

BRIEFLY

8 more killed in Kashmir: Indian army and paramilitary troops killed seven Muslim militants in a gun battle on Saturday in the troubled Himalayan state of Kashmir, security sources said in Kashmiri winter capital, AFP reports from Jammu.

An army officer also died in the battle in the district of Doda, about 200 kilometres (120 miles) east of Jammu, after security forces launched an operation against Muslim guerrillas, the sources said.

7 shot dead in Sindh: Seven members of the Ujjan tribe were shot dead by rival tribesmen in the southern Pakistani province of Sindh, police said on Thursday. Reuters reports from Hyderabad, Pakistan.

They said armed men raided the village of Hayat Ujjan in Khairpur district on Wednesday night, setting it on fire and then shooting at villagers as they ran out of their homes.

Major wins parliamentary vote: Embattled British Prime Minister John Major narrowly won a vital parliamentary vote on Wednesday when the House of Commons rejected an opposition attempt to censure his government over its European policy, Reuters reports from London.

The victory, by 319 votes to 314, vindicated Major's decision to make the keynote speech of a six-hour debate in an attempt to rally his beleaguered Conservative Party around an agreed stance.

6 die in Kobe accidents: At least six people have been killed and more than 100 injured in accidents during the reconstruction of Kobe and surrounding areas following a major earthquake six weeks ago, officials said on Thursday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Five deaths were recorded in Hyogo prefecture, including the capital Kobe, and another in neighbouring Osaka prefecture, labour ministry officials said.

Berlusconi faces fresh probe: Former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi confirmed in remarks published on Saturday that he faced a fresh corruption investigation but denied any wrongdoing, Reuters reports from Rome.

"I have been aware of the probe for a while now," the media magnate was quoted as saying in La Repubblica newspaper.

Andreotti to be tried: Former Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, who was on Thursday ordered to stand trial on mafia charges, said the judge's decision was "unjustified," Reuters reports from Rome.

"It is with sadness that I will face an unjustified trial. I thought a mortifying two-year wait would have sufficed to establish the truth," Italy's Agi news agency quoted the life-senator as saying in his first reaction to the decision.

Explosion kills 3 in Tbilisi: A day after a bomb blew up a pipeline delivering natural gas to Armenia, an explosion in the same area killed three people Saturday, authorities said, AP reports from Tbilisi.

The pipeline, Armenia's only source of energy, is the frequent target of bombings presumed to be related to Armenia's seven-year-old war with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. The explosion Friday, according to Armenian officials, came only hours after workers had finished repairing the damage from the previous bombing last month.

Kozyrev ends Japan visit: Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev ended a three-day visit to Japan on Saturday with no progress to report in resolving a territorial dispute which has dogged relations for half a century between the two nations.

For Tokyo, the main achievement was an agreement to begin negotiations over fishing rights in waters near the south Kurile islands off northern Japan, seized by Soviet troops in the closing days of World War Two.

Quake claims one in Colombia: One person was killed and three others injured Saturday when an earthquake of moderate intensity hit the southwestern city of Pasto, medical officials said, AFP reports from Bogota.

Four people were reported injured in a house that collapsed during the quake, which measured five on the Richter scale.

Greece fails to elect president: A new Greek president for a second time on Thursday but the favourite candidate appeared likely to win a third and final vote next week, avoiding an early runoff election, Reuters reports from Athens.

Costis Sifonidis, backed by the ruling Socialists and a small New Centre Party, again won 181 votes in the 300-seat house, falling to gather the 200 ballots needed in the first two rounds but showing he can get the 180 votes needed in the third.

Cambodian air chief killed: The deputy commander of Cambodia's air force was killed when a light reconnaissance plane he was piloting clipped some trees and crashed in central Cambodia, the government said Sunday, AP reports from Phnom Penh.

Information Minister Ieng Mouly said Maj Gen Tes Chanthan was killed Saturday while flying an Italian-made P-92 aircraft with a colleague on a mission to provide security for Co-Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

Iran to defend Gulf islands: Iran said Saturday it would defend with all its might three strategic Gulf islands claimed by the United Arab Emirates, AFP reports from Tehran.

Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said Saturday in a statement published by the government Daily Iran that "Tehran would never give up its vital interests and will never compromise on its territorial integrity."

