

BRIEFLY



Senator Bob Dole (R) and his wife Elizabeth cheer as they exit his plane on Saturday in Isip, NY. The two were celebrating news of his victory in the South Carolina primary. — AFP/UNB photo

Major begins HK tour: British Prime Minister John Major began his first working day in Hong Kong yesterday with a meeting with Governor Chris Patten and a tour of some of the territory's major construction projects, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Major, who arrived in Hong Kong Saturday for a two-day visit following the Asia-Europe summit in Bangkok, met with Patten in the morning and was to tour the Tsing Ma Bridge, which when completed will be the world's longest suspension bridge carrying both road and rail traffic.

The bridge is part of the massive transportation links for Hong Kong's new airport project at Chek Lap Kok, which Major will also visit Sunday.

Khartoum govt declares ceasefire: The Khartoum government declared a ceasefire in fighting in South Sudan starting midnight Saturday, armed forces spokesman Major General Mohammed Abdel Gadir said. AFP reports from Khartoum.

The government declaration came "in response to the ceasefire announcement made by the Riek Machar militia," a splinter faction from the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Abdel Gadir said. The spokesman did not specify the extent or duration of the ceasefire.

Sierra Leone peace talks break off: Talks to end civil war in Sierra Leone broke off inconclusively on Saturday and negotiators decided to ask government and rebel leaders to meet at summit level, delegates said. Reuter says from Abidjan.

The two sides have decided that their leaders should meet, a participant said. There was substantial agreement on procedure but no accord on elections and a ceasefire.

France returns Greenpeace ships: Five Greenpeace ships seized during last fall's protests against France's nuclear blasts are being returned, one with a fresh coat of paint — courtesy of the French navy. AP reports from Papeete, Tahiti.

But the Paris branch of the environmental group wasn't impressed: It demanded Saturday that the French government first restore the vessels to a "perfect state of seaworthiness." The navy seized the vessels and briefly detained crew members in September and October for entering an exclusion zone around the French Polynesian atolls of Mururoa and Fangataua.

Gunmen kill TV official in Algeria: Gunmen thought to be Muslim guerrillas abducted an Algerian television official, killed him and dumped his mutilated body in a forest in eastern Algeria, state television said on Saturday. Reuter reports from Algiers.

The television named the victim as Belgacem Saadi, 40, director of its photographic unit at Skikda, a town in eastern Algeria.

More than 60 journalists and media workers have been killed in Algeria during the past 32 months in attacks blamed on Muslim guerrillas accusing them of spreading the government propaganda.

Iraqi VP to meet Zeroul: Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan arrived in Algiers Saturday for talks with Algerian President Liamine Zeroul, official sources said. AFP reports from Algiers.

No details about the purpose of the visit were given. Ramadan, who was described officially as the personal envoy of President Saddam Hussein, was due to meet Zeroul yesterday.

Prisoners free 8 Greek guards: Inmates at a prison on the Greek island of Corfu released eight guards Saturday, two days after they began a mutiny to protest their living conditions, judicial sources said. AFP reports from Athens.

The guards were freed after a fresh round of negotiations between a committee representing the inmates and the Secretary General of the Greek Justice Ministry, Georges Pavlas, the source said.

Noted Italian journalist dies: Alberto Jacoviello, a longtime journalist who was the first Washington correspondent of the Italian Communist Party newspaper, had died. He was 78, AP reports from Rome.

Jacoviello died of cancer Friday night in the capital, the AGI and ANSA news agencies said.

Jacoviello began his career in 1947 and worked for the party paper "L'Unita" and later the left-leaning Rome daily La Repubblica.

Gunmen kill 3 in Lagos: Gunmen attacked the home of a singer who is well known for his protests against Nigeria's military regime, killing three men, a newspaper reported Saturday. AP reports from Lagos.

Seven men fired shots outside the Lagos compound of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, known as the "Afrobeat King," on Thursday night, the Tribune on Saturday newspaper said.

Kim Jong Il visits military unit: Elusive North Korean leader Kim Jong Il made another public appearance at an army unit, North Korea's official media said Sunday. AP reports from Seoul.

Kim has been the de facto ruler of North Korea since the 1994 death of his father, long-time ruler Kim Il Sung. But the younger Kim, 54, has yet to take his father's titles of president and head of the communist party. The Thursday tour of an air force unit followed his Tuesday visit to front-line troops and was his fifth reported public appearance in February.

