

Russia alarmed at ethnic dispute in Moldova

MOSCOW, Mar 29: Russia expressed alarm Sunday at the apparent escalation of an ethnic dispute in Moldova, and a news agency reported Moldovan troops were moving toward the breakaway Trans-Dniester region, reports AP.

Moldova's president on Saturday imposed a state of emergency in the former Soviet republic after weeks of fighting in Trans-Dniester, site of clashes between ethnic Romanian loyalists and Slavic separatists. Trans-Dniester's mostly Russian and Ukrainian population has voted to secede from Moldova.

Moldovan President Mircea Snegur vowed to disarm the separatists and prosecute Trans-Dniester president Igor Smirnov and other leaders he labeled "terrorists."

Russia issued a statement Sunday calling for calm and expressing willingness to help in any peace-making efforts, the Russian news agency ITAR-Tass reported.

Tass said Russia warned against an "escalation of bloodshed, violence and hostility."

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev sent messages to his counterparts in Moldova, Ukraine and Romania expressing concern and suggesting steps to resolve the dispute, Tass said. The news agency did not elaborate.

Tass also said sources in Trans-Dniester reported columns of troops were moving toward the region.



Croatian POWs get a joyful welcome as they arrive on March 27 in Nimetin by bus. About 350 Croatians and 40 Serbian POWs got exchanged under supervision of the Red Cross. — AFP/UNB photo.

Serbs threatens to retaliate

BOSANSKI BROD, Yugoslavia, Mar 29: The Serb-dominated federal army warned Saturday it will retaliate for any attacks in violence-plagued Bosnia-Herzegovina, where at least 30 people have died in ethnic violence in the past week, reports AP.

Two more men, both Slavic Muslims, were wounded when a bomb exploded outside a Bosnian mosque Saturday.

But leaders of the republic, with a volatile population of Slavic Muslims, Serbs and Croats, negotiated a local cease-fire Saturday night for this tense region on Bosnia's northern border with war-torn Croatia, Sarajevo TV reported.

No details were given. Word of the agreement followed a strong warning from the Serb-dominated federal army that it would respond resolutely to any attacks on its soldiers or civilians in Bosnia, the Tanjug news agency said.

Off the Record

Goal is to have more babies

SINGAPORE: Singapore's campaign to play Cupid is turning more young citizens into lovers but failing to serve the governments' goal — to have more babies, reports Reuter.

Chief population planner Paul Cheung told the Sunday Times newspaper that many young couples were delaying parenthood and opting for a state of quasi-marriage, travelling and sleeping together out of wedlock.

Marriage used to sanctify going out, dating and the couple's lifestyle. Now the significance of marriage is reduced to just sanctifying child-bearing, he said.

The official campaign to promote romance should now emphasise parenthood, he said, adding that delayed marriage was a worrying trend in a country with an acute labour shortage.

Singapore has several official matchmaking agencies. Cheung said these organisations had succeeded in helping singles find partners.

The problem now is how to get them to the second state of marrying and starting a family earlier.

Elizabeth seduced

LONDON: About 1830, a housemaid named Elizabeth was seduced by her employer in the village of Ashburnham, Sussex, reports AP.

She recorded her feelings in a sampler, telling her story in neat letters embroidered in red silk on white linen and beginning, "I put this down simply and freely as I might speak to a person to whose intimacy and tenderness I can fully intrust myself and who I know will bear with all my weaknesses..."

Elizabeth told of her downfall at "the wicked design of my master" of going out of her mind for a time and contemplating suicide, which she called "that great sin of self-destruction."

She eventually recovered her composure under a doctor's guidance and her confession ends with a prayer.

The sampler is part of "The Art of Death" a remarkable exhibit at London's Victoria and Albert Museum.

"Elizabeth's sampler is in the 'bad deaths' section of the exhibition, where souls were seen going to hell because of suicide or execution. The sampler is her thanks for her rescue," said Migel Llewelyn, a lecturer in art history and the show's organizer.



