Annan off to Baghdad, terms

# BDIFFIY

UN envoy arrives in Freetown:
UN envoy Francis Okello flew into Sierra Leone's battle-torn capital Wednesday to plan an emergency aid mission and call on fighters to release kidnapped aid workers. AP reports from Freetown.

Three Spaniards, an Austrian and an Italian were abducted over the weekend by fleeing gunmen loyal to junta leader Johnny Paul Koroma. The whereabouts of the aid workers four missionary doctors and a chemist - remained uncertain. although the Spanish Foreign Ministry said it believed the Spaniards were captured because the rebels needed medical assistance.

Landslide claims 3 in China: Three people have been killed and 16 are missing after a landslide swept through a small village in southern China, a journalist with Fujian Television said yesterday, AFP reports from

Heavy rain and excessive mining of an open quarry in the Bailing township in Fuxing city, in eastern Rujian province provoked a landslide on Wednesday which swept through houses where 50 people lived.

Islamic militants jailed in Paris:
A group of Islamic militants convicted of involvement in a series of terrorist bomb attacks in Paris in 1995 were sentenced

on Wednesday by a court here, AFP reports from Paris. The prison sentences, which ranged from 10 years to eight months suspended, were handed down for a wave of deadly attacks, in which nine people died, claimed by an Algerian group, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Wednesday's prison sentences included one in absentia of 10 years for Ali Touchent, the alleged ringleader of the network who evaded arrest by the French police. The Algerian authorities say he was killed by police in Algiers last May 23, but not identified at the time.

2 soldiers killed in Colombia: A grenade booby trap concealed on a slain soldier exploded when the corpse was removed from an evacuation helicopter, killing two other soldiers, an army division commander said

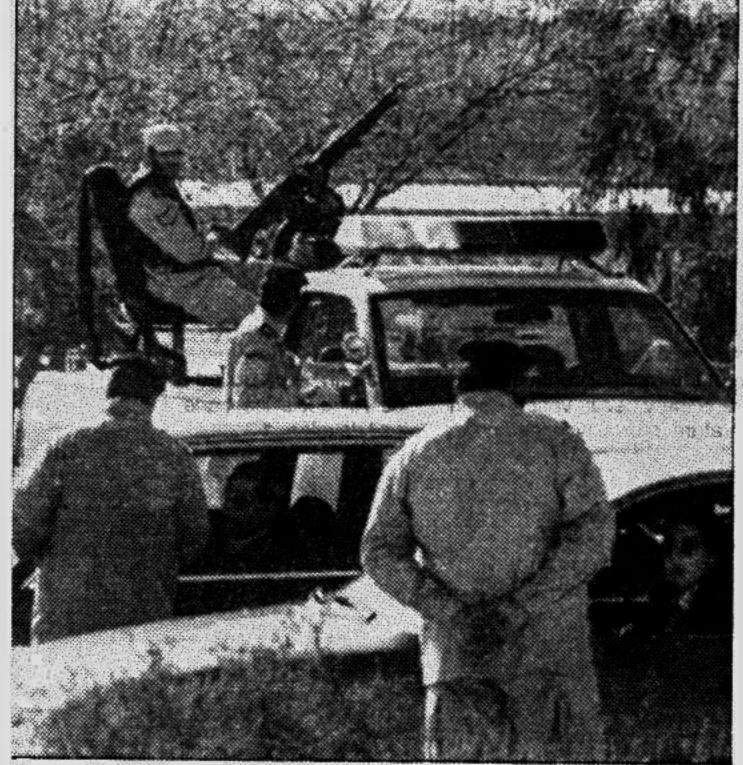
Wednesday, AP reports from Bogota. Authorities believe leftist rebels concealed the grenade in the underwear of one of three soldiers killed Monday during fighting with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, in the Chingaza heights some 50 km east of Bogota.

4 UN workers abducted in Georgia: Unidentified gunmen today kidnapped four employees of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in western Georgia, near the breakaway Abkhazia region, UNHCR officials told AFP in the Georgian capital Tbilisi.

