

BRIEFLY



Canadian singer Alanis Morissette waves to photographers in the photo room at 38th Annual Grammy Awards on Wednesday in Los Angeles. Morissette won five Grammys, including Album of the Year for "Jagged Little Pill", Song of the Year for "You Oughta Know" and Best Female Rock Vocal Performance. Morissette did not appear in the photo room with her awards. — AFP/UNB photo

NZ PM reshuffles cabinet: Prime Minister Jim Bolger yesterday reshuffled his cabinet following Wednesday's deal with the small United Party which has agreed to support the government in parliament. AFP reports from Wellington.

Under the deal United gets a seat at the cabinet table and this has been taken up by Peter Dunne who becomes minister of revenue and internal affairs. Former Revenue Minister Wyatt Creech becomes Education and Employment Minister. He takes over education from Lockwood Smith who becomes Minister of Agriculture.

Epidemics claim 15000 in Nigeria: Outbreaks of meningitis, cholera, measles and diarrhoea have claimed about 15,000 lives — mostly children — in the northern Nigerian state of Kano this month. Health Minister Ihechukwu Madubuike said in Kano on Tuesday. Reuter reports from Kano.

"It is a serious epidemic, posing a great challenge to our medical researchers," he told reporters after an inspection of hospitals and health centres in the state.

"If it continues till next week a state of emergency will be declared in Kano," Madubuike added.

Quake jolts eastern Indonesia: A magnitude 6.3 earthquake jolted Indonesia's eastern province of Maluku Wednesday, but there were no reports of casualties, the meteorology office said. AP reports from Jakarta.

The quake, at 2:44 pm (0944 GMT), was centered in the sea at a depth of 100 kilometres (62 miles), about 3,000 kilometres (1,875 miles) northeast of Jakarta. Earlier this month, a magnitude 7 quake hit the island of Biak in the neighbouring province of Irian Jaya, killing at least 107 people and leaving 55 missing.

Mild quake rocks Tokyo: An earthquake registering 3.5 on the Richter Scale shook Japanese islands south of Tokyo yesterday, but there were no immediate reports of damages or injuries, the meteorological agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

There was no danger of tidal waves, the agency said. The epicentre of the quake, which struck at 10:45 am (0145 GMT), was located 50 kilometres (30 miles) under the sea near Hashijo Island, some 300 kilometres (186 miles) south of Tokyo, the agency said.

Road mishap claims 11 in Spain: At least 11 people were killed in a crash between a bus carrying a group of Jehovah's witnesses and a car late Wednesday near Bailen, in the southern Spanish region of Andalusia, traffic authorities said. AFP reports from Bailen.

The cause of the accident was not immediately known, but it seemed that the car crossed the carriageway into the path of the bus, and an explosion occurred.

Rebels kill 13 in Myanmar: At least 13 people were killed in a clash between rival Karen guerrilla factions in southeastern Myanmar this week, rebel and Thai military sources said yesterday. Reuter reports from Mae Sot.

About 200 guerrillas from the anti-Yangon Karen National Union (KNU) recaptured a base from renegade Karen fighters in a dawn attack on Tuesday. KNU sources said.

The KNU sources, speaking on the Thai-Myanmar borders, said they had found eight bodies of guerrillas from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) when they over-ran the Ta Ok camp.

ROK navy rescues DPRK ship crewmen: Two North Korean sailors were rescued Thursday after their 10,000-ton freighter sank in the Sea of Japan. South Korean navy officials said. AP reports from Seoul.

South Korean navy boats also recovered two bodies believed to be crewmen of the unidentified North Korean ship that went down in international waters between Korea and Japan around noon (0300 GMT), they said. Other details, including the cause of the accident and the number of crewmen on board, were not immediately available.

Tunisian opposition leader jailed: Tunisia's main opposition leader has been sentenced to 11 years in prison for spying for neighbouring Libya — charges he insists were trumped-up. AP reports from Tunis.

A court handed down the verdict Wednesday against Mohamed Mouda, president of the Tunisian Movement of Democratic Socialists. He had faced the death penalty.

Road mishap claims 29 in Madrid: Twenty-nine people were killed and 18 injured in an overnight collision between a bus and car in the southern Spanish city of Bailen, authorities said yesterday. AFP reports from Madrid.

Clinton asks Congress to amend abortion bill

WASHINGTON, Feb 29: President Clinton asked Congress Wednesday to amend a bill outlawing a type of late-term abortion to permit the procedure when a woman's life or health is at risk. He said he had "studied and prayed" about it for months. reports AP.

