

BRIEFLY

14 Thai killed in road mishap: Thirteen women cannery workers and the male driver of the truck taking them to work were killed on Monday in a head-on collision with another truck on a bridge in southern Thailand, police said. Reuter reports from Bangkok.

Four other people were injured in the accident, which occurred as the women's pick-up truck was travelling across a four kilometre (2.5 mile) bridge over a lagoon in the southern province of Songkhla, police said.

Volcano kills 2 in Port Vila: A rock hurled from the crater of an active Vanuatu volcano killed a Japanese woman tourist and a local guide Saturday, the Vanuatu National Tourism office said here on Monday, AFP reports from Port Vila.

The accident brings the death toll at the Yasur volcano on southern Tanna island to three in less than a month.

4 killed in Swiss plane crash: Four people were killed when their private plane crashed in thick fog, AP reports from Sion, Switzerland.

The plane took off from Cannes in southern France and failed to arrive as scheduled in Sion in southern Switzerland late Sunday. Police discovered the wreckage at daybreak Monday in a mountainous area nearby.

Diana arrives in Japan: Princess Diana arrived in Japan on Monday for a four-day "working visit" partly sponsored by the British Red Cross during which she will visit several health care facilities but will not be going to the earthquake stricken city of Kobe, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Prince Charles' estranged wife will call on the Japanese imperial family and meet Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko even though her visit is not an official one, the imperial household agency confirmed.

2 soldiers die in Kashmir blast: Two Indian soldiers were killed yesterday when a land mine detonated by suspected Muslim separatists blew up their truck in the northern state of Kashmir, officials said.

Three other soldiers were injured in the powerful explosion at Phalawan, some 60 kilometres (37 miles) from the Himalayan state's winter capital, Jammu Divisional Commissioner B R Kundal said.

Ohmae to run for governor of Tokyo: Author and business consultant Kenichi Ohmae run for governor of Tokyo next year, campaign organisers said on Monday, AP reports from Tokyo.

Ohmae rose to fame in Japan and abroad as an early proponent of the view that in the 1980s, the world's economies are locked themselves into a healthy interdependence.

22.32 kg gold seized in Kathmandu: Customs officers at Nepal's Tribhuvan International Airport recovered 22.32 kilos (49 pounds) of unclaimed contraband gold from the toilet of a Thai International Airways (Thai) aircraft, the RSS news agency said, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The Thai aircraft was on a regular flight from Bangkok to Kathmandu, the state-run agency said quoting the airport customs office.

Delhi plans to ban smoking: The city government is bringing out a legislation to ban smoking in government offices, cinema halls and areas around schools in the Indian capital, a city official said on Monday, AP reports from New Delhi.

The legislation will be tabled for voting in March when the city assembly meets for its budget session, Health Secretary S Malachandran said.

Militant blew himself up in Egypt: A man thought to be a Muslim militant blew himself up in south Egypt on Sunday when he tried to throw a bomb at a police patrol, security sources said, Reuter reports from Assiut.

The man, named as Anwar Mohamed Mitwalli, 25, died in the street in the town of Maghagha, 150 km (90 miles) south of the capital Cairo, they said.

4 militants held in Gaza: Palestinian police arrested four key leaders of an Islamic militant group in the PLO-run Gaza Strip, an Israeli report said on Sunday, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The Israeli news agency Itim said police raided the homes of the suspected Islamic Jihad activists in the southern part of Gaza. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the January 22 bus stop bombing in central Israel that killed 21 Israelis.

Gulf FMs meet in Cairo: The foreign ministers of Egypt, Syria and the six conservative Gulf states met in Cairo on Sunday to discuss security and nuclear disarmament in a Middle East edging towards peace with Israel, Reuter reports from Cairo.

The ministers, from the countries which signed the Damascus declaration after the Gulf War in 1991, broke the Ramadan fast together at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and then sat down for a first formal session of talks.

Bus mishap claims 13 in Colombia: A bus filled with passengers collided with a cement truck on Sunday, killing 13 people, the highway police announced, AP reports from Bogota.

The accident occurred near Ponedera, 700 kilometres (435 miles) north of Bogota. After the head-on collision there was an explosion which engulfed the bus and trapped most of the passengers.

