

Kidnappers demand ransom to free Pak guards

QUETTA, Pakistan, Mar 30: Afghan guerrillas who kidnapped 27 Pakistani frontier guards last week have demanded a ransom of 10 million rupees (380,000 dollars) for their release, officials said today, reports Reuter.

The guerrillas took hostage the 27 men, including a major, after a gun battle in which 17 Afghans and two frontier corps members were killed last Thursday during a raid on the village of Qamar Din Karez in western Baluchistan province on the Afghan border.

In addition to the ransom, the kidnappers demanded compensation for the deaths of the Afghans in the raid by the guards to look for alleged criminals among Afghan refugees and guerrillas.

Pakistani officials said they were negotiating with tribal leaders representing the kidnappers. They refused to say whether they would meet the kidnappers' demands.

One official said relations between Afghans and the frontier corps have deteriorated since the corps raided the home of a guerrilla this month.

US fears famine in Sudan

WASHINGTON, Mar 30: The United States said on Monday an outbreak of fighting between two factions of a Sudanese rebel group could cause famine in the south of the African nation, reports Reuter.

Two rival factions of the fragmented Sudan People's Liberation Army Rebel Movement clashed in Kongor, Southern Sudan one of the groups reported on Sunday.

This latest outbreak of fighting threatens the lives of thousands of southern Sudanese.

Pacino, Thompson best actor and actress

LOS ANGELES, Mar 30: Hollywood finally made Clint Eastwood's day at the Academy Awards on Monday, handing him Oscars for best picture and best director for his tough Guy Western, "Unforgiven", reports Reuter.

For Eastwood, the double-barrel Oscar wins were both a personal triumph and in his words recognition and respectability for the Western as an American art form.

Veteran actor Al Pacino, who like Eastwood was snubbed for decades by Oscar voters, also finally got his due, breaking a 20-year losing streak, to win the best actor award for his role as a blind and embittered retired army officer in Columbia pictures' "Scent of a Woman".

Leading a mini-British invasion of the Academy Awards, was Emma Thompson, a fast-rising star of screen and stage, who won the Oscar for best actress for her role in the lush Edwardian romance "Howards End".

Once dismissed by critics as a tight-lipped "spaghetti western" actor who let his six-shooters do the talking, Eastwood at last won critical acclaim for "Unforgiven," a movie that repudiates the myth of the violent outlaw hero he helped create.

"Unforgiven" was the night's biggest winner. It scooped up Academy Awards for best picture, best director (Eastwood), best supporting actor (Gene Hackman) and best film editing.

Eastwood told reporters that he did not think some of his earlier box-office hits deserved an Oscar but he believed his more recent films were overdue for recognition.

"But at that time the academy wasn't ready to recognise an American art form, the Western," he said.

Eastwood, 62, one of the world's biggest box-office draws, produced the film under the Warner Bros. Studio

umbrella starred in it. "This is pretty good. This is all right," he told the audience after receiving the director's award.

Moments later, when the actor returned for his second accolade, his voice quaked with emotion. "This is just the wonderful one," he said.

Eastwood, whose muttered since Christmas, was the odds-on favourite to win as a pair of independent British productions made their mark.

"Howards End," produced by Merchant Ivory Productions and distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, was the top performer of the up-and-coming arthouse sensations, also

Elizabeth Taylor made an emotional plea for better treatment for AIDS sufferers. Thompson and others called on Hollywood to come up with better roles for women.

This is the year of the woman, when better roles are supposed to be being created for women. But this has been

ducer of the Oscar-winning documentary "The Panama Deception," called for improved human rights in Panama.

The politically charged remarks were reminiscent of the 1970s, when performers such as Marlon Brando and Vanessa Redgrave used the Oscar

and Wives). Gene Hackman won his first Oscar in 22 years, taking the best supporting actor award for his portrayal of a sheriff gone bad in "Unforgiven." He last won an Oscar for best actor in the 1971 blockbuster "The French Connection."

Though he originally turned down the role as the sadistic lawman Little Bill, Eastwood convinced the 63-year-old actor he was perfect for the part in the Warner Bros film.

With the announcement of the supporting actor prize one of Hollywood's worst-kept secrets was all but out of the bag.

Ever since the nominations were announced, Miramax Films Distributors of the Anglo-Irish suspense thriller "The Crying Game," had lobbied feverishly behind the scenes to keep journalists from revealing its surprise plot twist.

