

BRIEFLY



Kris Aquino, the unwed daughter of former Filipino President Corason Aquino breaks into tears on Monday during a live television interview as she apologises for causing a scandal in her family. Kris, 23, four months pregnant from married movie actor Phillip Salvador, 20 years her senior tearfully narrated the difficulties she has been going through after her illegitimate pregnancy was made public last year. — AFP photo

13 feared drowned in Karnataka:

At least 13 women were feared drowned Monday when an overloaded boat they were travelling in capsized in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, a news agency reported. AP says from New Delhi.

Rescuers had recovered two bodies and were searching for the missing passengers. United News of India (UNI) quoted police as saying.

Swedish army chief in Pakistan:

Sweden's Army Chief, Gen Ake Saigren arrived in Islamabad on Monday to apologise to his counterpart for the killing of three gift horses from Pakistan. AP reports from Islamabad.

He (Saigren) explained and regretted the unfortunate incident of the killing of three Pakistani horses in Sweden, said a Pakistan army new release.

Tributes to Subhash Bose:

Rich tributes were paid to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his 98th birth anniversary celebrated at a function on Monday morning. PTI reports from Patna.

Garlanding of Netaji's statue, processions and prabhats were some of the highlights of the celebrations.

8 Russians freeze to death:

Eight people froze to death and another eight died in car crashes on Moscow's treacherously icy streets at the weekend. Interfax news agency reported on Monday. Reuter says from Moscow.

It quoted health officials as saying 41 people were taken to hospital suffering from frost-bite and 84 were injured in car accidents. The frost-bite victims — and 115 out of 184 people who were treated for broken bones — were drunk. Interfax said.

Ukraine-Russian talks begin:

Ukraine has opened talks with Russia to work out a deal for returning Soviet strategic bombers left on Ukraine territory after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Itar-Tass news agency reported. AFP says from Moscow.

Ukrainian Defence Ministry spokesman Alexander Kluban said the Ukraine was ready to sell back the Tu-160 and Tu-95 bombers or work out some mutually advantageous deal for their return, the agency said.

Dudayev phones Gaddafi:

Chechen independence leader Dzhokhar Dudayev believes Chechnya is a victim of an international conspiracy to seize control of Caspian oil deposits. Libyan television monitored by the BBC reported Monday. AFP says from London.

The television said Dudayev had expounded his theory in a phone call to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Missing US pilot found alive:

A US Air Force pilot and his son, who disappeared on a sky trip nine days ago, were found alive Tuesday, a government official said. AP reports from Ankara.

Bolu province Gov Yener Rakitcioglu, interviewed on television, confirmed a report on Anatolia radio that the two were found at a camp run by the state forestry administration.

Last respect to Bazargan:

More than 30,000 mourners on Monday attended the funeral of former Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan who headed the first government after the 1979 Islamic revolution and was a key opposition figure for more than 50 years. AFP reports from Tehran.

Friends and supporters gathered in front of Husseinieh Ershad Mosque in northern Tehran to pay their last respects to Bazargan, who died of a heart failure in a Swiss hospital on Friday at the age of 88.

DPRK military rally this week:

North Korea has summoned ideology vanguard officers into its tightly controlled capital for a major military rally this week to solicit loyalty to their new leader, Kim Jong-Il, monitors in Seoul said yesterday. AFP reports from Seoul.

In a broadcast monitored here on Monday, North Korea's official media reported the arrival in Pyongyang of army vanguards responsible for ideological indoctrination, said the South's official monitoring agency, Naesoe Press.

Dini faces confidence vote today:

Italy's new Prime Minister, Lamberto Dini, on Tuesday looked set to win a vote of confidence in parliament with the support of parties that opposed him when he was Silvio Berlusconi's treasury minister. Reuter reports from Rome.

Dini, whose freshly formed emergency government faces the confidence vote in the 630-seat chamber of deputies (lower house) on Wednesday, is counting on what were once parliament's opposition parties to see him through.

9 die in Chinese inferno:

An early-morning inferno in a department store in the southeastern city of Jiujiang has left nine people dead and two injured as well as causing serious damage, the Workers' Daily reported on Tuesday. AFP says from Beijing.

The major blaze broke out at 3:00 am on Friday in the Dazhong Department Store in Jiujiang in Jiangxi province, destroying shop installations and most merchandise on the third to fifth floors, the report said.

Third World nations oppose indefinite extension of NPT

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 24: Delegates from 159 countries on Monday began a crucial round of discussions to review the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) with Third World nations continuing their strong opposition to an indefinite extension of the pact, reports Reuter.

The five-day meeting is the last preparatory session before the April 17 conference on the treaty. The NPT, signed in March 1970, calls for decisions every 25 years on whether or not — and how — the agreement will be extended.