Zulus to return to parliament: Zulu nationalists said on Sunday they would end their parliamentary boycott, but continued to insist President Nelson Mandela bring in international mediators to resolve a dispute over regional autonomy, AP reports from Ulundi, South Africa.

Some 3,000 delegates to a special Inkatha Freedom Party conference approved the resolution ending the boycott begun February 21. Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, facing a deadline this week for his members to return to the National Assembly and Senate or legally lose their seats, had signalled Saturday that the boycott was over.

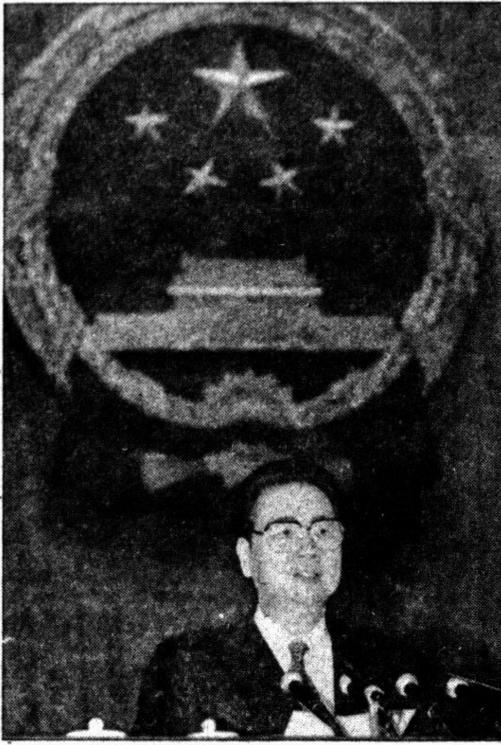
Doctors in two Delhi hospitals go on strike

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: Services in the two biggest state-run hospitals in the Indian capital were disrupted today by a doctors' strike that has forced authorities to call in specialists and consultants to man emergency services, reports AP.

Nearly 600 junior doctors, who perform bulk of the work at Safdarjung Hospital, resigned yesterday after authorities refused to consider their demands for housing.

At the All India Institute For Medical Sciences, more than 200 doctors continued their strike that began 21 days ago.

China's NPC session opens



Chinese Premier Li Peng reads his work report at the opening of the Eighth National People's Congress (NPC) in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Sunday.

BEIJING, Mar 5: China's National People's Congress (NPC) today opened its annual session before 2,811 delegates, with Chinese Premier Li Peng giving his report on the government's work over the past year, reports AFP.

NPC chairman Qiao Guo Shu Shi officially opened the proceedings in the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing's Tiananmen Square, after which the vast audience stood for the national anthem.

President Jiang Zemin and China's senior party and government leaders listened to Li's report from their seats, behind the NPC presidium, on the dais of the hall's main auditorium.

Wu Bangguo and Jiang Chunyun, politburo members who are expected to be promoted to vice premiers during the session, sat in the row of top leaders.

The session, which is expected to last 14 days, is to examine the government's work over the past year, plans for the future and adopt a number of laws, including legislation governing the central bank, education and the insurance sector.

AP adds: when Premier Li Peng told the legislature Sunday that only 849 days were left until Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule, he got one of the strongest rounds of applause of his speech.

The return of Hong Kong is a matter of national pride for China. The Chinese government earlier this year installed a mammoth digital display

facing central Beijing's Tiananmen Square to count down the days and the seconds until the turnover on July 1, 1997.

Li barely mentioned Sino-British relations, a reflection of the fact that China has effectively seized control from Britain in preparing for 1997.

When Hong Kong Gov Chris Patten went ahead with plans last year for expanded voter participation in Hong Kong's last elections under British rule, China made good on its threat to establish a committee that effectively functions as a government-in-waiting until 1997.

Li praised the committee and said preparation for the new Hong Kong government "has begun on all fronts and proceeds well." Hong Kong voters went to the polls Sunday for the territory's next-to-last election, in which the main pro-China party looks to build on its strong debut in polls last September.

In a glaring omission, Li did not mention the United States in his 100-minute address to the nation at the opening of the annual legislative session.

The two nations just last week narrowly averted an all-out trade war when China agreed to US demands to tighten enforcement of laws protecting copyrights, patents and trademarks.

