

We're ready to die if India opens fire: Amanullah Pakistan bans JKLF march across ceasefire line

ISLAMABAD, Feb 9: The Pakistani government has banned a planned march by Kashmiri militants across a ceasefire line into the Indian-ruled part of the disputed Himalayan state, reports Reuter.

But the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) said up to 100,000 unarmed followers would still cross the UN monitored line of Tuesday to show solidarity with militants fighting Indian rule.

Islamabad announced the ban on Saturday night after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met senior officials.

"The government has decided to politely but firmly prevent any crossing of the line," a government statement said.

The government imposed the ban a day after JKLF Chairman Amanullah Khan rejected a call by Pakistan's intelligence chief to cancel the protest.

"We are determined to cross over. We are firm in our objective," JKLF spokesman Farooq Haider told Reuters. "Since our march will be completely peaceful, they (Pakistani authorities) should not come in our way."

India said on Wednesday its security forces would resist the crossing, but the JKLF Chairman said on Thursday his followers were ready to die if Indian troops opened fire.

The day of the march marks the eighth anniversary of India's hanging of JKLF founder Maqbool Butt.

India holds two-thirds and Pakistan the remaining third of Kashmir, over which the two countries fought two of the three wars between them since independence from

could lead to war. The government statement quoted Sharif as saying he would not allow any loss of innocent lives "which would add to the miseries of the Kashmiri people."

"Enough innocent lives are already lost in Kashmir through naked Indian brutality

union with Islamic Pakistan. The militants accuse Indian forces of atrocities, including rape, torturing suspects and burning homes.

The JKLF, which wants to reunite both parts of Kashmir into an independent state, has led the revolt. But it has lost ground to groups fighting to unite Kashmir with Pakistan.

No comment on the Pakistani decision was available from India's Foreign Ministry, which has launched a diplomatic offensive to pressure Pakistan to halt the march.

Earlier on Saturday, Amanullah Khan said Pakistan would be bowing to Indian pressure if it used force to block the march.

AFP from Muzaffarabad: The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) continued hectic preparations today for a mass crossing into Indian-held Kashmir, ignoring warnings by Pakistan.

Posters and banners hailing the planned action have sprung up in the state capital from where JKLF supporters are to start Tuesday a planned 55-kilometer journey to Chakoti on the dividing line of control in Kashmir.

Witnesses said workers of the militant organization have been holding street meetings to mobilize public opinion.



Amanullah Khan

Britain in 1947.

A senior JKLF source quoted intelligence chief Major-General Asad Durrani as telling Amanullah Khan on Friday that Pakistan could not allow the march because it

ties," Sharif was quoted as saying.

More than 6,000 people have died in Indian Kashmir in the past two years after Muslim separatists rebelled, demanding independence or

Hundreds of FIS activists arrested

Clashes leave 35 dead in Algeria

ALGIERS, Feb 9: Militants defied security forces in a second day of clashes in Algeria in which at least 35 people have been killed and more than 100 wounded, reports Reuter.

In the darkened capital city, sporadic shots could be heard on Saturday night as security forces fired in response to stone-throwing supporters of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) trying to erect barricades.

Clashes erupted in other towns, including "intense confrontations" in the small town of Taher, near the port of Jijel

east of the capital, Algiers Radio and the Algerian news agency APS said.

State television late on Saturday showed Mohamed Boudiaf, leader of the new five-man presidency which the FIS regards as having taken over in a coup d'etat. Boudiaf was holding an emergency meeting of the high security council which includes the Prime Minister and Defence and Interior ministers, and the Chief of Staff.

The evening paper El Messa expected the authorities to declare a state of emergency during the coming week.

especially before a march called by the FIS for next Friday in the capital.

The authorities have banned the march by the FIS which was denied almost-certain victory by the cancellation of the second round of voting in Algeria's first multi-party general election last month.

The clashes in Taher were sparked by the trial of two imams (Muslim preachers), among scores detained by troops and other security forces in a clampdown on the FIS use of mosques to recruit supporters and spread its demand for an Islamic state.

Courthouses in the towns of Tlemcen and Barika, in the east, were set on fire on Saturday, Algiers Radio said, adding that in Taret and Batna clashes continued into the evening.

"Security services remain vigilant and are continuing to occupy key points in various parts of Batna," APS said.

The radio said that in Bordj Bou Arreridj, southeast of Algiers, five people were killed in the clashes after Friday prayers, the same death toll as in Oum El Boughi, 400 km (250 miles) southeast of Algiers.

Iraq accuses UN inspectors of violating diplomatic immunity

NICOSIA, Feb 9: Iraq's state-run news agency has accused UN nuclear inspectors of violating diplomatic immunity by entering the headquarters of an Arab scientific council in Baghdad, reports AP.

