

Israel orders demolition of UN building in WB

JERUSALEM, Feb 20: Israel has ordered the demolition of a UN building meant to serve as a school for Palestinian refugees in the West Bank saying the structure was built without a permit, Israeli officials said on Wednesday, reports AFP.

A spokesman for the Israeli military administration in the West Bank accused the Palestinian Authority of illegally granting a building permit to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for the school in an area still under full Israeli control.

"This is a violation of agreements by the Palestinians not to grant building permits in areas outside their jurisdiction, Lieutenant Peter Lerner told AFP."

The Palestinians informed UNRWA that they could build in the Bet Surik area between Jerusalem and the self-rule town of Ramallah in the expectation that the area would eventually be transferred to Palestinian control, Lerner said.

In a meeting Tuesday between civil administration and UNRWA officials, Israel issued the order informing the representative they must destroy the building or Israel would.

A spokesman for UNRWA said they were looking into the matter and had not yet decided what action to take.

Indonesia to try 22 for Java riot

JAKARTA, Feb 20: Indonesia will try 22 people accused of participating in an ethnic and religious riot in west Java in December in which four people were killed, the official Antara news agency reported today, says Reuters.

It quoted the prosecutor's office as saying the accused would be tried in the district court at Tasikmalaya, where a mainly-Muslim mob burned shops, police facilities and churches on December 26.

Police said the riot was sparked by police beating an Islamic teacher while he was being questioned.

Prosecutor M Adenan was quoted as saying police had charged one of the accused with subversion, which carries a possible death penalty. The others were charged with lesser offences.

China will allow DPRK man to fly to Seoul, hopes ROK

SEOUL, Feb 20: South Korea is hopeful that China will soon allow a high-ranking North Korean defector to fly to Seoul but his departure could be delayed pending the funeral of late leader Deng Xiaoping, government officials said Thursday, reports AP.

After China's state-controlled media reported for the first time Wednesday night that Hwang Jang Yop is seeking asylum at Seoul's consulate in Beijing, South Korean officials voiced hope that he could be headed for Seoul soon.

"It's an optimistic sign," Lee Ho, chief analyst at South Korea's Unification Board, said of the Chinese move, which broke a week-long official silence.

But some Seoul officials said Hwang's departure may have to wait until after Deng's funeral, tentatively scheduled for next week. China has not made any announcement about a funeral but has said a "memorial meeting" will be held for the Communist patriarch, who died Wednesday night.

"We think it is possible that the decision (on Hwang) will be affected by the funeral because some issues may require attention and approval by high-ranking leaders," said Ryu Kwang-suk, Chief of the Foreign Ministry's Asia-Pacific Bureau.

China has hesitated to allow Hwang to travel to Seoul for fear of angering North Korea, a longtime Socialist ally on whose side it fought in the 1950-53 Korean War. But China also does not want to jeopardise its growing trade relations with South Korea.

Staff at the South Korean Embassy in Beijing said Thursday that journalists seeking information about the talks on Hwang should call back next week.

Hwang, 74, a member of North Korea's top decision-making body the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party — is the highest ranking Pyongyang official to defect to South Korea in more than a half century.

A trickle of escapees from the impoverished communist North has become a steady flow in recent years.

Iraq accuses UN weapons inspectors of being CIA agents

BAGHDAD, Feb 20: Iraq accused some UN weapons inspectors of being CIA agents and insisted again Wednesday that it had destroyed all of its long-range missiles, reports AP.

The statements came one day before the chief UN weapons monitor, Rolf Ekeus, was expected to arrive in Iraq.

Ekeus has repeatedly accused Iraq of misleading his inspectors and is demanding that Baghdad allow the United Nations to test debris from destroyed missile engines in the United States.

Ekeus has said that Iraq may have removed and hidden sophisticated Russian-built engines or engine parts and replaced them with virtually useless Iraqi-made pieces before destroying the missiles.

Al-Thawra, the official newspaper of Iraq's ruling Baath party, dismissed Ekeus' suspicions.

"Iraq confirmed many times that it has destroyed all its missiles," the newspaper said.

"He (Ekeus) knows as well as we do that most of the inspectors in his commission are Americans," Al-Thawra added. "They are even agents at the worst spying agency, the CIA."

UN sanctions were imposed against Iraq after Baghdad invaded Kuwait in 1990. UN diplomats have said they will not consider lifting the sanctions until Iraq fully cooperates with UN arms monitors working to dismantle Iraq's chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles.

