

BRIEFLY

30 Chinese die in Kobe quake: More than 30 Chinese in Kobe were killed in last week's earthquake and the Chinese Red Cross has donated 100,000 dollars in relief aid, the official China Daily said Monday. AP reports from Beijing.

Nearly 5,000 people died in the 7.2 quake that struck Kobe last Tuesday. China's ambassador to Japan, Xu Dunxin, delivered the donation to the Japanese Red Cross in Tokyo, the China Daily said. The relief aid came days after many other governments already had sent help.

US condemns violence in Gaza: The White House strongly condemned Sunday's violence in the Gaza Strip where two suicide bombers killed 19 people and wounded 65 others. AFP reports from Washington.

I condemn in the strongest terms this horrendous act of terrorist violence. President Bill Clinton said in a prepared statement.

Armenia gets gas: Energy-starved Armenia began receiving natural gas from Turkmenistan again Monday, two days after a pipeline explosion had cut the flow to the Caucasus Mountain country. AP reports from Yerevan, Armenia.

A temporary pipeline was installed over the weekend, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Blackout in Georgia: Most of the capital and a large part of eastern Georgia was without electricity Monday after fire broke out at a power station Sunday. AP reports from Tbilisi, Georgia.

The station, about 30 kilometers (20 miles) east of Tbilisi, shut down at 10 pm Sunday when cables for two power units caught fire, the Georgian energy committee, Grozenergo, reported.

Malaysia to increase peacekeepers: Malaysia wants to increase the number of its peacekeepers in Bosnia to 3,000 from 1,633. Defence Minister Najib Tun Razak said in an interview published on Sunday. Reuter says from Kuala Lumpur.

The country, which has often been critical of what it perceives as half-hearted efforts by western countries to aid the Bosnians, is offering the United Nations another mechanised battalion and two mechanised companies, the New Sunday Times newspaper on Sunday quoted Najib as saying.

Dini picks more technocrats: Resisting pressures to pick officials from Silvio Berlusconi's government, his successor Premier Lamberto Dini on Monday named more "technocrats" to flesh out his non-partisan government. AP reports from Rome.

Dini's Cabinet, made up of professors and other independent experts, filled Cabinet undersecretary posts with more non-political figures. Agriculture Minister Walter Lucchetti told reporters.

SA parliament session begins: South Africa's parliament begins an eight-month session on Monday, three days after coalition leaders Nelson Mandela and F W De Klerk resolved their worst crisis of trust since apartheid ended last April. Reuter reports from Cape Town.

Officials said it would consider laws to enforce affirmative action, create a service corps for marginalised black youth, establish a truth commission on human rights abuses under apartheid and pass the first budget drafted under majority rule.



Chechen men carry the body of a fighter, killed during recent combat in Grozny, during his funeral ceremony on Friday. Russian forces renewed their offensive against remaining rebel positions in Grozny early Sunday, raining down shells and Grad missiles notably on the Chechen capital's southern outskirts. — AFP photo

Rainstorms sweep W France: Rainstorms and high winds continued to sweep Brittany in western France on Sunday, polluting water supplies and flooding several areas. Reuter reports from Rennes.

Residents were forced out of their homes and roads were cut after the Villaine river in the south of Brittany burst its banks. A spokesman for the local prefect said the river was expected to rise further on Sunday evening.

4 die in Burundi violence: Four people, including a Rwandan woman and her child, were killed and three were wounded in two incidents in northeastern Burundi, Burundi radio said on Sunday in a report monitored by the BBC. AFP reports from London.

Police sources said four people were murdered overnight Friday in the Swahili district of Muyinga and three others were wounded, the radio said.

US pianist Rachlin Dies: American conductor and pianist Ezra Rachlin, longtime music director of the Austin Symphony Orchestra in Texas, has died in London at the age of 79. AP reports from London.

The conductor, who underwent vascular surgery last week, died in St Mary's Hospital in London on Saturday, his wife, Ann Rachlin said on Sunday.

Egyptian policeman shot dead: Islamic militants shot dead a policeman in southern Egypt on Sunday, raising the death toll in three years of unrest to 600, police said. AFP reports from Minya.

