

BRIEFLY

Search warrants cancelled

The Supreme Court in Johannesburg cancelled yesterday warrants issued by South African police to search the house and office of Winnie Mandela earlier this month. The SAPA news agency reported. AFP says from Johannesburg.

The annulment had been requested by the controversial estranged wife of President Nelson Mandela, who is Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

The decision by the court should allow Winnie to recover documents seized March 1 by police investigating allegations she received kickbacks in a lowest public housing scheme.



Two executed in Illinois

Two convicted killers were put to death by lethal injection an hour apart from each other early yesterday, in the first double execution in Illinois in more than 42 years. AFP reports from Illinois.

James Free, 41, and Hernando Williams, 40, were convicted of separate murders committed in 1978. Last minute appeals were turned down by the US Supreme Court, in Free's case, and by a Federal Appeal's Court.

Saudi defence team in Pakistan

A four-member Saudi Arabian military delegation arrived in Islamabad on Tuesday for talks with Pakistani counterparts on bilateral cooperation, officials said. AFP reports from Islamabad.

The delegation is led by Major General Abdul Aziz, chief of staff for logistics of the Saudi Air Force. Aziz will tour Pakistan Air Force installations during his visit, officials said.

Chechens execute Russian pilot

Chechen rebels said they had executed a Russian bomber pilot on Tuesday, the Interfax news agency said. AFP reports from Moscow.

The airman was shot for carrying out raids on the town of Shali in which civilians were killed, the Chechen government spokesman Movladi Udugov told the agency.

Russia launches satellite

Russia on Wednesday launched a military satellite from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in the north of the country, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported. AFP says from London.

The launch was described as being "in the interests of the Russian Ministry of Defence," the agency said in a statement monitored in London by the BBC.

Gunman kills 4 in NY

A gunman killed at least four people in a post office in this wealthy suburb of New York late Tuesday, police said. AFP reports from Montclair, New Jersey.

Four or five people were killed, according to an early police tally. Another man was in critical condition after being shot in the head, according to the university hospital in Newark.

Abacha asked to free Onanuga

Nigeria's head of state General Sani Abacha, was asked by the Commonwealth Press Union on Tuesday to release prominent Nigerian journalist Bayo Onanuga. Reuter reports from London.

The union said it had been deeply shocked to learn of the arrest of Onanuga, who was given the top award for journalism in the Commonwealth, the Astor Award last November. "We ask you to ensure that he is released without delay," the union said in a letter to Abacha.

US Navy ship in China

The USS Bunker Hill sailed out of thick fog into the north China port of Qingdao on Wednesday to become the first US Navy ship to visit China since 1989. Reuter reports from Qingdao.

"This is a goodwill visit," US Rear Admiral Bernard J Smith told reporters as the Bunker Hill was piped in by Chinese and US bands playing marching tunes.

2 die in NY bldg collapse

A wall of a six-story Harlem apartment building collapsed on Tuesday, spilling residents and their belongings into a heap of rubble in an alley. Two people died and eight others were injured, officials said. AP reports from New York.

"The whole side of the building, the whole six-story exterior wall is gone," said Fire Department spokeswoman Cecilia Cox. After one body was found, police dogs were taken through the building and the rubble to sniff for survivors. A second body, a 35-to-40-year-old woman, was found more than four hours after the wall gave way. Emergency Medical Services spokesman David Bookstaver said.

French UN vehicle hijacked

Five armed men have hijacked a French UN vehicle in Serb-held territory, the latest in a series of such incidents around Sarajevo, the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) said in Sarajevo on Wednesday. AFP reports from Sarajevo.

The men forced two UN French soldiers out of their car at gunpoint on a stretch of road between Sarajevo and the "Sierra One" Serb checkpoint, west of the capital, UNPROFOR spokesman Major Pierre Chavancy said. The soldiers were not detained.

Teenage crime on rise

Nearly a year after American Michael Fay was flogged for vandalism, officials say teenage crime is increasing in Singapore and a decline in school discipline is causing concern. AP reports from Singapore.

The Criminal Investigation Department has opened an investigation into juvenile delinquency after a spurt in the arrests of youthful offenders. Last year, 2,108 suspects under 16 were nabbed, an increase of 216 from 1993. CID Director Khoo Boon Hui said there would be no letup. "They will be arrested if they commit an offense. The police will also identify teen gangs and ensure that they will not misbehave," Khoo told The Straits Times.

Iran rejects UAE's claim

TEHRAN, Mar 22: Iran said on Tuesday that it would hold on to three disputed Gulf islands "for eternity" and warned Gulf Arab monarchies against staking a claim, reports AFP.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman rejected a statement issued by the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Monday backing the United Arab Emirates' claim to the strategic islands of Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunb.

