

## International

## Jail riot in Honduras 243 prisoners flee with AK-47s into hills

TEGUIGALPA, Honduras, Feb 12: Scores of inmates rioted at a prison in northern Honduras on Wednesday, and 243 of them — armed with AK-47s — fled into nearby hills after overwhelming guards and setting a building on fire, reports AP.

Two prisoners were wounded during the breakout from El Porvenir prison near La Ceiba, and a third was captured several hours later.

Roadblocks were set up around La Ceiba, 190 miles (300 kilometres) north of Tegucigalpa, and the army was called in. A big contingent of police rushed to the prison just as the inmates were breaking out.

It was not immediately known how many prisoners rioted all together. The prison, which was designed for 300 inmates, currently houses about 500.

Deputy Interior Minister Alberto Reconcio Venegas told reporters the prisoners were demanding the immediate release of the prison director, who has been jailed since December.

The director, Jorge Martinez, had been popular with the prisoners because he allowed home leaves and frequent visits from relatives. Honduran au-

thorities believed he was too lenient and prosecuted him on charges of abuse of authority. He was replaced in December by an army captain.

## Israel, PA envoys meet US mediators

WASHINGTON, Feb 12: Israeli and Palestinian envoys held a brief face-to-face meeting with US mediators Wednesday but State Department said no progress was made to revive the peace process, reports AFP.

The meeting capped two days of consultations here on urgent steps the United States is seeking to end a 11-month stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace effort.

Israeli Cabinet Secretary Danny Naveh and chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat took part in the meeting chaired by the State Department's coordinator for the Middle East, Dennis Ross.

"We do not believe that we have closed the significant gaps that need to be closed and that the decisions that need to be made have not been made," State Department spokesman James Rubin said.

## Iraqi offer to open some sites rejected US forces will be ready to attack in a week: Clinton

WASHINGTON, Feb 12: The United States tightened the pressure on Iraq by rebuffing an Iraqi offer to open some sites for inspection and saying US forces would be ready to strike in about a week, reports Reuters.

Differences between key UN Security Council members on the crisis meanwhile persisted at an inconclusive meeting on Wednesday in New York. They agreed to resume talks later this week.

In an interview with CNN television, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz laid out Baghdad's proposal, offering to open eight disputed sites to inspection for 60 days provided the UN Secretary General and Security Council took direct control of the search for weapons of mass destruction.

Washington rejected the offer and insisted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein could set no new conditions for inspections imposed at the end of the 1991 Gulf War after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"We all hope we can avoid the use of force but let's face it, in the end that is up to Saddam Hussein," said President Bill Clinton, who has a powerful

military force in the Gulf to back up his demands.

"He must let the weapons inspectors back with full and free access to all suspect sites. If he will not act, we must be prepared to do so."

The US commander in the Middle East said his forces would have everything in place to strike Iraq "within a week or so."

"We're ready now, but there are a few more pieces to put in," Marine Corps Gen Anthony Zinni told reporters on a plane taking him and US Defence Secretary William Cohen from Qatar to Bahrain.

"My biggest concern would be to ensure we have looked at every possible reaction to a strike and we have sufficient plans to handle anything that might come up. We look at every possibility. Don't discount anything."

Cohen said Gulf Arab states understood the need for military action if Iraq denied unrestricted access, but they had also told him they preferred a diplomatic solution and were worried about the Iraqi people.

No details were released about the talks between the five

permanent Security Council members and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan but envoys said they reviewed proposals and came to no resolution.

It was the first time the five permanent council members — the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China — met as a group since a flurry of diplomatic initiatives by individual countries in a bid to avoid US and British military action.

Annan told participants he was "under pressure" to resolve the crisis and raised the possibility of a trip to Baghdad but no decision was made, envoys close to the talks said.

UN officials said such a trip was under consideration should the permanent council members agree on a negotiating formula. France and Russia want Annan to make such a trip but Annan was reluctant to go without some assurances of success.

Annan in a statement said only that "a number of aspects were considered and participants undertook to consult their capitals with a view to resuming discussions later this week."

## Di's last wish

LONDON, Feb 12: Princess Diana's dying words were a plea to her sister to take care of her bereaved sons, Mohammed Al-Fayed, the father of Diana's lover Dodi, said today, reports Reuters.