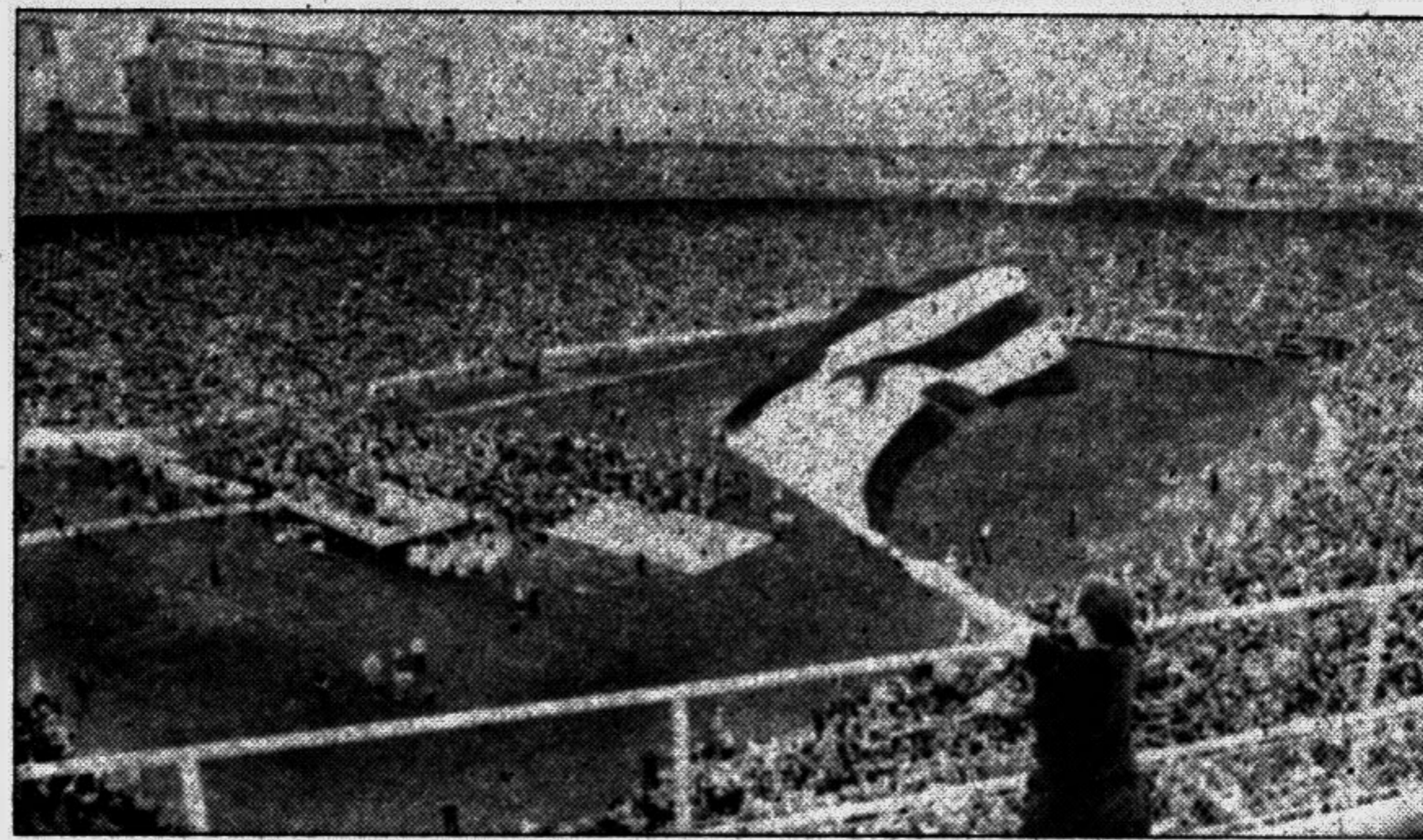
Purulia arms-drop incident CBI raids houses in 15 cities to prove Ananda Marg's linkage

NEW DELHI, Mar 3: India's premier investigation agency carried out nation-wide raids to collect evidence against a Hindu sect allegedly involved in the mysterious air-dropping of weapons over eastern India in December, reports AFP. Officials of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said today that more than 40 homes and offices of people linked to the Ananda Marg (Happy Path) sect were raided across 15 cities and "incriminating evidence" gathered. They said forged passports, hollow Buddha idols allegedly used for smuggling and other "damning" evidence such as sophisticated communications equipment and computer floppy disks were seized during the crackdown. More than 100 CBI personnel were involved in the drive which began before dawn and ended late Saturday, they said, a number of suspects were interrogated but no arrests made.

