

BRIEFLY

Indian relief for Iraqi children:

Three trucks with medicines for Iraqi children and other relief supplies from India headed Sunday for Baghdad. Indian sources said. AP reports from Amman.

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the supplies were sent by an Indian humanitarian agency and escorted to Baghdad by a team of Indian lawmakers headed by John Joseph.

Jiang greets Taiwan leaders:

President Jiang Zemin welcomed Taiwan's leaders to visit the mainland and sent holiday greetings to the people of Taiwan on Monday, the eve of the lunar New Year, reports AP from Beijing.

Jiang, who also is chairman of the Communist Party, also welcomed officials from all parties in Taiwan to visit and exchange views about Taiwan-mainland relations and "peaceful reunification," the Xinhua News Agency said.

Sino-SA diplomatic ties soon:

South Africa plans to establish diplomatic relations with China within the year, South African Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo said Monday, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

"That question will be resolved by the government very soon, so I'm sure that will happen," the minister told Reuters during an interview in Tokyo.

Mubarak to visit US soon:

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is to visit the United States soon, amid a dispute with Washington over nuclear curbs, Information Minister Safwat Al-Sherif said on Sunday, without giving a date, AFP reports from Cairo.

Egypt is refusing to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty unless Israel does the same.

Indian journalist dies in UK:

Parmanand Sharma, a senior correspondent of the Hindustan Times, died of cancer in London on Sunday night. He was 58, PTT reports from London.

The Hindustan Times London correspondent from 1987 to 1994, Sharma had been undergoing treatment for cancer for the last one year. He is survived by his widow Rama Sharma, one son and a daughter. The cremation is likely to take place in London on Wednesday, the family members said.

3 children die in London fire:

Three young brothers aged eight, three and two were killed when fire ripped through a fourth floor flat in South London early Monday, police said, Reuter reports from London.

Their mother, one year old sister and five-year old brother were seriously injured when the blaze engulfed the flat shortly after midnight.

China's comment angers Taiwan:

Taiwan on Monday reacted angrily to comments from China's President Jiang Zemin concerning the island's autonomy, describing Beijing's attitude as "obsolete," state-radio reported, AFP says from Taipei.

Jiang, in a lunar new year gathering in Beijing, said earlier Monday that Beijing would not hesitate to use force to preserve its sovereignty over the island, if Taiwan moved any further towards formal independence.

Most Russians distrust Yeltsin:

An opinion poll released on Sunday showed 72 per cent of Russians did not trust President Boris Yeltsin, who launched a bloody war with the breakaway region of Chechnya last month, Reuter reports from Moscow.

The poll, carried out for independent Russian television channel NTV, showed only eight per cent of the 1,300 people polled on January 20 trusted the increasingly unpopular leader.

2 rebels shot dead in E Timor:

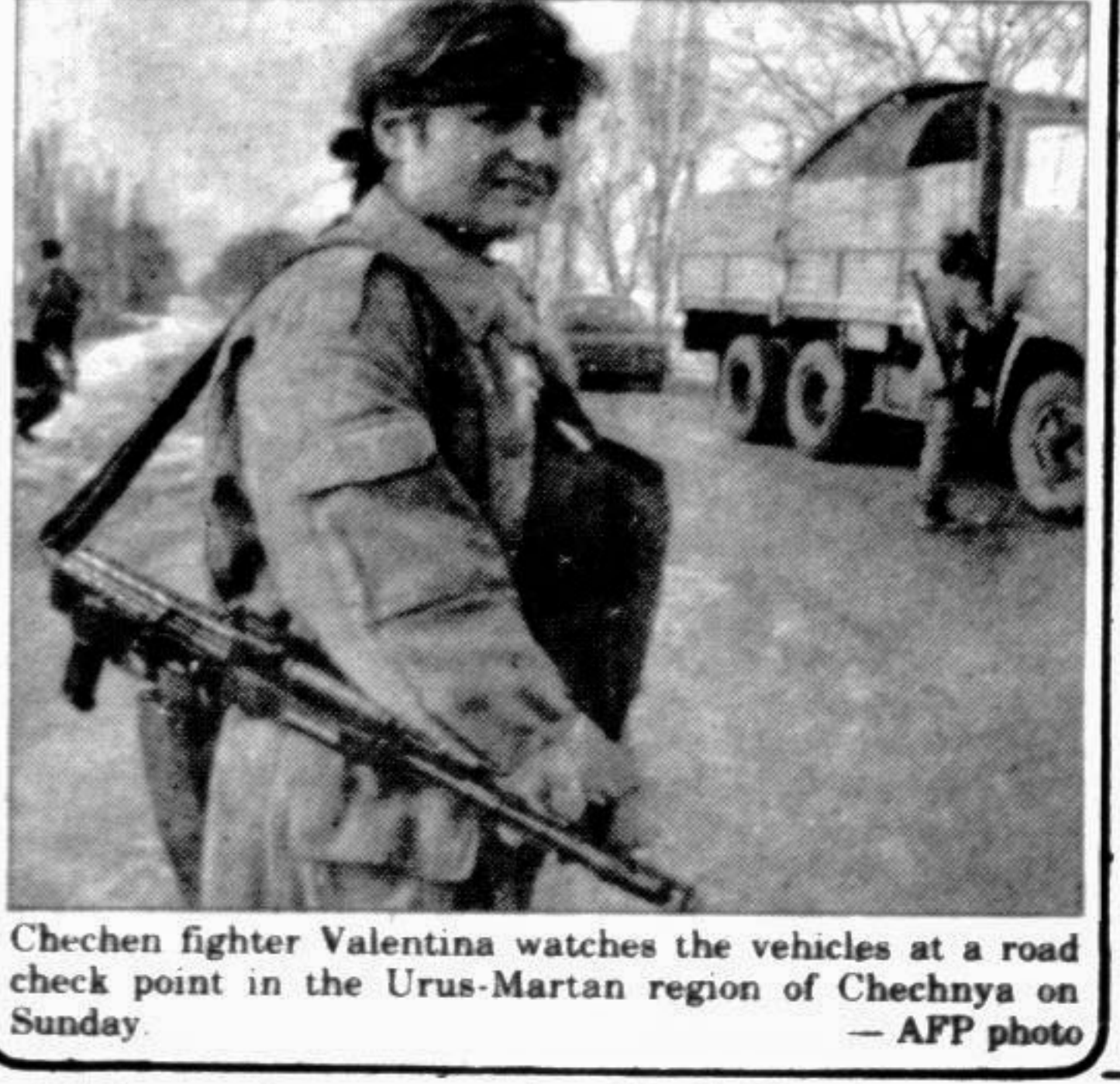
Two East Timorese rebels were killed by Indonesian troops while another escaped wounded after a shootout at a plantation, the military said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The two were killed in Hatolia Leten village on Saturday, some four kilometres (2.5 miles) from the border between Bobnaro and the neighbouring regency of Ermera, said East Timor military spokesman Laedan Simbolon by telephone from Dili.

Bridge blown up in N Iraq:

A bridge serving as a vital link between towns and villages was blown up on Sunday in northern Iraq, where two rival Kurdish groups have been fighting for more than a month, the Iranian News Agency IRNA reported, AFP says from Tehran.

Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) blamed Massud Barzani's Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK) for the destruction of the Zerim river bridge, IRNA added.



Chechen fighter Valentina watches the vehicles at a road check point in the Urus-Martan region of Chechnya on Sunday. — AFP photo

China plans to launch five more satellites

BELJING, Jan 30: China will go ahead with plans to launch five commercial satellites for foreign customers this year despite the explosion of a rocket last Thursday, the China Daily said today, reports Reuter.

China Great Wall Industrial Corporation will proceed with the five launches as planned, because its Long March 2E rocket has good technology, and is discussing new launch contracts with foreign customers, the newspaper quoted the company as saying.

It gave no more details.

The rocket exploded 50 seconds after launch from the Xichang Centre in Sichuan province at dawn on Thursday. Its wreckage killed six people and injured 23.

It destroyed the 160 million dollars Apstar 2 telecommunications satellite.

Sikh widows of '84 Delhi riots fight for survival

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: In squalid quarters in west Delhi live the sad reminders of the Indian capital's descent into anarchy and violence ten years ago, reports IPS.

There, nearly 2,000 widows try to go on with their lives after the 1984 assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi unleashed an orgy of violence against the males of the Sikh community easily identifiable by their long hair and turbans.

Gandhi was murdered by her Sikh bodyguards on Oct 31, 1984 in the days that followed, at least 2,000 Sikhs were massacred in New Delhi alone leaving behind an official count of 1,850 widows here.

At least 900 of these women, along with their remaining family members, have since been cramped into two-room tenement quarters provided by the government in west Delhi, after their worldly belongings were set aflame by rampaging mobs.

