

International

BRIEFLY

Israel lifts Hebron curfew: The Israeli army on Saturday lifted a curfew imposed on the occupied West Bank town of Hebron for the start of the Jewish Passover holiday on Friday, a military spokesman said. AFP reports from Hebron.

The curfew applied only to Palestinians and not to Israeli settlers living in and around the town. It was imposed for "security reasons," the army said without elaborating.

Chen Yun to be cremated today: Flaws in China will be flown half-staff Monday to mark the cremation of Chen Yun, considered China's second most powerful man after senior leader Deng Xiaoping, AP report from Beijing.

Chen died last Monday of a long, undisclosed illness. He was 90.

The cremation was announced Sunday by the official Xinhua News Agency.

Actor Carotenuto dies: Mario Carotenuto, a prolific stage and screen character actor, has died. He was 79. Carotenuto died Friday of lung cancer, reports said. AP reports from Rome.

Born into a family of actors, Carotenuto appeared in more than 100 movies. Working frequently on stage as well, he was congratulated by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht for a 1956 performance in "The Three-Penny Opera." He is survived by a daughter, Claretta, an actress. A funeral was scheduled for Tuesday in Rome.

Israeli forces kill 3 militants: Israeli security forces on Sunday shot dead three suspected Palestinian militants in the West Bank town of Hebron, Israeli radio said. AP reports from Jerusalem.

The radio said no Israelis were wounded in the firefight. The Palestinians were believed to be members of a Hamas organisation cell that has carried out fatal attacks on Jewish settlers in the Hebron area in an attempt to derail the Israel-PLO peace accord.

Russian Navy jets pursue sub: Russian Navy planes pursued an unidentified submarine near its territorial waters, Interfax news agency said on Saturday, citing a Russian military official. AFP reports from Moscow.

The planes, from Russia's Pacific fleet, tracked the sub for five hours on Friday as it cruised near Russia's territorial waters in the Sea of Japan, the agency said.

4 knifed to death in Tamil Nadu: Four people were knifed to death in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu as violence erupted following Friday's bomb blast in the state capital Madras, the United News of India (UNI) said on Saturday. Reuter reports from New Delhi.

UNI said the people were killed late on Friday on a Saturday during sporadic outbreaks of violence across the state, believed to be related to the bomb blast. Two people died in Friday's bombing of the offices of the right-wing Hindu Nationalist group in Madras.

Angel of Bergen-Belsen honoured: A Polish Jew who saved 46 Dutch Jewish children in the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen was honoured on Saturday in Amsterdam before many of those who owed her their lives. AFP reports from Amsterdam.

Luba Fredrick, dubbed the Angel of Bergen-Belsen, received the humanitarian aid Silver Medal, issued only by royal decree, at a ceremony in front of Amsterdam's City Hall.

Noted Tamil scholar Adigal dies: Noted Tamil scholar and savant, Kundrakudi Adigal, Sri Delva Siganam Arumachala Desikar, died of a massive heart attack at a private hospital in Madurai late Saturday night. He was 89. PTI reports from Madurai.

Road mishap claims 10 in Seoul: Ten members of two families were killed and two others were seriously injured yesterday when their cars collide head-on, on a provincial highway, the Yonhap news agency said. AFP reports from Seoul.

ROK cleric ends DPRK trip: A religious leader who made a controversial visit to North Korea walked across the heavily armed border Sunday to face police questioning and possible arrest, AP reports from Seoul.

An Ho-sang, 93, head of South Korea's Daejeong Kyo, an indigenous religion that worships the Korean nation's mythological father Tangun, and his chief secretary, Kim Sun-jok, entered North Korea on Tuesday despite government objections.

Burundi guerilla leader killed: The deputy commander of guerillas battling the Burundi army in the outskirts of the capital was killed on Saturday while riding a motor-cycle disguised as a woman, government sources said yesterday. Reuter reports from Bujumbura.

The man, known as Juma, was shot dead in the capital's Kinama area. He was deputy leader of the guerilla forces operating in north Bujumbura, the sources said.