CBI joint director U N Biswas said in the eastern city of Calcutta, capital of West Bengal state where the sect is headquartered, that the drive had been "successful" and the identity of the recipients of the arms established. "The motive of the recipients was to arm themselves as well as to strengthen their finances through some deals," he said. "We have unearthed very significant documentary evidence from raids conducted in Purulia (the Marg headquarters)." According to Indian officials, an AN-26 (a Russia-made transport plane) showered at least 250 AK-56 assault rifles, pistols, rocket launchers, anti-tank grenades and 20,000 rounds of ammunition near Purulia on December 17. The plane, believed to have stopped off in the Thai resort of Phuket, was headed back for the Pakistan city of Karachi when it was forced to land by Indian Air Force fighters in Bombay on December 22. Six crewmen — Briton Peter Bleach and five Latvians — have been arrested by the CBI and charged with sedition, which carries the death sentence, and violations of India's arms act. A seventh crew member, a New Zealander travelling on a false passport as Kim Palgrave Davy — the name of a baby who died 34 years ago — escaped from airport police after the plane touched down in Bombay. The CBI has identified two Indians as the key suspects in the baffling case. — Satyanaryana Gowda who used the alias "Randy" and Daya Manikram Anand or "Deepak" — an Indian-born immigrant who acquired a Singaporean passport on September 27. Biswas said photographs of the suspects, including Davy, and incriminating documents had been found at the Ananda Marg headquarters. "These documents prove beyond doubt that the arms were meant to be dropped in West Bengal and the low-flying AN-26 made no mistake in carrying out its mission." Interpol has issued an alert for Davy, Gowda and Anand at the request of the CBI. The Ananda Marg, founded by Bengali Praful Ranjan Sarkar, attracted several thousand followers in India and overseas during the 1970s. The case caused a furore in the Indian parliament last week with the opposition claiming that the investigation needed to be speeded up and made more transparent. It remains unclear who the weapons were intended for and how a plane which originated in Karachi loaded with weapons was allowed into Indian airspace.

Heavy fighting in N Afghanistan

KABUL, Mar 3: Fighting has broken out in northern Afghanistan between two factions opposing President Burhanuddin Rabbani, with heavy casualties on both sides, travellers from the area said on Saturday, reports Reuter. The clashes in Baghlan town between the Hezb-I-Islami Party of former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and a group headed by northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum came as Kabul itself was hit by rockets which witnesses said killed four people. The fighting in Baghlan broke out after the murder of a Hezb commander, Haji Nawab, which his party blamed on Dostum's forces, according to the travellers. This is the first reported serious clash between the two factions since they joined forces in early 1994 in a bid to overthrow Rabbani's government.



Cuban-American Nery Danger waves a Cuban flag on Saturday as thousands of Cuban-Americans gathered for a rally (and ecumenical memorial religious service) at the Orange Bowl in Miami, Florida, to commemorate the four "Brothers to the Rescue" pilots who were shot down February 24 by Cuban Migs. — AFP/UNB photo

Clashes leave 8 dead in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Mar 3: Sporadic clashes between the security forces and the LTTE militants claimed eight lives in war-hit north-eastern Sri Lanka during the last 48 hours, says the Defence Ministry, reports PTI.

One soldier was killed at Kolombuthurai in Jaffna yesterday when an observation post was attacked by the LTTE militants, troops retaliated with small arm and mortar fire and two soldiers were wounded during the confrontation, a press release by the operational headquarters of the ministry said. In another confrontation at Chidipuram, also in Jaffna, two soldiers and three militants were killed and three soldiers were wounded when the Tigers launched an attack.

Three soldiers were wounded in action and were sent to the northern Pahlly Hospital, the release said. Yet another soldiers was killed in a minor exchange of fire at Periyavilan in Jaffna when his foot patrol was attacked by a group of militants.

Spaniards go to polls

MADRID, Mar 3: Spaniards went to the polls today in general elections expected to end more than 13 years of socialist rule with a win by the conservatives, reports AFP. The front runner to be the next prime minister is Jose Maria Aznar, the 43-year-old leader of the center right Popular Party.

Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez and his Spanish socialist Workers Party have taken a beating from a wave of corruption scandals, and polls say voters are also fed up with unemployment running at nearly 23 per cent and Basque separatist terrorism.

