

45 killed in Lankan bomb explosion

COLOMBO, Apr 10: At least 45 people were killed by a bomb on a bus and in two Tamil rebel ambushes in eastern Sri Lanka today, military officials said, reports Reuters.

Explosives believed hidden in the bus fuel tank went off as the driver entered a bus station at Ampara, 240 km (150 miles) east of Colombo.

"It was a huge explosion and shattered windows of shops and offices nearby," a senior army officer said by telephone from Ampara.

He said 15 of the dead had so far been identified while another 10 were blown to bits.

The bus that brought the bomb has been blown to smithereens. Five other buses have been destroyed," he said.

Residents said about 30 to 40 people had been injured. Two buses were still burning and several nearby shops had been devastated. Bodies lay in pools of blood.

Military sources blamed Tamil separatist rebels for the bus attack. The officer said the bus had come from Kalmunai, a mainly Muslim town 30 km (18 miles) to the north, it was believed to be carrying about 30 people, mostly Muslims.

Military sources said clashes had erupted in the past few weeks between Muslims and Tamils in eastern areas but could not say whether this was the reason for the attack.

The rebels are fighting for an independent homeland in the north and east for minority Tamils, most of whom are Hindus.

In Colombo, a spokesman for the joint operations command in charge of offensives against Tamil rebels said 14 soldiers died in an ambush at Trincomalee.

Rebels killed another six in Batticaloa, he said. He gave no other details.

An earlier AP report says: A time bomb exploded in a bus as passengers were boarding at a bus station, killing 16 people Friday, and 20 soldiers were killed in two Tamil rebel attacks, military officials said.

The official said 30 people were hospitalized, eight critically, and 70 others suffered minor wounds in the explosion in the town of AMA, 200 kilometers (125 miles) east of Colombo.

A local newspaper reporter who visited the scene said debris and human body parts were scattered over an area of 200 meters (600 feet).

Ukrainian Parliament against handing over N-arms to Russia

MOSCOW, Apr 9: The Ukrainian parliament today ratified the government's decision not to hand over its tactical nuclear weapons to Russia for destruction until satisfactory international guarantees were in place, reports Reuters.

Itar-Tass news agency said a parliamentary resolution also demanded 'technical' control over that portion of the ex-Soviet nuclear arsenal based on its territory.

The Ukrainian parliament resolved that it was inexpedient to remove tactical nuclear weapons from its territory until a mechanism for international control over their destruction has been worked out and implemented," Tass said.

AP says, President Yeltsin on Friday promised to soften his economic reforms and step down as prime minister by the end of the year in a compromise with former communists who dominate parliament.

The brief, impromptu speech by an obviously tired Yeltsin marked a mild concession to his critics in return for preserving his power to issue economic decrees. Both sides claimed victory.

"I think his position as president has been weakened," said lawmaker Amangeldy Tuleyev, a member of the anti-Yeltsin camp.

Presidential adviser Galina Starovotova said Yeltsin had preserved what was most important to him. "Presidential decrees are the locomotive of reform," she said.

Yeltsin addressed the 1,046-member Congress of People's Deputies after it passed, on first reading, a resolution that maintained his sweeping powers but urged him to relinquish the post of prime minister and nominate a successor within a month.

"I realize that the combination of the posts of president and prime minister is very hard, above all on me," said Yeltsin, whose eyes were puffy and skin ashen after a week of fending off attacks in parliament.

"In another three months, once it is clear that there will be no return to the past, that the reforms are irreversible...undoubtedly I'll introduce proposals on a candidate for prime minister. Don't force me to do it at once," he told the lawmakers in the Kremlin.

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Y'slav forces warn Bosnia to stop fighting

SARAJEVO, Apr 10: Leaders of Yugoslavia's armed forces have warned Bosnia-Herzegovina to stamp out fighting which has spread across the newly-independent state — or face military retaliation, reports Reuters.

Army and Air Force leaders urged an end to clashes between Serbs, opposed to secession by the former Yugoslav republic and Muslims and Croats who support the split.

Much of the fighting has involved the Serb-led Yugoslav armed forces, who say they are needed to separate the warring sides. Muslims and Croats have accused them of supporting Serb guerrillas.

Air Force Chief Bozidar Stevanovic told Bosnia's leaders on Thursday to get fighting under control.

"We have given every warning and exhausted our patience waiting for you and the Bosnian Presidency to secure public order and peace," Stevanovic said in an open letter to Bosnia's Muslim President Alija Izetbegovic.

Iranians go to polls

TEHRAN, Apr 10: Iranians began voting today in a general election widely expected to endorse president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's policies of opening to the west and economic liberalisation, reports Reuters.

Rafsanjani was among the first to cast his vote when polling stations opened at 8 a.m. (0330 GMT).

