

BRIEFLY



US President Bill Clinton speaks Sunday at the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington, Virginia during a ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the battle. — AFP photo

Kohl's party loses state polls: Helmut Kohl lost his first big popularity test of 1995 when a leftist alliance defeated his party in Hesse state elections, AP reports from Bonn.

Still, there was a plus side for the chancellor, whose hold on power has been slipping because of the high costs of German unification: The Free Democrats, a tiny coalition partner, kept seats in Sunday's election for the Hesse state parliament.

Ramos appoints new army chief: President Fidel Ramos on Monday appointed Lt. General Orlando Soriano as the new acting commanding general of the Philippine army, Xinhua reports from Manila.

Soriano, who assumed his new post Monday morning, will hold in a concurrent capacity his old post as the southern command chief of the armed forces of the Philippines.

Carlos fractures wrist: King Juan Carlos slipped on a patch of ice, fell and fractured his right wrist on Sunday afternoon while attending the second day of the Winter University Games in Jaca, a northern ski resort, AP reports from Madrid.

A spokesman said the Spanish king continued his duties after the fall, presiding over the opening of a skating rink before returning to Madrid for treatment.

3 children found dead in US: Three children found dead inside a burned van were murdered, authorities said, AP reports from Kill Devil Hills.

The bodies of the children, all under age 13, were burned in the van Sunday in the parking lot at the Wright Brothers Monument Airport on the state's northern coast.

US chopper crashes near Mogadishu: A US Marine helicopter crashed into the ocean near the Somali capital as troops prepared for a mission to protect the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers, officials said Monday, AP reports from Mogadishu.

One person was missing and four were rescued after the Huey helicopter from the USS Essex crashed into the Indian Ocean Sunday morning, the US Navy said in a statement Monday.

Muntaber disease claims 21: A cholera-related disease has killed 21 people in a week and infected hundreds of others in the northern Moluccas, a press report said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The Media Indonesia Daily quoted unnamed sources in the Moluccas provincial capital Ambon saying that 21 people had died since "Muntaber," a cholera-related disease that causes serious diarrhoea and vomiting, broke out in the village of Dolic a week ago.

Oil slicks kill 2000 birds: More than 2,000 birds have been killed in recent weeks by oil slicks that reached the southern coastal regions of Trelleborg, the daily Sydsvenska Dagbadet reported on Sunday, AFP says from Malmoe, Sweden.

The paper said the origin of the oil slicks was unclear although fishermen suspect they come from East European ships which pay less attention to environmental legislation when they clean their oil tanks.

Ist death sentence since 1938: Papua New Guinea has imposed its first death sentence since 1938 on a man convicted of murder and rape, AP reports from Port Moresby.

National Court Justice Tracy Doherty on Friday ordered the hanging of Charles Ombusu, a prison escapee who raped a young woman and killed her father when he came to her aid. No date was set for execution.

Fire kill 6 kids in Iran: Fire swept through an elementary school in northern Iran on Sunday, killing six children, the official news agency IRNA reported, AFP says from Tehran.

The blaze in the city of Rasht broke out when a kerosene stove tipped over on a wooden floor, the agency said. The children who died were 11 and 12 years old.

Ortega appears in public: A fit-looking Daniel Ortega, leader of the leftist Sandinista Party, got a big welcome-home greeting on Sunday in his first public appearance since suffering a heart attack two months ago, Reuter reports from Managua.

Milosevic's 'no' to latest peace bid

BELGRADE, Feb 20: Serbia's president has refused the latest bid to get peace talks moving in former Yugoslavia, even though it could have led to an easing of tough economic sanctions, reports AP.

After weekend talks with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, President Slobodan Milosevic reiterated his call for sanctions to be lifted before he makes concessions.

A plan put forward by the United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany would have lifted the sanctions in exchange for Milosevic recognising the four republics which split from Yugoslavia: Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Slovenia.

In making the offer, the mediators were seeking to isolate rebel Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, in hopes that would improve chances for an overall peace.

Kozyrev said Milosevic should be rewarded for moves already made toward peace. The Serbian leader "should be helped with the lifting of sanctions," Kozyrev said, instead of being given more conditions.

Recognition, he added, "comes at the end."

The Serbian president announced six months ago that he was breaking with Bosnia's rebel Serbs because they refused to accept a peace plan that would leave them in control of 49 per cent of Bosnia, instead of the 70 per cent they now hold.

Bosnian radio reported more artillery and mortar fire around the town of Veljka Kladusa in the northern part of the region where Bosnian army troops are battling forces loyal to rebel Muslim leader Fikret Abdic there.

In Sarajevo, one person was wounded by sniper fire from Serb positions.



