

BRIEFLY

11 militants killed in Algeria:

Algerian security forces killed 11 armed Muslim militants during a four-day sweep in Blida, a fundamentalist stronghold town south of Algiers, the Algerian official APS news agency said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Tunis.

Among the militants killed between Wednesday and Saturday was Ali Gazeera, head of an armed ring, code-named the Red Hill Road. APS said quoting an official security statement.

Ali, armed with an automatic pistol stolen from a police man killed last December in a militant attack, was shot dead on Friday inside his hideout near a main road outside Blida, 50 km (30 miles) south of Algiers. APS added.

Gospel singer Fowler dies: Gospel singer Wally Fowler, who promoted some of the biggest US country western stars, died while fishing, his family said Sunday. AFP reports from Nashville.

Fowler, who was also a songwriter and was inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 1988 for such hits as "That's How Much I Love You," was found near the dock where he had been fishing outside Nashville, Tennessee.

His daughter said the 77-year-old may have died of a heart attack.

Cocaine seized in Brazil, 7 held:

Police seized seven tonnes of cocaine and arrested seven people Sunday in the biggest haul in Brazilian history. Globo Television reported. Reuter says from Brasilia.

Federal agents found the cocaine aboard two trucks at a farm near Guarai city, about 1000 km (600 miles) north of the capital Brasilia, Globo said.

The cocaine came from the Cali, Colombia, drug network and was bound for the United States via the southern Brazilian port of Santos. Seven people were arrested and three others were being sought, authorities said.

Italian actor Troisi dies: Massimo Troisi, one of the most popular figures in Italian cinema, has died of heart failure, his family said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Rome.

Troisi, 41, had a history of heart trouble from childhood. He died in his sleep on Saturday afternoon at his sister's house in Ostia, just outside of Rome.

Troisi was renowned for the black humour of his work. He shot to fame in Italy in 1981 when he starred and directed in his film debut "Ricomincio Da Tre" (Back to Square Three) which was a big box-office success.

Two teenagers shot dead in US: A party celebrating the end of the school year turned tragic Sunday when at least two people opened fire in the crowded backyard of a suburban home. Two teenagers were killed and seven other youngsters were wounded. AP reports from San Morino, California.

The attackers apparently had an argument at the party, left and returned around 1 am to retaliate. Los Angeles County sheriff's detectives said.

Such shootings are almost never heard of in the wealthy suburb of 13,000, which has some of the state's most exclusive homes and is home of the Huntington Library. The party, advertised by flyers in the area, was at the home of a high school student celebrating the end of the school year.

Quake hits southern Japan: A strong earthquake measuring 5.9 on the open-ended Richter scale struck parts of southern Japan today but there were no reports of casualties, Japan's Meteorological Agency said. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

There was no reason to fear a tidal wave from the tremor, which struck at around 6.03 pm (0903 GMT), the agency said.

The earthquake's epicentre was about 20 km (12 miles) below sea level, near Amami Oshima Island, which is between Kyushu and Okinawa.

Russians pay homage to Alexander Pushkin

PUSHKINSKY GORI, Russia, June 6: Hundreds of people flocked from all over Russia this weekend to pay homage to the country's national poet, Alexander Pushkin, on the 195th anniversary of his birth, reports AFP.

A three-day festival, now in its 28th year, attracted artists, writers and dignitaries as well as ordinary lovers of the poet to his tomb in the monastery of this little town, 600 kilometres (375 miles) northwest of Moscow, to quote long passages of Pushkin's verses with passion, convinced that he is

not really dead.

"Pushkin still lives in each of us," said Moscow writer Pyotr Proskurin, author of numerous orthodox novels in the Soviet era praising the simple peasantry and the heroism of Russian soldiers.

"Pushkin is like Jesus Christ, like a religion," he said. "While hostility to Russia tries to weaken it, Pushkin helps us to keep alive the idea of a Russia great and proud."

Another writer, Mikhail Lanov, expressed the wish that the name of Pushkin serve as a rallying cry for Russians.

Filipino Muslim rebels pledge to fight to death

ZAMBOANGA CITY, Philippines, June 6: Muslim extremists claimed responsibility Monday for a bombing that injured 35 people and pledged to fight to the death as troops closed in on their headquarters, reports AP.

The military reported four more soldiers were killed Monday trying to advance against the main camp of the Abu Sayyaf group on Jolo Island, 160 kilometers (100 miles) southwest of Zamboanga City and 960 kilometers (600 miles) south of Manila.

That brought the death toll in the fighting to 39, including nine troops and 30 Abu Sayyaf members.

In a letter received Monday by the Zamboanga Times, the Abu Sayyaf group claimed responsibility for a bomb that exploded beneath a car in a shopping district Sunday night.

"We hereby claim responsibility of the bomb which detonated last night and you can expect more," the typewritten note said.