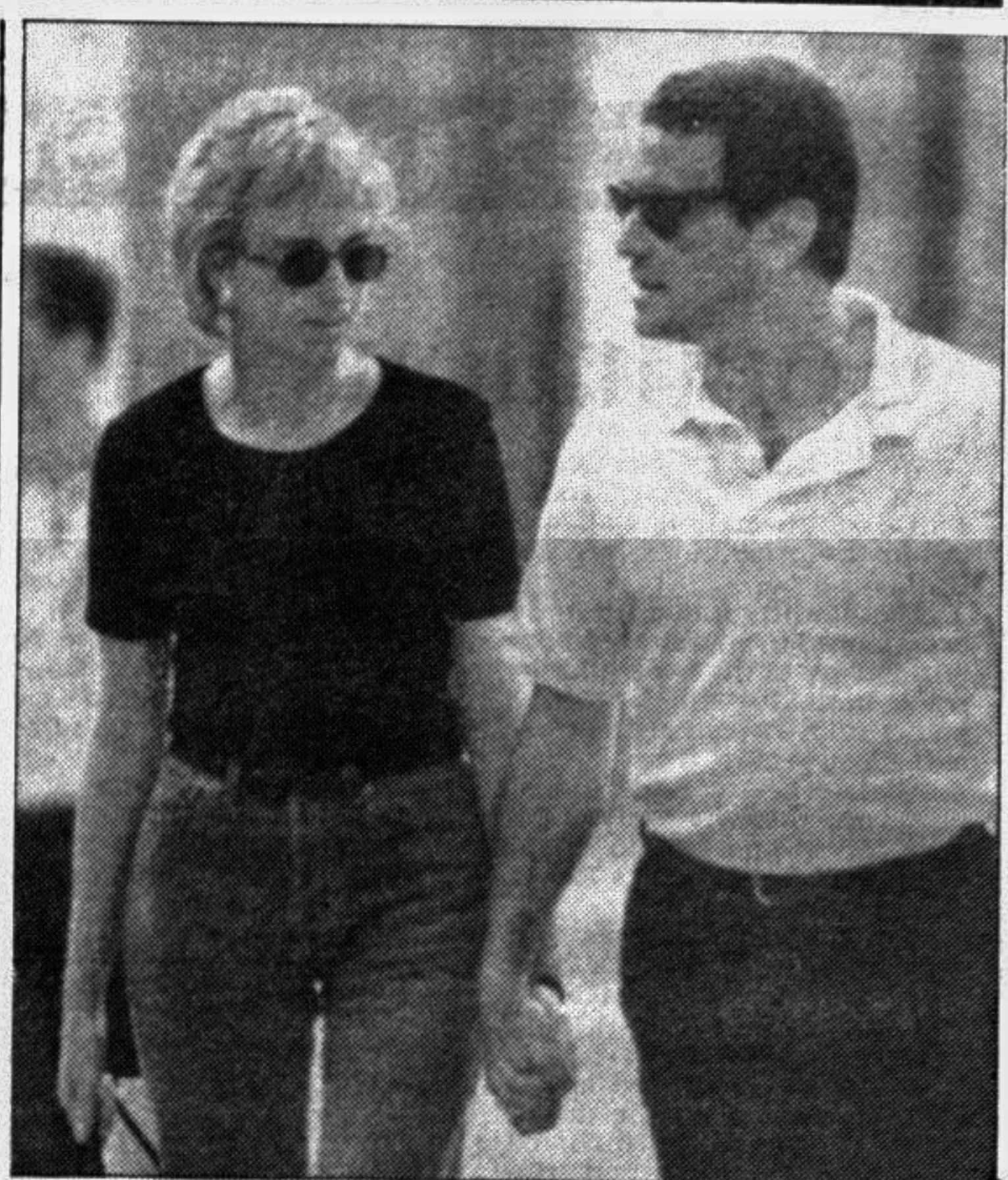
Al-Fayed, who provoked royal anger by claiming Diana spoke during her dying hours, insisted in an interview with the Daily Mirror that the message was passed to him by a nurse at the French hospital where the princess died.

"Her last words conveyed to me by this nurse were: 'I would like all my possessions in Dodi's apartment to be given to my sister Sarah, including my jewellery and my personal clothes. And please tell her to take care of my boys,' he said.