Driver killed in US tanker blast: A tanker truck carrying about 6,000 gallons (22,800 liters) of liquid petroleum gas exploded on Sunday after skidding along a guard rail on a busy freeway, killing the driver, blowing the truck to bits and incinerating a car, AP reports from Emeryville, California.

At least seven people were injured in the 9 a.m. explosion that sent a huge ball of flame into the sky, blew a hole in the road, ripped the guard rails and damaged the centre divide.

Oil spill may pollute Russian sea: Much of the oil spilled in a major pipeline accident in northern Russia will pollute the salmon-rich Pechora River and the Barents Sea unless cleanup efforts are intensified, a news agency said Monday, AP reports from Russia.

Local authorities have been unable to organize cleanup work around the clock and maintain steady efforts over weekends, ITAR-Tass said.

4 Filipino women kidnapped: Gunmen kidnapped four Mindanao State University women students in the southern Philippines, police said Monday, Reuter reports from Marawi.

Police officer Luminog Gumamat told reporters 10 students — nine women and one man — were forced from a minibus at gunpoint in Marawi City late on Sunday.

They were taken to nearby Lanao Lake to a small boat.

The male student and five of the women were freed because the boat was too small to carry all of them, Gumamat said.

Police are searching the area around the lake, about 800 km (500 miles) south of Manila.

DPRK vice president in Colombo: North Korean Vice President Kim Pyong Sik will hold talks Tuesday with Sri Lankan Premier Sirima Bandaranaike, marking the first official contact since Colombo severed diplomatic ties with Pyongyang in 1971, AFP reports from Colombo.

The North Korean Vice President is leading a five-member delegation which arrived here Sunday at the invitation of Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Deputy Information Minister Alavi Moulana said.

Kashmiris take control of 18th century Islamic shrine

SRINAGAR, Feb 6: Kashmiri Muslim rebels fighting against Indian rule have taken over a revered 18th-century Islamic shrine near this state summer capital, police said here on Sunday, reports AFP.

Charsharief, some 37 kilometres (23 miles) west of Srinagar, has been "occupied" by the rebels for two weeks in a bid reminiscent of a month-long siege of Hazratbal, Kashmir's holiest Islamic shrine in 1993, they said.

"They are (also) storing rations inside," a senior police official said, adding that the state administration was planning a "massive operation" in the thickly wooded area to flush the militants from the shrine.

"We are studying the situation. The militants want us to respond so that they can desecrate the shrine and blame security forces like they have done in the past (during the Hazratbal crisis)," he said.

"We will act at the proper time... we have exact information as to how many foreign and Kashmiri militant are inside," he said.

The rebels, however, say they only visit the Moghul-built

mausoleum of a renowned Muslim saint to offer prayers. "Otherwise, we live in the woods," a militant told AFP.

Residents of Charsharief village, which draws its name from the mausoleum, said the militants had ordered them to stay indoors after nine in the evening and disregard orders from the government or Indian security forces.

They said the rebels had put up several bunkers in the "liberated" area which was guarded round-the-clock.

Several locals are fleeing their homes fearing a "war-like" situation, but one local said the rebels, headed by an Afghan named Mast Gul from the pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen group, were very popular.

Meanwhile, the government after a failed attempt to cordon off the area, has rushed additional troops near the villages of Charsharief and Paharpur, with a population of some 60,000, as a precautionary measure.

Nearly 10,000 people have died in Kashmir since 1989 when Muslim rebels stepped up a secessionist drive.

Rao rules out early polls

NEW DELHI, Feb 6: Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao has ruled out early parliamentary elections and defended his free-market economic reforms in a campaign speech ahead of crucial state elections, reports AFP.

Rao told a public meeting in the western state of Maharashtra on Sunday that his government, which came to power in June 1991, would complete its five-year term irrespective of the verdict in the staggered polls beginning on Thursday.

"I ran a minority government for three years," Monday's newspaper quoted him as saying. "Now that my government has a majority in parliament, it will certainly continue until 1996."

Rao's assertion followed claims by the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) that the premier would call early general elections if his Congress (I) Party lost the upcoming state polls.

The Congress, which was routed in elections in two key southern states in December, faces a stiff challenge in the legislative polls in six Indian states in February and March.

Analysts have warned that another defeat could spell doom for Rao, who is already under siege following the revolt of his former de facto number two in the government, Arjun Singh.