"The repetition of such baseless allegations will only serve to aggravate misunderstandings and multiply problems," said the spokesman.

The islands near the straight of Hormuz at the entrance to the Gulf "belong to Iran for eternity."

Philippines bans women from going Singapore as maids

MANILA, Mar 22: President Fidel Ramos recalled his ambassador to Singapore, today, banned women from going there as maids and threatened to break relations if an investigation shows that a Filipino maid was unjustly hanged, reports AP.

But the moves did little to satisfy Ramos critics. A leftist alliance denounced the measures as palliatives and called for the Cabinet officers in charge of labour and foreign affairs to resign.

Ramos also offered free transportation home to the more than 75,000 Filipinos already working in the island city-state and said he would sever relations with Singapore if a commission he established found that Flor Contemplacion had been the victim of injustice.

Flor Contemplacion, 42, was hanged in Singapore last Friday despite appeals by Ramos and others for a postponement. She was executed for killing a fellow Filipino maid and a 4-year-old Singaporean boy in 1991, but millions of Filipinos believe she was innocent.

Opposition politicians have seized on the issue in the run-up to national elections May 8, accusing the government of not doing enough to protect her. Alarmed over that prospect, Ramos' own allies are urging him to fire Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto Romulo and Labor Secretary Nieves Consozor.

In a nationally televised

Benazir projects Pakistan as moderate Islamic state

ISLAMABAD, Mar 22: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has launched a campaign against terrorism and Muslim militants to project Pakistan as a moderate Islamic country, just two weeks ahead of a visit to the United States, reports AFP.

Hundreds of people have been detained following the arrest here last month of the suspected mastermind of the New York World Trade Centre bombing, Ramzi Ahmed Yusuf, and the killing of two US diplomats in Karachi early this month.

Benazir appealed today for western help in her efforts to curb terrorism and uncover militant groups, including some Arabs operating in Muslim countries since the fall of the procommunist regime in Afghanistan in 1992.

The Prime Minister, who leaves for Washington on April 5 for a week-long visit, faces escalating violence in her southern home province, Sindh, but says she wants to make the country a bastion of moderation.

Pakistan is emerging as a frontline state against the rising tide of Muslim militancy, she told reporters here today.

Benazir said her 14-month old government needed investment and technical help for police work to continue the campaign.

Police last week arrested six people including three Sudanese, a Syrian and an Iranian for their alleged links with Ramzi. Press reports said an investigation had started into the affairs of an Afghan-funded academy run by President Durrani's ally Rabbani's ally Rasul Sayyaf.

Reports said the institute, based in the northwestern border city of Peshawar, was training foreign Muslims. However, Sayyaf's Ittehad-i-Islami Party has denied the charges.

In a campaign against drug traffickers, Benazir's government recently arrested several narcotics smugglers and seized large quantities of hashish and heroin.

Official sources said some 700 people had been detained in the port city of Karachi.

The city has also seen a steady rise in political, ethnic and sectarian violence, with more than 1,300 people killed since January 1994.

For Benazir, the most embarrassing incident of violence in Karachi was the March 8 killing of two US Consulate employees, shortly after a series of attacks on mosques belonging to rival Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim sects claimed some 30 lives.

Officials said the killing of the diplomats was part of a conspiracy to "sabotage" her US visit.



King Hussein of Jordan (L) shakes hand with US Vice President Al Gore (R) after giving him a medal at the royal palace in Amman on Tuesday. Al Gore is on his first visit to Jordan where he is expected to reaffirm the Clinton administration's commitment to the Middle East peace process and to assuring Jordan's leaders of Washington's support. — AFP/UNB photo

Japanese police raid Aoum religious sect HQ

TOKYO, Mar 22: Some 3,000 policemen launched a dawn raid on the headquarters of a controversial Japanese religious sect, the Aoum Supreme Truth, today, two days after a deadly nerve gas attack on Tokyo's subway system, reports AFP.

The official reason given for the large-scale raids, which involved anti-riot units, was the abduction on a Tokyo street last February of a man who had a row with the cult over his sister's secession from the group.

But the Aoum Supreme Truth (Shinrikyo) has been implicitly linked by the Japanese media with Monday's attack with sarin gas on Tokyo's subway system which killed eight people and injured more than 4,000.

Sarin is a nerve gas, developed by the German Nazis, which is 500 times as toxic than cyanide.

The sect's lawyer at a news conference Tuesday denied any involvement by the group in the gas attacks.

The police raid was launched at dawn in 25 locations including the sect's headquarters in the central Japanese village of Kamikuishiki, about 100 kilometres west of Tokyo near Mount Fuji. The sect's office in Tokyo was also targeted.