It was the first time since the 1979 Islamic revolution that Iranians had been given a clear choice between rightists allied to Rafsanjani and leftists radicals.

Political analysts predicted the radicals would lose their dominant position in the 270-seat parliament.

speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that there was disagreement over who will represent the Palestinians at the Canada and Belgium meetings.

The United States supports the Palestinians' request to include representatives from outside the occupied territories and east Jerusalem, the official said.

"We have said we do not agree. That is where the matter stands, I know of no final development," said the official. He stressed Israel would not back down but that no final decision was taken.

The television's Arab Affairs reporter, Ehud Yaari, said Israel would "apparently boycott the talks about refugees and economic affairs for failure to find a formula," over Palestinian representatives.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Josep-h Snyder said: "We think it is very important that everybody participate. Several of the parties have concerns about one element or the other of the modalities of the working groups. We are working to resolve them."

Since the talks opened in Madrid, Spain last October the Palestinian delegation has been limited to Arabs from the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israel has long objected to including Palestinians from abroad as a way to ensure the Palestine Liberation Organization is excluded from negotiations.

It also refuses to negotiate with Arabs from east Jerusalem, arguing this would prejudice Israel's claim to the city as its indivisible capital.

Israeli officials insist these conditions were accepted as part of the ground rules when the Madrid talks began.

The Likud platform for June 23 elections maintains that the occupied territories are integral parts of historic Israel. More than 110,000 Israelis have been moved into the territories since 1967.

The rival Labor party's platform calls for territorial compromise with the Arabs.

In the last round of those talks, Israel introduced its plan for limited autonomy. The Palestinians rejected it and proposed an outline that the Israeli delegation termed tantamount to a declaration of statehood.

BRUSSELS, Apr 10: Military chiefs of staff from NATO and east European countries were to hold their first ever joint talks here today with the fate of former Soviet arms, both nuclear and conventional, expected to top the agenda, reports AFP.

The talks at NATO headquarters here will bring together top generals who only three years ago were busy laying plans for war between the forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on the one hand and what was then the Soviet led Warsaw Pact alliance on the other.

How, however, the generals main concern will be to ensure the safe disposal of the former Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal, and the avoidance of conflicts over the sharing-out of other forces between the republics.

The Brussels talks come amid new efforts to resolve a dispute between Russia and Ukraine over the disposal of the mighty Black Sea Fleet, which Russia claims but which is based in Ukrainian waters.

other fought to maintain her composure. Wife Felicidad, who faces her own state court appearance today in an unrelated shoplifting case, stared stonily at the judge. It was the first time she had returned to her husband's trial since her arrest at a suburban Miami department store last month.

"The family is horribly dejected," Rubino said. Testimony from 78 witnesses in the exhausting seven-month-long trial documented millions of dollars in bribes paid by the cartel to Noriega, who protected Florida-bound air and sea shipments through Panama.

Although Noriega never touched or handled drugs, he invited Medellin cartel leaders to build a cocaine manufacturing lab in Panama.

The combined cost of the invasion and the trial has been estimated at anywhere from dollar 173 to dollar 200 million, according to Pentagon and legal sources.

Off the Record

Microwaved kitten
AMMAPOLIS, Md: A lawyer has asked Maryland's highest court not to suspend him from practicing law after he was convicted of breaking into a woman's home and killing her cat in a microwave oven, reports AP.

Satanley E. Protokowicz Jr. pleaded guilty January 17 to breaking and entering and cruelty to animals in a break-in at the home of a friend's estranged wife. He was fined \$1,500, given a 15-month suspended sentence and 18 months probation and ordered to seek alcoholism counseling.

On Wednesday, Protokowicz told the Court of Appeals, which disciplines lawyers, that his behavior stemmed from alcoholism and depression triggered by his wife's leaving him and a close friend's death.

The kitten's death was accidental, he said. The court didn't rule immediately.

'Beer belly'-obvious effect of drinking
BOSTON: At last, science has found an explanation for one of the obvious effects of drinking too much — the beer belly, reports AP.

Swiss researchers report that when people drink alcohol their bodies burn up fat much more slowly than usual. And any fat that isn't burning is stored in the belly, the thighs or other places where people tend to put on weight.

The study suggests it isn't just the calories in alcohol that make it fattening. It's the way alcohol throws off the body's normal disposal of fat in the diet.

The study was based on an experiment in which people were put on a diet that included about 3 ounces of pure alcohol a day. This much alcohol reduced their bodies burning of fat by about one-third.

When people eat extra carbohydrates — sugar or starch — they tend to burn most of it, adding little to their girth. But the body burns extra fat sparingly and instead saves it away.

Of course, not everyone who drinks gets a big belly. It depends on what they eat. Beer guzzlers and whiskey drinkers who subsist on hamburgers and potato chips will almost certainly put on pounds, while vegetarian wine sippers do not.

