

BRIEFLY

13 militants held in Kashmir: Thirteen militants, two of them top-rankers, were arrested in Kashmir valley since Saturday night, reports PTI from Srinagar.

Militants set afire public and private property in different parts of the valley and Doda district of Jammu region during the period, an official spokesman said.

Security forces nabbed seven militants in Srinagar, three in Baramulla, two in Pulwama and one in Anantnag.

The arrested included a "district" and a "company" commander of a militant outfit, the spokesman said.

Mohammad Ramzan Bhat, an engineer, kidnapped by militants last week from Nascumbagh-Habak area here, was let off Saturday evening, official sources said.

9 die as boat capsizes in Haiti: Nine people died when an overloaded sailboat ferrying passengers between an Eastern port and the capital sank off the coast of Haiti, authorities said Monday, reports AFP from Port-Au-Prince.

Two people aboard the vessel, "esperer en dieu" ("Hope in God"), were rescued after the boat sank in high seas and strong winds near the island of La Gonave on a trip Sunday from point Aracquette.

The sailboat was the fourth vessel to sink in the area in the last five weeks. In the worst incident, 275 people were confirmed dead and at least 800 were missing following the sinking of the ferry Neptune the night of February 16-17.

Marine sanctuary for dolphins: Italy, France and Monaco are to create a marine sanctuary for dolphins and whales in the Mediterranean, the three countries announced here Monday, reports AFP from Brussels.

They said the sanctuary would include the Ligurian sea, stretching roughly south from the Franco-Italian coastline to the southern tip of Corsica, and east from the French port of Toulon into the Archipelago of Tuscany.

It comprises an area of 73,000 square kilometres. Officials said the decision would allow about 25,000 dolphins and 1,000 whales to live in safety from drift-nets, fishermen and tourists.

The agreement was signed on the sidelines of a meeting of EC ministers of the environment.

The French minister, Segolene Royal, said: "This is a world first, and I hope it will be followed in coming months by a similar sanctuary in the Antarctic."

Ivory products seized in HK: Hong Kong customs officers have seized a large cargo of ivory products intended for export to Japan, a customs spokesman said Monday, reports AFP from Hong Kong.

The carved ivory products, worth some five million Hong Kong dollars (641,000 US), were the largest ivory seizure since July 19, 1989, when a total ban on ivory trade was imposed by the local colonial administration, he said.

The carving, weighing about 2.5 kilograms (5.5 pounds) each, were discovered last Thursday in 12 cartons at the airport and were believed to be destined for Osaka, Japan, the spokesman said.

Despite being signatory to the Washington convention against trade in endangered animals and plants, which was amended in January 1990 to ban all ivory trade, Japan is believed to be the biggest importer of ivory from Hong Kong.

Bomb attack on newspaper office: Suspected right-wingers firebombed a Bavarian newspaper on Monday in the first attack on a newspaper office in a wave of anti-foreigner violence since German unification in 1990, reports Reuter from Munich.

A stone and a petrol bomb were thrown through a window in the office of the Mittelbayerische Zeitung in the town of Worth north of Munich, a police spokesman said.

Chinese CP for strong army to match int'l status

BEIJING, Mar 23: Chinese communist party chief Jiang Zemin said Beijing must pump more money into its growing military machine to guarantee a strong army that matches China's international status, reports Reuter.

In a speech splashed over the front page of today's People's Daily, Jiang said China's generals should modernise forces and enhance combat capability now while the international situation remained relatively peaceful.

"However, the world situation still has its grim aspect. Power politics and hegemonism still exist, and regional wars and conflicts have never ceased," Jiang was quoted as telling military

deputies to the current parliamentary session.

China's increasingly powerful military muscle has caused concern among some of its Asian neighbours, who fear Beijing may want the role of a big regional power as Russia and the United States cut their military presence in the area.

The recent Chinese purchase of jet fighters from the former Soviet Union as well as persistent rumours that Beijing is seeking long-range naval capabilities all cause concern.

Jiang said the army, which Beijing used to crush the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests of 1989, would continue to be the chief

US move to declare Pakistan a terrorist state angers Sharif

ISLAMABAD, Mar 23: Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has expressed his anger over efforts by some US political leaders to help declare Pakistan a terrorist state, reports Xinhua.

Any suggestion of Pakistan's involvement in terrorist activities anywhere are totally "false and unfounded," Nawaz Sharif said in an interview with the Times of Oman, according to local daily The Pakistan Times, today.

