BRIEFLY

Benazir to visit Singapore: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will visit Singapore from March 7-10 as part of her ongoing effort to lure investors to Pakistan. officials said Thursday. AP reports from Islamabad.

Ms. Bhutto has traveled abroad frequently seeking investment for development projects, particularly power

Algerian TV staff killed: A staff member of Algeria's state television, Nasser Ouari, was murdered near Algiers on Wednesday, the television news programme announced. AFP reports from Algiers.

Ouari presented a weekly magazine for the hard of hearing and was very popular with TV viewers.

Brizan Grenada's new PM: George Brizan was sworn in as Grenada's Prime Minister on Wednesday and said he would work to improve the tiny spicegrowing island's economy. Reuter reports from St George's.

Brizan succeeded fellow National Democratic Congress member Nicholas Brathwaite, 70, who quit politics for health reasons.

2 Greek fighter jets missing: Two Greek Air Force F-5 fighter planes vanished on Wednesday while flying near the eastern Aegean island of Limnos, close to Turkey, a Greek Defence Ministry source said, Reuter reports from Athens

The aircraft, with three pilots on board, disappeared at about 1500 GMT, the source said. One aircraft, a helicopter and several ships were searching for them around the heavilymilitarised island, he gave no more details.

3 bombs explode in Istanbul: A bomb explosion killed a suspected terrorist on Wednesday and two other blasts damaged buildings but caused no injuries, reports said. AP says from Istanbul.

A woman was killed when the bomb exploded in her face as she was placing it at the base of a main bridge crossing the Golden Horn, an inlet off the Bosporus on Istanbul's European side, the Anatolia news agency reported. No other information was immediately available. Another bomb at the bridge was defused by police and the span was closed to trallic.

Clash leaves 7 dead in Philippines: Five soldiers and two rebels were killed in a two-day clash between troops and the Muslim extremist Abu Sayyaf Group in the southern Philippines, the army said yesterday. Reuter reports from Manila.

Ten soldiers were wounded in the clash, which began on Monday in the district of Sumiship on the island province of Basilan, 900 km (558 miles) south of Manila, army spokesman Major Fredesvindo Covarrubias told reporters.

Jordanian new IOJ Secy-Gen: The International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ) elected a Jordanian as its first Arab secretary general on Wednesday and charted a new course for the grouping founded five decades ago, AFP reports from Amman.

The organisations' new head. Soleiman Kodhat, is the leader of Jordan's Journalists' Union.

Dini gets support to govern Italy: New Prime Minster Lamberto Dini secured overwhelming support to govern Italy in a vote by the Upper House on Wednesday. AFP reports from Rome.

The Senate vote came after Dini's government of technocrats won the approval of the Lower House last week. The Senate vote was split 191 in favour of his government and 17 against. He needed 106 voted to be effectively voted into power.

78 Kurds killed in Turkey since '91: Seventy-eight members of the pro-Kurdish Party of People's Democracy (PPD) have been killed in unsolved political assassinations since July 1991, the party said Wednesday, AFP reports from Ankara.

The party published a list of the dead the day after the latest killing, of Vasif Cetin, one of its leaders, in Batman in southeastern Turkey.

Discovery blasts off today: NASA announced on Wednesday that it was postponing Thursday's scheduled launch for the Discovery space shuttle for 24 hours because of a problem in the navigation system. AFP reports from Cape Canaveral

The new launch time has been set for Friday from Cape Canaveral Florida. The six member shuttle crew - which includes a Russian astronaut - will be on the first of the joint US-Russian space missions.

US denies asylum to ethnic Indian: An ethnic Indian living in Fiji who was seized, beaten and questioned about his membership in a dissident party was not subjected to political persecution, a federal appeals court ruled on Wednesday. AP reports from San Francisco.

In a 2-1 decision, the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals upheld an immigration board's denial of political asylum to Kamla Prasad, his wife and their three children, who fled the racially divided island nation after a 1987 military coup.