Georgian Interior Minister Kakha Targamadze told reporters the four UNHCR workers - three foreigners and one Georgian — were abducted from the UN mission in Zugdidi and were being held in the nearby mountain village of Tsalenjikha.

Singapore steps up coastal patrol: Singapore has stepped up coastal surveillance amid fears that more illegal immigrants could try to sneak in because of the regional financial crisis, police officials and press reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Singapore.

The prosperous island's police have arrested 23 illegal aliens so far this year - all of them in the first two weeks of February.



Kuwaiti Police officers check identification cards at the entrance of the International Kuwait City airport, Wednesday. The Kuwaiti government has increased security measures to prevent any terrorist attack, in response to the Iraq-UN tensions. - AP/UNB photo

### Bid to implement self-rule accords

### Top Palestinian, Israeli negotiators hold talks

HERZLIYA, Israel, Feb 19: Top Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met for more than two hours in US-sponsored talks on Wednesday to hammer out agreements on implementing self-rule accords, officials said.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat and his Israeli counterpart Danny Naveh mou at the residence of US Arabassador to Israel Ned Walker at Herzliya near Tel Aviv, Erakat told AFP.

Walker presented both sides with a US summary of the differences between the joint committees working on interim issu's, Erakat said.

The sides will each present the summary to their political leaderships and come up with proposals to bridge the differ-...ces at meetings next week, Erakat added.

"The gaps are very wide between the positions of the two the West Bank.

sides," Erakat said after the

The joint committees are studying implementation of the interim autonomy accords on issues including the opening of an airport and port in the Gaza Strip, creation of an industrial one and the establishment of a safe corridor for Palestinians between the West Bank and

Erakat and Naveh held talks in Washington last week with US officials on ways to revive the peace process after 11 months of stalemate but failed to achieve progress.

But Erakat said on Monday that the United States was expected to present within the next two weeks a new initiative to break the deadlock on key issues, particularly further Israeli troop withdrawals from

his mission 'difficult' UNITED NATIONS, Feb 19: The UN chief heads to a meeting with Saddam Hussein with the full backing of the Security Council but lingering doubts about what his mission can

the standoff over UN weapons inspections have been pro-posed, but Secretary-General Kofi Annan leaves for Baghdad on Thursday with clear warnings form the United States and Britain that they have the ultimate say over any settlement

Several formulas to break

achieve, reports AP.

the Iragis. "Be firm in substance and show flexibility in form," Annan quoted one diplomat as advising him during his brief-ing with the 15-member Secu-

plan he might negotiate with

rity Council on Wednesday. Annan acknowledged that his trip — seen as the last diplomatic effort to stave off US military strikes - wouldn't be an easy one. "It is a difficult mission coming at a very criti-

cal juncture," he told reporters. Nevertheless, he said he was encouraged by the 15-member council's unanimous support and also "the message coming from Baghdad that they are prepared to engaged me constructively to find a solution."

The UN inspectors must certify that Iraq has destroyed its long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction before the council will lift crippling economic sanctions imposed in 1990, when Saddam's troops invaded Kuwait, touching off the 1991 Gulf War.

Iraq claims it has destroyed all banned weapons and that the special commission has deceived the council to keep the sanctions in place.

Baghdad has blocked inspec-

tors form gaining access to eight so-called presidential sites, arguing they represent symbols of Iraqi sovereignty. appoint a new group of inspec-tors, possibly including some The United States and Britain, asserting that the independence and integrity of the inspections

