

Kuwait, Iraqi police trade gunfire

KUWAIT, Mar 5: Kuwait and Iraqi border police exchanged intermittent gunfire near the border post at Abdali, a Kuwaiti newspaper said Friday. There were no reported injuries, says AP.

The daily Al-Anba said firing started from the Iraqi side Wednesday evening, when what appeared to be tracer bullets flew around the Abdali police station.

The Kuwaitis returned fire and the shooting stopped.

Firing started again early Thursday, this time in the direction of a Kuwaiti farm, the newspaper said.

Abdel-Latif Khabbaj, spokesman for the UN Iraq Kuwait Observer Mission that monitors the border, could not immediately confirm the incident.

It was the first border incident reported since January.

Rao rejects dissidents' demand to retain Pawar in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: The Prime Minister, PV Narasimha Rao, yesterday rejected the demand of supporters of Sharad Pawar to retain him in Delhi and said the decision to send the Defence Minister to Maharashtra was not intended to cut him to size, reports PTL.

"There is no question of Pawar not going to the new assignment. My intention is not to cut him to size. On the other hand his stature would go up," Rao told a group of MPs who met him to press the demand for reconsidering the decision to send Pawar as Chief Minister.

Stating this, Suresh Kalmadi, MP and a close associate of Pawar, claimed that 104 MPs including former minister Buta Singh, Mamta Banerjee, Shantaram Potdukhe and Chintia Mohan had signed a memorandum urging Rao to

reconsider the decision. Kalmadi said that the memorandum was presented to the Prime Minister yesterday evening by a delegation of MPs led by him.

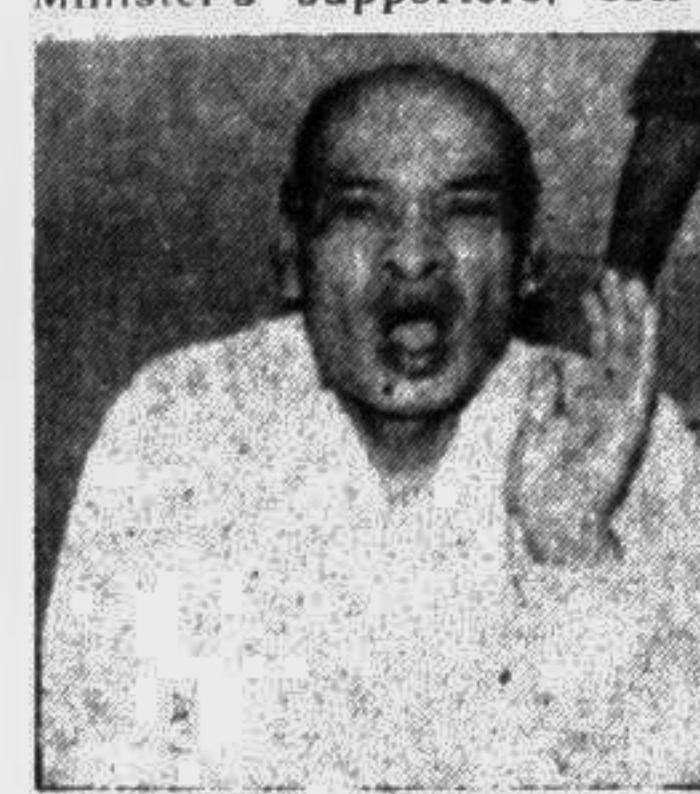
Kalmadi quoted the Prime Minister as saying that from now onwards, Pawar would be "twice helpful to me" by heading Maharashtra for ensuring stable administration and strengthening the party. "He will also be available to me in Delhi," Rao said.

Another report from Bombay says: Sharad Pawar will be formally elected as the Leader of Maharashtra Congress-I Legislature Party today paving the way for his taking over the Chief Ministership of the state for a record fourth time.

Pawar, who returned here yesterday after a 20-minute meeting with the Prime

Minister, PV Narasimha Rao said he will be sworn-in as Chief Minister of the state on Saturday.

A last minute effort was made by the Defence Minister's supporters, esti-



Narasimha Rao mated to be around 104 MPs including former ministers

Buta Singh Mamta Banerjee and Dr Chintia Mohan, to persuade the PM to retain his service in Delhi but in vain.

Sources close to Pawar said that he had agreed to go back to the state keeping in view the wider national perspective.