MANILA: Bernadette "Kris" Aquino (L) the youngest daughter of President Corazon Aquino, smiles while schoolmate Jackie Belmonte helps her fix gown during a graduation ceremony at the exclusive Jesuit priest run Ateneo University in suburban Manila on March 28. — AFP/UNB photo.

BRIEFLY

Order to free 4 Pakistanis:

Argentina's Supreme Court Saturday ordered authorities to release four Pakistanis who have been in custody since last week in connection with a devastating bomb blast at the Israeli embassy, officials said, AFP reports from Buenos Aires.

An explosion ripped through the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires on March 17, killing 28 people and injuring more than 200 others.

The suspects alleged connection with the bombing "could not be sufficiently prove," Chief Justice Ricardo Levene said.

"For now, they were released, but they are still under investigation."

Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Nawaz Chaudhury, Mohammad Azam and Azhar Iqbal remained in police custody late Saturday authorities prepared their release.

Sudan threatens to expel ICRC:

Sudan's military government on Saturday threatened to expel International Red Cross (ICRC) team working in southern Sudan, accusing it of giving aid to rebels in the region, AFP reports from Khartoum.

The statement accused the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of reneging on the agreed terms of its mission by landing aid planes in unauthorised regions and handing over vehicles to rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

It also alleged that one ICRC member had been recruiting children to work for the SPLA.

A lengthy statement said the ICRC had to obey both the terms of its agreement with the government and the country's laws if it wanted to go on working in Sudan.

LTTE kills 7 in Lanka:

Sri Lankan Tamil rebels attacked army bunkers in the north on Saturday, killing seven servicemen, a Defence Ministry statement said, Reuter reports from Colombo.

It said many rebels, including two senior members of the guerrilla group, died in a 45-minute attack in the Jaffna district.

One officer, four soldiers and two sailors died when the rebels launched an early morning attack on the forward bunkers with small arms, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, the statement said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are fighting government troops for a Tamil homeland in the north and east.

Roman re-elected party leader:

Reformist ex-premier Petre Roman was re-elected leader of the ruling National Salvation Front on Saturday, a day before an expected showdown with President Ion Iliescu, AP reports from Romania.

Roman was supported by 802 delegates in a vote winding up the second day of a three-day party convention. His opponent, Front parliamentary whip and Iliescu supporter Marion Enache, won 451 votes.

"Now we have a clear political line", Roman said after the vote count. Apparently addressing Iliescu supporters, he said, "Don't expect me to change my views."

The party is expected to choose its candidate for presidential Sunday. Iliescu has asked the party to back him for presidential elections by parliamentary ballot later this year.

Bush won't attend 'earth summit':

US President George Bush, will not attend an "earth summit" in Brazil unless the rest of the world backs down on limiting earth-warming carbon dioxide gases, his spokesman said, reports Reuter from Washington.

But a leading environmental group denounced the President's threatened boycott as the "height of arrogance."

"If we conclude that it is unlikely that his will be a productive international meeting, there is no point in having the President involved," said Clayton Yutterm, the newly-installed chief of domestic policy at the White House.

Organisers of June's United Nations conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro expect more than 70 world leaders to attend, but fear Bush's absence would scuttle their efforts to reach a meaningful accord on protecting the environment.

Deng's reform endorsed:

The Advisory body to China's Parliament closed its 11-day annual session on Saturday with an overwhelming vote to endorse the economic reform policies of paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, 87, reports Reuter from Beijing.

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) voted 1,518 to six with 27 abstentions and 25 not voting to express its full approval and endorsement of the Deng line that economic reform and opening to the outside world should be held to unwaveringly for 100 years, witnesses said.

Deng's ideas are "not only of great importance in guiding the current reform, opening to the outside world and the development of the whole economy, but also of far-reaching significance to the entire cause of socialist modernisation," the resolution said.

BJP starts demolition work around Babri mosque site

NEW DELHI, Mar 29: India's powerful Hindu nationalist party, up staged by the government over economic reforms, has managed to thrust religion into the forefront of national politics once more, reports Reuter.