As a law-abiding member of the international community, the Prime Minister said, "We are opposed to terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations. The United States has put

Pakistan under watch as the latter has been allegedly supporting armed Kashmiris in their violent movement, while Pakistan has denied all the allegations in this regard.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Siddique Khan Kanju also said at a press conference on Sunday that Pakistan, as a signatory to international conventions on terrorism, is resolved to take all necessary measures to combat terrorist activities.

Kanju declared Pakistan would set up an anti-terrorist cell in the Internal Ministry in order to counter terrorist activities in Pakistan.



LONDON: The Princess of Wales is greeted on arrival at the Queen Elizabeth Centre yesterday by actresses Ruley Wax (L) and Maurin Lipman (R). The Princess was attending the launch of Refuge, the world's first refuge for battered women. — AFP/UNB photo

Aspin won't attend NATO meeting

WASHINGTON, Mar 23: US Defence Secretary Les Aspin, who received a heart pacemaker last week, will not attend an upcoming NATO meeting in Brussels, one of his spokesmen said on Monday, reports Reuter.

Aspin reported to work at about 8.30 a.m. (1330 GMT), late than he normally arrives, and the spokesman said he was obeying doctors' orders to follow a mode at work schedule for at least the time being.

Aspin, 64, was released from hospital on Saturday after doctors implanted the electronic pacemaker in his chest on Thursday to help alleviate shortness of breath and other symptoms of a heart ailment.

Spokesman Vernon said Aspin, who is working on the 1993 defence budget, would not attend a March 29 meeting in Brussels.

G-7 yet to decide aid plan for Russia

TOKYO, Mar 23: The Group of Seven (G-7) industrialised nations has not yet decided on any concrete aid plan for Russia, Japanese Finance Minister Yoshio Hayashi said today, reports Reuter.

Hayashi told reporters that a specific aid programme for Russia, including a possible rescheduling of its foreign debt, should be discussed at a meeting of G-7 foreign and finance ministers expected in Tokyo in April.

Monetary sources in Washington said Russia had put forward a detailed bid to win more than dollars 20 billion in

assistance from the west this year, including dollar 6 billion for a fund to stabilise its currency.

Asked if the G-7 ministerial meeting might be brought forward in view of the heightened tensions in Russia, Hayashi said "all possibilities remain open."

But, he added, it would be of little use to hold such a meeting if the G-7 cannot come up with a concrete aid plan.

Hayashi said it was also possible the G-7 countries might hold the ministerial meeting at the same time as a scheduled G-7 finance ministers' meeting in Washington ahead of International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings on April 29.

"The schedule would be up to development in Russia," he said.

Hayashi did not specifically mention Japanese aid plans for Russia.

Tokyo's allies have stepped up pressure for Japan to move decisively on aiding Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who is locked in a confrontation with parliament.

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said on Sunday

Off the Record

Stoneman claims his 13th victim

CALCUTTA: An unidentified killer, who earned the nickname "stoneman" for a series of murders of homeless people three years ago claimed his 13th victim here Sunday after a gap of three years, police said, reports AFP.

A beggar was found early Sunday with his head smashed in on the pavement outside the Calcutta governor's house, prompting the police to reopen the files on the elusive serial killer.

A large stone was found near the body, police said, adding that the murder bore the "signature" of Calcutta's on/off most south after murderer.

The first killing occurred on Calcutta's crowded streets on June 4, 1990, successive lethal attacks led to one of the city's largest manhunts for the serial killer three years ago.

Woman aged 101 wants to learn Spanish

GENEVA: Fanny Lips celebrated her 101st birthday on Monday by announcing she wants to learn a new language—Spanish, reports AP.

Ms Lips, one of the first Swiss women to attend university early in this century, took up the hobby of learning languages at age 70 once she retired as a German teacher to French-speaking Geneva young people.

Since then she has learned Russian, Chinese and Sanskrit. She has been studying Hebrew since she turned 100.

"She has an excellent memory and still reads a great deal," said the Red Cross nurse who looks in daily on Ms. Lips in her Geneva apartment, where she lives alone with a lot of books but no radio or TV.

Blood-seeking ants besiege Brazilian town

BRASILIA: Blood-seeking ants are besieging a town in Brazil's Amazon jungle killing animals and attacking children, officials said on Monday, reports Reuter.

The 10,000 residents of the town of Envira are fighting back with poison and boiling water as well as mounting a campaign to clean up garbage, but the ants keep spreading, said Mayor Luis Andrade Neto.

