

BRIEFLY



Haitian President Rene Preval speaks to the press on Tuesday in Port-au-Prince before visiting the family of policewoman Marie-Christine Jeune killed by radical extremist March 18. — AFP/UNB photo

Liberian bandits kill 27 in Guinea: Armed bandits from Liberia killed 27 people and wounded seven in a cross-border attack on a refugee camp in southeastern Guinea at the weekend, the United Nations refugee agency said Tuesday. Reuter reports from Geneva.

It said the attackers were believed to belong to a Liberian faction known as Ulimo-k and it was considering moving its camps back from the border, deeper into Guinea.

Only 18 of the 27 people killed were Liberian refugees. The rest were local Guineans. Francis Kpatinde of the UN High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) told Reuters late in the day.

Peruvian PM resigns: Prime Minister Dante Cordova, who favoured slowing the nation's move toward a free-market economy, resigned Tuesday, prompting the rest of the Cabinet to offer their resignations as a matter of protocol. AP reports from Lima.

President Alberto Fujimori accepted the resignation of Cordova, but did not say if he would replace any other ministers. Cordova's resignation does not necessarily signify a crisis for the government. Peru does not have a parliamentary form of government and the prime minister's post is mostly ceremonial.

Iraqi official visits Moscow: An Iraqi presidential adviser was in Russia for consultations on technological aspects of UN-demanded disarmament of Iraq, the Foreign Ministry said Tuesday. AP reports from Moscow.

It said the official, Amer Saddy, met with Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk, Russia's special envoy for the Middle East, and other ministry representatives last week.

US to promote military help in Albania: US Secretary of defence William Perry said in Tirana, Albania that the US administration will promote its military cooperation with Albania by continuing to provide the country with military assistance. Xinhua reports from Tirana, Albania.

Perry, who arrived last Sunday to attend the meeting of defence ministers of southern Balkan countries, made the remarks at a press conference after meeting his Albanian counterpart Safet Zhulali.

Toll in Haiti ferry sinking 100: Scores of bodies were floating off Haiti's southwest peninsula days after a ferry went down in the Caribbean, drowning more than 100 people, a UN spokesman said. AP reports from Port Au Prince.

The boat went down in such a remote area that it took days for word to reach the capital. UN military mission members sent to investigate Monday drove until they ran out of road and then walked for 5 1-2 hours. UN spokesman Eric Falt said Tuesday.

12 militants detained in Egypt: Egyptian police said on Tuesday they had detained 12 members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the country's largest Islamic political organisation, for "threatening internal security". Reuter reports from Cairo.

An Interior Ministry statement said the men had been in contact with violent militant groups tried to infiltrate unions and universities and set up a brotherhood women's branch.

The men rounded up on Monday include 34 year-old engineer Abdul Ala Madri secretary general of the Islamist dominated engineers association and a founder of the centre party.

Floods claim 1 in Jakarta: Floods hit Jakarta, for the third time this year, killing one person and submerging thousands of homes, sources said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

A Jakarta police information officer, who declined to be named told AFP Wednesday that the floods hit mostly south and east Jakarta on Tuesday, but have "subsided considerably yesterday". A teenage boy in South Jakarta "who suffered from epilepsy" drowned in a stream Tuesday afternoon, the officer said.

French minister begins KSA tour: French Defence Minister Charles Millon began a visit to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to discuss military cooperation and arms sales, an official said. AFP reports from Riyadh.

Millon, making his second visit to the oil-rich Gulf kingdom since October, met his Saudi counterpart prince Sultan bin Abdel Aziz soon after he arrived to discuss "prospects for French-Saudi cooperation in the military domain".

Fire ruins Nat'l Park in Costa Rica: Costa Rica's largest fire in a decade destroyed more than 8,600 acres (3,500 hectares) of tropical forest in the Guanacaste National Park, firefighters said Tuesday. AP reports from San Jose.

The blaze broke out on Friday, but strong winds and the tropical climate frustrated hundreds of firefighters working to extinguish it over the weekend. By the time they brought the flames under control Monday, the fire had incinerated nearly one-tenth of the park in northern Costa Rica.