While mentioning that China intended to protect intellectual property rights, Li did not refer to the drawn-out negotiations with the United States over the issue.

ICJ holds both India, Pakistan responsible for HR violations

GENEVA, Mar 5: India, Pakistan and local militant groups are all violating human rights in Jammu and Kashmir, according to a report by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) released on Thursday, reports AFP.

"Indian security forces are found to have committed serious abuses of human rights in Kashmir. This includes extrajudicial executions, torture, arson and rape," the ICJ said, which is one of the main independent international human rights organisations.

The report is based on a mission by ICJ jurists in Srinagar and other places in August 1993. It was updated with other reports and reactions by the governments of both India and Pakistan and presented at a press conference outside the ICJ's mission on human

rights. After heated controversy at the commission last year, the Pakistani delegation withdrew at the last minute because of apparent lack of support for a draft resolution condemning the Indian repression of the seven-year old uprising in the disputed territory.

"Indian laws are 'defective' in a number of important aspects and 'torture is virtually routine,'" Sir William Goodhart, the British head of the mission, told journalists. Extra-judicial executions ranged between 50 and 350 a year, according to estimates given to the mission.

But the report said the ICJ had no evidence that the Indian authorities had set up death squads and welcomed Indian efforts to train the military in human rights

The independent body found that a number of Indian security laws contravened international human rights standards, because "they permit detention without trial, infringe rights to freedom of speech, and contravene the presumption of innocence."

The militant groups in Kashmir are condemned for serious human rights abuses, including the murder of political opponents, kidnapping and hostage taking, intimidation of the media and extortion.

On Tuesday the European Union welcomed efforts by Indian authorities in the field of human rights in 1994 but asked New Delhi to grant swift and full access to the territory to independent observers and the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC.

Int'l arms show in UAE from Mar 19

ABU DHABI, Mar 5: More than 40 defence ministers from around the world will converge on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) this month for an arms show that is expected to bring major sales deals, organisers said Friday, reports AFP.

Ministers from Russia, South Africa, Britain, France, the Middle East and other countries will visit the March 19-23 international ground and naval weapons show along with more than 40,000 senior military delegates, they said.

"Between 40 and 50 defence ministers from the participating and non-participating countries will come to the exhibition, which will attract more than 40,000 military delegates," they said in a statement sent to AFP.

Tamil rebel boat seized for 16 hrs

TRINCOMALEE, Mar 5: A boat carrying 33 Tamil rebels was intercepted by the navy off this port city in northeastern Sri Lanka where President Chandrika Kumaratunga is holidaying, military officials said yesterday, reports AP.

The boat was detained for 16 hours but released yesterday morning after negotiations with rebel leaders, the officials said.

Kumaratunga, staying at a naval base in Trincomalee town, is scheduled to reopen today a village rebuilt five years after its destruction in the Tamil guerilla war.

This is the president's first visit to war-ravaged area since coming to power last year.

Nepal-Bhutan talks fail

KATHMANDU, Mar 5: The Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan ended Thursday four days of fruitless talks over the fate of thousands of ethnic Nepali refugees from Bhutan, officials and human rights activists said, reports Reuters.

The two nations said in a joint statement at the end of the talks that the interior ministers of the two countries would meet in Bhutan next month but officials and human rights groups saw a basic difference in identifying refugees.

"There is a difference on the construction of the categories of the refugees which means a virtual breakdown of negotiations because of the disagreement on the very basis of the talks."



Albina Nazymova (L) pays her last respect to her husband, Listyev, before the start of the funeral ceremony in Moscow on Saturday.

Russian journalist Listyev buried

MOSCOW, Mar 5: A television journalist whose assassination stunned Russia was buried yesterday the nation's biggest public outpouring of grief since human rights hero Andrei Sakharov was laid to rest in 1989, reports AP.

Huge crowds of people, many bearing flowers, lined the streets around Vladimir Listyev's apartment building and the church where a private memorial service was held. More than 5,000 others filed to the cemetery where he was buried.

The 38-year-old Listyev, shot to death outside his home Wednesday night, is presumed to have been targeted by gangsters for his influential new role as executive director of state-run Ostankino television.