Rao ends Maldives visit: Prime Minister Narasimha Rao Sunday ended a two-day visit to the Maldives where he opened a hospital donated by India. Reuter reports from Male.

Rao and Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom opened the 30 million dollars Indira Gandhi Memorial hospital, a gift presented by former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

US Gen McCaffrey to visit Brazil: Gen Barry R McCaffrey, chief of the US army southern command headquartered in Panama, will visit Brazil next week to tighten military relations between the two countries. Xinhua reports from Rio De Janeiro.

McCaffrey is in charge of US military relations with all Latin American nations. During the visit, the two countries will sign an agreement under which the Brazilian army will give technical assistance to the US army in the area of tropical medicine.

7 die in Sierra Leone violence: Seven people have been killed in clashes between Sierra Leone government forces and rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), according to military statements issued in Freetown Saturday. AFP reports from Freetown.

Five rebels were killed and several others injured as government troops launched a "successful attack" to destroy a recently-established RUF base near Masiaka, around 80 kilometres (50 miles) east of the capital, the military said.

Portuguese film director dies: Antonio Lopes Ribeiro, one of the leading figures in Portuguese cinema, died on Friday aged 86 in his home city of Lisbon. AFP reports from Lisbon.

There are two names in Portuguese cinema. Manuel de Oliveira and Antonio Lopes Ribeiro, the Daily Publico said on Saturday in an obituary, adding that Ribeiro was "a rebel and respectful iconoclast."

5 hurt in S Lebanon violence: Five people including three pro-Israeli militiamen were wounded in fighting between the Jewish state's forces and Hezbollah guerrillas in South Lebanon on Saturday. AFP reports from Marjayoun.

The Iranian-backed Hezbollah fired mortars at a South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia position in Toumet Niha, in the north of Israel's self-declared "security zone," wounding three SLA militiamen, security officials said. One guerilla was also injured, they said.

Yeltsin returns to Moscow: President Boris Yeltsin returned to Moscow Sunday after a three-week vacation, his office said. AP reports from Moscow.

Yeltsin spent his vacation in the Northern Caucasus resort of Kislovodsk and the Black Sea coastal town of Sochi. He plans to return to work in the Kremlin on Monday.

Iraqis stage anti-US rally
Baghdad rejects UN offer

BAGHDAD, Apr 16: Iraq has rejected a UN offer to sell 2 billion dollars worth of oil to buy food and medicine, opting instead to launch a huge anti-American propaganda campaign, reports AP.

Thousands of people, mostly government employees, staged two noisy demonstrations Saturday in the Iraqi capital, rallies reminiscent of those in the days before the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Demonstrators in business suits marched through the streets holding placards with photos of President Saddam Hussein and banners denouncing the United States and the United Nations.

"I think the voices of the masses have expressed the Iraqi stand," parliament speaker Sadi Mahdi Saleh told Associated Press Television at one protest. "What you have heard from the people is rejection to this decision."

The leaders of Saddam's ruling Baath party, meanwhile, unleashed a diatribe against the Clinton administration.

"We need to fight the holy war against Satan America until our victory," said Abdul Gani Abdul Ghafoor, chief of the Baghdad chapter.

Both demonstrations appeared organised by the government.

The UN Security Council voted Friday to allow Iraq to sell up to 2 billion dollars worth of oil over 180 days to get money. Part of the proceeds would be used for humanitarian needs. Iraqis are suffering deep privations under the UN trade sanctions imposed after

Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. A State Department spokeswoman in Washington, Julie Resdie, said Iraq had yet to deliver an official reply. "We hope the Iraqi government, in the interest of its own citizens, will accept the resolution and its provisions," she said.

