

ROK to purchase 3 more submarines

SEOUL, Jan 31: South Korea will purchase three more German-designed submarines under a long-term plan to strengthen its defence against Communist North Korea, navy sources said Monday, reports AP.

The 510 million dollar in purchases, planned for 1991-2001, will increase the total number of South Korean submarines to nine. South Korea currently has three German-designed submarines and plans to introduce three more by 1998.

The submarines, designed by Germany's Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft AG, will be manufactured by South Korea's Daewoo Shipbuilding Co. under a licensing agreement, said the navy sources, speaking on condition of anonymity.

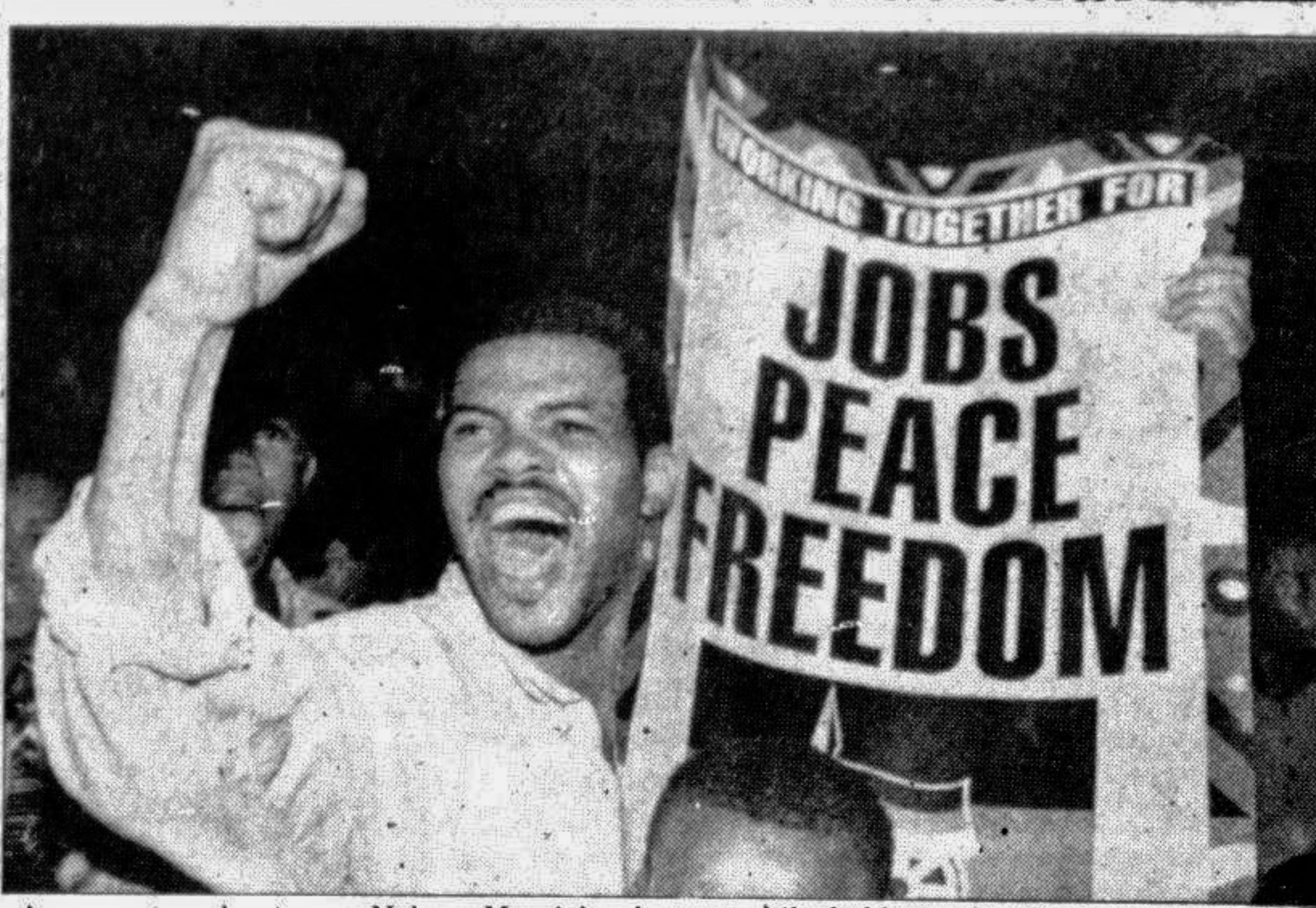
The Defence Ministry said it could neither confirm nor deny the purchase, citing sensitive relations with North Korea, which is angry over US plans to deploy Patriot missiles and other new weapons in South Korea.

