BRIEFIN



Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga waves after the closing of local council election campaigning in the capital Colombo Tuesday. - AFP/UNB photo

Ex-minister's wife jailed in India:

An Indian court has jailed the wife of a former cabinet minister on charges of illegally receiving foreign currency, newspapers reported yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Usha Krishnakumar was sent to the Tihar Central Jail here until April 3 by a court Tuesday following her arrest by the enforcement directorate of the Finance Ministry, The Times Of India said. Her husband. S Krishnakumar, was a minister in the government of former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. He lost his seat in the 1996 elections.

ROK minister offers resignation: South Korean Labour Minister Jin Nyum has offered to resign in connection with a revision of a controversial labour law, a

minister spokesman said yesterday, Reuter reports from Seoul. "The minister offered his resignation to Prime Minister Koh Kun on Tuesday but the offer has not been accepted yet," he said.

(UNI) reported vesterday, AFP says from New Delhi. The two members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

(LTTE) were identified simply as Kamalanathan and Udhaykumar and said to be residents of Jaffna in Sri Lanka's northern tip.

Gunmen kill cops in Pakistan:
Unknown assailants gunned down policemen overnight in the

They were killed late Tuesday while on patrol near the city's main vegetable market. The News Daily reported. Police suspect the constables were shot as they tried to catch some heroin addicts, it added.

50 children hospitalised in Russia: More than 50 Russian school-children were hospitalised suffering

Regional officials say that at least 53 children - ranging in age from 10 to 15 — were affected by the outbreak apparently contracted after eating shortcakes in the school cafeterias.

2 Malaysian choppers missing: Two Malaysian air force helicopters went missing after a mission in the eastern Sabah state, the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF)

Tuesday, an RMAF statement said adding that the last radio contact with the aircraft was at 4.21 pm. It said search operation launched late on Tuesday was continuing.

Army defies PM's order to free foreign mercenaries in Papua New Guinea

African and British mercenar-

ies detained by the army on

Gunmen kill 3

worshipers in

Pak Punjab

19: Unidentified gunmen killed

three worshipers and injured

another in an attack on a Sunni

mosque in strife-ridden Punjab

province late Tuesday, police

officials and aid workers said,

were offering their evening

prayers at the Qadri mosque in

Sunni Muslim worshipers

The mosque's imam or

critical condition at a Faisal-

men arrived at the mosque on a

motorcycle. One entered the

gate and opened fire on wor-

shipers leaving the mosque

while the other stood guard in

pects. But recent clashes be-

tween militant Sunni and Shi-

ite Muslim groups in Punjab

side a courthouse in the provin-

cial capital of Lahore killed 25

people, including a militant

Sunni leader and sparked the

A leading Shiite activist was

shot and critically wounded in

Khanewal, 150 kilometres (90

miles) south of Faisalabad, on

and generally get along with

their Shiite brethren, but two

sects recently have produced

several militant groups who

Most Pakistanis are Sunni

have left more than 40 dead.

wave of sectarian violence.

Sunday.

routinely clash.

Police didn't name any sus-

Last month's bombing out-

the street, police said.

Witnesses said the two gun-

reports AP.

abad hospital.

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, Mar

Singirok's orders.

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea. Mar 19: The standoff between the government and the army deepened Wednesday as a senior officer defied the prime Minister's order to free about 40 foreign mercenaries

civilians rallied outside the army barracks to denounce the government's plan to pay the mercenaries millions of dollars to crush the Bougainville rebel-

major public support for the former commander of the Defence Force, Brig.-Gen. Jerry military mutiny by refusing to work with the mercenaries.

Singirok was dismissed from his post by Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan and the Cabinet, and stepped down Tuesday.

Throughout the political crisis, soldiers have remained in barracks and never moved to occupy government buildings or block off streets.

Barracks, the army's main headquarters in Port Moresby. to demand that Chan and his finance minister resign.

