British army angry over IRA proposal

LONDON, Feb 22: The British Army has warned it will not take part in a "reconciliation" gesture alongside the IRA designed to put the Northern Ireland peace process back on track, newspapers reported here

today, says AFP. The Times said army chiefs were furious after Peter Mandelson, Britain's Minister for Northern Ireland, made a link at the weekend between disarmament by the paramilitary Irish Republican Army (IRA) and demilitarisation of the British-ruled province.

Mandelson said London was prepared to 'normalise' the security situation in the province. where some 15,000 British troops remain deployed, if the threat of conflict eased.

According to The Times and The Daily Telegraph, the IRA had proposed "a national day of reconciliation" in which the army would be expected to hand over a few weapons at the same

time as the paramilitaries.

The Times quoted one army the IRA to disarm.

source in Northern Ireland as saying: "The army would resign

Mandelson's office stressed here that the minister did not have any kind of weapons ceremony in mind and that any withdrawal of troops would depend on the security situation.

Speaking in Belfast on Mon-day, Mitchel McLaughlin, chairman of Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, hinted the IRA could disarm in conjunction with a partial withdrawal of British troops from Northern

"If people are now looking around for ways in which we can back out of this cul-de-sac, it's incumbent on all of us to look at these ideas. They may not work, but let's have a look at them," he said.

The peace process stalled after Mandelson suspended a two month-old power-sharing government in Belfast on February 11 over a lack of clear moves by

Christian-Muslim riots leave 20 dead in Nigeria

KADUNA, Nigeria, Feb 22: Police battled overnight to regain control of the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna where fighting has raged between Christians and Muslims who want to introduce Islamic law,

reports Reuters. The violence which flared on Monday and left at least 20 dead - a reminder of the fragility of Africa's most populous nation, whose long-term survival has been repeatedly called into question since the return of

civilian rule last year. "I am appealing to the Christian and Muslim leaders to caution their followers and desist from the ongoing riots," Kaduna State's deputy governor. Stephen Shekoni, said in a message broadcast on local

television. Violence erupted after a march by thousands of Christians protesting against appeals

by Muslims for the introduction of strict Sharla law in Kaduna following its full implementation by one northern state and its planned adoption

Residents said a 6 pm (11 pm BST) to 6 am curfew was ignored in parts of the city where Christian and Muslims gangs armed with sticks and cutlasses set up roadblocks to hunt down rivals.

Fires burned in many parts of Kaduna, including those untouched by past bouts of reli gious and ethnic rioting.
"The fighting is still spread

ing and we have called for reinforcement from neighbouring states. My men are still on the battlefield sending for reinforcement," one police commander told Reuters after night

Both ethnic and religious tension have been on the rise since Obasanjo, a southern

Christian, took office last May to end 15 years of dictatorship by soldiers from the largely Muslim north. More than 1,000 have died in various clashes since then.

The Sharia issue has polarised religious opinions in the West African country of at least 108 million, which is divided between Muslims, Christians and animists.

Riots in northern Nigeria between Hausa-speakers and Ibo immigrants in 1967 helped trigger southeastern Biafra's secession bid and civil war in which at least one million died.

Addressing Sharla poses a particularly difficult problem for Obasanjo, since he does not want to be seen further alienating the North, where there is a widespread feeling of exclusion from key government appoint-



Iranian President Mohammad Khatami greets supporters after inauguration of the first underground subway line in Tehran February 21. Iran's pro-Khatami reformers have won a majority in parliament, ousting the longstanding conservative majority by getting 152 out of 290 seats in last week's elections, according to official results published February 20, - AFP photo

Iran's legislative polls Reformists' gain on

TEHRAN, Feb 22: An influential reform leader in stridently anti-American Iran has said that talks with the United States would not be a "sin." That view is shared by many reformist candidates set to take control of Iran's next Parliament, giving momentum to President Mohammad Khatami's programme of liberal reform, reports AP.

Talks with the United States, a more liberal press and increased personal freedoms are expected to be among the issues discussed in the next Parliament, which will be seated in June.

Moderates look set to wrest the legislative body from hardline control for the first time since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution ousted the pro-US shah and brought the Muslim Shiite clergy to power.

Not to talk with any country is not a virtue, and to talk is not a sin," Abdollah Nouri, a former interior minister, told

United Nations Secretary

General Kofi Annan checks

the time before addressing

the National Press Club in

Canberra Tuesday. Annan

admitted that there is no

timetable for the withdrawal

of UN peacekeeping forces in

East Timor though he in-

sisted that the UN would

continue "to work hand-in-

glove with the East Timo-

- AFP photo

rese leadership."

reporters Monday when asked his opinion on opening talks with the United States, with whom Iran has not had relations in over two decades.