North Korea has said the planned deployment of the missiles would scuttle chances for obligatory international inspections of its nuclear facilities and warned that it would increase the danger of war on the peninsula.

The South Korea navy sources said the additional purchase of submarines is to counter North Korea's larger naval fleet which has increased its submarine strength from 24 to 26 in the last year.

The North Korean submarines, smaller in tonnage, are inferior to South Korea's German-designed 209 type in size and combat maneuverability.

South Korea is worried that the planned deployment of missiles and other weapons here may further heighten tensions.



A supporter shouts pro-Nelson Mandela slogans while holding ANC election manifesto poster at an election campaign meeting in Promosa, a coloured township outside Potchefstroom in Western Transvaal, on January 30. Mandela appealed to vote for ANC in the 27 April first non-racial general elections. —AFP photo

Zhirinovsky opposes air strike against Serbs

SARAJEVO, Jan 31: Bosnian Serb leaders warned the West not to use force to open Tuzla Airport in central Bosnia and Russian nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky said air strikes would be tantamount to declaring war against Russia, reports Reuter.

Bosnian Serb army commander General Manojlo Milovanovic said any plane that landed in Muslim-held Tuzla airport would not be allowed to take off again.

He said his Muslim-led foes only wanted the airport opened so they could smuggle in arms to help them carry out their military objectives.

"Because of that, not one plane must land at Tuzla airport, which Bosnian Serb units have within their gun sights," Milovanovic told Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency.

The United Nations and NATO have threatened to use air strikes to open the airport so that relief agencies can deliver aid to millions of trapped people, avoiding dangerous land routes through the chaos of central Bosnia.

"Every plane which lands on the airport in Tuzla by force would never take off again" Milovanovic said.

Just three hours after arriving in Belgrade on Sunday, Zhirinovsky launched into a defence of the Bosnian Serbs and said his party would consider any NATO air strike against them as a declaration of war against Russia.

AFP adds: Bosnian authorities in Zenica, central Bosnia, have detained a number of suspects in connection with an attack on British relief workers in which one was killed and two wounded. A spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said here.

Meanwhile, Croatia said on Sunday thousands of foreign Muslim activists were fighting with Bosnian government troops in Bosnia but denied accusations that Croatian army regular soldiers were involved in the war there.

Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granic accused Bosnia's Muslim-led government of hindering efforts to end the 22-month war by issuing false accusations.

"Thousands of Muslim extremists recruited from various Islamic countries are fighting in the Bosnian army," Granic said in a letter to the UN Security Council.

Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic said on Friday Croatia had sent large numbers of troops into Bosnia.

BRIEFLY

A Myanmar ministry reorganised: Myanmar has reorganised a Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs to replace the Ministry for Development of Border Areas and National Races, Xinhua reports from Yangon.

Official paper 'The New Light of Myanmar' on Monday carried a notification of the State Law and Order Restoration Council, saying that the ministry was reorganised to conduct urban and rural development affairs more effectively.

U-Gen Mung Thint, former Minister for Development of Border Areas and National Race, was appointed as minister for the newly-reorganised ministry.

IFP won't contest S African polls: South Africa's Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) confirmed on Sunday it will not contest South Africa's first all-race elections in April under the present interim constitution, Xinhua reports from Johannesburg.

IFP is the second largest black party only next to the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa.

In Ulundi, capital of Kwazulu homeland, IFP official Walter Felgate said on Monday an IFP special general conference in Ulundi on January 29 had mandated IFP negotiators to continue trying to secure Inkatha's constitutional demand.

Taiwan team leaves for China: A Taiwan delegation left for Beijing Monday to hold its highest-level negotiations since the two sides opened their historic talks in April, AP reports from Taipei.

The five-day session will bring together vice-chairman of the two semi-official organisations that handle relations between the two Chinas in the absence of official contact.

The talks will focus on disputes arising from the unofficial contacts that have blossomed despite the refusal of either government to recognise the other's legitimacy.

12 die in HK firebombing: The last victim in the revenge firebombing of a crowded bank in Hong Kong this month died yesterday bringing the total death toll to 12, a government spokeswoman said, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The victims were killed in the firebombing of a crowded Hong Kong bank branch in a public housing estate in Kowloon district on January 10.

