

BRIEFLY



Actress-singer Barbra Streisand waves to the audience before speaking at Harvard University's John F Kennedy School of Government on Friday. Streisand discussed her personal politics and the political role of the artist community. — AFP photo

Ghali to visit Moscow: Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has accepted an invitation from Russian President Boris Yeltsin to attend ceremonies in Moscow May 9 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the end of World War two in Europe, a UN spokesman said on Friday. Reuter reports from the UN.

Bus mishap claims 22 in Nepal: At least 22 people were killed and 16 injured when a passenger bus rolled down a highway in western Nepal, a news agency reported Saturday. AP says from Kathmandu. Most of the victims were killed on the spot when the bus fell about 100 metres (330 feet) down the road at Jhumsa village, 180 kilometres (112 miles) west of Katmandu on Friday, the Nepalese National News Agency reported.

Emergency in Baku extended: Emergency rule in Baku, the Azerbaijani capital, and Gyandzha, in the east of the country, has been extended by two months under a decree issued by President Geydar Aliyev and approved by parliament, the news agency Interfax reported Friday. AFP says from Moscow. But the parliament speaker, Rasul Guliyev, warned after approving the measure Thursday that the legislature would not extend special rule again.

UN seeks aid for Liberia: Almost two million Liberians are in desperate need of food, water and shelter and the United Nations appealed Friday for 65 million dollars for relief operations in the West African country, AP reports from United Nations. Five years of civil war have disrupted farming throughout Liberia and a recent upsurge in fighting has been disastrous for the country's civilian population, the UN appeal says.

Gambia to restore civilian rule: Gambia's military junta which seized power in a coup last July said Friday it would restore civilian rule in July next year, AFP reports from Banjul. Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh, who headed the Junta, said in a nationwide broadcast that the ruling Provisional Armed Forces Council and government had "accepted a duration of two years" as proposed by a Consultative Committee, formed by the junta last month.

Gunmen shoot at Mexican Senator: Assassins fired several shots at a leftist senator while he was driving with his wife but neither was hurt, an aide to the legislator said Friday, AP reports from Mexico City. His secretary Luis Sanchez said two attackers opened fire around 10:30 pm Thursday on Sen Heberto Castillo of the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Party and his wife, Maria Teresa, near a shopping mall.

US admin won't cut aid to Africa: The Clinton administration rejected congressional calls for sharp cuts in US aid to Africa on Friday, arguing that American help can convert that continent into a magnet for US exports, AP reports from Washington. Agency for International Development chief J. Brian Atwood said the 800 million dollar programme for Africa is neither welfare nor charity but an investment that will eventually create millions of jobs for our children.

New police academy in Haiti: President Jean-Bertrand Aristide inaugurated Haiti's new police academy Friday, urging its cadets to respect human rights rather than abuse them, AP reports from Port Au Prince. "This is the hope of our democracy," Aristide told 375 police trainees standing at attention on the parade grounds of the former Haitian army's training camp, where the academy is located.

Libyan oil tanker blast claims 9: Nine people were killed and eight injured in a gas explosion which virtually destroyed a Libyan oil tanker moored for repairs in the port of the Maltese capital, Interior Minister Louis Galea said yesterday, AFP reports from Valletta. The explosion on board the tanker Qum El Faroud, which occurred overnight Friday, was apparently caused by an accumulation of gas in the vessel's hold. It triggered a fire which firefighters rapidly brought under control.

Diana won't visit Kobe: Princess Diana, who was widely tipped to visit Kobe during her trip to Japan next week, will not after all go to the earthquake shattered city, aides said Friday night, AP reports from London. "We have been advised by the British Embassy in Tokyo that it would be more appropriate for her to express her obvious concern for the victims by doing something in Tokyo," said a statement by her office at St. James's Place in London.

Buddhist monk meets Suu Kyi: The Buddhist monk who initiated talks last year between Myanmar's junta and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi said Friday he met with the Nobel Peace Prize winner this week, AP reports from Yangon. Rewata Dharma told a news conference before leaving Yangon that he spoke mostly of religion during the rare, two-hour meeting on Monday with Mrs. Suu Kyi. He said the opposition leader was in good health and reiterated her stand to continue her work for democracy.

Nepal to strengthen democracy

KATHMANDU, Feb 4: Nepal Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari said that his government will consolidate multi-party democracy to build a prosperous and dignified Nepal, reports Xinhua.

Addressing a function organised by the Nepal international centre on Friday, the Prime Minister said that the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) would emphasise the supremacy of the constitution, rule of law and protection and promotion of human rights.

"In short, the political aim of our party is to create a competitive, dynamic socialist society which will bear higher moral values and norms," said the prime minister.

