

International

Indonesia riots

New military chief installed as troops fear more trouble

JAKARTA, Feb 16: President Suharto installed a trusted former aide as Indonesia's new armed forces commander Monday as thousands of troops and police watched for more trouble after days of technically-charged unrest, reports AP.

The armed forces are fully in control and can manage the situation," said Gen Wiranto after he was sworn-in at Jakarta's state palace.

He warned that the 465,000-member military would act against those who try to threaten national stability.

Police in Jakarta have pledged to keep the capital free from politically-motivated protests ahead of a presidential election in March. They say agitators could be imprisoned for up to five years.

Five people, including at least two men shot by security personnel, were killed during three days of rioting on four islands amid the worst economic crisis in three decades.

Mobs on Java, Lombok, Sumatra and Sulawesi attacked and torched dozens of houses and shops owned by the ethnic Chinese minority they blame for soaring prices and growing unemployment.

Troops patrolled several towns and villages Monday.

Violence has been building over the past two months as hard times hit millions of poor, mainly Muslim, Indonesians.

The Chinese, who are mostly

Christians or Buddhists, dominate commerce but complain they are being made scapegoats for economic problems.

Wiranto, a four-star general, denied the economic crisis alone was the reason for the unrest. Instead he blamed "certain groups" for fomenting trouble and spreading rumours.

"People must consider rumours as garbage," he said. "Garbage is poisonous."

Violence has rocked more than a dozen centres. Nevertheless Wiranto said it hasn't yet "been harmful to the nation's stability and security."

Suharto has governed for 32 years and is expected to win a seventh five-year term when an electoral college-like, 1,000-member assembly votes on the presidency in March.

Analysts have said his appointment of Wiranto as armed forces chief will help safeguard his position.

Wiranto, 50, established a trusted relationship with Suharto, 76, when he served as the president's adjutant, or military aide, between 1989 and 1993.

Unrest came as close as 80 kilometres (50 miles) to the capital during the weekend. Even so Jakarta remains calm in the lead-up to the election.

"Jakarta will always be secure and safe," the capital's police chief Maj Gen Hamami Nata said Sunday.

NZ sends commandos, planes for attack

Clinton admn setting stage for military attack on Iraq

WASHINGTON, Feb 16: Top Clinton administration officials say they see no answer to the diplomatic impasse with Iraq and are prepared to go to the nation to explain why a military strike may be necessary and unavoidable, reports AP.

Defence Secretary William Cohen said Sunday that the United States will accept no compromise that allows Iraq to limit UN weapons inspections. "I have seen no proposal that would satisfy the basic objectives... that is full, unrestricted access," he said on ABC television's "This Week."

UN representatives are in Baghdad and the Iraqi government has sought to defuse the crisis by offering some access to the presidential compounds. It previously declared off-limits.

The issue, chief UN weapons inspector Richard Butler said on Cable News Network's "late edition", is whether there can be about eight palaces that "will be inspected in a special way. That doesn't mean an ineffective inspection, but a special way that shows sensitivity to Iraq; and if a solution on that basis is agreeable to the (Security) Council, maybe we've got a diplomatic solution. If not, I don't know what will happen."

President Bill Clinton's na-

tional security adviser, Sandy Berger, said he hoped the dispute could be settled peacefully, but not if it meant concessions to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

"We simply cannot let this man, who has used chemical weapons 10 times since 1983, have safe havens to redevelop his weapons of mass destruction," Berger said on NBC television's "Meet the Press."

The administration says a military strike could come at any time, although it would still like to get more open support from US allies and has yet to get a formal endorsement from Congress, which is in recess this week.

To raise national consciousness on the issue, Clinton will go to the Pentagon on Tuesday. Cohen, Berger and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will hold a town-hall meeting in Columbus, Ohio, on Wednesday.

Sen Joseph Biden, a Delaware Democrat, said the United States has been promised logistical support for a military strike from at least 23 nations, compared with 37 backers during the 1991 Gulf War. But Russia, China and France remain opposed to the military option, and Clinton continued his telephone campaign Sunday, calling leaders in Austria, Belgium,

Bahrain and Kuwait to coordinate policy.

Meanwhile a senior Republican senator said it's time for President Bill Clinton to set a deadline for Saddam Hussein to back down or face US military might.

Other lawmakers insisted Sunday that the president should not act without a vote of support from Congress, which is on vacation next week.

