

US President Bill Clinton (R) speaks to his wife Hillary (L) during the presidential Awards for Excellence in Microenterprise Development at the White House in Washington Thursday. The awards reflect an ongoing commitment by Clinton to advance the role of microenterprise, or companies of five or fewer employees, in the US - AFP/UNB photo economy.

Yeltsin in good health': Russian President Boris Yeltsin is in good enough health to work on government decisions, and "he is doing so," Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said in Davos Thursday, AFP reports from Davos, Switzerland.

"If there had been any doubts or difficulties, I would not have come to Davos," he told reporters at the World Economic Forum. Yeltsin went to the Kremlin earlier Thursday for the third time in just over a week, the Presidential Press Service in Moscow told Russia's Itar-Tass news agency.

Fergie in India for treatment: The Duchess of York is on her first visit to India to "battle the stress of celebrity", the Times of India said Friday, AFP reports from New Delhi

Sarah Ferguson was staying in a hotel in the southern city of Bangalore to be treated by Isaac Mathai, a practitioner of "holistic" therapy who has treated former Beatle George Harrison and rock stars Tina Turner and Sting. Mathai said he had earlier treated the duchess in Britain for about a total of 70 hours in the past eight months.

Albania to reimburse people's savings:
Albania's Parliament voted unanimously Thursday to

reimburse people who lost their life savings in collapsed savings schemes, AFP reports from Tirana.

The collapse of the schemes has led to a series of riots in the capital and other cities.

Lanka upgrading telecom network:
Sri Lanka is laying cables under the sea at a cost of two million dollars to improve its telecommunication network with 39 countries, an official said Friday, AP reports from Colombo.

The overall upgrading cost will be 15 million dollars. The project is being jointly handled by US-based TNT company, Alcatel of France and Fujitsu of Japan, said A Maniccavasagar.

Iraqi spiritual leader dies: The spiritual leader of Iraqi Kurdish Muslims. Sheikh Osman, died in an Istanbul Hospital on Thursday after a long Illness, an Iraqi Kurdish group announced, He was 105. AFP reports from

Ankara. Sheikh Osman was born in Biara in northern Iraq and was a member of a prominent religious family, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) said in a statement. A philosopher, poet and physician, Sheikh Osman was one of the leaders of the Nagishbandi sect, which has millions of followers from India to Turkey.

Tribal rebels kill 7 in Tripura: Unidentified tribal militants killed seven persons, injured several others and set on fire houses at Taidu Bazar under Taidu Police station in south Tripura district in the early hours

According to preliminary reports received in Agartala, the militants attacked the villagers killing six persons on the spot. One person died on the way to hospital, the reports said. The

militants also set ablaze several houses, the reports added. Troops patrol Indonesian town after riot

JAKARTA, Jan 31: Hundreds of troops Friday enforced a tense calm in an Indonesian town where thousands of Muslims went on the rampage against ethnic Chinese ransacking and burning churches, homes, shops and cars, reports

yesterday, PTI reports from Agartala.

Rengasdengklok town's Chinese people, who are mostly traders, kept their shops closed and cleared rubble from their damaged houses and shops, said residents contacted by telephone.

There were no casualties in the violence Thursday.

"The situation is still tense. Troops were seen everywhere. Only shops belonging to Muslims are open, said one resident, speaking on condition of anonymity. The town is 50 kilometres (30 miles) east of Jakarta.

Antara news agency said the trouble began after a quarrel between a Chinese woman, identified as Go Wie, and a group of Muslim youths, who the woman said were making too much noise while waking up Muslim residents for a predawn meal, customary during the Islamic fasting month that began January 9. Police earlier reported that

the violence was sparked when a Chinese trader complained he was being disturbed by loud evening prayers at a mosque. The two versions could not be immediately reconciled.

Antara quoted West Java police chief Maj. Gen. Nana Permana as saying 76 houses and 72 shops were destroyed. Another 19 cars were damaged and seven other vehicles burned. He did not say how much of the damaged property belonged to Chinese.

The rioters also damaged three churches and burned another. Two Buddhist monasteries were damaged and burned, Permana said. No arrests have been made but 25 people are being questioned, he said.

During the riot, some residents put up signs saying "Muslim property" on the walls of their shops or homes.

Meanwhile, about 5,000 workers at a textile factory, demanding higher salaries and immediate payment of bonuses, burned two cars and damaged some facilities in Sumedang district Friday, police said.