The key issues are the same as delegates failed to resolve at the previous preparatory meeting in Geneva in September. But the difference now is that time is running out before decisions have to be made and a vote is taken.

An indefinite extension of the NPT, desired by the United States, Russia, Britain and France and other Western

states, is opposed by many Third World states, which argue for a limited extension to put pressure on the nuclear powers to tackle new proliferation concerns.

Mexico's Martin Bosch, his country's ambassador to the Geneva disarmament conference, made a passionate case for Non-Aligned states at Monday's closed door talks.

He said nuclear weapons states were not living up to their responsibilities, had not fulfilled their disarmament obligations and should not take the non-nuclear nations for granted, diplomats said.

A decision to extend the NPT requires a simple majority of the 169 treaty members. The options are an indefinite extension or an extension for one of more fixed periods after which the treaty lapses.

Prosplay Davinic, director of the UN Centre for Disarmament Affairs, said the treaty would survive the April

DPRK agrees to put N-fuel rods in concrete

SEOUL, Jan 24: North Korea has agreed to put 8,000 corroding rods of spent nuclear fuel in dry concrete as part of a new nuclear deal with the United States, a diplomatic source in Seoul said on Tuesday, reports AP.

The South Korean source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the agreement was made at six days of US North Korea talks that ended in Pyongyang on Monday.

The fate of the 8,000 spent fuel rods that North Korea unilaterally removed from its experimental 5-megawatt nuclear reactor last May was a key issue of contention left after the October 21 US-North Korea nuclear deal.

Experts have warned that reprocessing of the 8,000

spent fuel rods, being kept temporarily in a cooling pond, could give the communist North enough weapons-grade plutonium to make four to five atomic bombs.

At the Pyongyang talks that began last Wednesday, the United States and North Korea reached agreement on all technical issues related to dry storage of the fuel rods, the South Korean source said.

The source said a team of US specialists, joined by experts from the UN International Atomic Energy Agency, is expected to begin work on the dry storage as early as next week.

Experts say dry concrete is one of the safest ways of storing spent fuel rods to prevent them from corroding and giving off radioactivity. The rods could erode if kept in the cooling ponds.

North Korea's official news agency said Monday the US-North Korea talks in Pyongyang resulted in "significant progress." It did not report details.

Under the October 21 nuclear framework agreement, the North's spent fuel rods to be kept in dry concrete must be transferred to a third country by 2002, when the first of two new modern reactors is built in the North.

The second reactor is scheduled to be completed one year later.

The two US-arranged light-water reactors, worth 4 billion dollars, are a key part of the framework agreement.

Suu Kyi's talks with junta appear to have stalled

YANGON, Jan 24: Talks between military rulers and leading opposition figure Aung San Suu Kyi appear to have stalled, with no real progress towards meaningful dialogue, analysts said today, reports AFP.

In a statement released on Monday by her husband on his arrival in Bangkok from Yangon, Aung San Suu Kyi indicated she would not agree to talks in isolation but that substantive negotiations must include other pro-democracy leaders as well.

The junta has so far given no sign it was ready to talk to any other political opponent —

whether jailed, in exile or at liberty — but, under international pressure, had trumpeted the meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi, who is now in her sixth year of house arrest.

Her carefully phrased message stressed there would be "no secret deals" with the junta, officially known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), and that the goal remained the establishment of a "truly democratic political system in Myanmar."

A source familiar with both sides said that contacts to date amounted to little more than a reaffirmation of their respec-

Kobe declared disaster zone

KOBE, Jan 24: A week after Kobe was devastated by an earthquake, the Cabinet declared the once-vibrant city a disaster zone Tuesday, effectively shoring up huge rebuilding costs, reports AP.

Opposition lawmakers assailed the government of Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama for its slow response to the quake, which killed more than 5,000 people.

"We were just thinking of" Opposition delegate Akira Kuroyanagi screamed at the prime minister in an emotional parliament session. He demanded Murayama apologise to the nation for the suffering

to Kobe. Murayama avoided any apology but said the government will spare no effort to improve disaster preparedness. The Finance Ministry unveiled a series of tax breaks for quake victims based on their income and property losses.

Those whose property losses still exceed their annual income after discounting insurance payments will have to pay no income tax of 1994 the ministry said Tuesday.

The Health Minister relaxed restrictions on foreign doctors who have volunteered their services. The ministry said foreign doctors will be al-

40 Russian mothers reach Chechnya to rescue sons

GROZNY, Jan 24: The women of Russia, trying to succeed where their menfolk have failed for six weeks, made a dramatic and determined bid on Monday to penetrate the heart of the embattled Chechen capital of Grozny, reports Reuter.

A busload of about 40 mothers of Russian soldiers reached the southwestern outskirts of Grozny around midday. Their mission: to secure the release of sons taken prisoner during the drawn-out struggle for the city that began on December 11.