A spokesman for the 'Melanesian Solidarity Group," Michael Tatkai, said they planned to peacefully march on Parliament House, about 2 miles (3 km) away on the outskirts of the capital.

must reinstate Singirok. That's the only fair thing to do," he said. "The ordinary people of Papua New Guinea are opposed to the government paying mercenaries to kill people on

He said the 27 million dollars paid to the mercenaries should be spent on projects to help Papua New Guinea's many

peaceful, with a few police

UN, US express deep concern

Israel begins Jewish settlement work

Jerusalem.

JERUSALEM. Mar 19: Israeli buildozers under heavy guard ploughed up a hillside for a Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem on Tuesday. opening a new chapter in the bloody battle for control of the holy city, reports Reuter.

Israeli forces prepared for a Palestinian backlash after the ground-breaking that has pitted Israel's right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and drawn criticism from the Unites States. Britain, France, the United Nations and the Arab world.

About 50 Palestinian youths hurled stones from Um Tuba village at the edge of the site, a pine-covered hill known as Jabal Abu Ghneim or Har Homain Hebrew, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. They burned tyres and blocked a road.

Police kept back and no injuries were reported. It was a taste of the unrest that both Israeli and Palestinian security sources fear will break out. A handful of youths also scuffled with troops at another nearby

"It is a black day for the peace process," Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told re-

Erekat later met Israeli Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh but neither side gave details of their Arafat called an emergency

meeting to discuss the project. which tightens Israel's grip on Jerusalem and strengthens its hand at negotiations on the final status of the city that were supposed to resume this week. Another Reuter report from

UN adds: The Palestine Liberation Organisation called on Tuesday for an immediate meeting of the Security Council to adopt a resolution demand-

ing a halt to a controversial Israeli building project in Arab

East Jerusalem. In identical letters to both the Council President and Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the PLO's KN Observer, Nasser Al-Kidwa, said Israel had "begun the actual work for construction of a new settlement in the

Jabal Abu Ghneim area to the

south of occupied East

"The Israeli occupying authorities closed off the area. declaring it a military zone. and sent in bulldozers to start the work," he said, referring to plans to build 6,500 homes for Jews on a hill between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, called Har Homa by Israel,



Palestinians pray in front of the Jabel Abu Ghneim hill. Har Homa in Hebrew, shortly after that Israeli bulldozers started to work at the disputed hilltop in south east - AFP/UNB photo Jerusalem Tuesday.

which captured it during the

"We call upon the Security Council to convene an immediadopt a resolution in this regard, clearly demanding the immediate and full cessation of all settlement activities in Jabal Abu Ghneim, East Jerusalem and throughout the

"We believe that it is the duty of the Council to act and to act rapidly in response to such gravel developments," he added.

The request is likely to be considered during Council con-

clave in East Jerusalem.

"I think the Israeli's understand the difficulties that we see with their going forward" with the construction on Har Homa in mostly Arab East Jerusalem.

"We had wished that the Har Homa decision had not gone forward," she said.

In reference to the potential

spokesman Nicholas Burns said Washington's Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross was the only US official in contact with Israelis and Palestinians

1967 middle east war. ate, official meeting to consider this serious situation, and to

occupied. Palestinian territory.

sultations today. AFP from Washington says: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Tuesday repeated her concern over Israel's decision to press ahead with construction of a new Jewish en-

for a violent reaction from Palestinians to the new Jewish enclave. Albright said "violence is never an answer to the problems in the Middle East. department

over the past few days.

Another AFP report: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan expressed "disappointment and deep concern" Tuesday that Israel had begun construction on a housing settlement in East Jerusalem.

Clinton, Yeltsin meet today to lay foundation for Russia-NATO ties

HELSINKI, Mar 19: President Bill Clinton and President Boris Yeltsin meet Thursday for a long-awaited US-Russia summit that will attempt to lay the foundation for Russia-NATO ties and a new European security framework, reports

The eastward expansion of NATO, fiercely opposed by Moscow, will be the focus of talks set to take place on Friday at the Finninsh president's official residence, Maentyniemi, located on a wooded peninsula in the capital. The Helsinki Summit, the

seventh between Clinton and Yeltsin since 1993, will begin Thursday evening with a dinner hosted by Finnish President Martti Ahtisarari.

