

Indian troops kill 26 Kashmiris

SRINAGAR, Apr 8: Indian security forces completed a three-day sweep for Muslim guerrillas in a wooded district of Kashmir and claimed Wednesday they killed 20 militants, reports AP.

Villagers and residents who fled the area gave a conflicting account. They said 26 people were 4 killed, mostly innocent woodcutters, and at least six women were raped by rampaging soldiers.

The operations were held in villages near the Wullar Lake, 80 kilometers (50 miles) west of Srinagar, witnesses said Wednesday.

Additional Director-General of Police Amar Kapoor said soldiers shot and killed only 20 militants when they fired at an army patrol Saturday.

Witnesses fleeing to Srinagar, capital of Jammu-Kashmir state and seat of the Muslim insurrection, said soldiers barged into houses in Watlap village and raped women.

Kapoor said soldiers killed 19 militants at Hari Batt village Saturday when they ambushed an army patrol.

Witnesses, however, said the soldiers fired indiscriminately at bystanders after militants set fire to an army boat and drowned its eight passengers. The soldiers then rounded up woodcutters in the area and shot them at point-blank range, they said. Kapoor denied the charge and added there were no army casualties.

Villagers told reporters they fished out 26 bodies from the lake until Tuesday. They said at least 50 woodcutters were still missing. Journalists saw two bodies floating in the lake Tuesday.

Western human rights organizations have in the past accused the Indian government of killing and torturing people in the state.

The Indian government said it investigates all complaints and punishes the guilty. However, it denies permission to independent human rights organizations to investigate complaints.



Libyan Foreign Affairs Minister Ibrahim Bishari (L) and Colonel Gaddafi's cousin Ahmed Gaddafi Al-Dam (C) arrive at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo on Tuesday. Seven members of the Arab League are meeting to discuss the sanctions imposed by UN on Libya beginning April 15. — AFP/UNB photo

Policemen from 2 Indian states trade fire

GUWAHATI (INDIA), Apr 8: Policemen from two states in northeastern India attacked each other's territory, set hundreds of village huts on fire and killed at least three people, officials on both sides said today, reports Reuter.

Policemen and villagers from Arunachal Pradesh state attacked resident of neighbouring Assam on Tuesday, a senior Assam government official said.

Two people were shot dead and five were injured. Assam police pushed the attackers back into Arunachal Pradesh after exchanging volleys of rifle fire, he said.

In Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh, Home Secretary Hitem Tangu said Assamese policemen raxed four villages in his state on Monday.

He said at least one woman was burned to death in the wave of arson and a village headman seriously injured in random firing by the Assamese troops.

Both states are in India's mountainous northeastern region.

Off the Record

She knows how to put a Frenchman in cage

COPENHAGEN: Queen Margrethe II of Denmark and her French-born husband, Prince Henrik, gave some hints Tuesday on how to stay together for a quarter of a century, reports AFP.

"Show goodwill towards each other, give space and understand one another," the Queen said at an Amalienborg Palace news conference previewing the royal couple's 25th wedding anniversary on June 10.

"It's also a question of paying a lot of attention to the third party, the marriage itself," Margrethe said.

As crown princess, Margrethe married the French diplomat, Henri Marie Jean Andre, count de Laborde de Monpezat, in 1967. He changed his nationality, his name and his religion, from Roman Catholic to Protestant.

Margrethe ascended the throne at age 31 when her father, King Frederik IX, died in January 1972.

"We are used to seeing ourselves as a couple, which under all circumstances must be united," said Prince Henrik. "We must all the time remember that we must look like an entity, so that makes life, in a way, easier."

"There are easy and less easy times," the Queen said. "It would surprise me if it wasn't like that."

"The Queen knew she got a husband she shouldn't try to put in a cage," Henrik said, laughing.

"You put a Frenchman in a cage at your own risk," Margrethe responded.

Answering a question about long marriages the Queen said, "It's getting a bit rare, sadly enough."

