

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 Galezera, head of an armed ring, code-named the Red Hill Road, APS said quoting an official security statement.

All, armed with an automatic pistol stolen from a policeman 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 Guarani 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 fliers 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 Labanov, 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 kilometres (100 miles) southwest of Zamboanga City and 960 kilometres (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.

Li Gen Orlando Soriano, chief of the military's southern command, told reporters he believed the Abu Sayyaf group planned 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

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 Naewoo 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 punish North Korea over its secretive 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.

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. "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.

"Whether it will work is another story, but they are really trying hard," Plante said. UN operations to evacuate civilians trapped by the fighting were on hold pending the arrival of more fuel for the depleted UN force in the central African country.

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

were having a hard time with government troops caught behind their lines during an earlier RPF advance.

Aid officials estimate more than 500,000 and perhaps up to one million people may have been killed in civil war and massacres.

Italian Under-secretary of state for foreign affairs Franco Rocchetta was arriving for a visit to determine whether Italy should reinforce the UN garrison in Rwanda, largely paralysed by fighting.

The UN officers 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



A small Rwandan child sits 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.

Earlier Sunday, Shahal told reporters after the weekly Cabinet session that "we won't

agree to a creeping establishment of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem."

Shahal said existing Palestinian offices could stay if they limit their activities, but new ones were out of the question.

"We will certainly take measures to prevent the establishment of such institutions," he said.

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



Television footage of rescuers combing through the debris of a China Northwest Airlines Tupolev-154 which crashed near the central Chinese city of Xian yesterday killing all 160 people on board. (Story on Page-1) — AFP photo

US Senators criticise UN envoy's role

Serb forces withdraw from Gorazde

GENEVA, June 6: the Bosnian government said Monday it was satisfied all Serb troops had withdrawn from the Gorazde area, clearing the way for cease-fire talks to finally start, reports AP.

Bosnian Vice President Ejup Ganic said reports from a joint UN-Bosnian mission early in the morning showed all armed Serbs had withdrawn from the 3-kilometer (1.9-mile) exclusion zone around the eastern enclave.

"After four days of dragging the international community,

they (Bosnian Serbs) did something they were supposed to do a long time ago," Ganic told reporters before meeting with UN envoy Yasushi Akashi.

UN spokesman Michael Williams said the United Nations hoped to organize face-to-face talks between the Bosnian government delegation and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic later in the day.

Cease-fire negotiations have been stalled since Thursday over government demands that all armed Bosnian Serb forces

withdraw from Gorazde.

Meanwhile, US lawmakers who favour lifting the arms embargo for Bosnian Muslims criticized the top UN official in former Yugoslavia on Sunday, with one calling him an "impediment" to peace.

The attack by US Sen. Joseph Biden on Yasushi Akashi, the UN special envoy to former Yugoslavia, came during a visit to the Bosnian capital by Biden and republican Sens. Robert Dole and John Warner.

Dole and Biden have

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, reports Reuter.

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.

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, he added.

Since the Northern Korean nuclear crisis began about 18 months ago, Beijing has refused to consider it an inter-

national issue and has tried to block most initiatives taken within the United Nations.

Instead China, which is Pyongyang's only ally, has pushed for the United States to talk directly with the communist regime in the hope that this would eventually lead to Washington's official recognition of Pyongyang.

In March, China snubbed a similar Russian 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 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.

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.

Police said Robert Gaito had forgotten to leave the five-month-old boy at his baby sitter's and discovered his mistake when his wife called to find out where the child was Friday.

"The child had been restrained in some sort of child seat and he struggled furiously against the belt," said Jack Daviers, who conducted an autopsy on the infant.

Temperatures in the New York capital were about 24 degrees Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit) on Friday and the child was warmly dressed, police said.

Gaito, 28, has been charged with criminally negligent homicide.

10-yr-old university graduate!

MOBILE, Alabama: A 10-year-old boy received his diploma from an Alabama university Sunday, becoming the youngest American to graduate from college, reports AFP.

Michael Kearney, who graduated from high school at six, said the next step was graduate school.

"I've been sending applications to anybody who wants to have a 10-year-old graduate student who's soon to be 11. I'm here," he said after receiving his degree in anthropology from the University of South Alabama.

Kearney, who graduated with honours and a better-than-B-plus grade average, was also the youngest American to graduate high school and enter college, according to the Guinness Book of Records.

An 11-year-old boy graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1988.

Kearney's mother, who attended classes with the boy because he had trouble writing fast enough to take notes, said he wanted a car for his graduation present.

"I told him, 'You can't drive it until you're 16.' He said, 'That's okay, when I can, it'll still be in mint condition.'"

Teenager survives 30 meter fall

TOKYO: A 16-year-old high school pupil survived a 30 meter (100 foot) fall from the top floor of a 10-story apartment building in Tokyo yesterday after bouncing off a parking lot roof, police said reports AFP.

The boy, identified as Morio Kobayashi, slipped off a balcony railing on which he was sitting to view the pre-dawn scenery, after having his first taste of beer, police said.

"He was lucky he crashed on his bottom," a police official said. Kobayashi was hospitalised with a suspected broken right arm.

Husband-to-be snatched at wedding by present wife

BANGKOK: Almost 1,000 guests at a lavish wedding in southern Thailand were told to go home after the prospective bridegroom was snatched away at the last minute by an angry woman who said she was already married to him, reports Reuter.

The bride-to-be, Aree Naklithong, a teacher in the town of Tungpong, was forced to cancel the weekend wedding after the woman, and a young girl said to be the man's daughter, led her fiancé away from the party shortly before the ceremonies were to begin.

Aree later filed a complaint against the man, a local policeman, accusing him of damaging her reputation and seeking compensation for the small fortune she had spent on the aborted wedding, police said.