The suspect in the firebombing case, Chu Po-Kwong, made a second appearance in court last week to face additional charges of murder, after he was charged with arson and four counts of murder on January 12.

Bush, Baker honoured in Germany: Former President George Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker were presented with Germany's highest honour Sunday for their role in tearing down the Berlin wall, Reuter reports from Washington.

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl presented the grand cross of the order of merit of the Federal Republic of Germany to Bush and Baker at a formal ceremony at the German embassy here.

The Berlin wall, which became a symbol of the divisions between the East and West after it was erected in 1961, was torn down in November 1989.

Indonesian floods kill 2: Floods caused by heavy rains have damaged hundreds of homes and killed two people on Indonesia's Java island and the worst may not be over yet, weather officials and news reports said yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

Hundreds of villagers fled their homes in Tegal. Railway routes from Jakarta to east Java's capital on Surabaya, 680 KM (420 miles) to the east, had to be rerouted after a bridge was damaged.

In several villages in west Java, this month's floods were believed to be the worst in the past ten years.

Akayev wins referendum: President Askar Akayev won a solid vote of confidence in a national referendum seen as a gauge of public opinion on market reforms, according to preliminary results Monday, AP reports from Bishkek.

The Interfax news agency said 96.7 per cent of the voters endorsed Akayev, who has said he wants to transform Kyrgyzstan into the Switzerland of Central Asia.

The ITAR-Tass news agency said the turnout was high - 95.4 per cent of the electorate in this former Soviet republic nestled in the Pamir Mountains between China and Kazakhstan.

Next talks in a week in Cairo

PLO, Israel fail to break deadlock

DAVOS, Switzerland, Jan 31: The PLO and Israel failed today to break the deadlock in their peace accord but negotiators said they hoped to draft a compromise agreement within a week, reports Reuter.

It was the second time in two weeks that PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres had tried to hammer out issues delaying Israel's troop withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

"We achieved agreements in several important areas. Because gaps remain, it's impossible to initial a comprehensive signed documents" participant Yossi Sarid told Israeli army radio by telephone from the Swiss ski resort of Davos.

Arafat and Peres emerged together after two days of talks to say they would meet again in Cairo in seven days' time.

"There is more than a fair chance to complete our work," Peres told reporters, thanking Arafat for his 'cooperative approach' during the talks.

"We agreed to continue the final drafting for the agreement after one week in Cairo, Arafat told an impromptu news conference.

But AFP says: Israel and the PLO reported a breakthrough early today in their negotiations on Palestinian autonomy and said new high-level talks to finalise an accord would be held in Cairo in a week.

The announcement was made by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO chief Yasser Arafat after two days of intense discussions on the pullout of Israeli troops from the West Bank town of Jericho and the Gaza Strip.

Peres told reporters that the talks in this Alpine resort town dealt with many complicated issues and we were able to negotiate many of them, may be most of them.

"We have clarified many issues, many items, Arafat said after his fourth meeting with Peres here and the third on Sunday with aides working alongside to prepare a draft agreement.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin today hailed a 'positive' draft agreement on launching 'Palestinian self-rule' in Jericho and the Gaza Strip.

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Off the Record

Letters divert Charles' route

LAUNCESTON, Australia: A man placed a bundle of letters in a post box here and forced police to divert Prince Charles' motorcade, police said Monday, reports AFP.

The man started a bomb scare Sunday by placing the letters in a post box on the Prince's route when the royal limousine was only two minutes away, the spokesman said.

Police in this island state of Tasmania said they decided not to take any risks and diverted Charles' route, only to discover the suspect bomb was a bundle of letters.

"It had to be checked out," said detective Inspector Graham Hickey. "After the man was seen putting something in the mailbox, the prince's route diverted and it all went smoothly. The contents of the mailbox were inspected almost immediately."

On January 26, a man fired a starting pistol and plunged towards Charles as he prepared to address thousands of people during Australia Day celebrations at Sydney's Darling Harbour complex. The prince was unharmed.



Diplomat signs up as guide dog puppy walker

WELLINGTON: Japanese consul-general Keiki Hiraga has become the first diplomat in New Zealand to sign up as a guide dog puppy walker for the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind, reports AFP.

Hiraga, a dog-lover for many years, said Monday he had influenced his decision to sign up.

He said Japan's Princess Sayako was patron of a guide dog association in his home country.

