

23 killed in Kashmir since Saturday

SRINAGAR, July 20: Twenty three people, including a deputy superintendent of district armed police and seventeen militants were killed, where 27 suspected subversives arrested in Kashmir valley since Saturday night, reports PTI.

Doda town of Jammu region, where army was called out and curfew imposed in the wake of a fierce encounter between militants and security forces on Saturday, was 'tense'. Four persons including two security officials were killed and five others were injured in the encounter. Condition of two of them was stated to be critical, an officials spokesman told reporters here.

He said Lt Gen M A Zaki, adviser to the governor accompanied by the director general of state police, B S Bedi, rushed to Doda to assess the situation.

Pak army gets extra powers to tackle Sindh violence

ISLAMABAD, July 20: The Pakistan army won a battle on Sunday for controversial extra powers to tackle political and criminal violence in troubled Sindh province, reports Reuters.

President Ghulam Ishaq Khan issued a decree giving the army powers to launch search and arrest operations in support of the civil government and to use as much force as required.

Under the ordinance published by the government, soldiers get legal immunity from prosecution for their actions, backdated to when the military launched its Sindh operation in late May.

Up till now troops must be accompanied by police during raids against bandit gangs in

the rural interior of the province and former political allies of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Military spokesman say that was one of the impediments to their crackdown and the army has been seeking a much stronger legal framework for the operation.

Sharif ordered the military into action in May mainly to tackle the gangs of bandits terrorising much of interior Sindh.

But last month they switched attention to his coalition partners in the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) who dominated the Sindh capital Karachi and the province's second city Hyderabad.

The army uncovered what it said were 23 torture chambers used by the MQM for dealing with political foes and dissidents in their own ranks.

The MQM, which represents Muslim migrants from India, walked out in protest



Ghulam Ishaq Khan

from Sharif's coalition in Islamabad and the Sindh government, sparking a crisis in Karachi.

It also brought into the open splits in Pakistan's ruling Troika — Sharif, Ishaq Khan and Army Chief General Asif Nawaz.

Sindh Chief Minister Muzaffar Shah Hussain appeared unaware of the impending ordinance when he held a news conference in Islamabad on Sunday.

But he backed the military operation, saying: "The Sindh government and the army have a common perception and identity of view."

Condemning army revelations that the MQM was contemplating creating a separate nation in southern Pakistan, he said its leader Altaf Hussain could face arrest if he returned from London where he is having medical treatment.

Noriega wants to stay in Panama jail

PANAMA CITY, July 20: Ousted Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega, sentenced to 40 years in prison in the United States for drug trafficking and racketeering, is seeking to serve his term in Panama, his lawyer said Sunday, reports AFP.

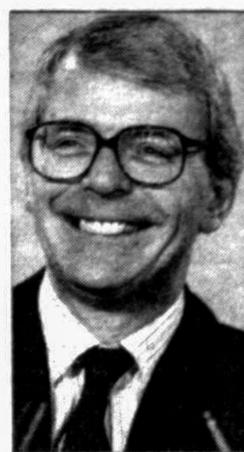
Jose Fonseca said in an interview with RPC radio in Panama City that Noriega has empowered him to ask the current government to let him serve his time in Panama City, under a US Panama treaty signed last year allowing nationals of both countries to serve prison sentences in each other's countries.

The treaty is not yet in force, however, as it had to be ratified by the US Congress.

The head of the Panamanian air force, Major Santiago Fundora, who headed a group of disaffected officers who made an abortive bid to overthrow Noriega in 1988, said "if Noriega is brought to Panama we will have to build a top security prison especially for him."

Off the Record

'Having difficulties in our marriage'



LONDON: Prime Minister John Major refused to accept the resignation of a Cabinet official who reportedly was involved in an extra-marital affair, government sources said Monday, reports AP.

A tabloid newspaper reported Sunday that David Mellor, the national heritage secretary, was involved with an actress. Some members of Parliament who are pressing for legal restraints on press intrusion condemned the newspaper coverage.

