

BRIEFLY

Queen may visit N Ireland: Queen Elizabeth II is expected to visit Northern Ireland on Thursday — her first visit since the paramilitary ceasefires of September and October last year — sources said Monday. AFP reports from Belfast.

Buckingham palace did not confirm the reports, but for security reasons, royal visits to the province are never announced in advance. It has been widely reported in Belfast that the Queen, who last visited Northern Ireland in 1993, will officially open a new bridge across the River Lagan in Belfast.

Kumaratunga seeks women's help: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga Tuesday appealed for women to back her government's bid to usher in democratic freedom and peace. AFP reports from Colombo.

The President asked for "unstinted support," particularly women, mothers and sisters for her People's Alliance (PA) government, in a special message ahead of International Women's day on Wednesday.

One killed in Yemen blast: A young woman was killed and 44 people injured in an accidental explosion at a dynamite store in Hodaïda in western Yemen on Monday, the Interior Ministry said, AFP reports from Sana'a.

The blast in the Red Sea Port, 270 kilometres, (168 miles) west of Sana'a, was caused by the "poor storage" of a large amount of dynamite, a ministry spokesman said. Homes and industrial installations were damaged in the explosion. He added.

34 die in Indonesian mishaps: Thirty-four people were killed and tens of others injured in four traffic accidents in the northern Sumatra province of Aceh on Sunday, the Antara news agency said Tuesday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The highest toll occurred as a minibus carrying 24 people collided with a truck in Pangsa, killing 20 people and injuring six others. An open-back pickup truck rammed into a sedan in Matang Meuheun later the same day, killing nine people while two other separate incidents in eastern and northern Aceh killed another five people.

New Polish govt sworn in: Poland's new leftwing government headed by former communist Jozef Oleksy was sworn in Monday by President Lech Walesa, the presidential press office announced, AFP reports from Warsaw.

In a ceremony that signalled the end of a more than month-long institutional crisis, Walesa called on Oleksy to "govern rather than appear to make reforms" — a thinly-veiled reference to Oleksy's predecessor, Waldemar Pawlak.

3 miners killed in S Africa: Three miners were killed and 26 were injured in clashes at a South African gold mine hostel in Carletonville, east of Johannesburg, early Tuesday, a spokeswoman for Delkraal gold mining company said, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

Management was trying to bring 1,700 miners to the surface after receiving reports of clashes underground this morning, she added.

Vietnam-Singapore defence ties: Vietnam and Singapore established bilateral defence ties yesterday during an official visit to Singapore by Vietnam's Defence Minister General Doan Khue, Reuter reports from Singapore.

Khue was the first Vietnamese defence minister to tour the city state. "The visit by General Khue heralds the establishment of bilateral defence ties between Vietnam and Singapore," the Singapore Ministry of Defence said in a statement.

Iraq blames US for clashes: Iraq said fresh clashes have erupted with a Kurdish faction in the north and blamed the United States for instigating the fighting, AP reports from Nicotia.

It was the first time Iraq has confirmed it had been fighting in the Kurdish enclave, established after the 1991 Gulf War to protect the Kurds from Iraqi leaders Saddam Hussein.

Thatcher passes on award: Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher will pass on an award from a Jesuit College which sparked protests from priests in northern Ireland and Irish Americans, officials said Monday, AFP reports from Massachusetts.

Boston College had planned to bestow the Ignatius Medal, its highest honour, at a May 5 dinner but Thatcher told the school she would not attend, college spokesman Douglas Whiting said.

Policeman executed in Vietnam: A policeman whose murder trial drew crowds angry at police abuses has exhausted all his appeals and been executed, an official newspaper said, AP reports from Hanoi.

Former police Lt. Nguyen Tung Duong, 37, was led before a firing squad Sunday morning after a final meeting with his family, said the newspaper Hanoi Moi (New Hanoi).



US President Bill Clinton speaks to a group of veterans at their annual midwinter conference in Washington DC on Monday. Clinton promised to intensify efforts to help thousands of Persian Gulf War veterans who are suffering from unexplained illnesses and said the administration will spend 13 million dollars to fund new research to find a possible cause for the ailments. — AFP/UNB photo

23 killed in Chinese bus accident

BEIJING, Mar 7: A tourist bus on an excursion to the eastern city of Hangzhou has careened off a bridge and into a river, killing 23 of 50 passengers, an official report said today, reports AP.

The newspaper China Daily, quoting a local report, said authorities were investigating the cause of the accident, which occurred near Jiaxing City, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) southwest of the port city of Shanghai.

Meanwhile, three men have been arrested and three top officials punished in connection with a bridge collapse on October 1 that killed 38 people at a tourist site near the southern city of Canton.

Most of the 38 people who died are believed to have drowned in the lake.