Jaye Davidson had been nominated for best supporting actor for playing the beautiful and sexually enigmatic hairdresser Dil in the film set in northern Ireland and London.

"Indochine," the French film about France's crumbling colonial empire in south east Asia that starred Catherine Deneuve, won the Oscar for best foreign film.

Neil Jordan took top honours for best original screenplay for "The Crying Game," a 4 million film that has set box-office records for an independent production.

Columbia Pictures' "A Few Good Men," a big-budget movie that has struck gold at the box office, was shut out in its quest for Oscar Gold. It had four nominations, including best picture, but failed to win a single award.

"I thought we had a chance," director Rob Reiner told a local television station. "But it didn't turn out that way."



LOS ANGELES: US actor Gene Hackman (L) and US actress Marisa Tomei pose with their Oscars Monday shortly after being respectively awarded best supporting actor and best supporting actress. — AFP/UNB photo

taunt 'make my day' in a 1983 "Dirty Harry" detective movie became the catchphrase of the decade, was a popular winner. He received lengthy standing ovations, each time he walked to the podium.

Pacino, who had been nominated six times before without an Oscar win to his credit, was ecstatically grateful. "You broke my streak," he said. "Thanks so much for this."

Thompson, a first-time Oscar nominee who had already picked up a half-dozen other best-actress honours

taking best adapted screenplay and best art direction. As presenters and winners stepped on to centre stage in the film's industry's biggest, glitziest annual show, politics intruded on the ceremony in a way not seen since the 1970s.

Speaking before a TV audience of more than one billion, actor Richard Gere — a Buddhist who for years has supported Tibetan independence — launched a scathing attack on Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and his country's human rights record.

List of Oscar winners

LOS ANGELES, Mar 30: The list of Oscar winners at the 65th Academy Awards, reports AFP.

- Best Picture: "Unforgiven"
- Best Director: Clint Eastwood ("Unforgiven")
- Best Actor: Al Pacino ("Scent of a Woman")
- Best Actress: Emma Thompson ("Howards End")
- Best Supporting Actor: Gene Hackman ("Unforgiven")
- Best Supporting Actress: Marisa Tomei ("My Cousin Vinny")
- Best Makeup: "Bram Stoker's Dracula"
- Best Film Editing: "Unforgiven"
- Best Animated Short Film: "Mona Lisa Descending A Staircase"
- Best Live Action Short Film: "Omnibus"
- Best Foreign Language Film: "Indochine" (France)
- Best Art Direction: "Howards End"
- Best Visual Effects: "Death Becomes Her"
- Best Sound Effects Editing: "Bram Stoker's Dracula"
- Best Documentary Short: "Educating Peter"
- Best Documentary Feature: "The Panama Deception"
- Best Original Score: Alan Menken ("Aladdin")
- Best Adapted Screenplay: Ruth Prawer: Jhabvala ("Howards End")
- Best Original Screenplay: Neil Jordan ("The Crying Game")
- Best Sound: "The Last of the Mohicans"
- Best Original Song: "A Whole New World" ("Aladdin")
- Best Cinematography: "A River Runs Through It" and "Best Costume Design: Eiko Ishioka "Bram Stoker's Dracula"

Reuter adds: Honorary award: Federico Fellini Jean Hersholt. Humanitarian award: Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn.

Six killed in Thai jet crash

BANGKOK, Mar 30: A royal Thai air force passenger jet crashed today in northeastern Thailand, killing all six people aboard, including one foreign civilian, the military said, reports AP.

The Boeing 737 jetliner was on a training flight near the Khon Kaen Airport, 450 kilometres (280 miles) from Bangkok — when it crashed, an air force spokesman said.

The Civkorian, a technician assigned to the US-made airplane, was tentatively identified as Mike Stocky, the Bangkok-based spokesman said. His nationality was not immediately known.

The five Thais on board the jetliner were air force crewmen. An official from the Khon Kaen control tower told local television at the crash site that the jet was out of control when it crashed in a wooded area some 10 kilometres (six miles) from the airport.

The plane started to come down for a landing, then twice pulled up suddenly only to fall back again with its nose still pointed straight up, the official said. It crashed in a vertical position.

A local villager who saw the crash gave a similar account. All six bodies and the airplane's flight recorders have been recovered, the official said.

