

BRIEFLY

15 killed in Punjab : Fifteen people including 10 militants, were killed in the troubled north Indian state of Punjab during the last four days, reports PTI from New Delhi.

Three hardcore militants of Bhindranwale Tigers Force of Khalistan (BTKF) and a police constable were killed in an encounter in Kurukshetra district of Haryana while four militants were killed in two separate encounters in Punjab since Sunday night.

Superintendent of Police of Kurukshetra district S K Dhul told reporters that the slain militants identified as Hardip Singh, Sajjan Singh and Gurmit Singh were involved in about 200 killings in the areas of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

Seven persons including three militants were killed while an arrested militant managed to escape from police custody in separate incidents in Punjab since Monday night.

Indonesia's ministers sworn in: Indonesian President Suharto Friday swore in members of the 41-member cabinet that will assist him in leading the world's fourth largest nation in the next five years, reports AFP from Jakarta.

In the ceremony held at Jakarta's Merdeka palace, 36 Muslims, two Protestants, one Roman Catholic and one Hindu took the oath according to their respective religions.

A total of 22 names from the outgoing administration failed to reappear in the new line up announced by Suharto late Wednesday.

The new cabinet excluded Suharto's long time western-educated and Christian-dominated economic team lead by Berkeley-graduate Rudianto Prawito, as well as Defence Minister Benny Murchandani and Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Sudomo who are also both non-Muslims.

G-7 ministers to meet in Tokyo : Group of Seven Finance and Foreign Ministers will convene in Tokyo on April 19 or 20 to discuss aid to Russia, Japanese press reports said Friday, reports AFP from Tokyo.

Japanese officials said the date would be fixed during the middle of next week, after vice foreign minister Hisashi Owada returns from the United States, probably via Paris where he would meet French officials over the weekend.

But the meeting will probably take place in Tokyo, at the ministerial level and, if possible, ahead of the Russian referendum set for April 25, and officials source said.

It would be a G-7 show of support for Russian President Boris Yeltsin's reforms, which are under severe attack from hardliners in Moscow, the source said.

Japan is hosting the annual G-7 economic summit in Tokyo on July 7-9, the group also includes Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and the United States.

UK journalist held in Algeria : The chief of bureau for the London-based news agency Reuters was arrested by Algerian police and held for 24 hours for sending an erroneous story about the assassination of a government minister, the agency's office in Algiers said Thursday, reports AP.

John Baggaley was charged with "spreading false news and offense to a public institution," according to the bureau.

He will face a court hearing Saturday and could have his journalist's credentials revoked.

The charges stemmed from a story sent Tuesday by Baggaley in which he quoted the police militia as saying that Sports Minister Abdelkader Khomri had been assassinated.

'Sharif jeopardises ties with India' Pakistan in danger of turning to fundamentalism: Benazir

LONDON, Mar 19: Pakistan opposition leader Benazir Bhutto accused the government of Thursday of economic mismanagement and said Pakistan was in danger of disintegrating into fundamentalism, reports Reuters.



she said, exploited old religious hatred to cover its mismanagement. "No criteria of good government has been employed," the former prime minister said of the coalition Islamic Democratic Alliance which

defeated her Pakistan People's Party in 1990 elections which she says were rigged.

Bhutto, 39, in her first public remarks since having her third child in a London hospital last month and them undergoing an operation to remove her gall bladder, accused Sharif's government of failing the people of Pakistan.

She said it had reversed the economic and social progress of her 1988-90 government, investment, health, education and reform for women had been reversed in three years, she said, and crucial relations with India had been damaged.

President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed Bhutto's 20-month government over allegations of massive bribery and corruption charges always denied by Bhutto. Bhutto said a rundown in

foreign exchange reserves had badly weakened the Pakistan economy and it would collapse if only a third of foreign investors withdrew their money.

Privatisation programmes had been directed not to promote wider share ownership and investment but to help government "cronies who pick up the institutions at throw-away prices."

Asked if she believed her party would win fresh elections, Bhutto said she thought Pakistan was ready for a return of the liberal, reformist platform espoused by her and her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, hanged by a military government in 1979.