Liz to star again

NEW YORK: Actress Liz Taylor will make a comeback on the silver screen starting in a role written especially for her the New York Newsday reported Tuesday, says AFP.

Taylor, 60 has not appeared in any movies since "The Mirror Crack'd" in the early 1980s, she starred in Franco Zeffirelli's "Young Tuscany" in 1987 but the film was never released.

New York Newsday quoted Taylor's agent Morgan Mason, who said the actress would star in a role written for her by Chazz Palminteri in an independently produced feature film entitled "Faithful."



Referendum on abortion

DUBLIN: Ireland is to stage a new referendum on abortion after its European Community partners refused to amend a special Irish protocol in the new EC Union treaty, the government announced on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The referendum will focus on the right on Irish women to travel abroad for an abortion and also their right to access to information and counselling in Roman Catholic Ireland where the operation is banned.

The last bitterly-divisive referendum on abortion in 1983 ended with the constitution being amended to protect the rights of the unborn child. But the issue erupted again last month when the Dublin high court banned a teenage rape victim from travelling to Britain for an abortion.

No date has yet been fixed for the referendum.

Prime Minister Albert Reynolds, struggling to maintain all-party consensus on the emotive issue, had hoped to avoid another vitriolic plebiscite.

But he ran out of options after Ireland's 11 EC partners refused in Luxembourg on Monday to reopen negotiations on the Maastricht Treaty.

Horse's royal visit to Israel

JORDAN: A horse emblazoned with the Jordanian Royal shield which swam across the Gulf of Aqaba to Israel on Tuesday belongs to Crown Prince Hassan, reliable sources said here, reports AFP.

Israeli state radio earlier reported that the horse belonged to King Hussein and had arrived at a beach in southern Israel after swimming across the Gulf of Aqaba.

The animal was examined by police and given medical attention after being found to have a slight leg wound, the radio said.

Reliable sources in Amman said the horse was being walked along the beach at Aqaba by a stable boy when it broke loose and jumped in the water, swimming towards Israel.

Prince Hassan uses the horse in Polo matches and was at Aqaba for a match, the source said.

Petrovsky-Gaddafi talks fail

TRIPOLI, Libya, Apr 8: UN envoy Vladimir Petrovsky apparently failed Tuesday to persuade Libya to surrender suspects in the bombing of a Pan Am airliner and avert international sanctions, reports AP.

Petrovsky told reporters he met with Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi for two hours and they had "frank, serious businesslike talks."

Speaking in English, Petrovsky said he brought a message from UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. But he refused to answer any questions and said he would be leaving for Geneva Wednesday to report on his visit to the secretary general.

Petrovsky arrived in an attempt to forestall the April 15 imposition of an airline embargo, an arms sales ban and diplomatic sanctions adopted by the United Nations last week. The sanctions will begin if Tripoli refuses to hand over two suspects in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, which killed 270 people.

Following the UN vote, Libyan demonstrators sacked the embassies of nations that voted for the sanctions, including Russia and Venezuela.

A Libyan official read a statement from Petrovsky in Arabic saying he had been reassured by the Libyan leader that attacks against embassies had ended and the problem of visas to foreigners was also solved and authorities would not stop people from leaving.

Petrovsky arrived early Tuesday from Rome, where he indicated he had hope for a last minute solution to Libya's dispute with the West.

He was greeted by hundreds of angry students in front of his hotel shouting anti-western slogans and banners saying "UN finished," "Security Council finished."

The crowd dispersed peacefully as he was entering the hotel.

Arab League offer
Meanwhile, Reuter adds: The Arab League said on Wednesday it was sending a new Libyan offer on the Lockerbie crisis to the United Nations but refused to disclose any further details.
League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Maguid said at the end of a long meeting of a seven-nation committee tackling the crisis that he was sending a letter to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

He said it "contains a new Libyan offer aimed at reaching a peaceful solution to the problem and reiterates Libya's respect for Security Council resolution 731 with respect to implementing the legal aspects of that resolution."