Kobe rocked again: An tremor measuring 4.2 on the Richter scale hit the Kobe region, scene of last month's devastating earthquake, today, the meteorological agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

The agency said the latest aftershock from the disaster hit Kobe and its vicinity at 4:19 PM (0719 GMT). There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, police said.

1m die of TB in S Asia a year: One million people die every year of tuberculosis in South Asia. home to one of every four new victims of the disease, a monitoring centre in Kathmandu said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from New Delhi.

The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation tuberculosis centre said that of eight' million new victims reported worldwide each year two million were from the region, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Sharif's close aide to form separate bloc

Split in Pakistan Muslim League

ISLAMABAD, Feb 2: A split has surfaced in Pakistan's main opposition party led by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif with the announcement by a key lieutenant that he would form a splinter group, reports

Nawaz Khokar, a member of the national assembly, announced his decision here late Tuesday and said he had the support of 12 other MPs who would join him to form a "forward, bloc" within the Pakistan Muslim League (PML).

Khokar, who was previously seen as a close aide to Sharif but held no office within the party, said he was leaving the mainstream PML due to the "unscrupulous" policies of the current leadership, which he criticised for not working out differences in parliament.

Late last year, Sharif led a series of protests and marches aimed at unseating Benazir.

there have been indications lately that the MPL plans to launch a no-confidence motion against the government, ob-

servers said. In November brawls and fist fights broke out in the parliament when the opposition attempted to disrupt an address by President Faroog Ahmed Leghari, accusing him of partisan behaviour and corruption.

"When you do not accept the president the prime minister and parliament, it poses a dangerous threat to the system," Khokar told a news conference, adding that Sharif's policies were fraught with danger to Pakistan's democratic system.

The revolt by Khokar, a former deputy speaker of the assembly, marked the first cricks in the PML which has been locked in battle with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto

Sever wan bound children shout slogans in a street protest on Wednesday for the security of

Peace chances slim as fighting

continues in Bihac

Akashi on Wednesday, over-

shadowed some relatively posi-

tive developments towards

peace in the besieged Bosnian

Sarajevo airport into the city

for the first time in six months

on Wednesday after Bosnian

Serbs allowed the supply route

to reopen to UN and relief

UN troops transported

sources of sick or wounded

people to a hospital in Sarajevo

after evacuating them from the

eastern Bosnia enclave of

European Union (EU) on

Wednesday urged Russia to call

an immediate ceasefire in

Chechnya and seek a negoti-

ated end to the conflict there.

a French Foreign Ministry

EU had urged Moscow to

"engage in dialogue on a politi-

cal resolution of the Chechen

crisis and take immediate

steps to protect human rights

and seek solutions to the very

serious humanitarian situation"

in the breakaway Caucasus re-

The message was transmit-

ted on behalf of the EU by

French Foreign Minister Alain

Juppe in a telephone call to

his Russian counterpart.

Arndrei Kozyrev.

public.

The spokesman said the

spokesman said, reports AFP.

It was the first time in

UN trucks drove across

capital Sarajevo

agencies.

life organised by the Karachi Women Action Committee.

SARAJEVO. Feb 2: Efforts

to bring peace to former

culties over the involvement of

Krajina Serbs from Croatia

fighting in Bosnia's Muslim

held Bihac enclave, reports

lzetbegovici gave a veiled

warning that his troops were

ready to strike across the

border into Croatia unless UN

peacekeeping soldiers

prevented Krajina Serb forces

from fighting alongside Muslim

UN mission chief Yasushi

UN aid drive for

Chechen

refugees

Nations humanitarian agencies

launched a joint appeal

Wednesday for 23.6 million

dirs to provide aid for more

than 160,000 refugees who

have fled the fighting in

gency food and medical sup-

plies as well as transport

needs until the end of April.

