

Pak-Iran relations worry India

NEW DELHI, Apr 9: India's Defence Ministry on Thursday portrayed Iran as a potential military partner to arch-foe Pakistan, reflecting worries in Delhi's high command about Tehran's modernisation of its forces, reports Reuter.

The modernisation and expansion of the Iranian armed forces presents the possibility of Iranian assistance to Pakistan in a future conflict situation, the ministry said in an annual report.

"Iran stands out conspicuously in the region in terms of rapid military build-up and modernisation of its forces with particular emphasis on missile arsenal, air force and force projection capabilities," it said.

The report made no mention of the fact that Pakistan and Iran are mainly Muslim while India is predominantly Hindu.

The newspaper quoted CIA and Pentagon officials as saying that the middle would have a range of 600 miles (1,000 km), which is about the distance from India's western border to Iran's frontier with Pakistan.

American officials have refused to confirm the report.

The Indian Defence Ministry report said Pakistan was continuously pursuing her weapons-oriented nuclear programme (and) has developed considerable capabilities in this field.



President Bill Clinton (C) listens to US Secretary of Defence Les Aspin (L) as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell (R) tries to clear the media out of the way during a visit to the Pentagon in Washington on Thursday. This is the first time Clinton has visited the Pentagon as president.

Bomb scare at Delhi airport

NEW DELHI, Apr 9: An Air France flight for Paris took off Friday after a seven-hour delay caused by a bomb scare minutes before its scheduled departure from New Delhi Airport, police and the airline said, reports AFP.

"We off-loaded the passengers and checked all the baggage but found nothing, Deputy Police Commissioner Aditya Arya said. "Somebody played mischief."

Flight AF-181, with 170 passengers and 15 crew, had been scheduled to take off at midnight (1830 GMT) on a non-stop flight to Paris.

The flight was finally cleared for departure after a seven hour delay, an airline spokeswoman said.

Off the Record

To make it more memorable

TOKYO: Dozens of Japanese couples have booked weddings on June 9, the day tipped by media as the most likely date for Crown Prince Naruhito to tie the knot, reports Reuter.

Prince Naruhito, 33, is engaged to marry former career diplomat Masako Owada this year. The Imperial Household Agency has not yet announced the wedding date but Japanese media said it was most likely to be June 9.

A spokesman at Meiji-kenkan, a leading wedding hall in Tokyo, said on Friday that nine wedding receptions had been booked for that day and they expected more.



There couples specifically asked to hold their reception on the same day as the royal wedding, when if it was changed.

"I think many of them feel that it would make their own wedding even more memorable and auspicious if they held it on the same day as the royal couple," a spokesman for another wedding hall said.

Collective hysteria

CAIRO: Around 1,000 schoolgirls in Egypt have fallen prey to mystery fainting fits, which the health minister blames on "collective hysteria", newspapers said Thursday, reports AFP.

Almost 300 new cases have been reported since Tuesday, with the ailment spreading to Cairo and southern Egypt after having surfaced last week in the Nile Delta province of Beheira, north of the capital.

The girls, mostly aged between 13 and 17, have lost consciousness for around 10 minutes.

Seeking to reassure the public, health Minister Rageb Duidar blamed "collective hysteria," for the phenomenon and said medical analyses had ruled out a virus, toxic gas or narcotics as the cause.

But newspapers said the ailment sweeping Egypt could be the work of saboteurs. Two people were arrested in a Cairo school in possession of a gas, Al-Akhar said, without giving details.

Around 30 schools have been closed since last Saturday to curb the spread of the fainting fits but Duidar said they would reopen at the end of this week.

Life savings robbed

FLENSBURG, Germany: An 86-year-old man was robbed of 193,000 marks (about 120,000 dollars) he had stuffed into his shopping bag after stopping at his bank to withdraw his life savings, police said Thursday, reports AFP.

The man had withdrawn the money in order to avoid paying taxes on interest he had made, the police said. The victim was in front of his home when a man in his 20s grabbed the money and took off in a car.

It is most common in younger women

LONDON: Cervical cancer is most common in younger women and those who have been regularly screened for the disease may not need to be tested after the age of 50, the British medical journal reported yesterday, says Reuter.