Rao, 73, addressing his first election rally, defended the economic reforms launched in 1991, and rejected opposition allegations that they threatened to undermine the country's sovereignty.

Powell may be invited as Dole's running mate

WASHINGTON, Feb 6: US Senate majority leader Bob Dole said Sunday he would consider inviting Colin Powell, the retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to be his vice presidential running mate for the 1996 elections, reports Reuter.

The Kansas Republican said on the NBC television programme "meet the press" that he would formally announce his candidacy for the Republican nomination in early April.

Beside Powell, Dole said his short list included former Housing Secretary Jack Kemp as well as governors Pete Wilson of California, Christine Whitman of New Jersey, William Weld of Massachusetts, Jim Edgar of Illinois, George Voinovich of Ohio and Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin.

Dole said he "had a good visit" with Powell two or three weeks ago, adding: "we didn't talk about this specific thing." He added that some of those on his list may be weighing their own bids to unseat President Bill Clinton.

US supports talks on Saudi-Yemeni border dispute

SANAA, Feb 6: The United States on Sunday expressed support for negotiations in the 60-year-old Yemen-Saudi border dispute and urged good relations between the two Arabian peninsula countries, reports Reuter.

Sanaa radio said President Bill Clinton in a written message to Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh expressed Washington's "welcome and support of the talks between the two countries with the aim of reaching a solution to the border issue."

MNLF accuses army of violating ceasefire

ZAMBOANGA, Feb 6: Muslim rebels (Monday) accused the military of deliberately breaking a ceasefire in the southern Philippines during recent peace talks, reports Reuter.

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) said the military had entered Basilan Island on three occasions without informing local rebel leaders.

Gunbattles resulted each time, with two soldiers and one rebel killed.

"Artillery and mortar shelling pounded MNLF areas and have caused much anguish, suffering and displacement among residents," it said in a statement.

"These provocations and violations came at a time when the government and the MNLF met... in Zamboanga on January 29-31."

It said the violations undermined the credibility of both president Fidel Ramos and of southern military commander Lieutenant General Orlando Soriano.

Off the Record



An adult orangutan dwarfs a little boy during a commercial photoshoot at the Surabaya zoo in East Java on Saturday. The zoo allows visitors to have their photograph taken with certain wild animals for a fee, the proceeds of which goes to supplement the zoo's meagre state subsidies. — AFP photo

'Regrets' for posing in pages of 'Sex'

LONDON: British supermodel Naomi Campbell has expressed "regrets" for posing naked in the pages of "Sex", pop star Madonna's book of steamy photographs, reports AFP.

"My mum and grandma were embarrassed," she told the latest edition of the magazine Esquire — for whom she also agreed to a photo shoot — adding "I'm learning from my mistakes."

Don't condemn my Kris, Aquino asks Filipinos

MANILA: Former president Corason Aquino, breaking into tears, has asked Filipinos not to condemn her daughter Kris for getting pregnant by a married film actor nearly twice her age, reports Reuter.

In an emotional speech before single parents on Saturday, Aquino recounted how crushed she was when she learned of her 23-year-old daughter's affair with Philip Salvador, 41.

"I am here to ask for your prayers and also to ask those who have condemned Kris to stop it," she said, apparently referring to news commentators who have chastised her daughter for running off with the actor. "It has pained me so much when I read about people condemning my daughter."

Kris Aquino, a film actress, left the family home in November to live with Salvador, who has three children with his estranged wife and another child with a former model.

Aquino, widely admired in this largely Roman Catholic country for her political courage and religious convictions, said she was willing to take back her daughter, along with her expected baby, but without Salvador.

But she said she was also praying for the actor.

"He is part of the problem and he has to be part of the solution. He has to reform," Aquino said. "He needs God's help to change him so that he will no longer do this, not only to my daughter but to other women as well."



Knesset speaker Shevah Weiss (C), head of a 29-member Israeli parliamentary delegation, introduces Rabbi Yosef Azran (R) of the Shas religious party to King Hussein of Jordan prior to the delegation's dinner with the monarch in Amman on Sunday. — AFP photo

Israeli MPs in Jordan Our peace will be an example: Hussein

AMMAN, Feb 6: King Hussein said here on Sunday that peace between Jordan and Israel would set "an example" for the Middle East and called for more "personal contacts" between the two countries, reports AFP.

