

BRIEFLY

Nicosia now Lefkosia: Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, has changed its name to Lefkosia as part of a campaign on the Mediterranean island to standardise spellings of place names. Reuter reports from Nicosia.

The change, voted unanimously by the municipal council late on Thursday, makes the spelling conform to the way the city's name is pronounced in Greek. Mayor Lellos Demetriadis said.

Air NZ grounds 10 boeings: Air New Zealand grounded 10 of its 13 Boeing 737 jetliners Friday because of engine problems that have forced two emergency landings. AP reports from Wellington.

A joint statement from the airline and the Civil Aviation Authority said the problems related to the reliability of engine turbine blades, which were recently overhauled when noise reduction gear was refitted.

Blasts damage bldgs in Istanbul: At least three bombs exploded in Istanbul overnight, damaging buildings but causing no casualties, Turkish police said on Friday. Reuter reports from Ankara.

One bomb damaged a bank while police defused another device also planted by a bank, officials told Anatolian News Agency.

Tremor jolts northeast India: An earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale jolted northeast India on Friday, causing residents to flee their homes in panic, the Press Trust of India reported. AFP says from New Delhi.

The tremor, lasted about 30 seconds and forced thousands of people out of their homes and offices in the northeastern city of Itanagar, it said.

Moderate quake shakes Japan: A moderate earthquake registering 4.1 on the Richter scale shook Japan's Izu Islands early Friday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, the Meteorological Agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

There was no danger of Tsunami tidal waves, the agency said.

Bosnian charged with murder: Sweden charged a 27-year-old Bosnian refugee with murder on Thursday after other refugees accused him of killing inmates at a Bosnian prison camp in 1992. AP reports from Stockholm.

The man, believed to be a Serb, was arrested on Wednesday in southern Sweden, where he had lived since arriving with tens of thousands of asylum-seekers over the last two years.

Tornado kills 3 in Alabama: A predawn tornado ripped across north Alabama on Thursday, killing three people, including a child, and injuring more than 100, authorities said. AP reports from Arab, Alabama.

The tornado struck about 5 am as a band of violent weather swept across north Alabama.

Colombian rebels down chopper: Leftist guerrillas are believed responsible for shooting down a police helicopter on Thursday in southern Colombia, killing two and injuring four others, police said. AP reports from Bogota.

Another officer from the helicopter was missing. The attack occurred outside Puerto Asis, 530 kilometres (330 miles) southwest of Bogota near the border with Ecuador.

US signs children's rights deal: After five years of refusal, the United States on Thursday signed a UN agreement on children's rights. AP reports from United Nations.

One-hundred seventy-seven countries now have signed the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires nations to protect children from abuse and guarantee access to education and basic health care.

Jet crashes at Hanoi airport: A Vietnamese air force Mig-21 jet fighter crashed on a training flight at Hanoi's Noi Bai Airport but the pilot parachuted to safety, an airport official said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Hanoi.

He confirmed a report by the *Tot Tre* (Youth) newspaper that the Russian-made plane crashed on Tuesday, but he said he could not confirm that the crash was caused by technical defects, as the newspaper reported.

Musician murdered in Algeria: One Algeria's most popular musicians was murdered by machine-gun fire on Wednesday night in the southwest city of Orlan, the country's second largest city. Organ television said on Thursday. AFP reports from Algiers.

The musician and musical producer, known by his stage name 'Rachid', was killed in front of his shop, television said.

Kobe marks moment of silence: The city of Kobe, marked a moment of silence on Friday in remembrance of the thousands who died when a massive earthquake struck Kobe one month ago. AP reports from Kobe.

Local leaders led the silent memorial, which was observed at noon across the city and broadcast live nationwide on television. At Kobe's City Hall, however, phones kept ringing and officials continued their work.

NY to restore death sentence: The governor and legislative leaders reached agreement on a plan to bring the death penalty back to New York, substituting death by injection for the electric chair, which was last used in 1963. AP reports from Albany, New York.

Gov George Pataki and lawmakers announced the pact on Wednesday to restore capital punishment, a major campaign promise of the new Republican governor.

3 die in US cargo plane crash: A stretch DC-8 cargo plane crashed on Thursday night after its tail scraped the runway on takeoff, killing all three people aboard, authorities said. AP reports from Kansas City.

The plane, owned by Air Transport Inc, crashed about 8:30 pm (0230 GMT) near a runway at Kansas City International Airport, said Joe McBride, spokesman for the city's Aviation Department.