He pointed out that the basic problems in Nepal are poverty, rapid population growth and environmental degradation which liquidate the modest development potential and prospects of the country.

Meanwhile the Nepal Congress (NC), the largest opposition in Nepal, has formed a shadow government to evaluate and analyse the activities of all ministries of the newly elected government led by the Communist Party of Nepal (UML).

Vietnam rejects US criticism on human rights

HANOI, Feb 4: Communist Vietnam today rejected US criticism on human rights and told Washington to mind its own business, reports Reuter.

"We think that no state has the right to judge and impose its own opinion on the human situation in other countries," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said in a one-sentence response to the US State Department's annual report on the issue.

The ministry did not comment on remarks about Vietnam in the report which reporters judged relatively mild.

Arafat supports Israeli demand for crackdown on Islamic Jihad

JERUSALEM, Feb 4: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is backing Israel's demand that Damascus crack down on anti-Israeli guerrillas in Syria, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Friday, reports AFP.

Interviewed on Israeli television, Rabin said that at Thursday's Middle East summit in Cairo, Arafat, supported Israeli demands for a crackdown on Fathi Chakaki, leader of the Islamic Jihad group, which has claimed responsibility for several attacks in Israel.

House of Lords hit by allegations

LONDON, Feb 4: Britain's upper house of parliament, the House of Lords, was hit by allegations on Friday that members took money from lobbyists in return for asking questions on their behalf during lawmaking sessions, reports Reuter. Opposition Liberal Democrat Lord Lester, a top human rights lawyer, made the claim in a secret submission to a Lords committee investigating the financial affairs of peers.

In the document, published by London's Evening Standard newspaper, Lord Lester said one of my commercial clients at the bar has informed me that he has paid substantial sums and given direct financial benefits to some four peers, as well as several members of the house of commons, to take other action on behalf of him and his company. "None of them declared this interest to either house."

Akashi fears wider conflict in Bosnia

ZAGREB, Feb 4: New diplomatic initiatives and political negotiations are needed to shore up the fragile ceasefire in Bosnia, which is at risk in the northwest pocket of Bihać, special UN envoy Yasushi Akashi said Friday, reports AFP.

"Armed forces are continuing their preparations for wider conflict," Akashi warned in a statement published here. "Despite the achievements of the last month, the ceasefire remains fragile."

As result of a four-month comprehensive agreement on a cessation of hostilities throughout Bosnia the situation on the ground has stabilised except in Bihać, where separatist Croatian Serbs have joined the fighting between Muslims, rebel Muslims and Bosnian Serbs. Croatian Serbs were not party to the January 1 ceasefire accord between the Bosnian government, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croat forces. Serb and Bosnian government gunners have been trading

Chandrika vows to end ethnic war within a yr

COLOMBO, Feb 4: President Chandrika Kumaratunga today marked Sri Lanka's 47th Independence Day by vowing to reunite her ethnically divided nation and end the separatist war within a year, reports AFP.

Kumaratunga, 49, said she was "cautiously optimistic" about restoring ethnic peace and establishing peace by the time the country celebrates its 48th anniversary of Independence from Britain next year.

"Our commitment to peace and a negotiated political solution of the ethnic question and the northeastern war shall remain unshakeable in the face of all obstacles."

"We have advanced far on the path of peace in a short period of five months," Kumaratunga said in her first Independence Day message to the national since coming to power following the August Parliamentary elections.

At the official ceremony marking the anniversary, Kumaratunga said it was imperative to end the ethnic blood letting in order to reduce rampant unemployment and improve the living condi-

tions for the 17 million Sri Lankans. Kumaratunga has initiated a dialogue with the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam which is waging a independent Tamil homeland in the island's northern and eastern regions. "On this 47th anniversary



Chandrika Kumaratunga of independence we Sri Lankans have some cause for satisfaction and for cautious optimism... when we celebrate our next anniversary of inde-

pendence, we may truly feel that our optimism has been well-founded."

She said the country had reached an important milestone on the road to peace with the establishment of a "cessation of hostilities" pact between government security forces and the Tamil Tigers.

The truce which went into effect on January 8 has been holding despite political setbacks to Kumaratunga's peace initiative.

"We have just emerged from a period in our affairs, when all those values and attributes which characterised modern Sri Lanka at its inception as a full-fledged member of the contemporary world community had been want only discarded."

"A united nation stood threatened with separation: multi-ethnic, multi-religious harmony has almost completely (been) overtaken by racialism and sectarianism; humanitarianism and tolerance had been forsaken, to be replaced by bigotry and violence," Kumaratunga added.