Gen Orlando Soriano, chief of the military's southern command, told reporters he believed the Abu Sayyaf group planted the bomb in retaliation for the offensive, now in its fourth day.

The 35 injured included seven children.

"I feel they wanted to divert our attention to relieve the pressure on them," Soriano said. "But we will continue the pressure and at the same time

be vigilant. We will meet force with force."

A second bomb was found and defused early Monday about 15 meters (yards) from the home of Rep Clara Llobregat. Police also found an unexploded tank round nearby.

Soriano said he had sent a message to the group's leader, Abubakar Janjalani, to surrender within 24 hours. In a radio broadcast, the Abu Sayyaf group refused and said, "We will wait for you here. Let's fight to the death."

The Abu Sayyaf group has taken responsibility for numerous bombings and kidnappings, including last November's abduction of American Bible translator Charles Walton.

Walton was released a few weeks later after the government provided hundreds of dollars in "food assistance" to the group.

Soriano said troops were closing in on Abu Sayyaf's main camp near the village of Patikul and expected to reach it within a day.

The shadowy Abu Sayyaf group surfaced in 1993. Janjalani, a former student in Libya, espouses a social ideology more religiously oriented than the larger and more secular Moro National Liberation Front.

On Monday, the state-run Philippines news agency quoted Agerico Kagaao, chief of operations for the national police, as saying leaders of the group were trained in Pakistan and undisclosed "radical" Middle Eastern countries.

"After four days of dragging the international community

International

Sanctions will provoke war, warns DPRK

SEOUL, June 6: In one of its strongest threats so far, North Korea warned Monday that any punitive sanctions against it over its nuclear programme would instantly provoke war, reports AP.

The warning came as the United States and its allies were preparing to seek a United Nations resolution to punish North Korea over its refusal to allow full nuclear inspections as required by an international controls treaty.

"Sanctions mean outright war," said a statement issued by the Committee for Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland, North Korea's chief organisation overseeing inter-Korea affairs.

If the South Korean puppet hopes that it would be safe while opening the forum of sanctions, it is a big miscalculation," it said.

The statement was carried by North Korea's state radio broadcasts, monitored by South Korea's semi-official Naeowe news agency.

Despite the North's warnings, there were no signs that Pyongyang's communist government was massing troops along its border with South Korea, Seoul officials said.

North Korea invaded its southern rival in 1950, starting a three-year war and resulted in millions of casualties.

In Seoul, security-related South Korean Cabinet officials

reviewed the looming crisis over the North's nuclear problem and assessed the readiness of their military.

"We must keep a close vigil," Prime Minister Lee Yung-duk said after the two-hour session.

Also Monday, a senior South Korean official said China is not expected to block a sanctions resolution if the UN Security Council decides to censure North Korea over its secret nuclear programme.

The official travelling with president Kim Young-sam on a visit to Russia and the former Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, said the Security Council is expected to begin studying possible sanctions against the

North on Tuesday.

Senior officials of the United States, South Korea and Japan met in Washington last week and decided to seek UN economic sanctions against North Korea over its recalcitrance.

"China is deeply worried about North Korea's unilateral replacing of spent fuel rods at its nuclear reactor," the official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told South Korean reporters travelling with Kim.

"We, therefore, expect that China would not use its veto power in the course of a sanctions debate at the UN Security Council," he added.

N Korean nuclear stand-off China considers Yeltsin's call for int'l confce

BEIJING, June 6: China is seriously considering Russian President Boris Yeltsin's call for an international conference on the North Korean nuclear stand-off, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said today, reports AFP.

"China believes that the most practical and effective framework so far for properly settling this issue is the trilateral dialogue between the four parties" — North and South Korea, the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

But nevertheless China would study seriously Moscow's call for a multilateral conference because it countered its own efforts to force the Americans to talk directly with Pyongyang.

China, torn between its role as an international power and its links with Pyongyang, may take advantage of the Russian proposal to delay any UN vote on sanctions which would put it in an embarrassing position, diplomatic sources said.

Myanmar's airstrikes against Khun Sa's army

BANGKOK, June 6: Myanmar's airstrikes against guerrillas loyal to Golden Triangle opium warlord Khun Sa killed at least four civilians and wounded three over the weekend, guerrilla sources said today, reports Reuter.

They said the casualties occurred on Saturday afternoon when planes dropped sixteen bombs near the contested town of Mong Kyawt in north-eastern Shan State.

Seven Myanmar soldiers were killed by landmines when they tried to rush the position at Doi Hing Kong just after the air strikes, the guerrilla sources said.

Earlier on Saturday troops launched two sorties against Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA) guerrillas at another contested position near Mong Kyawt but no one was reported hurt.

The sources said the air attacks continued on Sunday but there were no details.

Independent confirmation of the attacks was not available. A Thai military spokesman last month confirmed that the air force had been brought in to back up troops fighting Khun Sa's guerrillas, who captured Mong Kyawt in the south of Shan State earlier in the month.