The success of the Summit is in no way guaranteed. The White House has noted no "breakthrough" in recent pre-

liminary talks with the Russians, and both sides are sticking firmly to their positions.

"I can not imagine that we will resolve all the issues (in Helsinki) that are pending," White House spokesman Michael Mccurry said after Clinton met with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in Washington on Mon-

And last Friday, Yeltsin warned that "we may not reach and agreement on NATO" while adding that "we should not see this as a tragedy."

Moscow has come to recognise that it will not be able to prevent the alliance from expanding to central Europe — most likely Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic - but it is formally opposed to the future membership of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuanian and the CIS countries, notably Ukraine.

Rebels reiterate demands for Berisha's resignation

GJIROKASTER, Albania, Mar 19: Albanian rebel leaders Tuesday reiterated demands for President Sali Berisha to resign at a meeting with Greek mediator and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Yannos Kranidiotis, reports AFP.

"The rebels underlined to me the need for Sali Berisha to go and their support for Bashkim Fino's government of national unity," Kranidiotis said after the meeting.

"The aim of my visit is to get a clear picture of the current situation through contacts with all the parties involved," he continued.

The Greek minister said he hoped to meet Fino, who was last week appointed Prime Minister, at Gjirokaster.

"Contacts have been made for a possible meeting on Wednesday", he added.

Kranidiotis, who is the only official from a European Union country to have meet the Albanian rebels, said he would report back to Greece's EU part-

He reiterated Greece's commitment to "political dialogue between the rebels and the government to bring about a solution without violence and bloodshed."

Meanwhile, Albanian officials called again for the West to send troops to the crisis-hit Balkan state, the head of the European Union mission visiting Albania. Count Jan d'Ansembour, said Tuesday.

"Some of them wanted troops but I made it clear that is not our mandate. We are not a military organisation", d'Ansembour told AFP at the end of a day of meetings with Albanian government officials.

Zairean PM ousted: Angola intervenes in conflict

KINSHASA, Zaire, Mar 19: Zaire's prime minister, widely blamed for sweeping military losses to rebels in eastern Zaire. was ousted from power Tuesday by a nearly unanimous parliament vote, reports AP.

The unpopular Leon Kengo wa Dondo was toppled only hours after he left for Nairobi, Kenya, for an international meeting on the insurgency in Zaire.

His dismissal came after his government's worst setback in the war, the loss of Kisangani, Zaire's third-largest city, over the weekend. Parliament spokesman Vikans'y Kinkela said 464

members of the 470-seat transi-

tional parliament took part in

the vote tonight. Nine members

voted against his removal and 10 abstained, he said. No replacement was imme-

diately named. Kengo was elected prime minister by parliament in 1994, but only after President

Mobutu Sese Seko made clear

Kengo was his choice for the job. Mobutu had surgery for prostate cancer last August and was admitted to a hospital in Monaco on Friday

There was no immediate reaction to Kengo's ouster in the capital, which has been gripped by fear of an impending military coup or the fall of the gov ernment.

Military leaders had been among Kengo's harshest critics, blaming him for setbacks in the war against rebels who have captured most of eastern Zaire in the last seven months. Kengo, whose mother was of

Rwandan Tutsi descent, was accused of secretly backing the rebels, who are believed closely linked to the Tutsi-led government in neighbouring Rwanda. Earlier Tuesday, govern-

ment soldiers looted Mbuji-Mayi, the hub city of Zaire's lucrative diamond industry, an official of the government owned mining company said.

The report came after the

rebels said they would move toward Eastern Kasai province, of which Mbuji-Mayi is the capital. The rebel advance across eastern Zaire has been eased by the lack of discipline among Zaire's poorly paid soldiers, who have repeatedly looted cities and fled rather than fight.

An official of the MIBA mining company in Mbuji-Mayi, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, could , not say whether the rebels were near the city, about 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) east of Kinshasa.

The rebels have agreed in principle to a cease-fire, but only if Mobutu first meets with their leader. Laurent Kabila Mobutu has refused such a meeting.