The funds will cover emer-

In a separate appeal, the

International Committee of the

Red Cross stepped up its de-

mands Wednesday for a hu-

manitarian truce in the be-

sieged Chechen capital Grozny

to allow civilians and casualties

will allow us to conduct an ef-

fective humanitarian operation

in Grozny," explained ICRC

spokesman Rolin Wavre.

"Only a temporary truce

to be evacuated.

Chechnya, reports AP.

GENEVA. Feb 2: United

The threat, in a letter to

Bosnian President Alija

Reuter.

rebels in Bihac.

Yugoslavia ran into fresh diffi-

since she assumed office in October 1993.

There was no immediate reaction from Sharif or his aides to Khokar's rebellion, but sources in the party accused the MP of having had clandestine contacts with the government.

Khokar has denied striking any deals, citing outstanding charges against him by the government in a case involving a bank loan default, he was arrested three weeks ago and released on bail on Wednesday.

Several other opposition leaders, including former interior minister Shujat Hussain and Sharif's father, are under investigation by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for financial irregularities in a government-sponsored campaign to make politicians more accountable.

Sharif has termed the ac-

- AFP photo

nearly three years of war that

the Muslim led Bosnian gov-

ernment and Serb forces sur

rounding the Gorazde area had

Serbs were intervening in

Bihac despite promises to

withdraw. The area has seen

the heaviest fighting in Bosnia

since a truce was declared

across the former Yugoslav re-

lzetbegovic whose letter

was quoted on state radio, said

he was under pressure from

his military to open a new

France currently hold the

Kozyrev replied that he

union's six-month rotating

considered as a "positive" step

a recent visit to Grozny by a

delegation of monitors from

the Organisation for Security

and Cooperation in Europe

(OSCE), and that the team's

findings would be examined

today by Russia's Security

as disproportionate Russia's

seven week armed interven-

tion in Chechnya, and con

cluded that human rights had

been seriously violated in the

rectly criticising Moscow

But it refrained from di

The OSCE team denounced

public from January 1.

EU for negotiated end

to Chechnya conflict

presidency

Council.

republic

UN official said the Krajina

signed the same agreement.

countability drives as a deliberate act of victimisation saying it targetted only members of the opposition.

Speaking in the national assembly on Tuesday, he proposed the establishment of a commission of senior judges to carry out an imperial probe into corruption involving lawmakers.

Sharif said the commission could be appointed by consensus, or by a two thirds majority parliamentary vote, and would have the power to expel those found guilty for parliament for

But Minister for Law. Justice and Parliamentary Affairs N D Khan immediately rejected the proposal, saying corruption would be dealt with under existing laws, he also denied the government was using the campaign to victimise the opposition.

Clinton endorses Cairo summit

WASHINGTON, Feb 2: President Bill Clinton told Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak Wednesday he endorsed his call for an unprecedented summit with leaders of Jordan, Israel and the PLO, the White House said, reports AFP.

Clinton, in a phone conversation, with Mubarak, described the gathering, planned for today in Cairo, as "a very impressive summit". White House press secretary Mike McCurry said.

McCurry said Clinton has been in contact with Mubarak over the past days to discuss ways to advance the Middle East peace process which is stalled over efforts to extend Palestinian self-rule.

"The president hopes that this meeting will help create renewed momentum towards the goal of comprehensive and lasting peace for all the people of the Middle East," McCurry

Peru-Ecuador border clash leaves 50 dead

LIMA. Feb 2: Fifty soldiers were killed in a fresh outbreak of border clashes Wednesday between Peru and Ecuador in the Condor mountain range, America television reported here, says AFP.

The television report said 40 Ecuadorans and 10 Peruvian troops were killed around Condorcangui, and that the bodies were taken to a Peruvian muitary base in El Milagro.

Earlier, Ecuador accused Peru of launching a new ground and air offensive Wednesday as peace talks bogged down in Brazil after nearly a week of fighting on the disputed border.