Prospects for peace dim as Tamils reject foreign mediation

COLOMBO, Mar 7: The prospects for peace in Sri Lanka dimmed further on Monday as president Chandrika Kumaratunga announced that the Tamil Tiger guerrillas had rejected foreign mediation to end their protracted ethnic war, reports AP.

Officials sources said French mediation had been envisaged by Kumaratunga but her negotiating partner, the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), shot down the offer.

Kumaratunga, in a seven-page statement, did not name the foreign government but said LTTE supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran failed to set definite dates for political talks after calling for direct talks without foreign mediation.

The president, who initiated peace talks with the LTTE after coming to power in

Murtaza Bhutto to lead rival faction PPP faces split Mar 15

KARACHI, Mar 7: Murtaza Bhutto, estranged brother of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, says he plans to launch a rival political movement on March 15, reports AP.

Benazir's government has "pushed the country to the verge of economic collapse," Murtaza Bhutto said Monday evening. "The sooner the government is ousted, the better for the country."

Murtaza Bhutto, 41, faces a host of legal problems and has inspired only limited political support since his 1993 return from 16 years in exile. Most observers see him as a nuisance, but not a serious threat to Benazir's ruling Pakistan People's Party.

Murtaza Bhutto said that on March 15 he would formally launch a rival, breakaway faction of the People's Party, a group founded by the Benazir's father, the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

"I don't recognize the party led by Benazir," Murtaza Bhutto said. "The party leadership has been usurped by a coterie of thieves and opportunists."

The personal and political feud between the siblings has been going on for years. Both see themselves as the natural successor to their father, a former prime minister overthrown in a 1977 coup and hanged two years later.

Murtaza Bhutto faces numerous criminal charges in a lengthy case slowly working its way through the courts. He is accused of masterminding a 1981 hijacking of a Pakistani airliner and other "anti-national activities." He is currently free on bail.

Reuter adds from Lahore: Gunmen killed a leader of a militant Shi'ite Muslim organisation in the Pakistani city of Lahore Tuesday, police said.

They said gunmen on two motorcycles shot Mohammad Ali Naqvi, a member of the supreme council of Tehrik-i-Jafria Pakistan (TJP), in his car, killing him instantly.

After the killing, TJP supporters staged angry protests on the main Multan road in central Lahore, burning tyres, throwing stones and shooting in the air, witnesses said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The TJP has been locked in a vendetta with the rival militant Sunni Muslim Sipah-i-Sahaba organisation in which scores of people have been killed in recent months.



Troops loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani fire a BM-12 rocket launcher at rival Shi'ite Hezbi-Islami positions in southwest Kabul on Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

DPRK warns N-deal with US may collapse

SEOUL, Mar 7: North Korea warned today that a nuclear deal with the United States would collapse unless Washington drops plans to give it South Korean made reactors, reports AP.

The warning by the North's Foreign Ministry came two days before a US-led international consortium was to be inaugurated to underwrite the accord. Japan's Cabinet decided formally today to sign an agreement with the United States and South Korea setting up the consortium.

The agreement to form the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation will consist of the two 1,000-megawatt light-water reactors be "South Korean-type," Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman Terusuke Terada said.

But a copy of the draft agreement released by the ministry refers ambiguously to "reactors of the Korean standard nuclear plant model," a possible attempt to reduce objections from North Korea.

North Korea refuses to accept the reactors from its southern capitalist rival, arguing they are unsafe. Experts say the real reason is pride.

Even if the DPRK (North Korea) US agreed framework collapsed, we would have nothing to lose or fear," the North's official Korean Central News Agency quoted an unnamed Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying.

The two modern light-water reactors, worth about 4 billion dollars, are a key part of the October 21 deal, in which the North agreed to freeze and eventually dismantle its Soviet-developed nuclear programme, suspected of being used to develop atomic bombs.

The North is also assured of substitute fuel and improved diplomatic relations with

Washington. Under the deal, a reactor contract should be signed by April 21, although US officials have called that a target date, not a deadline.

The North's Foreign Ministry spokesman said his country was increasingly doubtful if the reactor contract would be signed as scheduled because of Washington's insistence on South Korean reactors.

"In fact, we cannot but doubt if an agreement on the provision of light-water reactors can be concluded by April 21... and this undermines our hope for light-water reactors with the passage of time," the spokesman said.

"Whether an agreement on the provision of light-water reactors is signed by April 21 or not is the key point decisive of the destiny of the DPRK-US agreed framework."

Israel opens talks with Arabs

AMMAN, Mar 7: Israel today opened its first talks with the Arabs on the fate of Palestinians displaced in the 1967 Middle East war when it captured the West Bank and Gaza, reports AP.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Abdel Karim Kabariti said the aim of the Arab parties was to set up "mechanisms to guarantee the return of the displaced" rather than discuss their right of return.