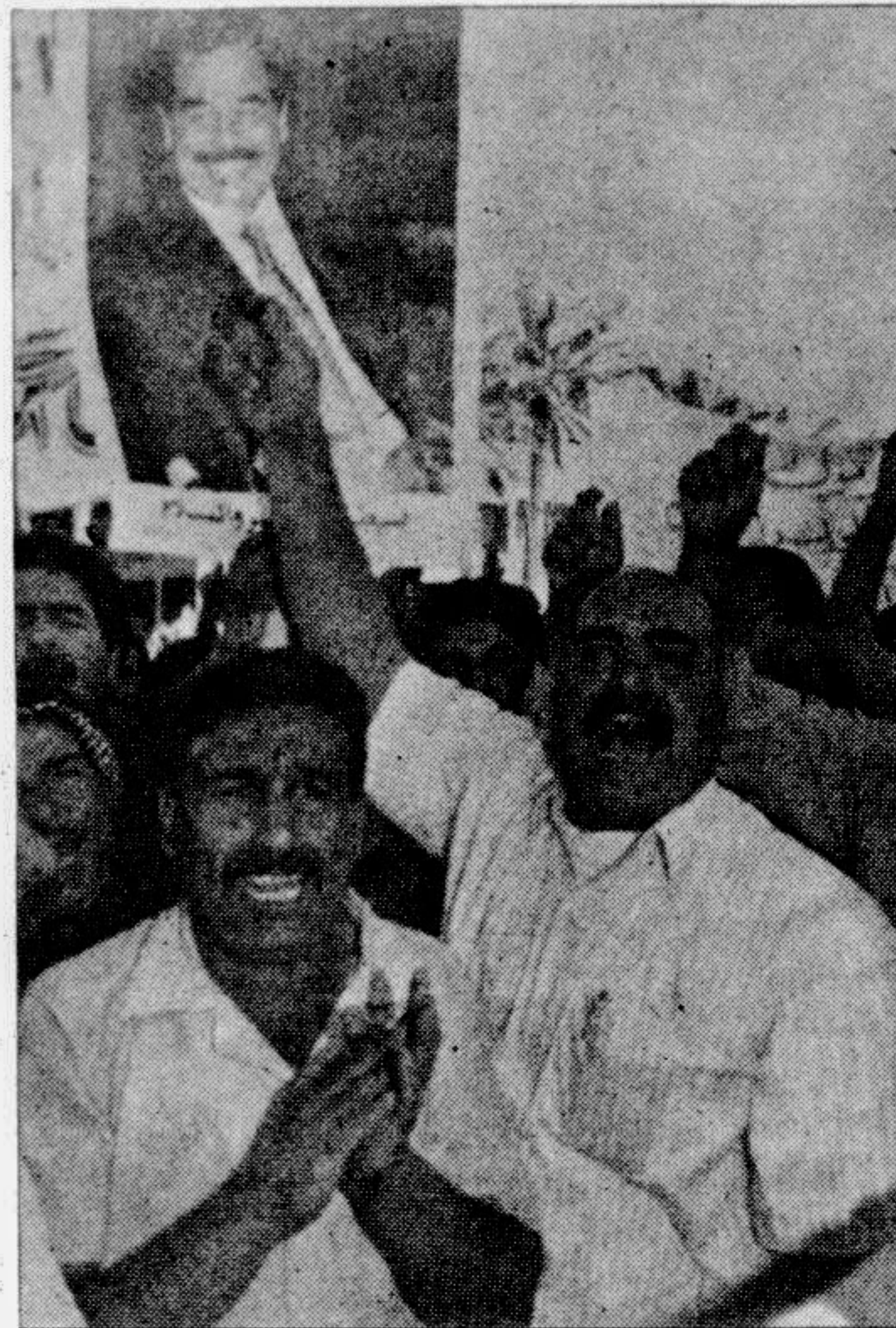
Iraq, however, wants the sanctions lifted completely something unlikely to happen soon. Washington maintains Saddam has yet to fully comply with UN terms set after the Gulf War.

UN weapons inspectors this month reported that Baghdad may be working on germ warfare agents in defiance of UN resolutions that ban it from stockpiling, developing or using weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq refused a 1991 proposal for a similar oil sale, charging that conditions attached infringed on its sovereignty. Officials raised the same objections to the new offer.