The 53-year-old Gonzalez, however, who is seeking a fourth term in office, has predicted an upset. Polling stations opened at 0800 GMT and were to stay open for 11 hours. A total of 32.5 million people out of a population of 39 million were registered to vote.

Pakistan won't allow fencing along border

Food convoys for Kashmiris trapped in snowfall, gunfire

AUTHMUQAM, Pakistan, Mar 3: A heavy snowfall held up army trucks packed with supplies for hungry Kashmiris trapped by relentless gunbattles between Pakistani and Indian troops in the isolated Neelum Valley, a military spokesman said, reports AP. Saturday's delay is hard on thousands of villagers who have been waiting three weeks for supplies. Isolated by weather, terrain and gunfire, the people of Neelum Valley are the victims of a protracted battle between India and Pakistan for control of the whole of Kashmir. Leaning over a stall of rotting vegetables, Ajaz Khan sifted through some fetid head of cauliflower in search of something edible. For nearly eight months the Valley's main road has been closed because of almost daily gun battles between Pakistani and Indian troops positioned along their disputes border. The only other access route to Authmuqam — a muddy, narrow bypass through Kashmir's treacherous mountains — is open sporadically during the winter months. Each day a few dozen men on foot risk a 12-kilometer (7-mile) journey along the Indian guarded Neelum Valley Road to fetch a few basic necessities: cooking oil, flour, sugar and salt. They can barely feed their families with what they return with carried either on their backs or in wheelbarrows. "The immediate problem isn't the gunfire of the mortars, it's the lack of supplies," said Dr Shabir Adho, the assistant district health officer for Authmuqam. The supplies that make it to Neelum Valley are often so expensive, they are out of reach of most villagers, whose family income is seldom more than \$10 per month. AFP adds: Pakistan will not tolerate attempts by India to erect a fence along the demarcation line separating Pakistani and Indian forces in the disputed state of Kashmir, the officials APP news agency reported today. Pakistani Foreign Minister Sardar Assef Ali was quoted today by AFP, as saying that Pakistan had taken "serious notice" of Indian attempts to build a fence along the Kashmiri line of control and would not let constructions of such a fence proceed "at any cost." Construction of a fence would violate UN resolutions concerning the demarcation line, he said.

Off the Record

Kangaroo Vasectomy Day

BANGKOK: To mark Australia's general elections on Saturday, a family planning clinic in Bangkok offered stuffed koalas and kangaroos to any man who showed up for a free non-scalpel vasectomy, reports AP. No Australians showed up for Kangaroo Vasectomy Day, but 45 Thai men took advantage of the offer from the clinic at the Population and Community Development Association. The association is run by Meechai Viravaidya, Thailand's celebrated family planning and AIDS activist. Mr Meechai, and all the doctors and nurses at the clinic, have studied in Australia at one time or another, an association spokesman said. The clinic performs 30 per cent of all vasectomies in Thailand, and 80 per cent of those performed in Bangkok. Australian beer and wines were also served.

Holding of hands — a sexual act!

CANBERRA: The headmaster of an Australian school has banned his students from holding hands, labelling it a sexual act, reports Reuter. Mick Sheehan, head of Sorell district high school in Hobart in the island state of Tasmania, said the act of holding hands was inappropriate on school grounds and threatened to suspend any student who defied the ban. The school council's president, Maria Mitsakis, said today that many students had complained about the decision and the council reviewed the move but found in favour of Sheehan. "The rule prohibiting physical displays of affection will stand," Mitsakis said in a statement. "In reaching this decision, council took into account wider community expectations of the school's role, the behavioural example that older students set for younger students and the pressure for conformity that often exist in adolescent culture." Tasmania is known for its conservatism and is the only one of Australia's six states where consenting men can be jailed for having sexual relations in their own homes.

Father indeed!

LAS VEGAS: A father has been charged with killing his baby daughter, who disappeared five years ago after he tried to trade her for new car, cash and a down payment on a new house, reports AP. James Francis Meegan, 39, was jailed without bond on a murder charge Friday, even though the body of little Francine Meegan has never been found. "We really don't believe that she is alive, but we're not any closer to locating her than we were before," said police Lt. Larry Spinosa. "We are hoping to get some leads which will eventually lead us to her body." Police, who would not discuss what evidence they have in the case, began questioning Meegan last month. Initially, Meegan and his wife, Lillian, had no explanation of what happened to the girl, but later said she had been taken from a casino parking lot. They never filed a report on the alleged kidnapping. Authorities were first alerted to Francine's disappearance in January when the former boyfriend of Lillian Meegan's sister came to them with his suspicions. Francine was last seen one month after she was returned to her natural parents by a couple who balked at paying any more than the \$30,000 — which included the new car, cash, a down payment for a house.