Govt, LTTE agree to open land routes to Jaffna

COLOMBO, Feb 17: Breaking a deadlock in peace talks, the government and Tamil guerrillas have agreed to open two land routes to the rebel-held Jaffna peninsula, a government negotiator said Friday, reports AP.

Details were not settled, but will be discussed when formal negotiations resume within two weeks, said Kusumari Balapatabendi, the chief negotiator and secretary to President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"There is an agreement on opening all land routes to Jaffna. We will discuss the details when we meet in a few days," he said.

He said the two sides have been communicating through letters since the last round of talks on January 14, which ended in a deadlock over the rebel's demand that a military camp blocking one road be dismantled.

Jaffna has been under an economic blockade for four years, depriving its 800,000 people of electricity, gasoline, telephone, communications and most consumer goods.

Balapatabendi said the negotiators will meet before March 1, when the government plans to begin a 40 billion rupee (800 million dollars) reconstruction package for the rebel-held war zone.

A truce declared on January 8 has held, despite minor violations reported by the military. Observers from Norway, Canada and the Netherlands have not yet begun monitoring the truce.

More than 34,000 people have died in the 11-year war for a homeland for the Tamil minority, who say they are discriminated against by the Sinhalese who dominate the government and military.

Meanwhile, a former chief election commissioner began work Friday as defence secretary, the first civilian since 1977 to hold the top administrative post in the defence structure.

Chandrananda de Silva replaced General Hamilton Wanasinghe, a former army chief who was appointed by the previous government. He resigned last week amid allegations of corruption.

De Silva supervised nine national elections during his 12 and a half years as commissioner. He had earlier declined the post, but said he changed his mind "after an assurance was given that no prejudice will be held to what I said and published during my term as elections commissioner."

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Peace activists march in Vavuniya, a northern Sri Lankan town on Thursday demanding an end to Lankan ethnic war. Vavuniya is a defacto border post at the entrance to territory held by Tamil Tigers. — AFP photo

Benazir, Ramos will strengthen ties to fight terrorism

MANILA, Feb 17: President Fidel Ramos and Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Friday agreed to strengthen cooperation in fighting international terrorism and drug trafficking, reports AP.

Bhutto arrived Friday for talks with Ramos and to address an international conference on climate change.

Last week, Ramzi Yousef, the alleged mastermind of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, was arrested in Pakistan by US and Pakistani authorities.

"With regard to the Yousef affair, we agreed to strengthen our bilateral networking on information regarding terrorist organisations... as well as participation in multilateral networking to reduce or intercept or control drug trafficking between our two sides of Asia," Ramos said.

Philippine police officials said Yousef was discovered to be in Manila last January after a police raid on an apartment following a mysterious fire.

Yousef escaped but he left evidence that indicated he was involved in a plot to kill Pope John Paul II during the pope's visit to Manila last month and also in the December 11 bombing of a Philippine Airlines plane bound for Tokyo in which one Japanese passenger was killed.

Ramos said that after the raid his government "immediately signalled" the countries around, including those that have major airlines passing through the Philippines about this discovery.

Several days after the apartment fire, the US Federal Aviation Administration issued warnings of possible terrorist attacks on US airliners in the Asia-Pacific.

In a February 4 letter to Ramos, President Clinton said he was grateful to the Philippine government for uncovering the terror plot.

"Had it not been for the good work of your government, hundreds of innocent Americans and others might have died tragically at the hands of terrorists intent on bombing US airlines," Clinton said.

Yousef was arrested in a hotel in Karachi February 7, shortly after he arrived from Bangkok, Thailand. He was immediately deported to the United States to face trial for the World Trade Center bombing that killed six persons.

Ramos said his talks with Bhutto also covered defence cooperation, citing possible acquisition by the Philippines of Pakistan-made infantry weapons. He added that Chief of Staff Gen Arturo Enrile will soon visit Pakistan in this connection.

They also discussed exchanges in technology and cooperation to enhance trade and investment cooperation as well as support for UN and regional agreements, he said.

Gunmen torch 64 houses in Nagaland

NEW DELHI, Feb 17: Armed attackers stormed a village early today in the far-eastern Indian state of Nagaland and left after torching at least 64 houses, the Press Trust of India reported, says AFP.

A villager was seriously injured in the pre-dawn attack by unidentified gunmen in Manoh village near the state capital of Kohima, it said without giving further details.



Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (R), Philippine President Fidel Ramos (L) review presidential honour guards upon Benazir's arrival at Malacanang presidential palace yesterday. Benazir is on a two-day visit to Manila. — AFP photo

US against Russian N-technology transfer to Iran

WASHINGTON, Feb 17: The United States opposes nuclear technology transfers from Russia to Iran but foresees no sanctions against Moscow as a result of the cooperation, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said on Thursday, reports AP.

"The question of sanctions is a very complicated one," Christopher told a House of Representatives panel when questioned about Russian nuclear technology reaching Tehran.

Although US law requires cutoff of aid to countries violating non-proliferation agreements, Christopher said "Our legal adviser has told me that the sanctions provision of the law would not be applicable in this particular situation."

Christopher said Washington was attempting to end the nuclear technology deals between Iran and Russia, with some success.

"We've been making that point to the Russians ever since we first met with them in Vancouver," Christopher said.

"And we're making some progress in getting a commitment from them not to go forward with at least future nuclear cooperation with Iran," he said.

100 Somalis block runway at Mogadishu airport

MOGADISHU, Feb 17: More than 100 Somalis formerly employed by the United Nations blocked the runway at Mogadishu's UN-controlled airport on Thursday, delaying the departure of Pakistani troops from the Somali capital, reports Reuter.

Chanting "UNOSOM (UN Operation in Somalia) is a thief," and "UNOSOM down," demonstrators sat on the runway and beneath the plane due to take off as part of the UN troops pullout from Somalia.

They demanded payment for what they said were outstanding annual leave and sick days before they were laid off by UNOSOM.

Pakistani troops backed by eight armoured troops carriers and vehicles mounted with a machineguns surrounded the demonstrators, some of them women. Some held their UN identity cards in the air.

Clinton has criticised both proposals as unwise restrictions of presidential authority, certain to cripple UN peacekeeping.

Defence Secretary William Perry sharply criticised the proposal Thursday with the argument that it makes allied warfare impossible.

In a breakfast speech to two defence associations, Perry noted that US Army Gen Gary Luck, the four-star commander in Korea, has an allied Korean general under him with operational authority over troops of the Army's 2nd Infantry.

That same general, during the Gulf War, had a French division under his command and put an American brigade in the field with the French, Perry said. Luck "didn't ask the secretary of defence. He didn't ask Congress. He just did it because that's what's done in coalition warfare," Perry said.

Gingrich told a news conference that "having watched this administration, we disagree deeply with the way they would risk American lives around the planet."

He singled out what he called the administration's "willingness to rely on the United Nations instead of the United States."

The Republicans also want to pressure the administration to establish an accelerated timetable for granting full membership in NATO to Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

However, admission of new members requires unanimous approval of NATO members, limiting the impact of congressional action by Congress.

Off the Record



Spanish model Judit Masco presenting Thursday a wedding dress by designer Angela Arregui during autumn/winter 95 fashion show in Madrid. — AFP photo

Parrot settles dispute with wolf-whistle

LONDON: A stolen parrot sorted out his disputed ownership in court with a piercing wolf-whistle that identified his mistress and convicted an interloper of handling stolen goods, judicial sources said, reports AP.

Barney, an Amazon parrot, worth 625 pounds (1000 dollars), had been stolen from Georgina Morgans, 27, in a burglary.

He surfaced among items in the possession of Eric Buckley, 39, suspected by police of handling stolen goods.

In court on Wednesday, Buckley claimed the bird was his and that its name was Blue.

Morgans said the bird's name was Barney and was her's. The bird was brought into court in a covered cage and released.

Ignoring Buckley altogether, Barney made a bee-line for Morgans, squawked his own name let out a shrill whistle and allowed her to tickle him under chin.

The jury found Buckley guilty of handling stolen goods and he was release on bail for sentencing later.

Land dispute with Qatar Bahrain seeks Saudi mediation to end crisis

MANAMA, Feb 17: Bahrain on Thursday agreed to seek Saudi mediation to resolve its land dispute with Qatar, reports AP.

"I welcome the invitation for a resumption of the good offices," of Saudi King Fahd, said Bahrain's Crown Prince Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa in response to a proposal from his Qatari counterpart Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani.

"This will come through a meeting to be convened as soon as possible between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain," the Bahraini Crown Prince said, quoted by the official news agency QNA.

"A framework to implement resumption of the talks will be laid down through such a meeting in order that a comprehensive brotherly solution may be reached," he said.