The journal carried a report by researchers at a hospital in Dundee, Scotland, that revealed the disease was most common in women under 45, with the rate falling thereafter.

Women over 50 rarely developed the cancer and the report said screening might safely be stopped at that age for women who had previously been tested every three years or so.



Double leg amputee Norman Croucher leaves the Holderness Limb Centre in London on Monday after collecting the spare artificial legs he will be using in his attempt to become the first 'legless' mountaineer to climb Mount Everest.

Kashmiris intensify attack on Indian troops: 37 killed

SRINAGAR, Apr 9: At least 37 people, including 11 soldiers, were killed in India's Kashmir province in two days this week, as separatist Muslim guerrillas stepped up attacks on government troops, officials said Friday, reports AP.

Local newspapers in Srinagar said more than 40 people were killed in clashes and during police search operations since Wednesday. Police confirmed 37 deaths.

Violence has intensified since India appointed former army chief of staff Gen. K.V. Krishna Rao as governor of the embattled state on March 12. At the same time, the government has contacted militant groups to test the chances of holding elections and restoring a popular government.

The latest moves prompted hardline guerrillas to step up pressure on the security forces and against more moderate factions.

The moderates seek independence for Kashmir, a territory divided between India and Pakistan in 1947 in the first of their three wars. Other factions seek accession to Pakistan or Jammu-Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state.

In the worst violence in recent weeks, guerrillas of the pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen blasted a military jeep in Patmaloo area of Srinagar killing six soldiers on Thursday.

Security forces retaliated by cordoning off several parts of Srinagar and evacuating homes to search for militants.

Witnesses said at least 12 men who were arrested were later found dead, their bullet-riddled bodies dumped in the streets. One was Qamar Ahmed, a leader of the outlawed Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front.

Residents described the recent crackdown as one of the toughest since Kashmir erupted into open rebellion in 1989.

As many as 15,000 men were made to sit in the hot sun for 10 hours on Thursday while police, aided by hooded informers, searched for militants.

"Nobody was even allowed to drink water," said Mohammed Yusuf, an engineer for the government.

Bashir Ahmed Sosa, a reporter for a national news agency, said, "I was not allowed to move and sat throughout the day in the local bus stand where people had been herded."

A police spokesman confirmed the crackdown but denied any knowledge of wanton killings of civilians.