One hundred people have died in the last two months alone, according to a toll compiled by AFP from police reports. The latest killing took place in Asmant village in the troubled province of Minya when gunmen attacked the police station. Yussef Besali Boutros, on guard duty, was shot dead and another policeman wounded.

Malaysian police to get cash for reporting bribery

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 23: Despite public criticism, authorities will implement a controversial plan to give police officers cash rewards if they report bribe-givers. Malaysia's police chief has said.

Several lawyers and consumer associations said it will lead to more abuse of power by policemen, who would be tempted to make false reports. "Those who feel they have been made use of by the police should lodge a report and we will investigate," Inspector General Abdul Rahim Noor was quoted as saying by the Star newspaper on Monday.

Pope's Asia-Pacific tour an extension of Catholic imperialism'

COLOMBO, Jan 23: Sri Lanka's influential Buddhist clergy on Sunday condemned an overnight visit here by Pope John Paul II and said the Pontiff's Asia-Pacific tour was an extension of Catholic imperialism, reports AFP.

A Buddhist lobby described as a "total success" their boycott of the Pope's visit here on Saturday marking the final leg of an 11-day tour that also took him to the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

"We could have attended an inter-religious meeting with the Pope only if he made some gesture to apologise to the Buddhist world," a spokesman for the Federation of Buddhist Organisations (FBO).

Rajesh Pilot trying for a patch-up
Rao-Arjun feud in Cong deepens

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: A leadership feud in India's ruling Congress(I) Party deepened today after a fresh salvo by Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's arch foe virtually killed off any possibility of a patch-up, reports AFP.

Former minister Arjun Singh, who quit Rao's cabinet on December 24, accused the Premier Sunday of "running away from realities" and of failing to build up the Congress, of which Rao is the President.

Arjun Singh, a known rival for the premiership, told a public rally in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh that Rao had not learned a lesson from the December election rout of the Congress in two key southern states.

The party which ignores the ground realities will be consigned to the dustbin of history," he said in an indirect denunciation of Rao during a hectic three-hour trip to the town of Banda.

It was Arjun Singh's first foray since quitting the government into the politically-sensitive sprawling Hindi-speaking belt, where the Congress has become marginalised in recent years.

Arjun Singh told his supporters in Banda that Rao was "running away from realities" by ignoring the issues he had raised in his resignation letter.

Congress sources said Arjun Singh's latest attack on Rao had virtually destroyed attempts by party leaders to bring the two together, and Rao's supporters were pressing for action against the defiant former minister.

Congress sources said Rao's reluctance to strike against Arjun Singh stemmed from concern for the latter's slowly growing support in the party ranks and sections of the leadership, including persons close to the prime minister.

Rao suffered a shock on Saturday when Congress spokesman Vithal Gadgil, a confidant, lashed out at the government's economic reforms in a language almost matching that of Arjun Singh, who has demanded a "human face" to the reforms.

But minister of state for internal security Rajesh Pilot, who has been frantically trying to bring together Rao and Arjun Singh, said he still hoped a rapprochement was possible.

"Sometimes there is some breakthrough and sometimes there is nothing," he said in the northern hill town of Shimla on Sunday. "But the efforts are on..."

Rao supporters fear the growing dissidence in the Congress sparked by Arjun Singh's resignation.



Aerial view of the site at the Bet Lid junction on Sunday where two bombs exploded in the morning, killing 18 Israelis and wounding more than sixty, most of them soldiers en route to their bases after a weekend off. A hole in the ground on the bottom right side shows where one of the bombs exploded. — AFP photo

All routes to Kabul closed

PESHAWAR, Jan 23: A major Afghan faction fighting President Burhanuddin Rabbani said on Sunday it had again closed all land routes to the capital Kabul after keeping them open for a week, reports Reuter.

The routes were opened at United Nations request to help Kabul citizens, but the period was used by pro-Rabbani forces to strengthen their positions and launch attacks on their opponents, a spokesman for the Hezb-i-Islami Party of former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar said.