Qatar's Crown Prince said on Wednesday that his country could withdraw its request for the International Court of Justice in the Hague to rule on the territorial dispute if a settlement could be reached through Saudi mediation.

Qatar hopes that the efforts of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia will continue and is ready to withdraw its request to the International Court of Justice if an acceptable settlement is reached," he said.

Earlier on Wednesday, the court said it was competent to rule on the dispute — a judgement described by Qatari representative Najib Al-Nawini as "a victory and a first step towards a peaceful settlement of the case."

Sheikh Hamad, quoted by the official Qatari news agency QNA, thanked King Fahd for his mediation efforts, which he said led to the signing of the 1990 Qatari-Bahraini accord.

Saudi mediation efforts appeared to have dried up in the past few years.

Qatar claims the Hawar Islands, and wants demarcation of underwater archipelago boundaries, Zubarah, pearl-diving areas and fishing grounds and all matters concerning maritime boundaries.

5000 Buddhist Karens return to Myanmar

BANGKOK, Feb 17: More than 5,000 Buddhist Karens opposed to the Christian leadership of the Karen National Union (KNU) have returned to Myanmar after fleeing to Thailand in January, state-run Myanmar radio said on Thursday, reports AP.

A total of 5,061 Buddhists returned to the Myanmar village of Myaingyung, where they were resettled after taking temporary shelter.

54 die of AIDS in Vietnam so far

HANOI, Feb 17: Five Vietnamese have died of AIDS-related causes in the past six weeks, taking to 54 the death toll in the country from the disease, official sources reported today, says Reuter.

They included the first married couple in Vietnam killed by acquired immune deficiency syndrome, which can be spread by sexual intercourse.

The National AIDS Protection Committee confirmed 53 deaths. The 54th, reported by the official Vietnam News Daily, occurred after the committee's statistics were drawn up.

"As of February 11, the whole country has recorded 2,200 Vietnamese tested positive with HIV, of which 131 have been confirmed as suffering from AIDS.

Republicans okay bill to cut US participation in peacekeeping

WASHINGTON, Feb 17: Ignoring strong opposition from President Clinton, the Republican-controlled US House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bill Thursday that would cut back US participation in UN peacekeeping and support early expansion of NATO, reports AP.

The Republican victory was tempered by rejection of a major part of the original proposition, which would have revised plans for a national missile defence system. Administration officials and military leaders had campaigned against the idea.

A counterpart bill now must be considered in the Senate, where one has yet to be proposed. President Clinton has made clear that he almost certainly would veto the measure if it passes the Senate in the form passed by the House.

The vote on final passage was 241 to 181.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich admitted that "we were a little surprised at the vote against missile defence, which had been a prime goal of last fall's Republican campaign programme they called a 'Contract With America'.

Twenty-four Republicans joined Democrats to delete the missile provision, which would have required the administration to present a plan for deployment of a missile defence programme.

its essential footage" and said the bill is a mid-course correction for US foreign and defence policy.

One most prominent Republican dissenter was Republican Jim Leach, chairman of the House Banking Committee.

In offering an amendment to delete a provision cutting back the US contribution to UN peacekeeping, Leach said "the key question is whether there's going to be a retreat from US leadership in international affairs."

But only six other Republicans joined him when the House voted down his amendment 267 to 158.

The House session giving President Clinton a temporary victory on the missile defence lasted until nearly midnight Wednesday. On Thursday, Mike

McCurry, the White House press secretary, characterised that vote marked "a measure of progress." The House voted not to drop billions of dollars on... an idea from the 1980s when we need to start thinking of 21st-century defence."

The most controversial foreign policy section of the full bill would require that US contributions toward UN peacekeeping operations be deducted from regular dues assessed the United States for such operations.

Republicans argued that the United States pays a disproportionate share of the cost of peacekeeping, more than double what any other nation contributes.

Another provision would keep US troops engaged in a UN operation from being placed under foreign command.

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DPRK threatens to scrap N-deal with US again

SEOUL, Feb 17: In tit-for-tat diplomacy, North Korea warned Friday it is ready to scrap a nuclear deal if Washington continues to try to impose "unjustifiable preconditions," reports AP.

The warning, in a report by the North's communist party organ Rodong Sinmun, indicated the communist government has no intention of changing its intransigence on the nuclear deal, although US and South Korean officials say this may be a bargaining ploy.

The report said implementation of the accord will only occur on a step-by-step basis, with Washington taking the first step. It also rejected dialogue with South Korea as a precondition.