Another report says: Angola has put between 1,000 and 2,000 Zairian exiles at the disposal of Zaire's rebel forces, reviving an American-inspired feud between Angola and Zaire that dates back to the Cold War, US officials say.

Annan seeks additional UN police in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 19: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Tuesday asked the UN Security Council for an additional 306 international police in Bosnia, including 186 for the disputed northern town of Brcko, reports AFP. The recommendations, in a

report released here, provide for 186 unarmed police and 11 civilian personnel to join the 30 international police already stationed in Serb-held Brcko. which is claimed by both Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian-Croat federation.

The United States had pressed for an armed force for Brcko, which has been placed under international supervision pending a final solution on the town's status in March next

Annan noted in his report that the international police in the Brcko area, who do not have powers of arrest, would have to perform their mission of shaping a local police force "in close cooperation with the NATO-led stabilisation force (SFOR)."

Lankan opposition accuses ruling party of intimidating voters

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Mar 19: Sri Lanka's opposition Wednesday accused the ruling party of intimidating voters to keep them away from Friday's local government elections, reports AFP.

"The People's Alliance is trying to pressurize people into not voting, because they know the vote will go against them," said Ranil Wickremasinghe, leader of the main opposition United National Party. He did not cite any instance.

The opposition claims an edge in the what is seen as a popularity vote and a low turnout could damage its prospects. The elections are the first since President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance coalition came to power in 1994.

Based on information from parties and police, Colombo's Center for Monitoring Election Violence, said the governing party was responsible for 46 per cent of the violence since Feb 23, and the opposition for 26

Bandit queen seeks presidential pardon



NEW DELHI, Mar 19: India's former "Bandit Queen" Phoolan Devi is seeking a presidential pardon over charges she murdered 20 men in 1981, the Indian Express said today, reports Devi, now a high-profile

member of parliament, sent the appeal to President Shankar Dayal Sharma ahead of her expected surrender to a court in the northern city of Kanpur on Thursday, the daily said. 15 100 "You cannot imagine the

trauma and agony I am undergoing," she was quoted as say-The Express said President

Sharma was "deferring the issue" and Devi, a member of the Socialist Party, had met Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda several times in recent weeks to request him to intervene on her behalf.

The 35-year-old Devi, who was elected to parliament last year from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh where she allegedly killed the 20 men, has said she must be pardoned because she has already spent several years in prison.

Off the Record

Politics in Washington DC really mean, nasty '

NEW YORK: If it wasn't already apparent, retired US Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf says he has no interest in a political

career, reports AP. "Politics in Washington, DC, has become a really mean business. Really mean and nasty," he said in the latest issue of George magazine. "It's very intrusive upon your life, and more important, it's intrusive on your family's life. It's very hard to accomplish anything in such a hostile environment.

But the field commander of the 1991 Gulf War thinks his former colleague, Gen. Colin Powell, is, as they say in the Army, good to go. "I think he will run. He's as

good as any other candidate we've got out there, Schwarzkopf told George editor and publisher John F. Kennedy

Schwarzkopf after retiring, turned his energies to various causes - among them the Nature Conservancy, the recovery

camp for sick children.

of the grizzly bear and a partnership with Paul Newman in a

Shipload of N-waste

ROKKASHO, Japan, Mar 19: A shipload of high-level nuclear waste arrived Tuesday morning at a northern Japanese port, where hundreds of protesters criticised the

northeast of Tokyo and was inspected by local officials.

reprocess spentuel and it sends the waste to Britain and France. where it is treated and sent back to Japan. This was the second shipment of high-level waste;

But he's resisted pressure to get intoolitics.

shouted slogans comparing Japan's nuclear program to useless footwear. There was a brief scuffle with security, but no arrests. Kyodo News reported. The shipments have been at-

tacked at home and abroad as risky. Critics say an accident could spill the waste into the sea, or that the cargo could be stolen or damaged by terrorists. Several countries banned the ship from their waters. "This shipment has caused

controversy around the planet and has become a symbol for the environmental, public health and proliferation risks" of Japan's nuclear program, Hideaki Takemura of Greenpeace Japan said in a state-