The measure seeks to outlaw a rare procedure known as an intact dilation and evacuation, which is performed after 20 weeks of gestation and is called by abortion opponents a "partial birth abortion." The White House has said previously that Clinton would veto the bill in its current form.

Human rights issue a major divide between Asia and Europe

BANGKOK, Feb 29: When Asian and European leaders meet Friday for their first economic summit, there are two words many of the Asian ministers don't want on the agenda: human rights, reports AP.

But even if Asian ministers prevent formal discussion of the subject at the Asia-Europe meeting, human rights already are overshadowing any other business they might conduct.

Views on civil rights and child labour differ markedly from Asia to Western Europe. In Indonesia's annexation of the Portuguese colony of East Timor — still unrecognized by the United Nations 20 years

India's 18 million dollar bribery scandal

Non-bailable arrest warrants against 10 politicians

NEW DELHI, Feb 29: A judge on Thursday ordered the arrest of 10 politicians charged in India's 18 million dollar bribery scandal, including four former Cabinet ministers and the leader of India's largest opposition party, reports AP.

The warrants were the latest indication of the unusually hard-hitting approach that the courts are taking in the case, and the impact it could have on a general election expected in April.

Special Judge V B Gupta, who issued the non-bailable arrest orders, said the politicians will be held in prison until they appear in court next month and their trial dates are set.

The move was unexpectedly harsh, since none of the public figures were expected to flee prosecution. Arrest-without-bail is normally reserved for people accused of violent crimes.

Reuter adds: A special court hearing cases linked to India's political corruption scandal has issued non-bailable arrest warrants for ten politicians including former ministers, a federal police spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said among them were Madhavrao Chindia, Balram Jakhar, V C Shukla and Kalpath Rai all former ministers in the current government, and L K Advani, leader of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

They have already been charged in the scandal which is likely to overshadow general elections expected in April.

Scindia, Jakhar and V C Shukla resigned last month from Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's cabinet to face charges in the 18-million dollar bribes-for-favours scandal linked to alleged illegal

foreign exchange, or "hawala," deals.

Rai quit in 1994 after a sugar scandal. He is already in jail in a different case, facing charges of harbouring an alleged criminal wanted in a bombing.

PTI said that among the others for whom warrants have been issued are Arjun Singh, who formed a breakaway group of the ruling Congress Party last year after resigning from Rao's cabinet.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal and his close relative Pradeep Singh, former finance minister, Yashwant Sinha and former energy minister Arif Mohammed Khan, all in opposition parties, also face arrest warrants, PTI said.

All politicians facing warrants have been charged by the CBI, except for Devi Lal who has been charged by the special court.

Seven ministers in Rao's

cabinet have resigned since the scandal broke to face charges in the case. It revolves around a diary belonging to an alleged "hawala" dealer, SK Jain, containing details of payments to more than 100 politicians and bureaucrats.

The opposition led by the Hindu nationalist BJP has accused Rao of hoarding his political rivals.

Rao's spokesman has denied charges by BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee that Rao himself received more than 30 million rupees (850,000 dollars) from Jain. The opposition wants Rao to quit because he supervises the CBI.

Meanwhile the Central Bureau of Investigation has charged several politicians over the scandal which will be a key issue in elections expected in April. The bureau has charged the leaders on the basis of a dealer's diary that mentioned payments.

Govt to take over 2nd Serb suburb

SARAJEVO, Feb 29: Police of the Muslim-Croat federation are taking over a second nearby deserted Sarajevo suburb from Serbs as they extend control over territory around the capital, reports AP.

Anticipating the arrival of police from Sarajevo on Thursday morning, the last Serbs of Iljijas — mostly old people, women and children — were packing up Wednesday and jamming everything they could carry into buses.

Just a few kilometers away, returning Muslims were already slipping back into Vogosca, a suburb the Serbs turned over on Friday.

International officials accused Bosnian Serb leaders of manipulating their own people into leaving. But they also said some of the returning refugees were harassing Serbs.

The commander of NATO-led peace forces, US Adm. Leighton Smith, told Bosnian TV late Wednesday that both the government and Bosnian Serb leaders came up short in efforts to persuade Serbs to stay.

2 Iraqi pilots defect to Kurds controlled north

CAIRO, Feb 29: Two army pilots and other Iraqi officers have defected to the Kurdish-controlled area in northern Iraq, an opposition leader said Wednesday, reports AP.

Hamid al-Bayati, spokesman for the opposition Supreme Council of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, said the pilots crossed into the Kurdish zone from the government-controlled Mosul province on Tuesday and asked the Kurdish rebels for protection.