He also said that Diana and Dodi were engaged to be married — another claim widely rejected by royal insiders — and he believed that their death together in a high-speed car crash was not an accident.

"I believe in my heart, 99.9 per cent, that it was not an accident. There was a conspiracy and I will not rest until I have established exactly what happened," he said.

"I believe there were people who did not want Dodi and Diana to be together," said Al-Fayed, who introduced Diana to his elder son in mid-1997 during a holiday aboard his luxury yacht in the Mediterranean.



British actors Amy Secombe, left, and George Jackos who portray Princess Diana and Dodi Al-Fayed in a British TV film, "The People's Princess", are seen during filming in Portofino, Mallorca Wednesday. The film portrays the story of Diana's last days and will be screened next April. — AP/UNB photo

## Proposal for confederation Pakistan dismisses Advani's comment as 'wishful thinking'

ISLAMABAD, Feb 12: Islamabad yesterday dismissed as "wishful thinking" a Hindu nationalist party leader's comment that "Pakistan and Bangladesh should reunite with India," reports AFP.

"This nostalgia for revival of the 'Raj' days ignores the bitter realities of history as much as it speaks for Indian hegemonic ambitions," a Pakistani foreign office spokesman said.

Lal Krishna Advani, president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), told reporters in New Delhi on Friday that Pakistan and Bangladesh should reunite with India.

Advani, whose party is tipped to come top in India's February-March elections but fall short of a majority, said people should realise that the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 "has not served the interest of any section of undivided India."

India was partitioned at the end of British colonial rule, known as the "Raj", as escalating tensions between Hindus and Muslims of the Subcontinent turned into violence.

The communal violence claimed an estimated two million lives.

"The question has been emphatically decided in 1947," the Pakistani foreign office spokesman said.

"Presently, in the forefront of the issues that need to be addressed are normalisation of relations among the countries of South Asia on the basis of legality, justice and fair play," he added.

## Cuban dissident for more release of prisoners

MEXICO CITY, Feb 12: Cuba has freed several dissidents, but the move doesn't appear related to the pope's call for prisoner releases, a leading rights activist said Wednesday, reports AP.

The action is "coincidental," Pope John Paul II's appeal last month, said Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation.



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, centre, welcomes US Ambassador Bill Richardson, at the beginning of a meeting at the UN, Wednesday. At left is Peter Burleigh, US deputy permanent representative. Richardson rejected Iraq's offer to open eight presidential complexes for a limited time, saying Washington opposes "any deals or compromises" over demands for unrestricted access by UN arms inspectors. — AP/UNB photo

## Sonia Gandhi, BJP main focus of attention in Pakistan

Muhammad Najeeb writes from Islamabad

India's election is being keenly watched by the rulers and people of Pakistan with attention focused on Sonia Gandhi and the likelihood of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in New Delhi.

While the Congress party's lead campaigner is being compared to international cricket star-turned-politician Imran Khan who attracted the crowds but failed to bowl over voters in Pakistan's general election last year, the BJP's declared nuclear agenda is being secretly welcomed here.

The foreign office here is keeping its fingers crossed, hoping for a more stable Indian government to get the Islamabad-New Delhi talks back on track. Pakistan considers that its diplomatic initiative on the foreign secretary-level talks has been undermined by two successive weak United Front (UF) governments in New Delhi.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Siddiq Khan Kanju says Islamabad is not concerned about which party or grouping takes office in New Delhi.

"We are least bothered who forms the government in India. Rather we are interested in continuity of the talks process," he says. He adds that Pakistan would like to take up the Kash-

mir and other issues more vigorously with the next elected government of India.

Analysts here have noted that the resumption of the talks by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart I.K. Gujral was marked by the same rigidity on the Indian side as had characterised earlier dialogues, especially on Kashmir.

Political observers here note that, unlike in this country, a "rigid" consensus is maintained on critical foreign policy and security issues in India and hence they saw "little room" for a change in policy towards Pakistan with a change in government.

Sonia Gandhi's entry into Indian politics is an added attraction for Pakistanis this time. Rajiv Gandhi's Italian-born widow has been described as a "saviour" on Pakistani television and radio shows on the Indian election.