Greek govt defeats censure motion

ATHENS, Mar 30: Greece's conservative government defeated a socialist censure motion in parliament early today, after a three-day debate on foreign and economic policy, reports Reuter.

Deputies loyal to Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis defeated the socialist motion condemning government policies by a vote of 152-145 with two abstentions in the 300-seat parliament. One deputy was absent.

BRIEFLY

Two Israeli cops shot dead: Two Israeli policemen were shot dead early Tuesday by unknown assailants near Hadera, north of Tel-Aviv, police said, reports AFP from Jerusalem.

The two policemen were shot with automatic weapons as they sat in their patrol vehicle in the Wadi Arra region where most Israeli Arabs live, police said. The attackers escaped with the dead officers' weapons.

Israel's 750,000 Arabs are due yesterday to celebrate the "Day of the Land," commemorating the deaths of six Arabs killed by police on March 30, 1976.

The six died during a demonstration against the annexation of land in Galilee in northern Israel.

Will Parker dies: Will Parker, a baritone whose collection of poems and lyrics about AIDS was turned into the "AIDS Quilt Songbook," died Monday. He was 49, reports AP from New York.

The cause of death was complications from AIDS, said his manager, Philip Caggiano.

Parker sang opera in Austria, the Netherlands and throughout the United States in the 1980s. He premiered Ned Rorem's "Santa Fe Songs" in 1980.

In 1991, he began gathering poems and lyrics by or about people with AIDS. The works were turned into songs by American composers. Parker and fellow baritone Kurt Ollmann, William Sharp and Sanford Sylvan performed the premiere of the "AIDS Quilt Songbook" on June 4, 1992, at Alice Tully Hall.

John Walson dead: The "Father" of Cable Television, John Walson, has died of liver cancer at age 78, reports AFP from Allentown.

Walson died Saturday in Pennsylvania, where he launched his innovation from an electrical appliance shop in 1947.

The inventor put a huge antenna on the top of his store in order to get better television reception. He later improved the system and began peddling it to local residents for a monthly fee.

The national Cable Association honored Walson in 1979 for his role in the television revolution.

ROK's ties with Madagascar: South Korea has normalized diplomatic relations with the African state of Madagascar, the Foreign Ministry said Tuesday, reports AP from Seoul.

South Korean Ambassador to France Lo Young-chun, who currently serves as envoy to Madagascar, visited Madagascar President Albert Zafy last Saturday and agreed on rapprochement, a ministry announcement said.

Seoul established diplomatic relations with Madagascar in 1962 but the African state had refused to accept a South Korean envoy since a leftist military coup in 1972.

Madagascar so far has been pro-North Korean.

Mishap leaves 24 dead in China: Two buses hurtled down a steep embankment and burst into flames in southern China, killing 24, an official report said Tuesday, reports AP from Beijing.

The accident last Thursday in Longchuan country, in south China's Guangdong province, injured 40, the China Daily said.

Hekmatyar's cabinet awaits Rabbani's approval

CHARASYAB (Afghanistan), Mar 30: Afghan Prime Minister designate Gulbuddin Hekmatyar said on Monday he had formed a cabinet and would ask president Burhanuddin Rabbani for his approval, reports Reuter.

"The good news today is that the consultations for formation of the cabinet have somehow been completed," the 44-year-old hardline leader of the radical Hezb-Islami Party said.

He refused to publicly name cabinet members until the list had been approved by Rabbani. Details were expected to be announced today.

Hekmatyar was speaking after a meeting with delegates of most of Afghanistan's

Mujahideen parties at his headquarters a few miles south of Kabul.

Hekmatyar was to name his cabinet, in consultation with the fundamentalist president, by last Monday as part of a March 7 Pakistan-brokered peace accord aimed at halting months of bitter factional fighting in Kabul.

But Hekmatyar said Rabbani had no right to object to his list and needed only to be consulted. "Under the accord no one has the right of objection," he said.

Each of the nine main Mujahideen parties, allies during the 14-year war against the former Soviet-installed government, is to be represented in the cabinet with the

main portfolios going to the most powerful of the groups.

However, it was unclear whether the two longtime rival guerrilla leaders had agreed on the divisive issue of who should have the post of defence minister.

"There was no problem," Hekmatyar said when asked if the delegates had selected a defence minister.

