

### Tamils raid 2 army camps: 19 killed

COLOMBO, Mar 20: Tamil separatist rebels attacked two Army camps in northwest Sri Lanka with mortars and grenades in an all-night battle in which 14 rebels and five government soldiers died, military sources said today, reports Reuters.

Separatists attacked the camps in the Mannar district, about 240km (150 miles) northwest of Colombo, with mortars, grenades and small arms from Tuesday night until early this morning, they said.

"They used all the weapons in their arsenal," one military officer said.

The government has placed the Mannar district and areas of the surrounding districts of Puttalam and Anuradhapura under indefinite curfew, the military said.

### African next UN chief?

NEW YORK, Mar 20: As the United Nations enjoys increased prominence due to its decisive action in the Gulf crisis, the race is on to succeed Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, reports AFP.

The candidates so far include two Europeans, two Latin Americans, seven Africans and three Asians.

The unwritten rules is that the Secretary General's post rotates geographically, Perez de Cuellar, a Peruvian who assumed the post in 1982 and stepped down December 31 of this year was preceded by Austria's Kurt Waldheim from 1976 to 1981.

This means an African stands a good chance of taking over if he is able to win the backing of the Non-Aligned countries, diplomats say.

# Kuwait seeks to hang 600 POWs for 'war crimes'

KUWAIT CITY, Mar 20: Kuwait will seek to hang most of 600 Iraqi, Palestinian and other prisoners held for alleged war crimes, a high-ranking prosecutor said Tuesday, reports AP.

The emirate also will try in absentia hundreds of Iraqi officers who fled Kuwait, and hopes to catch them with the help of the international police association Interpol, said Khalid al-Mudaf, an Undersecretary at the Ministry of Justice.

Those in custody are suspected of "robbery, murder, rape, kidnapping, arson, assault and forgery," said al-Mudaf, who will head the prosecution.

"We cannot call them insane," he said of the Iraqi occupiers. "That would allow them to plead insanity. They are men and they will be brought to justice."

The United States will not be involved in the investigation of any crimes committed on Kuwait soil, al-Mudaf said in an interview with the Association Press.

The US military's Judge Advocate General's Office, which has set up a centre in Kuwait City, will be allowed to document but not investigate war crimes cases, according to US Lt Col Lee Haworth, who heads the office.

"The Kuwaitis wanted to have control over what happened in Kuwait," said Haworth. "We're happy with our role."

The war crimes trials in Kuwait will be one of many legal wrangles inevitable in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

Others include proceedings to set a value of Iraq's destruction in Kuwait, which includes some 550 oil well fires, ransacked government ministries, and looted refineries and port installations.

US President George Bush

is demanding Iraq pay reparations to Kuwait.

International bodies such as the United Nations or a panel Arab tribunal also might conduct further war crimes trials, al-Mudaf said.

The Free Kuwait Committee in London, a non-governmental body, recently asked the Simon Wiesenthal Centre for help in suing Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council for war crimes according to Shimon Samuels, the Center's European Director.

The Los Angeles-based centre focuses on war crimes committed by Nazis during World War II, mainly against Jews.

Al-Mudaf said formal investigations will begin within 10

days, and the trials will be open.

Scores of Palestinians, Iraqis and other people have been dumped at hospitals with torture-related wounds, physicians have said. Doctors at three main Kuwaiti hospitals say they have received 45 bodies of non-Kuwaitis suffering from bullet wounds or beatings since Iraqi troops fled the city February 26.

Meanwhile, Reuters reports say: Nearly three weeks after US-led Allied forces liberated Kuwait, dozens of Palestinians are disappearing into a secret web of interrogation, torture, detention, deportation and in a few cases death, witnesses and relief officials say.

Many Kuwaitis accuse

Palestinians of collaborating with the Iraqi army during its seven-month occupation of Kuwait. In an atmosphere of virtual gun law, some are now taking organised or random revenge.

Palestinians are picked up at checkpoints manned by the Kuwaiti Army and Resistance or taken from hospitals and homes, human rights workers say. Some are taken to police stations, others to schools converted into interrogation centres.

After an ordeal of hours, days or weeks, some have been shot dead and buried in unmarked graves, according to Arab medical workers and grave diggers who say they saw the bodies.