He said other senior army and Republican Guard officers also have fled to Kurdish areas in recent days after the killing of Lt. Gen. Hussein Kamel al-Majid and his brother, Saddam Kamel al-Majid, in Baghdad last Friday.

Al-Bayati said they feared arrest in the reported crackdown by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's regime on people suspected of having connections with the al-Majids.

He said there were "a handful" of defectors, but gave no specific numbers. Al-Bayati spoke by telephone from London.

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Corazon Aquino denies corruption accusations

MANILA, Feb 29: Former President Corazon Aquino on Thursday denied accusations that she granted special favours to relatives while in office by allowing them to acquire companies slated for confiscation by the government, reports AP.

"As president, I never used my office to extend undue favours to anyone — least of all my relatives," Mrs. Aquino said in a statement.

A lawyers' group, the Anti-Graft League of the Philippines, said Tuesday that Mrs. Aquino was guilty of "gargantuan graft and corruption, betrayal of public trust and culpable violations of the constitution" in not stopping her relatives from committing corrupt acts.



Files photo dated November 5, 1989 shows the Prince (L) and Princess of Wales watching Indonesian tribal dancers in Yogyakarta. The Princess announced Wednesday that she had finally agreed to divorce Prince Charles and end the 14 year marriage. The couple has been separated for over three years. — AFP/UNB photo

Arafat reluctant to launch total crackdown on Hamas

JERUSALEM, Feb 29: Palestinian security forces conducted searches for unlicensed weapons into the early hours today after Israel demanded it disarm Islamic groups in self-rule areas, a PLO official said.

PLO President Yasser Arafat controls parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank with nearly 20,000 police but he has been reluctant to launch an all-out crackdown on Hamas and Islamic Jihad preferring dialogue and selective arrests.

The PLO on Wednesday ordered Palestinians in self-rule areas to hand in unlicensed weapons by Friday.

The security forces started

conducting searches overnight for weapons in Gaza and the West Bank in order to confirm the decision by the Palestinian authority," said Gaza police commander Abdel Razzak al-Majaydeh.

Despite the move, Hamas, the Islamic militant movement responsible for twin suicide bombings that killed 25 people on Sunday, vowed to continue attacks on Israel.

The Palestinian authority has previously said it would round up unlicensed weapons after Islamic attacks on Israelis but failed to follow through.

"I hope this time they will do what they can to ensure it

is implemented," said Israeli Minister Yossi Beilin.

"I think this order that has been given is the beginning of a Palestinian effort to change the situation," Beilin added.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Israel decided to demand forcefully from the PLO that its police be the only armed force in Palestinian ruled areas.

But pressure from Israel and its ally the United States for an onslaught against Hamas's military wing Qasam has been intense since the bombings in Jerusalem and Ashkelon.



US President Bill Clinton (R) meets with Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah (C) in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington on Wednesday. Meeting on the fifth anniversary of the 1991 Gulf War ceasefire, the two men are expected to discuss Gulf security, Iraq and bilateral issues. The man on the left is unidentified. — AFP/UNB photo

EU to oppose demand for more nuclear data: US

WASHINGTON, Feb 29: A US official warned senators Wednesday that the 15 governments of the European Union will object to any demand for more data as a safeguard against US nuclear material falling into the hands of terrorists, reports AP.

Some experts seem to want more information than provided for under a new 30-year agreement, said Norman A. Wolf of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. The accord, approved by President Clinton, takes effect March 14 unless Congress objects. It was made with Euratom, the EU body that distributes nuclear material among the 15 countries.

"We would have to go back to Euratom and get their agreement to that. That's nothing they'll take to kindly. I can assure you, sir," Wolf said.

European allies of the former Soviet Union, including Romania and Slovakia, also want to join the EU and Euratom.

Wolf and other Clinton administration officials were being questioned closely by Sen. Ted Stevens, the Republican

who chairs the Governmental Affairs Committee, and the ranking Democratic member, Sen. John Glenn, the former astronaut who is a Senate authority on scientific issues.

Wolf also said that until a new accord goes into force, the United States cannot sell nuclear materials to Europe. Over the past 15 years the United States has earned over \$15 billion selling 44,000 tons of such material throughout the world, according to the US General Accounting Office. A previous accord with Euratom expired Dec 31.

In this and many other trade matters, the US government treats the EU and Euratom as a single country and does not control the distribution of plutonium and uranium among the 15 members. The same arrangement automatically would apply to any new EU members.