Iraqi compliance. One proposal to end the standoff without resorting to force would have diplomats ac-

must be protected, have threat-

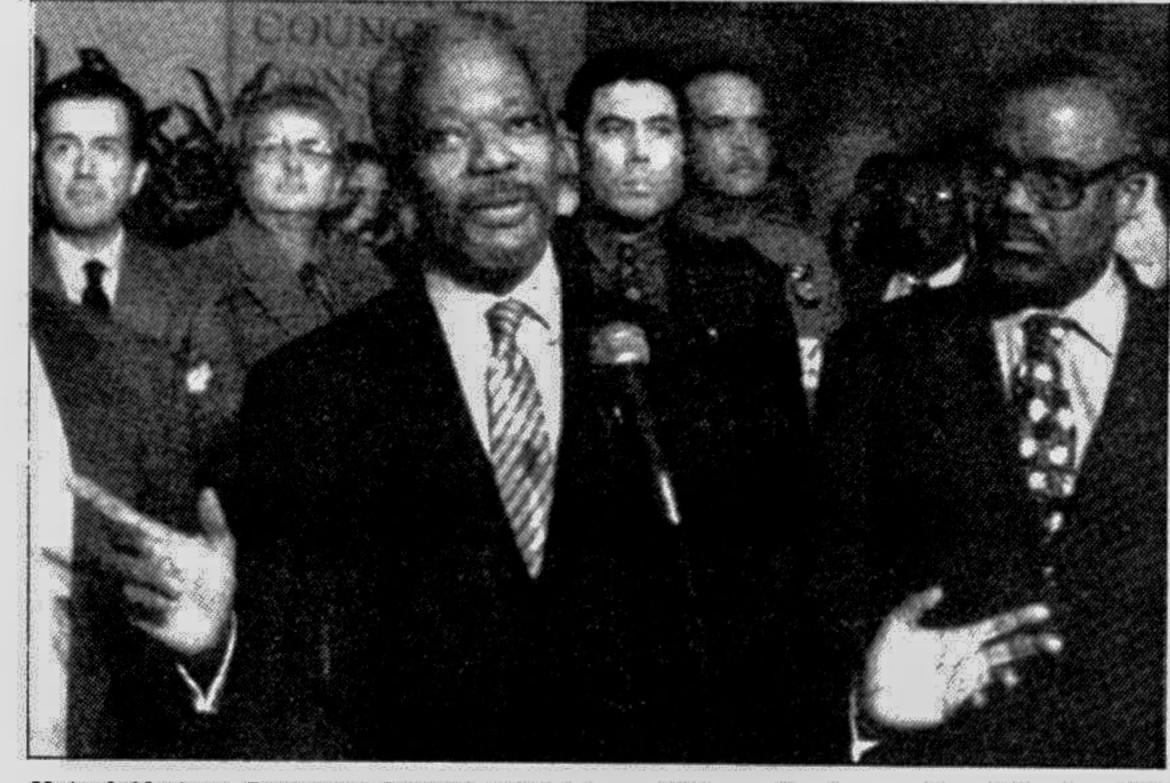
ened military action to force

company UN inspectors on vis-its to the sites. Others would have Annan

from the UN Special Commission that has been carrying out the inspections. Iraq also has insisted on a 60-day time-limit for inspections, something the United States and Britain have rejected.

Annan was leaving New York on Thursday and planned to spend the night in Paris, where he would meet with French President Jacques Chirac. He was expected to be in Baghdad by Friday and said he would meet directly with the Iraqi leader over the weekend.

He is expected back at the United Nations by early next



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, left, speaks to reporters following UN Security Council consultations, Wednesday. Annan said he received support from the 15member body for his trip to Baghdad, but cautioned that the mission is not going to be an easy one. - AP/UNP photo

### Kaunda charged, faces life sentence

LUSAKA, Feb 19: Former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, 73; was charged in court on Wednesday with concealing information about last October's failed coup in the southern African country, reports Reuters.

Kaunda, who ruled Zambia for 27 years from Independence in 1964, was charged with his security chief, Moyse Kaulungombe, on the charge of mispri-

sion of treason. Neither was asked to plead and the hearing was adjourned until February 27.

Kaunda and Kaulungombe are the first to be charged. If convicted, they could face up to life in prison. Misprision of treason is the

legal term for concealing knowledge of a treasonable act. According to the prosecution, the pair had prior knowledge of the coup attempt but failed to report it to the authorities.

The pair are among 92 people detained under emergency laws invoked after the attempt by junior army officers to overthrow President Frederick Chiluba's government.