"It is just a question of fair elections because the people of Pakistan have made up their minds," she said.

NATO ready to make Albania 'a partner' for security in Balkans

TIRANA, Mar 19: NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner, here on the first-ever visit to Albania by a leader of the Atlantic Alliance, said today that NATO was ready to make Albania "a partner" in tackling security problems in Europe and particularly in the Balkans, reports AFP.

"Albania may well be a small country but it has an important role to play," Woerner told the Albanian Parliament on the second day of his three-day visit to this former Bastion of Stalinism.

He said NATO sought to "extend the hand of cooperation" and to help Albania "to build modern armed forces that can not only preserve your independence but also be our partners in upholding cooperative security in Europe."

Woerner, who was welcomed on Thursday by President Sali Berisha, said "The success of Albania's internal reform programme and the policy it pursues vis-a-vis its neighbours have a significance extending far beyond your borders."

He said NATO wanted to "encourage" Albania's "active participation in the search for security and stability in the Balkans."

He praised Albania for showing restraint in the Yugoslav conflict despite "your understandable concern at the fate of ethnic Albanians outside your country"—a clear reference to tension in Serbia's predominantly Albanian Kosovo province.

He expressed concern that the Yugoslav conflict might spill over into neighbouring countries, adding that Albanian's policy of restraint "has been a vital factor in preventing the Yugoslav conflict becoming even more dangerous."

"An explosion of violence in Kosovo could, by spreading the conflict, constitute a serious threat to international peace and security," Woerner said.

NATO, he said "will support the international efforts" to stop that happening and was "replying on Albania to continue its constructive and reassuring diplomacy."

He said NATO was "especially pleased that Albania has agreed to cooperate fully with NATO" in enforcing United Nations sanctions against Yugoslavia. He said NATO was "already helping to implement" UN decisions on Yugoslavia.

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Gunmen kidnap Spanish priest in Philippines

ZAMBOANGA (Philippines), Mar 19: Unidentified gunmen kidnaped a Spanish Roman Catholic priest in a Muslim-dominated province in the southern Philippines, police said Friday, reports AP.

It was the third kidnapping of a Spanish cleric in the southern Philippines, this year. An American missionary was also seized in the same area last year.

Police said two men flagged down Rev Bernardo Blanco and took him and his jeep at gunpoint at 3:30 pm (0730 GMT) Thursday in a village near Lantawan town on the island province of Basilan off this southern port city, 880 kilometers (550 miles) south of Manila.

Blanco, 65, of Aliste in the Spanish province of Zamora, belongs to the Claretian order and is the parish priest of Matarling, Lantawan. He has been on Basilan for at least 16 years, a member of the mission in Manila said.

Bush, Barbara in Washington

WASHINGTON, Mar 19: George and Barbara Bush returned to Washington Thursday for the first time since inauguration day to accept an award and visit their pregnant daughter, reports AP.

The former president was to receive the James Forrestal award from the National Security Industrial Association, a group of 364 defence-oriented companies. Former President Dwight D Eisenhower was the association's only previous presidential winner.

The award, named for a former secretary of defence, has been given annually since 1954 to an American whose leadership has promoted significant understanding and co-operation between industry and government in the interest of national security.

Lankan planes raid LTTE targets

COLOMBO, Mar 19: Air force planes today carried out a series of raids on suspected Tamil Tiger guerrilla targets in northern Sri Lanka amid a build-up of rebel forces in the region, military sources said, reports AFP.

Ground attack aircraft bombed a suspected base of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Itichankulam in Vavuniya district within a day of similar attacks in neighbouring Mannar district, the sources said.

It was not immediately clear if there had been any casualties as a result of the stepped up air raids which came amid a reported heavy build-up of LTTE guerrillas in the Jaffna peninsula, further to the north.

Georgia accuses Russia of backing Abkhazian rebels

TBILISI, Georgia, Mar 19: Georgia has accused Russia of stirring war in the Transcaucasus by supporting separatists in an assault on the capital of the Black sea region of Abkhazia, reports Reuters.