Another AP report adds New Zealand on Monday added its support to the Western nations ready to back military action against Iraq offering its elite commando unit and two search and rescue planes.

Prime Minister Jenny Shipley said the Cabinet had approved sending 20 Special Air Services troops for search and rescue operations and two Orion aircraft to the coalition forces led by the United States.

US President Bill Clinton phoned Shipley last week to ask for New Zealand to be part of the coalition against Saddam Hussein.

Close ally Australia has already promised about 250 personnel to the Iraq mission, including more than 100 elite SAS commandos.

New Zealand contributed two Hercules supply aircraft and two medical teams to the Gulf War in 1991.

Narayanan first Indian president to cast vote

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: India's president broke from tradition and cast his vote Monday as the country went to the polls for the second time in two years, a local news agency reported, says AP.

President KR Narayanan and his wife Usha became the first Indian first couple to exercise their franchise. Press Trust of India reported. The Indian president usually does not vote in order to demonstrate the neutrality of his position.

"The President expressed his desire to vote. To the best of our knowledge and available records, he is the first president to vote," his press secretary TP Seetharam told PTI.

Elections are being held three years early because no party won a majority in the last Lok Sabha, or lower house of parliament in 1996 voting, and politicians could not agree on a minority or coalition government.

Shan rebels kill 7 troops in Myanmar

MAE HONG SON, Thailand, Feb 16: At least seven Myanmar government soldiers were killed when Shan guerrillas staged a surprise attack on a military outpost in eastern Shan state, guerrilla sources said today, reports Reuter.

About 200 Shan State Army (SSA) guerrillas, who are fighting for autonomy for the Shan state from Yangon, hit the outpost about three kms (1.8 miles) from Ho Mong town last Thursday, the guerrillas and refugee sources told Reuters.

The SEA lost two guerrillas in the attack, they said.

Ho Mong was once a stronghold of opium warlord Khun Sa, who surrendered to the ruling Myanmar military government in early 1996.

Lankan army shoring up defence line in Kilinochchi

KILINOCHCHI, Sri Lanka, Feb 16: Sri Lankan soldiers are hastily digging trenches and building sandbag bunkers to shore up defence lines in this strategic northern town following fierce fighting earlier this month, reports Reuter.

New defence lines are being constructed against occasional mortar thuds and bursts of automatic fire after a bloody battle left hundreds of soldiers and Tamil Tiger rebels dead and forced the military to withdraw from its frontlines south of Kilinochchi town.

"We were able to repulse a major attack. They (Tigers) could not achieve their aim," Brigadier Lohan Gunawardena, general officer commanding the army in the region, told journalists on a visit to Kilinochchi.

Sanjay, Rhea tie the knot

MUMBAI, Feb 16: Film actor Sanjay Dutt married leading Model Rhea Pillai at the maharajm Temple in south Mumbai Sunday, after a two year long courtship, reports PTI.

The stunning liaison between the macho star and the model, that was kept under wraps for sometime, became public after Rhea came to meet Sanjay regularly on sets of his under-production films.

The couple took the decision to tie the knot after attending a Valentine's party the previous night and went through the 'saat pheras' early Sunday in presence of the temple pujari.

This is the second marriage for 38-year-old Sanjay, son of the charismatic veteran actor turned politician Sunil Dutt. Sanjay's first wife actress Richa Sharma died of cancer last year. His daughter Trishala is in New York with Richa's parents.

Thai daily reports

Suu Kyi ready to share power with junta

BANGKOK, Feb 16: Embattled Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi is open to the idea of sharing power with the country's military leaders, a Thai newspaper quoted her as saying Monday in a rare interview, reports AP.

Myanmar's military government, however, has shown no sign it is willing to share power with Suu Kyi, whose political party won a landslide victory in a 1990 election that was not honoured.

"We are keeping all our options open," the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner was quoted as saying by The Nation, an English-language newspaper, regarding the possibility of forming a coalition with the military.

Myanmar's military government refuses to permit journalists to visit Suu Kyi at her home. She gives occasional clandestine interviews at the homes of other leaders of her political party, the National League for Democracy.

The Nation reported that the authorities, when they realised an interview was taking place, cut electricity to the home where it was being given.

Since her 1995 release from six years of house arrest for pro-democracy activities, Suu Kyi has repeatedly called for the government to let the victors in the election take power.

