

Russia may sell arms to Pakistan

MOSCOW, July 8: Russia does not rule out arms sales to Pakistan provided they do not negatively affect the situation in the South Asian region, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman said yesterday, reports PTI.

Russia does not anymore have any ideological prejudices on the question, the spokesman said while commenting on the just concluded visit of the Pakistani foreign minister to Moscow.

The spokesman said that the question of arms sales to Pakistan was discussed during the visit of the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Sardar Asif Ali, but did not give any further details.

When asked to comment on

reports that the sale of SU-30 aircraft and T-72 tanks was discussed during the talks, the spokesman said "your sources appear to have deeper insights. I do not have such information."

The independent Russia television channel NTV had reported Wednesday that Ali discussed the possible purchases of military aircraft and tanks.

The spokesman said that the question of non-proliferation in South Asia was given "considerable attention" during the talks. He reiterated Russia's view that a compromise on the issue could be found either through bilateral (apparently Indo-Pak) or multilateral negotiations.

N Korea warns South not to meddle in talks with US

TOKYO, July 8: North Korea sternly warned South Korea against meddling in US North Korean talks that were to resume in Geneva today, focusing on Pyongyang's suspected nuclear arms programme, reports AFP.

If an unreasonable demand containing the sinister purpose of a third party is brought forward, the discussion cannot be focused on the key issue and the talks will get complicated. The North Korean Workers' Party newspaper commented.

Without directly naming South Korea, Rodong Sinmun said "some quarters" contended that Washington and Pyongyang must discuss implementation of the 1992 inter-Korean declaration of

"denuclearisation" of the Korean peninsula and mutual inspection of nuclear facilities.

The newspaper commentary, carried by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) monitored here, said these demands sought to create a confusion in the debate on the nuclear issue between North Korea and the United States, and lay hurdles in the progress of the talks.

Government leaders in Seoul have demanded that North Korea abide by the joint declaration and accept the mutual nuclear inspections in order to enhance the transparency of each other's nuclear programme.

But Pyongyang's hardline communist government has

insisted that the nuclear crisis stems from the US nuclear strategy and it should be resolved through its bilateral talks with Washington in a package deal involving US diplomatic recognition and aid to the north.

Another report from Seoul says: South and North Korea today agreed that President Kim Young-Sam will take 50 armed guards with him when he travels to North Korea July 25 for an historic first-ever summit with President Kim Il-Sung.

The decision was made at working-level talks at the heavily-fortified border truce village of Panmunjom, Yonhap news agency and KBS television said.

Christopher won't visit Vietnam during Asia trip

WASHINGTON, July 8: Secretary of State Warren Christopher will not visit Vietnam when he is in Asia later this month despite Vietnamese assurances of greater cooperation in accounting for missing US servicemen, the State Department said Thursday, reports AFP.

Christopher is scheduled to attend the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional forum when the group meets in Bangkok, Thailand, beginning July 25.

Although he will pass up a trip to Vietnam, Christopher will have the chance to meet with his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Manh Cam, at the forum.

Speculation had been rife that the Secretary of State would become the most senior US official to visit Hanoi.

Griffiths said veterans groups on the visit were opposed to a stop-over by Christopher.

Andreotti to stand trial in Oct

ROME, July 8: Veteran seven-time Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti will stand trial in October charged with membership of the Sicilian Mafia, judicial officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

The announcement came to days after Gian Carlo Caselli, a public prosecutor in Palermo, Sicily's main city, for the first time accused the former premier and grand old man of Italian politics of membership of the Cosa Nostra.

Until then he had only been suspected of collaborating with organised crime.

The officials announced the trial, which will be held in Palermo starting October 19, after preliminary investigating magistrate Agostino Gristana approved Caselli's call for Andreotti to be tried on the amended accusation.

Now a life Senator, Christian Democrat Andreotti was part of virtually every Italian government between 1947 and 1992.

He denied Wednesday that he was a full-fledged member of the Mafia.

