

BRIEFLY



Israeli farmers burn tires and throw tomatoes on the road leading to Israel from the Gaza Strip at the Nahal Ooz crossing point on Sunday, as they protest Israelis who buy vegetables from Palestinians at a lower price. — AFP/UNB photo

Gerry Adams to visit US in March: Gerry Adams, president of the IRA's political ally, Sinn Fein, said Sunday he will visit the United States next month despite the end of the guerilla movement's cease-fire, AP reports from London.

"I have been invited to go to the United States. My intentions are to go," Adams said on BBC television. Adams is due to be in the United States around St. Patrick's Day on March 17.

Fire kills 3 children in Bombay: Three children including a seven-month-old baby, were charred to death and a boy was injured in a major fire, which engulfed two adjoining hutment colonies near Navynag Rian Colaba, south Bombay, yesterday fire brigade sources said, PTI reports to from Bombay.

The cause of the fire, which gutted the hutment dwellings at Gitanagar and Ganesh Nagar and rendered several people homeless, was not yet known.

The fire broke out around 0640 hours. Ten fire engines were rushed to the spot and the blaze was put out around 0755 hours.

Quakes shake eastern Japan: Three minor earthquakes all registering 3.7 on the Richter scale shook eastern Japan early yesterday and southern Japan late Sunday, the Meteorological Agency said adding there were no reports of damage or injuries, AFP says from Tokyo.

The most recent tremor occurred at 12:10 am Monday (15:10 GMT, Sunday), and had an epicentre about 50 kilometres (31 miles) beneath the earth's surface in northern Ibaraki prefecture, northeast of Tokyo the agency said.

Brawl claims 6 in Ghana: Six people have died in northern Ghana in a brawl following the nomination of four traditional chiefs, the radio reported on Sunday, AFP says from Accra.

The clash broke out in Techiman, some 240 kilometres (150 miles) north of Accra, on Saturday between supporters and opponents of the four chiefs, who had been promoted to the rank of paramount chief.

Ashanti King Otumfuo Opoku Ware II had promoted the four against the advice of residents who reject his authority.

Avalanches kill 5 in Vienna: Five people were killed and at least 16 others injured as fresh snow and high winds triggered several avalanches Sunday in the Austrian Alps, Austrian television said, AP reports from Vienna.

Regional authorities could not confirm the casualty figures. State television said one person was killed in avalanches in the provinces of Styria, Tyrol and Vorarlberg, with two dying in Salzburg province.

France buys Israeli planes: France is buying five Israeli-manufactured pilotless reconnaissance aircraft, a source at Israel Aircraft Industries said Sunday, AP reports from Jerusalem.

The French defence ministry has bought five Hunter unmanned spy planes and a ground station to operate them, the source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Associated Press. The Paris newspaper Le Monde reported that France bought the Israeli drones for more than \$20 million because the unmanned spy plane it was using was unsatisfactory.

6 killed in Mexico road mishap: Six pilgrims were killed and 30 more were injured Sunday when the bus in which they were travelling to a shrine overturned, police said, AFP reports from Cuernavaca.

The pilgrims were travelling from Puebla state to the Chalma shrine in the state of Mexico.

2 die as 'tomcat' crashes into Pacific: Two US navy flyers died when their F-14D fighter jet crashed in the Pacific Ocean during routine flight operations, a navy spokesman confirmed Sunday, AFP reports from Los Angeles.

The two crew members died after their F-14D "Tomcat" aircraft from fighter squadron II, carrier air wing 14, crashed at approximately 12:20 pm (2020 GMT), the navy said in a statement.

Algiers blasts Mandela for meeting FIS leader
ALGIERS, Feb 19: The Algerian Foreign Ministry on Sunday protested strongly to South Africa, after President Nelson Mandela held talks with a leading member of Algeria's outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), reports AFP.

An official statement said the talks last week showed "an unacceptable desire to interfere in Algerian domestic affairs."

The statement added that the Algerian government learnt with considerable astonishment of the meeting which it said took place on Friday in Cape Town between Mandela and one of those responsible for "destabilising Algeria" and for "ordering terrorist crimes against the Algerian people."

60 drown as waves batter down Philippine ferry to pieces

CADIZ, Philippines, Feb 19: About 60 people drowned when huge waves battered a Philippine ferry to pieces, ripping apart its roof deck and sending it crashing down on screaming passengers survivors said today, reports Reuter.

At least 141 passengers, including two German men, survived by swimming ashore or clinging to pieces of wood after waves "as big as houses" swamped the overcrowded boat on Sunday night as it sailed into Cadiz Port in the central Philippines, the coast guard said.

As the tide ebbed and rescuers rushed to pick up bodies of children cast ashore, the 75-ton Gretchen - I looked like it had been hit by a bomb - its town decks gone, its sides blown away and its mast cut in half.

