

BRIEFLY



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.

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 Saudi partners 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 campground 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 Berkeley 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, a 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 killed 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 two 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 Sothun 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 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, Reuters 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.

US senator urges China, Taiwan to mend fences

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 envenomed 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 execution of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other minority right activists which turned Nigeria into an international pariah, reports Reuters.

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 utmost 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.

Arafat terms Saudi visit as 'successful'

GAZA CITY, Apr 9: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, returning Monday from talks in Saudi Arabia, said his leaders promised him they would help the Palestinian economy, crippled by a six week Israeli military closure, reports AFP.

The visit was agreeable, positive and successful, Arafat told reporters. He did not say whether the Saudis had pledged a specific sum of money for the Palestinian areas or made general offers of assistance.

"We presented our position about the results of the siege and the strictures and, God willing they promised us good things," he said.

Arafat met with Crown Prince Abdullah ibn Abdel Aziz, Defence Minister Sultan bin Abdel Aziz and Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal in Riyadh on Sunday.

The closure was imposed on February 25 at the start of a suicide bombing campaign in Israel by Islamic militants that left 62 people dead.

Customs' dry port gutted in central Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Apr 9: A large fire swept through two buildings in a customs dry port in central Pakistan, destroying merchandise worth millions of dollars, state-run media reported Tuesday, says AP.

The fire late Monday broke out when a chemical container spilled onto a heap of scrap plastic in the Mughalpura Dry Port in Pakistan's central city of Lahore. The Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

The exact cost of the damages was not available as investigators had not yet been able to sift through the debris.

There was no loss of life or injuries in the fire, which took most of the city's firefighters all night to bring under control.

Politicians in India throng to astrologers ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, Apr 9: With elections around the corner, Indian politicians armed with their horoscopes are making a beeline for astrologers to learn what the planets and stars hold for them. It is boom time for the capital's soothsayers, reports AFP.

"Yes, a lot of politicians visit us around election time, said Raj Baldev Swamy, a leading astrologer here. But he refused to say how many clients he was getting since the polls were announced last month.

Some astrologers have even descended from other parts of India and move into hotels, eager to make a quick fortune. A few have taken out advertisements in newspapers, boasting of their secret occult powers.

If the astrologers are to be believed, the future of India and its large crop of politicians is being determined by the fluctuating positions of the

Lankan troops to intensify offensive against Tigers

COLOMBO, Apr 9: Military operations against Tamil Tiger guerrillas in northern Sri Lanka will be intensified shortly, Deputy Defence Minister Anura Kumara Ratwatte told Parliament today, reports Reuters.

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

he would end the ethnic war before the traditional new year on April 14, have been interpreted as heralding an on-slaught 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 the rebels' clandestine radio, Voice of Tigers, said on Friday it believed the military had postponed the offensive due to heavy casualties in the past few months.

AP adds: Sri Lanka's former military chief, Gen. Hamilton Wanasinghe, was indicted Tuesday by the country's

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 from this frontline earlier this year.

Ex-Russian dissidents for trial against world communism

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

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

Glezer, a prominent art collector and former emigre, has secured the agreement of well-known emigrant and Russian dissidents and anti-Communists to form a commission that would look into the possibility of holding such a trial.

Speaking to Interfax, he mentioned Vladimir Bukovsky of Britain, Leonid Plyushch and philosopher Andre Glucksmann of France, poet Yuri Khabanovsky of Russia, journal-

ist and author Eduard Kuznetsov of Israel, and sculptor Ernst Neizvestny of the United States.

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, Glezer 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 Communism.

The idea also is 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 believes a trial would demand serious preparatory work and take a long time to organise.

Glezer also indicated the idea was far from implementation.

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 international trial will come, he said. The former Soviet Communist Party already faced one trial in Russia since the Soviet collapse.

In that trial, which ended in 1993, the country's Constitutional Court upheld the legality of President Boris Yeltsin's order banning the Soviet party yet cleared the way for Communists to organise a new movement on the territory of Russia.



Former United States President George Bush (R) shakes hands with Chinese President Jiang Zemin as the two meet in Beijing on Tuesday. Bush, a one time US Ambassador to Beijing is in the Chinese capital as the guest of the China International Trust and Investment Corporation.

Off the Record

Girls do well to please others!

NEW YORK: Despite the popular image of teen-age girls obsessed with boys — talking about boys, thinking about boys, calling boys, chasing boys, crying over boys — what they are really concerned about is school, according to a survey.

About three-quarters of girls now in school say their academic progress is what they worry about most, the survey said.

But an analysis of the survey said that while girls do well in school, they often do so only in an effort to please others.

"I think it's important to point that out, because there is a lot of confusion there," said Marie Wilson, president of the Ms. Foundation for Women. They keep getting better grades while we say they have low self-esteem.

The survey of 500 girls and 500 boys, by EDK Associates in New York, was commissioned by the foundation and Seventeen magazine.

The girls' motivation to please others shows up again and again in the survey analysis. When it comes to having sex, teen-age girls often do so because boys want them to.

Nearly three-quarters of girls, 73 per cent, and about half the boys, 53 per cent, cited sexual pressure girls receive from their boyfriends as the reason why girls have sex.