Mellor is the minister responsible for deciding whether the government will propose legislation restraining the press.

Mellor, 43, a close friend of major, confirmed on Sunday that he and his wife Judith were 'having difficulties in our marriage.'

Both further hope these sensationalized disclosures in today's newspapers will be put aside and that we can be left to resolve these matters in private," Mellor said in a statement released to Press Association, the national news agency.

Major's office refused to comment on news reports that Mellor's resignation had been offered and refused. But government sources, speaking on condition they not be identified, confirmed the reports.

A Sunday newspaper, The People, carried a front-page story about Mellor's alleged affair with unemployed actress Antonia de Sancha, and several newspapers carried similar accounts in late editions.

A topless protest march

OTTAWA: A crowd of 3,000 men, some carrying video cameras, gathered in Ottawa on Sunday to which a protest by some 100 women who had vowed to march topless to protest against indecent exposure laws, police said, reports Reuters.

Only about four of the 100 women demonstrators actually took off their tops when hundreds of men, some uttering cat-calls, turned up as unwitting spectators.

The women, who marched to the Canadian parliament building, contend it is unfair that the law allows men to go bare-chested in public — something that for a woman is a criminal offence in Canada.

The protest marked one year since a female student was arrested in Guelph, Ontario, and fined 75 Canadian dollar (US 63 dollar) for walking topless on a sweltering day.

Police arrested five women for indecent exposure in a demonstration on Saturday in Waterloo, Ontario.

Just for laughing

MIAMI, Florida: A man who was chased into the bathroom of a popular nightclub and soaked with beer by a woman shot and killed a second man for laughing at the incident, officials said, reports AFP.

About 300 people were in the club Rio early Saturday when an unidentified woman followed a man into the men's bathroom and doused his back with beer.

Rafael Salvi, 21, who was in the men's restroom, laughed at the scene. The apparently humiliated patron then went into a stall, removed his wet shirt, came out and shot Salvi, who died at the scene, authorities said.

Single motherhood

NEW YORK: Television character Murphy Brown will respond to Vice President Dan Quayle's barbs about her single motherhood during the show's season opener this fall, two newspapers reported, reports AP.

The show's creator, Diane English, said the hourlong episode would be titled "Murphy's Revenge." The Miami Herald and The New York Times reported in Monday's editions.

She didn't say what the response would be but told the Times that Quayle would be mentioned by name and that it would be "very apparent."

Quayle provoked a national uproar last May by saying Murphy Brown, a fictional television journalist played by Candice Bergen on the CBS-TV series, "mocks the importance of fathers" because she bore a child out of wedlock in the season's concluding episode.

Quayle also charged that Hollywood's "cultural elite" was putting down family values by accepting Brown as an unmarried mother.

English left after last season as the show's executive producer. She is now producing a new comedy for CBS.

New govt in Algeria to crush unrest

ALGIERS, July 20: Prime Minister Belaid Abdesselam, who headed Algeria's 1970s oil nationalisation, on Sunday formed a new government, sending mixed signals on economic policy but strengthening the ministry in charge of crushing unrest, reports Reuters.

The man who backs a "war economy" for the debt-crippled country kept the key economy portfolio himself. But he also kept seven men from Sid Ahmed Ghozali's outgoing cabinet, including one in charge of moving towards the sort of free market economy

he has termed "a delusion."

Under Ghozali, Industry Minister Abdenour Deramane started moving the largely stagnant industrial sector towards privatisation.

Abdesselam, 64 has a track record of opposition to the free market reforms Algeria has been struggling towards since 1988.

Meanwhile AFP adds: Police arrested 11 people Saturday following Islamic demonstrations Friday in protest at the convict in seven Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) leaders by a military tribunal, said police.

Local press reports today said the merger, which will enable Chart Thai to field more than 100 former MPs in the poll, is clearly influenced by widespread anti-military public sentiment that showed Therd Thai to the brink of disintegration.

Therd Thai is the new name of the Samakkhitham Party.