The Nation characterised her statements regarding a possible coalition as a softening of her demands, and in a front-page headline declared "NLD ready to share power, says Suu Kyi."

But in every major speech since her release, Suu Kyi has called on the military government to work with the NLD in implementing democracy and forging national reconciliation.

There would be "no problem to sharing power," with military leaders, NLD vice chairman Tin Oo also said in a separate interview with The Nation.

Suu Kyi has steadfastly refused to detail what compromise she and her party would accept from the government before both parties enter into talks.

The military has refused to open a dialogue, however, with either Suu Kyi or Tin Oo, instead attempting last year to begin talks with other NLD officials.

"A genuine political dialogue involves equality, if they choose their own representatives and ours as well, that is not a dialogue on an equal basis. For that reason we will not accept this," Suu Kyi was quoted as saying by The Nation.

At a party congress held last September, NLD representatives reaffirmed a mandate

Nepal keenly observing Indian general elections

KATHMANDU, Feb 16: Though engulfed in its own political uncertainty, Nepal is keenly observing developments in the Indian general election, reports India Abroad News Service.

Nepali press and intelligentsia have welcomed the reference to relations with this country in the election manifesto of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which most here expect to emerge as the single largest party and be in a better position to form the government in New Delhi.

The BJP has said that it will continue the best of ties with Nepal if it comes to power. One of the party's foreign policy objectives is "to maintain the unique warm and friendly relations with Nepal with which India has the closest cultural, religious and historical ties."

"We recognise in particular the great scope for increasing cooperation in the energy and environment related areas. A BJP government will seek to resolve all outstanding issues quickly," the BJP manifesto,

which has been widely noted here, says.

The Congress party's stand on Indo-Nepal relations too has been welcomed.

Professor T.N. Jaisawal of Tribhuvan University is confident that Indo-Nepal ties will not be hampered no matter which party comes to power in New Delhi. "No one in New Delhi or in Kathmandu can go against Indo-Nepal relations, which are based on sound social, cultural, historical and economic foundations for immemorial," he told India Abroad News Service.

What Indian political parties' manifestos say about Indo-Nepal relations have been widely carried in newspapers in this country. "The People's Review (an English language weekly) Rising Nepal, The Kathmandu Post, The Independent (English language dailies) and leading Nepali language publications have given extensive coverage to manifestos."

All media commentaries and analyses in the Nepali media are upbeat about the future

of bilateral relations as proposed by major Indian parties.

The BJP's stand on India's nuclear programme too has generated much interest. A number of analytical reports have appeared focusing on what would happen if India went nuclear, as proposed by the BJP.

Jaisawal, who is an expert on foreign policy, does not see any negative impact on Nepal if India goes nuclear. "Since Nepal's geo-political status is directly linked with India's, Nepal's security somehow depends on its southern neighbour's security. For this reason, a strong India will be beneficial for Nepal in the long term," he said.

"I do not see any reason that India should not build a nuclear weapon when some countries are equipped with these," said senior journalist Bhairab

Risal. "India being a nuclear power will not disturb peace in South Asia. In case of Nepal, this matter will not have any negative impact," he added.



An Iraqi volunteer learns to use an anti-aircraft gun during a training session on the outskirts of Baghdad on Sunday, amid the arrival of a UN special commission sent by the UN Secretary General. Iraq is still facing the possibility of a US military attack.

— AP/UNB photo

Modernisation treads cautiously on tradition in Bhutan

THIMPHU, Feb 16: Once every two years, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck climbs into his Land Cruiser and heads out to meet his people. Often, his four wives and some of his 10 children go along, but there's hardly any security, reports AP.

In dozens of local meetings during the ritual, the 42-year-old king of Bhutan and his ministers discuss the latest development plans and decide where to build a bridge, a clinic, a school.

Such people-to-government contact is possible in a small nation like Bhutan, with only 600,000 people. While political chaos afflicts its democratic neighbours — India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh — Bhutan's monarchy is a refuge of stability.

It's a way of life the king will go to sometimes desperate lengths to protect.

In a January report, Amnesty International, the London-based human rights group, accused Bhutan of arresting and torturing dozens of pro-democracy activists, including Buddhist monks and teachers. A few years ago Bhutan cracked down to stop

what it considered a flood of immigrants, raising concerns about human rights in the kingdom.

