

## Islamic court set up in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 28: The All India Muslim Personal Law Board has set up the first Islamic court here following its controversial decision to set up Shariah courts all over the country to enable the Muslim community to refer and settle disputes relating to family matters, reports PTI.

The Darul Qaza (Qazi's Court) was established in the last week of January in south Delhi's Chkhla area, having a large concentration of Muslims.

The court, presided over by Qazi Mohammed Kamil, is functioning in a first floor apartment of a newly constructed building in the crowded Chkhla market.

Disputes involving marriage, divorce, succession and maintenance are being regularly brought to the court and the Qazi has issued notices to the respondents in several cases.

Eight cases are currently pending before the Darul Qaza and the court is conducting regular hearing in them. Qazi Mohammed Kamil told PTI in an interview.

# Arab FM's ignore US calls to ease trade boycott of Israel

CAIRO, Mar 28: Arab Foreign Ministers Sunday ignored US calls to ease their 46-year-old trade boycott of Israel, postponing a debate on the issue amid anger over the Hebron massacre, reports AFP.

The ministers of the 22-member Arab League agreed to consider the boycott at a session later in the year, participants said. It had been on the agenda of the ministerial meeting which ended in Cairo Sunday.

"The climate is not favourable for lifting the indirect boycott" on international firms dealing with Israel because of the February 25 massacre, a diplomat close to the Arab League told AFP.

Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq Al-Shara said there was agreement within the Arab League Council "not to raise the question of the boycott at this session."

"We can't lift the boycott without an Israeli retreat from the occupied Arab territories," he told journalists.

Gulf states — Oman and

Qatar recently began "intensive efforts" to ease the embargo, but "this lobbying effort did not get the hoped-for results because of the Hebron massacre," a diplomat said, asking to remain anonymous.

Shara said if an Arab country wanted to lift the boycott, "that would be a separate decision which would have nothing to do with the Arab League."

Since the Israeli-PLO autonomy accord was signed on September 13, Washington has called for the indirect boycott to be lifted in exchange for US participation in developing the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho, the first two areas earmarked for autonomy under the accord.

For Syria the main issue was not the massacre of 30 Palestinian worshippers in a Jewish settler in the West Bank town of Hebron, but the Israeli-occupied territories.

Syrian-Israeli peace talks have been deadlocked over the Golan heights, seized by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed in 1981.

Syria made no distinction between the direct boycott of Arab trade with Israel and the indirect boycott, Shara said.

Syria's official Tishrin newspaper said Sunday that Israel "had not broken off the negotiations with Arab parties, but it is also true it has made no step toward peace and made no effort to help the peace process succeed."

US commerce secretary Ronald Brown said in January that Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdel Meguid had promised to raise the issue of the indirect boycott at the ministerial meeting in Cairo.

As the session opened Saturday, Abdel Meguid reiterated the Arab states condemnation of the massacre, and calls for adequate international protection for Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Arab countries have boycotted Israel since it was created in 1948. Three years later, they set up a body in charge of drawing up a "black

list" of international firms with interests in Israel.

Barring Egypt, which signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, only Kuwait has lifted the indirect boycott, last year.

The Arab League also condemned a recent Franco-Israeli military accord, saying it would harm the peace process.

The two countries signed the accord on March 10 ending a 30-year freeze on military cooperation.

Shara said the agreement would affect Arab-French relations, and it came at a time when "we are talking about peace even though Israel has a huge arsenal of all sorts of weapons."

The Arab League postponed debate on creating an Arab Court of Justice and amending the League's charter, participants said.

On Sunday they discussed developing a joint strategy to safeguard water resources for Arab countries and accused Israel of "diverting Arab water resources."

## UN team begins mission to Iraq tomorrow

MANAMA, Mar 28: A team of UN Ballistic missiles experts are to begin a two-month-long mission to Iraq on Wednesday as part of preparations for long-term monitoring of its weapons programmes, a UN official said Sunday, reports AFP.

John Larrabee, an American at the head of the 14-member team, said they would draw up detailed protocols for the monitoring and verification of missile sites around Iraq.