Ovum fertilized by microsurgery
TOKYO: Japan's first baby produced by means of a microscope assisted artificial insemination method has been born at a hospital in Iwanuma, northern Japan, doctors said today, reports AFP.

The 3,025-gram (6.6 pound) baby was born by caesarean section, on Tuesday and both the mother and baby were in good condition, doctors said.

The technique involves fertilizing the ovum by means of microsurgery.

Doctors at Iwanuma used it on the 30-year-old woman before the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology (JSOG) gave its official approval last November but had kept it secret.

On March 26, an obstetrician at a hospital in Kitakyushu, Kyushu, said that doctors there had succeeded in performing microfertilization on two women, who are expected to give birth around November.



ISRAEL: Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan's horse, escorted by an Israeli woman soldier, before it was handed over to a UN officer at the Israeli Jordan border Yotvathal on Thursday for return to his owner. The horse, which ran away two days ago and swam two kilometers in the Red Sea waters from the Jordanian city Aqaba to the Israeli town of Eilat, was checked for explosives before its return. — AFP/UNB photo

29 N-accidents in US

WASHINGTON, Apr 10: Agency, said the Defense Department has released little information on radioactive contamination as a result of the accidents and "the extent of residual activity is unknown".

The Pentagon has acknowledged as many as 21 domestic, nuclear-related mishaps involving the Air Force, the Army and the Navy.

The latest findings were part of a wide-ranging study for the EPA on the scope of radioactive contamination nationwide as a result of military and civilian activities.

The study, presented to the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, said there are more than 45,000 locations where there have been nuclear activities and where there potentially has been radiation contamination.

The report catalogued all sites that now, or in the past, have possessed radioactivity. Michael Shapiro, an EPA deputy assistant administrator, told a Senate panel.

The study listed 29 locations where researchers said accidents involving nuclear weapons were documented to have occurred from 1950 to 1980.

PALESTINIAN SHOT DEAD

Israeli soldiers on Thursday shot dead a Palestinian sought for murdering suspected collaborators, military sources said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Abdel Kader Massarwa, 22, was being hunted by Israeli security forces for allegedly killing several Palestinians suspected of collaborating with the Israeli authorities.

He was fatally shot in the head in the northern occupied West Bank refugee camp of Nur-Al-Shams near Tulkarm as he fled after being identified by soldiers patrolling the camp, the sources said.

Massarwa's death brings to 885 the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli gunfire since the start of the anti-Israeli uprising in the occupied territories in December 1987, according to a toll established by AFP from Arab sources.

Turkish troops kill 4 rebels: Turkish security forces killed four Kurdish guerrillas in three separate clashes in the southeast, the regional governor's office said Thursday, AP report from Diyarbakir.

It said the clashes occurred near the town of Besni and in the villages of Cukurdere and Gorumlu on Wednesday.

Kurdish guerrillas in the region belong to the illegal Kurdish Labor Party, which has been fighting for an independent Kurdish states since 1984. Kurds make up one-fifth of Turkey's population of almost 60 million.

The separatists have become more active since Kurds in neighboring Iraq launched an uprising against Saddam Hussein at the end of the Gulf War. That revolt was crushed, but a US-led Western force helped resettle the Iraqi Kurds, who now control most of northern Iraq.

Marchers support Sudanese army: Tens of thousands of Sudanese northerners took to the streets in Khartoum Thursday in a government-sponsored demonstration of support for an army offensive against rebels in the south of the country, AFP reports from Khartoum.

The march followed reports that the army had advanced to within 100 kilometres (60 miles) of the headquarters of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

In an offensive that began in early March, the army has broken long rebel siege of Juba, the main southern city, and taken the rebel-held towns of Bor and Pochala.

Iran executes Baha'is: Iran has executed a member of the Baha'i faith for the first time in three and half years, international representatives of the sect said Thursday, AP reports from Geneva.

Wytze Bos, a Baha'i representative in Geneva, said he met with UN officials and urged them to include the case in the UN Human Rights Commission's next report on Iraq.

A statement by the Baha'i International Community said Bahman Samandari, a leading member of the faith in Iran, was executed secretly March 18 at Tehran's notorious Evin prison a day after being arrested.

The sect says more the 200 of its members were killed and hundreds jailed between 1979 and 1988, which coincides with the reign of the Islamic republic's fundamentalist founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

N-arms material thieves held: Police have arrested thieves who tried to smuggle out of the country 180 kilograms (400 pounds) of a material regarded as important in the manufacture of nuclear weapons, a news agency reported Friday, AP says from Moscow.