Rally demands resignation of Bulgarian govt

SOFIA, Apr 3: Some 10,000 Bulgarians called Tuesday for the resignation of the Socialist government, accusing it of secretly negotiating an alliance with Moscow.

The rally, called by the anti-Communist Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), was triggered by media reports quoting Russian President Boris Yeltsin as suggesting that Bulgaria join a newly formed customs union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The union envisages closer economic and political ties.

President Zhelev, a former dissident, has rejected the suggestion and demanded that Premier Zhan Videnov of the Socialists, the former Communist, state whether he has secretly discussed the issue with Yeltsin.

Two more ministers quit cabinet BJP calls for common candidate to defeat Rao

HYDERABAD, Apr 3: The BJP has decided not to field any candidate in Nandyal, from where Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao is contesting the Lok Sabha election, and appealed to all opposition parties to put up a common candidate who "has the best chance of defeating Rao," reports PTI.

Addressing a press conference here, the party general secretary M Venkaiah Naidu said there was need to avoid split in opposition votes by forging a broad understanding. "We admit we have limited strength there. After assessing the situation thoroughly, we will decide about whom to support" he said, adding the party would offer unconditional support to the "best suitable" opposition candidate.

The decision to this effect was taken by the party's central committee to ensure defeat of Rao who, he alleged,

symbolised "corrupt inefficient and unscrupulous regime."

Though BJP has not put across its proposals, of common candidate against Prime Minister, before other opposition parties, it was only making an appeal to the opposition in view of the "dire need to defeat Rao," he said.

Reuter adds India's main opposition party said on Tuesday a leading member's statement that it would test a nuclear device if it won coming general elections did not reject party policy.

The Asian Wall Street Journal on Tuesday quoted KN Govindacharya, general secretary of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as saying that the BJP, if elected, would declare India a nuclear power and test a nuclear device.

But a BJP spokesman said Govindacharya's comments on

a possible nuclear test did not reflect party policy.

"The policy is that we believe India should have its own nuclear deterrent. On testing, we have not taken a formal official stand. That will be decided at the appropriate time." Govindacharya could not be reached for comment. India tested an atomic bomb in 1974 but says it has chosen not to produce nuclear weapons.

The BJP has long declared that if it came to power it would develop a nuclear weapons system to meet perceived threats from neighbour China and Pakistan.

National security is an election issue in India, with both the ruling Congress Party and the BJP hoping to attract votes from the mostly Hindu population by taking a hard line against Islamic Pakistan.

Another Reuter report says Indian Commerce Minister P

Chidambaram, a leading proponent of economic reform, resigned today from Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's government. United News of India (UNI) said.

The news agency said Junior Industry Minister M Arunachalam also resigned.

Both Chidambaram and Arunachalam had vigorously opposed a decision by Rao's Congress Party last week to strike an alliance with the governing party in Tamil Nadu State, where both politicians have their parliamentary constituencies.

Earlier media reported that the two were expected to run in general elections starting after this month under the banner of a rebel Congress faction which has linked up with a Tamil Nadu opposition party.

UNI said Rao had forwarded their resignations to President Shankar Dayal Sharma for his expected approval.

Strike paralyses Karachi

KARACHI, Apr 3: Swathes of Pakistan's commercial capital of Karachi were paralysed today following a strike call by city's ethnic opposition, the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), witnesses said, reports AFP.

The strike was the fifth called this year by the MQM to protest at the killing of its militants by security officials. Six MQM activists have been killed since Saturday. The MQM represents Urdu-speaking migrants from India after the subcontinent was partitioned in 1947.

There was no violence ahead of the strike call and city police chief Shoab Suddle said an additional 1,250 men had been added to the 6,000-member force already deployed to counter any unrest.

About 1,000 paramilitary rangers are also assisting police in maintaining a heavy security presence on the streets, especially in the disturbed central and western districts, which were hardest hit by the strike call.

Iran blasts Peres' visit to Oman, Qatar

TEHRAN, Apr 3: Iran on Tuesday blasted a visit by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to Oman and Qatar, saying the Jewish state was trying to break Muslim unity, reports Reuter.

