major European nations tried last month to revive the peace process by creating an informal "contact group" on Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The purpose of the group, with American, Russian, British, French and German members, was to shuttle between the parties to the Bosnian conflict and persuade them, and especially the Serbs, to return to the negotiating table.

But the contact group appears to have made little headway in two subsequent trips to Bosnia and diplomats said Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade — a key factor in any settlement — refused to receive them at all.

Meanwhile: Two people were killed and one was wounded late on Wednesday when two shells crashed into

the centre of the Muslim town of Tuzla in northern Bosnia hours after an attack on the nearby Serb town of Brcko.

Two shells hit the centre of the town at 19.10 and 19.15 GMT killing to men and wounding one soldier, the Tuzla information centre told Reuters, quoting hospital sources.

One of the dead was a guard at the town central market which sustained "considerable damage," the information centre said.

It said the shells came from the Serb-held Ozren mountain overlooking the town, but UN officers in Tuzla were not available to confirm the claim.

The second attack in a day on the UN designated safe area came hours after Bosnian Serbs said five shells hit Brcko 50 km (30 miles) to the north.

Four people were wounded in the attack on Tuzla on Wednesday morning.



President Nelson Mandela confers with his deputy FW de Klerk during the first South African cabinet meeting at the Union Buildings in Pretoria Wednesday. The new cabinet of South African President Nelson Mandela was sworn in on May 11 with the Home Affairs Ministry going to his main black rival, Zulu nationalist Mangosuthu Buthelezi. — AFP photo

'Hata govt unfit to govern'

TOKYO, May 12: Opposition leaders accused Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata's minority government Thursday of being unfit to govern and reiterated calls for early elections, reports AP.

In parliamentary debate over a policy speech Hata delivered on Tuesday, leading opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) chief Yohei Kono heaped blame on Hata, who took office just over a week ago, for a host of economic and political woes.

"The Hata administration is not qualified to take charge," Kono said. "The way it was formed also cannot be justified as democratic."

Hata's government is expected to be short-lived because it does not hold a majority in parliament. Opposition parties are expected to hold off on a vote of no-confidence,

which could force Hata to call elections, only until passage of a long-overdue budget for the fiscal year that began April 1.

In a vehement, almost 40-minute speech that drew chuckles from some lawmakers and left Hata shaking his head in disagreement at times, Kono also assailed the prime minister's performance during his tenure as foreign minister under his predecessor, Morihiro Hosokawa.

Hosokawa resigned in April over questions regarding his personal finances, only eight months after his coalition forced the Liberal Democrats out of power for the first time in 38 years.

In self-defence, Hata said, "I am committed to doing my best, and to making Japan, a country that future generations will say they are glad existed."

Head of the shakiest Japa-

nese government in decades, Hata's honeymoon was over before it started.

His justice minister already has resigned after angering neighbouring Asian countries with remarks that soft-pedaled Japanese atrocities during World War II.

And Hata's first policy speech has been widely criticised as vague and bereft of new ideas for dealing with Japan's serious economic problems and chronic paralysis in its political world.

Kono blamed Hata for a bitter impasse in talks with the United States over Japan's massive trade surpluses. He also accused Hata of planning constitutional revisions to enable Japan to become more involved in military action overseas.

US committed to Gulf security

KUWAIT CITY, May 12: An American envoy stressed here today that the United States would remain committed to the security and stability of the Gulf region and support the unity of Yemen, reports Xinhua.

Robert Pelletreau, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, told reporters that he "was able to reaffirm to the Kuwaiti government the steadfast commitment of the US to assist in the defence of Kuwait and in the security and stability of the Gulf region."

He said he told Kuwaiti leaders that his country considered it was important for the Gulf Cooperation Council to be as strong and unified as it could be to assist in preventing potential threats in the region.

On the sanctions against

Iraq, he said, "In our view, Iraq is considered to be in violation of every single resolution, first and foremost, in the act of non-compliance Iraq has still not recognised the independence of Kuwait or its sovereignty of its territorial integrity or its borders, nor has Iraq agreed to account for missing Kuwaiti citizens."