The Iraqi News Agency late Saturday said it was "another proof of the inspections teams' violations of Security Council resolutions, and a deliberate

attempt to harm Iraq."

Because of bad communications with Iraq, it was not immediately possible to contact team leaders for their comment on the Iraqi allegation. There was no immediate comment from UN headquarters in New York.

The Iraqi agency, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation said the

inspectors entered the offices of the Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils on Friday.

Reference books list the agency as being headquartered in Baghdad, with 15 member countries. It was established in 1976 to encourage co-operation in scientific research, promote the establishment of new institutions

Charles, Diana due in India today

LONDON, Feb 9: Prince Charles and his wife Diana pay a visit next week to India, once the jewel in the British Empire and now courted by London as a key trading partner and ally in the post-cold war world, reports Reuter.

The future British king and queen will spend six days as the guests of Indian President Ramaswamy Venkataraman, starting on Monday in New Delhi and travelling as far as Calcutta.

Palace aides say India is treating the trip like a state visit, underlining the couple's growing stature as emissaries of Queen Elizabeth, who this month celebrated the 40th anniversary of her accession.

Gunmen kill 8 in Punjab

AMRITSAR, Feb 9: Gunmen shot and killed eight people sleeping in a Punjab farmhouse, police said Sunday, reports AP.

Unidentified gunmen opened fire Saturday with Chinese assault rifles at Wahinpuhin village, 400 kilometers northwest of New Delhi, said Ajit Singh, the senior-most police official of Taran district. The dead included Mahender Singh and seven of his relatives. One person was hospitalized with serious injuries, he said.

Off the Record

Britons don't want tax-free Queen

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth enjoys wide support among Britons after 40 years on the throne but most disagree with her tax-free status and believe her family is overpaid, according to a poll made public on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The survey, carried out for the Mail today newspaper, found that most Britons wanted the Queen to remain their head of state but affection for the monarchy was mixed with criticism.

More than 80 per cent of 1,000 people questioned in the poll said the Queen should start paying tax on her private fortune.

The British monarch traditionally pays no income tax.

About three-quarters of those questioned said they believe there were too many royals on the state payroll.

They wanted the Queen's younger sons Prince Andrew and Prince Edward and the monarch's sister Princess Margaret to pay their own way.

Prince Andrew's wife Sarah emerged as one of the least favourite royals after being attacked in the press for her jet-set lifestyle.



Bloody sacrifice to boost profits

COLOMBO: A businessman had a teenage employee killed after an astrologer predicted it would transform his money-losing tea factory in a profitable venture, a Sinhala weekly newspaper reported Saturday, says AP.

Nishantha Kumara, 15, who worked in a tea factory in Bulatkohupitiya village, 50 kilometers northeast of Colombo, was sacrificed January 21 so the businessman could make quick profits, said Aitha, the official paper of Sri Lanka's Communist Party.

The businessman, who was not identified, had in the past sacrificed a chicken, a goat and a cow on the astrologer's advice.

Police are yet to arrest the businessman or the astrologer despite a complaint by the parents of the dead boy, the paper said.

Police were not available on the phone for comment.

Jealous husband jails her for 50 years

LONDON: A jealous husband who couldn't bear his wife talking to another man locked her in a coal shed every time he went out, subjecting her to a 50-year ordeal of domestic cruelty, police said on Friday, reports Reuter.

The couple's strange domestic secret only slipped out when the 74-year-old woman confided in a nurse after falling ill and being admitted to hospital. The woman, who was not named, had suffered in silence throughout their long marriage.

"She couldn't remember any time during her domestic life when she wasn't locked up, usually in the coal shed, when he went out," said police in Manchester, Northern England.

The wife seemed to think her experience was common, said Sarah Gathercole, a domestic violence unit officer called in as counsellor on the case.

The woman did not lodge any official complaint and still lives with her husband.

Bush on better habits to save billion dollars

WASHINGTON: President Bush is throwing "personal responsibility" into the health care debate, saying Americans could save billions of dollars just by exercising more, drinking and smoking less, eating better and practicing safe sex, reports AP.

Above all, take you children to get shots, Bush advised Friday in a second day of promoting his suggested alternatives to Democratic calls for a bigger government role in health care.

"Maybe I am a little old-fashioned, but I believe personal responsibility has a lot to do with making America a better country," Bush told a San Diego Rotary Club audience Friday night.

"Good health equals a change in the health care system plus a change in the way we act," he said. "If you exercise and eat right and don't smoke (or) abuse drugs and drink less and avoid risky sexual behavior, you'll live longer, and America will live better."

Above all, Bush said, it would be better for people to take care of themselves so they need less medical attention. A change in health behavior would save society tens of billions of dollars in productivity, lost earnings, treatment programmes and crime, he said.



