

BRIEFLY

Drought hits 4m Chinese: Four million Chinese in the country's northwest have been seriously affected by drought, the worst to hit that region in 10 years, the state anti-drought office was quoted as saying yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

The China daily reported that about 14 million cattle lacked water mainly in Gansu province.

"The shortage of water was so serious in arid areas in northeast Gansu province that many locals had to get water from far away," the office was quoted as saying by the English-language daily.

Quakes rock Japan's islands:

More than 200 minor tremors and a series of moderate quakes have shaken islands south of Tokyo in the past 36 hours, meteorological officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

As of 1:00 PM (0400 GMT) the agency had registered 258 quakes, including two moderate jolts measuring just over five on the Richter scale, the agency officials said.

The police said no one was injured since the first tremor Friday morning, but ten residential houses were damaged and a crack appeared in the ground on Shikine island 180 kilometres (112 miles) south of Tokyo.

ROK President to address Diet:

South Korean President Kim Young-Sam is to address the Japanese parliament during a planned visit to Tokyo starting March 24. Jiji press said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

During his three-day visit, Kim will meet Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa, Emperor Akihito and Japanese business leaders, the news agency said.

Before departing for Shanghai on March 26, the South Korean President will also deliver a lecture at Waseda University. It will be Kim's first trip to Japan since he took office in February last year.

Bulgarian PM undergoes surgery:

Bulgarian Prime Minister Lyuben Berov, who suffered a minor heart attack earlier this week, underwent multiple heart-bypass surgery on Friday, a government statement said, Reuter, reports from Sofia.

"The operation went smoothly and professor Berov is already recovering in intensive care," the statement said.

The five-hour bypass operation had been planned for Thursday but the statement did not explain the delay.

Pak worshipper killed: A worshipper was killed and eight others were injured when unidentified gunmen sprayed bullets on a crowd offering prayers at a Pakistani village mosque, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

The raid, at a village near the industrial city of Faisalabad in Punjab province on Friday, was the fourth incident during the week and was believed to be linked with secretarian friction.

The assailants, whose number was not known, escaped after firing indiscriminately on the crowd in the mosque gathered on the religiously significant last Friday of the Muslim holy month of fasting.

Japan, Kazakhstan sign N-disarmament accord

ALMAATA, Mar 12: Japan and Kazakhstan signed here Friday a nuclear disarmament agreement under which the Kazakh government will receive part of a 100-million-dollar aid fund for the four nuclear states of the former Soviet Union, reports AFP.

The agreement signed by Kazakh Foreign Minister Tuleutay Suleymenov and the Japanese ambassador Akira Matsui was a result of Kazakhstan's ratification of the 1968 Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty in December.

Suleymenov said at a news conference that the agreement providing for financial assistance to dismantle nuclear weapons was a goodwill gesture from the Japanese government and stressed that the accord also addressed environmental problems in the

Inter-Korean talks fail to make progress

PANMUNJOM (Korea), Mar 12: Crucial talks between the rival Koreas failed to make significant headway Saturday, meaning that a scheduled US-North Korean high-level meeting seems certain to be postponed, Seoul officials said, reports AP.

Failure to hold the US-North Korean meeting, scheduled to take place in Geneva on March 21, could derail a US-brokered agreement to resolve the long-running dispute over Pyongyang's nuclear facilities.

The North apparently is not prepared to exchange special envoys now, a senior government official said after the 3 1/2-hour closed session. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

The meeting, the third since last week, ended without agreement on exchanging inter-Korean envoys, a key precondition of a US-brokered

agreement on nuclear inspections. But the two sides agreed again next Wednesday.

Smooth nuclear inspections and an exchange of inter-Korea special envoys, charge with discussing ways to make the Korean peninsula nuclear-free, are key preconditions of the March 21 meeting.

A decision by Seoul and Washington to cancel joint US-South Korean military exercises this spring also depends on the completion of nuclear inspections and the exchange of envoys.

At Saturday's meeting at this border village, North Korea somewhat softened its hard-line stand but still was reluctant to exchange envoys before the March 21 date, Seoul officials said.

The North denied that the envoy exchange was part of its deal with the United States.

SLA kills 2 guerillas

MARJAYOUN, (Lebanon), Mar 12: Israeli-backed militiamen killed two radical Palestinian guerillas and captured a third near the Lebanese border with Israel, security sources said today, reports Reuter.

They said the guerillas had managed to infiltrate Israel's occupation zone late on Friday before being spotted by a patrol of South Lebanon Army (SLA) militiamen near the village of Shebaa, three km (two miles) north of the Jewish state.

The militiamen killed two guerillas and captured a third in a brief firefight while United Nations peacekeepers in the area arrested a fourth gunman. The SLA did not suffer any casualties.

SLA kills 2 guerillas

WASHINGTON, Mar 12: The Treasury Department turned over about 3,700 pages of documents to the special prosecutor investigating the Whitewater affair, while seven more administration officials prepared to testify before a federal grand jury, reports AP.