Speaking to reporters Pawar said he had not made up his mind about the size and shape of the cabinet and he will not go to the capital to discuss it with the Prime Minister.

It would be formed in two stages, in consultation with MPPC-I President, Shivajirao Deshmukh and CLP, and only a few ministers would be sworn in along with him on March 6, he said.

He succeeds Suddhakarrao Naik who bowed out last week amidst controversy over his handling of the communal riots in the Megapolis.

Emergency in Zambia

LUSAKA, Mar 5: The Zambian government Thursday imposed a state of emergency in the southern African country amid reports of a covert plan by the former ruling party seeking to oust President Frederick Chiluba, reports AFP.

In a brief radio and television broadcast, Chiluba said the move was necessitated because "the threat to our young democracy is real."

Pointing to the influence of "foreign help," he also announced that relations with Iran and Iraq would be reviewed.

"The political stability of the democratic system has been poisoned and if left unattended the consequences will be great... hence I am using by continuation of powers to invoke a state of emergency with immediate effect," he said.

The move comes in the wake of a covert plan by the former ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP) leaked to the press last week.

Off the Record



SAN FRANCISCO: Edward Mark Bulawan sits in his mother's lap at Fort Mason during a news conference on Thursday. Bulawan is one of some 8,600 Philippine children allegedly fathered by US servicemen that are named in a 70 million dollar lawsuit against the US government for support.

Children fathered by US servicemen file suit

SAN FRANCISCO: Children fathered by US servicemen in the Philippines filed suit against the US government on Thursday seeking dollar 68 million in aid for their education and health care, their lawyer said, reports Reuter.

The suit, by three children of Philippine mothers and US servicemen and one of the mothers, was filed in the US claims court in Washington DC, Attorney Joseph Cotchett told a news conference in San Francisco.

It is a class-action suit which seeks educational assistance and medical care for an estimated 8,600 Amerasian children living in the Philippine town of Olongapo city.

The town adjoins the former US naval base of Subic Bay which housed a thriving 'rest and recreation' industry for US servicemen until the United States withdrew from the base last November.

Many children were born out of liaisons between Filipino women who worked in local clubs and bars and US servicemen who paid them for sex. Most were then abandoned by the fathers.

Raid on child pornography

MIAMI: Federal agents raided 40 locations around America on Thursday in the first crackdown on a worldwide computer-circulated child pornography ring linked to computer bulletin boards in Denmark, US, Customs said, reports AP.

The raids in 15 states from Florida to Washington may also lead to discovery of US pornographic bulletin boards, said William Rosenblatt, chief of the US Customs Service in Miami.

"It's not only the largest operation in US history, I want you to know it the first," he said. "It involves the high-tech exchange of child pornography — basically what we have here is a bunch of computer perverts."

Computer transmissions are quickly taking over from traditional magazine formats among pedophiles, he said.

Jews can't dress up as Saddam Hussein

JERUSALEM, Mar 5: A debate has been sparked in Israel after a senior Rabbi ordered that Jews cannot dress up as Saddam Hussein, skeletons and Arabs during the Jewish carnival of Purim, which takes place on Monday, reports AFP.

Mordechai Eliahou, the outgoing Chief Rabbi of the Sephardic Community of oriental Jews, issued a decree Wednesday ruling out certain carnival costumes during the Purim, saying they violated Jewish religious laws.

Among them, he said, Jews cannot dress up as Saddam in particular or Arabs in general, nor can Jewish men disguise themselves as women and Jewish women as men.

Many ultra-orthodox Jewish children were preparing this year to dress up as skeletons to protest the desecration of ancient tombs in Jerusalem by a public works enterprise, according to members of their community.

Former Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren had ruled that dressing up as skeletons was disrespectful to the remains of the dead.

But unlike Eliahou, he had said that Saddam costumes do not violate Jewish religious law although "dressing up as the executioners of the Jews, such as Hitler" was clearly out.

Eliahou, who will be replaced by Chief Rabbi Eliahou Bakshi Doron in April, did not explain all the reasons for his decrees.

But he stressed that dressing up as Arabs was 'risky' in an apparent reference to a fatal incident which happened at last year's Purim.

Third century old Greek statue unearthed

NICOSIA: An ancient Greek statue, dating as far back as the 2nd or 3rd century BC was unearthed by farmers in Iran's southern Bushehr province, Tehran television reported Thursday, says AP.