Nouri was impeached by hard-liners in 1998 and jailed in November on charges of religious dissent and advocating better ties with the United States.

He was let out of jail on a four-day furlough on Sunday.

Nouri was considered a consensus candidate among the reformers for the post of Parliament speaker until his jailing, seen as an attempt by the hard-liners to prevent him from taking part in the elections.

Reformers garnered 137 of the 191 parliament seats announced as of late Monday. Conservatives have won 44 seats, independents 10, and 69 are to be decided in run-offs. Results for 30 more seats are awaited. Some 83 per cent of Iran's 38.7 million electorate had voted.

Kashmir

istan, Feb 22: Indian troops

shelled villages on the Pakistan

side of the disputed Kashmir re-

gion yesterday, killing at least

three people, local officials

They said the Indians fired

about 150 artillery and mortar

shells on six villages in Neelum

valley northeast of Muzaf-

farabad, capital of Pakistan-

administered part of the Hi-

malayan region, killing a 10-

year-old boy and another man.

shelling on a village in Bhim-

ber district in the southeast of

Pakistani Kashmir, the offi-

Another man was killed by

The deaths raise to nine the

Pakistani troops retaliated

toll from Pakistan-reported In-

dian shelling in the area since

against Monday's firing by

shelling Indian positions

across the military Line of Con-

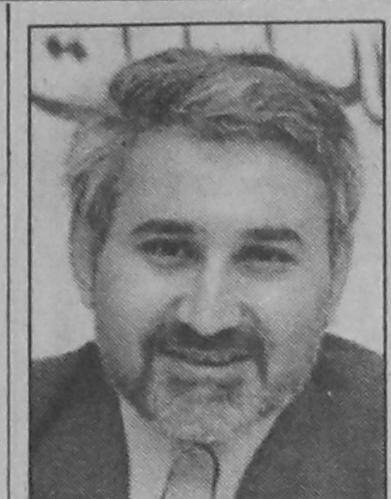
trol (LOC) dividing the region

MUZAFFARABAD,

said, reports Reuters.

cials said.

Friday.



Mohammad-Reza Khatami the reformers' top candidate, poses for a photo in the office of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF) in Tehran Sunday as results show the reformers winning 75 per cent of the seats counted so far outside Tehran,

BEIJING. Feb 22: Chinese

newspapers reported today an

ultimatum to Taiwan to begin

talks on reunification with the

mainland or face war, but did

not highlight the dramatic

An analyst at China's lead-

threat issued in a Cabinet pa-

ing think-tank said he did not

believe Monday's ultimatum

indicated Beijing had decided

on a timetable for reunifica-

morrow," said Liu Hong, a re-

searcher at the Chinese

at forcing Taiwan to "recognise

a sense of urgency to resolve the

measures, including military

force" if Taiwan dragged its

heels indefinitely on talks was

the most startling part of an

He said the threat was aimed

The threat to use "drastic

Academy of Social Sciences.

"It's not today, it's not to-

per, reports Reuters.

11 shot dead in polls violence in Bihar

PATNA. India, Feb 22: cer in charge of the area. Paramilitary policemen on Tuesday shot dead seven men who tried to steal and illegally mark ballot papers during a crucial state legislature election in Bihar, widely regarded as the most lawless place in India, re-

In the northeastern state of northern districts that border Manipur, suspected militants Nepal. ambushed a candidate's motorcade and killed three paramilitary soldiers and wounded nine. United News of India news agency reported. L. Lala, a candidate, was hospitalised after the attack. But voting was not affected in Manipur, one of the four states where new legislatures are being elected.

Two rounds of voting in Bihar earlier this month left at least 30 people dead and 50 wounded. On Tuesday, federal Rapid Action Force commandoes gunned down the attackers in Beetiah election district in northern Bihar, according to - AFP photo | Sudhir Prasad, the election offi-

11,000-word policy "white pa-

per" issued by the State Council,

pile pressure on candidates and

voters ahead of Taiwan's March

18 presidential elections, in

Opinion polls in Taiwan

which relations with China

have shown repeatedly most

residents favour the status quo

- but only because an outright

declaration of independence

would risk war. There is almost

no support for giving China any

political say in Taiwan's af-

In recent years, China has

threatened military action only

Taiwan declared independence

or in the event of foreign inva-

sion of the island, which Bei-

jing regards as a renegade

Chinese analysts said the paper.

under two circumstances - i

have emerged as a key issue.