"I have been waiting for a year and a half for evidence to be brought up against me and there still is nothing," Andreotti said in an interview with the Rome daily La Repubblica.

"But I shall just have to wait, as I know that there is nothing and never will be".

Caselli modified the accusation after months of probing by island investigators into Andreotti's suspect links with Senior Sicilian figures.

Nigerian bar expels Justice Minister

LAGOS, July 8: Nigerian Justice Minister Olu Onagoruwa was expelled from the Lagos branch of the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) Thursday, amid calls for him to resign, an NBA lawyer said, reports AFP.

The expulsion was agreed at a meeting which also voted to stage a protest in the federal capital Abuja next week when the trial of arrested opposition leader Moshood Abiola opens Thursday in a special court there.

The NBA members called on Onagoruwa to resign as Minister of Justice because they said he was no longer carrying out his duty as federal attorney-general.

The lawyers are to go to Abuja to protest the creation of a Federal High Court to try Abiola. They also decided to stage a peaceful demonstration Tuesday in the offices of Federal Justice Ministry here, the lawyer said.

Onagoruwa recently disobeyed two orders by the Federal High Court here for him to produce Abiola in court, causing him to be cited for contempt. He was due to have appeared in the High Court Thursday but the hearing was put off until July 12 at the request of the Federal Appeals Court.

Off the Record

Snake-smitten wife scares off husband, daughters

THE HUGUE: A woman attracted to snakes so deadly it caused her husband to flee with their two daughters has agreed to give up her menagerie, reports AP.

The husband called police Monday and told them he left with his daughters, aged two and seven, out of fear for his children's safety.

Police visited the family apartment and found 16 caged snakes, among them two rattlesnakes, two pythons and two boa constrictors, police spokesman Rob Kouwenhoven said Thursday.

The woman's collection also included a scorpion, three iguanas, two dogs, a cockatoo, a parrot, a mynah bird, three parakeets, as well as 20 rats and 20 hamsters kept as food for the snakes.

Two police officers convinced the 27-year-old woman to place all but three small snakes in animal shelters, said Kouwenhoven.

The husband and the children have still not returned, he said, adding that other domestic issues were at stake.

No charges were filed against the animal lover, since none of her pets were prohibited by law in this pet-happy nation.

Even the unborn feel pain

LONDON: Even the unborn feel pain, according to preliminary evidence by British researchers, reports AP.

The findings suggest fetuses should have pain-relief when undergoing invasive procedures, such as blood transfusions, said Dr Nicholas Fisk, the investigator at Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital in London.

The study will be published in Saturday's issue of The Lancet, a medical journal.

"Five or 10 years ago people thought newborns didn't feel pain and now analgesia for newborns is widespread. This is the first direct evidence that the human fetus may experience pain too," Fisk said in a telephone interview from Jerusalem, where he is attending a medical meeting.

Fisk and his colleagues found a dramatic rise in fetal stress hormones when they inserted a needle into fetuses for blood transfusions.

This is the same chemical response that occurs when children and adults feel pain.

Other experts said the study is intriguing but does not prove fetuses are hurting.

It is difficult to prove that a chemical reaction signals pain without being able to ask the patient because emotions also play a role, experts say.

"I think their nervous system is capable of reacting to painful stimuli, but I think perception builds up with experiences and memory and consciousness and that really comes in post-natal life," said Dr Maria Fitzgerald, an expert in fetal and infant pain pathways at University College London.