Rabbani had insisted on retaining Ahmad Shah Masood, who has held the job since the guerrillas toppled the ex-communist government last April. Hekmatyar had vowed to sack him.

"We are satisfied," said Noorullah Emad, Rabbani's representative at Monday's talks. "It is good news."

Israeli settlers set fire to a mosque in Gaza

GAZA CITY, Mar 30: Israeli settlers set fire to a mosque on the Gaza Strip today after the stabbing to death of two settlers in two days, Palestinian sources said, reports AFP.

Settlers drew up in cars at dawn and began shooting into the Al Aqad Mosque in Khan Yunis before setting fire to carpets, books and the loud speaker system, the sources said.

Firemen were still fighting the blaze three hours later.

The Israelis also ransacked eight Palestinian homes in the neighbourhood, smashing windows, doors and furniture. Several Palestinians were also beaten up, the sources added.

The settlers were believed to be from the nearby Gush Katif block of fortified Israeli villages where a Palestinian worker stabbed to death his Jewish employer on Monday.

The army had scaled off the

Strip indefinitely early Monday after a labourer murdered another settler in Nisanit, north of Gaza City.

Fifteen Israelis have been killed by Palestinians this month while 23 Palestinians have also died from Israeli bullets.

The authorities have warned settlers not to take the law into their own hands and a West Bank settler is facing murder charges for allegedly shooting dead a Palestinian near Hebron last week.

Reuter adds: Israeli soldiers ambushed a guerrilla, squad in South Lebanon, killing two gunmen, security sources said today.

The guerrillas were trying to sneak into the Sojoud area on the edge of Israel's self-proclaimed security zone shortly before midnight on Monday when an Israeli force spotted

them and opened fire. Two guerrillas were killed, the sources said. The others fled and there were no Israeli casualties.

The Israeli army confirmed its soldiers killed the two. It said no Israelis were hurt but offered no further details.

It was not immediately known to which group the guerrillas belonged. Pro-Iranian Hizbullah (party of god) guerrillas are active in the Sojoud area.

An Israeli-backed militia man was killed and two others were wounded on Saturday when communist guerrillas blew up a roadside bomb near their patrol in the south.

Israeli and allied gunners hit back by shelling villages north of the security zone, set up in 1985 to block attacks against northern Israel, killing two civilians and wounding 10.

Best pictures in last decade

LOS ANGELES, Mar 30: These were the winners of the best picture Academy Award in the last decade:

- 1982: "Gandhi"; 1983: "Terms of Endearment"; 1984: "Amadeus"; 1985: "Out of Africa"; 1986: "Platoon"; 1987: "The Last Emperor"; 1988: "Rain Man"; 1989: "Driving Miss Datsy"; 1990: "Dances With Wolves"; 1991: "The Silence of the Lambs", reports AFP.

Mao's body still in fine shape

BEIJING, Mar 30: Mao Tse-tung has been dead for more than 16 years but his body is still in fine shape, China's official Xinhua News Agency assured the public on Tuesday, reports AP.

Mao's body, draped in a red Chinese flag, is displayed in a glass case in memorial hall in a Tiananmen Square.

Rumours that it has been shrinking or discolouring in recent years are due to optical illusions from the hall's low lighting, Xinhua quoted the hall director, Xu Jing, as saying.

"Preservations of Chairman Mao's remains have been fine and, with our perfectly safe measures, long-term 'reservation is no problem," Xu said. "Monitors show no noticeable changes, macro or micro."

Mao, who led the communist Red Army to victory in a two-decade civil war and then plunged the country into two more decades of class warfare, died at age 82 in 1976. Western doctors say he may have suffered from Parkinson's disease.

This year is the centenary of his birth, and special celebrations are planned nationwide.

Xinhua said Xu has been taking care of Mao's remains since being summoned to his bedside four hours after his death. She said "liquid protection" was initially used, followed by "gas protection" after he was moved into the memorial hall, but did not elaborate.

Off the Record



A HAPPY REUNION: An elderly Bosnian woman hugs her husband Sunday, who is one of the 44 people evacuated from Tuzla. — AFP/UNB photo

Death warrant for pet kangaroos

CANBERRA, Australia: Queen Elizabeth II's representative in Australia has effectively signed a death warrant for more than 100 unwanted pet kangaroos which hop around his house, reports AP.