Friday's disclosure came as Republicans continued to hammer at the White House and call for hearings. Senate majority Leader George Mitchell, D-Maine, said hearings would be held, but not until it was clear they would not undermine the special prosecutor's investigation into the Arkansas land deal.

Also Friday, ABC World News Tonight showed photographs that appear to sup-

International

UN needs 12000 more troops to enforce truce in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 12: The United Nations this week called for nearly 12,000 new troops to consolidate fragile ceasefire in Bosnia and extend UN protection to the besieged Muslim town of Maglaj, reports Reuter.

A Security Council report from Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, obtained by Reuters, said 10,275 troops, military police and military observers were needed immediately around Sarajevo and in central Bosnia to enforce the new US brokered agreement between Croats and Muslims.

Another force of 1,500 was necessary if the council wanted to safeguard Muslims in the enclave of Maglaj, north

of Sarajevo, which never had any UN troops and is not part of the current negotiations or ceasefires taking hold elsewhere.

"It is clear that the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) needs additional troops in order to avoid losing the newly-gained initiative, he said.

"It would be a tragedy for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina if the present opportunity was lost for lack of resources, he added. Boutros-Ghali was responding to a recent Security Council resolution asking for plans to consolidate the Sarajevo ceasefire and to consider making the towns of Itez, Mostar and

Maglaj safe areas. He said Vitez and Mostar, unlike Maglaj, already had a UN presence.

But UNPROFOR needed to deploy another 11,775 soldiers, if Maglaj was to be declared a UN safe area without Maglaj, the figure was 10,275 of which the Council had authorised 2,400 troops that were not yet deployed.

AFP adds: The United Nations may ask Turkey for peacekeepers for Bosnia if sufficient reinforcements cannot be found elsewhere.

Bosnian Serbs have objected to Turkish troops because many would be Muslim.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said that he preferred to have Turkey help in other ways but

would turn to it for peacekeeping troops if other nations did not provide them.

Yaushi Akashi, special United Nations representative to Yugoslavia last week called for 10,650 additional international troops to bolster the 13,900 already in place in Bosnia.

Turkey's Ambassador, Inal Batu, announced Wednesday that Turkey was willing to deploy a mechanised battalion of more than 1,000 troops to central Bosnia within a week. Other Turkish officials have cited higher figures.

Greek Foreign Minister Carole Papoulias said Friday in Athens that Greece was considering sending peacekeepers if Turkey did so.

2500 arrested in Bombay to check fresh riot

BOMBAY, Mar 12: Police have taken into custody more than 2,500 people in Bombay to check outbreak of any sectarian violence on the completion of one year of the bomb blasts that had killed 257 people, police said Saturday, reports AP.

"This had to be done as a precautionary measure," Joint Commissioner of Police O P Bali said of the arrests.

Most of the people, picked up in the past 10 days, figure in the police list as habitual offenders.

On March 12, 1993, the city of 11 people was rocked by a series of bomb blasts that had left 257 dead and 700 wounded.

Police blame the blasts on Muslim radicals and say they carried out the strike to take revenge after Hindu zealots demolished a mosque in the central Indian town of Ayodhya.

180 detainees on hunger strike in UK

OXFORD (England), Mar 12: More than 100 asylum seekers held at a British detention centre are on hunger strike to protest against being "treated like prisoners" government officials said on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Up to 180 detainees from Asia, Africa and Latin America are taking part in an indefinite hunger strike at the detention centre near the central English city of Oxford.

About 7,000 supporters of the pro-Iranian Shi'ite Muslim movement, turned out in pouring rain in the mainly Shi'ite southern suburbs of Beirut escorted by hundreds of combatants bristling with sub-machineguns and revolvers.

The marches were organised to mark Jerusalem Day, an annual event launched in 1985 by Iran.

About 7,000 supporters of the pro-Iranian Shi'ite Muslim movement, turned out in pouring rain in the mainly Shi'ite southern suburbs of Beirut escorted by hundreds of combatants bristling with sub-machineguns and revolvers.

"No to negotiations for capitulation. Yes to continued armed resistance against Israel," Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said in a speech.

"We are being tortured psychologically," the hunger strikers said in a statement.

"We are not criminals. We want to be free while our cases are going on."

Pro-democracy activist, 2 others held in Nigeria

LAGOS, Mar 12: The military government, intensifying its pressure on its most vocal critics, has arrested a prominent pro-democracy lawyer and two other human rights activists, newspapers reported Saturday, reports AP.

Lagos lawyer Femi Falana, an official in the Campaign for Democracy human rights coalition, was jailed on Friday after 10 plainclothes security men said they wanted him to come to the police station to meet with the two activists arrested earlier in the week.

When he arrived at the station, he was told he was being detained. The arrests coincided with a new poster campaign by the rights group seeking to rally public opposition to the government of Gen. Sani Abacha.

The arrests of the activists was reported in Lagos newspapers.

No official confirmation was immediately available.