A foreign ministry spokesman quoted by state-run Tehran radio, said "the visits by the officials of the Zionist regime (Israel) aim to break Muslim unity and to infiltrate the ranks of Islamic and Arab states."

Peres on Tuesday ended a landmark two-day visit to Oman and Qatar — two Gulf Arab states with which Iran, the region's non Arab power, has "good ties."

The Iranian spokesman urged regional states not to allow Shimon Peres to justify the Zionist regime's crimes and its occupation of Palestine and other Islamic and Arab lands, the radio reported.

Rao's son to run for seat in Andhra Pradesh

HYDERABAD (India), Apr 3: India's ruling Congress Party has nominated a son of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and the wives of two ministers charged in a corruption scandal to contest general elections, party workers said today, reports Reuter.

They said P V Rajeshwar Rao, the second of Rao's three sons, would be running for office from Secunderabad in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

The Prime Minister's 49-year-old son is the general secretary of the state Congress wing. His elder brother served as Chief Minister in a previous Congress government from 1989 to 1994.



Russian soldiers check the documents of residents in Grozny on Monday. Fierce fighting raged between Russian forces and separatist guerrillas in southern Chechnya on Tuesday despite President Boris Yeltsin's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire. — AFP/UNB photo

Investigators begin surveying mass grave sites in Bosnia

VLAZENICA, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Apr 3: Rolling fields and forests of eastern Bosnia may hold evidence of Serb slaughter of thousands of Muslims. On Wednesday, investigators begin surveying for mass graves, reports AP.

The US Army is providing security and other services for the investigators, whose job it is to unlock the secrets buried in the thawing ground.

An estimated 7,000 Muslims have been missing since the Serb assault that captured the eastern Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica in July. Survivors say the Serbs systematically killed men and buried them in mass graves.

Investigators from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia planned their mission Tuesday in a meeting with US military officers at nearby Camp Lisa.

headquarters of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division in Vlasenica. The brigade is providing the security.

Suspected mass grave sites have been identified near both Srebrenica and Zvornik.

Srebrenica is about 20 kilometres (12 miles) to the southeast of Vlasenica, site of the US camp. Zvornik is about 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of Srebrenica.

Jean Rene Ruez said his six-member team of investigators would begin surveying sites on Wednesday, but declined to provide details.

Col. John Batiste, of Jaffrey, New Hampshire, commander of the 2nd Brigade, said the team would initially conduct reconnaissance of suspected grave sites.

Military sources who requested anonymity indicated

there would be no major digging for a week or so. Team members will first survey seven sites.

The war crimes tribunal has indicted Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander, Gen. Ratko Mladic, for their alleged role in the massacres.

Two Bosnian Serb soldiers suspected of taking part have been extradited from Serbia to the tribunal at The Hague.

Batiste said he would provide a quick reaction force of less than 100 troops, eight Bradley fighting vehicles, artillery, and attack helicopters for security.

Asked if he expected any trouble from the Serbs, in whose territory the sites lie, Batiste said he had assurance of support from the Bosnian Serb army and local police.



Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad (R) welcomes Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the Damascus International Airport on Tuesday. Mubarak flew into Damascus on a surprise visit for talks on Middle East peace with the Syrian President. — AFP/UNB photo

UN relief agency urges donors to help Iraqis

BAGHDAD, Apr 3: A UN relief agency said on Tuesday its food supplies in Iraq were low and it urged donor countries to come to the aid of destitute and needy Iraqis suffering under UN trade sanctions, reports Reuter.

The World Food Programme (WFP) said its supplies would hardly meet needs for the coming two months and so far it had received no confirmed pledges of new shipments.

Luciolo Ramirez, WFP's representative in Iraq, said about one million Iraqis were almost totally dependent on UN food rations and he feared for their well-being if their distribution were interrupted.

Our programme ended on March 31. What we have left does not exceed 20,000 tonnes of food, Ramirez told Reuters.