But the king remains widely admired. Even his harshest critics at the height of the immigration controversy did not call for an end to the monarchy, seeking only to limit its powers.

To the few visitors allowed in each year, this Buddhist kingdom high in the Himalayas is a magical land of legendary dragons, demons and deities. Its forests are vast and bountiful — and actually spreading. Its rivers are swift and clean. The crisp air is scented with pine.

The Bhutanese call their home Druk Yul — Land of the Thunder Dragon — a name derived from traditional stories that its branch of Mahayana, or Tibetan, Buddhism was conceived amid much thunder and lightning.

In the towns and villages huddled in the valleys, Buddhist good luck symbols adorn window frames and roof beams and often the white stone walls. Citizens are required to wear traditional dress: men a kilt that falls to the knee called the

'kho' women a robe known as the 'kira'.

In the debate on development vs environment and globalisation vs tradition, Bhutan has chosen the conservative path, with some twists — among them the government's home page on the Internet to provide information to outsiders.

Thimphu, the capital of 40,000 people, has no neon signs, no traffic lights, no pizzerias or fast food chains. It has only one newspaper — a weekly.

A Japanese-installed microwave system has spread telephone service to most parts of the country, but private phones are rare, especially in rural areas.

State-run radio broadcasts traditional music, news and talk shows, but there is no television service, and satellite dishes that could receive foreign broadcasts are banned.

Yet the government sends 1,000 of its best students to leading Western universities each year. And Bhutanese children are taught in English rather than the local language, Dzongkha.

Bhutan's leaders say that while defending their culture is a priority, English is a necessary tool in today's world. "When we leave Bhutan, we leave our language at the airport," Trade Minister Om Pradhan said.

And while there are no television broadcasts, many urban Bhutanese own VCRs and TV monitors so they can rent videos of foreign movies.

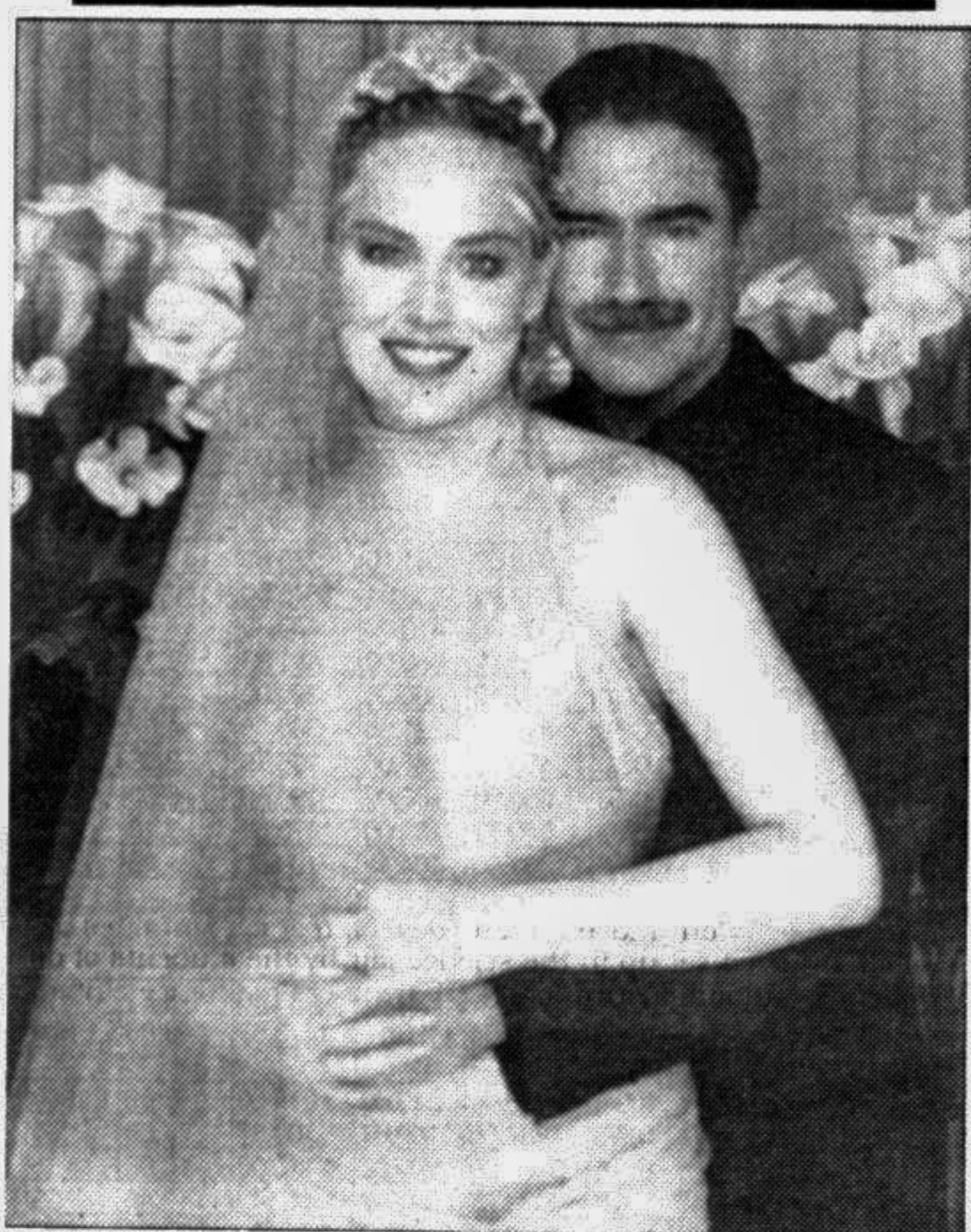
"In some ways, it's nice not to have television. Once you're exposed to things from the outside, you might get carried away," said the proprietor of a video rental shop.