Japan Broadcasting Corp (NHK) showed footage of police officers entering the Aoum buildings wearing gas masks and army fatigues.

Windows of the vast headquarters buildings were closed and only camera lights could be detected from outside.

Last July, residents near the sect's headquarters in Kamikuishiki complained, on two occasions, of a mysterious smell coming from the direction of the sect buildings.

Police later detected a substance similar to sarin near the site. The religious sect denied they were producing the deadly gas, developed by the Nazis in the 1930s, insisting that they were victims.

Japan's first sarin gas scare came last June when seven people in the central Japanese city of Matsumoto were killed by the gas. The source of the nerve gas was never discovered.

The Aoum, founded in the late 1980's by a 39-year-old guru, Shoko Asahara, espouse a doctrine of primitive Buddhism and Yoga.

Full-scale war feared in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Mar 22: Outbreaks of fighting and harassment of UN forces have dimmed hopes for a lasting peace in Bosnia amid growing international fears that full-scale warfare could resume, reports Reuter.

United Nations officials said fighting near Tuzla in north-east Bosnia persisted on Tuesday, but at a lower level.

In the Sarajevo area, Bosnian Serbs seized a heavy machinegun and 1,000 rounds of ammunition from British peacekeepers at a checkpoint west of the capital.

UN officials said Monday's Bosnian government army assault on Serb positions in northern and central areas of the country had badly dented hopes for peace and struck a major blow to an already fragile cease-fire.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said on Tuesday the United States and its partners must persuade the Muslim-led government not to re-ignite a broader war.

"Now that the Croatia matter is somewhat less tense than it was before, I think we need two focus on the situation in Bosnia," he said.

Christopher was speaking to journalists on his way to Paris for talks with French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe on former Yugoslavia and other issues.

Juppe said on Tuesday he expected fighting to resume in Bosnia and urged the United Nations to keep trying to prolong the cease-fire.

Kumaratunga begins India visit Saturday

NEW DELHI, Mar 22: India will discuss the possible extradition of a Sri Lankan Tamil guerrilla leader with Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga when she visits New Delhi this week, officials said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Kumaratunga begins a three-day visit to India on Saturday.

Senior government officials said Kumaratunga would be asked whether Sri Lanka was prepared to extradite Velupillai Prabhakaran, head of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has been linked to the killing of Rajiv Gandhi.

The former Indian prime minister was assassinated by a woman suicide bomber during an election rally in May 1991, near Madras in southern India.

The Asian Age newspaper quoted Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee as saying that Prabhakaran's extradition, an issue rarely discussed publicly, would be taken up with Kumaratunga.

CPI (M) congress from Apr 3

NEW DELHI, Mar 22: The Communist Party of India (Marxist) will hold its 15th all India congress at Chandigarh from April three to eight, which will be attended by over 750 delegates from all over the country, reports PTI.

Thirty delegates of the fraternal communist parties from abroad, including those of China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba, would also take part in the congress, a party spokesman said here yesterday.

The agenda in the six-day congress will include adoption of a report reviewing the implementation of political action line laid down in the 14th congress, adoption of political resolutions, and election of the new leadership.

Major wins parliamentary vote on EU

LONDON, Mar 22: British Prime Minister John Major won a key parliamentary vote on Tuesday after a debate that highlighted deep divisions on Europe threatening to tear apart his ruling Conservative Party, reports Reuter.

Major won the late-night vote on European Union farm price proposals, defeating a critical amendment put forward by the main opposition Labour Party by a margin of 27 votes.

Despite the defeat, senior Labour officials said party leader Tony Blair took the government's troubles over Europe so seriously that he planned to put his party on a "war footing" for an early general election.

Germany begins new Nazi hunt

LUDWIGSBURG, Germany, Mar 22: German authorities have begun a new Nazi hunt after the names of around 1,500 alleged Nazi war criminals were discovered in Stasi archives, the state prosecutor's office said here Tuesday, reports AFP.

Chief State Prosecutor Alfred Streim said up to 30 previously undetected Nazi war criminals could be charged as a result of the find. However, 50 years on from the end of the war, few cases are likely to make it to court.

In Germany, a defendant must be able to appear in court and be in full possession of his faculties, before a case can proceed.

Streim told AFP that in at least 50 cases, the Stasi — former East Germany's extensive secret police network — used their archives to blackmail former Nazis who fled to a new life in the west after the war.

Former SS captain Erich Gost, deputy commander at Buchenwald concentration camp, was forced to work for the Stasi in this way even as he forged a new life as a Bonn restaurateur. Gost died in 1992, months before the authorities traced him through Stasi files.

