

International

Polls result in Kosovo likely to back demands for independence

PRISTINA, Serbia, Mar 23: Results from elections held by Kosovo's ethnic Albanians in defiance of Belgrade and the outside world seemed certain to back demands by their political leaders for independence from Serbia, reports Reuters.

renewed vote in favour of independence would complicate western efforts to coax Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic towards compromise. A six-power international contact group comprising the United States, Russia, France, Germany, Italy and Britain is due to decide on Wednesday whether to impose stricter sanctions on Yugoslavia over the Kosovo crisis.

Yeltsin sacks government

MOSCOW, Mar 23: President Boris Yeltsin dismissed the entire Russian government in a shock announcement today and said he was taking over temporarily as prime minister, reports Reuters.



Boris Yeltsin

prime ministers Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, was not immediately clear. The Kremlin said Chubais was moving to another job but it was not clear whether this would be in the government.

nomyrdin to concentrate on political preparations for these elections," Yeltsin said in an announcement broadcast on NTV television.



Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, left, meets with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in Damascus Sunday. Annan held a series of meetings in Damascus to seek a resumption of talks between Syria and Israel on the withdrawal of Israeli troops from south Lebanon.

Turkish PM firm to fight religious extremism

ANKARA, Mar 23: Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz Sunday bowed to heavy pressure by Turkey's powerful pro-secular army generals pledging his government's full commitment to the fight against Islamic fundamentalism, reports AFP.

off and mind their own business this time said "our coalition government understanding is that there is no deference between the cabinet and the military on fighting fundamentalism."

Leghari to form political party to challenge PML, PPP

ISLAMABAD, Mar 23: Former Pakistani president Farooq Leghari would form a political party to challenge those led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, reports Reuters.

Vajpayee asks cabinet members to declare their assets

NEW DELHI, Mar 23: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has asked members of his cabinet to declare their assets to reinforce the new government's pledge for "clean" governance, a daily said today, reports AFP.

Israel rejects key element of new US peace initiative for ME

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envoy Dennis Ross visits the region later this week, the report said. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat said Ross would arrive Thursday.

Both the Palestinians and Israelis have expressed reservations with the US plan, which calls for Israel to withdraw troops in phases from about 13 per cent of the West Bank in exchange for a Palestinian crackdown on Islamic militants.

Karen refugee camp burned down

Nine ethnic Karen refugees were injured, three seriously, when armed attackers who had crossed the border from Myanmar into Thailand burned down part of their camp yesterday, border sources said, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Some 40 houses were destroyed in the early morning raid by unidentified attackers who crossed into Thai territory at around 3:30 am, local officials and aid workers said.

Pope appeals to Nigerian Muslims to cooperate with Christians



Mike McKee moves an Oscar statue to the red carpet area outside the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, Sunday, in preparation for yesterday's 70th annual Academy Awards.

ABUJA, Mar 23: Pope John Paul II late Sunday appealed to Muslims in Nigeria and the whole of Africa to work together with Christians for a new "era of solidarity," reports AFP.

Russian scientists to help Iran build missiles

WASHINGTON, Mar 23: Russia's top intelligence agency has been recruiting Russian scientists to travel to Iran and teach Iranians how to build long-distance missiles that can carry high explosives, the Washington Post reported today, says AFP.

The Russian Federal Security Service, the successor to the KGB, has been quietly recruiting Russian scientists to work in Iran over the past several years, according to the Post, which cites Russian and diplomatic sources in Moscow.

Once the scientists arrive in Iran they negotiate contracts with their hosts to cover up any direct involvement of the Russian government, according to the newspaper.

Cyclone hits Vanuatu islands

Tropical cyclone Yali caused severe damage when it battered some of Vanuatu's southern islands but no one has been reported killed or injured, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Port Vila.

National Disaster Management Office director Job Esau told AFP that Yali hit the southern islands overnight. He said three were reports of heavy crop damage and an unspecified number of houses blown down in the western part of Tanna island.

Fear over human 'mad cow disease'

SYDNEY, Mar 23: From cannibals in the highlands of Papua New Guinea to European beef eaters, thousands of people have been exposed to an undetectable disease that could slowly eat holes in their brains before killing them, reports Reuters.

The book "Cannibals, Cows and the CJD Catastrophe," tells a story its author says begins and ends in mortuaries and suggests the disease might be spread far wider than was ever imagined.

It was a long waiting game because CJD can incubate without displaying symptoms for more than four decades," she said.

'Fragile ceasefire in Cambodia may collapse'

BANGKOK, Mar 23: The commander of forces loyal to Prince Norodom Ranariddh said today he expected a fragile Cambodian ceasefire to collapse and a new push against his besieged stronghold O's-mach, reports Reuters.

The ceasefire began on February 27 as the first step in a Japanese-sponsored peace plan aimed at ending the conflict and ensuring Ranariddh can return to Cambodia for elections in July.

The rival forces have traded accusations of truce violations and there have been intermittent clashes, but the ceasefire has remained in effect.

8 tourists freed in Chad

Six French and two Italian tourists kidnapped in northern Chad have been freed just hours later, Radio France International reported early yesterday morning quoting a source at the Chadian Embassy in Paris, AFP reports from Paris.

The European tourists were kidnapped in the Emissi Koussi mountains of northern Chad Sunday afternoon in the Bourkou Enedi Tibesti region.



Some 15,000 people seat at a five-km table set on Lisbon's new Vasco da Gama bridge Sunday to enjoy a bean stew in an attempt to set a new record for the world's longest dining table.

'Pakistan should take measures to counter any N-plans of India's BJP-led govt'

ISLAMABAD, Mar 23: Pakistan's cricket hero-turned-politician Imran Khan has said that Islamabad should take immediate measures to counter any nuclear plans of the newly installed Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in India, reports India Abroad News Service.

Imran said that the people of Kashmir should be given a right to decide their future. He was of the view that both New Delhi and Islamabad should include Kashmiris in the talks. "They (Kashmiris) can best plead their case and any talks without them would be a futile exercise," he said.

coming local bodies poll despite the fact that several of his top leaders who contested the last elections have parted ways with the party. "The ruling party (Pakistan Muslim League) would be shocked to see the response of people," he claimed.

He said it was a crime to "sit with criminals" which would amount to becoming an "accomplice of the criminal" as per well recognized principles of law.



Suha Arafat sits Sunday under the portrait of her husband, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, during an interview in her Gaza home with the Associated Press.

Taliban execute two accused of sodomy

KABUL, Mar 23: Two Afghans accused of sodomy were publicly executed by the puritanical Taliban militia by being buried under a mud and brick wall pushed on top of them, official sources said today, reports AFP.