WASHINGTON: CNN Correspondent Peter Arnett holds up March 19 a plastic bag that he said contains baby formula manufactured by a plant in Baghdad that was bombed by Allied forces. According to Pentagon, the plant actually produced chemical weapons. Arnett was speaking to members of the National Press Club about his role as the only western journalist broadcasting from Baghdad after the start of the Gulf War. — AFP/UNB photo

### Shamir rejects Baker's peace partners!

TEL AVIV, Mar 20: Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has dismissed the 10 Palestinians who met US Secretary of State James A Baker as prospective negotiating partners because they back the PLO, an aide said Tuesday, reports AP.

The stand poses a new obstacle to Middle East peace efforts. The Arabs who met Baker in Jerusalem last week have long been considered by Washington as potential negotiators.

The Israeli Army's Chief of Staff Tuesday entered the debate, urging the government to trade land for peace. Lt Gen Dan Shomron has been leader of Israel's effort to contain the 40-month-old Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### Soviet request for delayed summit gets cold response

WASHINGTON, Mar 20: The Soviet Union has asked the United States to hold a delayed summit between Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and US President George Bush in May but received a non-committal response, an administration official said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The official, who spoke to the news agency on condition that he remain anonymous, said the issue had come up during US Secretary of State James Baker's visit to Moscow last week.

"We had to say we'll see," the official said of the US response to the Soviet proposal.

The summit was originally scheduled for mid-February but was postponed by mutual consent until some time in the first half of this year, officially because the Gulf war was raging.

# Kuwait's Cabinet resigns

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 20: Kuwait's Cabinet resigned Tuesday in a move intended to bring in new officials as the nation rebuilds from nearly seven months of Iraqi occupation, the Emirate's UN Ambassador said, reports AP.

The Kuwaiti leadership has been under pressure from foreign and domestic critics who believe it has lacked a commitment to democratic reform and has mishandled the first weeks of postwar rebuilding.

Ambassador Mohammad Abulhasan said the Prime Minister submitted the resignations, which were immediately accepted by the Emir, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah.

Abulhasan said the new Cabinet should be named in about a week. "This is the first

step in putting the house in order," he said.

He declined to speculate if the Cabinet reshuffling was in response to demands by some Kuwaitis for greater democracy and more popular say in choosing the 22-seat Cabinet. The ruling family abolished Parliament in 1986.

"When you have Martial Law, you need to change the government to cope with the critical situation that is now facing Kuwait," said Abulhasan.

Kuwaiti officials have declared Martial Law to restore security in the wake of the Iraqi retreat from allied forces late last month.

Many Kuwaitis have criticised the government for how it has handled the start of the postwar reconstruction. Kuwait's once oil-rich economy now suffers from widespread shortages.

Estimates on the cost of rebuilding Kuwait are 100-500 billion dollars.

Earlier this week, Kuwait's Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Saad Abdullah al-Sabah, came under intense questioning from visiting US Congressmen about his government's commitment to democracy.

The Prince put security first as a government priority, then reconstruction, and later political change. He said Kuwait is not a dictatorship and that Parliament will be restored, but he gave no timetable for political reform.

Some Kuwaitis have also begun questioning the 1,000-member ruling family's authority to lead Kuwait, as it has since 1959.

Those questions have been compounded by the departure of ruling family members during the Iraqi occupation. The Emir stayed in Saudi Arabia until two weeks after the Iraqi withdrawal.

### Nusrat faces contempt of court

KARACHI (Pakistan) Mar 20: A Pakistan court on Tuesday charged Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto's mother Nusrat with contempt for branding special tribunals trying her party followers as "kangaroo courts," reports Reuters.

The special, "anti-terrorist court" in Karachi ordered Nusrat to appear on March 27 to answer the charge of committing contempt of the court by making the remark last month, a court official said.

Benazir who was sacked as Prime Minister last August, and many members of her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are facing charges of abuse of power and other offences before special tribunals.

Nusrat and other party members have called these tribunals "kangaroo courts" because of their summary procedures.

### Ramos poised to succeed Corazon

ZAMBOANGA (Philippines), Mar 20: Defence Secretary Fidel Ramos is poised to seek the presidency, and aides believe President Corazon Aquino will endorse him even if it means splitting the nation's largest party, reports AP.