"They attack small animals like chickens and cats and turtles, and children who don't have defences," he said in a telephone interview. They go after meat, after salt and blood.

Neto said the ants had been identified as a species of fire ant. About 70 per cent of the town had been invaded, with low anti-hills everyone to five metres (yards).

Crime rises sharply in China, says top judge

BEIJING, Mar 22: China's top judge said Tuesday that crime has risen sharply in the past five years and that some parts of the country are virtually lawless, reports AP.

Supreme People's Court president Ren Jianxin said in a report to the National People's Congress that the number of criminal cases handled by China's courts had climbed an average 7.9 per cent annually since 1988.

"The general security situation is stable now, but in some places the security situation is still not good, with cases of serious crime continuing to rise. In a very few places, criminal activity is running wild," he said.

China's rapid economic development of recent years has spawned a wave of violent and white-collar crime. This in turn has prompted a series of police crackdowns, making it hard to determine how much of the rise in the crime statistics is due to tighter policing.

Ren said that fewer than 1 in 200 of more than 2.4 million criminal suspects brought before courts over the past five years was found innocent, a statistic sure to fan charges that China ignores due process of law.

The West also has accused China of human rights abuses for jailing people for their political or religious beliefs, using torture to extract confessions and denying constitutionally promised rights such as free speech.

Neither Ren nor Liu Fuzhi, head of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, addressed those specific charges in separate reports to the legislature.

Liu said nearly 1,700 cases of security officials extorting confessions by torture were filed for investigation in the past five years. He did not say how many officials were found guilty or how they were punished.

North Korea to counter any UN sanctions

TOKYO, Mar 23: North Korea, which this month pulled out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), said on Monday it could counter any sanctions by the United Nations Security Council, reports Reuter.

"Whatever sanctions, blockade and military threat on the part of the US-led imperialist reactionaries and their followers can never frighten the Korean people," the official newspaper Rodong Sinmun said.

"We will answer their new sanctions with corresponding measures," added the paper's report, carried by the Korean central news agency monitored in Tokyo. It did not elaborate.

Pyeongyang fuelled tension on the divided Korean peninsula this month when it said it was pulling out of the NPT rather than open military sites to international inspector who suspect they are atomic weapons laboratories.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency has given Pyongyang until the end of the month to allow its inspectors in or face possible Security Council sanctions.

Meanwhile, another report from Seoul adds: South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sang-Joo left for the United States today to discuss counter-measures against North Korea.

Han will visit the United Nations during his stay in New York and then go to Washington for talks with US leaders on the nuclear threat, which has heightened with Pyongyang's pullout from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

After his stay in the United States, Han will stop in Japan, which is gravely concerned about rising nuclear tensions in the neighbouring Korean peninsula, before coming home on March 31.

Polish move to privatise economy

WARSAW, Mar 23: The Polish government will propose a new bill to privatise the economy in two stage rather than all at once following the rejection last week by parliament of its first privatisation bill. It was announced here, reports AFP.

No talks with Bosnian Serb, Muslim or Croat leaders were scheduled, and the spokesman for mediators Cyrus Vance and Lord David Owen painted a bleak picture of prospects for agreement.

"The feeling is that time is running out on the talks," spokesman Fred Eckhard said. Vance and Owen "are not

Israeli troops kill four Palestinians in Gaza

JERUSALEM, Mar 23: Israeli soldiers shot dead four Palestinians, two of them children, in the occupied Gaza Strip on Monday after an Arab stabbed and wounded six Israelis in a Jerusalem school yard, reports Reuter.

Angry Israelis blocked Jerusalem's main street calling for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's resignation. In parliament, Rabin's Labour Party defeated by 50 votes to 41 a right-wing no-confidence motion prompted by the wave of bloodshed.

On Monday morning an Arab charged into a high school in Jewish west Jerusalem with a kitchen knife shouting "Allahu Akbar" (God is great). He stabbed and lightly wounded five students and the principal.

Police stopped a crowd from lynching the attacker, aged 22.

In the Gaza Strip soldiers shot dead four Palestinians, bringing the number of deaths in the strip in a week to 12.

In the Gaza refugee camp of Rafah soldiers shot dead 11-year-old Mohammad Jarbou.

UN officials said he was shot having school during sporadic stone-throwing protests.

In the town of Khan Younis in the Strip, soldiers shot dead a Muazzin, a Muslim who calls worshippers to prayer at the mosque. Palestinians sources said.