He said it was important to renew the sanctions on Iraq. On the current situation in Yemen, the US envoy expressed his country's support for the Arab League's efforts, together with the Gulf states, to persuade the warring leaders in Yemen to end the fighting and renew political dialogue.

There is no military solution, to the conflict in Yemen. The United States continues to

support the unity of Yemen, the unity is in the interest of the people and is supported by the people, the unity should be rebuilt by ending the fighting and restoring political dialogue," he noted.

If the fighting goes on, the US official said, there will be more civilian casualties and potential instability in the region that could open doors for outside intervention.

The official warned of a danger of an outflow of Yemeni refugees.

He said there has been no confirmation of outside intervention in the conflict in Yemen.

Pelletreau disclosed that the US ambassador was continuing to operate in Sanaa and they are contacting certain southern officials by telephone.

JOHANNESBURG, May 12: Winnie Mandela, darling of South Africa's radical township youth, has clawed her way back from the disgrace of a sinister kidnapping scandal that threatened to relegate her to the political wilderness, reports Reuter.

The estranged wife of President Nelson Mandela may not yet be South Africa's first lady — a position some reports suggest she would dearly love to occupy.

But her appointment on Wednesday as a deputy minister in her husband's new national unity government gives her a stake in the running of the country until the next elections in 1999.

Mandela, sworn in as South Africa's first black President on Tuesday, named Winnie as Deputy Minister for Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

Winnie, according to one source close to her was taken, aback by the appointment. "She was quite surprised at the appointment. When I told her she thought I was joking," the source said. "She thought it was a weird portfolio."

Political commentators say

Appointment as deputy minister surprises Winnie

that despite the scandals, Winnie remains immensely popular with the ANC rank and file.

One suggested that the appointment was an attempt by Mandela to associate her with his reconciliation drive — rather than run the risk of her becoming a focus for radical opposition outside the government.

Senior members of the ANC had already distanced themselves from Winnie as the scandal about the 1989 kidnapping unfolded and she had to resign her posts in the ANC.

Slowly but surely she has returned to prominence — in December securing the presidency of the ANC women's league.

The ANC then included her on its list of prospective members of parliament.

"This is the beginning of the revolution against the hunger and homelessness of my people," she said after voting for the first time in the

historic April 26-29 all-race elections.

Idolised by township youth for her stand against apartheid and her fiery rhetoric, she once accused Mandela and other ANC executives of losing touch with grassroots members and of climbing between "silken sheets" in democracy talks with the government of the then President F W de Klerk's National Party, which created apartheid in 1948.

On Monday, Mandela refused to acknowledge her when she sat beside him briefly in the new national parliament in Cape Town during the session that chose him as South Africa's first black president.

A few days earlier, when Mandela claimed victory in the elections before a jubilant crowd in a Johannesburg hotel, Winnie was absent.

She attended Mandela's inaugural luncheon on Tuesday, along with dozens of kings, prime ministers and other world leaders.

When he took the oath of office, it was their daughter, Princes Zenani Dlamini, married to a Swazi prince, who was at his side.

Preparation for Hajj on

JEDDAH, May 12: The kingdom Wednesday put the final touches on preparations for the annual Muslim pilgrimage with a ceremonial cleaning of the Kaaba in Makkah's Grand Mosque, reports AP.

Saudi Arabia is gearing up for the pilgrimage, or Hajj, in which nearly 2 million people from within the kingdom and around the world will pray in unison on the ninth day of the Muslim month of Zulhijja, congregated on Mount Arafat overlooking Makkah.

The lunar month started Wednesday, so the climax of the ceremonies will fall on May '9.

The governor of Makkah, Prince Majed Ibn Abdel-Aziz, performed the ritual on behalf of King Fahd. The ceremony also was attended by President Cassem Uteem of Mauritius and ambassadors of Muslim nations.

The Kiswa, a black velvet covering inscribed with Quranic verses in gold, also was handed over to the head guardian of the Grand Mosque, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz Shaibi.