38 lakh civilians trapped in Sarajevo Warring factions ignore truce

SARAJEVO, July 20: Warring factions in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo ignored a European Community-brokered truce and fought on Sunday night with mortars, machine-guns and heavy artillery, reports Reuters.

Persistent shooting and clashes with heavy weapons could be heard around the Balkan capital several hours after the latest truce was due to go into effect at 6 pm (1600 GMT) on Sunday.

Some 380,000 civilians have been trapped in Sarajevo since April by fighting between Muslim and Croat defence forces and Bosnia's rebel Serbs, who are laying siege to the city.

Heavy fighting was also reported in other towns and

cities in the newly-independent state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, including in Gorazde, Bugojno and Mostar.

More than 7,500 people have been killed since Muslims and Croats declared the republic's independence from Yugoslavia in March, sparking a rebellion by the minority Serbs.

Despite the ceasefire violations, the new Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, Milan Panic, said he had reached agreement for the withdrawal of artillery from in and around the besieged town of Gorazde.

Panic flew to Sarajevo on Sunday afternoon for talks with Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, a Muslim, and said he had offered to start peace talks immediately.

"War for the Serbs in Bosnia

is over. There will be peace in Gorazde from tomorrow and all heavy weapons from all sides in that region will be transferred to Yugoslav territory pending UN control."

Yugoslavia, now made up of only the republics of Serbia and Montenegro, has been branded the aggressor by the international community. The United Nations imposed economic sanctions on Belgrade in May.

Panic, who took over as Yugoslav prime minister last week, said Serb-dominated Yugoslavia and the Bosnian Serbs were ready to end "this stupid, unbelievable, unconscionable war."

Panic gave Izetbegovic a short time to reply to the offer for peace talks and said if the

Bosnian President did not agree, then the world would know which side wanted the war.

Izetbegovic told reporters Panic appeared "insufficiently informed" on what was happening in Bosnia and that he doubted the prime minister could deliver on his promises to rein in the Serb irregulars.

"I have doubts about his ability to implement some of the things he was talking about to me," he told Sarjevo Radio. "It remains for us to see whether Panic can ensure the ceasefire or not."

Panic, a millionaire businessman with dual US-Yugoslav nationality, left for New York after his talks, with Izetbegovic to meet UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.



ZAGREB: A group of Bosnian women refugee reach out to grab some food handed out in Zagreb on Sunday, part of an aid package from Germany. — AP/UNB

New law to detain illegal immigrants in Australia

CANBERRA, July 20: Australian authorities will be able to detain illegal immigrants automatically under new laws announced by the Labour government today, reports Reuters.

The changes mean that anybody who is in Australia unlawfully, by overstaying their visa, will be detained, said Immigration Minister Gerry Hand.

"These proposed changes are likely to make life much tougher for those people who are in Australia without lawful status," Hand added in a statement.

The changes mean that an individual's particular circumstances will no longer be a factor in determining whether they are immediately free.

In some cases people classified as over-stayers, because

their visa had expired, were not immediately listed as illegal migrants.

Hand said the new laws, which will go before parliament next month, would provide a uniform set of rules to enable detention of people remaining illegally in Australia.

The number of over-stayers in the 12 months to the end of April 1992 was 81,500

Pope making excellent recovery

ROME, July 20: Pope John Paul II drank his first liquids Monday since intestinal surgery five days ago, and his doctors said he was making an excellent recovery, reports AP.

"The Pope is doing well," said Francesco Crucitti, the Pope's surgeon, after visiting his patient at Gemelli hospital. Crucitti led the medical team that removed a colon tumor, described as benign.

Crucitti said the Pope, who has been nourished intravenously, drank tea for the first time.

Sounding a bit weak, the 72-year-old John Paul on Sunday slowly said his first public words since the nearly 4-hour operation, thanking his doctors and well-wishers in a recorded broadcast from the hospital.

Imelda barred from visiting Hong Kong

MANILA, July 20: A Philippine judge on Monday barred former first lady Imelda Marcos from making a planned visit to Hong Kong this week, reports Reuters.