The United Nations Security Council has backed the West's position with a vote to impose sanctions on Libya, including a ban on air links and an arms embargo, if the suspects are not handed over by April 15.

The UN resolution also orders Libya to allow four other citizens to be questioned about the bombing of a French UTA plane over Niger in 1989 in which 71 people died.

A further demand is for "concrete actions" to prove Libya has ended any involvement in terrorism.

The Arab league committee was set up last month to try to find a compromise solution. It groups foreign ministers of Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania and the Secretary-General of the league.

The most the committee has secured from Libya until now is a letter to the United Nations saying it would not object if the Lockerbie suspects volunteered to give themselves up to the Arab League.

Arab diplomats said Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi appeared convinced the west's demands were part of a campaign aimed at removing him from power.

They said the Libyan delegation in Cairo had asked whether the United States would guarantee that if Gaddafi handed over the two Lockerbie suspects, the west would not make any further demands in connection with other violent incidents blamed on Libya.

The diplomats said the United States had already refused to give any guarantees and was insisting on unconditional compliance with Security Council resolution.

Yeltsin speeds up creation of Russian army

MOSCOW, Apr 8: President Boris Yeltsin seized the initiative from his critics Tuesday by speeding up creation of Russia's army, reasserting control over the Black Sea Fleet, and warning parliament that reducing his powers could "plunge the country into chaos," reports AP.

His tough talk was aimed both at countering Ukraine's claims to the powerful Black Sea armada and neutralizing the challenge to his authority by former Communists in the parliament.

But it was certain to raise tensions in the Commonwealth of Independent States, which has been divided by bickering between Russia and Ukraine over the fleet of more than 300 warships.

"This decree on the Black Sea Fleet will give Yeltsin the votes of 'patriots' in the Congress. But it's a step toward the Yugoslavization of relations between Ukraine and Russia," said presidential adviser Galina Starovoltova, referring to Yugoslavia's civil war.

Yeltsin's moves once again demonstrated the boldness that the 61-year-old Siberian showed in his political comeback in 1989, after he was dropped from the Communist Party Politburo, and last year, when he and other republic leaders pressured Mikhail Gorbachev into resigning as Soviet president.

Yeltsin drafted a decree asserting Russia's control over the Black Sea Fleet in response to an order the night before by Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk, who claimed the fleet for Ukraine.

The competing Ukrainian and Russian decrees had no immediate military effect, because the fleet remained under the control of Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, commander of the commonwealth's joint armed forces.



'Agantuk' best film

NEW DELHI, Apr 8: Ailing director Satyajit Ray, who was given a special Oscar last week for lifetime achievement, has won two more awards for best Indian film and best direction for his latest movie, reports AP.

New govt in Thailand soon

BANGKOK, Apr 8: Thailand's new Prime Minister, General Suchinda Kraprayoon said today his government would be formed in the next few days as critics blasted his appointment as a disguised coup, reports Reuter.

Suchinda, who was formally appointed yesterday, told reporters he would discuss the government line-up later today with leaders of the pro-military coalition in the House of Representatives.

The cabinet will be announced by the end of next week," he said.

Analysts expect the Defence and Interior ministries to be held by senior military men, while press reports predict that Pongpol Adireksarn, a little-known parliamentarian, will become Foreign Minister.

Posters have appeared throughout Bangkok protesting the "appointment of an outsider" — a reference to the fact that Suchinda did not stand in the March 22 general election — and a leading newspaper described his accession to the premiership as "an officially — sanctioned coup."

"Indeed, it may be more damaging to Thailand than the actual coup d'etat he led against the (elected) government of general Chatchai Choonhavan on February 23, 1991," the English-language edition of the nation in an editorial.

"Suchinda has done what many in this country feared would happen since the turbulent days of the 1970s — institutionalized military control of the country's parliamentary politics," it said.

Suchinda's appointment was, however, given a cautious welcome in the business community where it was seen as ending the confusion over the choice of a premier since last month's election.

