

BRIEFLY

Mubarak arrives in Jordan: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak arrived in Aqaba Saturday for his first visit to Jordan since the 1990 Gulf crisis which caused a rift between the two Arab countries. AFP reports from Aqaba.

King Hussein of Jordan and senior officials welcomed Mubarak from the plane before they were to hold talks in the Red Sea city of Aqaba. Jordanian officials said.

Blast on USS Nimitz: An explosion was reported on the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz late Friday night, a spokesman for the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard said. AP reports from Bremerton, Wash.

Spokesman John Gordon said he had no word on any casualties and no other details. The Nimitz is finishing up an overhaul at the shipyard.

Quake hits Indonesian island: An earthquake measuring 5.9 on the Richter scale rocked Indonesia's Sulawesi island on Friday night but there were no reports of damage or casualties, the official Antara News Agency reported Saturday. Reuter says from Jakarta.

The agency said the quake was centred around the city of Manado on the northern tip of Sulawesi, a popular tourist destination with world famous scuba diving.

95000 corruption cases in China: China uncovered 95,000 cases of corruption from January to November last year, according to a national Anti-Corruption Conference in Beijing, the official Chinese news agency said. AFP reports from Beijing.

A total of 65,000 people were disciplined by the Chinese Communist Party, and 37,000 cases were dealt via administrative regulations, the Xinhua report said.

Slovak-Czech tug of war on orphans: The adoption of 1,200 Slovakian children boarded out in Czech orphanages since Czechoslovakia split up two years ago has turned into a bureaucratic tug of war. AFP reports from Prague.

Many of the children, housed in institutions in northern Bohemia almost since their birth, were abandoned by their gypsy prostitute mothers who hailed from Slovakia. The press here has dubbed them "children of the e-55" after the Prague to Germany road where the prostitutes plied their trade in border regions.

IAEA team in Pyongyang: A delegation from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) flew into Pyongyang yesterday to discuss North Korea's nuclear programme, a report said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) report, monitored in Tokyo said the delegation would discuss "matters related to the freezing of the nuclear facilities."

Khmers admit attack on tourists: Cambodia's Khmer Rouge guerillas yesterday said they were responsible for last weekend's attack on a tourist convoy in northwestern Siem Reap province which killed a US woman and seriously wounded her husband. Reuter reports from Phnom Penh.

In a clandestine radio report, the rebel faction accused the couple of being US military experts helping the government's armed forces.

The Iran hits news stands: A new daily run by Iran's official IRNA news agency hit the news stands yesterday. AFP reports from Tehran.

In its first editorial, the paper said it had named itself "Iran" because we feel our country is today calling upon all of us... to unite and defend our identity, culture and interests in the face of mounting hostilities. Publishing "Iran" is an attempt to respond to this historical summoning, it said.

Tremor shakes Turkish city: A moderate earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 3.9 shook the southeastern city of Kahramanmaraş in Turkey on Saturday, the Anatolia news agency said. AP reports from Ankara.

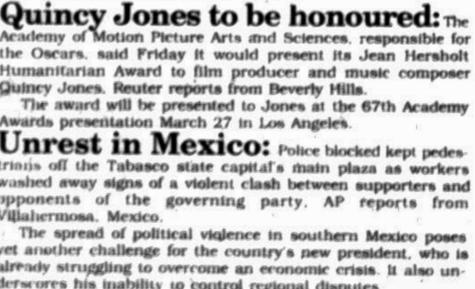
The epicenter of the quake, which hit the area at 5:49 am, was about 300 kilometers (190 miles) from Ankara. There were no reports of injuries or damage.

Quincy Jones to be honoured: The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, responsible for the Oscars, said Friday it would present its Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award to film producer and music composer Quincy Jones. Reuter reports from Beverly Hills.

The award will be presented to Jones at the 67th Academy Awards presentation March 27 in Los Angeles.

Unrest in Mexico: Police blocked kept pedestrians off the Tabasco state capital's main plaza as workers washed away signs of a violent clash between supporters and opponents of the governing party. AP reports from Villahermosa, Mexico.

The spread of political violence in southern Mexico poses yet another challenge for the country's new president, who is already struggling to overcome an economic crisis. It also underscores his inability to control regional disputes.



Mehmed Husakovic (C), a 23-year old Bosnian ex-detainee, is embraced by two friends after being released from Serbian imprisonment on Friday. Mehmed, who spent 32 months in Serbian detention, was one of one hundred detainees Bosnian government and Serb authorities released in Sarajevo. — AFP photo

South Korea urges North to improve ties

US eases sanctions on DPRK

WASHINGTON, Jan 21: The United States, complying with a landmark nuclear accord, on Friday agreed to permit direct telephone links with North Korea as part of a modest package of steps easing for the first time 45-year-old trade curbs on the Stalinist regime, reports Reuter.

US officials acknowledged that their actions are far less sweeping than those taken earlier by Pyongyang.