Iraq has accused Ekeus of working with the US administration to keep the sanctions in place to undermine Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

On the missile engines, Iraq is insisting that most of the testing could be done in Iraq. It wants any further testing to be conducted in Russia, where the missiles were made, and wants its scientists to take part. Ekeus has rejected that idea.

300 feared dead in Peruvian mudslide

LIMA, Feb 20: President Alberto Fujimori joined efforts to recover the bodies of villagers killed by a mudslide in the Peruvian Andes. As many as 300 people were feared dead, and hopes dimmed Thursday that any more people would be found alive, reports AP.

Rescue workers using picks, shovels and crowbars had recovered 41 bodies by Wednesday evening. But scores more were still buried under the mud.

Fujimori participated in the rescue effort Wednesday, carrying the body of a young boy and placing it in a coffin.

"It's estimated that between 250 and 300 people are buried below this immense quantity of mud," Fujimori said. "Two villages have almost completely vanished."

Homes, livestock and crops were also swept away.

The president, known for his steady lack of emotions, seemed visibly moved by the tragedy as he walked with rescue workers through the mud.

"I have just seen 3-year-old

children," removed from the mud with their bodies limp. It is truly dramatic," said the Peruvian leader who arrived at the mountain site by helicopter.

The mudslide occurred before dawn Tuesday when the side of a hill saturated by torrential rains let loose and came roaring down on two Andean villages.

The river of mud and rocks buried the villages in the district of Tamburco, outside of the departmental capital of Abancay, 300 miles (480 kilometres) southeast of the capital, Lima.

Only five people — two children and three adults — in the direct line of the river of mud are believed to have survived, Fujimori said.

Television footage Wednesday showed dead men, women, and children trapped in the 300,000 cubic metres (10.5 million cubic feet) of thick mud which swept over the villages. Arms and legs of some of the victims stuck out of the earth.

"It is really a huge glob and there is the risk that if it rains again there could be another

landslide," Fujimori said. He said heavy equipment could not be brought into the site and soldiers and volunteers were working with picks, shovels and crowbars to search.

"For the few survivors — and there really are few — emergency help is arriving," he said. Miriam Monzon Carrion, a rescue nurse, said many of the bodies recovered were mutilated when their homes came crashing down upon them as they slept.

The chances of finding any more survivors two days after the mudslide were dim.

Health Minister Marino Costa Bauer said large quantities of insecticide to keep down disease were being sent to the area. Drinking water was also being sent.

"The main risk we confront is an outbreak of epidemic diseases," he said.

Costa Bauer said 250 people had been evacuated because of the threat of other mudslides and as many as 600 may be moved to safer areas.

Turkish FM cleared of corruption charges

ANKARA, Feb 20: The Turkish parliament on Wednesday cleared Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller of charges of corruption regarding her personal assets, Deputy Speaker Kamer Genc said, reports AFP.

Parliament had on Tuesday cleared Ciller of corruption charges over the dealings of a state-run company and a privatisation process during her time as prime minister.

On Tuesday deputies from Ciller's conservative True Path Party and her coalition partners, the pro-Islamic Welfare Party of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, voted to clear her.

Most of the opposition supported calls for her to face trial. Had the opposition managed to gather 276 votes in the 550-seat parliament, Ciller would have been sent for trial by the Constitutional Court, Turkey's highest judicial body.

Lanka planning tighter laws to control use of firearms

COLOMBO, Feb 20: Sri Lanka is planning tighter laws to control the use of firearms as an alarming number of guns remain in the hands of politicians, Justice Minister G L Peiris said today, reports AFP.

The government proposed laws to make gun offences non-bailable, Peiris told reporters, as an opposition legislator wanted in connection with the assassination of a ruling party MP was declared a fugitive.

The opposition MP is still at large after the shooting of government law maker Nalanda Ellawela but 15 people, including the fugitive's bodyguards, have been taken into custody, Peiris said.

"Violence has entered politics because of this large number of weapons in the hands of politicians," Peiris said.

"This is a distressing social problem. We will take legal and administrative measures to control this."

A large number of automatic assault rifles issued to politicians during a violent uprising by leftist rebels between 1988 and 1990 had not been returned,

Kim's son ordered to appear in court

SEOUL, Feb 20: The second son of South Korean president Kim Young-Sam was ordered to appear for questioning Friday over opposition accusations that he played a key role in the Hanbo Loans-for-kickbacks scandal, prosecutors said today, reports AFP.