It appeared to be designed to

or Cabinet.

Federal Rapid Action Force commandoes gunned down the seven attackers in Beetiah election district in northern Bihar, according to Sudhir Prasad, the election officer in charge of the area. Four more people were killed in clashes in the Bihar's

Police in Bihar were ordered to shoot people trying to stuff ballot boxes or indulging in violence during the election.

By noon, some 35 per cent of the voters had cast their ballots, according to UN Panjiar, the highest official of the Interior Department, which oversees law and order.

Voting was peaceful in Orissa and Haryana states. The ballots will be counted on

Friday and early results are expected later that day. On Tuesday, police in Bihar also arrested two people.

threat in the white paper was

not entirely new, and the late

paramount leader Deng Xioap-

ing spoke of unspecified "non-

peaceful" action if the reunifi-

cation issue remained unre-

had never before formally

ously also threatened invasion

if Taiwan developed nuclear

weapons, or if unrest broke out

Chinese policy pronounce-

ments have stuck to the more

narrow formulation that war

was inevitable only if Taiwan

split away, or if there was a for-

The People's Daily, flagship

of the Communist Party, pub-

lished the full text of the white

Still, in the past few years,

spelled this out as policy.

on the island.

eign invasion.

But the analysts said Beijing

Chinese leaders have previ-

Indian shelling kills 3 in Pak-held Chinese media repeats would leave office in six Blast destroys threat to invade Taiwan jet in Kabul

KABUL, Feb 22: A powerful explosion rocked the Kabul airport Monday, airport officials said, reports AFP.

airport

KATHMANDU, Feb 22: King

Birendra today accepted the res-

ignations of eleven ministers

who have joined a group of dis-

gruntled ruling Nepali Congress

MPs seeking Prime Minister KP

Bhattarai's ouster, official

senior cabinet ministers, sub-

mitted their resignations to

Bhattarai on Friday after a no-

confidence motion registered by

58 MPs of the Nepali Congress

has failed to control the ex-

treme left Maoist insurgents,

check administrative corrup-

tion or boost the economy.

They allege that Bhattarai

The party parliamentary

group will meet on Saturday

when Bhattarai is expected to

defend his record, an official

Party President Girija

Prasad Koirala is keen to take

over as premier but Bhattarai is

unwilling to go before June,

The two, together with other

senior party leaders, had agreed

in December that Bhattarai

The eleven, including five

sources said, reports AFP.

parliamentary group.

close to him said.

party sources said.

In Pakistan, the private Afghan Islamic Press said a SU-22 jet belonging to the ruling Taliban militia was destroyed in

The agency, quoting uniden-tified sources, said the explosion was caused by a bomb placed under the jet. Taliban authorities were not available Monday to comment on the report.

Airport officials said there were no casualties in the blast, which occurred in an ammunition depot in the eastern part of the airport at around 7:00 pm (8:30pm BST).

The explosion caused a blaze which was controlled by two fire engines, they said.

Belgrade behind unrest in divided Kosovo town: US Birendra accepts resignation of 11 ministers

KOSOVSKA MITROVICA, Feb 22: American officials are blaming the Yugoslav government for fomenting he cris, 3 in this ethnically divided Kosovo town, where French and British peacekeepers thwarted attempts by thousands of ethnic Albanians to cross into the Serb-con-

trolled sector, reports AP. French and British troops pushed back the crowd Monday after demonstrators tried to force their way across the bridge over the Ibar river into the northern part of town, where up to 4,000 Serbs were waiting, determined to battle the Albanians themselves to keep them from entering their

territory. The Albanian crowd, numbering between 6,000 and 10,000, was the lead contingent of up to 50,000 protesters who had marched on this northwestern Kosovo industrial city.

Richard Holbrooke, the US ambassador to the United Nations, accused the Yugoslav government of fomenting unrest in Kosovska Mitrovica, where 2.500 NATO-led peacekeepers from 12 countries have been trying to collect illegal weapons in the past two days. His view was shared by Gen. Wesley Clark, the NATO commander in

There is an influence by Belgrade in the area. The interference should diminish over time, but it won't until it's clear and until there is a political agreement, yet the UN and KFOR are in charge here." Clark said, referring to the international Kosovo Force.