"The boat was packed with

people and I could hear the wailing of children calling for help," said Florencio Gonzales, an oil firm employee who survived by grabbing a life vest.

Coast guard officers said they had detained the boat's captain and two officers for questioning after learning that the wooden ferry, with an authorised capacity of 100, was carrying more than 200 passengers and crew.

A number of those killed had rushed to the roof deck when the vessel began to keel over in a sudden squall and lost power after water entered the engine room, the coast guard said.

"After the roof deck collapsed, the boat just started to disintegrate," area coast guard commander Edmund Tan said.

The passengers panicked. They started clambering up to the roof deck, causing it to collapse," he told reporters.

Passengers hung to the roof until successive waves smashed it to pieces and drowned them, survivors said.

Survivors and journalists who saw rows of bodies lying on the cement floor of a funeral parlour said most victims had apparently drowned.

The coast guard said they had recovered 51 bodies, 31 of them children. About 15 people were missing and feared dead.

A mother hugged a dead son to her breast in a corner of the parlour, looking deranged as she laughed, cried and sang to him.

"I had three children. Where are the two others?" she screamed.

Other women survivors, their children either dead or missing, were dazed and could not even give their names.

The encounter with the waves at the entrance to Cadiz

Port, 500 km (310 miles) south of Manila on Negros Island, was the last of a series of misfortunes to dog the ferry on its relatively short, 100-km (60-mile) journey from Cebu Island.

On leaving Cebu, it ran aground twice. Two hundred metres (yards) from Cadiz, it ran aground again as the tide ebbed.

While it was manoeuvring into port after the water rose, a sudden squall slammed it and raised 16-metre (50-foot) waves, a coast guard spokesman said.

More than 3,000 people died in December 1987 when the ferry Dona Paz sank after a collision with an oil tanker, also in the central Philippines, in the world's worst peacetime sea disaster. Only 26 people survived that tragedy.

Car bomb blasts kill 12 in Algiers

PARIS, Feb 19: Two car bombs exploded in Algiers on Sunday, killing 12 people, the official Algerian news agency APS reported, says Reuter.

One of the bombs ripped through the eastern Ain-Taya district of the Algerian capital killing eight people and injuring 14, APS said, quoting a communique issued by the security services.

The other blast occurred in the Ain-Naadja district of Algiers killing four people and injuring 18.

The early evening blasts came on the eve of the Muslim Eid ul-Fitr holiday marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

The government announced on Sunday, before the two car bombs, that after the end of Ramadan it would permanently lift a night curfew imposed four years ago to help its troops fight Muslim guerillas.

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A Polish couple cast their ballots in a privatisation referendum on Sunday. Voters are deciding whether they want to take part in privatising state owned property and whether privatising proceeds should be used to pay state debts to pensioners and civil servants. — AFP/UNB photo

Chechens fleeing village to escape fighting

GROZNY, Feb 19: Civilians were fleeing a besieged village in northern Chechnya after fighting erupted again between Russian troops and rebel fighters on Sunday, reports AP.

The Interfax news agency said five Russian soldiers were killed and seven wounded Sunday in renewed fighting at Novogrozny, a village that separatist guerillas had been using as a hideout.

Quoting Russian officials, it said Russian troops were allowing the villagers to leave.

In several past assaults on Chechen villages, Russian troops have refused to let civilians flee. The subsequent casualties among non-combatants made Russia the target of sharp criticism both at home and abroad.

Since President Boris Yeltsin sent in thousands of troops in December 1994 to end Chechnya's three years of self-declared independence, about 30,000 people, mostly civilians, have died.

Jihad newspaper closed for criticising Arafat

GAZA CITY, Feb 19: Palestinian police arrested the publisher of a militant Muslim newspaper on Sunday for criticising FLO leader Yasser Arafat, the publication's employees said, reports AP.

A note that police posted on the door of Istiqlal, a weekly newspaper and the mouthpiece of the group Islamic Jihad, said the offices were closed until further notice.

Employees said the paper's publisher, Alaa Saftawi, was taken from his home in the middle of the night because of an editorial he wrote last Friday.

The piece ridiculed Arafat's pledge, made during his swearing-in as president of the Palestinian Authority last week, to uphold the constitution and respect the people's well-being.

Israeli opposition claims future of Jerusalem at stake

JERUSALEM, Feb 19: Drawing the battle lines for Israel's upcoming elections, the main opposition party claimed on Sunday that the future of Jerusalem is at stake, reports AP.

"This election is a real referendum," Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu said. "It's a referendum about the future of Jerusalem... whether we can have peace with Jerusalem, or Jerusalem divided."

Prime Minister Shimon Peres denied Likud charges that he has been negotiating in secret to give up parts of the holy city to the Palestinians, and pledged to keep Jerusalem united under Israeli rule.