The state government has deployed bulldozers at the two-acre (0.8 hectare) site around the mosque to demolish small temples, level the ground and build a wall around the mosque.

It says it has no immediate plans to raze the mosque and is just beautifying the area for the many tourists and pilgrims who visit Ayodhya, which has 8,000 Hindu temples.

The BJP government is committed to pulling down the mosque eventually and building a temple to the Hindu god Lord Rama but is at present restricted by a court case to decide ownership of the property.

The mosque has been a

major flashpoint in Indian politics for the past two years. The BJP came to power in Uttar Pradesh last year after an emotive campaign to build the temple.

The party has seen its strength grow from a mere two seats in the national parliament in 1989 to 119 today, mainly as a result of the movement.

Orthodox Hindus say the Mughal Emperor Babar tore down a temple to Rama at the god's exact birthplace and erected a mosque in its place. Muslims say there is no evidence to back the claim.

BJP leaders say turning the spotlight back on religion could not have come at a better time.

"Finance Minister Monmo han Singh is no longer the issue, the temple has come to the fore," Advani said.

The BJP has been in a dilemma over the Congress government's radical reforms of the state-dominated econ-

Jharkand rejects appeal to end blockade

NEW DELHI, Mar 29: Powerful tribal groups seeking a semi-autonomous state have rejected government appeals to end a week-long blockade of India's richest mining region, news reports said today, says Reuter.

Talks between the Jharkand Mukti Morcha (JMM) or Jharkand Freedom Movement, the federal government and the Bihar state government on the demand for a separate state ended in failure on Saturday, the pioneer newspaper reported.

The JMM is demanding control over the Jharkand tribal area spread over southern Bihar and three neighbouring states. It has imposed an economic blockade in the re-

gion, with the country's richest coal and iron ore reserves since March 23.

Newspapers have estimated the blockade is costing about 10 million dollars a day. Many steel plants may soon have to stop production. The Hindustan times newspaper reported.

Domestic news agencies said JMM activists exploded bombs at an airport in the steel city of Jamshedpur and on railway tracks in southern Bihar on Saturday. They said no one was hurt but traffic was disrupted.

The pioneer said the JMM refused to call off the blockade after it failed to receive any assurances from the federal government, the Bihar govern-



YANGON: A boy carries home water passing two soldiers on guard duty on March 27, soldiers on every street corner has become a daily sight for residents of the Myanmar capital. — AFP/UNB photo.

ment has said it does not oppose the JMM demand but the initiative must come from New Delhi.

The paper said federal Home (Interior) Minister S B Chavan had agreed to table the JMM's demand in parliament and call a meeting of the chief ministers of Bihar and the other three affected states — West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh — next month.

The JMM said Chavan offered a regional development council under the Bihar government but the plan was rejected. "We stand by our demand for a homeland, said leader Suraj Mandal.

The JMM has been de-

Turkish police storm Demirel's office

ISTANBUL, Mar 29: Turkish police stormed an Istanbul office of Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel's ruling party on Saturday and captured 14 hostage-taking Kurds, reports Reuter.

Anatolian news agency said there were no casualties when police burst into the building in the Bestikas district to end a three-hour occupation by members of the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party (PKK).

The Kurds, including at least four women, had seized two branch committee members of Demirel's True Path Party (DYP), but let other party officials and workers go.

Television showed a petrol bomb exploding in flames at the entrance to the two-storied building as police in riot gear tore down the door by hooking it to a truck. Other police climbed a ladder to get in through a first-floor widow.

A new kind of female sterilization

XIAN: A new kind of female sterilization device has received a patent from the state patent office, reports Xinhua.

The device was invented by Pan Junsheng, a 40-year-old doctor who works at a hospital in Longmen town, near Hancheng city, Shaanxi province.

The device is a metal embolus which is used to block the oviduct.

According clinical reports on the more than 100 women who have been fitted with the device the embolus is reliable, easy to implant and has no side-effects.

Experts said that the new sterilization embolus is an alternative to the pain of a sterilization operation.