BRIEFLY

Three guerillas killed in Lebanon:

Three guerillas were killed and two Israeli soldiers slightly wounded in a clash Saturday in south Lebanon, an army spokesman reported, AFP says from Jerusalem.

The clash took place in the central sector of Israel's self-declared "security zone" north of the border with Israel.

According to security sources in south Lebanon, one anti-Israeli guerilla was killed and another wounded, apart from the two Israeli casualties.

The commando and an army patrol traded rocket and automatic weapons fire for two hours, the sources said. The wounded soldiers were evacuated by helicopter to a hospital near Haifa in northern Israel.

Israeli artillery later fired around 100 shells at Shakra and Baraachit villages, which lay in the direction in which the guerillas had fled, security sources said. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Avalanches kill 57 in Turkey:

Rescue workers dug 35 survivors out from under the snow in South-Eastern Turkey Friday one day after fresh avalanches killed 57 people, officials said, Reuter reports from Diyarbakir, Turkey.

The villagers were rescued in Tatlica village in Batman province with the help of US Black Hawk helicopters from Incirlik air base. Deputy Governor Ahmed Erturk said.

Bad weather is hampering rescue efforts, he added. Erturk said two more bodies were found on Friday night in Karakaya village in Diyarbakir province, bringing to 203 the overall death toll from avalanches this month.

Levy to vie for PM's office:

Israel Foreign Minister David Levy has announced that he will run for the leadership of the ruling Likud group and vie for the Prime Minister's office television reported Saturday, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Levy, the conservative group's number two, will stand against outgoing Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Defence Minister Moshe Arens and Housing Minister Ariel Sharon. Early general elections are due in Israel on June 23.

"It is time that I matched myself with the leadership of the Likud and the country," Levy told a televised electoral meeting. "I believe that the odds are in my favour to lead my party to victory."

Levy, 55, was born in Rabat, capital of Morocco, and emigrated to Israel in 1957.

He started his political career in the 1960s after working as a farmhand and a construction worker.

Kashmir defence official abducted:

Militants abducted Director (Defence) Labour Procurement, BA Shah, from his office Saturday while a militant was killed and five suspected subversives were arrested in the Kashmir valley since Friday night, PTI reports from Srinagar.

Militants forced their entry into the office of Director (Defence) Labour Procurement at Batmaloo and made Shah to accompany them at gun point, official sources told PTI.

The Allah Tigers, a pro-Pakistan militant outfit claimed responsibility for kidnapping of Shah.

A caller speaking for the abductors told on phone that they kidnapped Shah but did not fix any deadline or demand for his release.

With the abduction of Shah, the number of captives with different militant outfits in the valley has risen to eight. Prominent among them are Hafizullah Dar, Dig (security airport), A K Dhar, scientists of Regional Research Laboratory, TK Ratna, a retired Deputy Commissioner, Mir Nasirullah, son of a former minister and Dr Sonallah Kuchay, son of a former NLA.

Floods leave 7 dead in Jordan:

Seven people, including two children, have been killed as a result of floods in Jordan and the country has incurred losses worth seven million dollars because of record rainfall, it was announced here Saturday, AFP from Amman reports.

A spokesman for the civil defense said that an Egyptian national was among those killed in the past 48 hours.

Most of the victims were killed when their homes collapsed, he said, adding that the authorities have recorded 120 incidents of flooding nationwide and helicopters have been dispatched to assist residents in isolated areas.

Flooding has caused seven million dollars worth of losses in the Jordan valley, an official said.

Thousands vote in Nepal's by-polls:

Thousands of voters lined up outside polling stations Sunday morning to elect two representatives to polling stations Sunday morning to elect two representatives to policy making lower house of Parliament after the winning candidates opted for more prestigious constituencies, AP from Kathmandu.

Observers predicted a keen contest between the ruling Nepali Congress and the communists.

The opposition Nepal Communist Party once again hoped to defeat the Congress Party in a Kathmandu constituency.

The by-election in Katmandu's constituency No. 5 was announced after the winning communist candidate vacated the seat. He preferred, instead, to retain another constituency where he defeated the then prime minister, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

Voting also began for a by-election in Sunsari district, 240 kilometers (150 miles) southwest of Kathmandu.

The earlier winner, former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, vacated it after also winning the nearby Morang district election last May, held after 30 years of autocratic rule.

Iran won't allow US presence in Gulf

TEHRAN, Feb 9: Iran's spiritual guide Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed Saturday that his country would never allow the United States of becoming a "policeman in the Gulf," in the second consecutive day of verbal attacks against Washington, reports AP.

"Iran will not remain indifferent to the security of the Gulf and will not allow any country, not even the United States, becoming a policeman in the Persian Gulf," Khamenei told a air force personnel.