The broadcast, monitored in Nicosia, said the marble figure was in the shape of a falcon's head, and measured 35 centimeters (13.7 inches) in length.

The artifact was discovered by farmers in Tan Khandaq, in Burshan township, the report said.

It said engravings on the side of the figure pointed to the 2nd or 3rd century of the Hellenic period, which spanned from the late 8th century BC to the death of Alexander the Great in the year 323 BC.

Iran, or what was then Persia, was invaded by Alexander the Great in 334 BC.

The discovery lent credibility to rumours that an ancient Greek temple once stood on the site, the report said, adding that archaeological digs are planned in the area.

Taiwan to buy 10 French subs

TAIPEI, Mar 5: France is planning to sell 10 submarines and other weapons to Taiwan, a move which could further provoke Beijing, a long-time rival of the island, the local press reported today, says AFP.

The mass-circulation China Times said France might sell Agosta Class submarines currently in service with the French, Spanish and Pakistani navies.

The paper, quoting unnamed defence industry sources, said Taiwan wants to buy 10 submarines and France is also considering selling Taiwan the latest MU-90 torpedo system and SM-39 anti-submarine missiles.

The Agosta Class submarine, first built in the mid 1970s, is a diesel-electric vessel with a dive speed of 20 knots. The boats, which can patrol for 45 days, have four torpedo tubes and are capable of firing French-made exocet anti-ship missiles.

France signed a contract with Taiwan in November to sell 60 Mirage 2000-5 Fighter Jets, which subsequently let to Beijing's freezing of several contracts with France and the closure of the French consulate in the southern city of Guangzhou.

Any sale of submarines is expected to increase tensions

between France and Beijing, which views Taiwan as a renegade province and forbids most other countries from forging ties or selling arms to the island.

The nationalists lost the civil war to the Chinese communists and were driven off the mainland in 1949. Since then, they have persistently sought foreign weapons to increase their defence capabilities.

Taiwan has recently failed to obtain submarines from the Netherlands and Germany, which both backed away from selling arms for fears of damaging relations with China.

China protests Clinton's remark on Taiwan

BENJING, Mar 5: Taking note of a reference by US President Bill Clinton to Taiwan as a country, China has delivered a rap on the knuckles and asked him to watch his words, reports PTL.

Clinton made the reference in the course of a rambling discourse at American University on February 26. He had also referred to Los Angeles as a country in that speech.

At a news briefing here yesterday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Li Jianying took note of Clinton's remark, expressed 'regret' over it and voiced the hope that "such a thing will not happen again."

To call Taiwan a country runs counter to the Sino-US joint communique on the establishment of diplomatic relations, in which the United States recognised the government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government, the spokesman said.

Clinton welcomes Carter in White House

WASHINGTON, Mar 5: Former President Jimmy Carter, the last Democrat to occupy the White House, was welcomed back to his old digs Thursday by President Bill Clinton, reports AFP.

The two met privately to discuss the administration's battle against inner city poverty and government bureaucracy.

When questioned about the closed-door nature of the meeting, The White House denied that Clinton wanted to avoid being photographed with the former president whose 1977-81 tenure has been widely considered a failure.

Muslim writers regret UNESCO DG's statement

TEHRAN, Mar 5: The Association of Muslim authors and artists here in a letter to Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Federico Mayor voiced regret and astonishment over his recent statement in support of Salman Rushdie, reports IRNA.

The writers in the letter regretted that the UNESCO chief had made the remark on the 4th anniversary of the late Imam Khomeini's Islamic edict against one of "the most hateful and miserable human beings" thus insulting one billion plus Muslims and rather the followers of all divine religions.

Further addressing Mayor, the Muslim writers and artists termed the move as "shameful" and wrote that by making such a statement "you unveiled the face of an organisation which for years had tried to establish and justify itself among the Third World countries."



AUSTRALIA: The leader of the Conservative opposition, John Hewson (L) shakes hands with the public during a rally which was attended by some 6,000 people in Adelaide on Friday. The rally was held on the tenth anniversary of the Labour Party coming to power in Australia, a legacy Hewson said would end with the general election on March 13.

Brother of China's last emperor hospitalised

BEIJING, Mar 5: China's imperial survivor, the 86-year-old brother of the last Emperor, is in hospital, officials said today, reports Reuter.

