

BRIEFLY

Blast wounds UK soldiers: A number of British security forces were injured on Saturday when an explosion rocked a Northern Ireland military base, police said. Reuter reports from Belfast.

The royal Ulster constabulary said the army and police base at Crossmaglen, south Armagh, came "under attack" on Saturday evening and the security forces suffered a number of casualties. The number of those hurt and the extent of their injuries was not immediately known.

Prominent Pak scholar dies: Maulana Kausar Niazi, a prominent Pakistani Islamic scholar and former minister, died in Islamabad Saturday, the official Associated Press of Pakistan said. AFP reports from Islamabad.

Niazi, 60, was admitted to a hospital on Wednesday after suffering a heart attack and brain hemorrhage, the agency said.

Bomb blast in Baku, 12 killed: A powerful bomb blast tore through a crowded metro train in the Azerbaijan capital Baku on Saturday, killing at least 12 people and injuring 53, the Interior Ministry said. Reuter reports from Baku.

"Investigators have determined that this was an act of sabotage," said a statement after the bombing, which significantly raised tensions in the crisis-ridden Transcaucasian country on the eve of the Muslim New Year.

The ministry said the bomb, detonated by a timing mechanism, exploded in early afternoon inside the first carriage of the train at a platform in the central "January 20" metro station.

24 more Sikh militants surrender:

Twenty-four Sikh militants surrendered to the police Saturday in the northern Indian state of Punjab, where a decade-old separatist campaign has claimed more than 25,000 lives, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The Press Trust of India news agency said the insurgents belonging to separate militant organisations surrendered with their weapons before Punjab Police Chief Kanwar Pal Singh Gill in Batala district.

More than 700 Sikh separatists have surrendered during the past two years to Gill, who is credited with breaking the backbone of the bloody drive which erupted in Punjab 10 years ago.

US to reopen embassy in Bosnia:

The United States plans to reopen its Sarajevo embassy, possibly within a few weeks, as a result of a ceasefire in Bosnia and an accord signed by the state's Muslims and Croats, the White House said Saturday. AFP reports from Washington.

The White House said President Bill Clinton informed Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic of the decision at a meeting Friday after the signing of the federation agreement and "reaffirmed the intention of the US to participate in the implementation of a viable peace agreement among the parties in Bosnia."

Clinton told Croatian president Franjo Tudjman that Washington would provide 3.5 million dollars in medical assistance to Croatia and would allow the Zagreb government to open four US consulates in New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Ohio, Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania.

Dalai Lama in Tel Aviv: Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, arrived in Tel Aviv yesterday on his first trip to Israel for a five-day private visit, his hosts said. AFP reports from Tel Aviv.

The Dalai Lama was invited by the Israeli Society for the Protection of Nature (SPN) and is to attend ceremonies in the Red Sea resort of Eilat marking the organisation's 40th anniversary, an SPN spokesman said.

No meeting with Israeli officials has been scheduled.

Khmer Rouge guerilla base falls to govt forces

PIHOM PENH, Mar 20: Cambodia's government says it has captured the Khmer Rouge guerrillas' main base and expressed confidence today that its army would be able to hold it, reports Reuter.

"We have thousands of troops — we can control it," said secretary of state for information Khieu Kanharith.

He said soldiers entered the western town of Pailin at 6 pm (100 GMT) on Saturday after attacking Khmer Rouge defensive positions in the surrounding hills with artillery, rockets and rocket-firing helicopters.

The report of the capture could not immediately be independently confirmed.

Kanharith said controlling the hills was the key to holding the town and there would be no repeat of a humiliation reverse at the Maoist Khmer Rouge's northern stronghold of Anlong Veng last month.

Government troops took that town but were forced out again by a fierce guerilla counter-attack.

Some Cambodian army officers in Battambang province have expressed concern that the guerrillas — the last group still fighting despite a United Nations-sponsored peace pact — would use the same tactics at Pailin.

Western diplomats have said that taking Pailin could be a mistake for the government and be little more than a symbolic victory. They said the area would be difficult to hold.

Kanharith said the army controlled all the hills except

70 German citizens removed from Kurdish town

ANKARA, Mar 20: Turkish authorities on Saturday removed more than 70 German nationals from the Southeastern Kurdish-majority towns of Van and Diyarbakir where they had been interning to join in celebrations of the Kurdish new year, reports AFP.

Most of them were to be expelled from Turkey, according to officials here.

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