To date, over 700,000 pilgrims have arrived in Jeddah, the Red Sea port city by sea, air and land. They will travel by land some 65 kilometers (40 miles) to Makkah.

Arkansas 1st US state to execute 2 on same day

VARNER, Arkansas, May 12: Arkansas Wednesday became the first US state to execute two people on the same day since the Supreme Court allowed states to restore the death penalty in 1976, reports AP.

Convicted killer Jonas Whitmore was the first to be put to death by lethal injection Wednesday. He was pronounced dead at 8:08 pm, prison spokesman Alan Ables said.

Whitmore, a drifter who was convicted of stabbing a 62-year-old woman to death in 1986 after she gave him milk and cake, had no final word, the spokesman said.

Edward Pickens, convicted in 1975 of gunning down a retired farmer, was then executed by lethal injection. According to witnesses the farmer begged for his life seconds before Pickens shot him during a store hold-up.

Pickens was sentenced to death in 1976, but the sentence was twice overturned before a court finally upheld the sentence last September.

Lawyers for Pickens then won several stays of execution but earlier this week a 10-judge court lifted the final stay.

A last hour bid by Pickens' lawyers to halt his execution was turned down by the Supreme Court.

Myanmar troops locked in battle with rebels

BANGKOK, May 12: Myanmar government troops are locked in battle with guerrillas from the army of Golden Triangle opium warlord Khun Sa in northeastern Myanmar, Thai army and rebel sources said today, report Reuter.

Hundreds of villagers have fled the fighting and are heading towards the Thai border, said a Thai army source based in the northern Thai border district of Chiang Dao.

There has been heavy fighting near Mong Kyaw and Mongton. Initial reports from the battlefield say our troops are circling around the enemy," Yi Seng, a spokesman for Khun Sa's Mon Tai Army (MTA), told Reuters by telephone.

He said an estimated 700 to 800 government soldiers and a

guerrilla force of the same size had been engaged in heavy fighting since May 10. He had no reports of casualties.

The Myanmar government has since November deployed more than 2,000 infantry to attack Khun Sa's stronghold in Shan State near the Thai border. The two sides have since been confronting each other across the banks of the Salween River.

Khun Sa, alias Chang Si-Fu, 60, had been indicted by a court in the United States on heroin trafficking charges.

He has an army of an estimated 10,000 guerrillas and says he is fighting for the independence of Shan State.

But Thai and US narcotics-suppression officials dismiss Khun Sa's political pronouncements.

Off the Record**Chelsea bumps head**

WASHINGTON: President Clinton, who doesn't let much come between him and 18 holes of golf, cancelled an outing to be home with his daughter after she bumped her head at school, reports AP.

Fresh from a meeting on his Supreme Court search, Clinton planned to hit a local golf course Tuesday afternoon with Sen David Pryor of Arkansas.

At the last minute, Clinton got word that Chelsea bumped her head on a door at school. Neel Lattimore, spokesman for Hillary Rodham Clinton, said the minor injury did not keep Chelsea out of school but the president was concerned anyhow and wanted to be home when she arrived.

"She just hit her head a little bit — a 14-year-olds are prone to do," Lattimore said.

Chelsea was in school as usual on Wednesday.

American culture is superior to all others?

TAVARES: After reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and hearing student musicians play "It's a Grand Old Flag," the county School Board voted to require schools to teach that American culture is superior to all others, reports AP.

School Board chairwoman Pat Hart wrote the policy, adopted 3-2 on Tuesday.

"It is the neglecting and forgetting of these things that have led us to our present state," Hart said. "Do we want to undermine our love of country and sovereignty, or perpetuate the great liberties that we have?"

Opponents found the word "superior" bothersome. "Superior says we are simply going to tolerate somebody," said Joe Parisian, maintenance supervisor for the school district. "Who wants to be tolerated?"

School Superintendent Tom Sanders said just defining the term "American culture" will pose a problem.