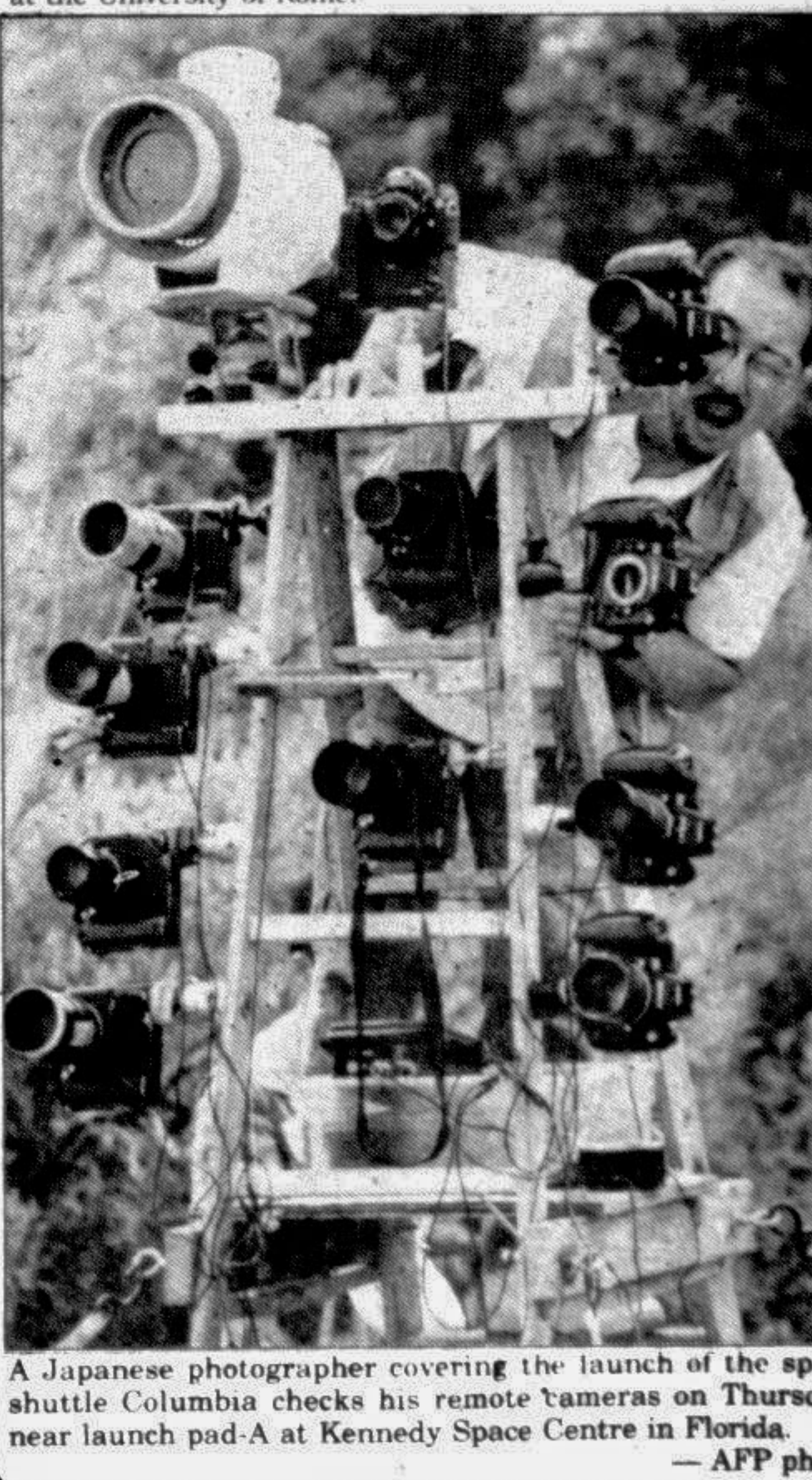
Professor masterminds painting robbery

ROME: A university art professor was arrested Thursday on charges he masterminded the robbery of paintings valued at more than 600,000 dollars, reports AP.

Carmine Benincasa was taken into custody at his Rome villa. He is accused of organising the armed band that stormed a home south of Rome in September and fled with five paintings.

Three of the canvases were found in the getaway car, but authorities have not recovered two valuable works: "King David" by George Rouault and "Face of a Woman" by Henri de Toulouse Lautrec.