In New Delhi, I. Ramamohan Rao, a spokesman for the state, said many of the

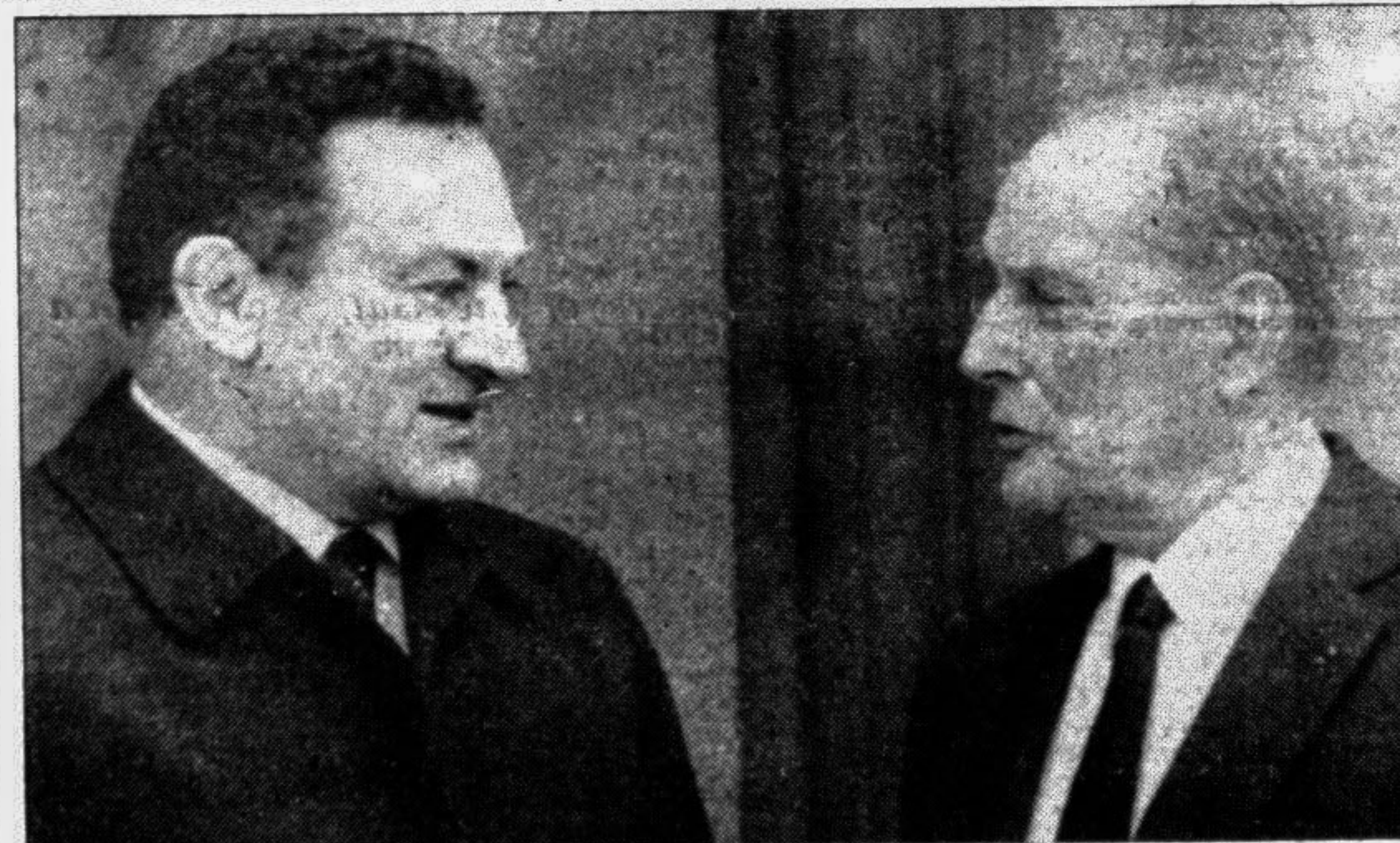
recent casualties were victims of fighting among the guerrillas factions.

A group calling itself the Rabita (coordination) Committee of various militant factions admitted killing five militants on Thursday whom it accused of being police informers.

In Wawan Bundgam village about 30 kilometers (18 miles) from Srinagar, troops killed four guerrillas in a gun battle. One civilian also died in the cross fire.

Militants also ambushed a patrol in outside Srinagar and a Hizbul spokesman later claimed they had killed four soldiers in the attack. The Border Security Force retaliated killing four civilians.

Nearly 6,000 people have died in Kashmir since 1989, including at least 413 so far this year, India accuses Pakistan of training and arming the rebels. Islamabad denies the charge.



French President Francois Mitterrand (R) talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the steps of the Elysee Palace on Thursday.

Iran worse than Iraq: Mubarak

PARIS, Apr 9: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Thursday accused Iran of being worse than the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein, and said Tehran wants to seize control of the whole Gulf, reports AFP.

Iraq occupied Kuwait, and made mistakes, he said on French television during a visit to France to brief political leaders on his meeting with US President Bill Clinton.

"But Iran is much worse," he added. "Iran wants to get its hands on the whole of the Gulf."

Mubarak said, however, that the Iranian government would never launch hostilities in the region. Tehran "will not launch hostilities against other Gulf countries," he said.

"Because they know they will have against them the Arab countries, the European allies and the United States." Nevertheless, he said. They will continue to cause problems.

lems, by trying to destabilise the region.

He also accused the Iranian regime of state terrorism, and of acting against Egypt. They "buy innocent people for 50,100, or 200 dollars to organise explosions here and there," he said.

Asked about the resumption of Mideast Peace Talks, scheduled for April 20 in Washington, Mubarak said they could not be delayed any further.

"We have a golden opportunity to reach peace. We must do everything to achieve that. If not, it will be a victory for the extremists."

He said Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin has "a very flexible attitude," while Syrian Hafez Al Assad was "a man who sincerely wants peace on an equitable basis," he said.