"Our peace will be an example to the region," the king told a delegation of Israeli members of parliament visiting Jordan for the first time.

"We should do our best to achieve a comprehensive peace... we should work together for the best interest of our future generations," Hussein said at a dinner in honour of the 29 MPs drawn from all Israeli political parties.

Jordanian military and civilian officials, including the

Speakers of the Senate Ahmad Laouzi and lower house of parliament Saad Srour, members of the government and Senator Habes Al-majalli who was army chief during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war were also present.

The Speaker of the Israeli parliament Shevah Weiss said Israel and Jordan had "overcome many problems between us."

"We want to express here our admiration for the courage and efforts of King Hussein to bring our two peoples closer together," Weiss said.

The Israeli delegation earlier met Crown Prince Hassan Ibn Tala who called for "dialogue" between Jordanians and Israelis to lay the foundation for "genuine peace between the two countries."

Days of Western influences over Asia are numbered

SINGAPORE, Feb 6: The days of Western influences over Asia are numbered, and soon East will talk to West "on more equal terms," says the visionary leader who shaped Singapore's 36-year-history, reports AP.

For 300 years, the European and the American civilizations dominated the world. But the economic successes of East Asia will in 20 years give its products, lifestyles, political vocabulary and values wider appeal, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew said on Sunday.

"The tide is rising for East Asia. We have learned from the West, from their mistakes as well as their strengths. Soon we shall talk to them on more equal terms," Lee said.

As Singapore's prime minister from 1959 to 1990, Lee led an economic revolution

that made the city-state one of the richest in the world and possibly inspiring neighbouring economies to greater successes.

A former British colony, Singapore attained self-government in 1959 and became an independent nation in 1965.

Singapore has a love-hate relationship with the West.

While the United States and other Western nations remain Singapore's biggest trading partners, it has at the same time acted as Asia's unofficial spokesman in a debate over the merits of Asian values over Western ones.

"The question whether Asian or Western values are better will not be settled by argument alone. It will be settled by the economic trans-

Malaysian gov't's no to Islamic penal laws

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 6: Once again facing a debate over enforcing stricter Islamic laws, the Malaysian government has said no. At least not yet, reports AP.

The current debate is another in the government's periodic spat with the opposition Pan-Islamic Party of Malaysia, which wants to make secular Malaysia into an Islamic state.

The debate picks up additional steam during election. Although no date has been set, national polls are expected to be held this year.

On Saturday, Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim rejected the PAS demand to implement "hukum hudud," the Islamic penal law that among other things allows hands of convicted thieves to be chopped off.

"We have not rejected the hukum hudud but the time is not right yet. First people must understand fully what it is," said Anwar, whose administration has for long practiced a middle path on Islam.

The PAS controls one of Malaysia's 13 states, but has made little inroads in other states held firmly by the Barisan Nasional, the ruling federal coalition.

Anwar said the draft of the hudud laws proposed by the PAS had about 12 to 13 faults and misinterpretations of Islam.

"How can we therefore accept it?" he said.

But as part of its strategy to keep conservative Muslim voters from drifting to PAS, the government does enforce some other Islamic laws.

For example, religious policemen, patrol the streets during the Muslim fasting months of Ramadan to catch Muslims trying to sneak in a snack.

Thailand sends back 800 Karen rebels

BANGKOK, Feb 6: Thai authorities have sent back to Myanmar more than 800 ethnic minority Karen guerrillas who fled an attack by Myanmar government forces on their headquarters 10 days ago, a Thai army source said today, reports Reuter.

The guerrillas had refused to lay down their weapons and vowed to continue their war for autonomy against Myanmar ruling military body, the officer said.

They were ordered back from a forest area on the Thai side of the border in the area of their fallen headquarters at Manerplaw, the officer said.

Manerplaw was overrun by Myanmar government forces on January 27, prompting some 6,000 civilians and guerrillas and their leaders to flee into Thailand.

The Thai authorities have said civilians and unarmed

Walesa meets Pawlak

WARSAW, Feb 6: President Leach Walesa, who has begun a process to dissolve parliament in order to call new elections and oust the left-dominated government, met Monday with Prime Minister Waldemir Pawlak, reports AP.