Authorities suspect Benincasa may have sold the paintings on the black market through contacts he made in an art consulting business he runs with his wife. Benincasa also teaches at the University of Rome.



A Japanese photographer covering the launch of the space shuttle Columbia checks his remote cameras on Thursday near launch pad-A at Kennedy Space Centre in Florida. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Al-Gabid goes to Kabul today: The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Secretary General Hamid al-Gabid, will visit war-torn Afghanistan at the weekend on a peace mission, the OIC said late Thursday, AFP reports from Islamabad.

Al-Gabid, who has been meeting representatives of Afghan factions here since his arrival in Pakistan six days ago, will go to Afghanistan Saturday. The announcement by the OIC representative in Islamabad said.

The announcement, which did not say how long the visit would last, also made an "urgent appeal" to all Afghan parties and military commanders to observe a ceasefire during al-Gabid's visit.

AASU agitation from July 11: The All Assam Student Union (AASU) on Thursday announced the launching of a nearly month-long agitation programme from July 11 to protest against the alleged non-implementation of the Assam Accord, the foreigners problem, issuing of land deeds and identity cards to foreigners. PTI reports from Guwahati.

The AASU *anchalik* units would observe 6-hours sit-in demonstration from 1000 hours on July 11 protesting against the alleged violence in the state. Workers meeting would also be held between July 14 and July 19 to discuss the foreigners issue.

On July 21, the AASU local units would protest against ragging in the educational institutions, besides observing a *dharna* on July 23 and 24 to demand supply of Guwahati and Dibrugarh University text books.

Flash flood kills 12 in Quetta: At least a dozen people died when several mud and stone-built houses caved in as torrential monsoon rains lashed this southwestern city Thursday, officials said, AFP reports from Quetta.

The rains caused flash floods disrupting rail and road communications with the rest of the country and stranding hundreds of picknickers in a nearby valley, they said.

Rescue workers in Quetta capital of Baluchistan province, said the number of deaths could rise. More than 30 people died earlier this week in southern port city of Karachi, as a result of heavy rainfall.

One shot dead in Nigeria: Police opened fire on protesters Thursday in Lagos, killing a teenager witnesses said, AFP reports from Lagos.

The violence began when police fired tear gas at hundreds of lawyers outside the Lagos High Court who wanted to march to the office of Justice Minister Olu Onagoruwa, the witnesses said.

Onagoruwa, who is also Attorney General, recently disobeyed two orders by the Federal High Court for him to produce detained opposition leader Moshood Abiola in court.

Diarrhoea claims 28 in Indonesia: An outbreak of diarrhoea has killed at least 28 people and another 56 have been hospitalised in central Halmahera regency of eastern Maluku province in the past week, a press report said yesterday, AFP says from Jakarta.

The diarrhoea epidemic struck villages on the islands of Oba, Waisit, Payabe in mid-June, the Media Indonesia daily quoted a provincial health official as saying.

The official blamed the spread of the disease on poor sanitary habits and on a lack of clean drinking water in the area.

Somali clash leaves 6 dead: Rival clan militiamen battled in the Somali capital Mogadishu with heavy machineguns and anti-tanks rockets on Thursday, killing at least six people and wounding 11, Reuters reports from Mogadishu.

Witnesses said a four-hour battle broke out on the Oreen Line no man's zone dividing the city between militiamen loyal to warlords General Mohammed Farah Aided and Ali Mahdi Mohammed.

Hospital sources said at least six people were killed and 11 wounded in the fighting which subsided in the afternoon before fresh clashes broke out in Medina district on the outskirts of the capital.

17 die in Indian floods: Monsoon floods and a landslide have killed at least 17 people, flattened homes and washed away crops in Kashmir and in far eastern India, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported yesterday, AFP says from New Delhi.

Flash floods in Kashmir's Rajouri district flattened a house late Thursday, killing five people taking shelter inside from pounding rains. PTI said adding that three others were washed away elsewhere in the northern state.