Khamenei, who was quoted by the official Iran news agency, also denied reports that Iran was "trying to obtain nuclear arms."

"The purpose of such propaganda is to justify the presence of superpowers in the region and to intimidate neighbours" of Iran, Khamenei said.

"Whatever weapons Iran may equip itself with, this will not be a threat for regional countries," he stressed, adding that Iran had "never sought to play the part of policeman in the region."

On Friday Khamenei charged, that US "bullying" and interference in the affairs of other nations posed the greatest danger to world peace.

"The danger posed by the show of power and bullying of the world oppressors is worse than an atomic bomb," he told commanders.

JAFFNA, Feb 9: Shortly before nightfall, Tamil militiamen leap off a truck to take up positions in trenches and bunkers among destroyed buildings along the sea front of this northern town, reports AP.

Nearby, a carpenter hammers coffins out of fish boxes and rough planks.

Jaffna peninsula, home to more than one million Tamils is preparing for another military offensive that people fear will worsen their already tormented lives.

"If the government is preparing for war, we are prepared to fight," said Anton Balasingham, an ideologue of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil



JERUSALEM: Young Palestinian women struggle with an Israeli policeman (R) to prevent him from arresting one of them, during a demonstration recently. Some 50 Palestinian women demonstrated in East Jerusalem's Arab Neighbourhood, protesting the killing of Mustapha Aabdullah Al-Akawi, who allegedly died of torture in an Israeli prison in the West Bank. — AFP/UNB photo

War-torn Jaffna prepares for new military offensive

Eelam, a fierce guerilla group battling government troops in its quest for an independent homeland. "If the government chooses negotiation, we are prepared for peace talks."

The Tigers admit recent government offensives have weakened them, but say they are determined to hold on to the Tamil-dominated Jaffna peninsula. The real problem will start after the troops enter the peninsula. Balasingham said in a recent interview in Jaffna city.

A fresh battle, people say, will mean more destruction, loss of lives and more hardship for the Tamils, who constitute 18 per cent of the island nation's 17 million people.

Eight years of bloody conflict between Tamil rebels and Sinhalese troops has left 17,000 people dead and destroyed a quarter of Jaffna city's 25,000 houses.

More than 350,000 people have fled to 257 refugee camps across the peninsula. Electricity and water supplies have been disrupted for two years.

The government transports shiploads of essential food items to the peninsula every month, but western and local welfare workers say it meets only half the requirement of 10,000 metric tons a month.

To beat exorbitant prices and an economic blockade by

the government imposed in June 1990, traders and civilians make an arduous journey on foot, bicycles, motorcycles, and on tractors across a lagoon and an arid terrain, carrying what they can.

Medical workers say the fighting has worsened health care. Infant mortality climbed to 31 per cent in 1991.

A survey by the Jaffna Municipal Council last July found 62 per cent of infants and 73 per cent of pre-school children in refugee camps to be malnourished. Almost all pregnant women and lactating mothers were anaemic.

"The situation outside the refugee camps is no better," Jaffna's medical officer,

Rajasingham Theivendran, said. "Normal illnesses are now becoming fatal," he said.

Theivendran said lack of food and medicines had retarded the growth and mental capabilities of children.

"People are desperately wanting peace," said K Manikkavasagar, the government chief administrative officer in Jaffna city.

Last week more than 20,000 people demonstrated for more food and withdrawal of the army. They gave a petition to Manikkavasagar, the only government link with the peninsula.

"The rebels run the administration in the peninsula, levying taxes, dispensing justice

Three Afghan guerilla groups back peace move

PESHAWAR, Feb 9: Three conservative Afghan guerilla parties on Saturday backed a United Nations peace initiative to end the country's 13-year-old war — a plan already rejected by radicals, reports Reuter.

The three mainly Pushtun-speaking groups issued a statement describing the UN

initiative as the "most appropriate option under the present conditions" for a peaceful settlement of the Afghan civil war. The plan calls for the convening of an assembly of all parties to form an interim government.

The traditionalist organisations are led by Sibghatullah Mojaddidi, Syed Ahmad Gollani and Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi.

Three Pakistan-based Islamic guerilla groups have rejected the UN plan as a conspiracy to deny them power. A fourth criticises it as vague, but has not rejected it outright.

UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali wants about 150 representatives of all sides to hold the interim government to take power, halt the war and hold elections.

His special envoy on Afghanistan, Benon Sevan, said on Friday chances of a settlement had brightened following his talks with Pakistan-based guerilla leaders.

A UN statement said Sevan was confident concerns expressed by some guerilla leaders could be resolved "and the chances for a political settlement to this 13-year-old conflict

"We pray to God to bring us peace," said Jeeva Murugesu, a 26-year-old teacher. "It is only God who can bring us peace."