An Israeli soldier checks the permits of the Palestinian workers at Erez Crossing on the border with the Gaza Strip on Sunday. A Palestinian teenager was shot dead by an Israeli soldier on the day when he tried to cross the border without a permit. — AFP photo

Israel to take part in naval exercise with Arab countries

JERUSALEM, Feb 20: Israel is to join at least eight Arab countries in a Canadian-sponsored naval exercise in the Mediterranean next month, Israeli Defence Ministry officials said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The exercises off the Tunisian Coast will be the first of its kind involving Israel and Arab states.

"It was agreed a while back in Tunis," one official told Reuters, referring to a session in December of the arms control and regional security working group, one of several multilateral committees set up as part of the Middle East peace process.

He named the Arab participants in the exercise as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Israel radio reported that Jordan and the Palestinians also would take part.

Canada will lead the exercise, whose aim is to show how states in the region can give assistance during an incident at sea," Defence Ministry Director-General David Ivri said in an interview with the Israeli Davar newspaper.

Israel has full diplomatic relations with Egypt and Jordan and low level ties with Tunisia and Morocco.

The committee has threatened to rethink the whole of the peace process with Israel following a deadlock in extending Palestinian self-rule.

PLO executive committee meets Arafat today

CAIRO, Feb 20: The PLO's executive committee will meet Tuesday in Cairo with Palestinian Chief Yasser Arafat to discuss the Middle East peace process, a Palestinian representative said today, reports AP.

Mohammed Sobehi told AFP Arafat would head to Tunis from Paris before arriving Tuesday in Cairo.

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Polling begins in Gujarat

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Thousands of people voted on Monday in India's second most industrialised state in key elections seen as a referendum on Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, official said, reports AP.

Counting of the millions of votes cast in the six states will begin March 11.

That governs Gujarat at the hands of the main opposition Hindu-revivalist Bhartiya Janata Party (Indian people's party).

Analysts have also warned that a congress rout in Gujarat or in adjoining Maharashtra, which went to the polls on February 9 and 12, would spell disaster for Rao, who became Prime Minister in 1991.

Six Indian states are to elect new governments in February and March.

Elections have been held in two and three states would go the polls next month.

The staggered ballot is considered crucial for Rao, who has to win in at least Gujarat and Maharashtra to salvage the prestige he lost when he led the ruling party to a humiliating rout in two key southern states in December.

The southern defeat triggered a rebellion in the Congress by Arjun Singh, Rao's de facto deputy in the government who quit the cabinet on December 24 and launched a tirade against the premier.

Rao, who is also the Congress president, sacked Singh on February 7.

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Dostum threatens to form new state

ISLAMABAD, Feb 20: Rashid Dostum, head of Afghanistan's ethnic Uzbek forces, has threatened to declare an independent state if Taliban forces attack his northern strongholds, a spokesman said today, reports AP.

A spokesman for Dostum's Jumbish Party was quoted in Pakistani press as saying he would form the new state, to be called South Turkmenistan, in response to any offensive by the Talibans, now at the gates of Kabul.

The Talibans, who control large areas of southern Afghanistan after a series of dramatic victories over Mujahideen forces are fighting to establish a single Islamic state in Afghanistan.

Dostum controls several provinces in northern Afghanistan. He was major figure in the former communist regime who went over to the Mujahideen at the beginning of 1992 sparking the fall of President Najibullah.

He has never made such a threat before and no confirmation of his comments was available from Dostum himself.

Dostum, whose headquarters in the large city of Mazar-I-Sharif has been allied with the fundamentalist leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar since the beginning of 1994.

Hekmatyar's Hazb-I-Islami faction was forced to abandon its positions in southern Kabul last week ahead of the Taliban advance.

The Taliban have said that if they take Kabul, they will disarm all sides in the civil war, including forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Off the Record

Search for origins of horsemanship

ATLANTA: Six thousand years ago, a brave, unknown Ukrainian stuck a piece of bone in the mouth of a horse, attached a bridle, sat astride the animal and invented horseback riding, reports AP.

That's the conclusion of David Anthony, an anthropologist who searched for the origins of horsemanship by studying marks on the teeth of ancient horses in museums around the world.

Learning to domesticate and ride horses marked a revolution in human civilization, enabling humans at a time before the wheel to travel great distances and find new ways to live, Anthony said Sunday at the national meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The ancients who first rode horses were a "scruffy people" who were forced to live in the river valleys of the Ukraine. Beyond the rivers, they were trapped by vast grasslands that defied easy travel on foot, Anthony said.

There were huge herds of horses then and the first use of those horses was to eat them, he said. "Horses to them (early Ukrainians) were like the buffalo to the American Indians."