Kulwinder Kaur, 50, who survived the trauma of seeing her husband, two sons and a nephew clubbed and kicked to death in the lawless aftermath of the Gandhi assassination, says she now lives only for the teenage son she managed to save from the mobs fury.

"I dressed him up in women's clothes and his long hair helped in the disguise," she recalls.

Apart from a paltry US 64 dollar compensation and the flat Kulwinder has accepted nothing else from the government and largely gets by on her own resources.

But majority of the Sikh widows took the jobs offered to them by the government as part of their resettlement plan, and became their families breadwinners.

Having to stay away from home for the larger part of the

Riyadh denies troops massing along border Saudi-Yemeni talks on

DUBAI, Jan 30: Saudi Arabia's defence minister denied Saudi troops were massing along its frontier with Yemen and said talks between the two sides to resolve a longstanding border dispute were proceeding well, reports Reuter.

Talks are going well in brotherly and high spirits, Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz was quoted by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) as telling reporters on Sunday.

"Do not believe this international clamour," said Prince Sultan, who is also the second Deputy Prime Minister.

No breakthrough has been reported from negotiations between a Yemeni delegation headed by Deputy Prime Minister Abdul-Qader Bajammal in Riyadh since January 26, and a

Saudi team headed by Education Minister Abdul Aziz Al-Khweiter.

But both sides say they have not reached a deadlock in the talks aimed at solving the 60-year-old border dispute.

Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh last week accused Saudi Arabia of massing troops along the border despite an agreement brokered by Syria on December 15 to withdraw forces from the area, revive border talks and not resort to force.

Saudi Arabia issued a denial on Friday night and told Yemen to check with it first before making such accusations.

Asked about reports of the Saudi deployment, Prince Sultan answered "there is no truth in them" SPA said.

He said the border issue

would soon be resolved to the satisfaction of both sides.

Ties between the two Arab neighbours have been strained particularly since 1990, mainly by Yemen's vote in the UN Security Council against a resolution sanctioning the 1991 Gulf War to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

They suffered another blow last year when Saudi Arabia and other regional states appeared to side with a southern Yemeni secessionist bid that was crushed in a two-month civil war.

In 1993, Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, warned foreign oil firms prospecting near the border with Yemeni licences they were trespassing on Saudi territory.



Michelle Engler (C), wife of Michigan Governor John Engler laughs with First Lady Hillary Clinton (R) as President Bill Clinton (L) holds up a picture of her girl triplets, born just after the November election. President Clinton was hosting a dinner to honour the governors of the US and its territories. — AFP photo

Rao fails to heal split within party ranks

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao moved to reassert his authority at a top meeting of his ruling Congress Party, but failed to heal a deepening split within its ranks, reports Reuter.

At a late-night meeting on Sunday, the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the ruling party's top decision-making body, discussed the suspension of leading party dissident Arjun Singh, but only after hours of heated debate.

Singh, who quit as Human Resources Minister on December 24 accusing Rao of ignoring minorities and being soft on party corruption, has become a focus of dissent in the ruling party.

The meeting highlighted

the growing split within the Congress Party, and party sources said it had been difficult and sometimes heated.

Disagreement centred on Rao's decision to cut short the time period given to Singh to answer charges laid against him by the party disciplinary committee last Friday that could lead to his expulsion from the Congress Party.

The charges, that Singh had been behaving as an opponent of the party and the government since his resignation, must be answered in four days.

Official party spokesman VN Gadgil said three of the 18 CWC members argued that the time given to Singh to answer the charges should be extended.

Party sources said these in-

Corruption scandals overshadow French polls campaign

PARIS, Jan 30: Corruption scandals overshadow France's presidential campaign, making sleaze and justice the prime election issues, reports Reuter.

Several prominent public figures are due to appear in court on charges ranging from fraud and bribery to illicit campaign funding before the first round of voting on April 23.

They include Lyon Mayor Michel Noir, Socialist Party leader Henri Emmanuelli, soccer boss turned politician Bernard Tapie and leading television newscaster Patrick

Poivre d'arvor.

Others — including three minister forced to resign last year, a dozen mayors, parliamentarians from all major parties and some senior businessmen — are under investigation for alleged corruption and influence peddling.

While some politicians are accused of personal enrichment, a common thread in many cases is the funding of political parties via rake-offs from public works and water contracts, fictitious consultancy services and false In

voices.