But the Russian Defence Minister denied the charges and denounced Georgia for what he called "lies and provocation" aimed at smearing the Russian armed forces.

Russian paratroopers in the region also proclaimed their neutrality but vowed to hit back if attacked.

The events of recent days in Abkhazia confirm that Russia is expanding the scope of its undeclared war against Georgia," read an appeal on Thursday by the Georgian parliament to the United Nations.

Fighting in the volatile region flared last week after months of uneasy calm when rebels attacked the capital Sukhumi. But the Georgian army said on Thursday it had halted the separatist offensive.

Georgian military sources said 35 soldiers and 50 civilians in Sukhumi were killed and more than 60 wounded. They said at least 300 Abkhazians were killed or wounded.

The Georgian appeal, also addressed to the Russian and other parliaments, said Russia's position was "openly aggressive" and aimed at separating Abkhazia from Georgia.

It would accuse Russia of backing the rebels in the conflict, which erupted last August when the Abkhazian parliament voted for greater autonomy.

Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev retorted by saying the Georgian government was waging war against its own people. Itar-Tass news agency said.

Kerala govt won't allow Advani to address rally THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Mar 19: The Kerala government would not permit BJP leader, L K Advani to address the party's rally at Kozhikode on March 26, he Chief Minister, K Karunanakaran told the State Assembly today, reports PTI.

The decision to stall the meeting was taken in view of Eid-ul-Fitr coinciding with the day of the rally.

strikes against Serbian air-fleets, from which attacks against Muslim enclaves have been launched. A Sarajevo report says: Serbs are blocking UN food convoys to Srebrenica and two other Muslim enclaves, where tens of thousands of desperate residents are trapped, freezing and near starvation.

Calcutta: Explosive experts, flown in from Bombay collect specimens March 18 to try and establish the cause of the explosions in Bow Bazar March 16.

UN completes demarcation of Iraq-Kuwait borders

GENEVA, Mar 19: A United Nations Commission completed the demarcation of the land and sea borders between Iraq and Kuwait on Thursday, UN officials said, reports Reuters.

The UN Iraq-Kuwait Boundary Demarcation Commission said in a statement it had fixed the coordinates of the future sea border along a median line of the Khor Abdallah waterway. It decided last year on the land border between the two countries.

Officials said Iraq, a member of the commission, did not take part in the four days of talks.

The commission said it believed its definition of the sea border would ensure that both countries has fair navigational access to their respective territories.

The commission was set up in mid-1991, a few months after US-led forces drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait after a seven-month occupation. It will hold its 10th session in late April before giving its

Allow N-inspectors by Mar 31, IAEA tells DPRK

VIENNA, Mar 19: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Thursday gave North Korea until March 31 to allow international inspectors to visit two controversial nuclear sites, reports AFP.

The deadline, already set at an IAEA meeting on February 25, was confirmed by an emergency meeting of 35 IAEA directors convened after North Korea's decision to withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The decision came amid unconfirmed rumours that Pyongyang was reconsidering its decision, which included a refusal to allow inspectors access to the two sites at Yanggyon, north of Pyongyang.

North Korea is suspected of developing a nuclear weapon, and Washington and Seoul have been pressuring Pyongyang to allow IAEA inspections as well as South Korean inspections under an inter-Korean accord signed last year.

The agency suspects that the two sites are holding liquid and solid nuclear waste.

But the North Koreans insist the two sites are used only for military purposes and are not involved with nuclear operations.

Timorese rebels kill students, soldiers

JAKARTA, Mar 19: East Timorese rebels have shot and killed two soldiers and two students in the former Portuguese colony, the armed forces headquarters said Friday, reports AP.

It said the four were shot Wednesday night in Los Palos, about 180 kilometers (112 miles) east of the East Timor capital of Dili.

The students, from Jakarta and Surakarta, Central Java, were conducting compulsory field work in East Timor, the army said, without releasing details on the two soldiers.