During his official visit Mubarak met French President Francois Mitterrand and the new Prime Minister Edouard Balladur. The Egyptian President left Paris Thursday afternoon for Cairo.

Huge search on Khan Yunes: 50 detained

GAZA CITY, Apr 9: The Israeli army Thursday carried out a huge search on the Palestinian town of Khan Yunes and its adjoining refugee camp, Palestinian sources said, reports AFP.

More than 1,000 soldiers took part in the operation, which was of unprecedented magnitude, on urban areas and settlements with a total of more than 120,000 inhabitants.

Witnesses said soldiers staged systematic searches after imposing a curfew from dawn. Some 50 people were detained for questioning.

An Israeli military spokesman confirmed that searches were underway in Khan Yunes.

Highest Kuwaiti honour awaits Bush

KUWAIT, Apr 9: Former US President George Bush will be awarded Kuwait's highest decoration when he visits next week, the officials Kuna news agency said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

It said Bush, who arrives in Kuwait on Tuesday, will be accompanied by prominent former members of the White House staff including ex-Secretary of State James Baker and White House Chief of Staff John Sununu.

Former Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady and White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater will also be in Bush's party, the agency said.

It said the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad-Al-Sabah, will present Bush with the "Mubarak Al-Kabeer Chain," which is awarded only to heads of state.

Bush, who lost last year's US presidential elections to Bill Clinton, remains popular among Kuwaitis for leading the campaign to drive Iraqi forces out of the emirate in 1991.

Bush will receive the decoration after visiting US troops deployed in Kuwait.

He will also give a speech in the Kuwaiti parliament and receive an honorary degree at Kuwait University.

Junior Kim replaces father

TOKYO, Apr 9: Kim Jong-Il, the eldest son of President Kim Il-Sung, was appointed Chairman of North Korea's National Defence Commission at the Supreme People's Assembly today, the North Korean central news agency said in a dispatch monitored here, reports AFP.

The rubber stamp parliament went into session Wednesday. The junior Kim, 52, replaced his father in the post of commission chairman.

BRIEFLY

Macedonia new UN member: The UN General Assembly formally admitted Macedonia to the world body on Thursday after months of debate between Athens and Skopje, reports AFP from United Nations.

The two governments finally agreed that the new state would temporarily be called the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and that its flag — another point of dispute — would not be raised outside UN headquarters.

Questions on both the name and the flag will be settled later according to the agreement.

Nixon in China: Former US President Richard Nixon, whose 1977 visit to China paved the way for normalisation of relations between the countries, arrived in Beijing on Thursday on a private visit, Xinhua reported, Reuter says from Beijing.

During his six-day visit Nixon will meet Chinese leaders to discuss Sino-US relations and international issues, the official news agency said.

Nixon has made a number of private visits to China since he was forced to resign the presidency in 1974 after the Watergate Scandal. He is still held in high esteem in Beijing for his part in the establishment of formal relations between China and the United States in 1979.

During a visit to Beijing after the 1989 army massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators around the city's Tiananmen Square an angry Nixon bluntly told Chinese leaders they had lost the trust of the world.

Jt exercise in Gulf begins today: The United States, Kuwait and the United Kingdom will participate in joint naval exercises in the Gulf from April 10-17, the Defence department said Thursday, reports AFP from Washington.

An estimated 700 US troops will participate in the training exercise, dubbed "Eager Sentry 93" designed to improve cooperation and readiness among troops from the three countries and demonstrate US determination to maintain security and stability in the Gulf, the Pentagon said in a statement.

The Pentagon announced Tuesday that it would also hold joint exercises with the Kuwaiti army, dubbed "Intrinsic Action 90-2." An estimated 1,500 Americans are to participate in those maneuvers scheduled for April 15 to May 14.

Israelis kill Palestinian girl: Israeli soldiers shot and killed a 13-year-old Palestinian girl in the occupied Gaza strip on Thursday, Palestinian sources said, reports Reuter from Gaza.

They said soldiers opened fire without any provocation, hitting Raida Al-Karra in the head while she stood in front of her house in the village of Bani Suhaila. She was taken to hospital and died of her wounds.