Says Shanti, 42, who was expecting her sixth child when she lost her husband to the mobs a decade ago, "my son dropped out of school in the ninth standard. From being a good student, he has turned into a thief."

Worrying how their chil-

Arab League plans int'l meet to end war in Somalia

CAIRO, Jan 30: The Arab League is planning to organise an international meeting on ending the conflict between warring clans in Somalia before UN troops pull out in March, a leading official said on Sunday, reports AFP.

League Secretary General Esmat Abdel Meguid told journalists that "invitations had been sent to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as well as all the Somali factions in the conflict and to concerned countries."

He added that the League would put forward "suggestions on ways of peacefully solving the Somali crisis."

Last year two delegations from the Pan Arab organisation visited Somalia in a bid to reconcile the factions but it was in vain.

On Sunday at least one Somali was reported killed and five others wounded when two clan militias continued to battle one another for the second week running in the Bermuda area of southern Mogadishu.

Egyptian women may get right to divorce

CAIRO, Jan 30: Egypt is preparing to change its marriage rules to give a woman the right to divorce her husband if he takes another wife, but is advancing cautiously to avoid angering Muslim militants.

A draft law giving a woman for the first time the right to an automatic divorce if her husband is polygamous has already been prepared, and is expected to be passed by decree rather than by parliamentary adoption, a senior official from the Justice Ministry told AFP.

Under Islamic Law, or Sharia, men are allowed to take another wife and may have up to four at the same time.

Fathi Naguib said the ministry was still waiting for the opinion of Egypt's Mufti Sheikh Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi, the country's leading Sunni Muslim authority.

The proposed law was put forward by the National Women's Committee headed by Suzanne Mubarak, wife of President Hosni Mubarak.

Controversy over Pak gift to Omani Sultan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 30: Sultan Qaboos of Oman has accepted a gift of land in Pakistan that became a focus of controversy in the country, the visiting Omani commerce minister said here Sunday, reports AFP.

Maqbool Bin Sultan dismissed doubts that the recent controversy over the gift of 100 acres (40 hectares) in the coastal area of Gawadar in Baluchistan would dampen relations between the two countries.

Political opponents of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had accused her of selling back Gawadar to Oman, which sold and ceded the area to Pakistan in 1958.

A gift of 100 acres was given and his majesty accepted, that as its very normal thing to do," Maqbool said.

Off the Record

Drunkard in tigers' jaws

COLOGNE, Germany: A man was fighting for his life Sunday after being severely mauled by two tigers when he climbed into their enclosure at Cologne Zoo in an apparently drunken state, police said, reports AFP.

The man climbed into the enclosure in the early hours of the morning. A neighbour alerted the police after hearing cries. When police arrived, they found the man attempting to prevent the two tigers, who were holding him in their jaws, from dragging him into their den.

The police fired shots but were unable to persuade the tigers to drop the man for several moments.

One of the tigers were slightly wounded by the police.

Deadly in the hands of Rushdie

NEW YORK: Lyrics to the "Flintstones" theme song are innocuous enough, but Turner Broadcasting Systems apparently believes they could turn deadly in the hands of writer Salman Rushdie, reports AP.

TBS owns the song, and it has demanded that the author remove lines from it that appear in the American edition of Rushdie's new collection of short stories, titled "East, West," according to the February 6 issue of Newsweek.

The lines in question: "Flintstones! Meet the Flintstones! They're the modern stone age family."

In an interview with Newsweek in London, Rushdie seemed a bit annoyed by Turner Broadcasting's demand.

"If I quoted these lines, somebody would shoot Fred Flintstone?" he asked rhetorically of the cartoon character.

TBS apparently fears reprisals, but officials could not immediately be reached for comment. They were not quoted in the Newsweek article, and a message left Sunday afternoon at the home of a spokeswoman was not immediately returned.

On February 14, it will be six years since the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the late Iranian leader, sentenced Salman Rushdie to death for the contents of his book "The Satanic Verses." But Rushdie still lives in fear, and the death sentence still inspires fear.

Over the years, Islamic terrorists have attacked three of his translators, killing the Japanese translator.

The "Flintstones" lyrics appear in a story titled "The Courier" in the "East, West," collection. The story is about an aging Indian nanny who is wooed by an Eastern European porter — both are "Flintstones" fans — but ultimately leaves her suitor to return to India.



Fresh Myanmar attack on Karen rebel base

BANGKOK, Jan 30: Myanmar forces were attacking Monday the last major Karen base in the northern sector of their once-potent insurgency and moving against guerrilla bases to the south, Thai military and aid sources said, reports AP.