India may allow ICRC to probe HR abuses in Kashmir jails

NEW DELHI, Feb 4: India may soon allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to detainees in the prisons of the northern state of Kashmir, rent by a Muslim secessionist drive, the Hindu Daily said today, reports AFP.

The agreement was being "fine-tuned and would be signed shortly," the newspaper said, enabling investigations into alleged human rights violations and poor living conditions in jails and detention centres, the daily said.

David Delapraz chief of the ICRC mission in India told AFP that the negotiations were at a

"serious stage."

"I am expecting a concrete agreement soon," Delapraz said the international humanitarian organisation had insisted on having repeated access to all detainees, interviewing them in private and collecting all data pertinent to the individual.

"Our methods of operation are the same the world over," he said. "We cannot change these conditions."

Delapraz said "repeated visits would help reduce alleged disappearances," and added that the ICRC was keen on providing "humanitarian and medical assistance as and

when the need arose."

Muslim rebel and political groups charge Indian security forces with rampant rights abuse in their bid to quell the militant drive including third-degree torture in prisons and indefinite detention for suspected militant links.

A fact-finding ICRC mission visited Kashmir in March and submitted a list of proposals including unqualified access to prisoners and detainees.

New Delhi has embarked on a policy of "transparency," allowing foreign missions and diplomats to visit Kashmir for a first-hand leaders to travel abroad.

Polish govt in deep crisis

WARSAW, Feb 4: Polish Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak's own coalition allies angrily attacked him late on Friday, even as he struggled to fend off repeated blows from an implacably hostile President Lech Walsia, reports Reuter.

Walsia is so determined to get rid of Pawlak that he began moves this week to dissolve parliament on controversial legal grounds, arousing fears of a constitutional crisis.

Walsia says this is the only way he can unseat the ruling left coalition made up of the ex-communist Democratic Left

Alliance (SLD) and Pawlak's smaller Polish Peasant Party (PSL).

Walsia accuses Pawlak of stalling market reforms, heading a cabinet in which ministers stand accused of corruption or other abuses, and trying to strip the presidency of some powers.

In what they termed a "stormy" meeting on Friday, SLD chiefs also questioned Pawlak's leadership of the coalition and suggested that both parties vote on whether it should continue.

Gunman kills 13 in Colombia

BOGOTA, Feb 3: Gunman on a murder spree killed 13 people, including nine during a memorial service, authorities said Friday, reports AP.

The slayings occurred Thursday evening in Riosucio, 100 miles (160 kilometres) west of Bogota, said Jorge Castro, the local police chief.

After the memorial service killings, the attackers escaped with three hostages. Their incinerated bodies were found later near their car.



Ann Mohamed, a rich Kuwaiti housewife, brushing the teeth of Michael, a three-year-old Royal Bengal Tiger in her home in Kuwait City on Wednesday. Ann Mohamed and her husband decided three years ago to add two tigers to the five members of their family who live in a huge villa in the richest district of Kuwait. — AFP photo



Convicted IRA terrorist Pamela Kane raising Friday her fist in a defiant salute as she was released from Limerick Prison, Ireland freed five IRA prisoners, including Kane who was the only IRA woman in an Irish jail. — AFP photo

Off the Record

Daughter's scandal upsets Corazon Aquino

MANILA, Feb 4: In her first public reaction to a scandal over her daughter, former President Corazon Aquino urged critics Saturday to stop condemning her daughter for becoming pregnant and running off with a married man nearly twice her age.

"I am here today to ask for your prayers and also to ask those who have condemned (my daughter) Kirs to stop it," Corazon Aquino told a national convention of single parents. "It has pained me so much when I read about people condemning my daughter."

Corazon Aquino, a devout Catholic, said she had originally refused to talk about her daughter's relationship and pregnancy but was forced to in order to correct public perception. "I have not heard of a mother talking about this particular kind of problem publicly, but his is the price of fame or infamy," she added. "I just upsets me so much, and it really gives me so much pain, but now I think I can talk about it."

She said did not force her youngest daughter to leave their family home after learning about her pregnancy.

Teenager will be tried as adult

WALLA WALLA, Wash: A teenager accused of tying up his sister and her best friend and suffocating them with plastic bags will be tried as an adult, reports AP.

Judge Phil Raekes, who oversaw the Superior Court hearing, said Wednesday that 15-year-old Daniel Betournay's low intellect should not keep him in juvenile court.

As a parent of five children this is a most unpleasant task assigned to me," Raekes said.

Betournay cried as he was being led out of the courtroom. The "teen-ager" is charged with two counts of first-degree murder in the Dec 14 deaths of his sister April and her friend Beth Garbe, both 14. Betournay told police he tied up the girls with a strong adhesive tape and suffocated them by putting plastic bags over their heads.