On Tuesday, Ramos told reporters in Manila that he will meet Mrs Aquino's brother, Rep. Jose Peping, Cojuangco, Secretary-General of the Struggle of the Democratic Filipino, on Thursday to join the largest party.

"Soon after, I'll meet with the President, hopefully to ask her final blessing," Ramos said. During a visit this week in



western Mindanao island, Ramos dropped numerous, broad hints that he is prepared to run in elections set for May 1992. Mrs. Aquino has ruled out a second term.

"Thank you for helping me celebrate my 39th birthday," the West Point graduate and former Military Chief of Staff told a meeting of Mindanao mayors and government when he turned 63 last Monday.

# Kurds cement hold on Kirkuk

NICOSIA, Mar 20: Kurdish rebels say they are cementing their hold on the northern Iraqi oil city of Kirkuk, and Shiite Muslim insurgents claim they control major southern cities, reports AP.

But Iraq's government news media on Tuesday said officials visited several southern cities and watched a pro-government demonstration in the battered port city of Basra.

The Iraqi Kurdistan Front said in London that rebel forces had seized much of central Kirkuk, a city of more than 200,000 people 240 kilometers (150 miles) north of Baghdad.

"There are pockets we are still mopping up," front spokesman Hoshiyar Zebari said by telephone.

He claimed rebels shot down two government helicopter gunships early Tuesday over Kirkuk, the most important oil production centre in northern Iraq.

The front statement also said Kurds, Arabs and Christians were demonstrating in the streets of Mosul, a city of more than one million people.

The front claimed security forces there had rounded up about 20,000 residents as human shields Muslim rebels.

In the south, where Shiite Muslim rebels also are battling to topple President Saddam Hussein, both rebels and government spokesmen claimed their side held the Shiite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala.

Jalal Talabani, leader of the

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, appealed to the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and France to intervene against alleged Iraqi use of napalm and phosphorus bombs against rebels.

But White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater said in Washington that US officials have no evidence to support claims of napalm use.

The Shiite Muslim Dawa Party fighting Saddam in the south also appeared to be trying to draw the coalition forces into the conflict.

In a statement issued in London, it said Iraqi forces had fired Scud missiles at Najaf, killing 2,000 people.

It also accused the army of using helicopter gunships against rebels in Kirkuk despite warnings from the Allied forces that such actions are contrary to the cease-fire.

Bayan Jabr, spokesman for the Shiite Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, said the southern cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kut, Amara and Nasiriyah were still in rebel hands, despite government claims to the contrary.

Official Baghdad Radio said Transport Minister Mohammed Harnzah visited Nasiriyah on Tuesday and stressed the need for cooperation to beat the imperialist-Atlantic-Zionist aggression destroyed.

The radio said the recently replaced Interior Minister, Samir Mohammed Abdul-Wahab, had recently visited Nasiriyah and Amara.

### Pre-poll duty concessions for politicians in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Mar 20: The Nepalese government has decided to provide customs duty exemptions and discounts on some equipment imported by political parties as part of campaigns for forthcoming elections, the Finance Ministry said Tuesday, reports AFP.

A spokesman said a 90 per cent discount on custom duties would be provided until May on cars, jeeps and light vehicles to be used by political parties and independent candidates during their election campaign.

Similarly custom duties have been waived for importing printed materials between March 15 and May 10.

Custom duties and sales tax on paper and printing material have also been waived, the spokesman said.

The general election is due to be held on May 12.

### Stable govt needed: Rajiv

SRIGANGA NAGAR (Rajasthan), March 20: The Congress (I) President, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, Monday assailed the performance of the non-Congress governments during the last 15 months and said a stable government was the need of the hour to take the country on the path of progress.

Mr. Gandhi said the Congress (I) had expected the National Front government to last its full five-year term.

# Indian polls likely to affect Nepal

NEW DELHI, March 20: A summer election in India may turn out to be a setback for Nepal's emerging democratic process. New Delhi has promised 20,000 ballot boxes and printing ink for the Himalayan kingdom's first free elections in three decades, scheduled for May. It has promised instruction books for polling officers and the expectation in New Delhi is that vehicles, photocopy machines and a whole range of other equipment would have to be sent to Nepal next month to facilitate the electoral process there, reports UNI.