Officials at the Beijing Union Hospital gave few details of Aisin Otoro Pu Jie's illness.

One said it was "old age" and not serious and others hung up the phone when asked for information.

An officials of the Public Health Ministry said special government permission was needed to discuss the case.

Pu Jie, younger brother of China's last emperor and once heir-apparent to the throne of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, was last seen in public in October when he met Emperor Akihito, the first Japanese monarch to visit China.

Pu Jie was schooled in Japan and is married to a member of its aristocracy.

His eventful life saw him by turn prince, prisoner of war, traitor and now retired scholar.

ROK steps to change military-style admn

SEOUL, Mar 5: President Kim Young-sam, a dissident under decades of rule by generals, has quickly set his administration apart from the military-dominated regimes, reports AP.

He reached outside traditional power circles to include college professors and many women in his Cabinet. He removed steel barriers from the street in front of his office, and is said to laugh out loud at meetings and serve simple noodles to honoured guests at the Blue House, the presidential mansion.

The question remains whether the first civilian government in three decades can stamp out corruption, the single largest obstacles to meaningful political and economic reform.

Bribes and payoffs are an accepted way to get things done in South Korea. Millions of dollars are spent to grease the palms of bureaucrats for permits, bank loans and even

to get children into elite primary schools.

"We have let misdeeds and corruption pervade our society," said Kim in his first speech. "The country today is clearly not the land of morality that our ancestors envisioned."

The 65-year-old Kim, a nine-term legislator and a longtime dissident, was inaugurated February 25 to a five-year term. He was the first non-military president in 32 years.

He became the first head of state to reveal his personal worth, 2.2 million dollars announced, "I have not received a penny since the presidential elections and I will not receive money from anyone during the next five years."

Kim reportedly replaced the majestic carved chairs in the Cabinet room with plain upholstered ones. He invited the press to visit 12 luxurious "safe houses" in the presidential compound and said they would be demolished.

Cambodians still think with nostalgia of their Thai days

SANG RANG (Cambodia), Mar 5: Fighting between the army and Khmer Rouge has made some Cambodians who waited years to return home think with nostalgia of their former refugee camps in Thailand, reports AP.

Chan Sein, a single mother of four, says she feels vulnerable under the sheet of blue plastic, held up by tree branches, that has been the family refuge since artillery fire demolished her parents' home in December.

It is in a sea of plastic and straw shelters along a road at Sang Rang, nearly 200 miles (320 kilometers) northwest of Phnom Penh, the capital.

UN officials estimate that 10,000 Cambodians, 900 of them returned refugees, were forced to evacuate the area in and around nearby Bavel in December.

Chan and her family fled with half a sack of rice, a cow, cooking pots, clothes and the sheet of plastic, settling along the road with other evacuees. She said she could hear at least 20 shell explosions a day from Bavel and had begun to yearn for the dismal site 8 refugee camp where she spent eight years.

"I did not expect there to be any fighting here," she said while breast-feeding her baby under a burning midday sun. "I was told the four factions had agreed on a peace plan."

But Annick Roulet, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said all 375,000 Cambodian refugees in Thailand were told of the instability and had clamored to get out of the camps nonetheless.

Cambodia's four factions — the Vietnamese-backed government and three rebel groups — signed a peace plan in October 1991 to end 13 years of war. It authorizes UN peacekeepers to stabilize the country so elections can be

held by May, but the radical Khmer Rouge has refused to cooperate.

At the beginning of this year, government soldiers conducted their biggest offensive in northwestern Cambodia since the peacekeeping operation began in March 1992. UN officials said the troops had forced an undetermined number of returned refugees to carry their ammunition and help fight the Khmer Rouge.

Despite the conditions, repatriation is considered one of the most successful parts of the UN effort, with 280,000 refugees returned in about 10 months.

Roulet said most were in safe parts of the country, reunited with relatives. She said it was normal for those in Bavel, the only place where refugees had been displaced by fighting, to think back to the Thai camps.

"It was safer in Thailand than here because there was no fighting in the camp," Chan said. If the UN agency would take her family back there, she said, "I would like to go."

Some of the 1,600 refugees living in Yei Ath, a village controlled by the Khmer Rouge about 25 miles (40 kilometers) away, expressed similar feelings.