Sen. Glenn asked if the United States could say "stop" if it received information that a transfer of nuclear material was being made to an EU member who might be diverting it to an unauthorized destination.

Off the Record

Six-legged calf

ERRE, France: A calf with six legs has been born in a farm in Erre, near Valenciennes in the north of France, its owners said on Wednesday.

It was born on February 22 in a farm run by Michel and Isabelle Dussart and it remains "in full health," Mrs. Dussart told AFP.

The two extra legs, a bit shorter than the other four, extend from the calf's shoulder blades.

"You can say that this calf is an angel," Mrs. Dussart said, smiling.

A veterinarian who has looked at the calf said it should have the same life expectancy as any regular calf, and that its extra legs will likely grow longer.

That would be a luckier fate than that of its mother. She died Tuesday from a womb infection.

Emotional robots to act like human being

TOKYO: A newly developed robot that can show its emotions by smiling may one day help users talk as quickly and easily to machines as they now do with other people, its inventor says, reports Reuter.

"I think the face robot represents at least a small improvement on the way man and machine have communicated in the past," Tokyo University of Science Professor Fumio Hara told Reuters.

After three years of development, the face robot, with prompting from its mainframe computer, can express six emotions — anger, sadness, fear, surprise, happiness and disgust. Its skin is made of silicon and its 24 muscles are hydraulic pistons made of aluminium.

Ciller, Yilmaz settle outlines of coalition govt

ANKARA, Feb 29: Turkey's fractious conservatives have moved closer to a final coalition deal that could set the country firmly along a pro-western path despite an Islamist victory at a general election in December, reports Reuter.

Caretaker Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the Motherland Party (ANAP), settled the outlines of a "grand coalition" in more than two hours of talks on Wednesday.

But the two rivals proved unable to resolve competing demands to head the rotating premiership, forcing a second round of talks on Friday and

raising the possibility that their bid to end five months of political paralysis could yet fail.

They must also round up outside support, likely from left-wing lawmakers, to win a confidence vote in the new parliament.

"We put forward a draft coalition programme. I have proposals about the economy, justice, education, lessening the role of the state, the fight against corruption and other issues," Yilmaz told a joint news conference.

"We reached an agreement on the issues dealt with. We will finish the talks soon and form a government."

Bid to prevent anti-govt demonstrations Army clamps indefinite curfew in Lebanon

BEIRUT, Feb 29: The army clamped an indefinite nationwide curfew on Lebanon today to prevent labour unions staging a general strike and anti-government demonstrations, reports Reuter.

Helmeted troops in battle gear patrolled cities in strength on foot and in trucks. In Beirut, reporters saw groups of curfew-breakers, apparently ordinary citizens, halted by squads of soldiers.

Army trucks and pickups were seen driving off with arrested people inside.

In Christian east Beirut troops manned dozens of checkpoints with steel barricades across streets searched cars and questioned occupants. A Reuter correspondent was stopped at six checkpoints on his way to work.

But most Beirut streets were empty and the city looked like a ghost town apart from the patrolling troops and groups of armoured vehicles waiting at strategic corners. Shops were shuttered and

there was immediate reports of violence after labour unions and on Wednesday they would respect the curfew.

Similar deployments in strength were reported from the southern cities of Tyre and Sidon, where troops briefly arrested curfew breakers before releasing them with warnings.

The curfew ordered by army commander General Emile Lahoud went into effect at three a.m. (0100 gmt) in all major cities where the general labour confederation (CGTL) had planned to hold demonstrations in defiance of a government ban.

Lahoud acted after the government ordered the 50,000-strong army to take charge of national security for three months, giving him command of security forces totalling another 50,000 men and authority to stop all demonstrations.

The CGTL had planned a one-day strike and peaceful street demonstrations in defence of "liberties and daily bread."

Peru accuses Ecuador of violating peace accord

LIMA, Feb 29: Peru accused Ecuador of violating a fragile peace accord by infiltrating troops into the demilitarised zone along their disputed border, officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

"Military installations have been detected within the demilitarised zone," Foreign Minister Francisco Tudela said in an interview with Peruvian radio from Brazil.

"The movement for democracy in Burma has very strong support from the people of Burma, and unless they wish to call the people of Burma 'un-Asian,' they cannot call our struggle 'un-Asian,'" she said in an interview to be broadcast Thursday.

Mrs. Suu Kyi said Asian leaders have abandoned the idea that led to their nations' independence — that Asians deserve the same rights as Europeans.

"But of course with time views do change, and on the road to economic development some people now think issues of human rights and democracy are not important."