Senior investigator Lee Jung-Soo said the president's son, Kim Hyun-Chul, will present himself to the prosecutors' office around 3 pm (0600 GMT) Friday, a prosecution official told AFP.

LTTE kills 20,000 children so far

COLOMBO, Feb 20: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has killed an estimated 20,000 Tamil children since it began its separatist war against the Sri Lankan government, according to Tamil sources here today, reports Xinhua.

The sources said that these children aged between 12 to 15 years were abducted from schools or from their homes, trained in guerilla warfare in rebel training camps in the north and recruited to the "Bay Brigade", which formed the front-line of attack on military establishments.

An estimated 10,000 women and children styled "Black Tigers" and "Sea Tigers" have formed the second line of attack and also engaged in suicide missions by order of Vellupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, the sources stated.

They added that the LTTE had also killed over 5,000 Sinhalese children in villages in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

The LTTE has been fighting a 14-year old war against the Sri Lankan government for a separate Tamil state in the north and east of the country.

Myanmar to lease sat services from Asiasat

YANGON, Feb 20: Myawaddy Television, Myanmar's army-owned station, has signed an agreement to lease satellite services from Asia Satellite Telecommunication Co of Hong Kong, the state-run New Light of Myanmar reported Thursday, says AP.

Myawaddy Television will lease transponder space on the Asiasat 2 satellite.

The station, which broadcasts news, entertainment and advertisements for four hours every day, now shares the same channel with state-run television which is on for seven hours daily.

The agreement will allow Myawaddy Television to broadcast on its own channel and allow opportunities for both stations to expand programming.

"Except for hotels and businesses which have been granted tightly-controlled licenses to own satellite dishes, Burmese viewers only have one channel available."

All media is strictly censored by the military government.

Troops-militants clash in Egypt: 4 hurt

MINYA, Egypt, Feb 20: Egyptian security forces and suspected Muslim fundamentalist militants fought a gunbattle in southern Egypt late Wednesday during which at least four people were wounded, police sources said, reports AFP.

They identified the injured as two members of the security forces and two militants.

The fighting erupted during a security force mission to track down militants suspected of involvement in an attack on a church last week, during which nine Coptic Christians were shot dead, the source said.

The clashes broke out around fields in the Malawi and Abu Qurgas region in the southern district of Minya province, they said, adding that the security forces were besieging a group of militants in the village of Ashmunin.

An official for the group told the London-based Arab daily Al-Hayat the massacre was "perhaps a mistake."



The new US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (L) poses with British Prime Minister John Major before their meeting at 10 Downing Street in London on Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Moonshiners' plight

MOSCOW: Police arrested 69 producers of homemade vodka in the Moscow region in 1996 in a crackdown on a growing moonshine business, a newspaper reported Wednesday, reports AP.

Most of the illegal distilleries were located in villages near Moscow and were selling their vodka in kiosks in the capital's suburbs, the Komsomolskaya Pravda daily said.

Some of the moonshiners were operating out of their apartments or garages, and one was caught producing large amounts of vodka in a former pigpen, the report said.

The number of people who die after drinking homemade vodka has doubled annually in recent years, according to Interior Ministry data.

Homemade vodka, identified by its cheap price and poor quality labels, is much less expensive than vodka that is produced legally in Russia or imported.

Production of homemade vodka has soared in recent years, and officials say it is difficult to control because the necessary equipment and ingredients are readily available.

7,000-yr-old wooden canoe found

DUBLIN: A 7,000-year-old wooden canoe, found in the mud flats of the Shannon estuary in the west of Ireland, may be one of the oldest signs of a human settlement in the country, reports Reuter.

Carbon-dating methods show the Mesolithic wooden craft dates back to 4,800 BC and is about 2,000 years older than other canoes found by archaeologists in Ireland.

"The marks of the stone tools used to carve the boat can still be seen on areas of the wood," Ronan O'Flaherty, manager of the discovery programme, said.

The canoe, preserved by the silt, was found near a bank of the Shannon River directly opposite Bunratty Castle, a tourist attraction in county Clare.

Also located in the same operation were a piece of human skull, which has been sent for dating to experts in Britain, flint tools, a fish-trap and other relics.

42 yrs behind bars for fantasy game

MADRID: A man who hacked to death a janitor as part of a fantasy game was convicted Tuesday of murder and sentenced to 42 years in prison, reports AP.