Zairean stand on a taxi that drives out of Kinshasa Tuesday. As military patrols are on duty in Kinshasa, the population fears a replay of the pillaging, looting and rape that reportedly accompanied the Zairean army retreat. The government Monday urged Zaireans not to panic and said that Mobutu Sese Seko would return home next weekend

Unemployment, war worry Europeans most LONDON, Mar 19: What do Europeans worry about most when they look at the world?

reports AP. Overall, their prime concern is war, according to a 13-nation poll released Tuesday. But the Germans, who fought in two world wars this century, generally view the environment as a bigger problem, and the Italians are equally worried about war

and jobs. At home, unemployment tops the list of worries, according to the survey, one of the largest ever conducted on European social concerns. But the Irish worry most about drug abuse, the Belgians about child sex abuse, and the Dutch about the environment.

"While there are certainly

many similarities in the way

Europeans view their own coun-

tries and the world, there are

also considerable differences." Michele Corrado of Londonbased Market Opinion and Research International (MORI), which directed the survey, told a news conference. MORI interviewed over

13,000 people last fall in Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The margin of error was plus or minus 3 per

The survey was conducted on behalf of the United Nations Population Fund to assess views on population, domestic and international problems. and foreign aid following the 1994 UN population conference in Cairo. Dr. Nafis Sadik, the fund's

director, said in statement that

the study "shows the high level

of awareness among Europeans not only of global issues but of the root causes and the actions that are needed to address them." When asked to identify the

- AFP/UNB photo

most pressing global problems, 41 per cent of Europeans polled cited war and violence, 27 per cent cited famine and 25 per cent cited environmental degradation. Poverty was fourth on the list of worries followed by unemployment, drug abuse. AIDS and population growth.

War was cited most often by the Swedes, the Danes and the Finns and least often by the Germans and Austrians. While almost half the Swedes mentioned the environment as a major concern, only about one in 10 Britons, French, Belgians and Spaniards cited it. "Even on famine, which we

than 10 per cent of those polled.

per cent of Swedes cited the economic situation as a domestic concern, only 7 per cent of the Irish did. Education was identified as a key concern by 30 per

would have anticipated people to mention as a global problem, there are differences by nation, Corrado said. Forty three per cent of Spaniards mentioned it compared with only 13 per cent of Belgians.

When asked to identify the most pressing domestic problems, 59 per cent of those polled cited unemployment, 30 per cent cited the economy. But there were some stark difference among the countries.

In Finland, for example, 85

per cent cited unemployment

compared with just 22 per cent in the Netherlands. While 53 cent of Britons, but in the other 12 countries it was cited by less

arrives in Japan old shoes at the entrance and

shipment as an environmental risk, reports AP. The Pacific Teal, carrying 20 tons of waste reprocessed in France, docked in a fishing village 520 kilometers (350 miles)

Japan has little capability to the first was in 1995.

About 300 demonstrators protested at the front gate of the port. A group of 30 put a line of

around to help redirect traffic. But police officials said they were calling in reinforcements in case the crowd got out of



2 Tigers held in S India: Two Sri Lankan Tamil Tiger guerillas were arrested in southern India while trying to smuggle out motorcycles, the United News of India

Pakistani capital, Islamabad, press reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Islamabad.

from food poisoning apparently contracted at their school in a town near the Mongolian border, ITAR-Tass news agency reported Tuesday, AFP reports from Moscow.

said yesterday, Reuter reports from Kuala Lumpur. The two Nuri helicopters were scheduled to arrive at their base on Labuan island off Borneo at 4.55 pm (0900 GMT) on

under detention, reports AP. Meanwhile, more than 1,000

It was the first overt sign of Singirok, who on Monday led a

(120 miles) southeast of Islamabad, when the attack took prayer leader, was killed, along But demonstrators rallied with a young boy and another Wednesday outside the Murray worshiper. The injured was in

"If Chan doesn't resign, they Bougainville".

impoverished people. The protest was noisy but