Of the 67 per cent of girls who reported having had sex, more than two-thirds, about 81 per cent, said they later regretted it.

Despite the number who are sexually active, girls are also concerned about their reputation, according to the survey. Almost half worried about being known as easy.

"Girls are very confused about where they should draw the line," Miller said. "Boys expect and even demand sex, but girls are judged harshly if they acquiesce. It's a no-win situation for girls."

Rally for legalisation of marijuana

ANN ARBOR, Michigan: Signs read "Hemp Hemp Hooray" and "Pot is Fun," and the aroma of marijuana smoke hung over a crowd of more than 5,000 people at the 25th annual Hash Bash to promote marijuana legalisation, reports AP.

"Everything's cool. It's a beautiful day. Everyone's getting high," said John Sinclair, a long-time Ann Arbor marijuana activist.

The rally at the University of Michigan featured speakers who tried to differentiate marijuana from other drugs and alcohol, with some focusing on its use to relieve conditions such as arthritis pain.

"You can use it for a lot of different purposes. It comes from the ground. God made it and we're going to smoke it," said 17-year-old Velvet France of Canton.

Police said 63 people were arrested at Saturday's rally on various charges, down from the nearly 100 arrested last year. Most were accused of possession of a controlled substance, a misdemeanor that carries a maximum sentence of one year in prison and/or a \$2,000 fine.

Dudayev's proposal rejected Yeltsin to discuss peace plan with top officials

MOSCOW, Apr 9: Chechens rallied on Monday for peace, independence and the withdrawal of Russian troops and a minister said President Boris Yeltsin would meet top officials on Wednesday to discuss his plan to end the conflict there, reports Reuters.

Rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev, shown on NTV commercial television, said he was ready to talk about peace, but wanted to be sure that mediators could guarantee a deal was implemented.

Whoever wishes to act as mediator should guarantee that any agreement which is reached is observed, no matter what that may be, Dudayev said.

Yeltsin, stepping back from earlier deals offered in a peace plan unveiled on March 31 to talk to Dudayev's forces through intermediaries.

Nationalities Minister Vyacheslav Mikhailov said on Monday Yeltsin would meet members of a newly-appointed Chechnya.

Commission and it at some changes might be made to the plan, which has been marred by fighting. Mikhailov became the first Russian official to say that Russian forces held some responsibility for the fighting, which has included air attacks on Chechen villages.

The correspondent reported that bombing and shelling was continuing in Chechnya.

AFP adds from London: Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin rejected Monday's latest proposals for peace talks by Chechen rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev, Interfax news agency reported.

US may evacuate Americans 15,000 Liberians seek refuge at US Embassy to escape fighting

MONROVIA, Apr 9: At least 15,000 civilians have fled to a US Embassy compound, seeking refuge from three days of shelling and gunfire in the capital. The Clinton administration is considering evacuating Americans from Liberia as early as Tuesday, reports AP.

The fighting between government troops and warring rebel factions that broke out Saturday in Monrovia is the worst in three years.

We hear rocket-propelled grenades, fire, mortar fire, heavy-arms fire," Dudley Sims, a spokesman for the US Embassy, said by telephone. "It's pretty bad."

The conflict between seven rebel factions fighting mainly along ethnic lines has killed more than 150,000 people and left at least half the country's 2.3 million residents homeless in the six-year civil war.

The fighting subsided overnight, but the warring parties were expected to regroup and resume their clashes with sunrise Tuesday.

"When it gets dark here, not much takes place because there's hardly any electricity," said Sims. "Things will start getting hot again."

US officials aid 224 foreigners, including the Egyptian ambassador, were holed up at the embassy Monday night. United Nations and US officials considered the evacuation of foreign nationals as worries about an impending food shortage grew.

A peace accord was supposed to clear the way for elections this year but renewed unrest in the country, founded in 1847 by freed American slaves, has caused the collapse of civil order.

US owes \$ 1.5b to world body UN on the brink of financial disaster: Ghali

NEW YORK, Apr 9: The United Nations "is on the brink of financial disaster" and the United States must pay 1.5 billion dollar it owes the world body, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali wrote in an opinion piece published on Monday, reports Reuters.

"Americans need to know what's going on, because their country took the lead in creating the organisation, and its delinquency in paying arrears is threatening it," Boutros-Ghali wrote in the New York Times.

He said the UN financial crisis was threatening operations such as missions to foster democracy in Haiti and promote human rights in Guatemala.

"Something has to give," he wrote. "If the Haiti and Guatemala operations are to go forward, other obligations must be scaled back. The

members must make that hard call. If they don't, we will run out of money before long."

Boutros-Ghali said he had streamlined the organisation over the past four years and planned either to leave unfilled or cut, 1,000 positions in the secretariat, the UN administrative body, as part of his proposed 2.5 billion dollars budget for the 1996-97 fiscal years.

The United Nations has been borrowing from peace-keeping budgets to meet operating expenses, he said. "Incredibly, our cash on hand is under 100 million dollars... The financial crisis has not been made any easier by the refusal of many to pay dues."

The United States and Russian Federation dominate the past-due list, he wrote.