He said WFP would soon launch an appeal for about 162 million dollars to help Iraqis in urgent need of food assistance.

These, he said, included internationally displaced people, refugees destitute families malnourished children under five, families covered by Iraq's meagre social security benefits, orphanages and hospitals. UN sanctions imposed on

Iraq for invading Kuwait in 1990 prevent all trade with Iraq apart from goods of a humanitarian nature. The embargo also includes a ban on oil exports barring Iraq from getting the hard cash needed to pay for urgent needs.

Iraq UN Coordinator Mohammed Zejjari left Baghdad for New York on Tuesday to lobby for 400 million dollars to cover urgent food and medical assistance to Iraq.

But UN relief officials in Baghdad said the outlook was bleak in view of the donor apathy.

Ramirez said he got only 41 per cent of the 61 million dollar he asked for to meet needs for the six months ending March 31.

The officials said the only sensible solution to the precarious food supply situation was to enable Iraq, a potentially rich country, to import foods to meet requirements.

Iraqi and UN negotiators are to meet again in New York on April 8 to try to solve issues hindering implementation of a UN offer allowing Iraq partial oil sales worth 2 billion dollars in six months in exchange for urgent humanitarian needs.

'Real negotiations' with Russia only after troops withdrawal: Dudayev

MOSCOW, Apr 3: Chechen separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev said Tuesday that "real negotiations" with the Russian authorities could take place only after Russian troops had withdrawn from Chechnya, reports AFP.

Dudayev, who was speaking in an interview with the Azerbaijan news agency Turkh, did not explicitly reject President Boris Yeltsin's offer Sunday to launch peace talks through intermediaries.

However, he stressed that "real negotiations can only take place once military operations have been halted and after Russian troops have withdrawn from the territory of the Chechen republic."

Fierce fighting raged be-

tween Russian forces and Dudayev's guerrillas in southern Chechnya on Tuesday.

Yeltsin said Moscow was ready to hold peace talks with Dudayev through intermediaries, presenting his peace plan for the breakaway north Caucasus republic Sunday.

However, Yeltsin also said "acts of terrorism" would meet with "an adequate response" from the Russian forces, which have been battling the rebels since December 1994 in a war that has cost more than 30,000 lives.

Yeltsin faces a tough challenge in the June presidential elections from Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, who is ahead in opinion poll.

Off the Record

Incentives for more than three!

TOKYO: The small southwestern Japanese town of Kyokoshi which is suffering a diminishing younger population has announced incentives for couples who have more than three children. Kyodo news agency said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Couples living in the farming village on Kyushu island will be paid 500,000 yen (4,675 dollars) if they produce a fourth child the agency said.

Kyokoshi has a population of 5,500 and its annual birthrate has declined from about 200 new babies a year since the 1950s to about 50 in recent years, the report said.

Twenty-two per cent of village residents were over 65 years old, compared to the national average of 15 per cent, it added.

To be eligible for the incentive payout, couples must have lived in the villages for at least a year. If a couple had left the village but moved back, it could be eligible for the money in a year's time.

Dogs may be better friends than man realises

CHICAGO: Dogs may be better friends than man realises, scientists reported on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

People confined to wheelchairs by chronic disease and injury showed significant gains in self system, feelings of control and psychological well being after they were given dogs to help them get around, the report said.

So-called service dogs can open doors, turn on switches, pull a person up to a sitting position, help someone in and out of a bath or pool, pick up objects, pull wheelchairs, carry parcels and drag a person to safety in an emergency.

Dogs are also cheaper than hired help, added the study from the state university of New York at Buffalo and the University of California at Santa Barbara published in this week's journal of the American Medical Association.

"In times of heated political debate regarding health care costs, the commensurate of one of our participants, which lives with the consequences of spinal cord injury, provides an 'insight': 'With my dog I feel safe and capable and I am no longer afraid of the future.'"

100m yr old dinosaur egg for auction

VIENNA: A 100-million-year-old dinosaur egg took centre stage in an eastern charity sale at the world's second-oldest auction house on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Collectors from Japan and Switzerland were among the bidders at Vienna's historic Dorotheum. But the petrified egg was eventually sold to Vienna newspaper publisher Hans Dichand, raising 50,000 schillings (4,800 dollar) for children's cancer research.