However, many here compare her decision to campaign for her assassinated husband's party to the political debut of Imran Khan who drew huge crowds at his poll rallies last year in almost every Pakistani city but failed to win a single Parliament seat.

"The Congress which was considered unable to reach the

three digit figure may now get a few more seats (in the Lok Sabha)," says Indian affairs expert Shireen Mazari, who, however, adds "for sure Sonia has put in colour to the Indian elections."

Many Pakistanis would prefer a Congress win to that of the BJP even though the former has not been seen to have been sincere in resolving the "core issues" in India-Pakistan ties.

Analysts here have noted how the BJP is trying to moderate its stand. They note how BJP President L.K. Advani, who had once said his party would get Pakistan declared a terrorist state, is now speaking differently to woo Muslim voters in his country.

Newspapers have quoted Advani as mentioning how India and Pakistan "had enjoyed best relations" when (BJP prime ministerial nominee) Atal Behari Vajpayee was foreign minister (in the 1977-79 Janata Party government).

The BJP's nuclear agenda set out in its election manifesto has also caused much debate. While the BJP's hard line on the issue has long been known, analysts here are asking whether a BJP or a BJP-led government would be any different from a Congress government on this issue.

India Abroad News Service

## Mudslide in Bolivia kills 50 miners

LA PAZ, Bolivia, Feb 12: A mudslide caused by El Nino's heavy rains swept through a northern gold mine camp early Wednesday, killing as many as 50 people, officials said, reports AP.

Rescue crews recovered 19 bodies by mid-afternoon, presidential press secretary Patricia Balda told The Associated Press. Twenty-one more miners were missing and feared dead, she said.

The head of the Civil Defence agency, Carlos Montero, said the death toll could be higher. "We are afraid that as many as 50 miners may have been killed, buried," Montero told the AP.

The mudslide occurred in the Mocotero camp in the Tipuani mountains, about 230 kilometres (145 miles) northwest of the Bolivian capital, La Paz. Thousands of people work in small cooperatives in the area, searching for gold along river banks.

## Clinton to visit 5 African states from Mar 22

WASHINGTON, Feb 12: US President Bill Clinton will travel to Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Botswana and Senegal from March 22 to April 2, the White House announced on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

He will become the first president to make a tour of sub-Saharan Africa since Jimmy Carter went to Nigeria and Liberia in 1978. George Bush made a brief visit to Somalia in late 1992 and early 1993 to visit US forces there.

"During the trip, the president will highlight the new US partnership with Africa — a vibrant continent increasingly open to democracy and free markets — and efforts to promote human rights and prevent future conflicts," said White House spokesman Mike McCurry.

Clinton's wife Hillary visited three of the countries on Clinton's list last March: Uganda, South Africa and Senegal.

Clinton planned to visit Ghana in West Africa first, then on to Uganda in East Africa, then on to South Africa and Botswana in southern Africa, and finally move back to West Africa to visit Senegal before returning home.

The South Africa stop will be a state visit. Clinton is expected to visit Johannesburg and Cape Town. A visit to Robben Island off Cape Town with South African President Nelson Mandela seemed likely. Mandela was imprisoned on the island during the apartheid years.

## Monica Lewinsky may refuse to testify, warns her lawyer

WASHINGTON, Feb 12: Former White House intern Monica Lewinsky was set to take the stand in the sex and perjury probe targeting President Bill Clinton, as a witness told of an encounter between the two in 1995, reports AFP.

But Lewinsky's lawyer William Ginsburg warned his client may refuse to testify without full protection from criminal charges.

Lewinsky, 24, is seeking immunity from independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr, who is investigating charges she had an affair with Clinton and that the president urged her to lie about it.

While Lewinsky has denied the affair under oath, she was reportedly taped talking about it and the discrepancy could land her with perjury charges.

But no immunity deal has been clinched and Starr is now seeking Lewinsky's testimony before a Grand Jury on Thursday, according to her lawyer William Ginsburg.

"She will not defy either a Federal Court order or a subpoena," Ginsburg said.

## 10 more killed in Algeria Salvation Front chastises head of EU delegation

ALGIERS, Algeria, Feb 12: The outlawed Islamic Salvation Front on Wednesday chastised the head of a delegation of visiting European lawmakers for publicly tearing up a letter from its leaders seeking a meeting, reports AP.