The feared Stasi's meticulous attention to detail allowed it to accumulate eight kilometres (five miles) of archives on Nazi war criminals living in the west. The files were transferred to the state prosecutor's office here after German reunification in 1990.

Officials say 6,000 Nazi war criminals were caught and tried in West Germany since the war, 14,000 in the East. Twenty-four thousand others were tried in the Soviet Union, 16,000 in Poland and Czechoslovakia and 1,000 in other countries.

But numerous Nazis have stayed a step ahead of justice long enough to die as free men, like the infamous Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele.

Off the Record

Scorpion travels by plane

LOS ANGELES: A man flying to Los Angeles from Costa Rica got a nasty surprise when he unfolded his blanket — a scorpion that was apparently hiding inside stung him in the leg, reports AP.

The 46-year-old Fresno man, who was not identified, was stung about a half-hour before his American Airlines flight arrived at Los Angeles International Airport on Tuesday evening, said Los Angeles City Fire Department spokesman Brian Humphrey.

Paramedics were waiting for the man on the ground when he arrived, but "he had no obvious injury," Humphrey said, and was suffering no ill effects. The man boarded his connecting flight to Fresno after paramedics advised him to see his personal doctor.

The scorpion, which was about 1 and half inches long, was found dead on the plane, Humphrey said. It was unknown how it got on board.

Singapore's cleanliness a myth

SINGAPORE: To outsiders, Singapore is a squeaky-clean city of gleaming pavements. Not entirely true, reports AP.

Littering is rampant in public housing estates despite decades of cleanliness campaigns and tough laws, four government legislators told Parliament on Tuesday.

Litterbugs in Singapore face fines of up to 1,000 Singapore dollars (US 700 dollars) for sweeping streets wearing bright orange workmen's vests with "Corrective Working Order" written on them.

"The presence of the obnoxious litterbugs in our otherwise spick and span, almost clinically clean Singapore, is indeed a public nuisance," said lawmaker Teo Cheong Tee.

Teo and the other three lawmakers demanded tougher measures to control messing, largely in the back alleys of public housing, which are vast jungles of brown or yellow multi-story blocks that house 80 per cent of Singapore's 3.3 million people.

However, shopping centres, air conditioned eating places and subway trains and stations — where it is easier to get caught — remain spotless.

Napoleon's death to be investigated again

CAPETOWN: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) will examine the mystery of Napoleon's death by analysing four strands of his hair to determine if he was poisoned, a museum official said Tuesday, reports AP.

The Capetown Museum has several 174-year-old strands of the ex-emperor's hair, said museum curator Mike Cluver.

In France Monday, a Swedish scientist said he had found nearly 10 times the normal level of arsenic in the former French emperor's locks, casting doubt on the widely held belief that Napoleon died of stomach cancer at the age of 51 while in exile off the coast of southern Africa.

It will be the second study of Napoleon's hair by the FBI. In September, a previous analysis detected far lower levels of arsenic within the considered normal range of one to three parts per million. But the FBI questioned the authenticity of that hair sample.

The Capetown Museum sent its hair sample last week to the American Napoleonic Society. The museum has possessed the lock of hair since it was donated by a Dutch minister who practiced on the island of St Helena, where Napoleon died in 1821.

Landing confirms the mistake

TAIPEI: The 22 passengers knew something was wrong when, instead of arriving in Taipei, the capital, they landed on a remote island, reports AP.

The flight had been changed, but the airline neglected to inform the pilot.

The Dash-8 commuter plane took off Tuesday from Chiayi for what passengers thought would be a 35-minute hop to Taipei. They began worrying about hijackers or engine trouble when the plane touched down at Penghu Island, 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Taiwan.

St Chung-ching, president of the carrier, Great China Airlines, blamed the blunder on the complicated procedures involved in duty assignments.

The Canadian pilot, Ray Hargrove, discovered the mistake after landing, and flew the passengers to Taipei an hour later.

Iran rejects UAE's claim

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Opposition politicians have seized on the issue in the run-up to national elections May 8, accusing the government of not doing enough to protect her. Alarmed over that prospect, Ramos' own allies are urging him to fire Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto Romulo and Labor Secretary Nieves Consozor.

In a nationally televised

Myanmar Karenni rebels surrender

YANGON, Mar 22: Ethnic minority rebels in Myanmar's eastern Kayah state have laid down their arms and surrendered to the government, Myanmar's official media reported today, says Reuter.

A total of 7,790 members of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) "returned to the legal fold" on Tuesday at a ceremony in Lokkaw, the Kayah state capital.

They brought with them almost 9,000 weapons including mortars, recoilless rifles, machine guns and automatic rifles, the media said.

Myanmar's powerful military intelligence chief Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt attended the ceremony.

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