"I remember her visiting the foundation's guide dog centre here in 1992," he said.

Hiraga's new charge is Oban, a seven-week-old border Collie, Golden Retriever Cross. As part of the foundation's dog puppy development programme, Oban will be walked and looked after by Hiraga for one year. The dog will then be returned for six months' intensive training.

Educating girls best investment

WASHINGTON: Educational opportunities for girls lag significantly behind those for boys in 50 countries, according to a study released Sunday, reports AFP.

The report by Population Action International says the gap in education leads to higher birth rates, more disease, and fewer choices for women, particularly in developing countries.

The study, "Closing the gender gap: Educating girls," said it would cost at least 6.5 billion dollars to close the gap in the 50 countries, but that the money would be well spent.

"Educating girls is one of the best investments any country can make," said Joseph Speidel, president of the organisation formerly known as Population Crisis Committee.

The study's authors said better education opportunities for girls were important in population control efforts.

"The educational status of women has a great deal to do with how many children they have and therefore population stability," said researcher Shanti Conly.

No interest in sex trade

BANGKOK: A Thai government spokesman Monday denied charges by a western human rights group that it allows sex traffickers to lure young girls from neighbouring Myanmar into prostitution, reports AFP.

"The Thai government has never supported the sex trade as claimed in the allegations," said Abhisit Vejajiva, spokesman for Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai. "The government has a policy to suppress the sex trade absolutely."

"The government has no interest in gaining foreign exchange from this kind of business," Abhisit said on Radio Thailand.

The spokesman also noted that the Chuan government is in the process of restructuring the national police force.

Zaire's prison system in state of collapse

WASHINGTON, Jan 31: Zaire's prison system is in a state of collapse, with prisoners routinely dying of malnutrition and mass starvation only avoided by intervention from humanitarian organisations, a human rights watch said in its report entitled "prison conditions in Zaire," reports AFP.

"In the past year, only the intervention of humanitarian and religious associations has prevented mass starvation."

In 1991, the last year for which figures were available, 2,229 prisoners died according to official count, more than 7.5 per cent of the total prison population. In the United States the death rate among prison inmates is 0.25 per cent.

A shocking percentage of prisoners die from banal causes related to malnutrition and poor health care," the report said.

Throughout the 1980s the prison system suffered from lack of funds, with inmates dependent on friends and families for food and no money being spent to maintain crumbling colonial-era prisons, the report said.



Flanked by Bosnian Muslim imams Mustafa of Cerić (C), the supreme religious leader of the Bosnian Muslims, addresses the press on Sunday in Sarajevo. —AFP photo

Pak gunmen kill 2 people

KARACHI, Jan 31: At least two people were killed and four injured including a woman as unidentified gunmen opened fire on a passenger bus here early today, officials and ambulance sources said, reports AFP.

Witnesses said four vehicles were also set ablaze as violence erupted in various parts of this largest city, following Sunday's murder of Zafar Abbas, a leader of the ethnic based Mohajir Qaumi Movement's faction known as MQM-Haqiqi.

13 die in India after drinking chemical

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: At least 13 villagers died after drinking a poisonous chemical they stole from a disabled tanker, believing it was carrying liquor, news reports said Monday, according to AP.

About 50 illiterate villagers Sunday filled bottles with methyl alcohol being transported in the tanker that overturned after colliding with a bus on a national highway, United News of India news agency said.

Hekmatyar's forces attack Kabul

KABUL, Jan 31: Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami faction opened up a new front in the Afghan capital today, attacking downtown Kabul from the south under cover of a heavy artillery bombardment.

This was the first major attack on this front since the fighting started, a member of the presidential guard based in the south of the city told AFP.

The attack, which was repulsed, was an attempt to divert President Burhanuddin Rabbani's forces away from the eastern front where the Hezb's fighting alongside former communist militias. Defence Ministry officials said.

"This attack was intended to keep us busy so we won't attack Maranjari hill and Bala Hissar fort," said an official, who added that two state jets bombed Hezb heavy weapons posts in the south.

Bala Hissar and Maranjari Hill are the last stronghold of Hekmatyar's ally, the ex-communist General Abdul Rashid Dostam, who launched an unsuccessful coup attempt against Rabbani in Kabul 31 days ago.

Starting at first light today, Hezb forces advanced from their Jangalak stronghold, a former industrial estate in South Kabul, and attempted to seize nearby Babur gardens defended by pro-Rabbani troops.