If elections are to be held in this country around the same time or a little later, India will find itself unable to meet Nepal's requirements of these items. It is not that Kathmandu did not ask others to lend material needed for the polls. Japan, the US, the UK and Germany were approached, but some of these countries offered to send personnel to conduct elections or observers

to oversee them — offers that were promptly turned down by the Nepali Congress-led government.

In the end, only India agreed to meet the kingdom's requests and that raises questions which have a fundamental bearing on this country's policy towards Nepal.

A somewhat similar situation arose in November when King Birendra picked his date for announcing the kingdom's new Constitution.

On November 7 was the trial of strength between VP Singh and the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the King announced soon after a date was fixed for the crucial Lok Sabha meeting that he would promulgate his new Constitution on November 9. Underlying the choice of this date was a tacit admission that events in Nepal were influenced by developments across this side of the border.

The realisation that Indian leverage in Nepal is pervasive enough to influence the course

of events runs very deep. Segments of the democratic opposition to King Birendra feared at that time that promulgation of a new Constitution was, in fact, dependent on the outcome of the trial of strength in the Lok Sabha. If Chandra Shekhar, who provided an inspiration for the democracy movement, became prime minister, the King reckoned he had no choice but to go ahead with a liberal Constitution. On the other hand, if VP Singh, who followed a hands-off policy towards neighbours, survived in office, then an alternative draft statute retaining many of the monarch's powers would be made into law.

In the event, Chandra Shekhar became prime minister and the move towards greater democracy in Nepal continued. But in office, the Janata Dal (S) leader has been unable to resist the temptation to flaunt India's influence in Nepal's domestic development last month was seen in many quarters as an exercise

ments. His visit to the king-unabashedly aimed at strengthening the hands of the Nepali Congress at the hustings.

New Delhi is understood to have asked for different dates for the visit, but the Nepalese prime minister, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, short-circuited the diplomatic process and unilaterally announced the visit at a public meeting in Birganj. And Chandra Shekhar's itinerary included a public meeting at Birganj, the home town of GP Koirala.

The result of it all has been allegations that the Indian prime minister's visit was aimed at influencing the outcome of the elections. What is worse, there have been charges that Chandra Shekhar is close to certain factions of the Nepali Congress and that the visit to Birganj, for instance, was intended to help Koirala since visiting heads of government do not normally address public meetings — that too in places outside the capital.

# Off the Record

## Vengeance of a tree!

MAGNOLIA SPRINGS (Alabama): A 50 centuries-old oak tree that someone tried to kill with a chain saw is in intensive care with its own furnace, air-conditioning system and round-the-clock guard, reports AP.

While a court battle over ownership of the tree and its land has lingered for six months, the tree has become a celebrity of sorts. About 30,000 people have visited it, many leaving with T-shirts bearing the image of the tree.

The 65-foot-tall (20 meter) oak near Magnolia Springs, a retirement enclave on the Alabama coast, is estimated at about 500 years old. Its trunk is 25 feet (7.6 meters) in circumference and its branches spread 150 feet (46 meters) across.

Last October, someone wielding a chain saw cut a ring around the trunk, cutting off the flow of nutrients between the roots and leaves. Law enforcement officials investigated but brought no charges.

Forester Stan Revis of Holt, Florida, spent his vacation treating the tree, grafting bark over the wound.

"As far as the grafts themselves, that's looking pretty good, but it's a bad injury," Revis said. "If the tree stays alive it will heal itself across that wound."

The treatment has included installing an irrigation system and keeping the tree at 100 per cent humidity during the winter.

"If it lives through this summer, it has an 80 per cent chance of living," Revis said. He said he's consulting with horticulturists around the country about treatment.

## Panda on rampage

BEIJING: Cuddly, shy and chewing on bamboo — the image of China's rare panda has been endangered by a hungry female that has reportedly taken to devouring sheep, reports Reuters.

"It doesn't eat bamboo, cats sheep," screamed the headline in the Wenhu Bao, an official Shanghai newspaper.

A panda had left its forest home in the southwest province of Sichuan and attacked and eaten three sheep, it said. The animal then fell asleep in the sheep pen and refused to leave.

The panda, named Jiasie Shanmei, has eaten more than 30 sheep, the paper's Monday edition said.