"The new resolution is worse and more dangerous than previous resolutions which Iraq had a strongly rejected," the ruling Revolutionary Command Council, which met with Saddam, said Saturday before the demonstrations.

On Sunday, the council formally rejected the proposal. The council had said the proposal was to be presented to the parliament and it was not immediately clear if Sunday's statement obviated that vote; in any case, the parliament has never challenged Saddam's decisions.



Iraqi citizens on Saturday in Baghdad show their opposition to a UN resolution allowing Baghdad to export 2 billion dollars worth of oil each quarter to pay for food and medicine, and renew their support for Saddam Hussein. — AFP/UNB photo

Rafsanjani arrives in Delhi today

NEW DELHI, Apr 16: Islamic Iran, isolated by the West for its fundamentalist policies, will seek closer ties with India when President Hashemi Rafsanjani on Monday becomes the first Iranian leader to visit New Delhi in 16 years, reports AP.

During his three-day stay in India, Rafsanjani is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and top Indian officials to bolster economic and political ties.

In October, Indian officials were upset when Rafsanjani canceled a scheduled visit at the last moment.

Iranian diplomats said he did that because an epidemic of pneumonic plague appeared to be sweeping across India and many countries had closed their airports and seaports to India.

But New Delhi questioned that excuse when Iran sent a naval delegation to visit India toward the end of the plague.

This time, Rafsanjani appears determined to improve ties.

"This visit will take place in order to consolidate as well as expand the relations between the two countries," Rafsanjani told the Hindu newspaper in an interview published Thursday.

While India is keen for access to Central Asian markets through Iran, Tehran wants Indian help to modernise its military.

Western and Indian defense analysts say Iran is trying to get India's help in adapting two Russian-built submarines for use in warm-water ports. India's navy, which has eight of

these submarines, has decades of experience in converting the ships, which were built to operate in freezing temperatures.

India's Foreign Office denies any naval cooperation, but independent naval experts say that New Delhi already has quietly helped the Iranians service their submarines.

Western experts say that Iran is trying to emerge as a premier naval power in the Persian Gulf. The United States worries that Iran is trying to become a nuclear power and recently failed to persuade Moscow to call off a nuclear reactor deal.

Russian forces shell Chechen town

MOSCOW, Apr 16: Russian forces today heavily shelled the town of Bamut, the last bastion held by Chechen rebels in the independence-seeking region's lowland, Interfax news agency said, reports Reuter.

In a report from the neighbouring Ingushetia region, it said Russian troops did not try to advance on Bamut, built to resist nuclear attack, after being beaten off on Friday.

Interfax said talks between Russian commanders and the elders of Bamut had failed.

Russian forces tried to enter Bamut on Friday after a night of heavy artillery bombardment but were forced back by an intense counter-attack in which several soldiers were killed.

Colombo allows fuel into LTTE-held territory

COLOMBO, Apr 16: Ending a five-year embargo, the government Sunday allowed people to carry petrol and diesel to rebel-held territory in northern Sri Lanka, military officials said, reports AP.

"People now take the banned fuel in bottles and cans," said officials on condition of anonymity. The government is yet to formally announce the lifting of the restriction.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga last week agreed to ease the embargo on fuel and fishing as further concessions to the rebels.

Kumaratunga met a major demand by the guerillas but accused them of delaying discussions on a political settlement for the 11-year ethnic war to squeeze more military concessions from the government.

The four round of talks between the government and the rebels so far have focussed on economic reliefs to the minority Tamils.

The socialist coalition won elections last year on a pledge to end the war. It has lifted an embargo on 48 of 50 items, including fertiliser and batteries which the military argued could be used to improvise explosives.

There is still a ban on carrying

guns, ammunition and compasses to rebel-held areas. About 800,000 Tamils have been living in the rebel-controlled Jaffna Peninsula without electricity, gasoline or telephone for four years.