Javier Rosado, 23, stabbed Carlos Moreno because the 52-year-old man fit a physical description of a victim that Rosado had thought up for a role-playing game, according to court testimony.

The five-day trial last month centered on testimony from Rosado's friend and co-playing game, according to court testimony.

The five-day trial last month centered on testimony from Rosado's friend and co-defendant, Felix Martinez. Rosado refused to testify.

Martinez, 19, said Rosado had created a fantasy game in which the goal was to commit "the perfect murder." He and Rosado chose Moreno after spotting him at a Madrid bus stop late one night in April 1994, he said.

Price pays the price

EDINBURGH, Scotland: A killer with a talent for music missed the premiere of his opera, "Odyssey," Tuesday night, reports AP.

Although David Pirce had earlier been given permission to attend, Edward Frizell, the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, said Pirce would have to stay in his cell.

Pirce, 34, is serving a life sentence for the rape and murder of 26-year-old Michelle Slater in 1984.

Her father had protested against plans to allow Pirce to attend the premiere performance at the Demarco European Art Foundation in Edinburgh.

"Given the fact that the event has generated considerable publicity it was considered inappropriate to allow him to attend. It would be a media circus," said a spokesman for the prison service, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Asian leaders mourn death of Deng Xiaoping

HONG KONG, Feb 20: Asian leaders today mourned the death of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and paid tribute to his economic reforms but voiced concern over the future direction their giant neighbour would take, reports AFP.

Taiwan's premier Lien Chan praised Deng for his economic reforms and pledged to seek peaceful reunification with the mainland in the post-Deng era but he also urged Beijing to take a more pragmatic attitude towards Taiwan and stop "bullying" the island in the international community.

He called on Beijing leaders "to face the fact that the two sides have been governed separately since 1949" when the nationalists fled to Taiwan at the end of a civil war.

"The cloud of suspicion and hostility has never cleared up in the other side, making it hard to establish mutual trust... and a base for sincere negotiations," he said.

In Hong Kong, which is due to be returned to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, British governor Chris Patten said in a statement, "I learned with regret this morning of the death of Deng Xiaoping."

Patten said Deng's concept of one country, two systems helped "to make possible the successful negotiation of the joint declaration and thus to lay the foundation for Hong Kong's stability and prosperity after 1997."

Japan's Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto expressed his "deep sorrow over Deng's death, noting the role he played in developing friendship between the two East Asian powers, whose relationship is still occasionally haunted by memories of Japan's World War II aggression."

Indian Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said Deng's death would not halt the move towards closer ties between the two Asian giants, whose relations have been on the mend in recent years following decades

of animosity over a border dispute which flared into a brief war in 1962.

South Korean President Kim Young-Sam cabled his condolences to president Jiang, a presidential spokesman said.

"Deeply grieved, I express to

the Chinese people, who have lost a great leader, deep condolences and a tribute to the memory of the deceased," Kim was quoted as saying in the cable.

He expressed hope that the Chinese people "overcome the

Life-sketch of China's paramount leader

Another AFP report from Beijing adds: Deng Xiaoping's life spanned an era of dazzling change in China, from feudalism and foot-binding to lasers and satellites, from economic subjugation to a powerful economy held in awe by the rest of Asia.

Here are the key dates in Deng's life.

1904 — born Deng Xihou in Guanyang, Sichuan province.

1920 — after studying in Chongqing, the provincial capital, travels to France on work-study programme.

1924 — joins Chinese Communist Party.

1926 — leaves France for Moscow, studies at Sun Yat-Sen University.

1927 — returns to China, teaches politics at Xian military academy. Changes given name to "Xiaoping," or "little peace."

1934 — joins underground party centre in Shanghai.

1935 — sent to Southwestern Guanyang as CPC military uprising organiser. Zhang Xinyuan dies.

1936 — becomes political commissar in eight route army's 129th division in war with Japan.

1939 — marries Zhuo Lin in Yanan.

1945 — elevated to CPC's 7th central committee. Deng's division annihilates 30,000 Kuomintang troops.

1952 — transferred to central government. Becomes Vice Premier, Vice Chairman of Finance and Economic Commission. Member of State Planning Commission.

1953 — appointed Minister of Finance.

1956 — becomes General Secretary of Party Central Committee and Politburo Standing Committee member.

1967 — purged in cultural revolution as "number two capitalist roader." Stripped of all posts and sent to countryside in Jiangxi.