The former president was arrested on Christmas Day on suspicion that he was involved in plotting the coup, he was later placed under house arrest. However, the charge against him on Wednesday did not allege direct involvement.

### Coimbatore bomb blast

### Govt claims breakthrough in investigation

CHENNAI, Feb 19: The Tamil Nadu government yesterday claimed to have achieved a breakthrough in the investigation into the 14 serial bomb blasts which killed 50 people at Coimbatore and unearthed a deep-rooted conspiracy behind the explosions, reports PTI.

State Home Secretary R Poornalingam and Director General of Police FC Sharma told a media conference here that the identity of the perpetrators had been established and efforts were on to apprehend them.

Declining to divulge details. as the investigation was at a delicate stage, the officials said the highly sophisticated explosive device, weighing 50 kg and placed in an abandoned car in a residential locality here had been defused.

Some of the 'conspirators' were beyond the borders of the state, and the state police had mounted a massive operation to day official visit to Pakistan.

### US has no plan to use N-weapons

### US citizens call for peace with Iraq, end of sanctions

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 19: Marchers carrying child-sized coffins rallied in downtown San Francisco on Wednesday, calling for peace with Iraq and an end to sanctions that have crippled its economy since the Gulf War, reports AP.

At least 800 people joined the protest which came hours after US President Bill Clinton warned lraq that it will face air strikes unless it opens all sites to UN inspectors searching for banned weapons of mass destruction. The coffins symbolised the

hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children who have died during the seven years of economic sanctions, protesters said.

Jane Welford, a Berkeley gardener, carried a cardboard coffin decorated with a handpainted dove and a single lily.

Sanctions have been an ongoing war against the Iraqi people," she said. "It's hard to imagine that another bombing is going to accomplish something when Saddam Hussein is hidden safely away and it is the people who suffer and die." It was a sentiment echoed by

many protesters.

Ameena Jandali, a 37-yearold El Cerrito resident, carried a hand-lettered sign that said, "Airstrikes Kill Children. "Everyone talks about Iraq

as if only Saddam and buildings are in it - and no people,' said Jandali, a Muslim woman wearing the religion's traditional scarf.

On Tuesday night in New York, about 250 protesters organised by the International Action Center picketed the US armed forces recruiting station in Times Square. Meanwhile shifting its

rhetoric if not its policy, the Clinton administration is taking a much firmer public stand against using nuclear weapons on Iraq.

The latest declaration: The United States has no plan, intention or policy of using nuclear weapons to destroy weapons of mass destruction.

Although the administration concedes no policy change, a clear adjustment in language is emerging in response to concerns raised in Moscow, in the Mideast and in this country following pointedly ambiguous statements by Clinton administration officials on the subject.

The use of nuclear weapons as part of punitive air strikes against Iraq seemed farfetched initially but gained plausibility as weapons experts talked about the possible need for heat-producing bombs to destroy fraqi chemical and biological weapons stocks.

# KNU seeks fresh

THUKYAKWEE, Myanmar, Feb 19: The ageing leader of the rebel Karen National Union (KNU) is seeking fresh peace talks with Myanmar's military rulers to end a 50-year war for an autonomous ethnic Karen

tions and mutiny, self-styled general Bo Mya told Reuters late on Wednesday he was ready to negotiate.

tunity to go to Yangon again soon," the 71-year-old rebel told Reuters in an interview in unusually conciliatory tones.

He has not set foot in the capital for nearly half a cen-He said he had received information from Yangon that

the Myanmar military junta was now willing to hold another round of peace talks. "Some positive signs of peace efforts are emerging," Bo Mya

said from his mobile headquarters on the bank of the Moei River, which borders northeastern Myanmar and western Thailand.

"I was informed that SPDC (Myanmar's ruling State Peace and Development Council) has to clear some internal problems first before they will begin talks

### peace talks with Myanmar junta

Amid flagging morale, deser-

"I hope I will have an oppor-

allegations of a presidential affair and cover-up to light after secretly taping her conversations with Lewinsky about an alleged sexual relationship

The information surfaced as Lindsey appeared before the

# Off the Record

### Spring babies make taller men!

LONDON: A person's height may be determined by the time of year they are born, according to an Austrian study published Thursday in the British scientific magazine Nature, reports

According to Gerhard W. Weber and his team at Vienna University Institute of Human Biology," men born in spring time tend to be taller than those born in the autumn," the magazine said.