Judge Corona, Somera reversed an earlier ruling that Marcos would be allowed to travel to the British colony after protests from government lawyers.

Marcos, who faces several currency charges before Somera's court, had planned to leave for Hong Kong on Wednesday to discuss with associates a proposed out-of-court settlement of civil cases against her.

Under the proposed scheme, Marcos would surrender part of her family's wealth to the government in exchange for the suits being dropped.

BRIEFLY

Victor Louis dead: Victor Louis, a Soviet journalist who was responsible for banking several important stories in the West, has died in London, published reports said Monday, AP reports from London.

Louis, 64, died Saturday of a heart attack following surgery in a London hospital, The Times reported.

Louis has close contacts with Soviet leaders and is believed to have been used by the Kremlin to provide approved stories in the Western press. In 1964, he was the first to report Premier Nikita Khrushchev's ouster, with the report appearing in a London newspaper.

He also sold videotapes of Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, made while Sakharov was in forced exile in the closed city of Gorky, to a West German newspaper.

Hurd talks with Berisha: British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, who is currently in Albania, met in the capital Tirana with President Sali Berisha and Prime Minister Alexander Meksi on Sunday, the official ATA news agency said, reports AFP from Belgrade.

In a dispatch monitored in Belgrade, the agency said the talks covered European Community aid to Albania as well as the country's economic crisis and resulting attempts by many Albanians to flee to other countries.

Meksi also discussed the plight of the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo, an autonomous region of Serbia which borders on Albania, ATA said.

Michael may run for president: King Michael who ruled Romania twice will respond this week to a political party's request for him to run for president, a spokesman for the king said Sunday, reports AP from Bucharest.

The National Liberal Party, one of Romania's largest opposition parties, said Saturday it wanted the 70-year-old former monarch to run against President Ion Iliescu in September.

Michael was deposed by Communists in 1947. Radu Campeanu, leader of the National Liberal Party said Saturday that running the former king "was the best way of removing Iliescu from power. ... I don't think Michael can be defeated by Iliescu."

Michael was cheered by tens of thousands during a visit to Romania in April with his wife, Anne de Bourbon-Parme, and other family members, to celebrate Orthodox Easter.

4 killed in US plane crash: A small plane hit a pine tree while taking off in a national forest, killing all four people aboard, authorities said Sunday, reports AFP from Arizona.

Three people died on impact in the crash of the Cessna 172 and the fourth at a hospital.

The accident occurred about 150 kilometres (90 miles) northeast of Phoenix.

Quake rattles California: An earthquake measuring 3.9 on the Richter scale rattled the Southern California desert on Sunday night. There were no reports of damage or injuries, reports AP from Calif.

The quake at 9:04 pm (0404 GMT) was centered five miles (eight kilometres) north of Yucca Valley, said Steve Bryant of the California Institute of Technology.

It was the latest moderate aftershock to the 7.5 magnitude quake of June 28 that killed a child and caused major damage to the Mojave Desert towns of Yucca Valley and Landers.

Java accident leaves 8 dead: A collision between a passenger train and a car at a railway crossing in Sragen, central Java, killed eight people and seriously injured one. Antara news agency reported Monday, AFP says from Jakarta.

The car, with nine people on board, was crossing the railway when an express train bound for Surabaya in east Java rammed into it Sunday, Antara said.

The agency said everyone in the car died except for the driver, who was seriously injured and remained unconscious at a nearby hospital.

Police are questioning the railway crossing guard, it said.

25 Mexicans die in Guatemala: Twenty-five Mexicans, members of a dance company touring Guatemala, were killed and 22 others injured late Sunday when the bus in which they were travelling plunged into a ravine near here firefighters said, AFP reports from Guatemala.

They said the accident occurred 50 kilometers (30 miles) west of here in a rugged area near the town of Antigua, where the dance company was to perform Sunday night.

Authorities said the cause of the accident was not yet known, although they did not rule out a mechanical failure as witnesses said the bus was travelling at low speed.