Serbia's wedding of the century

ZITORADJA, Yugoslavia: Bullets whistled overhead as Serbia's most notorious warlord claimed the queen of "torbofolk" music as his bride Sunday in a raucous ceremony, reports AP.

In what was billed as Serbia's wedding of the century, Zeljko Raznatovic, cited as a possible war criminal by former US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, wed Svetlana Velickovic, a pop singer half his age.

During the ceremony, Raznatovic, known as Arkan, shot an apple of a 10-metre pole atop his bride-to-be's house. It took the 42-year-old militia leader six tries with a twin-barrel hunting rifle.

When he succeeded, Arkan and about 100 members of his Tigers paramilitary unit, which has spread fear in Bosnia and Croatia, celebrated with a hail of gunfire shot over the heads of thousands of villagers and guests.

Arkan's fighters appeared at the wedding dressed in long black overcoats, and their guns were not visible until they pulled them out to salute him.

"Now he can have her," said Mileva Stojic, from the 21-year-old music queen's home village, Velickovic, popularly known as Ceca, "has found a real husband for herself."



The 'Lion King,' made with grapefruit, lemons and oranges is displayed Saturday as the French Menton Citrus Festival opens. — AFP photo

Only 10 countries likely to join KEDO next month

TOKYO, Feb 20: Only 10 countries are likely to join the Korean Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) next month to help finance the construction of light-water reactors in North Korea, the Yomiuri Shimbun said today, reports AP.

More than 20 countries have been asked to join the KEDO, whose board of directors will comprise the United States, South Korea and Japan.

A meeting in New York to formally establish the KEDO is set for March 7, the mass-circulation newspaper added.

Astronomers will have technology soon to search for other earths

ATLANTA, Feb 20: Astronomers will have the technology before this century is over to start a full-scale search of the universe for others Earths orbiting other stars, scientists say, reports AP.

Such a search is in pursuit of an answer to "one of the most intriguing questions of the human mind," Robert Brown of the Space Telescope Science Institute said Sunday at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Are we alone in the universe? Is Earth the only place like this? said Brown. New instruments placed on the Hubble Space Telescope will finally give science the tools to seriously address these questions, he said.

In 1997, NASA will add to the Hubble Space Telescope a high resolution spectrograph and camera that will be able to take unprecedented pictures of the space surrounding two stars less than 15 light years from Earth, said Steve Maran, a NASA astronomer.

planet, at about the distance from the star that Jupiter is from the sun, we should be able to detect it."

David W. Latham of the Centre for Astrophysics at Harvard said that the key to finding a second Earth is to first find a second Jupiter.

Planets the size of Jupiter, the largest in the solar system and almost 100 times the size of Earth, would be much more easily spotted, said Latham, and they would suggest that the target star has other planets.

"If you find a big one, then you can assume that there will be little ones," he said.

Three planets already have been found, but they are in orbit of a pulsar, a distant, rapidly rotating star that sends out powerful radio signals, but little light.

Alexander Wolszczan, a radio astronomer at Pennsylvania State University, found the planets three years ago by measuring bursts in the 160-per-second bursts of radio signals coming from the pulsar.

It is extremely unlikely that there is life on these planets.

"Being on those planets would be like standing in front of an X-ray machine and getting X-rayed 160 times a second," said Wolszczan.

Wolszczan said there is strong evidence of other planets about other pulsars, and this in turn, supports the idea that there could be planets about more normal stars.

The meaning of this discovery is that there should be planets elsewhere," he said. "If you can find planets around a weird object like a pulsar, then you should find them elsewhere."

Brown said the search for planets will concentrate on what he calls "the life zone" around stars. These orbits would be where the heat from the central star is enough to warm a planet, but not boil away water.

"Our understanding of life would require liquid water," Latham explained.

More advanced cameras to aid in the search will be placed on the Hubble in 1999 and still other instruments will be attached in 2002 and 2005.

Eventually, said Brown, the search could involve instruments placed in liberation points — areas in deep space where the gravity pull of the Earth is neutralised and objects stay in one place. He said two or more instruments could be teamed to act as one massive infrared telescope capable of taking images of small objects near distant stars.

It may take such instruments to remove any doubt about the existence of other planets, said Latham.

Libya against Arab-Israeli meet

TRIPOLI, Feb 20: Libya on Sunday warned four Arab countries against taking part in a meeting organised by NATO with Israel due to discuss the dangers of "violent extremism," reports AP.

Arab Unity Minister Jomaa-el-Fezzani told state television that the ambassadors of Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt and Tunisia to Tripoli had been warned of "the dangerous implications of their participation alongside Israel at a meeting concerning internal affairs."

He said the meeting due to be held in Brussels on Friday under the auspices of the NATO.

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