Some of the leaders of the ethnic rebel movement, along with thousands of followers, have already fled to Thailand, and more refugees are expected.

Thai Foreign Minister Taksin Shinawatra said Sunday that the refugees would be granted temporary asylum.

The headquarters of the Karen National Union, at Manerplaw, about 240 kilometres (150 miles) east of Yangon, fell to government troops Thursday night after six days of fighting.

Thai Border Patrol Police officers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the

Karen had also lost six other bases along the Thai-Myanmar border in the areas north and south of Manerplaw.

The officers said Myanmar were pressing hard against the stronghold of Kawmoora and had also opened up another front against the Karen further south opposite the Thai province of Kanchanaburi. Nearly 1,000 refugees were reported already inside Kanchanaburi and more Karen villages were being evacuated in face of the Myanmar advance.

The Karen — who field some 4,000 guerillas — were the strongest of what were once more than a dozen ethnic insurgencies fighting for greater autonomy from the military-run central government. The Karen rebellion first erupted 46 years ago, making it one of the world's longest-lasting insurgencies.

Aftershocks continue in Kobe

TOKYO, Jan 30: Aftershocks continue in the port city of Kobe and its environs, where the Meteorological Agency recorded 1,304 between January 17 earthquake and this noon, reports AFP.

Only 144 of the aftershocks were strong enough to be felt by residents, the agency said. Experts have warned that aftershocks with a magnitude of up to 6 on the Richter scale may hit the Kobe region. The main earthquake, which had a magnitude of 7.2, killed more than 5,000 people and injured over 26,000.

Japan's N-reactor closed

TOKYO, Jan 30: A Japanese nuclear reactor was closed down and another had its output reduced due to faults in two separate incidents today, power companies said, reports Reuter.

There were no leaks of radioactivity, they said.

The 820,000-kilowatt number two reactor at Shimane Nuclear Power Plant in Shimane prefecture, western Japan, automatically stopped when the water level rose in a reserve tank in a system moving fuel rods, operator Chugoku electric power co INC said.

The cause of the incident was still unclear, it said. In

Takahama, Fukui prefecture, central Japan, the output of a 826,000-kilowatt reactor was reduced to 75 per cent of capacity due to a faulty tube in a heat exchange chamber, Kansai electric power co INC said.

The two water systems meeting in the chamber were both using non-radioactive water, and normal operations were soon restored. The tube, which was plugged, was one of 2,000 running into the chamber.

Japan has 46 nuclear reactors and relies on them for some 30 per cent of its electricity needs.

Khmers admit killing of US tourist

PHNOM PENH, Jan 30: Cambodia's Khmer Rouge guerrillas said today they had rewarded their fighters for killing an American tourist they called an "army expert", reports Reuter.

Rebel radio monitored in Phnom Penh today said 11 Cambodians arrested for an attack on a tour group in the northwest province of Siem Reap on January 15 were innocent. "The guerillas who shot the American have already been awarded 10 yoke of oxen, 10 yoke of water buffalo and 100,000 baht (4,000 dollar)," the radio said.

Susan Hadden, 50, from Texas, and her Khmer tour guide were killed by automatic weapon and rocket fire when they were ambushed on their way to visit the ancient Banteay Srey Temple north of the Angkor Wat Complex.

Shastri says neither the widows nor their children have any faith in the government or the concept of justice. She adds that this is hardly surprising since little has been done to bring the people behind the riots to book.

Sixteen different official committees have been set up to find responsibility for the riots, but no action has been taken on the basis of their reports as yet.

The widows accuse the leaders of Gandhi's Congress Party which is back in power after a short absence from 1989 and 1992 and police officials for conniving to engineer the riots but the survey found that, in general, they bear no rancour to the majority Hindu community.

For the widows, foremost in their concerns is survival and perhaps a return to normal life.

Babita, of a similar age says, "In our school, our teachers treat differently and say children from the widows colony are bad."

Dalbir Kaur, widowed at 36 has four children, three of them girls, says she prefers to stay at home and accept compensation money rather than take the risk of not providing the children enough parental guidance.

But IWPC team member Rithambara Shastri says it is not merely absence of the father that seems to upset the children, but the manner in which he died.

She observes, "apart from a deep seated insecurity, the children bear a sense of fatalism and have developed the attitude that since life can be snuffed out so easily as happened with their fathers, uncles and brothers, there is little use in studying or building