Italian stylist Rocco Barocco is flanked by German top model Claudia Schiffer (L) and Valerie Mazza (R) from Argentina at the end of the catwalk show for his Autumn/Winter '96/'97 ready-to-wear fashion collection. — AFP/UNB photo

China sends more jets to Fujian

TAIPEI, Mar 3: China has sent more fighter jets to its southeastern Fujian province, where aircraft activities have increased during good weather, a leading newspaper reported on Sunday, reports AP.

The China Times quoted unidentified military officials as saying that China sent 20 more jets to Fujian, some of them Jian-7 fighters, in addition to the 227 aircraft it had deployed in the province before February 18.

It has also moved a division of troops from Zhejiang province in eastern China to Fujian, but the total number of troops has not exceeded 150,000 personnel, the paper said.

Euro-Asia summit declares new era in regional relations

BANGKOK, Mar 3: Asia and Europe vowed at the weekend to work together for the greater good, putting aside difficult questions on subjects like human rights until later. With economics firmly in the driving seat and history a passenger, the 25-nation Euro-Asian summit that ended on Saturday declared a new era in regional relations, reports Reuter. Europe is bidding to invade Asia again — but this time with money and at Asia's bidding and under Asia's control. "It is obvious to all of us that new opportunities are opening up here. If we understand them properly this can be the beginning of a real partnership," German Chancellor Helmut Kohl told a news conference after the two-day meeting. The 15 European Union and 10 Asian leaders, their eyes fixed on each other's riches, tipped past issues such as human rights, labour laws, social development, democracy, nuclear disarmament and trade to produce a declaration focused on boosting business. "We consider ourselves to be regions that can mutually enrich each other," Kohl said. Europe weighed down by 18 million unemployed and "mature" economies that are failing to turn the tide, needs to plug into the economic vitality of the region, and Asia

needs guaranteed access to the giant European market. The degree of blatant and disguised market protection varies enormously between Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam — and the European Union will pursue them relentlessly as it looks to sow its seed money in the most fertile ground. The 10 Asian countries, already suspicious that the European Union might be using its trade laws to protect niche markets, will be watching like hawks to see that the bloc lives up to its Bangkok promises. The increasing consumer markets in Asia offer us great opportunities. Likewise the European Union's single market is an opportunity for the Asians," Kohl said. "We have assured them we will keep it open." The "feel good" factor pervading the summit paid handsome dividends in an array of side meetings on thorny issues such as East Timor and Hong Kong. Portugal offered Indonesia's President Suharto a deal on East Timor which he is considering, relations between Britain and China showed signs of thawing and South Korea and the European Union agreed on a significant new trade pact. The summit decided to re-

convene in 1998 in Britain and in 2001 in South Korea, with foreign, economics and possibly finance ministers' meeting in the interim, as well as gatherings of businessmen, officials and academics. It agreed that within six months details of an Asia-Europe investment promotion action plan would be drawn up. Malaysia pledged to coordinate a study into integrating a trans-Asian railway network linking up eventually with the European rail system. Well aware of their historical baggage, the leaders agreed it was vital to get their young to intermingling through cultural and student exchanges and seminars. Echoing the now popular refrain of creating jobs out of clean technology, the summit agreed to set up an Asia-Europe environment technology centre in Thailand to undertake research and coordinate activities. "The result has been extremely positive," European Trade Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan said after the meeting. "There have been pretty honest and frank discussions on all issues." The whole theme of the conference was economic openness and political acceptance of mutual responsibility. It is the launch of a process that is going to go quite far," he added.

Blasts in Imphal, one killed

IMPHAL, India, March 3: One person was killed and another seriously injured on Saturday when two separate bombs exploded in the Indian city of Imphal, the capital of northeast Manipur state, police said, reports AFP. "A powerful bomb went off near the Keisambong bridge area killing a man on the spot and critically injuring a woman," a police spokesman said. "A second bomb exploded within an hour of the first explosion at Meino Leirak, two kilometres (1.24 miles) away from Keisambong bridge but no one was injured, police said. "We suspect tribal guerrillas to be behind these explosions," spokesman said.