The principle itself has already been accepted in the September 1993 Israeli-PLO autonomy accord as well as last October peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, he told AFP.

Amr Mussa, his Egyptian counterpart, agreed on arrival in the Jordanian capital that "the right of return of the Palestinians displaced in 1967 is not up for discussion."

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO chief autonomy negotiator Nabil Shaath were also taking part in the one-day meeting, at the end of which all four officials were to meet King Hussein of Jordan.

Under the terms of the autonomy accord, a committee is to be set up to study the means of return of Palestinians displaced by the 1967 war.

Shaath said on Monday that Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians had drawn up a working paper for Amman setting out criteria and priorities for the return of the displaced.

Warlords agree to reopen Mogadishu airport

MOGADISHU, Mar 7: Somalia's two main warlords have agreed to reopen and jointly operate Mogadishu's port and airport, perhaps as early as this week, reports AP.

A north Mogadishu radio station supporting Ali Mahdi Mohamed said Monday that he and his chief rival, Gen Mohamed Farrah Aideed, made the agreement after recognizing the need to allow the unloading of ships now waiting offshore with cargos belonging to Somali traders.

A member of the faction leaders' joint port authority, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the port would reopen Thursday.

But an Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman cautioned: "It's only a first meeting, it's not going to solve the problem."

PLO leader Yasser Arafat's self-rule authority says the displaced number almost 1.5 million with their dependents, mostly living in Jordan.

The United Nations said 350,000 Palestinians were displaced by the war, while Israel says the number is between 150,000 and 200,000.

The term "refugee" applies to Palestinians who fled the areas where the state of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, while "displaced" refers to those who came from the areas occupied in 1967.

NY restores death penalty

ALBANY, New York, Mar 7: New York joined 37 other states today in restoring capital punishment after both branches of the state legislature voted to pass a death penalty bill, reports Reuter.

Crossing party lines, both Democrats and Republicans in the senate late on Monday night voted 38 in favour of the measure and 19 against while early today after lengthy debate, the state legislature's lower house, the assembly, voted 94 to 52 in favour.

New York Governor George Pataki, a Republican who was elected last November after campaigning to restore the death penalty, said he plans to sign the bill once it was passed by the legislature.

His democratic predecessors — governor's Mario Cuomo and Hugh Carey — vetoed death penalty bills which were passed by both houses of the legislature each of the past 18 years.

Off the Record

Urine cures cancer

NEW DELHI: An Indian doctor said patients who drink their own urine as part of special therapy can cure themselves of diseases ranging from the common cold to cancer. United News of India (UNI) reported Monday, says Reuter.

G K Thakkar, director of the Water of Life Foundation in Bombay, told the news agency his therapy combined a strict diet with fasting.

"It not only purifies the system, but also regenerates and builds up old worn-out tissues," Thakkar said of urine, according to UNI.

"That is why, it is effective in the de-aging process and in cancer too."

Thakkar's therapy, called auto-urine treatment, has received increased attention following the 99th birthday last week of former prime minister Morarji Desai, who advocates the method.

Thakkar said auto urine treatment cures illnesses by detoxifying the body. He said urine contains urea sodium, potassium calcium and other vitamin enzymes and hormones.

Dr A S Pental, former director general of the Indian Council of Medical Research, said the treatment could relieve certain symptoms and boost a patient's morale. "I do not debunk auto urine therapy," he said.

"It is a confidence-building method. It is one of the good devices which does not do any harm whatsoever," he said.

Thakkar said newcomers to his therapy can add water, sugar or honey to improve the taste of fresh urine, which can also be used to treat skin diseases.

"Like old wine, old urine is precious for rubbing and massage but not for drinking," Thakkar was quoted as saying.

One of the functions to be organised next year to mark Desai's centenary will be a world conference on urine therapy in the southern state of Goa.

... to stop worship in the nude

BANGALORE: police were deployed in a south Indian village on Monday to stop Hindus from taking part in a centuries-old festival requiring them to walk in the nude, following protests by reformers.

"We have made all arrangements to stop pilgrims from offering worship in the nude. We do not foresee any law and order problems," Karnataka state police chief R. Ramalingam told AFP in Bangalore, the provincial capital.

Ramalingam said policemen had been sent to Chandragutti village, some 400 kilometres (250 miles) from here to prevent pilgrims from going on a four kilometre naked trek during the week-long festival.

Tens of thousands of devotees traditionally took a holy bath in a sacred river near the village and walked to a nearby temple in the nude to recreate the naked flight of a holy man's wife who was suspected of infidelity.

The Karnataka government banned the festival following widespread protest by an organisation of low-caste Hindus who said the ritual was barbaric and indecent.