The situation is under control, said a police officer contacted by telephone. The area is 210 kilometres (130 miles) southeast of Jakarta.

US State Department report

China, 6 other Asian states committed human rights abuses last year

WASHINGTON, Jan 31: In addition to China, the region's most prominent violator, other Asian countries committed serious human rights abuses last year including Burma, Pak-istan, India, North Korea, Indonesia and Cambodia, the US State Department has said, reports Reuter.

In its 20th annual report on human rights yesterday, the department also said violence against women was a serious problem in South Korea, and called Vietnam's record poor.

The report, on 193 countries, accused China of effectively silencing all public dissent against the communist party and government in 1996.

The department's findings on China were of keen interest because of US efforts to build a better relationship with the communist giant. It concluded that no dissidents were known to be active (in China) at year's

Phoolan Devi

to surrender

to court

"bandit queen" turned politi-

cian, Phoolan Devi, today said

she would surrender to a court

to face justice over the alleged

massacre of 22 men accused of

here she would present herself

before a local court in the

northern state of Uttar Pradesh

on Tuesday in connection with

self came after the Supreme

Court turned down Devi's plea

for the case be shifted to an-

had argued that courts in Uttar

Pradesh, from where Devi was

elected to parliament last, year,

were prejudiced. The Supreme

Court denied the appeal as well

in 1994 after serving 11 years

on 55 charges of murder and

robbery. She gave herself up on

February 12, 1983, but never admitted to the 1981 killings.

Pakistani singer

honoured

Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh

Ali Khan and Thumri Queen Shobha Gurtu were honoured

with the Hafiz Ali Khan Award at an impressive ceremony here, reports AFP.

Shiv Kumar Sharma was given

the award in absentia at the

function held at the legendary

Sarod Ghar Museum of music

here on Tuesday, in which the

living legend of dhrupad, As-

ghari Bai, was presented a cheque of Rs one lakh by sarod

to Ustad Fateh Ali Khan and

Shobha Gurtu by the great tabla

maestro of Varanasi, pandit

acceptance speech described the

award as the "greatest award" of

founder-trustee of the Ustad

Hafiz Ali Khan memorial trust Ustad Amjad Ali Khan said the

trust took the initiative of raising the fund for Asghari Bai after reading in the newspapers

that she was leading a hand-to-

mouth existence. The trust do-

nated Rs 21,000 while the rest

was collected by the music

Iran-Iraq accord

on jt searches for

missing troops

Thursday it had reached an

agreement with Iraq to conduct

joint searches for the remains

of soldiers killed during their

Brigadier General Mir-

Faisal Bagherzadeh, Head of the

Commission on Soldiers Miss-

ing in Action (MIAS), said

Baghdad had welcomed a pro-

posal by Tehran on the issue in

a meeting between foreign min-

istry officials of the two coun-

Iran's official Irna news agency,

did not specify where or when

the talks took place or at what

level, but promised more details

to conduct joint searches in

both countries as a "positive

step by Iraq in the direction of

He described the agreement

in the "near future."

improving relations."

Bagherzadeh, quoted by

1980-1988 war, reports AFP.

TEHRAN, Jan 31: Iran said

lovers of Gwalior city.

Kishan Maharaj.

The awards were presented

Ustad Fateh Ali Khan in his

In his welcome speech, the

wizard Ustad Amjad Ali Khan.

Santoor Maestro pandit

GWALIOR, Jan 31: Noted

Devi was released from jail

as a plea for blanket bail.

The pledge to surrender her-

Her lawyer Kamini Jaiswal

the 1981 killings.

other province.

Devi told the Supreme Court

gang-raping her, reports AFP.

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: India's

In India, there also continued to be significant human itary dictatorship. rights abuses, despite constitutional and statutory safeguards,

the report concluded. Abuses include extra-judicial executions, excessive use of force by security forces torture. rape and deaths of suspects in police custody throughout the country poor prison conditions and arbitrary arrests and de-

tentions, it said. Separatist militants were also responsible for numberous serious abuses, the report

The report also said severe human rights repression by Burma's military regime, the State Law and Order Council (SLORC), increased during 1996, even as increased economic activity fostered the appearance

of greater normalcy. Out of sight of most visitors, citizens continued to live subject at any time and without appeal to the arbitrary and sometimes brutal dictates of the mil-

The report faulted the SLORC for restricting the democratic opposition, the National League for Democracy, and its leader, Aung Suu Kyi and cited credible reports of brutality and killings of civilians by the military, especially in areas dominated by ethnic minorities.