Speaking at the United Nations. Holbrooke said, "I think the situation in Mitrovica is dangerous and requires the immediate attention of all the

countries concerned. He said. "I think there is no question who's responsible for it. It's Belgrade. The leadership in Belgrade is fomenting trouble north of the Mitrovica bridge. There's no question. The problem here comes from Bel-

In a sign that the Serbs were prepared for a showdown, some Serb women and children began evacuating the city, and a local

Serb leader, Nikola Kabasic,

told a Belgrade radio station that the Serbs were bringing in reinforcement from neighbouring villages to defend their part of the city of NATO cannot control the Albanians.

But the French and British troops stood their ground on the bridge, and by 6 pm (11 pm BST), the start of a daily 12hour curfew, crowds on both sides were dispersing.

Earlier, however, the Albanian crowd managed to breach French positions on the approach to the bridge. More French troops rushed to the bridge and began firing volleys of tear gas in five-minute inter-

British troops blocked the bridge with armoured vehicles. British soldiers pushed away ethnic Albanian men who tried to climb over the vehicles to rush the Serb positions on the north bank.

No American troops were involved in the scuffles at the

Hot-house pressure on Chinese pupils goes

BEIJING, Feb 22: Beijing's army of 1.6 million schoolchildren were celebrating today after the government moved to stop teachers pilling them high with homework, state media

reported, says AFP. The English-language China Daily said the education authorities had removed the 100mark system for pupils in the capital in which each piece of homework was graded from

zero to 100. The paper said the system was seen as encouraging overbearing parents to put too much pressure on pupils to score perfect marks, as well as encouraging teachers to set too

much homework. Education officials have told teachers to ease up on the homework to allow pupils to "develop all-round personalities," said the paper.

BRETY

Avalanches claim 3 in Alps: Avalanches swept down Alpine slopes in Italy and Switzerland at the height of the ski season Monday, killing at least three skiers. Rescue teams in Switzerland dug into the evening for an unknown number of people believed buried beneath the snow, AP reports

In Italy, two back-to-back avalanches in the northern Venosta Valley hit a group of seven Germans and one Italian skiing on an unauthorized route, Alpine rescue official Luigi Weger said.

Blast kills 11 in China: Firecracker peddlers showing off their wares sparked an explosion in a market that killed 11 people and injured more than 30 others in northern China, an official newspaper said Tuesday, AP reports from

The explosion on February 17 destroyed the market in Hebei province's Dacheng county, with sparks igniting all of its firecracker stalls, the China Daily said.

7 drown in Red River: Seven people, including two children and a pregnant woman, drowned when their overloaded boat sank on the Red River in the northern province of Ha Tay, a local police officer said Tuesday, AP reports from



Recording Academy President Michael Greene (L) presents rock music star Sir Elton John (C) with the MusiCares' Person of the Year Award prior to a tribute honouring John Monday in Los Angeles, California. The benefit event included performances by (From L-- AFP photo R,background): Cheryl Crow, Jewel and Tony Bennett.

Muslim militants step up violence in Kashmir ahead of Clinton's India visit

dent Bill Clinton's visit to India, in a bid to raise the profile of their 10-year struggle, re-

Kashmir experts say a spurt in guerilla violence has been noticeable ever since Washington announced the dates of the presidential visit, scheduled for the third week of March.

There is deep concern about heightened violence in the run up to the visit," said noted Kashmir watcher Tahir Mohi-

The violence in Kashmir will be closely watched and the presumed objective is to give publicity to the issue," he said. The Muslim separatist drive in the Indian-administered zone of the divided Kashmir region has claimed more than 25,000 lives since 1989.

India accuses Pakistan

SRINAGAR, India, Feb 22: which holds the northern third Muslim guerillas have stepped of Kashmir, of fomenting miliup their separatist operations tancy in its territory. Islamin Kashmir ahead of US Presi- abad denies the charge but extends moral and diplomatic

support to the unrest. Clinton recently said at a press conference in Washington that he would be willing to broker a peace on Kashmir between arch-rivals India and Pakistan, who have fought two wars over

the region. However, the president stressed that without requests from both sides any intervention by a third party would be

uscless. While Pakistan is keen to internationalise the Kashmir dispute. India is adamantly opposed to any third-party interference, insisting it is a purely

bilateral issue based on national sovereignty. "There is a whole litany of genuine and vested interests at play," said another Kashmir expert Sibte Sidiq.