PLO leader warns of 'new uprising'

JERUSALEM, Feb 2: Palestinians will wage a new uprising against Israel if construction of Jewish neighbourhoods in predominantly Arab east Jerusalem continues, a senior PLO official said Thursday, reports AP.

Faisal Husseini, a minister in Yasser Arafat's self-rule government, issued the warning a day after Jerusalem's planning council approved building plans for a Jewish neighbourhood of 6,500 homes in the eastern sector that is claimed by the Palestinians as a future capital.

Husseini said the construction of this and other Jewish neighbourhoods would undurmine support for Arafat among Palestinians and boost Islamic militants who oppose reconciliation with Israel.

First embarrassment to minority govt

Two Nepali parties walk out of parliament

KATHMANDU. Feb 2: Nepal's two main opposition parties stormed out of parliament over separate issues on Tuesday night, causing the first embarrassment to the minority communist government they support, reports Reuter.

The Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), the second largest opposition group after the Nepali Congress Party, walked out in protest at what it called the government's failure to win more power and water from an Indian hydro-electric power project on the border.

Shortly afterwards, the Nepali Congress walked out protesting against the government's reply on an accident two years ago in which two communists were killed.

Both the RPP, holding 20 seats, and the Nepali Congress, with 83 seats, have supported the minority communist government since elections in December after no party emerged with a clear majority.
The re-negotiation of hydro-electric power project with India, one of the Communist Party's election prom-

ises, dominated Tuesday's session with opposition deputies demanding that the government clarify its stand on the issue. Opposition leaders said it was not clear whether the communists, which had criticised the earlier Congress government for not having wrested enough concessions

The minister for law, justice and parliamentary affairs. Subash Chandra Nemwang. said the government would present its views on the matter at the next session of parliament in six months' time.

from India on the Tanakpur

dam project, had changed its

Off the Record

A blatant act of sexual harassment

NEW YORK: Russian ultranationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky sexually harassed a playboy magazine interviewer and her translator on a campaign trip, the magazine said Wednesday, reports Reuter.

It said Zhirinovsky, who ran for bresidency during Russia's first free election in 1991, urged journalist Jennifer Gould and her translator Masha Pavlenko to have group sex with his two male bodyguards on the Volga river trip in August, 1994.

"It's the best when it's with a group", Zhirinovsky is quoted as saying in the interview to be published in the March edition.

"There are four of you here. You have to show me love for four. I love to watch more. To observe how people drink, smoke, this is not interesting," Zhirinovsky is quoted as

Moscow-based Canadian reporter Gould wrote that she had never been subjected to such blatant sexual harassment, but instead of walking out "I tried to turn the sexism back onto him by provoking him into explaining his behaviour."

Men's sperm counts falling

BOSTON: Men's sperm counts seem to be falling, and no one knows why, reports AP. The latest evidence of this troubling trend is a French

study that found that the sperm counts of donors at a Paris sperm bank have dropped by one-third over the past two

While the researchers said they could not explain their finding, they raised a variety of possibilities, including male fetuses' exposure to estrogen in the womb as well as environmental pollution and unspecified changes in diet and lifestyles.

The research, being published Thursday in the New England Journal of medicine, is probably the most rigorous of several studies to look at this question. Many experts remain skeptical, however.

It has not been clearly documented this is a real phenomenon," said Dr Stuart Howards of the University of Virginia. "This study from Paris raises the level of concern a

In 1992, a Danish group looked at 61 different studies involving nearly 15,000 men. They said that when taken together, the studies suggest that men's sperm counts have dropped in half over the past 50 years.

Lebanese army accused of harassing SLA

BEIRUT. Feb 2: The Israeli army has protested to the Lebanese army about its treatment of residents of Israel's South Lebanon occupation zone and warned of countermeasures, security sources in the south said today, reports Reuter. It accused the Lebanese

army of harassing zone residents and members of the pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia at checkpoints as they travelled to and from the occupied border strip, the sources said.