After the report's release, the State Department issued a separate statement deploring at-tacks by the armed forces associated with the SLORC on unarmed civilians in three ethnic minority refugee camps in Thailand on Jan 28 and 29.

The United States calls on the government of Myanmar to cease its support for repression and violence against the ethnic minorities and to respect international humanitarian principles and their obligations toward refugees inside of Thai-

land, the statement said. The report found the overall

The Prince of Wales (L)chats with Hollywood actor Al Pacino (R), co-star Kevin Spacey (C

and Lyndall Hobbs (2ndR) at the Royal Film Premiere of Pacino's film, "Looking For

Three Malaysian leaders fined

bouring Indonesia. More than

100 delegates were arrested

Lumpur hotel after some 50 pro-

Indonesian youths ransacked

the meeting room. Some foreign

delegates who also were ar-

general announced he was

dropping charges against 60 lo-

cal activists who had been ar-

rested for failing to disperse on

decided to go ahead with the

cases against the ruling party

members to counter criticism

that authorities may have en-

couraged the pro-Indonesian

mob to disrupt the conference,

The government apparently

On Thursday, the attorney

rested were deported.

police orders.

from the conference in a Kuala

Richard," at the Odeon Leicester Square Thursday.

Three members of Malaysia's !!.

ruling coalition were fined Fri-

day for rioting and disrupting a

conference last year on the hu-

man rights situation in the In-

hamed fined them 1,500 ringgit

(dlrs 600) each. The maximum

punishment they faced was two

years jail and a fine. The three

men hold senior positions in

United Malays National Orga-

nization, the dominant party in

had banned the Nov. 9 confer-

ence organized by local and for-

eign human rights groups, say-

The Malaysian government

Malaysia's ruling coalition.

They paid the fine.

Timor, reports AP.

donesian-controlled East

Magistrate Julianna Mo-

VKUALA LUMPUR, Jan 81: ing it would embarrass neigh

human rights situation in Pakistan to be poor despite a public government pledge to address problems, especially those of women and children.

It said members of the (Pakistani) security forces committed numerous human rights abuses and there was no serious government effort to reform the police, judicial systems or to prosecute those responsible for abuse.

In its human rights report on Indonesia, the department said despite a surface adherence to democratic forms, the Indonesian political system remains strongly authoritarian.

The government maintained a tight grip on the political process and continued to commit serious human rights abuses, the report said. In East Timor, there were further instances of killings, disappearances, torture and excessive use of force by the military and insurgents, it said.

- AFP/UNB photo

and that the police did little to

stop them. shows him and root

window dressing," said Tian

Chua, a spokesman of the con-

ference organizers. He said an-

other 200 people who used vio-

lence should have been charged.

Ismail, 39, a lawmaker from

Perak state, Mohamad Supardi

Noor, 37 and Abdul Hadi Zam,

39, office bearers of the youth

wing of UMNO — pleaded guilty

A fourth co-defendant, Saai-

fuddin Nasution Ismail, 39, is

on a pilgrimage to Mecca and

his case will be heard on Feb.

to trespassing, rioting and dis-

rupting the conference.

The three leaders — Nadzri

"This sentencing ... is just

Congress won't join UF govt: Pawar

JAIPUR, Jan 31: The Congress Parliamentary Party leader, Shared Pawar, today said his party would not join the United Front government, would support it from outside only and not shoulder any responsibility for its perfor-

mance, reports PTI. "We will not hesitate in criticising the UF government for its shortcomings on the floor of the parliament and outside," Pawar told reporters here to-

He said the Congress Party would continue to strengthen its base in order to come to

"Congress will consolidate itself and provide an alternative before the people to come back to power on its own strength," Pawar said while reacting to the suggestions made by Tamil Manila Congress president. G K Moopnar and Janata

Dal leader, Biju Patnaik. He said since Sitaram Kesri became the president of party, the mantle of Congress was on right track. "The Congress president has taken right steps to consolidate the party by unify-

ing it and taking a clear stand on the issue of corruption." Pawar said justifying the expul-

sion of Sukh Ram. He said Congress had to pay very dearly because of its stand on the controversial Babri-Masjid and temple issue. But now we are rectifying our past mistakes to gain the faith of the minority."