The documents would contain "detailed guidelines which will assist the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors during ongoing monitoring" of Iraq's missile facilities under the programme of long-term monitoring, he said.

UNSCOM, based in Bahrain, is in charge of eliminating post-war Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometres (90 miles).

Larrabee said the team would spend up to two months in Iraq visiting about 20 missile facilities.

On Saturday, UN inspectors left Iraq with air samples from a former chemical weapons centre.

## Off the Record



The Princess of Wales carries on Monday in Austria her skis to a cable car. Princess Diana and her two sons arrived at the ski resort on March 23 for their annual pre-Easter holiday. — AFP photo

## Arab League wants trial of Lockerbie suspects

CAIRO, Mar 28: The Arab League Sunday said the trial of two Libyans suspected of involvement in the destruction of a US airliner over Scotland in 1988 should be held by the International Court of Justice with Scottish judges, reports AFP.

The trial should also be held in accordance with Scottish law, the resolution of the Arab League Foreign Ministers said. It did not condemn international sanctions ordered against Libya by the United Nations for refusing to hand the men over for trial.

Both Britain and the United States want to try the Libyans in connection with the crash of a Pan Am Boeing 747 which blew up over Lockerbie.

Libya said on March 22 that it accepted the idea of a trial before the international court in the Hague with Scottish judges on the bench.

## 180 lashes for adultery

DUBAI: A United Arab Emirates appeals court has rejected a pregnant woman's plea to reverse a Sharia Muslim court sentence of 180 lashes for adultery, the newspaper Gulf News reported Monday, says Reuter.

It identified the 27-year-old woman only by her first name Amina and said she had been found guilty of committing adultery and becoming pregnant as a result. There was no mention of the man involved.

Physical punishments such as flogging are not carried out during pregnancy.

## 'Depo Provera' new contraceptive

NEW DELHI: India will introduce a new contraceptive, "Depo Provera", and will hit the market next week, official sources said here Monday, reports Xinhua.

The effect of the new injectable contraceptive for women is said to last three months and it is being projected as one of the better methods for spacing births.

This is the first time that an anti-fertility vaccine will be introduced in India. The contraceptive is in use in 90 countries but it was opposed in India on the grounds that it played upon the reproductive system.

Depo Provera is the brand name for Depot Medroxy-Progesterone Acetate (DMPA). It is being brought to India by Max India Limited and the US Upjohn Company as the first pharmaceutical product of their collaboration. It will be an intramuscular injection to be administered in the shoulder or the thigh.

## Help for street kids

BEIJING: China is trying to help 200,000 street children who have fallen through the cracks of the rapidly disintegrating socialist security system, reports Reuter.

The public-awareness drive is aimed at raising money to provide shelter and schooling for children aged between four and 11 "thrown onto the streets as the result of regional disasters, broken families and inadequate pastoral care," the official China Daily said Monday.

"The kids survive by begging and sleep in the cities' warrens and railway stations at night," the newspaper said.

"Mortality and disability rates among homeless kids are high and they are also prey to the temptations of crime."

A joint investigation of 1,000 homeless children sponsored by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found two-thirds took to the streets either following a parental divorce or to escape mistreatment at home.

Almost 23 per cent "succumbed to the lure of social evils like gambling or stealing" while eight per cent were abandoned because they were mentally retarded. Five per cent were forced onto the streets by poverty, the China Daily said.

## BRIEFLY

**Gaviria elected OAS chief:** Colombian President Cesar Gaviria, who had the support of the United States and other large countries in the region, was elected Sunday as head of the Organisation of American States (OAS). Reuter reports from Washington.

Gaviria, who will be Secretary-General of the 34-member organisation for five years, immediately called for the creation of a free-trade zone stretching the length of the Americas.

Gaviria will take office in August. He defeated Costa Rican Foreign Minister Bernd Niehaus by 20-14 votes.

**Somalis free 2 hostages:** Somali kidnappers freed a Kenyan and an Australian, both employees of the catering company supplying UN forces, after 16 days of captivity, a relative said Monday, AP reports from Brisbane.

