

Top Kashmiri rebel leader, 10 others arrested

SRINAGAR, May 21: Indian troops arrested a top Kashmiri, Muslim separatist leader and 10 of his bodyguards in a pre-dawn raid today, police said, reports AFP.

Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Commander in Chief of the pro-Pakistan militant organization Al Jihad, or holy warriors, was captured at Nelora village in Pulwama district following a tipoff, police said.

A defence ministry spokesman described Aziz as a "prize catch," and said his capture had dealt a major setback

China executes 18 criminals

BEIJING, May 21: Eighteen people found guilty of a variety of crimes have been executed in the city of Foshan in China's southern Guangdong Province, the Yangcheng Evening News said, reports AFP.

to the four-year-old Muslim militancy.

Police said two militants were injured in a shootout which led to the capture of Aziz, who has headed Al Jihad since its formation in 1991 and figured high on the government's most wanted list.

Troops recovered five AK-56 assault rifles, a pair of pistols and ammunition from the arrested militants.

Meanwhile, parts of Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir, were under curfew Friday to prevent demonstrations marking the third anniversary of the assassination of Islamic cleric Mirwaz Mohammad Farooq.

The Mirwaz, head priest at Srinagar's main mosque, was gunned down at his home by unknown assailants three years ago. Police later fired on his funeral procession, killing several mourners in Srinagar.

Khmer Rouge threatens attacks on polling centres UN firm to hold polls in Cambodia despite violence

UNITED NATIONS, May 21: The UN Security Council on Thursday unanimously declared that despite pre-election violence Cambodia's first democratic election would be held on schedule beginning this weekend, reports AP.

In an indirect warning to the Khmer Rouge, which is disrupting the election process, it warned in a resolution that the council would oppose any attempt to take power by force and would punish aggressors.

The 15-member council condemned pre-election violence by the Khmer Rouge, which has boycotted the polls, and by the Cambodian government, although neither were identified by name in the resolution.

The council declared it

would endorse the results of the election for the constituent assembly, from May 23-28, provided they are certified as free and fair by UN monitors. It also vowed to support the government that emerges from the election.

It warned that the council would "respond appropriately should any of the parties (to the Paris peace agreements) fail to honour its obligations."

It especially condemned attacks on the UN peace mission which is overseeing the elections.

US Ambassador Madeleine K Albright told the council: "Should any party attempt to intervene or overturn this democratic process... the international community will not countenance or legitimate any attempt to take power by

armed force and will take appropriate measures against those who attempt to do so."

Various speakers warned of sanctions against offending parties, especially the Khmer Rouge or party of Democratic Kampuchea.

UN officials say that more than 95 per cent of the eligible voters and 20 political parties have registered in a clear demonstration of the Cambodian people's desire to determine their future. Most of those not registered are believed to be in Khmer Rouge-held territory.

Albright said that the Khmer Rouge obstinately has refused to participate in the democratic process, and has "incurred the condemnation of the entire international community." She said the

Cambodian Communists were trying to disrupt or prevent elections and have murdered innocent civilians and UN personnel.

AFP adds: Cambodia's Khmer Rouge issued a warning Friday that the United Nations would have to take full responsibility for any events in the wake of elections due to begin this weekend.

The radical guerilla faction has already attacked UN peacekeepers in the run up to the election which the Khmer Rouge are boycotting, and its spokesman Mak Ben refused to rule out bombardments or other attacks on polling stations.

The May 23-28 polls were a ruse to "silence the Cambodian people," Mak Ben told journalists in a village near the border with Thailand.

BRIEFLY

Velayati arrives in Oman: Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati arrived Thursday in Oman on the second leg of a Gulf tour to promote cooperation with regional monarchies, AFP reports from Muscat.

Velayati's talks with Omani leaders will also focus on Gulf security, officials said.

The Iranian Foreign Minister began his tour Tuesday with a visit to Saudi Arabia, where he handed King Fahd a message from President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

He also confirmed that Fahd would visit Tehran at an undisclosed date for the first Iranian-Saudi summit since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Velayati's tour will also take him to Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Explosions rock Santiago: Explosions rocked several neighbourhoods in Santiago late Thursday, police said, AFP reports from Santiago.

Some of the attacks were claimed by the leftist Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (MRPF), police said.

Police said the exclusive club De La Union near the presidential palace was attacked, but there were no reports of injuries.

Other explosions occurred in the elegant neighbourhood of Providencia. In other areas, the blasts cut power, police said.

Leaflets were found near the Push Club from the MRPF. The government has recently launched a drive against the rebel group, which was founded in 1982 when General Augustus Pinochet was in power.