They told Nature that they had found the pattern by studying the heights of 507, 125 military conscripts measured when they were 18 years old. The figures were taken from federal army registers over a period of 10 years. "The survey reveals clear evidence for a dependence of body

height at age 18 on month of birth. Height varies periodically (amplitude: plus or minus 0.3 centimetres) over the course of a "The researchers cannot explain this clear relationship, but

the link is presumably connected with the annual cycle and could be connected with the light-dependent activity of the pineal gland. This gland produces the hormone melatonin, the concentration of which is known to vary according to the intensity and wavelength of light which, of course, has a strong compo-

nent of annual variation," Nature said.

# Spice Girls no match

for Indian temple NEW DELHI, India: A top Indian classical dancer asked the government on Wednesday to ban a performance by the Spice Girls at an archaeological site famed for its erotic sculptures.

The British pop group's performance this November in the central Indian town of Khajuraho will "marginalise the delicate spiritual context in which the temples were constructed nearly 1,000 years ago," said Geeta Chandran, a leading exponent of the classical dance form called Bharatanatyam.

"The eroticism of Khajuraho is part of the larger Hindu view of the cyclicality of life," Chandran said in a statement. "The profile of the Spice Girls does not match that of the temples. Eroticism sans spirituality will be reduced to pornography," she

"By making those temples an erotic prop in their performance, the Spice Girls will be hurting the sentiments of cen-

turies and centuries of sacred creativity of India," she said. Archaeological authorities have barred even Indian classical dancers from performing at the temples of Khajuraho.

Chandran said. Indian government officials were not immediately available

### Monica Lewinsky case

### Clinton's closest advisor appears before grand jury

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: Longtime presidential confidant Bruce Lindsey testified before a grand jury in the Monica Lewinsky investigation amid indications the advisor may have urged a key potential witness last summer to contact President Bill Clinton's private lawyer, reports AP.

Lindsey, who has been with Clinton since the early days of Clinton's political career in Arkansas, spoke at least twice last summer with former White House staffer Linda Tripp, according to individuals familiar with Tripp's account of the mat-

It was Tripp who brought the with Clinton.

In one conversation, these individuals said, Lindsey tried to persuade Tripp to go see Robert Bennett, the lawyer Clinton hired to represent him in the Paula Jones sexual harassment case. These sources, discussing the case only one grounds of anonymity, said Tripp's lawyer advised her not to do so and she didn't.

federal grand jury for questioning. The White House adviser's testimony was interrupted for about 45 minutes as he and his attorney appeared before US District Judge Susan Holloway Johnson. The nature of the conference was not immediately

One White House official said earlier that Lindsey had not refused to answer any questions through midday Wednesday. There had been reports that he might invoke "executive privilege." a tact that has been used to shield the presidency from the judicial branch of gov-

ernment. It could not be immediately learned whether his appearance before judge presiding over the grand jury investigation involved that issue.

"I'm not going to talk about my testimony," Lindsey told reporters as he left the courthouse after a more than 5-hour

Meanwhile US Prosecutors have gathered evidence documenting a sudden burst of contacts between presidential confidant Vernon Jordan and Monica Lewinsky over a month's time: Four meetings, nearly a dozen phone calls and a package sent by courier.