"This will lead to stability," said Anan Manjanapas, chairman of Bangkok land, a powerful real estate conglomerate.

BRIEFLY

US won't reduce forces in Gulf:

US General Colin Powell said Tuesday the United States will not reduce its forces in the Gulf area until Iraq fully complies with the terms of the UN-mandated ceasefire, AP reports from London.

Powell, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said political, economic and diplomatic means should be used first to ensure Iraqi compliance, but force cannot be discounted.

"I can assure you that this is uppermost in my mind and the armed forces of the United States are certainly ready to do what might be required," Powell said. He spoke in an address to the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

He said four times as many troops are stationed in the region than before Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Libyan die in clash with police:

A Libyan demonstrator died in Tripoli on Tuesday of injuries he received during clashes with police trying to disperse protests against UN envoy Vladimir Petrovsky, the official news agency Jana said, Reuter reports from Nicosia.

The demonstrator, a 35-year-old man, was severely injured and died later in hospital, said the agency, monitored in Cyprus. It gave no other details.

Thousands of Libyans came out on the streets of Tripoli on Tuesday to denounce the UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on Libya from April 15 unless it hands over two men accused of blowing up a Pan Am airliner in 1988.

Police fired tear gas at one group of demonstrators who tried to break through a cordon of soldiers and reach the hotel where Petrovsky, the UN undersecretary-general in charge of political affairs, is staying.

Cossiga talks with Bush:

President George Bush met Tuesday with outgoing Italian President Francesco Cossiga to discuss the need to maintain a strong trans-Atlantic partnership, the White House said, AFP reports from Washington.

Cossiga, who leaves office in July, had a farewell meeting with Bush in which they discussed Italian politics and Cossiga's views on the recent legislative elections in Italy. The Italian leader also emphasized that bilateral relations would remain unchanged.

Bush said the United States would work with any Italian government formed in the wake of the elections. The center-left retained its majority in the vote, although it was considerably reduced.

The discussion also touched on Yugoslavia, trade relations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the White House said.

Air strike continues in Manila:

Philippines air controllers stayed off the job for a fifth day in defiance of government back-to-work orders, AP says from Manila.

Philippine Airlines said 21 domestic flights and 14 international flights were scheduled to depart Manila on Wednesday, about a third of normal operations.

Cathay Pacific sent two flights Wednesday from Hong Kong, and company officials said they would decide later whether to dispatch afternoon and evening flights.

Air controllers walked off the job last Saturday demanding that the government allow them to establish a cooperative and privatize their operations. That would enable controllers to negotiate pay scales above the legal limits for civil servants.

Albania drops communist flag:

The Albanian parliament on Tuesday dropped the communist flag with the red star, adopted after World War II, a Tirana television journalist told AFP from Belgrade.

Meeting after the country's second free elections held at the end of March, the deputies adopted the traditional Albanian flag — a two-headed black eagle on a red background.

The move was supported by some former communist deputies as well as those of the Democratic Party, who hold 92 of the 140 seats. It was the first law adopted by the new Albanian parliament whose President, Pjeter Arbori, is a former political prisoner.

Bush admn to sell arms to Egypt:

The Bush administration has notified Congress it plans to sell 695 Tow anti-tank missiles and 152 launchers to Egypt for US dollars 28 million, the defence department said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Washington.

The Pentagon said the missiles, made by the Hughes aircraft division of General Motors Corporation would help improve the security of a country that is an important force for political stability in the Middle East.

Ajit Singh arrested

NEW DELHI, Apr 8: Police have arrested the best-known human rights activist in the strife-torn Indian state of Punjab on charges of making seditious speeches, newspapers reported today, reports AFP.

Ajit Singh Bains, 70 and chairman of the Punjab human rights organisation, was picked up outside the Golf Club in Chandigarh city April 3 and subjected to "rigorous police handling," the Tribune said.

A former judge of the Punjab High Court, Bains was brought home the next day in handcuffs "like a criminal," the pioneer daily added.