The nine-member delegation, on a fact-finding mission that concludes Thursday, was itself falling victim to the divisions wracking Algeria, with internal dissension over whether to hold a meeting with the Muslim fundamentalists on its agenda.

The delegation was the second group sent here on behalf of the European Union to see how to end violence that has left an estimated 75,000 people dead since 1992.

Authorities blame the bloodshed on Islamic insurgents trying to topple the military-backed regime. But some Algerians and human rights groups have called for an independent investigation to find out whether others, notable the army, might not play a role.

The head of the delegation, Andre Soulier, of France,

was "unbefitting political and diplomatic usage," said a statement by the Salvation Front's executive office in exile.

"It would have been preferable for the delegation president to refuse to receive the letter," said the statement, faxed to The Associated Press. It called the tearing up of the letter Tuesday at a news conference "media buffoonery."

Soulier also tore up a letter from the outlawed party of Ahmed Ben Bella, Algeria's first president, now living in exile in Morocco. And Soulier used firm words to reproach delegation member Daniel Cohn-Bendit of Germany's Greens Party.

Cohn-Bendit had said he wanted to meet with Ali Belhadj, the Salvation Front's No 2 man, imprisoned in a secret location, in the hopes he could influence Islamic insurgents to lay down their arms.

Meanwhile, violence continued with the slaying Wednesday of 10 people on a rural highway near Sidi Bel Abes — some 400 kms (272 miles) west of Algiers.

## Bid to oust Sierra Leone junta W African forces capture hill top base in Freetown

FREETOWN, Feb 12: Nigerian-led West African forces battling to oust Sierra Leone's military junta won control of a strategic hilltop stronghold in the capital Freetown, military officials and residents said, reports Reuters.

But both sides in the week-long fighting came under growing criticism — the Nigerians for widespread bombardments and junta forces for alleged atrocities against civilians.

The plight of thousands of civilians seeking any means to escape the war was underscored when 50 people were drowned after they tried to flee to neighbouring Guinea in a rusty canoe.

Freetown residents said the ECOMOG regional force made forays close to the city centre on Wednesday night after taking control of Furih Bay Hill, a major junta military base overlooking the capital.

Thousands of civilians, ignoring a night-time curfew imposed last week by the junta, headed towards the National Stadium in the west where other displaced people and had gathered.

"Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow or after tomorrow. Many people feel the junta's resistance is weakening," one resident said.

UN Secretary General Kofi

Annan called for an end to the fighting in view of widespread civilian suffering. "I call on both sides urgently to spare civilians and to ensure the protection of humanitarian personnel," he said in a statement.

## New law limits use of death penalty in China

BEIJING, Feb 12: A 4-month-old law has reduced the number of death sentences in China, the most prolific user of judicial executions worldwide, Chinese state-run media reported Thursday, reports AP.

"The greater restriction on capital punishment shows China cherishes the lives of criminals," the Xinhua News Agency quoted Supreme People's Court Judge Zhang Jun as saying.

A revised criminal law, which went into effect Oct. 1, prohibits the death penalty for pregnant women and minors and limits its use for crimes of theft, Xinhua said.

Judges are also given greater latitude to issue suspended death sentences, a penalty usually commuted to life in prison. The provision has curbed the number of immediate executions, Xinhua said.

## Off the Record

### Attention: Twins!

CHICAGO: Taking brisk, half-hour walks just six times a month appeared to cut the risk of death by 44 per cent among twins in a study researchers say is the first to separate the influences of heredity and exercise on longevity, reports AP.

The study tracked almost 16,000 healthy men and women in a national registry of twins in Finland for an average of 19 years. The authors, led by Dr Urho M Kujala of the University of Helsinki, reported their findings in Feb 11 issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association.

The researchers found that even occasional exercisers — those who did less than the equivalent of six brisk, half-hour walks a month — were 30 per cent less likely to die than their sedentary twins during the study.

Vigorous exercisers — those who did at least the equivalent of six brisk walks or jogs lasting 30 minutes each month — were 44 per cent less likely to die.

"Even if you have bad genes, this study strongly suggests that increasing physical activity can help you live longer," said exercise physiologist Steve Farrell, associate director of the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research in Dallas. He was not involved in the study.