Wayne Hargreaves of Australia and John Warjui of Kenya were released Sunday evening in Mogadishu in exchange for a package of food, said Hargreaves' wife.

No ransom money was exchanged, said Denis Hargreaves. She said both men were well and were celebrating their release with company staff.

**African leaders' meet this week:** Kwazulu homeland ruler Mangosuthu Buthelezi said Sunday that Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, ANC President Nelson Mandela and South African President Frederik de Klerk might meet this week, AFP reports from Johannesburg.

In an interview on SABC public television, Buthelezi, who is also leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Buthelezi said: "It is possible this week there will be a meeting between de Klerk, Mandela and the King."

Mandela, wrote a letter to Zwelithini last week requesting talks with the Monarch. An historic first meeting between the two in the Kwazulu capital of Ulundi was cancelled on March 18 over fears for Mandela's safety.

**Two killed in Los Angeles:** A Japanese student and his Japanese-American friend shot in carjacking in Los Angeles were declared brain dead Sunday, hospital officials said, AFP reports from Los Angeles.

An unidentified gunman shot Takuma Ito, who is Japanese, and Go Matsura, who was born in Japan but has US citizenship, in the head before taking their car and fleeing a supermarket parking lot in the Los Angeles suburb of San Pedro, police said.

The Friday night shooting prompted Japan's Foreign Ministry in Tokyo Sunday to caution Japanese travellers to be especially careful about violence in the United States.

**4 shot dead in Egypt:** Four Muslim militants including a woman were shot dead and four policemen wounded in a shootout in southern Egypt on Sunday night, security sources said, Reuter reports from Assiut, Egypt.

The militants through to be members of the radical Gama's Al-Islamiya (Islamic group), opened fire from a car at two police vehicles passing through the town of Al-Ghanaim in Assiut province, they said.

A police sergeant and three officers — a captain and two lieutenants — were shot in the arms and the legs.

**Heavy turnout in Ukraine's polls:** A heavy turnout in Ukraine's first post-Soviet parliamentary election confounded pundits who had predicted that voters disheartened and impoverished by economic decline would stay away from the polls, Reuter reports from Kiev.

President Leonid Kravchuk may also have been surprised that three-quarters of the 36 million voters cast ballots in Sunday's first round of the election.

Kravchuk had forecast a "power vacuum" as a result of Ukraine's cumbersome electoral laws and called for the postponement of presidential elections set for June.

**Govt troops kill 9 Tamils:** Government troops yesterday gunned down at least nine Tamil guerrillas and seized several automatic weapons, ammunition and communications equipment from the victims, a military spokesman said, AFP reports from Colombo.

There were no casualties among troops, he added.

Among the items seized from the dead rebels were some communications equipment, six automatic weapons, 28 anti-personnel mines and 10 grenades, the spokesman said.