If convicted as a juvenile, Betournay would have faced up to nine years in a detention facility. If convicted as an adult, he faces up to 52 years in prison. No trial date was set.

Sharif accuses govt of horse-trading in politics

ISLAMABAD, Feb 4: Pakistan's opposition leader Nawaz Sharif has accused the government of harassing his associates in a bid to force them to change their loyalties, news reports said today, reports AFP. "Such tactics will not help the government," he said, adding that "we are not afraid of its vindictive policies."

The government has denied opposition allegations of political victimisation, while vowing to make those it claims have plundered the national wealth account for their actions in court. Bitter confrontation has prevailed between the government and the opposition since Bhutto came to power in October 1993 after snap elections that followed Sharif's resignation amid a political crisis.

Last year, the opposition leader waged a series of protest marches in an abortive campaign designed to unseat Bhutto and force new polls. Nawaz Khokar, who had been secretary of the parliamentary group of the Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League (PML), broke away Wednesday, condemning what he called the opposition leader's "confrontational politics."

Terminating the action by Khokar, who plans to form a splinter group in the PML, as unethical and undemocratic.

Akashi fears wider conflict in Bosnia

ZAGREB, Feb 4: New diplomatic initiatives and political negotiations are needed to shore up the fragile ceasefire in Bosnia, which is at risk in the northwest pocket of Bihać, special UN envoy Yasushi Akashi said Friday, reports AFP.

"Armed forces are continuing their preparations for wider conflict," Akashi warned in a statement published here. "Despite the achievements of the last month, the ceasefire remains fragile."

As result of a four-month comprehensive agreement on a cessation of hostilities throughout Bosnia the situation on the ground has stabilised except in Bihać, where separatist Croatian Serbs have joined the fighting between Muslims, rebel Muslims and Bosnian Serbs. Croatian Serbs were not party to the January 1 ceasefire accord between the Bosnian government, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croat forces. Serb and Bosnian government gunners have been trading

ing shellfire in intense artillery duels for the past two days in Bihać, Bosnia-Serb television reported Thursday.

All involved must now make a concerted effort to solve the conflict in Bihać," Akashi said after Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic warned that prolonged fighting in Bihać could threaten the ceasefire in other Bosnian regions.

Reuter from Sarajevo adds: Bosnian rivals say they are optimistic of making a quick breakthrough in negotiations to allow resumption of civilian traffic along supply routes into the besieged Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

Bosnian negotiator Hasan Muratovic issued a brief statement on Friday night saying he expected further progress in negotiations to open up the airport roads to civilian traffic. He did not elaborate.

The Serbs have reopened supply routes across the airport for the United Nations, the International Red Cross

and their affiliated humanitarian organisation but not to civilian or commercial traffic as demanded by the Bosnian government.

The reopening of routes for civilian traffic would help restore as semblance of normalcy in the city which recently marked its 1,000th day of siege, while commercial traffic would help boost food supplies.

UN officials had said the Bosnian Serbs were linking the talks about the routes to other issues, including the release or exchange of prisoners of war.

Bosnian Serb parliament speaker Momcilo Krajinic told Reuters in an earlier interview that the United Nations has come up with a new proposal on civilian traffic and that the Serbs were ready to accept it.

"Today we were asked by (UN chief of Civil Affairs Enrique) Aguilar whether we agree that civilian traffic be opened. I asked that his proposal be sent to me and we will give our consent."

DPRK threatens to pull out of N-deal with US

SEOUL, Feb 4: North Korea threatened Saturday to pull out of its nuclear deal with Washington if the United States holds its annual spring military exercise with South Korea, reports AP.

North Korea calls the "Team Spirit" exercises a rehearsal for an invasion and in the past has protested by cancelling talks on improving relations.

In past years, about 100,000 US and South Korean troops have participated.

The implementation of the agreed (nuclear) framework would be unthinkable if a belligerent party staged a massive military rehearsal against the other side," the North's official Korea Central News Agency said, quoting from the Communist party newspaper Rodong Sinmun.

The exercises would also "spoil the atmosphere of détente on the Korean peninsula

and lead the situation back to the extreme pitch of strain," KCNA said.

The US-North Korea agreement in October halted North Korea's nuclear programme, suspected of being used to make atomic weapons. In turn, the United States promised to help the North build safer nuclear reactors and establish diplomatic relations.

But subsequent talks on working out the details of the nuclear deal have reportedly bogged down, with North Korea refusing to accept a South Korean replacement reactor.

South Korea has said it would pay the bulk of the \$4 billion price tag for the new reactors, but only if they are South Korean models.

North Korea has also been refusing to reopen inter-Korean talks, also required under the October nuclear agreement.