Intense fighting raged for four hours with Hezb artillery shell smashing into the zoo in the south of the city and against the television tower.

Few of the Kabul zoo animals have survived the fierce duelling of tanks, mortars and rockets in the area. A tiger and a black bear were said to have survived and a brown bear and a vulture were in their cages. Two lions were seen sunning themselves in their open compound.

The zoo buildings are shattered and crumbling, and trenches dug by six Dostam prisoners captured when the zoo fell to Rabbani forces zig-zag through empty cages to link the zoo command post with forward bunkers facing south.

Until now the Shi'ite forces of Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Wahdat faction ally, which are dug-in a hundred metres from the zoo, have stayed neutral in the fighting, the guards said.

Meanwhile, a huge fire which started when rockets crashed into shops near the city's central Pushtunstan square on Sunday was brought under control by the Kabul fire brigade.

Meshkov elected president of Crimea

SIMFEROPOL, Ukraine, Jan 31: Russian nationalist Yuri Meshkov won Sunday's presidential election in the autonomous Ukrainian republic of Crimea with 72.9 per cent of the vote, according to the official results announced today, reports AFP.

His rival in the run-off round, parliamentary speaker Nikolai Bagrov, took 23.35 per cent.

Turnout was 75.21 per cent of the republic's 1.9 million registered voters, the electoral commission said.

The Ukrainian news agency reported overnight that Meshkov had built up an unassailable lead by winning 73.5 per cent of the vote in the republic's major towns, including Simferopol, Sevastopol, and Yalta.

Meshkov, a 48-year-old lawyer, won the first round of the election on January 16 with 38.5 per cent of the vote against Bagrov's 17.5 per cent.



Sir Richard Attenborough (L) and Sir Anthony Hopkins share a joke at the reception for the Evening Standard Film Awards at the Savoy Hotel in England on Monday. Sir Anthony Hopkins received a special honour at the ceremony. —AFP photo

Anti-insurgency move in Naga cities planned

KOHIMA, Nagaland, Jan 31: Following a shift in guerrilla warfare from jungle terrains to urban centres, security forces in Nagaland were concentrating their anti-insurgency efforts on major towns, according to the inspector general of the Assam reports Maj Gen S Patil, reports PTI.

These towns under focus were Dimapur, Kohima, Mokochung and Zunheboto and all district headquarters, he said.

Talking to newsmen at Zakhama cantonment near here, Maj Gen Patil said insurgency problem should not be viewed purely as law and order one and should be solved through political efforts and socio-economic reforms.

Asked about the reported high handedness of the security personnel while undertaking operations, Patil said that sometimes harassment of civilians to a certain extent was inevitable.

When some reporters asked about his view on a specific case highlighted by the local media in which two students were reportedly subjected to third degree torture in Dimapur, Maj Gen Patil admitted that it was a case of indiscipline on the part of the jawans.

AFP adds from New Delhi: A general strike shut down a coal-mining district in eastern India today to protest the deaths of 55 workers in the country's worst mine disaster in nearly 20 years, the Press Trust of India reported.

Markets and businesses shut down and vehicles went off the streets in the coal rich West Bengal towns of Asansol, Raniganj and Durgapur as miners called a strike to protest against the poor safety conditions at the state-owned mine.

Fifty-five miners died on January 25 after a fire believed to have been started by a short circuit trapped them hundreds of feet below ground.

Their bodies were recovered four days after the inferno died down inside the mine owned by Eastern Coal Fields Ltd.

The general strike was called by a trade union affiliated to the state's Marxist administration.

It was the second mining accident in the area in five years and the worst since December 1975, when 375 miners died in an underground deluge following a blast in a pit in the eastern Indian town of Chasnala.

Fresh battle in Lanka: Two killed

COLOMBO, Jan 31: Security forces fought a gun battle with Tamil Tiger guerrillas and killed two suspected rebels in eastern Sri Lanka as the Roman catholic church here called for a ceasefire, reports AFP.

Troops killed the two suspected rebels from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Batticaloa district Sunday as security was tightened ahead of the March 1 local government elections.

The violence came as a delegation led by the Roman Catholic Archbishop Nicholas Amoros Fernando called on both sides to explore the possibility of ending the war through negotiations, beginning with a ceasefire.

"We wish that both sides begin making some positive gestures," a church statement said after the bishop had held talks with LTTE leaders in the northern Jaffna peninsula last week.