Governor-General Bill Hayden, who acts as head of state on behalf of the British monarch, wants the marsupials put down because of a population explosion, his official secretary Douglas Sturkey said Monday.

About a dozen kangaroos were brought to the 130-acre (52-hectare) Government House estate to please visiting foreign dignitaries more than a decade ago, Sturkey said. However, there were now about 140.

Gardeners at the plush residence complain they not only eat its plentiful grass but also nibble at rose bushes and jump on other decorative plants.

Sturkey said Hayden wants only a small number of desexed kangaroos to stay.

'I couldn't wiggle a finger'

LITTLETON, Colo: A 9-year-old boy buried when a canal bank collapsed while he was trying to build a play fort says he desperately tried to dig his way out but could barely move, reports AP.

"I was so scared," Stephen McKee said from his hospital bed Sunday. "I could not wiggle a finger."

He was in fair condition Monday, a nursing supervisor said. The boy spent more than five minutes under to 2 to 3 feet (60 to 90 centimeters) of dirt Sunday before two passers by clawed through and pulled him free. He was unconscious and turning blue but was revived before paramedics arrived.

Stephen and two friends, Tim Read, 9, and John Moore, 10, were building a dirt fort in the canal bank. The collapse buried Stephen and covered Tim up to his chest.

14 more Sikhs killed

NEW DELHI, Mar 30: Police shot and killed 14 suspected Sikh militants in Punjab, a sensitive border state where the Sikhs are leading a often violent campaign for secession, news reports said Monday, reports AP.

Press Trust of India news agency said the deaths occurred in six separate clashes between the security forces and suspected groups of militant since Sunday.

Among the deceased was Joga Singh of the Khalistan Armed Force.

US, Britain soften attitude towards Saddam Hussein

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 30: The United States distanced itself on Monday from insisting that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein must be out of power before international sanctions against his country are lifted, reports Reuter.

Both former President George Bush and British Prime Minister John Major had on several occasions linked any lifting on sanctions to Saddam's stay in office, although this demand is not part of the many Security Council resolutions imposed on Iraq before and following the 1991 Gulf war.

The Security Council on Monday, as expected, maintained sanctions against Iraq at its periodic review of sanctions, instituted in August 1990 when Baghdad's troops invaded Kuwait.

Asked whether Washington still insisted Saddam leave office before sanctions could be lifted, US Ambassador Madeline Albright said, "We are not talking about that."

She added, however, that Iraq was not yet willing to destroy all its weapons of mass destruction and appeared to have no intention of agreeing to long-term UN monitoring of its weapons potential.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said on Sunday that the United States wanted to "de-personalise" the controversy over Iraq "because we want those resolution to be obeyed not only by Saddam Hussein but by whoever his successor might be."

Britain also appeared to distance itself from earlier major comments.

"The instructions I received for conducting the sanctions review did not relate to Saddam Hussein's staying in office," British Ambassador Sir David Hannay said.

Western diplomats for weeks have said that Monday's Iraqi sanctions review was an occasion for the Clinton administration to set out its policy at length although there was no immediate crisis between Iraq and the United Nations.

They said the administration sought to divert it from Bush's frequent verbal assaults against Saddam and put US policy firmly in the context of Council resolution.

Iraq recently has made conciliatory statements in hopes they would be reciprocated by the Clinton administration.

But in her address to a closed-door council meeting, later distributed to reporters, Albright said Iraq recently had attempted to "charm" the international community but this had not been translated into concrete response.

"And no such charm has been enjoyed by the people of Iraq who suffer the policies of their government," she said.

The State Department on Monday also announced it had evidence Iraq recently shipped an unspecified amount of oil to Iran. Limited quantities of Iraqi oil are already being shipped through Jordan. But the United States apparently is concerned about possible larger shipments through Iran, itself a major oil exporter, as a way of sending the oil abroad.

Cyclone damages parts of Vanuatu

WELLINGTON, Mar 30: Tropical cyclone Prema appears to have caused widespread damage to parts of Vanuatu, New Zealand High Commissioner Brian Smythe said today, reports AFP.

New Zealand Metservice spokesman Steve Ready said Prema, now moving towards New Caledonia, was "in the top bracket of hurricanes in the south Pacific."

Smythe told the New Zealand Press Association that winds in the Vanuatu capital had reached 80 to 90 knots (110-165 kilometres per hour).