Bodos kill 8 in Assam

GUWAHATI, July 20: At least eight persons were killed and seven others injured, two of them seriously, when Bodo Security Force (BSF) militants fired indiscriminately in two non-Bodo villages near Udalguri, in Darrang district last night, according to official reports reaching here today, reports PTI.

The reports said that the police had launched a massive manhunt in the nearby jungles to track down the 'miscreants who were armed with sophisticated weapons.'

Two of the seriously injured had been rushed to the Guwahati Medical College, the reports added.

India may have world's highest HIV patients in late nineties

WASHINGTON, July 20: The Chairman of an international AIDS conference in Amsterdam, Dr Jonathan Mann of Harvard University, has warned that by the late nineties, India could have more people infected with the HIV-virus (which causes AIDS) than any other country in the world, reports PTI.

About one million are infected in Asia. The epidemic is now worst in Africa, where eight million people are infected with the AIDS virus.

However, Mann says that by the end of the decade, there may be more HIV-infected people in Asia than even in Africa.

The conference in Amsterdam is being attended by 10,000 AIDS experts from all over the world.

AP adds: Experts at an international AIDS conference denounced restrictions on AIDS-infected people trying to enter the United States and appealed for global cooperation to fight the disease.

More than 10,000 scientists, policy-makers, activists and AIDS-infected patients have gathered this week for the eighth International Conference on AIDS.

Hundreds of whistle-blowing demonstrators tried unsuccessfully to get into the meeting, which began Sunday, and some ransacked the booth of a pharmaceutical firm that sells a drug that treats AIDS-related blindness.

AIDS and gay rights activists dumped 40 cardboard coffins in front of the US and other consulates to protest visa restrictions against people infected with the AIDS virus.

In Boston on Sunday, about 150 demonstrators from across the northeastern United States attacked American policy toward AIDS-infected visitors.

The international conference, originally planned for Boston, was switched to Amsterdam because the United States restricts entry to people infected with the virus that causes AIDS.

"Let us raise our voices again today and say

this unsound policy must change," Dr. Harvey Fineberg, dean of the Harvard School of Public Health, declared in Amsterdam on Sunday.

"It must change and we must not relent until this wrong is made right," Fineberg said.

US immigration rules do not completely bar the entry of AIDS-infected people, but restrict them to a 30-day stay to conduct business, see relatives, obtain medical treatment or attend scientific or medical conferences.

Tomas Fabregas, a Spanish AIDS patient who has lived in the United States since 1979, told the conference he plans to challenge the American policy when he returns to California on Saturday.

"I will be arriving in San Francisco at 4:50 in the afternoon, and I defy George Bush to prevent me from returning to my home. ... I am vulnerable, but I am not weak," Fabregas said to a loud round of applause.

The AIDS activists in Boston hoisted a slogan-covered coffin as they marched on the federal building to protest the US visa policy.

Some handed out condoms to tourists in the city's center.

In May 1991, the World Health Organization predicted that up to 40 million people will be infected with the AIDS virus by the end of the century. Ten million people were likely to develop the disease by the year 2000, 90 per cent of them from developing countries, the UN agency said.

A recent report has suggested that a new, undetectable strain of the disease may have emerged.

At least 11 people, including six Americans, have developed AIDS without testing positive for the AIDS virus, the US magazine Newsweek reported in its July 27 issue.

Several policy-makers told the conference that the only effective strategy to stem the spread of AIDS is to consider AIDS a social and political problem, not just a medical one.

"The old vision of AIDS has really become a straitjacket," said Dr. Jonathan Mann, chairman of the conference.

Two Thai parties merge

BANGKOK, July 20: The Chart Thai and Therd Thai parties announced a merger Sunday in the strong hope of overcoming a public backlash against parties linked to the May bloodbath and of seeing the biggest political force emerge after the September election, reports Xinhua.

Local press reports today said the merger, which will enable Chart Thai to field more than 100 former MPs in the poll, is clearly influenced by widespread anti-military public sentiment that showed Therd Thai to the brink of disintegration.

Therd Thai is the new name of the Samakkhitham Party.