US, allies moving to enforce 'no-fly zone' in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 19: Outraged by new Serb aerial attacks on Muslims, the United States, Britain and France are moving to enforce a ban on military flights over Bosnia, diplomats said Thursday, reports AP.

France met with diplomats from Russia, the United States, Britain and Spain on Thursday and told them it would circulate a draft resolution in the Security Council late this week, according to diplomats who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The resolution suggests enforcement of the no-fly zone set up by the 15-nation Security Council in October,

they said. In Paris, Foreign Minister Roland Dumas said his government was pushing toward having the resolution adopted, perhaps next week.

The zone had been violated 465 times, according to the United Nations. But the first violation involving a bombing occurred Saturday, when small planes bombed Muslim villages in eastern Bosnia and then fled toward Serb-ruled Yugoslavia.

The Security Council condemned the raid on Wednesday and asked for Serbs to explain. Yugoslavia's foreign minister, Vladislav Jovanovic, denied his country had anything to do with the raid.

Kazakh President for stronger CIS ties

MOSCOW, Mar 19: Kazakhistan President Nursultan Nazarbayev on Thursday called for an early summit of leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, bolstering an appeal for stronger CIS ties made one day earlier by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, reports AFP.

In a telegram sent to the Russian leader Nazarbayev said a summit meeting should be held at the end of March or in early April to "preserve and develop mutual cooperation, find a common way out of the economic crisis and re-establish captured ties," Interfax reported.

Off the Record



PARIS: A model presents a random-pleated and twisted taffeta ensemble with bouncing spiral head pieces for the 1993/94 Fall/Winter ready-to-wear collection by Issey Miyake March 17.

Comedian marries mother of his two children

NEW YORK: Actor-comedian Eddie Murphy married his longtime girlfriend and the mother of his two children, model Nicole Mitchell, at a lavish wedding Thursday evening, reports AP.

The ceremony at the Plaza Hotel near Central Park was planned for 500 guests, including Quincy Jones, Donald Trump, Bruce Willis, Bill Murray, Arsenio Hall, Robert Townsend, Steve Wonder, Wayne Newton, Queen Latifah, Sugar Ray Leonard and Paramount head Sherry Lansing.

Murphy, the 31-year-old star of "Beverly Hills Cop," "Trading Places" and other movies, met Mitchell five years ago. They have two children — daughter Brianna, 3, and son Myles, 4 months.

Clinton a mine of jokes

WASHINGTON: If his current career doesn't work out, President Clinton might consider stand-up comedy, reports AP.



Clinton unleashed a barrage of sarcastic one-liners ridiculing the media, Washington politics and himself Thursday night at the annual Radio and Television Correspondents Association dinner.

"If I kept going I'd give you 150 jokes, 150 specific jokes guaranteed to reduce the humour deficit, which is crippling this country, and denying us control of our future. Jokes that we could pass on to our children," he said, slipping into an imitation of his own earnest campaign voice.

His monologue rolled for about 10 minutes, and the crowd roared as the president roasted his young staff, Ross Perot and his own idiosyncrasies.

Silicone breast implant may harm immune system

DETROIT: A Dow Corning Corp. study on laboratory rats found a possible link between silicone gel breast implants and immune system irregularities, the company said Thursday, reports AP.

"If it can happen with animals, can it happen with humans? We're doing additional research to try to answer that," Dr Myron Harrison, Dow Corning's chief medical officer, said in a telephone interview.

Harrison emphasized that the gel didn't cause disease in rats, it simply caused the immune system to react more strongly. Between 3,500 and 4,000 women have filed lawsuits against the Midland-based company, many claiming the implants have caused auto-immune disease, where the immune system is overly activated and attacks its own body's healthy tissue.

Psychiatrists clear him of sex abuse charge

NEW HAVEN, Conn.: Woody Allen said Thursday that a team of child abuse experts cleared him of Mia Farrow's allegation that he sexually abused their adopted 7-year-old daughter, reports AP.

Allen, 57, was accused of molesting the child, Dylan, in August at the Bridgeview home of Farrow, Allen's companion and favourite leading lady for 12 years before a bitter split last summer.