### 'Water flowed on Mars for a million years'

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: Water flowed on Mars for a million years, a senior NASA official asserted Wednesday, lending credence to the theory there was once life on the red planet, reports AFP. Wesley Huntress, NASA's as-

sociate administrator for space science, said that recent photos from the Mars Global Surveyor orbiting Mars show an ancient river bed at the bottom of a 2.5kilometre (1.6-mile) wide canyon called the Nanedi Vallis, near the planet's equator. The twisting, winding canyon - similar to the turned

taken by the Mississippi river provides "clear evidence of a fast-flowing river bed that changed its course several times," Huntress told the American Association for the Advancement of Science. "This is the first evidence of long-term water flow, not just a

catastrophic event," Huntress

said, adding that the canyon

"probably took a million or so

perative." Evidence of water on the red planet was first provided last July, when the Mars Pathfinder probe began transmitting data from the rocky and barren

The presence of water in

"Wherever liquid water and

liquid form on Mars points in-

evitably to life, Huntress said.

chemical energy are found,

there is life, there is no excep-

tion. Life may be a cosmic im-

But the Pathfinder's data did not enable scientists to rule on the existence of life.

Huntress showed the scientific congress another photo taken by the Global Surveyor showing riverbanks in the vallis Marineria plain. He said they resemble the banks of the Colorado river where it intersects with the grand canyon in the state of Arizona.

Further proof of water lies in the ancient lakebeds and countless dunes seen in images from Global Surveyor, Huntress said.

## Rioting continues

JAKARTA, Feb 19: Some 6.000 people rioted in the In-

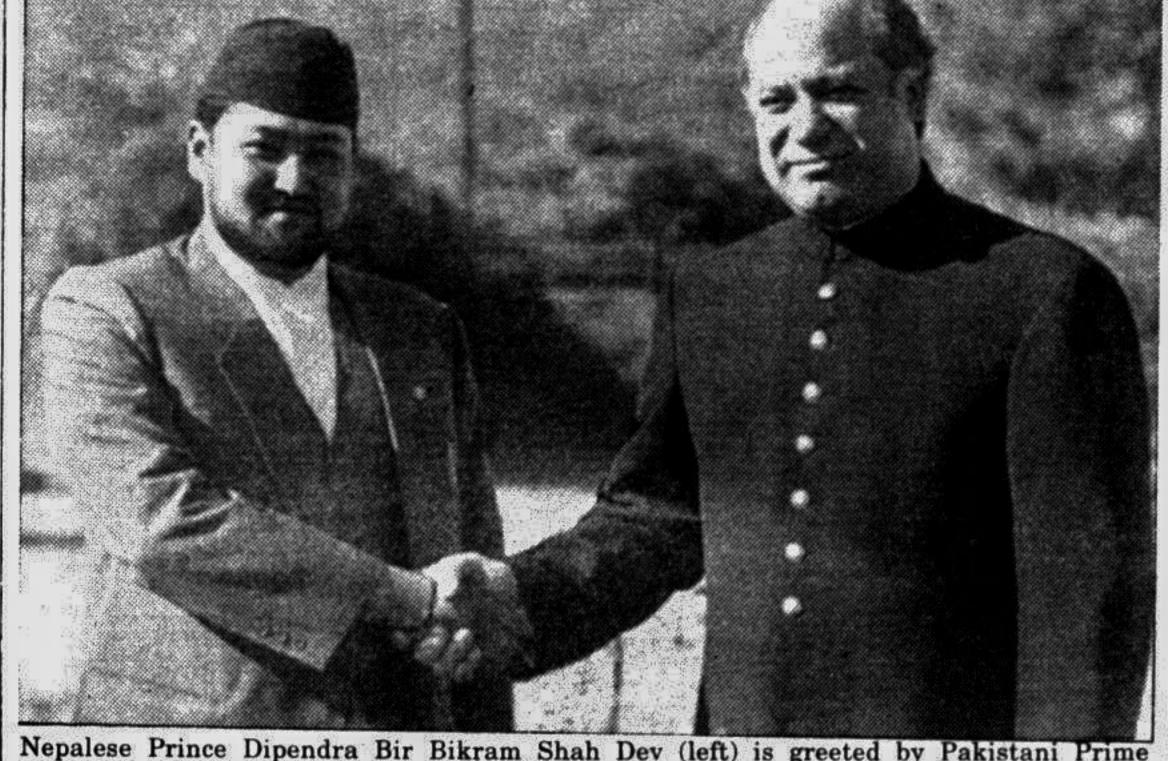
mobs, tried to march on the central business district of the South Sulawesi province Wednesday, the reports said.

troops dispersed the crowds, but no casualties or arrests were reported. No further details were im-

mediately available. It was the latest in a series of

prices, shortages of basic goods and mass unemployment. More than 20 similar riots

and cities across the country over the past two weeks.