Hekmatyar and northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum lead a Supreme Coordination Council seeking to oust Rabbani, whose extended presidential term ran out on December 27.

The roads were opened as a gesture of goodwill to Kabul citizens, he said. But he said Rabbani did not sincerely want peace and was trying to trigger a fresh round of fighting.

Nearly 20,000 people have been killed in factional fighting after the Mujahideen guerrillas took power in Kabul from a collapsed former communist government following a 14-year civil war.

was held captive by an Afghan Shiite faction in west Kabul for eight months was flown out of Afghanistan on special Red Cross flight on Sunday.

"We were requested by British diplomats present in Kabul to fly Fernandez out of Afghanistan which we gladly accepted on humanitarian grounds," said Peter Stockerc, Kabul chief of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Fernandez was released Saturday by the Shiite Hezb-i-Wahdat faction leader Abdul Ali Mazari into the custody of Pakistan-based British diplomat Stephen Evans.

Fahd-Saleh meet likely soon

RIYADH, Jan 23: Yemen wants a permanent settlement to its border dispute with Saudi Arabia, Yemeni parliamentary Speaker Sheikh Abdallah Al Ahmar said here on Sunday during a visit for talks with Saudi officials, reports AFP.

Sheikh Abdallah also said his trip was aimed at preparing the ground for a meeting between King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh, which "could be held soon".

A planned visit by Saleh was to have taken place before last week but was postponed amid a tense stand-off between Yemeni and Saudi forces on the disputed border.

Both sides pledged to avoid the use of force following Syrian and Egyptian mediation. Yemen wants to normalise its relations with Saudi Arabia and settle permanently the border problem between the two countries, Sheikh Abdallah said.

He heads the Islamic fundamentalist Al-Islah Party, which is in the ruling coalition. His delegation met with Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz and Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal on Sunday, Riyadh radio said.

Saleh hinted on Tuesday he was ready to renew a border accord which gives Saudi Arabia three disputed provinces. The Yemeni president said his country accepted a settlement of the issue on the basis of the Taef Accord of 1934.



Miss Universe 1994 Sushmita Sen of India tests a telephone during her visit to an airline office on Monday. Sushmita is in Malaysia to witness the grand finals of the Miss Malaysia Universe Pageant 1995 tomorrow. — AFP photo

India's woman supercop to meet Clinton

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Khran Bedi, India's first woman police officer, will be allowed to travel to Washington to attend a breakfast meeting with US President Bill Clinton next month, she said here today, reports AFP.

Inspector General Bedi, Chief of the maximum-security Tihar Prison, will join delegates from scores of countries for the annual White House prayer breakfast on February 2.

Bedi, who won the Magsaysay Award last year for government service, was also invited for a breakfast meeting with Clinton last year, but the government did not permit her to travel to the United States. The government did not give a reason for its refusal.

This year, the Home Ministry gave the green signal.

Rose Kennedy dead

NEW YORK, Jan 23: Rose Kennedy, the matriarch of the political dynasty who lost two of her sons to assassins' bullets during the 1960s, died on Sunday at the age of 104. CNN reported, says Reuter.

Rose Kennedy, born Rose Fitzgerald on July 22, 1900, had been ailing for several years. She died in Hyannisport on Cape Cod, where the family has its well-known compound. Four of Rose Kennedy's nine children died violently. Her eldest son, Joseph, was killed in World War II, daughter Kathleen died in a 1948 plane crash. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in 1963, and in 1968 Senator Robert F. Kennedy was murdered in Los Angeles.

Bodo rebels raid village: 8 shot

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Tribal militants fighting for autonomy fatally shot eight people and injured 10 during raids on village in northeastern India, news agencies reported on Monday, says AP.

Indian security forces were rushed to the village that the Bodo rebels raided late Sunday. United News of India (UNI) said.

The area is about 1,375 kilometres (850 miles) east of New Delhi.

Bodo rebels, who want to carve out a Bodoland state within the remote, hilly state of Assam, have killed at least 1,000 people during the past six years in attacks on policemen, army troops, government officials and non-Bodo residents.

It was not immediately known why Bodo rebels picked up the village for the attack.