Off the Record

Charles-Diana clash over William's career

LONDON: Britain's Prince Charles has clashed with his estranged wife, Princess Diana, over his plans for their elder son, Prince William, to have a military career, the Daily Express reported Saturday, says Reuter.

The newspaper, quoting unidentified royal sources, said the couple had a row when they met at St James' palace in London last month to discuss 11-year-old William's future.

Charles revealed he wanted William to join the royal navy and told Diana he had discussed the issue with his own father, Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth, who agreed it was the best course, said the newspaper.

It quoted a source as saying: "The Princess was upset because she wants the decision to be left with William."

The Daily Express said Charles, a royal navy commander, believed a career in the services was the perfect grounding for William as an heir to the throne.

"He is understood to be concerned by his son's apparent lack of discipline and believes the navy would help mould him for his future role as king," said the newspaper.

Charles and Diana formally separated in December, 1992, after 11 years of marriage. They have a second son, nine-year-old Prince Harry.

Woman jailed for organising marriages of convenience

STRASBOURG, France: A French court has jailed a woman for organising marriages of convenience to enable Moroccan immigrants to obtain French citizenship, judicial sources said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Among the marriages arranged by Marie-Therese Herrero, 55, was that of a French housewife in her 50s and a 20-year-old Moroccan who did not speak French.

Her female recruits included a pregnant 15-year-old girl and a one-legged woman.

The court in Colmar, near Strasbourg, sentenced Herrero to four years in jail, two of them suspended, and a 100,000-franc (17,000 dollars) fine for obtaining official documents illegally and helping foreigners to live in France clandestinely.

Eighteen Moroccans who were married through her efforts were each sentenced to a month in jail.

Priest beheads brother-in-law

MADRASI: A temple festival in Tamil Nadu's Ramapathipattam district turned into a macabre field of blood Friday, when the temple priest beheaded his brother-in-law, who was kneeling in prayer, in full view of the devotees.

The villagers of Seemanendhal, near Kamuthi, gathered to watch a goat being sacrificed as part of the festival, were horrified when the priest took the giant "araval" or sickle and slaughtered his brother-in-law Marimuthu, police said Saturday.

The two had fallen out after Marimuthu had returned the money collected for the renovation of the temple to the donors, as the priest had not taken steps to start the repairs.

The priest made good his escape before the shocked devotees could come to their senses. Police are looking for him.

Prince Edward preparing to marry and set up home

LONDON: Buckingham Palace late Friday played down growing speculation that Queen Elizabeth II's youngest son, Prince Edward, is preparing to marry and set up home, reports AP.

Prince Edward, 30, and his girlfriend of six months, public relations consultant Sophie Rhys-Jones, recently appealed to the media to be allowed privacy, but that has not stopped the gathering rumours.

According to the Daily Mail on Saturday, royal staff have little doubt that an apartment at Kensington Palace, next to the Princess of Wales has been earmarked for the couple.

It is reported Prince Edward is known to feel that once married he would no longer feel comfortable living at Buckingham Palace.

Thousands escape from jail in Algeria

ALGIERS: A thousand prisoners, including at least 280 Muslim fundamentalists, escaped in a mass jail break after Islamic guerrillas attacked the prison holding them, reliable sources here said Friday, reports AP.

Four prison warders were killed in Thursday's jail-break at Tazoult some 400 kilometres (240 miles) southeast of the capital.

The prisoners escaped when an unknown number of assailants stormed the prison during the Ramadan meal break at 1800 GMT when security was lax, the sources added.

One hundred common-law prisoners returned to the prison after the jail break - the most spectacular since the start of fundamentalist violence in Algeria two years ago.

No official confirmation was immediately available.

Austria urged to drop plans to honour Rushdie

JAKARTA, Mar 12: The Islamic Solidarity Committee (KSI) has called on Austria to drop plans to confer a European literary honour on British author Salman Rushdie, its chairman said Saturday, reports AP.

The Austrian government's award would be tantamount to insulting the world's Islamic community, which currently stands at 1.2 billion people," KSI Chairman Lukman Harun said in a statement obtained here Saturday.

Rushdie, the author of the "Satanic Verses," which sparked waves of protests throughout the Islamic world, has been living in hiding.

Veiled women hold flags inscribed with a picture of the Al-Aqsa mosque on Al-Quds Day March 11 after Friday prayers, in Karachi. Thousands of protesters across Pakistan joined processions to mark Al-Quds Day in which they strongly condemned the Israeli occupation of the holy Muslim Mosque.

— AFP photo

Hamas, Jihad activists demand revenge for Hebron carnage

GAZA CITY, Occupied Gaza Strip, Mar 12: Thousands of Palestinians held anti-Israeli demonstrations in the occupied Gaza Strip Friday organised by the fundamentalist Islamic resistance movement Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Palestinian sources said. reports AFP.

Some 3,000 Hamas supporters demonstrated in the Khan Younes refugee camp, chanting anti-Israeli slogans, burning an Israeli flag and demanding revenge for the February 25 massacre of 30 Palestinians by a Jewish settler in a Hebron mosque.