Kashmir's most powerful militant group, Hizbul Mujahideen, has claimed that Indian security troops are planning to massacre Hindus, a religious minority in Kashmir, to undermine the Muslim drive for secession from India.

"This will serve their purpose to malign us as terrorists," Hizbul's top leader Syed Salahuddin said.

A top Indian police official said on condition of anonymity that Muslim rebel were clearly willing to go out of their way to draw global attention to the Kashmir issue. The increased militant ac-

tivities are a clear indication of Security has been beefed up in Kashmir following a spate of bombings and bloody shootouts between militants and Indian troops that have also

claimed around a dozen civilian

Not everyone here feels that Clinton's visit will have a positive affect on the Kashmir dis-

Tariq Baba, whose brother was shot dead by Indian border guards last week during a shootout with militants, said he lid not want the US president in India.

"The cauldron is boiling and we continue to stew in it no matter who comes or when, Baba said, "What is the purpose of a

our misery? Kashmiri Hindus, who have been forced to leave their homes in the Kashmir Valley due to the unrest, meanwhile said they would seek Clinton's help to re-

visit that is going to increase

turn to their homes. "We will apprise Clinton of the plight of displaced Hindus," said Ajay Chrungoo, a leader of the main Kashmiri Hindu forum. Panun Kashmiri (Our Kashmir).

'No Israeli troop withdrawal from around Jerusalem'

JERUSALEM, Feb 22: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, made it known to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat Monday that there would be no Israeli troop withdrawal from in and around Jerusalem, public radio here reported, reports AFP.

Barak made his stance known to Arafat via US mediator Dennis Ross, with whom he held talks here Monday on reviving the Middle East peace process

The two men mainly discussed the agreed, and overdue, Israeli military withdrawal from 6.1 per cent of the West Bank, in line with the agreement signed by Barak and Arafat last year in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

The radio reported that Barak asked Ross to tell Arafat that his country would consider "slight modifications" to the planned withdrawals "but in no case was there any question of transferring to the Palestinians any land from the Jerusalem

BANGLADESH PARJATAN CORPORATION

National Tourism Organization Works Division 233, Airport Road, Tejgaon, Dhaka

Urgent Tender Notice Sealed tenders are hereby invited from 1st class (unlimited/special class) contractors/firms enlisted with any govt/semi-govt organisations having experience of constructing a single building under any govt/semi-govt organisation worth not less than Tk 3.00 crore in a single work order for construction of Parjatan Motel & Recreation Centre at Khagrachhari Hill District

of the Corporation. Each tender document with terms & conditions may be obtained from the Accounts Division of the Corporation (Head Office) and Divisional Commissioner's Office, Dhaka on payment of Taka two thousand only (nonrefundable) during 10-2:00 hrs on all working days up to 9th March 2000. Necessary permission is to be taken from Works Division & abovementioned offices before purchasing tender schedule by submitting works completion certificate, enlistment & original work order as mentioned below (Sl i & ii) at least 2 days before last date of selling of tender schedule as mentioned above and that during purchase of tender document the proprietor of the firm shall have to come with a recent photograph.

Each tender must accompany the earnest money at the rate of 2.00% of the total quoted amount in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order from any scheduled bank of Bangladesh in favour of "Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation."

Each tender must also accompany attested photostat copies of the document regarding (i) enlistment as class-1 (unlimited/special class) contractor for the year 1999-2000; (ii) completion certificate of construction work of a single building worth more than Tk 3.00 crore in a single work order under any govt/semi-govt organisation from the respective executive engineer which the contractor completed not before 1996 together with work order; (iii) list of technical personnel and equipment employed and owned by the firm which is to be duly certified by an executive engineer not issued before December, 1999; (iv) income tax clearance certificate for the year 1998-99; (v) up-to-date VAT registration certificate; (vi) ABC electrical licence & (vii) financial solvency certificate from a scheduled bank of Bangladesh not issued before December, 1999 mentioning a cash deposit of Taka twenty lacs on the issuing date. The tender without earnest money, without abovementioned documents and without documents mentioned in the schedule will be rejected.

Tender is to be dropped in the tender box kept in the Works Division & Dhaka Divisional Commissioner's Office up to 11:30 AM on 12.3.2000 and will be opened on the same day at 12-00 Noon by the committee in presence of tenderer,

The abovementioned work will have to be completed within 365 days from the day of issue of the work order. Running bill costing not less than Tk 25 lacs will be paid for this work. The Corporation reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders

> Abul Kashem General Manager (Works)

without assigning any reason whatsoever. GD-163