But they said maintaining some restrictions was an "important diplomatic tool for ensuring North Korea's continuing cooperation and implementation" of the nuclear deal signed by the two governments last October.

US officials, who briefed reports anonymously, said their package includes direct

telephone links between the United States and North Korea, the last country Americans have been barred from dialing direct.

A number of US companies are expected to complete for the North Korean telephone business and no firm is expected to have an advantage, the officials said.

In a move that could mean five million dollars to 10 million dollars a year for Pyongyang, American businesses will now be permitted to import North Korean magnesite, a rare metal used to coat the insides of steel industry blast furnaces, the officials said.

They said they took this step to aid US industry which recently faced a heavy new tax on exports by China, the only

source of natural magnesite on the world market.

US news organisations will be allowed for the first time to open offices in North Korea, and North Korean journalists to set up shop in the United States.

Also, American visitors to North Korea will be permitted to make unlimited credit card purchases in connection with personal travel, officials said.

In the past, a total ban on financial transactions has been in effect. But now North Korea will be permitted to use the US banking system to clear financial transactions not beginning or terminating in the United States.

An unspecified portion of the 11 million dollar in North Korean-related assets frozen in this country will be unblocked.

US officials said.

Also, US firms will be considered on a case-by-case basis for participation in the 4.5 billion dollar US-led project to provide North Korea with new light-water nuclear reactors and alternative energy supplies, officials said.

They acknowledged the US move are not nearly as broad as those announced earlier by Pyongyang, including opening North Korea to port calls by US ship and allowing the purchase of American products in North Korea.

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Pope John Paul II is seated beside President Chandrika Kumaratunga (R) as she welcomes the head of the Roman Catholic Church to the island nation on Friday at the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo. The pontiff strongly supported Kumaratunga's efforts to end ethnic strife which has claimed over 30,000 lives in Sri Lanka in the past 23 years. — AFP photo

Quake 'big one' to hit California by 2024

LOS ANGELES, Jan 21: A major earthquake the "big one" is almost certain to hit southern California by the year 2024, a research center said Friday, reports AP.

The southern California earthquake center said there is an 86 per cent chance of a quake of at least 7.0 on the Richter scale in the region the next three decades — a greater likelihood than earlier believed.

Previous studies predicted a 60 per cent likelihood of a major tremor, and said the region could be suffer major damage from smaller quakes.

The most vulnerable area is a densely populated stretch of about 200 kilometers (150 miles) from San Bernardino to Santa Barbara.

Concerns have been heightened in California following the deadly 7.2 magnitude quake near Kobe, Japan, one year to the date and after the 6.7 magnitude Los Angeles tremors that killed 61 people and caused some 20 billion dollars in damage.

Lankan monks boycott meet with Pope

COLOMBO, Jan 21: Buddhist leaders boycotted a meeting with Pope John Paul II today, protesting his views of their religion in his best selling book, reports AP.

Six Hindu and six Muslim representatives greeted the pope, but none of the invited Buddhist prelates showed up for the meeting with the leader of the world's 1.5 billion Catholics.

"I am very sorry about it, frankly, extremely sorry," said Sri Lanka's minister of religious and cultural affairs, Lakshman Yakkody. About 70 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people are Buddhist while Catholics are 7 per cent.

The Vatican played down the absence of the Buddhists, the pope in formal remarks, again stressed the need for religious harmony as he did upon arriving in Sri Lanka Friday.

The pope, however, indirectly expressed regret, adding to his prepared remarks to the religious leaders:

It is important that we are together. Not being together is dangerous.

He also told the religious leaders that the Church "firmly rejects proselytism and the use of unethical means to gain conversions." In an apparent response to criticism from Buddhists of the Church's conduct in Sri Lanka.

The pope went from the meeting to a Mass on the shore of the Indian Ocean where, to the blowing of conch shells and the beating of drums, he declared a 17th century Indian missionary "blessed," the final step before possible sainthood.

About 350,000 people attended the ceremony which John Paul conducted on an altar designed by a well-known Buddhist architect. Many of the celebrants arrived the night before, camping in the open grounds during a thunderstorm.

Fire on Pak Basant festival: 3 killed, 225 hurt

LAHORE, Jan 21: At least three people were killed and 225 injured when people fired bullets into the air during a kite-flying festival in this cultural centre of Pakistan, police and hospital sources said today, reports AP.

The Basant Festival, heralding spring, was celebrated Friday with the participation of tens of thousands of visitors, among them many foreign diplomats.

A six-year-old boy who was sitting with his parents on a rooftop was killed when a stray bullet hit him and another child died after falling from a rooftop. A third person was also killed by indiscriminate fire.

People fire weapons into the air in jubilation during festivals in Pakistan. Heavy firing was heard throughout Lahore on Friday.

