

Thatcher leaves hospital after tests

AFP, London

Former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher left hospital yesterday after undergoing precautionary tests, her spokesman said.

Baroness Thatcher, 82, spent the night at St Thomas' Hospital in London where she was driven from her home in the capital late Friday after she fell ill while dining with friends.

"She's very comfortable and she had a comfortable night. She's feeling a lot better, much revived," said Mark Worthington, Thatcher's private secretary, outside the hospital.

He said the former leader of the Conservative Party -- who was prime minister throughout the 1980s -- was dining at the House of Lords, the upper house of parliament, when she started feeling "slightly nauseous and faint".

"Her legs gave way a little bit under her," he said, although he denied she had collapsed.

"We thought it safest to be sure about these things," he said.

Television images showed Thatcher, wearing a deep red dress, walking to her chauffeur-driven car.

Hillary to change Pakistan policy

THE DAWN, Washington

US presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton has promised to end the Bush administration's "one dimensional" policy towards Pakistan if voted to power because it focuses on President Pervez Musharraf and ignores the people.

In a policy statement issued by her headquarters, Clinton vowed to push for improving relations between India and Pakistan if she wins the 2008 presidential election.

The Democratic leader also promised to increase non-military US assistance to Pakistan and to make the military aid more accountable.

"For the past seven years the Bush administration has pursued a one-dimensional policy toward Pakistan, focusing its high level attention overwhelmingly on President Musharraf to the exclusion of other important political actors in Pakistan and its civil society," she said. "It is time for this to change."

Clinton, who won three key primaries this week to reassert

herself as a leading contender for the White House, blamed the Bush administration for ignoring Afghanistan by entering into an unpopular war in Iraq.

"The recent Pakistan elections are a key step toward the return of democracy for Pakistan and the establishment of a civilian-led government," she observed. Clinton stressed that the Feb 18 elections should send a signal to policymakers in Washington that they need to reassess their policies towards Pakistan.

The former first lady, who is now a senator from New York and a frontrunner in the Democratic presidential race, also pledged to increase non-military assistance to Pakistan.

"A stable and democratic Pakistan will be a stronger security partner for the United States in the years ahead."

Clinton pledged to support improved relations between India and Pakistan.

The envoy would also attempt to engage Iran to prevent drug smuggling and support the Afghan government.

Indian freed by Pakistan admits to being a spy

AP, Chandigarh

An Indian man freed after spending 35 years in Pakistani prisons for espionage has admitted being a spy, leading the Pakistani minister who organized the release to say it would now be harder to free other prisoners.

"I did the duty assigned to me as a spy... I was a regular recruit," Kashmiri Singh told reporters Friday. "I did not open my mouth for 35 years in Pakistan."

The Pakistani minister who was instrumental in freeing Singh, who was released Tuesday, said he did not know he was a spy. During his trial in the 1970s, Singh had repeatedly denied he was an agent for Indian military intelligence.

His unconditional release was partly meant to reduce the deep-rooted enmity between the South Asian rivals, who have detained many of each other's citizens.

"I am shocked to hear these statements," Pakistan Minister for Human Rights Ansar Burney told CNN-IBN, a private TV news channel in India. "It will surely make it difficult for Indian prisoners in Pakistan and Pakistani prisoners in India."



Chairperson of India's United Progressive Alliance and Congress President Sonia Gandhi (R) hugs an awardee of Stree Shakti Awards after presenting the award during The Stree Shakti Awards on the occasion of International Womens Day in New Delhi yesterday.

Pleas for action as Asia marks Women's Day

AFP, Hong Kong

Asia marked International Women's Day from Afghanistan to Australia yesterday with pleas for greater rights and equality for half the region's population.

Events were also held in Pakistan, India, Indonesia and China as activists pressed for an end to discrimination ranging from abortion of female foetuses to workplace bias.

Women gathered at Kabul's American University to highlight issues affecting them, organisers said. Another event was planned in Panjshir province, north of the capital.

The issue has special resonance in Afghanistan, whose former Taliban government was notorious for stopping women from working or going to school and forcing them to wear the all-covering burka.

Events were also planned in neighbouring Pakistan, where "honour killings" of women and punishment gang-rapes have been widely reported.

Activists joined a conference on eliminating discrimination and violence against women, a rally and even a women's rock-climbing competition.

Meanwhile Australian women's

minister, Tanya Plibersek, said the occasion was a chance to acknowledge issues of continuing concern such as women's lack of economic security and financial independence.

"From the moment a woman enters the workforce she is likely to earn less than her male colleagues, regardless of her career, industry or level," she said.

In Japan, a rally was scheduled in Osaka to express solidarity with women in Iraq.