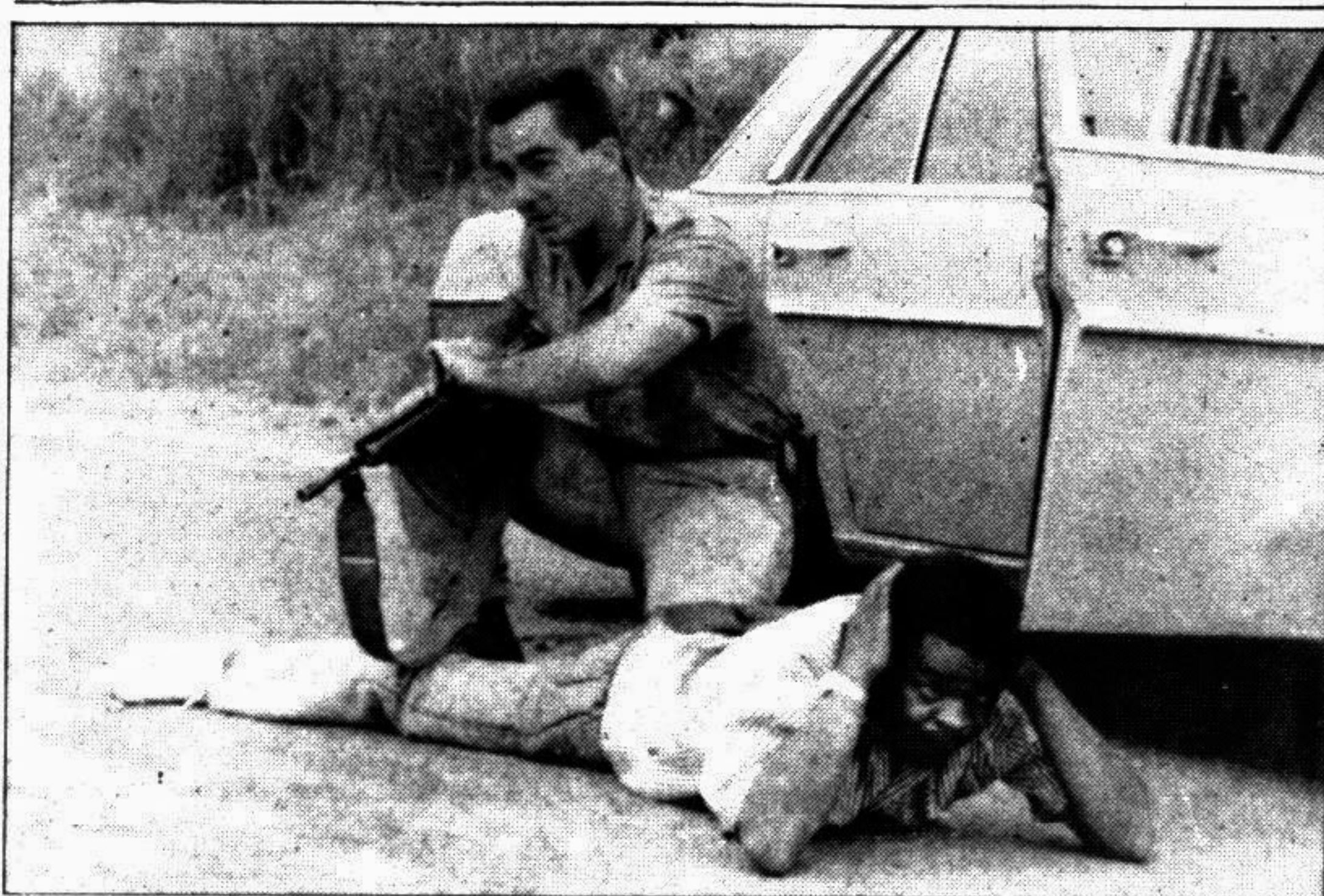
**Kashmir blast kills 2**

NEW DELHI, Mar 28: A bomb exploded in the hall of a bus station in the northern state of Kashmir, killing two people and wounding 14 others, United News of India reported Monday, says AP.

The explosion in Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu-Kashmir, occurred late Sunday when passengers were about to board two night buses for nearby towns.

No one claimed responsibility for the blast, but Muslim militants often are blamed for violence in the border state.

More than 8,200 people have died in separatist violence in Kashmir in the past four years. The separatists say they are discriminated against in Hindu-dominated India and want Kashmir to become independent or be annexed to Pakistan, an Islamic country.



A South African Defence Force soldier searches a man he holds on the ground in KwaMashu township near Durban on March 27. Gunfire was reported in this area of strife between Inkatha aligned hostel dwellers and ANC supporters. — AFP photo

## Kuwaiti parliament okays Defence Bill

KUWAIT, Mar 28: Kuwait, one of the world's big spenders on weapons, is set to resume arms purchases under the unaccustomed glare of parliamentary scrutiny following an eight-month political tussle over control of defence spending, reports Reuter.

MPs say a bill they passed on March 22 gives the opposition dominated National Assembly authority to examine hitherto secret allocations for major arms and military training programmes.

The move is a boost for arms makers, signalling the end of an eight-month informal freeze on procurement and the resumption of a 3.5 billion dinar (11 billion dollar) rearmament programme.

But it also means increased legislative oversight of an arms purchase process attacked as extravagant, secretive and occasionally corrupt by MPs

campaigning for increased fiscal accountability and open government.