Queen Mother hospitalised: Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother was hospitalized Thursday for treatment of an obstruction in her throat, Buckingham Palace said, AP reports from London.

The 92-year-old mother of Queen Elizabeth II was taken to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary in Scotland Thursday evening, the palace said.

Buckingham Palace described her ailment as a "slight tightening of the throat," and denied earlier reports that a fish bone had lodged in her throat.

The palace said she would remain in the hospital for observation.

The Queen Mother, widow of King George VI, was vacationing in Scotland, the palace said.

Quake jolts downtown Tokyo: A strong earthquake registering a preliminary 5.2 on the Richter scale jolted downtown Tokyo Friday, causing high buildings to sway and jiggle for several minutes, AP reports from Tokyo.

There were no immediate reports of serious damage or injuries.

High-speed bullet trains in the area surrounding Tokyo were temporarily halted and Tokyo's Haneda Airport briefly closed three runways to check for damage, but there were no other reports of disruption to transportation networks.

The earthquake struck at 11:36 am (0236 GMT). There was no immediate danger of tsunami seismic waves, the Central Meteorological Agency said.

New US envoy in Moscow: US Ambassador Thomas Pickering arrived Thursday to present his credentials to the Russian government, AP reports from Moscow.

Pickering, a career diplomat who was UN ambassador during the Persian Gulf war, was named to his latest job by President Clinton in January.

A member of the foreign service since 1959, Pickering has had high-level jobs in the Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan and Bush administrations. He has been ambassador to Israel, Jordan, El Salvador, Nigeria and India.

Pickering is one of only four career diplomats in the State Department's foreign service to hold the rank of career ambassador — the diplomatic equivalent of a five-star general.

Pickering replaces Robert Strauss, who stepped down as US ambassador to Russia late last year. Officials in Washington have said Pickering will work closely with Strobe Talbott, Clinton's special envoy to the states of the former Soviet Union.

Blast kills two in Pakistan: At least two passengers were killed and 20 injured when a bomb exploded in a passenger bus in Pakistan's Punjab Province Thursday, state-run television reported, reports AFP from Islamabad.

The bomb suddenly went off when the bus reached near the town of Kamoki killing two and injuring 20. The bus was on its way from Rawalpindi to Lahore.

The report said the 10 injured are stated to be in serious condition.

Kim adamant to stamp out corruption

SEOUL, May 21: President Kim Young-sam on Friday reaffirmed his resolve to stamp out corruption as prosecutors summoned a former Cabinet minister for questioning about his alleged links with Korean organized crime, reports AP.

"There should be no sanctuary from the anti-corruption campaign," Kim told a meeting of women leaders. "We can't create a new Korea without ridding the country of corrup-

Outcome of local polls won't change ethnic realities, Tamils say

COLOMBO, May 21: Shri Lanka's Tamil minority says the outcome of local elections will not change ethnic realities but is merely a vote of confidence in a system originally designed to meet their demands for greater autonomy, reports AFP.

An opposition alliance led by former premier Bandaranaike ended the ruling party's electoral dominance of all seven provincial councils in Monday's polls outside the island's embattled northeast. The opposition won three of the most important councils. Tamil politicians saw the opposition success as a turning



Afghan factional leaders leaving the Presidential Palace of Jalalabad Thursday after signing an agreement in an attempt to establish durable peace in the war-torn nation. From (R to L) representative of the Ittehad-i-Islam faction Mohammad Dorrani, President Burhanuddin Rabbani, leader of the Herakat-i-Islami faction Ayatollah Mohseni, leader of the National Liberation Front Sibgatullah Mozaddedi, leader of the Hezb-i-Wahdad faction Karim Khetili and leader of the Hezb-i-Islam faction Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. —AFP/UNB photo

Pakistan denies receiving M-11 missiles from China

BEIJING, May 21: A senior Pakistani official denied Thursday that Islamabad has received M-11 missiles from China calling reports of such transfers speculative and "motivated", reports AFP.

"I categorically deny that Pakistan has taken M-11 missiles," Akram Zaki, Secretary General of the country's Foreign Ministry, told reporters here.

"I can tell you Pakistan has not acquired them." He declined to say if Pakistan was interested in acquiring M-11s or if his government considered the Ballistic missiles to be controlled under the Missile

Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

"Pakistan and China have a long-standing friendship and we have a relationship which also extends to the field of defence since 1963, but once China made commitments to honour the MTCR limit, China has strictly adhered to those commitments," Zaki said.

Press reports citing US intelligence, sources have said spy satellites spotted two dozen Chinese M-11 missiles being delivered to Pakistan.

"These are speculative stories and motivated allegations," said Zaki, a one-time Pakistani Ambassador to China.