The prime minister stressed that the entire government is united around the principle of not dividing Jerusalem," government secretary Shmuel Hollander said after the weekly Cabinet meeting.

Netanyahu said secret talks over the fate of Jerusalem were being conducted in Europe, and complained that FLO activity in east Jerusalem "cast a grave shadow and grave doubt over Peres' statements that he will keep Jerusalem united."

The political division of the city has already begun, Netanyahu said, citing the January 20 Palestinian elections in

which east Jerusalem residents were allowed to vote.

"Physical partition follows political partition, surely as night follows day," he said, comparing Jerusalem to Berlin.

Labour party secretary-General Nissim Zivli called the Likud charges "an absolute lie" and warned they could backfire by raising expectations among Palestinians and the world that the future of Jerusalem is negotiable.

Government officials pledged on Sunday that the city, whose eastern portion was captured from Jordan in 1967 and later annexed, would never again be divided.



A man steps on the rubble surrounding the ruins of the Presidential palace in Grozny on Saturday. The palace building was blown up last week by Russian forces. The pro-Russian Chechen government took steps on Sunday to prevent new mass demonstrations by separatists by not authorising demonstrations February 23 when Chechens observe the anniversary of their mass deportation by Stalin in 1944. — AFP/UNB photo

Sri Lanka welcomes decision Malaysia outlaws open support for Tamil Tigers

COLOMBO, Feb 19: Malaysia's decision to outlaw open support for the Tamil Tigers was welcomed by Sri Lanka today as a major breakthrough in its diplomatic drive to block foreign fund raising and propaganda for the rebels.

This is very, very encouraging to us indeed, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgama told AFP. Every single step has cumulative effect and we can expect more and more countries to follow suit.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are known to operate about 40 offices abroad.

Kadirgama said Malaysia was the second country after India to act against activities supporting the LTTE and described it as a "very significant and major development."

The Malaysian government announced today it would re-

voked the permanent residency status of foreigners involved in demonstrations supported by Sri Lanka's separatist guerilla movement and that it would charge anyone taking part in pro-Tiger rallies with causing unrest.

The LTTE are fighting for a separate state in Sri Lanka's northern and eastern regions and more than 50,000 people have died in the bitter campaign for an independent homeland.

Last month, the rebels devastated Colombo's main financial hub with a suicide truck bomb which killed 87 and wounded 1,400 others.

India which was at one time directly involved in the Sri Lanka conflict, banned the LTTE after the group was accused of assassinating former Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

Dissidents open office in Amman Iraqi military defector plans to return home

JERUSALEM, Feb 19: A prominent Iraqi defector told a Palestinian newspaper that he plans to go back because Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is moving toward democracy, reports AP.

"My country has begun paving the road toward comfort and confidence," Lt General Hussein Kamel Al-Majid, a former confidant of Saddam, head of his weapons programme, and his son-in-law, said in Sunday's edition of the Al-Ayyam daily newspaper.

"I only hope what is taking place in Iraq is not just a passing current," he said in an interview in Amman, Jordan.

He did not say when he might go back.

Majid defected to Jordan in August with his brother, Col Saddam Kamel Al-Majid, deputy head of the Iraqi president's palace security, and the wives, both daughters of the Iraqi leader.

Information he provided forced Baghdad to hand over vast amounts of data on Iraq's

clandestine weapons programmes to UN weapons inspectors.

Majid said he was in contact with the Iraqi government.

"Baghdad makes contacts and we respond," he said.

And he expects the UN Security Council to allow Iraq to sell its oil.

"Iraq is taking a step toward accepting the Security Council resolution and toward a democratic path and holding elections," Majid said. "For these reasons, my return and the return of many who seek an improvement in the situation is normal."

Majid denied that his decision to return to Iraq was made because of pressure from Jordan's King Hussein.

Another report from Amman, with King Hussein's blessing, members of an Iraqi movement trying to topple Saddam Hussein opened an office in Amman on Sunday, proclaiming a "new dawn" for their long-suffering homeland.

Off the Record

She made mistakes because of unfamiliarity with Washington.

WASHINGTON: Hillary Rodham Clinton says that although much criticism of her is politically motivated, she also made mistakes early in her husband's presidency because of unfamiliarity with Washington.

"I suddenly came to a place where perception is more important than it had ever been in my life — where I was being, I thought, painted in ways based almost on tea-leaf reading," Mrs. Clinton said in a lengthy magazine article in The New Yorker magazine, on newsstands on Monday.

But I finally realised that this was serious business for the people who cover politics in this town and think about it, and so I had to pay at least some attention."

As an example, Mrs. Clinton mentions her health care task force's decision to keep reporters in the dark about the details of the plan the group was developing in 1992. She now feels she should have been more open with the press, she said.