1,500 troops revolt in Guatemala

GUATEMALA City, Jan 31: As many as 1,500 army troops have rebelled here and remain quartered in their barracks just north of the capital, defense ministry officials said Thursday, reports AFP,

The soldiers revolted Wednesday to demand 10,000 dollars each for being demobilized as part of the peace accord signed in December with Guatemalan rebels, the unnamed officials said

Sources said the government had offered the mobile military police troops a much smaller amount.

Yugoslav president hints at recognition of opposition victories

BELGRADE, Jan 31: A senior official close to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic hinted Thursday that a compromise was possible over disputed local election results which have caused more than two months of street protests here, reports

Yugoslav President Zoran Lilic on Thursday hinted at the recognition of opposition victories in the disputed local elections but rejected some points from an OSCE report which called for all annulled opposition gains in last November's polls to be recognised.

'We are all obliged to make a final effort, especially the ruling party, to settle the current problems within the law," said Lilic, the federal Yugoslavia's largely ceremonial head of

Observers said Lilic was unlikely to have spoken without the green light from Milosevic. who remains the most powerful politician in the Federal Yugoslav Republic, which com-

prises Serbia and its tiny neighbour Montenegro. Street demonstrations con-

tinued in Belgrade Thursday for the 72nd day. Opposition leader, Vuk Draskovic, reacting to Lilic's

comments, told a rally of

30,000 that he hoped Lilic was speaking for Milosevic. "Up to today, he (Lilic) has been Milosevic's spokesman. It would be a good thing if he was speaking for him today."

Draskovic said. "It would be a bad thing, however, if he had suddenly become independent and started thinking for himself," he added. "We must urgently resolve

the dispute over a part of the local election results," Lilic had said during a meeting with army officers in the Montenegrin capital. "A solution to the crisis must

be without force and with no provocations from any side," added Lilic, who as president is supreme commander of the Yugoslav armed forces.

Netanyahu, Assad must decide on agenda for peace talks

WASHINGTON, Jan 31: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and President Hafez Assad of Syria — not the United States will choose the agenda if they decide to reopen peace talks, the State Department said Thursday, reports

One of the decisions they will face is whether to start anew, as Israel has changed governments since the talks broke down nearly a year ago, or build on what the negotiators

had accomplished. "It is fundamentally up to Israel and Syria to determine partment spokesman Nicholas Burns said. "If they do wish to talk to each other, they've got to decide the basis of those talks. This week, Syria's chief ne-

gotiator, Walid Moualem, said Israel and Syria had reached agreement on a land-for-peace settlement - including a withdrawal by Israel to its 1967 border — before the breakdown. In reply, Israeli Ambassador

Eliahu Ben-Elissar accused Syria of spreading false reports, trying to make it appear Israel had reneged.

there was no agreement.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (L) shakes hands with the chairman of the Constitutional Court, Vladimir Tumanov, Thursday. Yeltsin suggested for the first time that Russia's presidential constitution could be changed, referring to an "evolution" of the basic law - AFP/UNB photo during his meeting with Tumanov.

The State Department said that particular question," de-

Twins' festival

Off the Record

MOSCOW: Moscow will play host to more than 4,000 sets of twins from nine different countries at a six-day festival in March Itar-Tass news agency reported Friday, says AFP. Organiser Mrina Parusnikova said the aim was "to try to

penetrate the difficult spiritual world of twins and demonstrate their psychological peculiarities."
Russia which has two million of the world's estimated popu-

lation of 60 million twins staged similar festivals in 1990 and 1991. Events will include two "mirror-image", football matches be-

tween the separate hales of the same sets of twins, while prizes will be awarded to achievers in the fields of science, culture, art, sport and business, Parusnikova said. Among those expected are twins from France, Germany,

Japan and the United States, she said.

Love for liquor

SINGAPORE: A Singapore businessman's love for liquor is so great that he happily agreed to be permanently banned from driving, saying he wanted to "drink and drink and drink," reports AP.

Lek Yew Chinag's wish was granted by District Judge Seng Kwang Boon, who on Thursday imposed on him a fine of 3,500 Singapore dollars (dlrs 2,500) and a life-ban on driving in Singapore, the Straits Times reported Friday.

A first offender, Lek pleaded guilty to drinking and driving on January 5 and faced a maximum penalty of six months jail and 5,000 dollar (dlrs 3,570) fine and a life-time driving ban, the Times said.