In a note delivered on Wednesday to a Lebanese military checkpoint in the south, the Israeli army threatened counter-measures that could "harm the interests of the Lebanese government", the sources added.

The harassment of residents encouraged Hezbollah (Party of God) and other enemies of peace, the sources quoted the note as saying in a reference to the pro-Iranian Shi'ite Muslim group whose guerillas are fighting Israeli troops in the south.

* "These repressive measures against residents and personnel of the SLA are a doubleedged weapon and the use of such weapons could generate counter-measures which would harm the interests of the Lebanese government," the note said.

apparent threat and a Lebanese army spokesman declined to confirm or deny that it had received the message.

It did not elaborate on the

Phoolan has finally got her wish

NEW DELHI. Feb 2: India's "bandit queen" Phoolan Devi finally got her wish and watched a controversial movie based on her life as an outlaw. reports AFP.

But she left the screening

of Bandit Queen here Wednesday in distress, her face partly covered in a shawl. after having shut her eyes during every scene of sex and

She is troubled and angry at what she saw." her husband Umaid Singh said. "It is not the true story."

The acclaimed film, whose public release has been blocked by the courts in response to a petition by the former outlaw, was shown to Devi by court order.

Devi. who was freed from prison last year after spending 11 years in jail accused of gunning down 22 men to avenge her gang rape.

HR abuses still a significant problem in India: US WASHINGTON. Feb 2: credible evidence that authori Jammu, another state where

Human rights abuses remain a significant problem in India despite its longstanding democratic tradition and extensive constitutional and legal safeguards, the United States said on Wednesday, reports

In its annual worldwide review of human rights, the State Department said abuses include extrajudicial executions. torture, reprisal killings by security forces, kidnappings, rape and prolonged detention of suspects in isolation.

These problems are acute in Kashmir, where the judicial system has been disrupted by both terrorist threats includ-

ing the assassination of judges and witnesses, and by judicial tolerance of the government's heavy-handed anti-militant tactics," the report said.

Abuses were also cited in

separatist insurgents have been active, the report said.

In Punjab, the report said, terrorist violence virtually disappeared in 1994, and the number of Sikh militants killed diminished considerably from 1993.

In Bihar, human rights groups claimed police continund to kill Naxalites in faked encounter killings," according to the report, and there was evidence this practice had spread to Bombay.

There were widespread reports of disappearances in India, and security forces acknowledge having detained more than 10,000 people in Jammu and Kashmir from 1990 to mid-1994, while re-

leasing 7,000, the report said Although law prohibits torture, the report said there is ties use the practice during interrogations and sometimes to extort money.

Rape of persons in custody also was widely reported, ac cording to the State Department. Laws intended to fight sep-

aratists have been used to justify widespread arbitrary arrest and detention, the report said. While most Indians have access to a fair trial, long delays can be a burden to the

poor, it added. The report also cited forced prostitution, female bondage and domestic violence against women as widespread despite laws protecting women's rights.

It also cited official figures that there were 17.5 million child workers in 1985, while independent observers say the figure is much higher.



A Myanmar student reads a statement on Thursday deploring the recent fall of the Korean National Union (KNU) stronghold of Manerplaue to government troops and KNU defectors. Several students participated in the peaceful protest held outside the Myanmar embassy in - AFP photo Bangkok.

ROK studying US request to send troops to Bosnia SEOUL, Feb 2: South Korea

is studying a US request that it send troops to join the UN peacekeeping operation in Bosnia, the Defence Ministry said Thursday, reports AP. South Korea has not sent

combat troops abroad since the Vietnam War, although non-combat medical teams and observers are operating in several of the world's trouble spots under the UN flag. The Joong-ang Daily News

reported Thursday that since ' mid-January, the United States has been asking Seoul to send about a battalion-size contingent - 700 infantry or Army engineering troops - augment the peacekeeping effort in Bosnia. Gen. John Shalikashvili,

chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, had intensive discussions on the issue with South Korean officials when he visited Seoul last month, the daily