But mourners remembered him as the anchorman of several popular current affairs and talk shows — a witty, charismatic journalist who championed reforms in ground breaking shows in the early days of perestroika.

Listyev was laid to rest just a few metres (feet) from Vladimir Vysotsky, probably the most popular nation's singer.

AFP adds: President Boris Yeltsin said Thursday he had fired Moscow's public prosecutor and the police chief over the killing of Listyev. Interfax news agency reported.

Meanwhile, a UNESCO report from Paris says: UNESCO's Director-General Federico Mayor condemned the murder of Listyev.

Off the Record

Major favours modern masters

LONDON: Prime Minister John Major has removed paintings by 19th century British landscape artists Turner and Constable from his office in favour of modern masters such as David Hockney and Howard Hodgkin, the Sunday Telegraph reported, says Reuter.

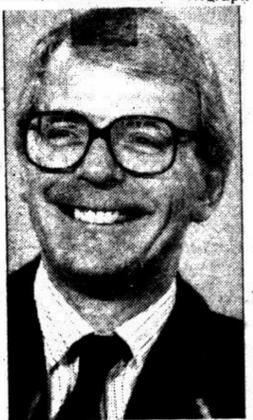
The newspaper said Major's wife Norma had overseen the change and the result had caused "enormous joy".

Major's predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, was known to enjoy the prime minister's prerogative of taking the pick of the nation's paintings.

But Major clearly did not share her penchant for scenes of rural idylls, preferring bright primary colours rather than sepia tints.

One of the paintings given pride of place now in Major's Downing Street office is Hockney's "My Parents," borrowed from the Tate Gallery.

The Telegraph said cricket-loving Major had not entirely turned his back on traditionalists. When he was asked to name his most treasured object, he chose a Turner. "It did, however, include a cricket scene," the newspaper said.



Begging near Pyramids highly profitable!

CAIRO: An Egyptian woman earned nearly 100 dollar in one hour of begging before she was arrested by police, a newspaper reported on Saturday, says AFP.

The woman criticised police for costing her a "golden opportunity" to earn money, the newspaper Al-Ahram Al-Missa' said.

The 300 Egyptian pounds (almost 100 dollar) that she earned on the sidewalks near the Pyramids of Giza is twice the average monthly salary of a government employee.

Those convicted of begging face between a month and a year in prison but the sentences do not discourage the practice.

China to ban ads abusing women

BEIJING: China is to outlaw all advertisements that "abuse" women and children by portraying them in a negative light, a report said Saturday, says AFP.

"We have noticed that some advertisements, mostly broadcast through TV, have used improper portrayals of women and children, or even abused their images," said Liu Baofu, who heads the national advertising regulatory body within the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC).

"A typical problem is that some advertisements depict women in inferior moral images and thus infringe upon women's dignity and traditional values," the China Daily quoted Liu as saying.

The official Chinese media has recently started a propaganda campaign aimed at bolstering the country's shaky record on sexual equality ahead of the world conference on women which opens in Beijing in September.

SAIC deputy director Yang Peiqing said that some advertisements were in violation of the advertising law, which became effective last month, because they carried an obvious sexual bias or promoted pornographic inclinations.

"The state will ban all those advertisements hurting women and children in line with the law," Yang said, urging stricter self-regulation among the mass media.

Muslims all over world celebrate Eid

Muslims all over the world on Friday celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr marking the end of Ramadan with traditional fervour and enthusiasm, report agencies.

PTI adds: Muslims all over Maharashtra on Friday celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr with traditional fervour and enthusiasm, marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

Dressed in their ceremonial best, men, women and children in the metropolis thronged several mosques and Eidgahs early morning to participate in mass prayers. They later exchanged greetings with members from other communities.

Dr B Syedna, head of the Bohra community, in a message to his followers, has asked them to contribute towards the progress of the country and well being of humanity.

A report from Nasik said more than 20,000 Muslims dressed in traditional clothes offered mass prayers at Golf Club grounds "mosque".

Xinhua adds: Hundreds of thousands of Muslims across China Friday celebrated the end of Ramadan with their festival of fast-breaking.

In Lhasa, capital of southwest China's Tibetan autonomous region, thousands of Muslims, dressed in their holiday best, gathered in the morning at the city's mosques to attend the traditional memorial ceremonies.