They said an army sniper aimed a rifle with a telescopic sight at Jihad Mustafa Ali Sadek, 22, and shot him in the back while he was standing at the top of his mosque's minaret.

In the Nusseirat refugee camp soldiers shot Yasse Al-Majdalwai, 23, after dusk as Muslim broke the daytime fast for the holy month of Ramadan, Palestinians said. He died in Shifa hospital.

Palestinians said Mohammed Basma A-Salih, 10, was hit in the head in Nusseirat, and died on the way to the hospital.

The army said it was checking the reports.

Students took to the streets after the Jerusalem stabbings and threw stones at Arab-owned vehicles.



JERUSALEM: An Israeli policeman protects a Palestinian from an angry mob after the man stabbed five schoolboys and their headmaster here Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

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Liu claimed that the government immediately investigates reports of human rights violations and said, "Unprincipled attacks on the issue of 'human rights' from a few Western countries are utterly groundless."

Japan to question ROK 'comfort women'

TOKYO, Mar 23: Japan said today it was considering questioning South Korean "Comfort Women" to discover the truth about their claims that they were forced to work as prostitutes for the Japanese army in World War Two, reports Reuter.

"We are thinking of questioning people who were involved," Chief government spokesman Yohel Kono told Parliament. "The study of documents alone has proved to be insufficient."

Historians say as many as 2,00,000 women, mostly Koreans, recruited as "Comfort Women"

Serbs to walk out of peace talks if UN calls for military action

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 23: The Bosnian peace talks appeared near collapse Monday and a Security Council vote to enforce the no-fly zone over the region was delayed, reports AP.

Bosnian Serbs hinted they would walk out of the talks if the Security Council called for military action to ground their aircraft.

No talks with Bosnian Serb, Muslim or Croat leaders were scheduled, and the spokesman for mediators Cyrus Vance and Lord David Owen painted a bleak picture of prospects for agreement.

"The feeling is that time is running out on the talks," spokesman Fred Eckhard said. Vance and Owen "are not

throwing up their hands," Eckhard said. "But there is a question as to how many days they can keep going with a negotiating process which is not getting anywhere."

Vance, the UN envoy, was not present because of illness, Eckhard said. Owen represents the European Community.

A Security Council vote to enforce its no-fly zone declaration had been expected as early as Monday. But it was postponed because of arduous negotiations over a final text, including the grace period before shoot-down or other orders could be issued.

Political turmoil in Russia also was considered partly responsible since Russia, a

Serbian ally, is a permanent member of the Security Council.

Military enforcement of the zone would be implemented to Serbian war planes from attacking Muslim villages. Bosnian Serbs deny responsibility for the attacks, which have continued since the UN declared the no-fly zone last October.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, meanwhile, proposed a freeze in Serbian military activities around besieged Serbentica and told the council in a letter that enforcing the no-fly zone would "threaten negotiations and seriously increase chances of hostilities."

Eckhard said it appeared unlikely that Karadzic and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, a Muslim, would swiftly accept the Vance-Owen map which divides Bosnia into 10 provinces, partly along ethnic lines. The map is the final stumbling block to an overall peace agreement.

and heavy machine-gunfire, but not on the scale of Sunday when nearly 2,400 artillery hits were recorded in one of the heaviest barrages since the siege began 11 months ago.

In eastern Bosnia a ceasefire around the besieged Muslim town of Serbentica was due to have come into effect on Tuesday to enable the United Nations to evacuate civilians from the town by helicopter along Vredetermined air corridors.

There was no immediate confirmation that the Serb offensive that has taken them to just a few kms (miles) from the edge of the town had ceased, as Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic promised it would.

Bosnian Serb forces have said the UN can evacuate people from Serbentica provided Serbs trapped in the Muslim stronghold of Tuzla in northern Bosnia are also taken out.

Another report says: Bosnian Serbs promised to open an air link today to the besieged Muslim enclave of Serbentica and to halt an offensive that brought their forces close to the town's outskirts.

Amato to replace Agri Minister SOON

ROME, Mar 23: Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato said on Monday he would replace Gianni Pontana, who resigned as Agriculture Minister over the weekend after becoming caught up in the country's political corruption scandal, reports Reuter.

"I am working on proposing a new Agriculture Minister," Amato told reporters, ruling out suggestions he might temporarily take over the portfolio himself.

The Christian Democrat Pontana was the fifth minister to resign because of the scandal in less than two months.