'Libya victim of US terrorism'

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, Mar 29: Libya suggested it is a victim of US terrorism, but Washington accuses it of hiding behind the World Court to avoid paying for the Pan Am Flight 103 bombing that killed 270 people, reports AP.

In the last of three days of charges and countercharges, Washington on Saturday branded Libya a terrorist state and denied that the International Court of Justice has any jurisdiction in the case.

Libya has come to the court for emergency protection from punitive action by the United States or Britain to force surrender of two Libyan suspects in the 1988 bombing of the Pan Am jumbo jet over Lockerbie, Scotland.

The UN Security Council is moving toward the imposition of trade, air and diplomatic sanctions on April 15 to force a halt to Libya's alleged terrorist activities.

A Security Council vote is due Monday or Tuesday, while it may take the World Court three weeks to reach a decision about an emergency injunction. Unlike the council, the court, which is the UN's judicial arm, has no enforcement powers.

Meanwhile, the 21-member Arab League was discussing with the United Nations some Libyan proposals to end the standoff, league Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid said. He would not elaborate.

Libya's foreign minister, Ibrahim al-Beshari, was to discuss the conflict Sunday at an Arab League meeting in Cairo.

US officials accused Libya of using the court case as a political ploy to stall for time.

Libyan claims the 1986 US air raids on Libya were as much a terrorist act as the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103.

Australia to recognise Georgia

CANBERRA, Mar 29: Australia has decided to recognise the former Soviet republic of Georgia as an independent state and establish diplomatic relations with it, Prime Minister Paul Keating announced today, reports AP.

In a statement issued here, Keating hinted that Australia's decision was influenced by the new authority in Georgia of former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.

"I am confident that Shevardnadze will make a significant contribution to solving the formidable challenges faced by his country."

Police crackdown in Tunisia to crush fundamentalists

TUNIS, Mar 29: While Muslim radicals marched to the brink of power in Algeria next door, Tunisia crushed its own fundamentalists with a campaign of mass arrests and police torture in which some prisoners died, reports AP.

President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's government says the crackdown was necessary to keep the militant An-Nahda movement from overthrowing him and starting a civil war.

Critics respond that the repression enabled Ben Ali to stall democratic reforms and destroyed what respect the police had for civil liberties.

"The Islamic question has

poisoned the general political atmosphere," said Mustapha Banjaafar, secretary-general of the Movement of Socialist Democrats, a centrist opposition party.

The US State Department and Amnesty International claim Tunisian authorities arrested from 4,000 to 8,000 people in the latest campaign against An-Mahda, starting in early 1991.

Most were released eventually, but the Tunisian Human Rights League believes about 800 remain in jail, many without charges. The State Department and Amnesty reports say police regularly tor-

Chabane Ben Ali's adviser on human rights. "All political Islam is, by nature, extremist. It is faith, and therefore can't be discussed."

The government said it was prepared to cooperate with Amnesty in investigation allegations in its most recent report.

"Tunisia is always ready to cooperate with Amnesty... The stakes are too high for this sort of matter to be taken lightly," it said.

Both democracy and Islamic fundamentalism are on the rise in Africa. In Tunisia and Algeria, former French colonies, mixtures of the two have proved volatile.

After independence, Algeria was bankrupted by three decades of Marxist rule.

Riots in 1988 forced the government to allow new parties. The largest, the fundamentalist Salvation Front, was on the verge of winning parliamentary elections in January when the army cancelled the vote.

Tunisia also was a one-party state, but former president Habib Bourguiba welcomed foreign investment and ran an open economy based on oil and tourism.

After deposing Bourguiba,

Beijing, Seoul to use official names

SEOUL, Mar 29: China and South Korea have agreed to use their official names and national flags for the first time during trade fairs to be held in each other's capitals this year, news reports said today, reports Reuter.

South Korea and China, a key ally of North Korea, have no diplomatic ties. But trade and other non-political contacts between Seoul and Beijing have increased in recent years.

State radio said China would allow South Korea to use its official title, Republic of Korea,