

BRIEFLY

La France et les mondes arabe



French President Jacques Chirac calls on Israel to respect its agreements with the Palestinians as he announces a 'revitalised Grand Arab Policy' for France stressing strong links with Arab nations at an address at Cairo University on Monday.

— AFP/UNB photo

BBC Arab service to end: The BBC's Arabic language television service faces axing unless it can replace its Saudi partner, a statement said Monday. AP reports from London.

The termination comes three months after the Saudis began censoring BBC reports about British government attempts to deport a Saudi dissident, and a week after a scathing BBC documentary examining reports of human rights abuses in the kingdom was broadcast uncensored on the channel. If the service, established in 1994 by the British Broadcasting Corp. and Orbit Satellite Television, goes under, 250 people could lose jobs.

Li Peng leaves for France: Chinese Premier Li Peng left Beijing yesterday for an official visit to France, AFP reports from Beijing.

Li was accompanied by his wife, Zhu Lin, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and Wu Yi, the Foreign Trade Minister, the official Xinhua agency said. He is the first Chinese Premier to visit France for 12 years.

Li will go to Paris, where he will have talks with French Prime Minister Alain Juppe and President Jacques Chirac, then go to the southwest city of Toulouse to visit the headquarters of Airbus industries.

3 US airmen found dead in Japan: Three US airmen were found dead at a campsite in northern Japan on Monday, apparently killed by carbon monoxide poison from a gas stove inside their tent, Japanese police said Tuesday, AP reports from Tokyo.

The dead were identified as Master Sgt. George A. MacRae, Airman 1st Class Jason M. Buck and Airman 1st Class Berkley S. Cobb, all of Misawa Air Base, the US Air Force said in a release.

Russia launches foreign sat: Russia's space center launched its first foreign commercial satellite Tuesday as part of a Russian American joint venture, AP reports from Moscow.

A Russian Proton booster rocket carrying an American-made Astra-1F communications satellite blasted off at 3:09 am (2309 GMT Monday) from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.

The launch of the satellite, belonging to the European aerospace company SES, had been postponed from March 28 after engineers found a leak in its propulsion system.

4 Thai fishermen jailed in Malaysia: Four Thai fishermen were sent to jail Tuesday for six months when they could not pay fines for fishing illegally in Malaysian waters, news agency reported, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The four were aboard the boat Charoen Samut 1, which was seized by a patrol boat Sunday off the coast of Kuala Trengganu, Bernama news agency reported. A 17-year-old fisherman on the boat was warned and ordered deported by Magistrate Sanusi Yahya in Kuala Trengganu, 300 kilometers (185 miles) northeast of Kuala Lumpur.

3 walls as wall collapses in Jakarta: The old concrete wall of a railway station collapsed and crushed two women and a baby girl to death, Antara news agency reported Tuesday. AP says from Jakarta.

Six other people were injured when the 3-meter (10-foot) high wall collapsed Monday in a central Jakarta station, Antara said. The cause of the collapse was being investigated, it said.

US actor Ben Johnson dies: Ben Johnson, a champion rodeo performer who appeared in numerous Westerns and won a best supporting actor Oscar for 'The Last Picture Show' in 1971, died Monday of an apparent heart attack, AP reports from Mesa.

Johnson, 77, collapsed while visiting his mother at Leisure World, a suburban Phoenix retirement community where the both lived.

'He asked a lady to fix him some breakfast and he went into the bathroom and that's where he collapsed,' said Buster Brown, an assistant to Johnson.

China bars import of 'Babe': Chinese censors have barred the importation of 'Babe' for fear the film about a pig becoming a shepherd dog would hurt the local movie industry, the Los Angeles Times said. AFP reports from Los Angeles.

The Australian movie was on a list of 10 foreign films that had been proposed for distribution in China this year, under the terms of an unofficial quota system for foreign movies. 'Apollo 13' and the latest James Bond 'Golden Eye' were also recently rejected.

Vietnamese PM to visit Phnom Penh: Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet is to arrive in Phnom Penh Wednesday to help resolve a festering border dispute between the two countries, AP reports from Phnom Penh.

Leading a 16-member delegation, he is scheduled to meet with King Norodom Sihanouk, the country's two co-prime ministers and other senior officials during the one-day visit, Foreign Affairs spokesman Hor Sothom said Tuesday. One of the co-prime ministers, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, recently accused Vietnam of sending its villagers to plant rice inside Cambodia's border province of Svay Rieng.

Fire claims 9 in Melbourne: Nine patients at a residence for the intellectually disabled died in a fire late Monday night, officials said, AP reports from Melbourne.

Police said the fire began shortly before midnight at the New Residential Services, known commonly as Kew Cottages. Investigators were prevented by the heat from immediately trying to determine the cause of the fire and will try again later Tuesday.

Polish President visits Russia: Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski started his first official visit to Russia on Monday by laying a wreath to honour thousands of Polish officers shot by the Soviets in the Katyn forest during World War II, AP reports from Moscow.