Shocked experts who caught the panda for research believed she had been forced to kill because her natural bamboo forest habitat was disappearing.

Only about 1,000 pandas are estimated to be left in the wild.

## Vast nature reserve

BEIJING: China has set up a vast nature reserve in the mountains of northern Tibet to protect wild yaks, Tibetan Gazelles, snow pheasants and other rare mammals and birds, the China Daily said, reports AFP.

The newspaper said the reserve on the Gangtang plateau covered 200,000 square kilometers (78,125 square miles) and was one of the world's most pristine natural ecosystems.

The mountainous reserve was at an average altitude of 4,500 meters (14,850 feet) and was also home to brown bears, snow leopards, wild asses, Tibetan antelopes, argali and blue sheep, wolves and lynxes, it said.

The few local people who lived in the area would be allowed to hunt according to their traditional lifestyle, but rare animals such as snow leopards and brown bears would be protected.

Since 1985, Tibet has set up seven nature reserves with a total area of 5,000 square kilometers (2,000 square miles) to protect some 40 rare plant species and 60 threatened animals, the newspaper said.

Plans are in the works for reserves to protect other species indigenous to Tibet including the Yunnan golden monkey, the black-necked crane and the red goat.

# BRIEFLY

**Copies of 'Dawn' snatched:** Armed assassins on Tuesday snatched copies of the Pakistani newspaper Dawn to prevent its sale in the country's largest city Karachi, a spokesman for the Independent Daily said, reports Reuters.

He blamed the attacks on militants of the powerful Mohajir National Movement (MQM) party who he said seized thousands of copies of the English-Language Daily from sellers and delivery vans in 11 neighbourhoods of the Sind province capital.

The MQM denied it was responsible. Police said the attackers were unidentified and that no violence was reported.

## Soviet envoy meets Mujahideen:

A Soviet Envoy held talks on Monday with Iran-based Afghan guerrilla leaders fighting the Soviet-backed government in Kabul, Tehran radio reported, says Reuters.

Special Envoy Nikolai Kozirev told Rahmatollah Mostafavi, spokesman for the Shiite Muslim Islamic Unity Party, that Moscow was ready to cooperate with the Mujahideen to bring peace to Afghanistan, the radio said.

Soviet troops quit Afghanistan in 1989 after 10 years but the guerrillas, including Sunni Muslim groups based in Pakistan fight on against President Najibullah.

## Shamir seeks Saudi role:

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told US legislators Tuesday that the time had come for Saudi Arabia to play positive role in the Middle East peace process, reports AFP.

He also said Jordan had a very important role in the region and that Israel wished to negotiate a peace agreement with Amman, but that Jordanians must first change their attitude toward the Jewish State.

## 'Release Karim, take hostages':

Settlement of the Western hostages issue in Lebanon depends on the release of Sheikh Abdel Karim Obeid, a Shiite cleric captured by Israel, and other detainees in Israeli prisons, the Islami Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine (IJLP) said Tuesday, reports AFP.

In a statement released to a western news agency in Beirut along with a photocopied picture of US hostage Jesse Turner, the organisation said these conditions were the ultimate requirements for a settlements of the hostage question.

## Japan asked to admit war crimes:

Prime Minister Bob Hawke has urged Japan to acknowledge guilt for aggression in World War II as a way of building trust with other Asian Pacific nations, according to a newspaper report Wednesday, reports AP.

Hawke also said the international community should move to redraft the United Nations charter, deleting outdated references to Japan and Germany as "aggressor nations," and move toward giving them both places on the UN Security Council.

## Burial plots for French Muslims:

Muslims have welcomed government plans to provide special burial plots in French cemeteries for followers of Islam, with around four million the country's second biggest religion after Roman Catholicism, reports Reuters.

New Interior Minister Philippe Marchand, reviving largely ignored 1975 legislation on Muslim burial rights, has called on local authorities to establish "Islamic zones" in their graveyards.

Omar Lasfar, a member of France's Islamic Council, welcomed the move on Tuesday, saying: "If we want to reconcile the living, we also have to reconcile the dead."

## Pak Defence Adviser resigns:

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has accepted the resignation of his Defence Adviser Iqbal Haider Zaidi, it was officially announced here late Tuesday, reports AFP.