Some 700 MTA guerrillas were forced to withdraw from the town and take up positions in mountains overlooking it last week, the guerrilla sources

said.

Mong Kyawt is on the leading route to Khun Sa's main headquarters at Ho Mong to the west.

Myanmar soldiers launched an offensive, code-named "Operation Eradicate Opium," against Khun Sa late last year. Intermittent fighting, at times heavy, has intensified since last month.

Guerrilla sources say battles are continuing at 13 points along a broad front in the south of Shan State.

Anti-mafia drive in Italy : 100 held

MESSINA, Sicily, June 6: Police arrested more than 100 people Monday in a vast anti-Mafia sweep, reports AP.

At least 128 people were picked up in Sicily and the Italian mainland and charged with crimes related to at least 50 gangland murders carried out between 1986 and 1993; extortion and criminal association.

Fifty-four people in prison were served warrants informing them of charges related to the crimes, and dozens of others were being sought, news reports said.

The Italian news agency ANSA said 1,200 police took part in the operation aimed at thwarting the underground criminal group in eastern Sicily.

Rwandan army launch major counter-attack against rebels

KIGALI, June 6: Heavy fighting raged across Rwanda today as government forces launched a counter-offensive against rebels, dashing hopes of an imminent end to two months of bloodshed and carnage, reports Reuter.

A UN military spokesman in Rwanda, Major Jean Guy Plante, said it was the first counter-offensive by government troops in two months and was concentrated in territories north and south of the capital Kigali.

"It is a major counter-attack," he said. "The government forces want to push back the whole of the RPF (Rwanda Patriotic Front) forces to the west of the Kigali-Butare road," he said.

The UN officer said the firing on the airport showed that security guarantees given to the UN could not be trusted.

Plante said the UN had put on hold the evacuation of civilians trapped behind frontlines in the divided capital because of a fuel shortage.

180 PLO employees arrive in Gaza

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, June 6: A group of 180 PLO employees and a new chief of Palestinian security arrived Sunday in the Gaza Strip to help run institutions in the newly autonomous territories, reports AFP.

The group from PLO headquarters in Tunis was made up of bureaucrats, economists, legal experts, journalists and intelligence officers of the Palestine Liberation Army.

He said all UN relief flights were cancelled until Friday after mortar bombs hit the airport on Sunday, but the UN hoped to organise a land convoy through rebel-held Rwanda from Uganda with much needed supplies.

Heavy fighting raged about 50 kms (30 miles) northwest of Kigali, where the rebels



A small Rwandan child cries sitting in the dirt in a refugee camp on Sunday, some 50 km from the Rwandan capital Kigali.

— AFP photo

Israel won't allow new PLO offices in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, June 6: Israel will bar Palestinians from setting up new offices in Jerusalem and arrest any armed guards at existing offices, a government minister said Sunday, reports AP.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal's comments were the latest round in the war of words between Israelis and Palestinians over the city both claim as their capital.

The controversy over Jerusalem has mushroomed since Palestinian autonomy began last month in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town

of Jericho. Many Israelis are worried about losing part of the mixed Jewish-Arab city to the Palestinians once the issue comes up for negotiation in about two years.

About 700 right-wing Israelis marched from Jerusalem's city hall to the old walled city on Sunday, waving Israeli flags and signs that read "Jerusalem is ours." Police closed off Jaffa Road, the city's main avenue, to accommodate them.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said last month that Israel would limit activities of the Orthodox House, the PLO headquarters in east Jerusalem, to prevent Palestinians from running their autonomy.

2 die, 25 hurt in Madhya Pradesh train blast

NEW DELHI, June 6: Two people were killed and 25 injured when a bomb exploded on an express train in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, domestic news agencies said.

They said the blast rocked one carriage of the Delhi-bound express at about 5 pm (1130 GMT) on Sunday just after it left the station at Rajnandgaon, on its way from the east coast city of Vishakhapatnam.

The Press Trust of India said a woman and a 13-year-old girl were killed.

Bronze statue of Eisenhower unveiled

BAYEUX, France, June 6: A bronze statue of General Dwight Eisenhower, the supreme Allied commander who was the architect of the June 1944 Operation Overlord, was unveiled today, reports AFP.

Eisenhower is shown in a typical posture, with hands on hips.

Eisenhower's son John, also a US general, was among 3,000 people at the ceremony in Bayeux, the first major Normandy town to be liberated by Operation Overlord.

The statue, standing some three metres (12 feet) high, is by American sculptor Robert Dean. It was offered to Bayeux by President Bill Clinton who was represented at Sunday's ceremony by US ambassador to France, Pamela Harriman.

Off the Record

Baby left in car for 8 hours dies of heat exhaustion

ALBANY, New York: A baby forgotten in the back of a car died of heat exhaustion after more than eight hours strapped in his seat, authorities said Sunday, reports AFP.