Fishing is allowed in the sea and lagoons in the mainland. But the fishermen are prohibited to enter the waters within a two mile radius of military installations, government officials said.

The guerillas are fighting for a separate homeland in the north and east. More than 34,000 people have died in the ethnic conflict.

Kumaratunga is yet to accept the rebel demand to remove a strategic military base in the north. She has also not responded to a request by the guerillas that they be allowed to carry arms on the mainland.

A government minister and leader of the main coalition partner in her government has threatened to quit in case she allowed the rebels to carry arms in the east.

"If that happens, we will be forced to quit the government," Mohamed Ashroff of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress was quoted by the Sunday Leader newspaper as saying.

The rebels accuse Sri Lanka's majority Sinhala population of widespread discrimination in jobs and education.

She could easily have taken the option of leaving her country and joining her family in Britain," he was quoted as saying.



Afghans in the northern provincial capital Taloqan begin the cleanup of their bazaar on Thursday after it was bombed by Russian jets flying from bases in neighbouring Tajikistan. Some 100 civilians were killed and 120 more wounded in what was believed to be a reprisal raid for alleged Afghan support for armed Tajik opposition groups fighting the Russian-backed neo-communist regime based in Dushanbe. — AFP/UNB photo

Gaddafi to accept UN probe into Lockerbie affair

TRIPOLI, Apr 16: Libyan leader Colonel Moamer Gaddafi on Saturday said he would accept a UN probe into the destruction of a US airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, for which the United States and Britain have charged two Libyans, reports AFP.

"Libya accepts the principle that the United Nations should resolve problems among states and we do not fear an enquiry," Gaddafi declared in a speech.

The Libyan news agency JANA said he was speaking on the ninth anniversary of a US air raid on Tripoli and the coastal city of Benghazi that killed 37 people, including Gaddafi's five-year-old adopted daughter.

Oman denies sending troops to Bahrain

DUBAI, Apr 16: Oman has denied sending troops to the Gulf island state of Bahrain, where there have been anti-government protests in recent months.

"These reports are not true. There is no Omani force of any kind present in Bahrain," the official Omani news agency on Saturday quoted Omani Information Minister Abdulaziz bin Mohammad Al-Rowass as saying.

UNITA backs talks to end Angolan crisis

LUANDA, Apr 16: UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi reaffirmed his backing Saturday for a political solution to end fighting between his rebels and the Angolan government, a UN mission in Angola said, reports AFP.

The UN body said Savimbi had recognised UNITA's loss in 1992 elections during meetings Friday with the UN representative to Angola, Aloune Blondin Beye, and Amara Essy, the president of the UN General Assembly.

After Friday's meeting with UN officials in the Zairean town of Gbadolite, Essy told AFP that Savimbi would meet with Angolan leader Eduardo dos Santos "very soon."

A face-to-face meeting between the two leaders would be the first since the Angolan civil war erupted in 1992.

Conference on N-arms opens in NY today

PARIS, Apr 16: More than 170 countries will open a month-long Nuclear Weapons Conference today in New York with the goal, shared by the world's five declared nuclear powers, of stopping their spread, reports AP.

The signatory countries of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) will meet through May 12 at UN headquarters to mark the expiration of the 25-year pact and decide whether to extend it indefinitely or for one or more periods.

Four of the five nuclear powers Britain, France, Russia

and the United States are seeking indefinite, unconditional extension of the NPT.

The fifth, China, has not yet officially stated its position but is leaning towards a renewable extension of another 25 years.

According to experts of the four countries backing open-ended extension, that solution would banish the specter of nuclear war, whether partial or global.

It also would reinforce other treaty aspects, they argue, such as the obligation to negotiate disarmament, as well as sharing information on peaceful uses of atomic energy

with non-nuclear states. A vocal minority of non-nuclear countries already have weighed in favouring a limited extension of the treaty, striving for deeper disarmament by the nuclear big five, as the five permanent members of the UN Security Council are known.

Prominent among these countries is Indonesia, which currently chairs the Non-Aligned Movement, Mexico, Iran, Egypt and several other Arab countries.