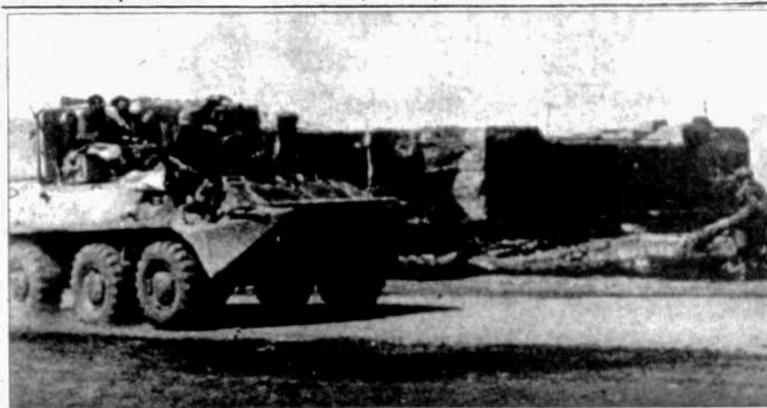
Ukrainian and Russian police thwarted the plot and restored the red mercury to the plant in Tambov in central Russia, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Fujimori fires 13 justices: President Alberto Fujimori has carried his political crackdown to the judicial system, firing 13 Supreme Court justices and dozens of other judges linked to a main opposition party, AP reports from Lima.

The President, who suspended the constitution and dissolved Congress on Sunday, also fired all nine members of a federal constitutional review panel and a number of other officials. His decree took effect Thursday.

"You can buy a judge for \$5,000 or 10,000," Fujimori told the nation Wednesday night, explaining his series of extraordinary moves.

Lawmakers, meanwhile, said they were meeting clandestinely to study how to retaliate against the closure of Peru's 240-member Congress.



Soldiers and Mujahideen ride together a top an armoured personnel carrier on Monday near the northern city of Mazar-I-Sharif, headquarters of a newly created military council, now in control of most of the 11 Northern Afghan provinces. The new alliance of Mujahideen and soldiers say they now want President Najibullah to go. — AFP/UNB photo

Israel may boycott peace talks

JERUSALEM, Apr 10: Israel may boycott two upcoming rounds of Middle East peace talks over its refusal to sit down with Palestinians from Jerusalem or the diaspora, Israel television reported Thursday, reports AP.

It would be Israel's first boycott of Middle East peace talks since they began in Madrid last October.

The planned talks, which will focus on Palestinian refugees and economic development, are expected to convene next month in Canada and Belgium.

They are separate from the bilateral talks between Israel and its neighbors that are expected to resume April 27 in Washington.

In December, Israel delayed the start of the bilateral talks but eventually sent its delegates to the Washington meetings.

A Foreign Ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that there was disagreement over who will represent the Palestinians at the Canada and Belgium meetings.

The United States supports the Palestinians' request to include representatives from outside the occupied territories and east Jerusalem, the official said.

"We have said we do not agree. That is where the matter stands, I know of no final development," said the official. He stressed Israel would not back down but that no final decision was taken.

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Report on US performance in Gulf War

WASHINGTON, Apr 10: After multiple revisions and delays, the US Defense Department is releasing a 1,300-page study on its performance in the Gulf War, reports AP.

The review being released to Congress on Friday looks at the military's response to Iraq's Aug 2, 1990, invasion of Kuwait, the buildup of a 540,000-member US force during Operation Desert Shield, and the 43-day war itself — dubbed Desert Storm by its commander, Gen II Norman Schwarzkopf.

Noriega faces 120 years jail for drug trafficking

MIAMI Apr 10: Toppled Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, jailed since his capture in the US invasion of Panama more than two years ago, now faces a prison sentence of 120 years for his drug and racketeering conviction, reports Reuters.

A jury declared Noriega, 54, guilty on Thursday of helping Pablo Escobar and other top Medellin cartel leaders set up shop in Panama and export tons of cocaine to Florida.

The panel convicted Noriega of eight of 10 charges, acquitting him of two less serious charges.

US prosecutors said Noriega would be taken to Tampa, Florida, after his sentencing on July 10 to face separate marijuana trafficking charges.

When the US judicial system is done with Noriega, Panamanian government officials have said they want to extradite him to face charges of corruption and murder there.

20 Nepalese arrested for defying curfew

KATHMANDU, Apr 10: At least 20 people including teenagers were arrested for defying a six-hour curfew overnight Thursday and police again fired blanks in various places in Kathmandu, sources said, reports AFP.

A high placed official source said the curfew may be prolonged until next Monday if the present series of protest demonstrations does not stop.

A 10-hour curfew was imposed Monday after security forces moved to break up a silent funeral procession for a victim of protests earlier in the day, during which police shot dead seven people and injured 40, by officials count.

A nightly curfew has been maintained all week but reduced in length. Police arrested 40 people overnight Wednesday and fired tear gas and blanks.

Police sources said protesters had insulted security forces and tried to stop their patrolling vehicles at four places in Kathmandu, police

Talks on fate of Soviet arms

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