Kwasniewski said he would seek compensation for Polish victims of Stalinist repressions when he meets in Moscow with President Boris Yeltsin, Russian television reported.

Moscow winter claims 600 this yr: Six hundred people froze to death in Moscow this winter and two others became the first for five years to be killed by falling icicles, Interfax News Agency said on Monday. Reuter reports from Moscow.

The agency quoted city authorities as saying all the victims of the cold, 120 of them women, had been drinking. They died between November 17 and April 7.

International

Lankan troops to intensify offensive against Tigers

TAIPEI, Apr 9: A US senator who met the leaders of Taiwan and China said Tuesday they should mend fences by reopening talks on economic ties, reports AP.

Wyoming Republican Craig Thomas, chairman of the US Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, arrived Monday from Beijing, where he met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin. On Tuesday, he conferred with Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui.

He said he passed on to Lee a remark by Jiang that 'the rain has passed' — a reference to the latest bout of tension between Taiwan and China.

Beijing objected to Lee seeking separate international status for Taiwan, which China claims as a renegade province.

After 18 days of menacing Chinese war games last month, both sides have expressed a desire to resume dialogue, but neither has moved to break the deadlock.

UN begins probe into Wiwa's execution

PORT HARCOURT, Nigeria, Apr 9: The United Nations has begun investigating the executions of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other minority rights activists which turned Nigeria into an international pariah, reports Reuter.

A four-man UN fact-finding mission flew into Port Harcourt on Monday, capital of the south-eastern Rivers state of which Ogoniland is a part, and urged its people to talk freely.

At a meeting with 14 elders and chiefs the mission told Ogoni people that all evidence would be treated in outmost confidence, the news agency of Nigeria reported.

Tight security surrounded the hotel where the team was staying. The Rivers state government has warned it would deal firmly with any unrest that might occur during the UN mission's trip to Ogoniland.

No incidents have been reported but Ogoni minority rights activists said security forces had arrested 19 people on Sunday, a charge local authorities denied.

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he would end the ethnic war before the traditional new year on April 14, have been interpreted as heralding an onslaught against the Tigers.

The military has poured troops into northern bases, residents have said.

Tamil Tiger guerrillas were withdrawing arms dumps and moving civilian supporters from the Jaffna Peninsula ahead of the imminent army offensive, residents said on Monday.

But he said he was unable to reveal details of planned offensives for security reasons.

Military officials have said they were planning a major offensive against Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels in the eastern half of the Jaffna Peninsula, the guerrilla's northern stronghold.

Last week, the military said it was asking civilians to stay away from rebel camps as these were likely to come under artillery or air attack without notice.

The announcement, as well as a remark by Ratwatte that

bribery commissioner on charges of bribery and corruption.

Wanasinghe had failed to explain how he earned 7.5 million rupees (140,187 dollars) when declaring his assets from September 3, 1993 to September 30, 1994, the time he served as defence secretary.

The bribery commissioner, Nelum Gamage, said in the indictment in the High Court that the 7.5 million rupees in cash and other assets had been acquired 'by way of bribes or by turning into cash material received as bribes.'

Wanasinghe, a four star general, had headed the powerful Joint Operations Command (similar to the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff) until 1993. He was army chief in 1990-91.



A Bosnian soldier and government officials recover parts of human remains on the former

frontline in Sarajevo's suburb of Stup on Monday. Local authorities are intensifying their

search for missing people in this area now that the Bosnian Serb soldiers have withdrawn

— AFP/UNB photo

Ex-Russian dissidents for trial against world communism

MOSCOW, Apr 9: Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn and other former Soviet dissidents seek to organise an international trial against world Communism and the ex-Soviet Communist Party, an activist said Monday.

Publisher Alexander Glezner told Interfax news agency such a trial could be held in Moscow or abroad, depending on 'political reasons.'

The commission has set itself the task of collecting and systematising literary works and various documents on crimes against humanity committed by the regimes of red totalitarianism, Glezner said.

He said the planned commission would also collect testimony from former prisoners of Soviet labour camps and seek to prove that the revived Communist Party of Russia is the successor and heir to Soviet Communists.

The idea is also backed by Solzhenitsyn, who returned to Russia after a long exile in the United States, and the Ukraine-based Congress of Ukrainian Political Prisoners, according to activists in Moscow familiar with the is-

sue.

However, Solzhenitsyn be-

lieves a trial would demand se-

rious preparatory work and take a long time to organise.

Glezner also indicated the

idea was far from implementa-

tion.

'All material prepared by

the commission will be handed

over to a group of lawyers from

Russia and other countries.

When the lawyers finish their

work, the time of the interna-

tional trial will come,' he said.

The former Soviet Com-

unist Party already faced one

trial in Fuzia since the 1991

Soviet collapse.

In that trial, which ended

in 1993, the country's Constitu-

tional Court upheld the legali-

ty of President Boris Yeltsin's

order banning the Soviet party

yet cleared the way for Com-

munist to organise a new

movement on the territory of

Russia.

'Whoever wishes to act as

mediator should guarantee that

any agreement which is

reached is observed, no matter