The attacks are the latest in the campaign by the Bodo rebels in Assam, India's top oil producing state and also famous for its tea.

The Bodo tribespeople, who still practice witchcraft and black magic, want to preserve their ancient culture and heritage. They say they need an autonomous state for that.

Bodo militants signed an accord in February 1993 with the federal government to end their insurgency, but the pact broke down within months as the rebels resumed their attack.

Suu Kyi won't sign secret deal

BANGKOK, Jan 23: Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi renewed Monday her vow to refuse to cut a secret deal with Yangon's military junta to end her six years of house arrest, reports AP.

The 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner made the promise in a statement dated Sunday but distributed to journalists by her husband, British academic Michael Aris, as he passed through Bangkok Monday.

"There has not been and there will not be any secret deals with regard either to my release or to any other issue," Suu Kyi said.

"I adhere to the principle of accountability and consider myself at all times bound by the democratic duty... to be guided by the aspirations of those engaged in the movement to establish a truly democratic political system in Myanmar."

The opposition leader, who was jailed in 1989 on charges of "endangering the state".

Thailand Foreign Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who met with senior Myanmar officials on a two-day visit to Yangon last week, said the government told him it would not free Suu Kyi until it had finished writing a constitution it has been drafting since January 1993. It is unclear when the draft will be complete.

Off the Record



Italian actress Sophia Loren holds up her Golden Globe award as she poses with long-time friend Charlton Heston on Saturday at the annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills. Sophia won the Cecil B DeMille award for her career achievements. — AFP photo

Mission to eradicate wordy Victorian English

LONDON: An expert in "plain English" travels to India this week on a mission to eradicate wordy, convoluted Victorian English used on the sub-continent, reports Reuter.

Martin Cutts, a director of Britain's Independent Plain Language Commission, will start a three-week series of writing workshops and public lectures to stamp out what he calls the antiquated English leftover since the days of empire.

He has been invited by the Federation of Consumer Organisations of Tamil Nadu, who are keen to cut out long-winded English in business forms, letters and contracts. As examples of archaic phrases in letters, Cutts cited "I humbly crave your opinion" and "I beg your esteemed perusal of this letter."

"There's a lot of old-style English used... you read in the newspapers about the 'miscraent absconding' rather than running away," said Neil Gilroy-Scott, head of literature at the British Council, which has helped organise Cutts's trip.

But L K Sharma, the Times of India's London correspondent, said many Indians believed colonial English had a unique charm.

"Whenever British people I know come back from India, they always say how much they appreciate hearing English spoken properly over there," he told the Sunday Telegraph.

A slap with a good behaviour bond

MELBOURNE: An Australian court slapped US rock singer Courtney Love, widow of star Kurt Cobain, with a good behaviour bond on Monday after she admitted abusing a flight attendant at the weekend, reports Reuter.

Love, widowed last year when Nirvana lead singer Cobain shot himself in the head, was wearing a tight-fitting black dress, jacket and stilettos when she pleaded guilty in a Melbourne court to committing an offence aboard an aircraft.

Police arrested Love, 30, on Saturday after a domestic flight from Brisbane to Melbourne, during which she used an obscenity against a flight attendant who had told her to take her legs down from a wall.

Love, lead singer of touring band Hole, was resting her legs on the wall in the Qantas plane's first-class section to ease back pain, her lawyer told the court on Monday.

The flight attendant threatened to call the police if Love did not take her legs down. "Go the f... ahead," Love replied before complying.

Love, who arrived at the hearing in a silver limousine, was not convicted of the charge, but magistrate Robert Kumar ordered her to be of good behaviour for one month.

10 die as Kurds battle in N Iraq

NICOLETTA, Jan 23: Ten people died and 30 others were wounded on Sunday in shelling of the key city of Arbil in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, a Kurdish official said.

Kosrat Rassoul, a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), told AFP by telephone that shells and rockets fired by supporters of the rival Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) slammed into the Berslaw suburb in the south-east of the city.

Rassoul said the shells were fired from the Kaznan hills around the city, where the KDP has made a breakthrough in its bid to seize back Arbil which has been controlled by the PUK since late December.