Clashes between the reformers and devotees made national headlines in 1986 when ten policemen were forcibly stripped and paraded by enraged Hindus who resented efforts to stop them from disrobing for the festival.

Trouble with fingerbowls

LONDON: Another shocking secret of the royal family: Prince Philip has trouble with fingerbowls, reports AP.

Former footman Norman Barson told the Today newspaper about one night in 1948 when the prince was about to eat loganberries and raspberries at the end of meal.

He looked at the fingerbowl and instead of dipping his fingers in it and drying them on his napkin, he reached forward, put it on top of his plate and said, "Norman, there's water in this," Barson said in Monday's editions.

"I felt a right idiot but I emptied it. Then, rather than let me serve him, he took the bowl and poured the lot into this tin bowl and topped up with cream," he said.

Elizabeth looked away, Barson said.



US First Lady Hillary Clinton donates the dress she wore to the 1993 inaugural balls to the First Ladies Collection at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History on Monday in Washington DC. The gown includes a violet, beaded lace sheath overskirt and full-length coat, designed by Sarah Phillips. — AFP/UNB photo

Ship with French N-waste enters Brazilian waters

RIO DE JANEIRO, Mar 7: The British Cargo-ship Pacific Pintal loaded with French nuclear waste and headed to Japan entered Brazilian waters on Monday despite Brasilia's opposition, an environmental group said Monday, reports AP.

The Pacific Pintal left the French port of Cherbourg on February 23, followed by the environmental group Greenpeace's boat Solo.

The crew aboard the Solo reported on Monday that the Pacific Pintal passed within 70 kilometers (45 miles) of the Brazilian islands Penedos De Sao Pedro and Sao Paulo, which are 865 kilometers (540 miles) north of Natal in northeastern Brazil.

Ship with French N-waste enters Brazilian waters

The government has begun work on 23 other villages in the Trincomalee district, building schools and roads and giving thousands of refugees land and money to rebuild homes.

But peace talks that began last October are stalled, and each side is accusing the other of delays and insincerity.

Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte, visiting military camps in the north-east over the weekend, asked troops to be prepared for more warfare if the talks breakdown.

But will villages like Kappalthurai survive if negotiations collapse?

"It that happens, we'll be back in the refugee camp again," said Selvaraj.

sumed in 1990, and they fled again to another refugee camp.

Now, they are one of 167 families the government has brought to Kappalthurai, rebuilt after a ceasefire went into effect on January 8. It was reopened by President Chandrika Kumaratunga Sunday, accompanied by fanfare and the chanted blessings of Buddhist monks.

"I have faith in this government that peace talks will succeed, and we won't have to flee our homes again," said Selvaraj, 43, who has five children.

But he appeared doubtful. "Our daughter Selvarani has spent eight of her 12 years in refugee camps," said his wife Kairaly.

Tamil Tiger guerrillas, fighting for a Tamil homeland in this predominantly Sinhalese country, had turned the

August, accused Tiger guerrillas of slowing down the peace process. The tigers are the dominant Tamil separatist group in Sri Lanka.

She said the offer of foreign intermediaries was made after the LTTE failed to agree to direct face-to-face substantive talks in the past three months although both sides met three times to talk about day-to-day economic issues.

The president said the LTTE was responsible for the stalemate and urged Prabhakaran to do his part in "order to make lasting peace a reality." She said the government was committed to resolving the conflict as the Tamil people wanted peace.

The LTTE's claim that the government has refused to accept their proposal to start peace talks is factually incorrect, Kumaratunga said in re-

sponse to a strongly worded two-page letter by Prabhakaran last week.

AP adds: Sinniah Selvaraj sat on the dusty floor of his thatched hut this weekend, ignoring the noisy celebrations reopening this village that once was a training camp for Tamil guerrillas.

It was supposed to mark a turning point of sorts, signifying the pacification of eastern Sri Lanka and a return of normality after 11 years of civil war.

Selvaraj's skepticism was understandable. He had been through this procedure before. He and his family fled their original village in 1984 and lived in a refugee camp for three years. When the government and the rebels reached a truce in 1987, they were resettled here, near the port city of Trincomalee. Fighting re-

opened into a training camp until the army drove them out in 1991.

The Tigers still control the jungles of northern Sri Lanka the Jaffna Peninsula, but the military has reasserted control over most of the eastern front.

About 34,000 people have been killed in the war, which the Tamils claim was meant to fight against discrimination by the Sinhalese.

Selvaraj was given Rs. 7,000 (143 dollars) to rebuild his mud hut, and one acre, on which he already has started growing vegetables and spices.

In this Indian Ocean island of 17 million people, 524,000 live in 490 refugee camps scattered throughout the northeast and with friends and relatives. Another 104,000 are in camps in south India.

Tens of thousands more have sought political asylum in