There was a lot of demand from abroad. We are very happy with the price, said Dorotheum spokeswoman Inge Fiegl. The dinosaur egg was one of the oldest objects to be auctioned by the Dorotheum.

The 17-by-14 cm (6.6 by 5.5 inch) egg, which should have hatched a tarbosaurus was found early this century in China's Henan province alongside the skeleton of an adult dinosaur.

Taiwan election inspires democracy-seeking neighbours

TAIPEI, Apr 3: As preparations are made to inaugurate Taiwan's first fully elected leader, the question reverberates around the Chinese-speaking world — why not us, too?, reports AP.

"Voting, elections — these are an aspect of modernising," says Shih Ming-teh, whose opposition party was walloped in the polls. "It's impossible to say they are exclusive of Chinese culture."

Shih spent more than 25 years as a political prisoner for opposing an authoritarian government.

The time was not wasted, he says, because without the sacrifices of dissenters Taiwan would not have universal suffrage and self-determination today.

Such goals echo through other Chinese societies as well. "It is very encouraging for

democratic development," said lawmaker Chee Soon Juan, secretary general of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party.

Although Singapore holds parliamentary elections, the ruling party holds more than 90 per cent of the seats and maintains that social discipline, not Western-style democracy and human rights, bring stability and economic growth.

While Taiwan's example is unlikely to speed change among its neighbours, it provides powerful ammunition to exponents of democracy.

In Hong Kong, the Taiwan experience is held up as a model for life after China takes over next year.

"Taiwan elections reveal that a top-down appointment system is no longer accept-

able," the Sing Tao Daily said. The elections will encourage Hong Kong to resist Beijing's plan to fill the legislature and chief executive's post with appointees, the paper said.

Since Taiwan lifted martial law in 1987, two legislatures have been elected and the constitution amended to allow the election by universal suffrage that swept Lee Teng-hui back into office on March 23.

Even in China, where a dissident opinion can result in a jail term, a government spokesman had no argument with Taiwan's election.

"The Taiwanese people should be able to choose their own leaders," Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang said in Beijing.

The only condition he cited was that "they should not think that their leaders are anything more than local leader of a

part of China."

In one sense, China itself participated in Taiwan's election. Its menacing war games were designed to sway voters away from Lee, whom Beijing claims is bent on making Taiwan independent and dumping the doctrine that Taiwan and China are one country.

In Hong Kong too, Chinese officials gave behind-the-scenes backing to their favoured candidates in the British colony's legislative election in September — even though China has vowed to disband the legislature and appoint its replacement in 1997.

The tactics have been less than successful. The war games probably boosted Lee's vote, while in Hong Kong, democrats opposed to Chinese policy won handily.

China has never freely chosen a leader, and elections are

little more than exercises in approving the Communist Party's appointees.

Xinhua, China's official news agency, reported that Lee won the election but did not mention the world "democracy" or tell readers that Taiwan elected its president by universal suffrage.

Strapping on his in-line roller skates in the shadow of a mammoth marble monument to Taiwan's former military leader, Chiang Kai-shek, 26-year-old club manager Vegas Wang dismissed the idea that elections are not the Chinese way.

"Nonsense," he said. "That may once have been true, but it is also true that cultures change."

Few people have paid more for the privilege of the vote than Shih.

Belarussians protest union with Russia

MINSK, Apr 3: Up to 20,000 Belarussians massed in the centre of Minsk on Tuesday to vent their fury at a pact on integration with Russia signed in the Kremlin earlier by their hardline President and Kremlin leader Boris Yeltsin, reports Reuter.

The protesters, prevented from approaching the parliament by cordons of police, defied a ban on public gatherings by shouting "long live Belarus"

AP from Moscow adds: The new union formed by Russia and Belarus will link the two countries' political systems and economies while stopping short of creating a single state.

President Boris Yeltsin hopes it will also give his candidacy a boost.