The United States and Russia would be forced to account for all their progress in

nuclear limitation and disarmament since the NPT took effect on March 5, 1970.

In addition to the 1970s SALT I and II agreements, which limited the number and strength of nuclear warheads and missiles, Washington and Moscow also would need to report on progress made in the 1990s under the START treaties toward significant nuclear disarmament.

They will offer as evidence the beginning of negotiations on a nuclear testing ban which could conclude at the end of 1996 and the ban on missile materials production.

Off the Record

Aquino would welcome back Kris and baby

MANILA: Former Philippine President Corazon Aquino said yesterday that she would welcome the return to the family of her wayward youngest daughter and her soon-to-be-born baby. The Philippine Star reported, says AFP.

Aquino made the comments in her first television interview to be aired Monday on the subject of her daughter, Kris, 24, whose pregnancy by a married man has stirred controversy in predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines.

"You and your baby, you will always be welcome," the paper quoted Aquino, who led the popular revolt that toppled the 20-year old dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, as saying.

"But definitely I will not welcome you know who," she told the television show "Firing Line", referring to Philip Salvador, more than 20 years Kris' senior, who is separated from his legal wife with three children.

In the interview, the deeply religious Aquino said the pregnancy of Kris, a movie actress who is currently living-in with Salvador, has caused "much pain" for her.

"I know that there will be a time when she will be back and that she will finally realise that what she has done in wrong," she added.

Naked royal couple removed

CANBERRA: A controversial sculpture of a naked Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip was Sunday removed from public display after three attacks which almost destroyed the work, reports AP.

Artist Greg Taylor said he was disgusted by the damage done to his sculpture, "Down By The Lake With Liz and Phil," which was attacked on three consecutive nights.

The sculpture shows the royal couple lounging naked on a park bench — the queen with bare breasts and Philip with his legs parted.

It was installed on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin as part of the national capital's sculpture festival and was due to be removed at the end of the month.

The sculpture enraged monarchists, including one who tried to clothe the bodies. Taylor said he had received death threats because of the work.

Queen Elizabeth's head was removed in the first attack and Prince Philip was attacked with a sledgehammer on Friday night.

On Saturday night, Queen Elizabeth's legs were severed and one of Prince Philip's arms was destroyed, said Neil Roberts, coordinator of the National Sculpture Forum.

"We're talking about people attacking them with a lot of violence, not just a casual glancing blow," Roberts said.

"We've left the park bench there as a sort of ghostly reminder. It's a real waste. It's really shocking."

Alternative to tracheotomy

WASHINGTON: Brad Smith was turned into a speechless invalid overnight when his doctor drilled a hole in his throat to pump air into his disease-weakened lungs, reports AP.

His doctor didn't know there was an alternative. Now a New Jersey physician is out to change that, sewing up patients' tracheas and helping them breathe again with a simple polio-era machine unearthed from a museum.

Neuromuscular diseases such as Lou Gehrig's, muscular dystrophy or paralysis weaken chest muscles until victims can no longer breathe easily or cough to clear their lungs of dangerous mucus.

Typically, these patients get a tracheotomy — a tube inserted through a hole drilled in the throat so air can be pumped in and secretions suctioned out. The opening is vulnerable to lethal bacteria and patients routinely get pneumonia. Often, they can't speak. Constant care to keep the tubes open forces many into nursing homes.

There is a non-invasive alternative that few doctors offer, contends Dr John Bach of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. Key is a 1952 machine called the Cof-flator that, when held to the mouth, sucks air from the bronchial tubes to induce a cough that patients can't force unaided.

Once patients can clear their lungs, they can breathe with standard oxygen masks or with an easily learned inhaling technique, says Bach, who travels the globe to push non-invasive respiratory care.

The Cof-flator had disappeared because, in the 1950s, tracheotomies replaced the cumbersome iron lung as the standard treatment for polio, and quickly spread to other ailments. With trach tubes, patients don't cough, their lungs are suctioned.