Several other houses were damaged and crops submerged by the floods in Rajouri and Poonch districts, the news agency said.

At least nine people died and 50 others were injured in the landslide that destroyed a timber factory in the far eastern Indian state of Assam, a separate PTI dispatch said.

Amnesty report exaggerated: India

NEW DELHI, July 8: India Thursday described as "exaggerated" Amnesty International's charge that security forces were holding tens of thousands of political prisoners without trial and routinely torturing them, reports AP.

The names of the victims of excesses by security forces listed in Amnesty's 1994 annual report were incorrect, Press Trust of India news agency said quoting unnamed officials.

The report by the London-based human rights group Wednesday said special laws gave security forces sweeping powers to arrest and detain the suspects without specifying charges.

Yemeni president battles to cement national unity

DUBAI, July 8: Having emerged victorious Thursday from two months of bloodshed with the secessionist South, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh now faces a new battle — to cement national unity after the storm.

Much will depend on his future attitude towards the South. "If he chooses to go along the path of repression, national unity will never be effective," one diplomat urging dialogue told AFP Thursday from Sanaa.

Saleh's position depends largely on the position of the southern army and whether it accepts defeat, one western observer said. Even unification in 1990 failed to cement a union of northern and southern forces.

her said their troops had arrested thousands of southern soldiers as they advanced on the southern capital Aden.

"They gave themselves up by the thousand," said Colonel Ali Salem Mohammad, Lieutenant Ali El Hass added southern prisoners were being held in several military camps, including Al Anad, 90 kilometres (55 miles) north of Aden.

El Hass said the prisoners would be questioned and then released.

The Saba news agency meanwhile reported that the airport at Rayyane, the second southern city which fell into northern forces' hands on Wednesday, had been reopened and was "functioning normally" following repairs.

The city having been "purged" of rebel elements.

An absence of military integration and deep-seated political differences largely fuelled the outbreak of civil war on May 5.

Saleh succeeded in putting down the southern rebellion by force, as he had intended, with little interference from the international community. Both the United Nations and Arab states merely limited themselves to calls for an immediate ceasefire.

Southern attempts to gain international recognition for their "democratic republic," which they proclaimed on May 21, fell on deaf ears.

The Gulf states, along with Egypt and Syria, merely threatened Sanaa with "appropriate measures" if the

conflict continued.

The long quest for national unity in Yemen, now seemingly all but restored by force of arms, has a long and tumultuous history.

Hopes which arose with the merging of North and South on May 22, 1990, were left in tatters with the outbreak of this year's conflict, sparked by southerners' discontent they were the poor relations in a state led by northern supremo Saleh.

The nightmare of failed unity already had a precedent, two previous unification accords having foundered in 1972 and 1979.

The division of the country into two halves goes back to the British occupation of Aden in 1839, at a time when the rest of the country was in the

thrall of the Ottoman Empire. Between 1903 and 1905, an Anglo-Turkish commission drew up a border between Yemen and the territory of Aden.

In February 1934, Britain recognised Yemen as an independent state under the leadership of Imam Yahya, then proclaimed Aden a royal colony and its hinterland a protectorate.

The 1962 overthrow of Yahya sparked an armed revolt against the British in 1963. On November 30, 1967, South Yemen gained independence and a Marxist regime took power.

With the end of the civil war in the North that same year, both regimes said they favoured union, but this came to nothing.

Belfast jail protest ends

BELFAST, July 8: More than 100 inmates involved in a three-hour roof-top demonstration in Belfast jail ended their protest late Thursday and were all locked in their cells, the Northern Ireland office said early today, reports AP.

One hundred and three loyalist prisoners at Belfast's Crumlin Road jail smashed their way through the roof and clambered out after refusing to return to their cells at the end of an exercise period.

But by midnight the Northern Ireland office said the inmates had given up their protest and were returning to their cells and being locked up. Their return had been monitored by independent witnesses, a spokesman said.