"But I think it would be better to have TV, to see what's happening around the world. We are too limited," he added, asking to remain anonymous like others critical of the system.

Bhutan's cautious approach to the outside world is dictated by its location, squeezed between the two most populous countries on earth, China and India.

It has watched other traditional Buddhist societies disappear as independent nations.

Off the Record



Actress Sharon Stone, 39, and San Francisco Examiner executive editor Phil Bronstein, 47, pose after their wedding ceremony on Saturday at her home in Beverly Hills, California.

— AP/UNB photo

Etiquette school for cab drivers

PHILADELPHIA: Philadelphia cabbies are taking classes to learn a little class, reports AP.

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, which oversees taxis, has been holding mandatory etiquette classes for Philadelphia's cab drivers since January. It's a sort of charm school that's meant to better prepare cab drivers for the job.

On the lesson plan are movies like "View from the Backseat" and lectures about keeping cars clean. The drivers are also schooled on how to dress — clean shirts with collars, pants, shoes and socks.

"We like drivers to think of themselves as business professionals doing a job," PUC enforcement officer Benes Lawrence told a class of a dozen men last week.

The city's 6,000 certified taxi drivers are required to take a one-day class. New drivers must take a three-day course.

Happily reunited

BANGKOK: Mike and Susu, a celebrity couple in Thailand who had been separated for a year, have been reunited in a new home, says AP.

The orangutans, whose nearly human "marriage" drew a nationwide television audience in 1996, were moved to separate quarters in January 1997 after Susu gave birth to a son.

Mike was jealous of the attention showered on the infant and his handlers at the Lop Buri Zoo, north of Bangkok, feared he would harm the baby.

The Nation newspaper reported Sunday that Mike had regained his equilibrium and moved with his family to a new 1.5 million-baht (dhs 30,000) ape house.

Indian polls

Voting gets off to slow start as weary voters fear another hung parliament

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Maqbool Ahmed, a 65-year-old New Delhi resident, voted today with resignation in his heart, reports AFP.

India's polls, to elect the country's fifth government within two years, are widely expected to lead to another hung parliament.

"I do not see the point of this exercise if it throws up another hung parliament. We might as well sit at home," said Ahmed wearily, a chequered scarf around his head, after casting his ballot.

His mood seemed to be reflected in the slow start to balloting, although officials argued it would pick up later.

Most polling stations reported thin voter turnout during the first five hours of polling.

Praveen Sharma, a clean-shaven executive of a multinational firm dressed in dark blue suit, agreed it was "unfortunate that no single party may get a majority."

G Randha Krishnan, a 32-

year-old government employee, said in previous elections he had waited for about an hour to cast his vote.

"Now there are no people here," Krishnan said.

"I am a bit surprised that there are no long queues. It is a strange and one does not feel being in a polling station."

For him, it was heavy security around polling stations, rather than the likely result, that was keeping people away.

"The security has been tight for this election and I think that could be one main reason," he said.