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Israeli cabinet decides fate of Jewish settlements today

JERUSALEM, Jan 21: The divided Israeli cabinet is set to hold a potentially explosive debate on Sunday to decide if Jewish settlements around Jerusalem should be allowed to expand, endangering the peace process, reports AP.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has manoeuvred himself into a corner full of contradictions after encouraging construction in "greater Jerusalem."

A halt to building in the occupied crescent around Jerusalem will outrage his nationalist supporters while left-wing ministers have threatened to quit if a green light is given for more building.

At the same time, new land grabbed by settlers across the

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The judge declared a mistrial in his trial Wednesday after the jury was mistakenly given a document showing that Sunnycalb had a previous sex-crime conviction. The retrial had been scheduled for Monday.

The younger girl and the niece, who was then 13, each lived with Sunnycalb in his trailer home during different six-month periods, police said.

The girls testified Tuesday that Sunnycalb enticed them by offering gifts but never threatened them or forced them to have sex. The younger girl testified that she loved him because, unlike her parents, he picked her up from school and promised to take care of her.

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Off the Record



One of Nina Ricci's mannequins spread the vent of a strawberry-red wool and silk evening dress gilded with a fine gold-lame arabesque created by Girard Pipart on Friday in a preview of the '95 haute-couture collections. — AFP photo

Sun to return Camilla's photos

LONDON: The best-selling British daily The Sun has agreed to hand over all its photographs of Prince Charles's intimate friend Camilla Parker-Bowles and her husband Andrew, after the couple sued the paper for "intrusion" into their private lives, reports AP.

Lawyers for the Parker-Bowles who were officially divorced on Thursday, said in a statement Friday that the paper had undertaken to return to us immediately all these photographs together with any copies of them which may have been taken.

The statement from Messrs Kingsley Napley: "They have further agreed that the source of the photographs will not be paid or otherwise rewarded and that the fee of 25,000 pounds (42,000 dollar) which was to have been paid to the source will now be paid to the National Osteoporosis Society and the hospice of the Hospital of St John and St Elizabeth."

The statement said The Sun had agreed to meet the couple's costs estimated at about 8,000 pound (13,000 dollar).

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The rocketing began on Thursday evening and continued through the night, the radio said.

22 killed as Heakmatyarmen rocket Kabul

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Pretoria disbands Intelligence Service

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 21: The National Intelligence Service, once used to monitor anti-apartheid activists has been disbanded and would be restructured, government officials say, reports AP.

According to the South African Press Association, a spokesman for the Ministry of Justice said Friday the NIS would be replaced by two separate intelligence arms, one dealing with internal intelligence and the other with international matters.

The move was a result of legislation passed last year.

Jaffna is to all intents, purposes already an independent state

JAFFNA, Jan 21: The Jaffna peninsula in northern Sri Lanka, held by Tamil Tiger guerrillas who have been waging a bloody separatist struggle for more than ten years, is to all intents and purposes already an independent state, reports AP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been clearly in charge of the region for more than four years, with their own government, police and taxation system.

"We have a parallel administration," the Tigers' spokesman, Anton Balasingam said.

But ironically the salaries of civil servants, teachers and health service employees con-

tinued to be paid by the Colombo government, one of the only identifiable signs that Jaffna is not a state independent of Sri Lanka.

The Tamil minority numbers around two million of Sri Lanka's total population of 17 million. Some 700,000 Tamils live in Jaffna.

The Tigers, one of the world's most efficient guerilla movements, have been fighting for years for an independent state, to be called Eelam, in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka.

Peace talks are now underway, and the LTTE said recently that it would abandon its demands in exchange for

substantial regional autonomy, as a federal solution to the conflict that has left more than 30,000 dead.

But despite the offered compromise, the Tigers are still apparently in firm control of territory while waiting for a solution — and not just the peninsula, but a large area of the country's north.

In order to travel south from the peninsula — an extremely difficult exercise given that it is almost entirely surrounded by Sri Lankan troops — residents have to obtain formal LTTE permission.

Jaffna is patrolled by policemen in blue uniforms, with shoulder badges bearing the

head of a Tiger and the words "Tamil Eelam police."

The town's chief of police, a 23-year-old woman, explained that there is no crime in Jaffna.

She described the duties of those under her as directing traffic and dealing with domestic disputes.

Most of those questioned here are not critical of the Tigers and stress that they are the only effective defenders of the Tamil identity against the Sinhalese majority.

However, a few who requested anonymity, denounced the authoritarianism of the movement run with an iron hand by the 40-year old

3 Filipinos beheaded in Saudi Arabia

DUBAI, Jan 21: Three Filipinos accused of breaking into the house of a leading Saudi businessman last year and killing three people were beheaded in Saudi Arabia on Friday, a diplomat said.

A Filipino diplomat in the Saudi capital Riyadh told Reuters by telephone that he heard the news on the local radio but the embassy had not been officially notified of the executions.

A fourth Filipino who took part in the attack was killed after Saudi anti-terrorist police stormed the house.