Female unionists held a seminar in Kushiro on the northern island of Hokkaido to address the plight of part-time workers and other employees who work irregular hours.

And Communist North Korea marked International Women's Day in its own way by urging its women to reject Western fashions and to "set good examples" in their clothes and hairstyles.

The plight of women in the 21st century was outlined by the top United Nations human rights official on Friday.

"Laws that discriminate against women are still to be found on the statute books of virtually every country in the world," said human rights commissioner Louise Arbour.



PHOTO: AFP

Blair to teach at Yale

AFP, New York

Former British prime minister Tony Blair is to take up a post teaching at Yale, one of the top educational institutions in the United States, the university said Friday.

Blair, who stepped down as prime minister last year after 10 years in power, was to lecture on faith and globalization as the Howland Distinguished Fellow, and would start in the next academic year, the university said.

His work at the university would relate to the work of his Tony Blair Faith Foundation, which he is due to launch later this year. Blair is known as an observant Christian and converted to Roman Catholicism last year.

Blair's eldest son Euan is currently studying international relations at the university, which counts President George W. Bush among its alumni.

Malaysian polls close, ruling party confident of winning majority

AFP, AP, Kuala Lumpur

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's coalition appeared certain to win Malaysia's parliamentary elections as the polls closed yesterday, but the opposition could see gains amid anger over race and religion among minority Chinese and Indians.

Malaysians voted in general elections expected to hand the ruling coalition another victory but with a reduced majority, as ethnic Chinese and Indians shift to the opposition.

Abdullah's coalition has won the balloting for more than five decades. However, analysts predicted the opposition would win 35 to 38 seats in Parliament, nearly doubling its 19-

Malaysian polls close, ruling party confident of winning majority

seat share of the 222-seat body.

A reduced majority for the National Front would be seen as a personal rebuke for Abdullah, who has lost much of the goodwill he had when he replaced longtime leader Mahathir Mohamad in 2003.

A win in the Muslim Malay heartland of Kelantan would be a major boost for Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi whose Barisan Nasional coalition is expected to lose some of its majority in the federal parliament.

Analysts said the race between the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and the coalition, which has promised billions of dollars in investment to the impoverished northern state, will go down to the wire.

Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said there is a groundswell of support for the opposition but also growing concern of "massive rigging" by the National Front.

Abdullah denied allegations of vote fraud.

Hoping to capitalise on deteriorating race relations, rising crime and inflation, the opposition says it has one purpose to deny Abdullah a two-thirds majority in Parliament. The National Front has achieved the majority in every election but one since independence in 1957.

The National Front has already won eight seats that were uncontested.

Opposition parties say they are fighting an unfair battle. Apart from the National Front's organized and well-funded electoral machinery, the

Regional cooperation for Saarc farmers

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Agriculture experts of South Asian countries have recommended the setting up of regional information centres to alert farmers in the area on movement of pests and spread of crop diseases in the wake of climate change.

A three-day meeting on Science-based Agricultural Transformation towards Alleviation of Hunger and Poverty which concluded here on Friday also decided to set up a South Asian Forum for farmers and cooperatives to address issues confronting the farming community in Saarc region.

The Chairman of the meeting Suresh Prabhu told reporters here that timely information on movement of pests and spread of crop-related diseases across the frontiers would help farmers adopt better agricultural practices.

The meeting, he said, recom-

mended that South Asian countries should jointly develop a surveillance and early warning system for trans-border pests.

Pests like locusts moving from Pakistan to western part of India had affected crops in both the countries, it was pointed out at the meeting.

With climate change, it has become difficult to monitor pests movement without cooperation among SAARC countries, the meeting agreed.

Regarding the proposed South Asian Forum for farmers and cooperatives, Prabhu said the executive committee of the Forum, comprising two representatives from each Saarc country, will meet in Pakistan in September to carry forward the initiative.

The meeting was attended by representatives from all the eight SAARC member-countries including Bangladesh.

India 'too polite' to seek British apology

AFP, New Delhi

British brutality during colonial rule in India cannot be forgotten but the nation is too polite to ask for an apology, India's vice president Hamid Ansari said, according to a report on Yesterday.

"The amount of brutality by the British cannot be forgotten," Ansari was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India at a book launch late on Friday.

"We are too polite to even ask for

an apology from Britain" for the mass killings during the 1857 revolt, he said, noting that in contrast Australia's government recently apologised to aborigines for historic injustices against them.

The Indian uprising, which helped pave the way for independence 90 years later, was spurred by reports that the British were introducing bullets greased with cow and pig fat -- considered unclean by Hindus and Muslims respectively.

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