Major weapons purchases for the small Gulf State's 13,000-strong military have hitherto been off-budget.

"The bill allows the Defence Ministry to get on with providing for the defence of the country and with planning for all the armed services," said an arms industry executive.

Kuwait has been the world's biggest spender on defence in per capita terms and as a percentage of national wealth since its 1991 liberation from Iraqi occupation, when its military plant and equipment was looted or destroyed, according to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

The bill has gone for approval to the Emir, Sheikh Ja-

ber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, a process that normally lasts a few weeks.

The Defence Bill was approved by parliament in secret session and has not yet been published.

But MPs say it approves in principle a 3.5 billion dinar programme of spending between 1992 and 2004 and requires the government to submit to parliament each year broad plans stating how much of the total it plans to use.

The bill means that the government can't go and spend the money all at once," the diplomat said. "They have to rake it out over the 12 years. How they'll do that and what their priorities will be, we don't yet know," he said.

Salesmen say that since arms ordered now can take years to be installed, most of

the money ought to be spent soon if weapons are meant to be operational by 2004.

Diplomats say it is doubtful the assembly will be able to block spending outright. But MPs say they will be able to demand the government supply detailed plans if members feel the choice of weapon, the cost, or method of financing is questionable.

"We will have the right to ask about every screw of a machine, every piece of equipment," said MP Nasser Al-Sanea. "It means more control for the parliament."

Diplomats say Kuwait is considering the possible purchase in coming years of 16 attack helicopters, eight fast patrol boats, six missile attack boats, 24 self-propelled howitzers, a multi rocket launch system and some general purpose helicopters.

## Hekmatyar welcomes UN team

CHARASYAB, Afghanistan, Mar 28: Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar said on Sunday he would guarantee security for a UN peace mission in areas controlled by his forces who are fighting to topple President Burhanuddin Rabbani, reports Reuter.

Hekmatyar said in an interview at his Charasyab base south of the capital Kabul that the mission, headed by former Tunisian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Mestiri, should not make an end to factional fighting a condition for visiting Afghanistan.

Hekmatyar's assurance came after a similar pledge last week by a spokesman for Rabbani.

Mestiri arrived to begin his mission in the Pakistani capital Islamabad on Sunday from Geneva, where he said on Friday that heavy fighting might prevent him entering the besieged Afghan capital.

At least 28 people were killed and more than 130 wounded in an exchange of rocket fire between rival factions in Kabul on Saturday, sporadic shelling continued on Sunday but there was no information of any casualties.

Hekmatyar said he welcomed Mestiri's mission and would guarantee its security "in areas under our control, not the whole country."

Mestiri leads a five-member UN group that plans to seek the views of a broad spectrum of Afghan leaders on how the United Nations might best help with national reconciliation.

Hekmatyar said any mission could face dangers but he said Mestiri and his colleagues "should not wait for the restoration of peace and termination of fighting."

## 18 tonnes of hashish seized in Pakistan

QUETTA, Pakistan, Mar 28: Pakistani soldiers have seized 18 tonnes of hashish from hills off the Mekran coast in Baluchistan province, officials said in Quetta Sunday, reports AFP.

The hashish, worth millions of rupees in the illegal drug market, was found after a two-day search of the area, an official said, adding that smugglers planned to ship the drug abroad.

It was one of a series of big narcotics hauls in Pakistan.



South Korean President Kim Young-Sam (L) chats with Foreign Minister Qian Qichen while President Jiang Zemin (C) listens during a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in China on Monday.

## Algerian govt to talk to FIS

ALGIERS, Mar 28: Algeria's president plans to include the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in a dialogue aimed at ending an Islamic insurgency, a moderate fundamentalist party said Sunday, reports AP.

The state-run news agency reported later that the claim was a "misleading extrapolation."

The Hamas party said it learned of the plans in a conversation between its leader, Mahfoud Nahnah, and President Liamien Zeroual. The two met as part of the national dialogue, which got under way Wednesday.

"The chief of state affirmed that the dialogue will include Salvation Front leaders," Hamas said.

It was the first clear statement that talks with various political parties would include the Salvation Front.