Nepalese Prince Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev (left) is greeted by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday at his house in Islamabad. The Prince is on a seven--AP/UNB photo | years to form."

# Edmund Hillary Basu may become 1st communist PM of world's largest democracy

return to Nepal AUCKLAND, Feb 19: The first man to conquer Mount Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary, vowed to return to Nepal as he recovered from a near fatal bout of pneumonia, but said he was going to take things easy for a while, reports AFP.

Hillary, 78, was rushed into intensive care in Christchurch Hospital last week when he came down with pneumonia while aboard the cruise liner Marco Polo in Antarctica. His wife Lady Hillary revealed a helicopter airlift had

been planned to lift New Zealander Hillary off the ship but fog prevented it. "It will probably take a few weeks before I am completely back to health and strength," he

told television New Zealand.

CALCUTTA, India, Feb 19: After ruling the Indian state of West Bengal for more than 20 years, Jyoti Basu is hoping for a change of scene, and a shift to New Delhi as the country's first communist Prime Minister, re-

ports AFP. While he campaigns for his Communist party of India-Marxist (CIP-M) in Calcutta before Sunday's polls, both his rivals and allies are focusing on the role Basu could play at the

national level come the end of elections next month. The communists are confident to winning 50 to 60 parliamentary seats in the namuch better, not because of mytional polls, making them the self but because we have that largest contingent in a multiparty United Front alliance

hoping to return to power in

tandem with the Congress

If that happens, Basu 81. could become premier - two years after turning down the

The fragile, multi-party front, keeping in mind his experience of running a coalition in West Bengal for two decades, had wanted Basu as prime min-But his party — which still reveres Stalin and is opposed to

joining governments it cannot dominate - declined. This week Basu reiterated that the decision was "a historic blunder." "I feel we could have done

experience — how to deal with a United Front," he said. But Basu is evasive on whether he would take the job now if there were another hung parliament? He rules out a coalition with



the Congress, which abandoned

the front government in

November but whose support me may need. But he adds: "What will happen after the elections, I do not know." What makes communist Basu tick?

> believes in the ballot box and in pragmatism. West Bengal's 70 million people believe in him to such an extent that he has not been challenged since becoming chief minister in 1977. No elected communist administration anywhere in the world has matched that feat.

"India's constitution has

communist timetable."

He is one of India's most

charismatic politicians, and

pro-Soviet communist party of India. Soon it suffered its own Basu concedes, however, that his government does not split when a pro-Chinese wing have enough independence to walked away. work "towards a socialist or

But he argues "many things can be done within the existing system. And we are doing precisely that. That has been key to our success.' Some say Basu is slowing down. But he remains a hugely

been made in a way in which

influential figurehead of the Indian communist movement. The CPI-M has always been ready to go its own way. It was born in 1964, breaking from the

The party, disowned by both Moscow and Beijing, had a taste of power in two short-lived

state coalitions in 1967 before following a communist protaking a firm grip of West Bengramme is next to impossible. gal in 1977. We continue to live in a semi-Basu, a communist for feudal capitalistic framework."

nearly 50 years after studying law in London, began by launching rural reforms, sharing out land among the poor. That won him lasting support. As the room for such re-

forms was exhausted, Basu, a former railway union activist, looked to profit from an alhance with capitalism. When India introduced market reforms in 1991, Basu

toured abroad looking to attract foreign investment. Some attribute the left's suc-

cess in West Bengal to Basu's personal appeal. That charisma will be tested if India sees another hung parliament.

# in Indonesia

donesian city of Kendari stoning shops and other businesses, reports said today, says AFP. The rioters, in three separate

Several hundred police and

riots to rock the province amid increasing tension over soaring

have taken place in other towns