Pak army officer 2 bandits killed in encounter

KARACHI, May 21: A Pakistan army officer and two bandits were killed and several others were injured in an encounter in Pakistan's southern Sindh Province, an official said, reports AFP.

Captain Jameel Ahmad was killed while trying to apprehend a group of bandits on Wednesday night in the Naseerabad area of Larkana, the official said late Thursday.

Among the injured was a seven-year-old child, caught in cross fire. Army and paramilitary rangers have been engaged in operations against alleged terrorists and bandits in Sindh for more than a year.

The area of the incident had been sealed off to weed out the remaining bandits, the official said.

France, Malaysia to sign defence pact

KUALA LUMPUR, May 21: France and Malaysia are to sign a pact in Paris next month to promote defence cooperation particularly in the training of Kuala Lumpur's military, French and Malaysian officials said.

"France is ready to enter into a defence Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with Malaysia," Frederic Grasset told AFP prior to his return to Paris after his four years here as ambassador.

Malaysian Defence officials said that Malaysia's Defence Minister Najim Tun Razak would sign the defence MOU when he visits Paris to grace an international airshow next month.

The proposal for a bilateral defence agreement first surfaced when the then French Defence Minister Pierre Joxe

visited Malaysia in February last year. Joxe also extended France's offer to sell arms and military equipment to help Kuala Lumpur modernise its armed forces.

French officials recently said France was still quietly lobbying to sell an unspecified number of fighter planes and Rafale combat aircraft to Malaysia.

Russia has reportedly offered Malaysia a two-billion-dollar package (800 million US) for 18 Mig-29s and six Mi-35 helicopters, while the United States wants to sell an unspecified number of F-16s and F-16s.

Grasset said France should deepen its political dialogue with Malaysia, adding that bilateral ties were too focused on economic and trade links.

East Timor rebel leader gets life-term

JAKARTA, May 21: A court on Friday sentenced East Timor rebel leader Jose Alexandre Gusmao to life in prison, the Dili district court said, reports AP.

A court officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, refused to give further details of the verdict.

Gusmao, who was captured last November had led the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor, or FRETILIN. He went on trial in early February on charges of undermining the government and illegal possession on firearms.

He was accused on ordering a pro-independence protest in November 1991 that turned bloody as Indonesian soldiers shot and killed dozens of demonstrators.

The trial began in early February. On Monday, Gusmao was allowed to read only 2 1/2 pages of a 27-page handwritten Portuguese-language defence. The court said his argument was irrelevant to the charges against him.

He argued that the court was illegitimate because East Timor's annexation by Indonesia in 1976 has not been recognized by the United Nations.

His lawyer had said the charges against Gusmao were baseless.

Indonesia annexed East Timor, a former Portuguese colony after intervening in a civil war there between FRETILIN and pro-Indonesia forces.

Russian team in Cuba to promote cooperation

WAVANA, May 21: A Russian government delegation arrived here Thursday for talks aimed at increasing cooperation between Cuba and Russia, reports AFP.

Russia and Cuba have a common goal of developing "mutually advantageous economic relations," said Vladimir Shumeiko, First Vice President of the Russian Council of Ministers and head of the delegation.

"We are going to try to make decisions that will allow us to use industries built here with aid from the former Soviet Union for the benefit of the Cuban economy and the Russian economy," Shumeiko told reporters.

Cuba has been subject to a US embargo for three decades, but its economy was not really damaged until the collapse of the east bloc stripped the Caribbean island nation of its trading partners and economic sponsors.

Shumeiko notably mentioned Cuba's petroleum and petrochemical industries, but did not specify whether his remarks also referred to the Jaraguá Nuclear Power Plant, located about 300 kms (200 miles) east of Havana.

Off the Record

20 Bosnian girls to compete for "Miss Sarajevo-under-siege"

SARAJEVO: About 20 Bosnian girls will compete next week for the title of "Miss Sarajevo-under-siege," organizers said Thursday after the first round of the beauty pageant, reports AFP.

Gordana Magas, a dancer, said proceeds from the contest would be donated to a brigade of the Bosnian army. "It's our way of resisting and of showing that our fine young people must be saved," she said.

The contestants, ranging in age between 15 and 20, shyly took to the stage in their first appearance, the only professional model them easily outstripping her rivals.

The pageant is going ahead despite the year-long siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serb forces and a lack of water and electricity, not to mention the absence of beauty products and fashionable clothes.

A spirit of solidarity reigns among the contestants, who willingly share indispensable items such as high-heeled shoes.

The winner will receive an air-ticket to Madrid supplied by a Spanish weekly newspaper, and clothing provided by local sponsors.