"I'm not leaving until I get my son back, even if I have to stay in cellars in Grozny till I find him," one middle-aged mother vowed. Others were red-eyed and some incoherent after days of winter travel to the centre of the conflict.

But the group dressed in tight fur-trimmed coats, with the ends of their dyed fair hair just visible under bulky fur hats, fared no better than the Russian army has managed in its so far disastrous campaign

to subdue the separatist southern region.

The crowd scattered within seconds. Mothers poured out of the bus and fled in panic behind the shelter of the nearest nine-storey blocks of flats. Cars screeched away from the exposed road overlooking a dam and the fog-shrouded city centre.

"Look what filthy swine those Russian soldiers are," yelled one Chechen man through rotting gold teeth as he ran for cover.

"It's just like them to shoot at their own mothers."

A measure of calm returned as the mother regrouped in the relative safety of the hidden courtyards behind the row of buildings. A few started talking to phlegmatic Chechen women already used to Russian aerial and artillery bombardment.

"I had no idea you had to live in these conditions, facing all this bombing," a plump Russian matron said in wonderment amid the rolling thunderclaps of shell fire.

Off the Record



Spreading the vent of her savage-orange Empire-line silk gown to reveal its taffeta underpinnings, a Nina Ricci model leads the presentation of the designer's lame-embroidered evening dresses for 1995 in Paris on Sunday. — AFP photo

Oldest deer dies

SCOTLAND: The world's oldest recorded deer has died in Scotland at the age of 31, its owners said on Monday, reports Reuter.

Bambi lived almost twice as long as most deer on a diet of sugar-beet, maize and chocolate biscuits before suffering a stroke at the weekend.

Bambi entered the Guinness Book of Records in 1989 as the world's oldest known deer and started receiving fan mail and Christmas cards after appearing on children's television.

"I am sure we will get a huge amount of mail when people hear the bad news," said Nancy Fraser, who tended Bambi at her guest house in the Scottish highlands since she was a lawn.

Doctor under investigation for mixing up sperm

NAPLES: An artificial insemination specialist is under investigation for allegedly overlooking a man's healthy sperm and using another sample that passed on a serious blood disease to the baby, reports AP.

The inquest, announced Monday, is the latest scandal involving Italy's highly unregulated field of "test tube" births.

According to reports, Dr Raffaele Magli did not use the sperm of the father, but that of donor who carried thalassaemia, which causes a reduction in red blood cells.

Their daughter, Giada, who is now 2 years old, must undergo periodic blood transfusions, the ANSA news agency reported.

Prosecutors must now decide whether to seek indictment or drop the case.

Magli also has sued the couple claiming they tried to extort about 1 billion lire (600,000 dollar) in exchange for a promise not to go to police.

Italy has few rules governing medical work to assist pregnancies.

Earlier this month, a Rome gynaecologist came under criticism from colleagues after he claimed a girl was born two years after her mother's death — from a frozen embryo thawed and implanted in the womb of her father's sister.

Some groups also have challenged the ethics of Italian doctors who help post-menopausal women give birth.

Now gay archive

LOS ANGELES: A collection of more than 2 million items chronicling 20th century homosexual life and politics has found a home at the University of Southern California, reports AP.

The merged holdings of the International Gay and Lesbian Archives and the ONE Institute include a 1906 edition of a German gay magazine, a pink leather motorcycle outfit worn at a charity event and matchbooks from gay bars.

"One of our problems as gay and lesbian people is finding our roots. It's so important for people to know who and what they came from," said John O'Brien, acting president of the ONE Institute, which administers the collection.

The institute, founded in 1952, has published a magazine and offered classes in gay studies.

USC is providing space in return for access to the collection. Walter Williams, an anthropology professor who teaches in USC's gender studies programme, used the collections for his research on homosexuality in non-Western cultures and found information unavailable anywhere else. "I realized how valuable these were," Williams said.

Violence is not characteristic of Islam: Suharto

JAKARTA, Jan 24: Force and violence are neither an Islamic characteristic nor example and those spreading the religion's teachings should reflect this, Indonesian President Suharto said today, reports AFP.

He was officially opening the ninth meeting of the Propagating Committee of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference OIC being held at the State Palace here.

"Islamic preachers should show the peaceful face of the religion to the world. Truly, in the implementation of preaching we must show a face of Islam which is full of peace," he told more than 200 delegates from 22 nations.

"Allah has already given guidance in preaching, guidance which is soft and full of smiles," he said.

"We must avoid preaching which is forced above all with the way of violence," said Suharto.



A woman weeps as she clutches the last of her money, which will not enable her to leave her destroyed house in Grozny on Saturday. — AFP photo