1973 — recalled to Beijing and reinstated as Vice Premier.

1974 — takes over daily affairs from ailing premier Zhou Enlai.

1975 — appointed Vice Chairman of central military commission and people's liberation army chief of staff.

1976 — Deng makes historic visit to the United States.

1977 — Deng's final comeback. Restored to all major posts.

1978 — launch of economic reforms and scrapping of Mao's economic legacy, notably the dismantling of people's communes (1978) and March 1979 Democracy wall movement, brutally crushed by Deng.

1979 — Deng makes historic visit to the United States.

1989 — Sino-Soviet relations are normalised in a Beijing summit between Deng and Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev. Army crushes student protests in Tiananmen Square. Party chief Zhao Ziyang is removed from office.

1990 — Deng resigns from central military commission, his last official post, but remains China's political master.

1992 — Deng visits the economically booming south of China and demands faster pace of economic reform. 14th party congress officially adopts Deng's theory of a "socialist market economy."

1994 — A frail-looking Deng makes last known public appearance, at a lunar new year's ceremony in Shanghai.

1997 — Deng dies.

Armenian PM undergoes throat surgery

YEREVAN, Armenia, Feb 20: Armenia's prime minister has undergone throat surgery and his duties will be assumed by President Levon Ter-Petrosian while he recuperates, a presidential spokesman said Tuesday, reports AP.

Prime Minister Armen Sarkisyan, who remains in London where he was operated on last week, is expected to return to work in two to three weeks, spokesman Levon Zurabian told a news conference in Yerevan.

In the meantime, Ter-Petrosian will work in the president's residence in the morning and the prime minister's office in the afternoon, where he will hold Cabinet meetings and handle administrative issues, the spokesman said in remarks carried by the Interfax news agency.

Russia plans to reduce armed forces by '97

MOSCOW, Feb 20: Russia plans to reduce its armed forces by 200,000 men by the end of this year, Defence Minister Igor Rodionov announced Tuesday, AFP reports from Moscow.

The minister, quoted by ITAR-Tass news agency, said further cutbacks were planned in 1998.

The current strength of the Russian armed forces is 1.7 million.

"This is a real task, we planned it and we will fulfill it," Rodionov was quoted as saying after talks with President Boris Yeltsin.

BRIEFLY

Jet crash claims 5 in Guatemala: Searchers have found five bodies in the wreckage of an east wind 24 executive jet that crashed 60 kilometres (37 miles) south of Guatemala city early Wednesday, government officials said, AP reports from Guatemala City.

Among the dead were US citizens Bruce Hadad, Latin American region vice-president for telecommunications Firm Gte, and his wife Dorothy Sumner, officials said. The aircraft's three pilots were also confirmed dead.

Quake rocks Japan: An earthquake, measuring 5.4 on the Richter Scale, hit eastern Japan yesterday, but no injuries and damage were reported, the Meteorological Agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicentre of the quake, which took place at 5:22 am (2022 GMT Wednesday), was off coast of Fukushima prefecture, some 200 kilometres (124 miles) northeast of Tokyo, an agency spokesman said. There were no fears of tidal waves, he said.

Chlorine gas kills 1 in Russia: One person died and more than 200 others were hurt Wednesday when a cloud of toxic chlorine gas was discharged from a chemical plant in the Russian far east city of Khabarovsk, the ITAR-Tass news agency said, AFP reports from Moscow.

Several people were hospitalised including nearly a dozen in serious condition, the agency said. The gas was released as employees fought a blaze that flared up at the plant, which produces chemicals and pharmaceuticals, the agency said. The emergency ministry blamed the fire on violation of safety regulations, it added.

Ferry mishap claims 9 in Vietnam: Nine people died when the ferry they were traveling on sank in the middle of a bay in northern Vietnam, state-run media reported Thursday, AP reports from Hanoi.

Five of the 14 passengers were rescued by passing boats, the Communist Party newspaper The People reported. The newspaper did not say what caused the accident, which occurred over the weekend. Reports of the mishap were only made public Thursday in Vietnam's state-controlled media.

Hungary, Romania sign accord: Hungary and Romania agreed Wednesday to join forces in the struggle against organised crime, signing a pact to combat a range of criminal activities from drug trafficking to terrorism, AFP reports from Budapest.

The accord, which provides for information exchanges on criminals, drug traffickers and terrorists, was signed by Hungarian Foreign Minister Gabor Kunce and his Romanian counterpart Gavril Dejeu.