The purpose of the study was to clarify the relationship between those factors influencing how long people live that can be modified and those that cannot.

The importance of family history — locked-in trait — has gained attention in recent years with the identification of specific genes that make people susceptible to such illnesses as heart disease and cancer. But much research also makes clear the importance of exercise in lowering the risk of early death and disease.

## BRIEFLY

### 48 killed in Colombia in 10 days:

A right-wing death squad killed at least 48 people in 10 days of bloodshed in and around a river port in southern Colombia, a mayor said on Wednesday, Reuters reports from Bogota.

National Police Chief Gen Rosso Jose Serrano denied any knowledge of a massacre in Putumayo province and said communist agitators were spreading misinformation. National Peace Commissioner Daniel Garcia Pena, however, appeared to confirm the reports of the killings in the south, saying that they had produced "horror" in government circles.

### Tremor shakes Indonesia:

Hundreds of residents on the island of Ambon spent Wednesday night in the open following an earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 4.5, the official Antara news agency reported Thursday, AP says from Jakarta.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or major damage on the island, about 2,400 kilometres (1,500 miles) northeast of Jakarta. Antara said the tremor struck at 8.54 pm (15.54 GMT) Wednesday. It said local people were panicked by the tremor and stayed outdoors.

### Moderate quake rocks Philippines:

A moderate earthquake jolted the central Philippine island of Leyte, damaged pier and causing cracks in roads, but there were no immediate reports of casualties, officials said, Reuters reports from Tacloban.

The earthquake struck on Wednesday evening and registered a magnitude of 5.6 on the open ended Richter Scale, the seismology office in Manila said. "According to the local mayor, a portion of the dock was broken and there were cracks on roads," a Red Cross spokeswoman said quoting a report from the Red Cross chapter on Leyte, about 600 kms (370 miles) southeast of Manila.

### 25 hurt in Italian train crash:

A Pisa-bound passenger train pulling out of Rome's main station was rammed by a locomotive Wednesday, injuring 25 people, Italian news reports said, AP reports from Rome.

Most of the injured suffered bruises which were treated at the infirmary at Termini Station, but two people were seriously enough injured to be transferred to a hospital, the Italian news agency AGI and state-run RAI TV reported. The crash was the latest in a series of accidents involving the Italian state-run rails for more than a year.

### Zemin invites ROK president:

Chinese President Jiang Zemin has invited South Korean President-elect Kim Dae-jung to visit Beijing soon after he takes office later this month, officials said Thursday, AP reports from Seoul.

Jiang extended the invitation when he met with Kim Jong-pil, honorary chairman of a coalition party in the new South Korean government, in Beijing earlier this week. Kim Dae-jung's camp did not immediately respond to the invitation. But the president-elect has expressed hope for a meeting with Jiang to discuss peace on the Korean peninsula. China remains communist North Korea's last major ally.

### Top HR activist jailed in Tunisia:

A court on Wednesday sentenced a leading human rights activist to three years in prison, drawing immediate criticism from human rights advocates who denounced Tunisia as a police state, AP says from Tunis.

Khemaïs Ksila, vice-president of the Tunisian League of Human Rights, was convicted of "slandering public bodies," "disseminating false information that risks troubling public order" and "inciting the population to break the law." Human rights activists claim that the real reason for Ksila's arrest was his active role in a 1996 campaign against human rights abuses in this small North African nation.

### Indonesia's new army chief named:

Indonesia's Chief of Army Staff General Wiranto will be the country's new armed forces chief outgoing Commander General Faisal Tanjung said yesterday, Reuters reports from Jakarta.

He told a meeting of senior military officials that the Deputy Chief of Army Staff, General Subagio, will take over Wiranto's position. Tanjung, who is due for retirement, said Wiranto will take over his new post on Monday. Lieutenant General Sugiono, head of the strategic reserve, will take over as army deputy chief of staff, he said.



Chris Ann Becki, right, and Jennifer Rubin react to life-size cut-outs of President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, in a Marilyn Monroe pose, outside Federal Court in Washington Wednesday. On Wednesday, Lewinsky's mother Marcia Lewis was to return for a second day of testifying before the Grand Jury. The cut-outs were set-up by an entrepreneur who charged to take photos of people with the cut-outs. — AP/UNB photo