More than 80,000 policemen and soldiers armed with automatic rifles and wireless sets were deployed today in New Delhi.

The security issue came to the fore at the weekend when 16 bombs went off near a political rally due to have been addressed by the leader of India's largest party BJP.

At one east Delhi polling station, 178 of 1,050 eligible voters had turned up by midday, five hours into polling.

BRIEFLY



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (R) Kisses Jordanian King Hussein on the forehead, shortly after arriving at Amman's hilltop Raghadan Palace on Sunday. Arafat and Hussein discussed the stalled Mideast peace process and Iraq's standoff with the UN.

— AP/UNB photo

110 hospitalised for food poisoning

At least 110 people were in hospital in southern Pakistan Monday suffering severe food poisoning, the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan reported, AP says from Islamabad.

They fell ill Sunday after attending a wedding party in Sukur, a town 720 kilometres (430 miles) south of the federal capital Islamabad, the report said. The local hospital was unable to cope with the many sick people, prompting authorities to transfer 35 of them to other clinics in southern Sindh province, the report said. Most were expected to be released later Monday, according to hospital officials.

British tourist drowns in Australia

A British man drowned after being caught in a rip tide off Coff's Harbor late Sunday, becoming the second foreign tourist to die off the mid-northern New South Wales coast city in four days, AP says from Sydney.

Police said Adam Robert Russell, 33, from Yorkshire, drowned while swimming at park beach, the same beach where 56-year-old German Karl Heniz Heile drowned three days earlier. A police launch was called to the beach to assist surf life-savers in the rescue of Russell and his traveling companion, Catherine Boocock, also of Yorkshire.

Blast on bus kills 16 in China

An explosion on a trolley bus shattered windows 200 metres (600 feet) away and scattered body parts on a strategic bridge over the Yangtze River, China's state-run media reported Monday, AP says from Beijing.

Officials in central Wuhan city said that the casualty count from Saturday's explosion has held steady: 16 people dead, 30 wounded. State-run television, in a brief report, showed a tow-truck hauling away the electric trolley's charred, skeletal frame and chassis. The blast apparently blew back the roof and burned the upholstery off the metal-framed seats.

Iraqi FM to meet Annan

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said al-Sahhaf said in an interview published yesterday that he will meet UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in Paris on Wednesday, AFP says from Amman.

"I called our permanent ambassador to the UN in New York Nizar Hamdoun Sunday and he told us that Annan will pass through Paris on Wednesday. I will, of course, be in Paris and will meet him with handshakes," Sahhaf said in an interview with al-Rai newspapers. "There is also the possibility that Annan will visit Baghdad," reiterated Sahhaf.

7 bodies found in Chiapas

Mexican Red Cross workers have discovered the bodies of seven men killed several months ago, apparently in a dispute between rebel and government sympathisers in Chiapas state, AP says from San Cristobal de Las Casas.

The discovery of the bodies in a cave Sunday comes nearly two months after the Dec. 22 massacre of 45 sympathisers of the Zapatista rebel movement. Residents blamed a paramilitary group with government ties to that massacre. Rescue workers rappelled into a 130-foot (40-metre) vertical cave near the village of Petepel, 70 miles (115 km) southeast of San Cristobal, to retrieve the bodies. The seven apparently had been thrown into the pit after being shot in a dispute between peasants in the nearby village of El Vergel back in October.

Kim turns 56: North Korean Kim Jong Il turned 56 on Monday amid signs that his reclusive communist country may try to defrost its icy relations with arch-rival South Korea, AP says from Seoul.

Warning to South Korea, with which the North is technically in a state of war, could ease strains between Pyongyang and the rest of the world, especially the United States and Japan. "There are subtle, hopeful signs that the North Korean leader may ease his tough stance toward South Korea," said Koh Young-hwan, a political science professor at Seoul's Dongguk University.

2 killed in Poland chopper crash: A helicopter carrying seven Russian tourists and a Polish pilot crashed into a lake in northern Poland on Sunday, killing at least two people, local police said, AFP reports from Warsaw.

Two bodies and one person with serious injuries were recovered from the icy waters of Lake Sniardwy in the Mazury region and rescuers said chances of finding any more survivors were "scant." The helicopter, owned by Grudziadz Flying Club in northern Poland, had been chartered by tourists from Kaliningrad for a sight-seeing flight.