

International

Annan optimistic about positive outcome of meeting with Saddam

PARIS, Feb 20: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan left Paris Friday morning aboard a Mystere 900 jet provided by...

The United States also wished Annan success, but made clear it reserved the right to reject any deal he makes...

At the United Nations, the Security Council postponed a briefing on the progress of weapons inspections and prepared for a vote Friday to allow Iraq to more than double the amount of oil it can sell under a UN oil-for-food plan.

failed to fully disclose its chemical and biological weapons ability or to provide information on its missile warheads.



UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, left, met French President Jacques Chirac at the Elysee Palace in Paris Thursday to discuss his mission to defuse the current standoff with Iraq.

BRIEFLY

Huge arms seized in Coimbatore: Indian police seized a huge cache of arms and explosives on Thursday in the southern city of Coimbatore...

Blast kills 2 in Algeria: A bomb exploded yesterday near Algiers market, killing two people and wounding 23, security services said.

Quake rocks Indonesia: An earthquake rocked the tiny Indonesian island of Ambon, causing residents to flee their homes and shopping centres in panic.

1 dies in UK mine mishap: One man died and 16 others were injured, up to nine seriously, in an accident late Thursday at an open-cast mine in Scotland.

Cuba frees 299 prisoners: Cuba said on Thursday it had freed 299 prisoners, including more than 70 political detainees.

Heating supply rationed in Russia: More than 30,000 people have been left without heat in subfreezing temperatures in Russia's Far East because local authorities are running out of heating fuel.

Thailand begins repatriation of Myanmar refugees Mar 1

BANGKOK, Feb 20: More than 10,000 refugees from Myanmar in Thailand will either be repatriated or moved to a central refugee camp in a two-week operation beginning March 1.

The Karen and aid workers have documented human rights abuses committed by the Myanmar army against Karen villagers, including extrajudicial killings, torture, rapes, forced labour and forced relocations.

Govt negotiating release of UN observers in Georgia

TBILISI, Feb 20: The government negotiated Friday for the release of four UN military observers, but their kidnappers insisted on freedom for seven suspects held in the recent attempt to kill Georgia's president.

The incident is the latest sign of turbulence in the former Soviet republic, where President Eduard Shevardnadze narrowly survived an assassination attempt Feb 9.

UNICEF, OAU to launch anti-land mine campaign

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 20: The UN Children's Fund and the Organisation for African Unity are launching a campaign for ratification of a treaty banning land mines.

Maharashtra goes to polls Sunday Anti-Sonia campaign may cost Shiv Sena its majority

BOMBAY, Feb 20: India's most radical right-wing party, in power in the country's financial centre of Mumbai (Bombay), has blundered badly by firing off personalised broadsides at Congress campaign figurehead Sonia Gandhi during national elections.

Maharashtra accounts for 48 of the 545 seats in India's Lower House of Parliament. The Shiv Sena and BJP, which controls the state government, won 33 seats in 1996 national polls.

Repolling begins in Assam

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Repolling began Friday in 211 polling booths in Assam while electioneering for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls for 183 seats spread over nine states and union territory of Pondicherry ends at 1700 hours, reports PTI.

Altogether 183 constituencies would go to the polls on February 22 after polling in Coimbatore constituency was rescheduled for Feb 28 by the Election Commission in the wake of the recent blasts.

Strike paralyses Darjeeling dist

SILIGURI, Feb 20: Normal life has come to a halt in West Bengal's Darjeeling district as the three-day general strike called by GNLFF began today, reports PTI.

The strike has been called by GNLFF president Subash Ghising to protest against alleged silences of the centre over receipt of a notice from International Court of Justice at The Hague on January 5 about its opinion on the status of Darjeeling Hills.

Off the Record

Secret of happy marriage

WASHINGTON: Men who want their marriages to succeed should just do what their wives suggest, psychologists said Friday, reports Reuter.

For a third ear...

LONDON: A Performance artist has announced in London that he is to grow a third ear, a report said Friday, AFP reports from London.

Blind TV director!

LONDON: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has hired a blind man as a television director, it confirmed Friday, reports AFP.



Britain's Prince Andrew and his ex-wife, Duchess of York Sarah Ferguson, pose with their two daughters Eugenie (L) and Beatrice, on a snowbike, in the ski resort of Verbier, Switzerland, on Feb 19.

Duke of Windsor's estate comes under hammer

NEW YORK, Feb 20: A 61-year-old piece of wedding cake sold for 26,000 US dollar in spirited bidding in the first round of a nine-day auction of the Paris estate of the late Duke and Duchess of Windsor, reports AP.

40 massacred in Colombia

BOGOTA, Feb 20: Up to 40 people were reportedly killed Thursday in a massacre in rural Colombia, an official of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said, reports Reuter.



Amid the tourist souvenirs in London's Carnaby Street Feb 19, are plates commemorating the life of Diana, Princess of Wales, an industry said to be worth some 100 million pounds a year (dls 165). British Prime Minister Tony Blair railed at the "inappropriate and tacky" commercial exploitation of Diana's memory.

US Navy's 160-year-old Antarctic exploration mission ends

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand, Feb 20: Declaring its 160-year mission of Antarctic exploration accomplished, the US Navy lowered the flag Friday and shut down "Operation Deep Freeze," reports AP.

Some lost military traditions are not mourned by most of today's staff. Women, once banned from Antarctica, are now actively recruited, and make up 30 to 40 per cent of the McMurdo population of up to 1,200 in summer.

Opposition call to let Zardari attend parliament

ISLAMABAD, Feb 20: A Pakistani opposition leader demanded today that jailed senator Asif Ali Zardari, husband of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, be allowed to attend a coming session of parliament, reports AP.