Although first time offenders usually get off with fines. Lek, 47, told the court: "I am a habitual drinker and I ask your honour to disqualify me for life as I want to drink and don't want to

Later he told the Straits Times: "I just want to drink and drink and drink - brandy, XO (cognac) beer and any kind of al-

cohol. I want to be able to drink with my friends every night."

Fujimori assures hostages' relatives of seeking peaceful solution KNU Condemns attacks on

refugee camps in Thailand BANGKOK, Jan 31: Myanmar Karen National Union (KNU) today condemned "atrocities" committed by an offshoot of the rebel group against refugee camps in Thailand and

accused Yangon of being behind the attacks. The KNU said in a statement received here that attacks on refugee camps by the democratic Kayin (Karen) Buddhist Army (DKBA) in western Thailand this week had been launched with the aid of the

Myanmar government. At least two people were killed when the DKBA burned and looted two refugee camps housing more than 10,000

Karen refugees, border sources

An attack on a third camp housing more than 25,000 refugees, was turned back by Thai troops before dawn Wednesday, the sources said.

"We strongly and unequivocally condemn these atrocities by the DKBA against the innocent and the weak," the KNU statement said.

The attacks were launched simultaneously against the Wangka and Don Pa Kiang refugee camps, just north of Mae Sot in western Thailand.

"These attacks are acts of collaboration between the SLORC and the DKBA," it said.

berto Fujimori heads for Canada as part of an intense campaign to persuade Japan that he is doing everything possible to find a peaceful solution to the hostage crisis, reports

LIMA, Jan 31: President Al-

The hastily called one-day summit Friday with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto could lead to renewed negotiations to free the 72 hostages being held by leftist guerillas.

Before leaying for Toronto. Fujimori summoned 43 relatives of the hostages to the government palace, assuring them of his commitment to seek a peaceful solution to the stand-

"I wanted to call you together to share moments of anguish. anxiety and suffering, which you have lived through," he

Fujimori, whose younger brother Pedro is among the captives, told the family members that he was committed to seeking a peaceful solution to the standoff.

He recognized the relatives' desire for a swift end to the crisis and said he wanted to take that wish with him in his "conscience and heart.

Tupac Amaru leader Nestor Cerpa and about 20 followers seized the Japanese ambassador's mansion on Dec. 17, initially taking more than 500 hostages. They released most within the first two weeks of the

Fujimori is also scheduled to stop in Washington, where he is to address the permanent council of the Organization of American States on Monday. He will speak on terrorism and the hostages in Lima.

Rumors abound that he might meet with US President Clinton, but the White House indicted it had not received a request for a meeting and Clinton's agenda was closed.

Fujimori asked for the meeting with Hashimoto after the Japanese prime minister twice this week cautioned Peru on its

Hashimoto was concerned

handling of the hostage situa

about militarized police ma neuvers outside the diplomatic residence that led to shots being fired by the rebels on Monday. A police troop carrier was

nicked by the gunfire and Japan urged Peru not to take any unnecessary risks. Peru has since toned down the police activity, which had been escalating for more than a week.

Still, police blasted military music at the ambassador's residence twice on Thursday, trying to frustrate the rebels. The martial tunes drowned out the rebels' shouted revolutionary

slogans. While the rebels and the gov-

ple to talks to end the hostage crisis, no meetings have yet been scheduled. The impasse is the rebels' demand that talks include discussion of freedom for at least 300 imprisoned guerrillas. Fujimori says the issue is out of the question. Two mediators — Canadian

ernment have agreed in princi-

Ambassador Anthony Vincent and Catholic archbishop Juan Luis Cipriani — will accompany Fujimori on his trip.

Meanwhile, police Thursday hunted for a small band of leftist rebels. The band is thought to be acting as a liaison between

guerillas holed up in the

Japanese residence and their

comrades in the remote jungle.

Amaru leader after Cerpa. The rest of the movement's leaders are in prison. Avellaneda Valdez was last reported to be in France, the pro-government newspaper Expreso reported Thursday.

Police say the five or six

rebels they are seeking may in-

clude Hugo Avellaneda Valdez,

the highest-ranking Tupac

The rebels are believed to be in a safe house in Lima and

communicate by radio with Cerpa, according to a police official who spoke on customary anonymity. Police believe Cerpa has sophisticated radio equipment inside the ambassador's residence.