"There was no curfew and no clashes. We heard a shot and we went out of our houses to see and found the girl shot in the eye and bleeding from her head," said Hanan Albureim, 26.

The army said it was checking the report.

8 Indians to be tried in Bhopal disaster case

BHOPAL, India, Apr 9: A court ruled Thursday that eight Indian executives should be tried for manslaughter in the 1984 Bhopal gas leak, which killed more than 4,000 people in the world's worst industrial disaster, reports AP.

The officials are accused of having responsibility for the leak at a pesticide plant run by the Indian subsidiary of Union Carbide Corp of Danbury, Conn. The charge carries a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Vijay Gupta, a lawyer representing the company, said the executives would appeal to a higher court seeking to overturn the order for a trial.

It took India eight years to file charges because the government first negotiated an out-of-court settlement with Union Carbide, but the Supreme Court then threw out a provision barring criminal charges.

Another Bhopal court is considering a homicide charge for Warren Anderson, who was chief executive of Union Carbide when the leak of deadly methyl isocyanate gas enveloped surrounding Shantytowns.

That court initiated extradition proceedings against Anderson last year, but India and the United States have no extradition treaty. Anderson, who retired in 1986, has refused to appear.

India's legal system has spent years settling the claims of more than 600,000 people who were injured in the disaster or whose relatives died in the leak.

The eight executives facing trial include Keshub Mahindra, a leading Indian industrialist and a former chairman of Union Carbide India Ltd, and Vijay Gokhale, who is still the

firm's chief executive. All have been free on bail since being arrested shortly after the disaster.

India initially sued Union Carbide for \$3 billion, but later accepted \$470 million in an out-of-court settlement in 1989.

French conservatives plan crackdown on illegal immigrants

PARIS, Apr 9: France's conservative premier won applause from parliament with his tough law-and-order line, but his plans were likely to worry those who fear police excesses under the new government, reports AP.

Edouard Balladur's first policy speech before the National Assembly Thursday came as youths rioted over police shootings that left a Zairean teenager dead and an Algerian in a coma. A third police shooting left a Frenchman dead in the eastern city of Chambery.

Issues of crime and immigration have been linked here, and Balladur's policy address included a call for a crackdown on illegal immigration.

France "is a nation which knows how to be welcoming but which intends to conserve its identity," Balladur said, in what appeared to be a tip of the hat to the far right.

He said expulsions would be carried out without hesitation, border controls reinforced

and conditions for entering the country tightened. In addition, the premier said, the nationality code which confers French citizenship will be revised.

The security policy will include increased identification checks by police and reaffirming "the authority of the state in sensitive neighbourhoods where the law... must be respected," Balladur said.

The policies were reminiscent of controversial law-and-order measures taken by the previous conservative government, in office from 1986-88.

In recent days, press commentators and human rights activists have suggested that police may feel emboldened by the installation of a conservative government after years of Socialist rule.

The conservatives, in the campaign leading to their rout of the Socialists last month, promised to intensify the fight against crime and illegal immigration.

But police officials say they have received no orders to use tougher crime-fighting methods, and Balladur, referring to the recent shootings, emphasized the need for restraint.

"I fully support the interior minister who, following the tragedies, just called on the forces of order to show discipline and self-restraint in carrying out their duties," he told parliament.

Hundreds of youths rained bottles and stones on police and smashed windows Thursday in a second night of rioting over the fatal shooting of a Zairean teenager by a Paris policeman interrogating him.

Rioting also flared in Turcoing, near the northern city of Lille, where an Algerian youth was in a coma after being shot by a policeman.

Officials charged Pascal Compain, the interrogating officer in Paris, with homicide in the death of the 17-year-old Zairean. Frederic

Libya accuses UK of racism

TRIPOLI, Apr 9: The Libyan government today accused Britain of racism and hatred for having hinted at even more severe UN sanctions against Libya, reports AFP.

"All British statements and actions flow from a disguised hatred and historic racism," a Libyan Foreign Ministry communique said.

On Wednesday the Foreign Office said in London that it could not wait indefinitely for Libya to hand over two suspects in the 1988 bombing of a Pan American airliner over Lockerbie Scotland, which killed 270 people.

It raised the possibility of more UN sanctions against Libya.