Criticised, also for falling what The New Yorker calls the "charm offensive" required of first ladies, Mrs. Clinton said her duties as mother come first.

"I think that's one of the reasons people say, 'Well, who is she? We don't know her.' I don't get out as much as many people do, because these years of child-rearing go by so fast."

I mean, Chelsea's going to be gone," the First Lady said of her daughter, "I can go to dinner parties from now to kingdom come when she's in college and when she's grown."

Good news for silver screen lover minors

ROME: Reasoning that violence on the screen can sometimes be educational, a high court has lifted a ban on minors' seeing the film "Pulp Fiction," reports AP.

Italian newspapers reported on Sunday that the Council of State, Italy's highest administrative tribunal, recently ruled that people under 18 should be allowed into cinemas showing the film, which is filled with bloody shootings and other gruesome scenes.

The Italian distributor of "Pulp Fiction," which was still playing in Italy, had appealed the rating barring people under 18 from seeing the film.

The high court said it was reversing the 18-or-over rating because "the most crudely violent scene... if inserted in a certain context... can have an educational value, acting as a deterrent against certain negative models," Il Messaggero, a Rome daily reported.



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Bosnian peace process gains new life after Rome summit

SARAJEVO, Feb 19: Bosnia's flagging peace process has gained new life after a Rome summit, where Balkan leaders pledged to reunify the divided cities of Sarajevo and Mostar and apparently agreed on rules for pursuing war criminals, reports AP.

The summit also yielded agreement for more talks between Serb, Croat and Muslim officials. The first session is scheduled Monday on the USS George Washington in the Adriatic Sea.

Despite the progress, hundreds of panicked Serbs fled their parts of Sarajevo over the weekend as the Rome summit reaffirmed they must relinquish those areas to the Muslim-led government.

Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and his new ally, Bosnian Serb Prime Minister Rajko Stasovic, urged the Serbs to stay put and trust interna-

tional supervision of government police, who begin taking control of Serb Sarajevo next weekend.

But Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, still claiming his claim to prominence despite indictment for war crimes, accused the world of forcing his people out and said no guarantees could make Serbs stay in the Bosnian capital after it is reunified March 19.

"I'm afraid it's top late for the Serbs in Sarajevo," Karadzic told The Associated Press. "Many of them have left already, and many more will leave in the days to come."

Forcing the Serbs out and pressuring them over war crimes and mass graves are merely "the laundering of the international community's conscience," Karadzic told Serb mayors from all over Bosnia, summoned to his stronghold of

Pale.

His comments signalled continued defiance of the peace agreement negotiated for him by his former mentor, Milosevic. The accord bars indicted war criminals like Karadzic from office.

Yet Karadzic promised to "follow the results" of the Rome conference at which Milosevic and other Balkan leaders pledged to respect the peace accord.

That indicated the Serbs will resume contacts with the NATO-led peace force. The Serbs cut off contact after the Bosnian government's arrest of two Bosnian Serb army officers and the pair's subsequent extradition to the war crimes tribunal in the Hague.

arresting war criminals, which would prevent random arrests by the government but also enhance NATO powers for such detentions.

The new rules appeared aimed at increasing pressure to force Karadzic and Bosnian Serb Gen Ratko Mladic, who has also been indicted as a war criminal, out of office. Milosevic so far has been unable to do that.

Karadzic told The AP it was "better now than never" that sanctions may be lifted against the Bosnian Serbs if they comply with the peace accord.

But ordinary Serbs and their leaders demonstrated their lack of faith in coexistence by fleeing en masse from Hadzici, a grim industrial suburb west of Sarajevo.

This weekend's flight was the first organised exodus in buses provided by Serb author-

ities.

"We're taking everything, even the traffic signs," said Slavko Pusara, a secretary in the mayor's office. "How can we trust NATO? They bombed us too," he added.

The western alliance launched air strikes on Bosnian Serb facilities last summer and now heads the 60,000-strong force international peace force. Tens of thousands of Serbs have said they will flee. Many say they fear retribution after nearly four years of Serb siege and bombardment of Sarajevo. But others this weekend reported being under orders to flee.

Taliban rocket kills 3 in Kabul

KABUL, Feb 19: Three civilians were killed and six others injured when a rocket slammed into their home in the south of the war-torn Afghan capital, hospital staff said today, reports AFP.

The rocket was part of a volley fired late Sunday by the Islamic Taliban militia who have been besieging Kabul for the last five months, defence officials said.

The victims were rushed to hospital after the strike in the suburb of Cheliston, which is near the frontline separating the government from the Taliban.

"Nine people were brought to the hospital, but unfortunately three were declared dead on arrival," a doctor at Karte Seh Hospital told AFP.

The exchange of artillery and rocket fire by both sides was routine and not out of the ordinary, one soldier said.