Afterwards, they went by various means of transporta-

tion to the tombs in the western and northern suburbs to offer sacrifices to their ancestors.

Reuters adds: In an address marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, President Bill Clinton on Wednesday urged Muslims in the United States and around the world to work for peace and greater understanding among peoples.

AFP adds: More than half a million South African Muslims, basking in a new respect for their faith, celebrated an end to the Ramadan fast on Friday, their spirits bolstered by a decision to suspend parliamentary debate to mark the festivities.

France ratifies treaty to ban chemical weapons

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 5: France has formally ratified the treaty to ban and destroy chemical weapons, depositing papers with UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's office, France's U.N mission said, reports Reuter.

The instruments of ratification were deposited on Thursday, making France only the fifth European Community member to have ratified the convention. The other four are Germany, Greece, Spain and Sweden.

Neither the United States nor Russia, which have the world's largest chemical arsenals, have ratified the convention.

Japan to slash troops by 20 pc

TOKYO, Mar 5: Japan will slash its military troops and hardware by about 20 per cent in response to changing needs in the post-Cold War period, a news report said yesterday, reports AP.

Kyodo News Service, quoting unnamed military sources, said the reductions in both hardware and personnel will be spelled out in a revision of the National Defense Programme Outline, which serves as the nation's basic defence policy.

Defence Agency Director General Tokuchiro Tamazawa is expected to bring the new plan when he visits the United States in May, Kyodo added.

Abdel Rahman's ex-stronghold now Egypt's biggest mosque

CAIRO, Mar 5: A former stronghold of leading Muslim fundamentalist Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and centre for anti-government militants has been turned into the biggest mosque in Egypt, reports AFP.

Thirty years after construction started and 10 years after the government wrested control of the site from the Islamists, El-Nour mosque was Monday inaugurated in the Abbassiya neighbourhood of Cairo.

The mosque covers 4,000 square metres and can take 5,000 worshippers. A dissident member of the Muslim brotherhood, Sheikh Hafez Salama, began construc-

tion of the mosque in 1965 as a gesture of defiance against then-president Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The president had attended the groundbreaking for the Coptic Orthodox patriarchy being built nearby.

Faced with financial problems and government interference, construction on El-Nour mosque remained uncompleted. But by the early 1980s the site became the headquarters for Islamists in Cairo.

While most large mosques were headed by imams back under the government line, the faithful who gathered in the unfinished foundations of El-Nour were electrified by the

passionate sermons of blind cleric Abdel Rahman.

The spiritual guide of the outlawed Jihad group currently faces charges of conspiracy in the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York that killed six people.

Salama and Abdel Rahman launched a campaign in 1985 against President Hosni Mubarak's decision to allow the return to Cairo of the Coptic pope Shenouda.

The pope was exiled in 1981 by former President Anwar Al-Sadat to a desert monastery in Wadi el-Natroun, 115 kilometres northwest of Cairo.

Also in 1985, Salama called for his supporters to stage a show of force against the government, threatening a "green march" to the presidential place if the head of state did not announce the institution of Islamic Sharia law.

The government put down the demonstration and held Salama in detention for several days.

In July 1985, it placed El-Nour as well as 140,000 other privately owned mosques under the control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and ruled that all sermons for the Jumma prayers must be approved by the ministry.

Salama, now 90, lives in

Suez where he opened a mosque named El-Shuhada, or martyrs. In August, he raised a court case demanding the cancellation of the UN population conference held in Cairo last September.

The government decided to finish construction of El-Nour mosque. Planned as a complete Islamic centre, the mosque includes a library, a school of theology, classrooms and suites for visiting scholars.

Two minarets tower 106 metres above the mosque, each crowned by a crescent, the symbol of Islam, which add another six metres to their height. Five green-tiled domes top the mosque.

An Arabesque design of green, blue, yellow and red glass, illuminated by artificial light, line the domes' interiors.

The central chandelier, made of leather and bronze, is six metres wide and hangs 12 metres above the floor. The columns and walls are covered in grey granite.

Women pray in the upper floors, hidden by mashrabeys, wooden screens which allow them to watch without being seen.

The mosque complex also has its own school for handicrafts, a projection room and international conference hall