US serial killer's brain to be examined for abnormalities

CHICAGO: The brain of serial killer John Wayne Gacy will be examined by a doctor for abnormalities, reports AP.

Gacy, who was convicted of killing 33 men and boys and burying most of the bodies in the crawl space under his house, was executed by injection Tuesday.

The University of Chicago Medical Center said Wednesday that the results of the examination will be given to an unidentified researcher who requested the procedure.

But the university said it is unlikely the brain autopsy will find any "anatomical abnormalities that will shed light on the subject's behaviour."

The research has the approval of Gacy's family, the university said.

Former leader of Lankan ruling party arrested

COLOMBO, May 12: A suspected underworld gang leader who was an office-bearer of the governing party was arrested Thursday in connection with several killings, police said, reports AP.

Don Upali Ranjith, who reportedly was a close associate of a government minister critical of the ruling party, was arrested in a central Sri Lankan town during a crackdown on criminals, police said.

At least four people were killed in fighting between two gangs, one of which allegedly was led by Ranjith, popularly known as Soththi Upali. The gang war ended with a shooting in a court room in a western town last week.

Upali was a member of the governing United National Party's executive committee.



From left, former US first ladies Barbara Bush, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, and Nancy Reagan pose for photos at a fundraiser for the National Garden at the Botanic Garden in Washington, DC Wednesday. — AFP photo

Gala in honour of US first ladies

WASHINGTON, May 12: Toasted by President Clinton, five former first ladies and Hillary Rodham Clinton attended a gala in their honour Wednesday night, a benefit for the National Garden, reports AP.

Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Nancy Reagan, Rosalynn Carter and Barbara Bush attended the 1,000 dollars a plate charity event, along with Hillary Clinton. Only Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis declined the invitation.

Hillary who was honorary chairwoman of the event, went to the formal gala soon after returning to Washington from South Africa, where she attended the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela.

A 28-piece orchestra entertained the crowd in a cavernous white tent 300 yards away from the Capitol festooned with 14,000 roses that were flown in from around the country.

"All first ladies showed one

common goal: To help enrich the understanding and appreciation of this country," Hillary said.

"As I look back over the last 15 months, there is no prescription or role model or cookbook for being first lady. Each woman has defined the role in a way that has defined herself."

Hillary said the role of the First Lady has always been a combination of helping her husband, caring for her family and helping her country.

President Clinton echoed her remarks, saying that all the first ladies had "graced our nation and served us well."

"They reminded us daily of the importance and centrality of family in all of our lives and how it transcends politics," he said. "In reminding us of our connection to our natural surroundings, they also reminded us that we have a connection to nature and to God that transcends politics."

"When this garden is fin-

ished, may we always toast the first ladies or helping us all to be more human," he said.

The benefit, which took place at the site of the future garden, between the Capitol and the US Botanic Gardens conservatory, was emceed by Phyllis George and Merv Griffin with entertainment provided by singer Johnny Mathis.

House Minority Leader Robert Michel, R-Ill., sang the national anthem, and the first ladies were introduced to the audience of about 1,000 after the showing of a video highlighting their accomplishments.

The event, organised by the wives of Sen. Bennett Johnston, D-La., and Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, was intended to raise more than 1 million dollars toward development of the new National Garden. The lobbyists and corporate chiefs who donated got the chance to mingle with lawmakers and Cabinet members.

Pulitzer prize winner commits suicide

WASHINGTON, May 12: Vietnam veteran Lewis Puller, who won a Pulitzer prize for his autobiography, shot and killed himself Wednesday at his Virginia home, police said, reports Reuter.

Puller, 48, lost both legs when he stepped on a mine while serving in Vietnam with the marines in 1968. His story of the ordeal and its repercussions, titled "fortunate son," won a Pulitzer in 1992.

Puller's father was the legendary Lewis "Chesty" Puller, whose heroism in the Pacific during World War II made him the most decorated marine in history, being awarded 56 medals in a 37-year-military career.

The younger Puller worked as a lawyer at the Defence Department, but left after winning the Pulitzer.