Police said Bains was arrested for making seditious speeches at a Sikh temple March 18.

British Muslims expected to vote on national issues

LONDON, Apr 8: Britain's two-million strong Muslim community, politicised by the Salman Rushdie affair, is expected to rejoin the mainstream of British politics tomorrow casting its vote in the general election, reports AP.

The community took up an isolated stance over the Rushdie affair, feeling itself ignored in its protest over the author's allegedly blasphemous book *The Satanic Verses*, but is expected to vote more on national rather than community issues at the coming election.

Only the small Islamic party is fielding candidates on a separatist Islamic ticket just four nationally — and is leaving its supporters to decide who to vote for in the other 647 constituencies.

In London's Brick Lane market Bengali Sunami businessmen profess allegiance across the spectrum to the ruling Conservatives and Opposition Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties.

The Muslim Parliament, established in January as a separatist organisation for Muslims disaffected by the British system, has made no call to its supporters to abstain from voting.

On the other hand it is not endorsing any one party, advising its members to vote for the candidates in their constituencies they consider most helpful to Muslim causes locally.

We think that all parties have ignored Muslim demands and there is very little to choose between them, said Muslim parliament spokesman Muhammad Ghayasuddin.

No party had promised to satisfy Muslim demands for government funding for Muslim schools in the same way as their Christian and Jewish equivalents nor to extend the Race Relations Act to include a provision for religious discrimination, he said.

The Fatwa or death sentence against Salman Rushdie for *The Satanic Verses*, seen as blasphemous by some Muslims reawakened a Muslim identity in Britain, where Muslims burned copies of the book and attacked some bookstores.

Leader of the Muslim Institute Kalim Siddiqui, who is also president of the Muslim parliament endorsed the death sentence and still backs it, although he has said that Rushdie is not in danger from British Muslims.

As immigrants to Britain the Asian community has for decades seen the Labour Party as most likely to respond to its needs but there seem to be signs of Muslims switching away from it.

There is now the end to the automatic Labour vote of the Islamic community said Davis Muss Pidoock of the Islamic party, himself a convert from Catholicism.

"When I first came to Britain 16 years ago, I voted Labour, I was zero, zero, zero," says Kazi Nazim Uddin, now a successful garment manufacturer in London, providing employment for nearly 1,000 people.

A Labour victory and the higher taxes which would result would force him to lay off workers and close factories, he said. Who wants to work for nothing, he asked.

Labour supporter Rafiqe Haque, also a Brick Lane shopkeeper is convinced that many members of the 95,000 strong Asian community there have been turned off the Conservative Party by the hated poll tax, which helped bring about the downfall of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

His own business turnover is 35 per cent down this year because of the recession and he is hoping for a Labour victory he says.

The three major political parties have not been slow to capitalize on the growing influence of at least a section of the Asian community and its burgeoning middle class, offering dinners and social opportunities.

Some of the businessmen have fallen into the heads of the Conservatives in recent years, says Shorogul Haque Sheraj, a Liberal Democrat Party member, who runs a clothes shops in Brick Lane.

What they are after is not their vote but their money, they think they can fool them into thinking they want to be friends with them by giving them a nice photograph with Margaret Thatcher.

The ethnic minority population in Britain amounts to 4.7 per cent but goes as high as 15 per cent in around 51 constituencies, many of them marginals; where they are numerous enough to swing a seat either way.

'US, Israel to remain friends forever'

WASHINGTON, Apr 8: Vice President Dan Quayle on Tuesday sought to smooth over the strain that has developed between Israel and the Bush administration, saying the two nations will be "friends and allies forever," reports AP.

Quayle used a speech to a US pro-Israel political action committee to counter deteriorating relations that have developed with the Bush administration's hard line on Israeli settlements in its occupied territories.

He took issue with the notion that Israel's supporters in America are only Jews.

"Speaking as a non-Jew, let me say this. As long as I am in public life,