She is being prosecuted for cruelty to animals

BIRMINGHAM: A woman who put her pet tarantula spider in an envelope and posted it home because she was prevented from taking it on a plane is being prosecuted for cruelty to animals, reports Reuter.

Ingrid Hannonway, 32, of northern Ireland, could face a fine of up to 2,000 pounds (3,100 dollar) or six months in jail for popping boris in a stamped addressed envelope at Birmingham Airport.

"Mrs Hannonway had no regard for this spider's welfare whatsoever," Wykeham Garzia, prosecuting on behalf of the British Rspca Animal Welfare Society, told a court on Thursday.

"Indeed the animal would have been likely to die. The container it was in was not sturdy enough and it would have been crushed."

Boris was liberated by post office workers after horrified airport security staff watched Hannonway drop him in a letter box after being refused entry to a flight to Belfast.

Hannonway wrote to the court admitting a charge of abandoning the spider but was summoned to appear in person for sentencing.

I'm the voice of those who can't speak

CANNES, France: Elizabeth Taylor brought her campaign against AIDS to the Cannes Film Festival Thursday, appealing to the cinema community to do more to combat the deadly disease, reports AP.

"I come before you today not as an actress, but on behalf of all those living with AIDS," Taylor told about 500 journalists at a Cannes hotel.

"I am the advocate of the dying child in an impoverished nation," she said. "I am the voice of the needle-user in the inner city. I am the delegate of the prostitute in the urban street. I simply ask your help for all those who cannot speak."

Taylor was to host a \$2,500-a-plate charity dinner at the swanky Moulton de Mougins restaurant later Thursday. Actors Michael Douglas, Sylvester Stallone, Nastassja Kinski, Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh were to attend.

The dinner is part of a day devoted to AIDS at the Cannes festival. In an unusual move, organizers screened a non-competition film at the prime time slot of 7:30 pm and sold tickets for 300 francs (dfrs 54) each.

The film, "Cliffhangers" starring Stallone, is an action piece about a mountain climber who sets out to rescue a group of stranded alpinists who turn out to be a criminal gang with hostages.



Elizabeth Taylor and US actor Sylvester Stallone wave to the crowd Thursday before the projection of the film "Cliffhangers" during the evening "Cinema Against AIDS" in the Cannes Film Festival. —AFP/UNB photo

Arab League to set up its office in Beijing

BEIJING, May 21: The League of Arab States grouping 21 countries, will establish a representative office here next week, 16 months after their arch-enemy, Israel, formally opened its embassy in China, reports PTI.

Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdel-Magud of Egypt, who is visiting China from Sunday, told official Chinese news agency Xinhua, in Cairo that a protocol of cooperation between the League and China will be signed next week.

troops and the dominant guerilla group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has prevented the central government from holding elections in the region.

The two main Sinhalese dominated parties have not been able to come up with a solution to the ethnic crisis.

Sathananthan said the election results would only strengthen the position of the military, the Buddhist clergy and the Sinhalese hardliners who have always advocated a military solution to the ethnic conflict.

Since then fighting in the northeast between government

Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party boycotted the 1988 regional polls, allowing the ruling United National Party (UNP) to win all seven councils. The UNP-led central government however did not devolve powers to the councils.

The ethnic divide widened when the central government in 1990 sacked the Tamil-dominated northeastern council led by the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) after the regional council proclaimed independence.

But parties controlled by majority Sinhalese vehemently objected to the provincial council system, aimed at granting greater powers to the country's two million Tamils.

Security forces are still battling rebels in the island northeast where Tamils are concentrated.

In a bid to quell the militancy, Sri Lanka and neighbouring India, which is home to 50 million Tamils, signed a bilateral pact in 1987 under which provincial councils were introduced to devolve power to the regions to enact their laws, raise taxes and generally run their own affairs.

But parties controlled by majority Sinhalese vehemently objected to the provincial council system, aimed at granting greater powers to the country's two million Tamils.

for the provincial council system. But the southern Sinhala Parties should not forget the Tamil question which led to the councils in the first place," Sihanathan said.

Demands by the minority Tamil community to have a greater say in education, health, land, law and order and employment have been resisted by governments dominated by the majority Sinhalese community since independence in 1948.

A Tamil militancy that emerged in the early 1970s became a powerful guerilla campaign for an independent homeland in the early 1980s.

point for the provincial councils system but others were sceptical the results would lead to an early resolution of the ethnic crisis in the north-east.

"This election doesn't change anything because all Sinhala political parties think alike on the ethnic question," said Tamil social scientists Sathananthan.

Tamil politician Dharmalingam Sihanathan said the outcome of the provincial polls, should strengthen the hands of those who sought a solution to the ethnic war that has left thousands dead.

"It is a vote of confidence