

BRIEFLY

Ozone pollution slows tree growth:

Ozone pollution slows tree growth and even small amount in the air are enough to have an effect, US ecologists reported today.

Sandy McLaughlin and colleagues at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee measured ozone levels against tree growth over a period of five years. They found even slightly elevated levels of ozone slowed tree growth.

Iran arrests 1 for spying:

Iran has arrested a person for spying for Israel, the Ettelaat daily newspaper said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Tehran.

It quoted a security official in Karaj 40 km (25 miles) west of Tehran as saying an Israeli spy and several other people had been arrested. It did not say whether the suspect was a man or a woman and gave no further details.

Gore invited to meet Arafat:

US Vice President Al Gore has been invited to meet PLO chief Yasser Arafat in this autonomous Palestinian enclave next week. PLO officials said on Thursday. AP reports from Jericho, WB.

Arrangements for a Gore-Arafat meeting are being discussed with US envoys, said a senior official in Arafat's self-rule government, speaking on condition of anonymity.

US chopper crashes into sea:

A US Navy helicopter from the aircraft carrier, USS Independence, crashed into the Pacific Ocean off Japan on Thursday and two crew members were missing, a US Navy spokesman said.

The helicopter was on a routing operation from the Independence which is based in Yokosuka south of Tokyo. The cause of the accident was under investigation.

Menem's son dies in chopper crash:

Carlos Menem Jr, the son of Argentine President Carlos Menem, died on Wednesday in hospital soon after his helicopter crashed when it hit an electricity cable. Reuter reports from Buenos Aires.

Menem Jr, 25, died some three hours after the helicopter he was apparently piloting crashed onto a corn field 100 miles (170 km) northwest of Buenos Aires, doctors told reporters.

Pinter wins UK literary prize:

Harold Pinter won Britain's biggest literary prize on Wednesday for a lifetime's achievement as playwright and screenwriter. AP reports from London.

Pinter won the 30,000-pound (48,000 dollars) David Cohen British Literature Prize, for work ranging from his acclaimed plays "The Birthday Party" and "The Caretaker" to screenplays for such films as "The French Lieutenant's Woman" and "The Remains of The Day."

US team to test Saudi meteor site:

Scientists have journeyed to Saudi Arabia's desert for the first on site testing of what is believed to be the best preserved meteor impact site on Earth, the expedition's US sponsor said in a statement on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Dubai.

The sponsor, AM General Corporation, said American Dr Eugene Shoemaker, one of the discoverers of the Shoemaker-Levy 9 Comet which crashed into Jupiter last July led the team on Tuesday into Saudi Arabia's vast empty quarter to study the Wabar Crater site.

UN seeks aid for Sierra Leone:

UN aid agencies appealed on Wednesday for 14.6 million dollar this year to help more than 700,000 people displaced by civil war in the West African nation of Sierra Leone. AP reports from United Nations.

Part of the appeal is for more than 200,000 refugees in neighbouring Guinea. More than 500,000 people are displaced inside Sierra Leone, mostly around the capital of Freetown, the United Nations said.

Specter to declare candidacy Mar 30:

Three-term US Senator Arlen Specter announced on Wednesday he will formally declare his candidacy for the 1996 presidential race in Washington and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on March 30. Reuter reports from Washington. The senator from Pennsylvania said he would also travel around the country to announce his campaign to win the Republican nomination to challenge President Bill Clinton.

Blast damages Greek TV station:

A rocket-propelled grenade blasted one of Greece's top private television stations, Mega Channel, during its main evening news programme on Wednesday, causing extensive damage but no injuries, Reuter reports from Athens.

The station broadcast live coverage of its heavily damaged newsroom just after the blast. There was a gaping hole in one wall, and computers and other equipment were badly damaged.

Air crash claims 6 in Russia:

Six crew members were killed on Thursday, when a light cargo plane crashed on Kamchatka peninsula in the Russian far east, the Emergencies Ministry said. Reuter reports from Moscow.

A ministry spokesman said the Ukrainian airlines AN-26 slammed into a hillside 10 km (six miles) outside the locality of Ossova as it tried to land.

20 die in ethnic clashes in Ghana:

Twenty people have been killed and several wounded in inter-ethnic clashes in northern Ghana since Sunday, a toll published by the government said here on Thursday. AFP reports from Accra.

An interior ministry statement said that an overnight curfew was imposed in the Bimbila region 370 kilometres (more than 200 miles) north of Accra.

Privatisation of NASA:

A panel of experts think America's space agency should turn over to private contractors more of the space shuttle work now done by federal employees and simplify procedures for launching the craft. AP reports from Washington.

The panel said Wednesday that the space shuttle is now "a mature and reliable system" and "is about as safe as yesterday's technology will provide."

Fresh violence rocks Istanbul: 4 killed

ANKARA, Mar 16: Four people died as fresh violence rocked Istanbul late on Wednesday despite Turkish government assurances that the situation was under control after a four-day wave of rioting in two major cities, reports Reuter.

Prime Minister Tansu Ciller warned the country against the possibility of "foreign provocations."

"The state has not relinquished control at any time.... the state is stronger, more determined and braver than ever," said Ciller after Istanbul officials confirmed the four deaths in a resurgence of rioting.

But in a televised statement, she said the nation was faced "with a very big multifaceted provocation prompted by foreign circles."

Overfishing damaging world's oceans more badly than originally feared

LONDON, Mar 16: Overfishing is damaging the world's oceans more badly than originally feared, and marine parks where fishing is forbidden may be needed to help them recover, researchers said today. The researchers, working at the International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management in Manila, found that plankton and other plants at the base of the food chain are at maximum production. In a report in the science journal Nature, they said fishing and other ocean activities were profoundly affecting all life in the sea. "We have identified a new limit that people were not aware of our ability to extract food from the sea," one of the researchers, Daniel Pauly, said in a telephone interview. The fact is that at the bottom of the food there is not as much space as we anticipated... we have no way of increasing primary production in the ocean.



A Moroccan guest attending the state dinner hosted by US President Bill Clinton for King Hassan II of Morocco (L) pays her respects to the king on Wednesday in the receiving line at the White House in Washington DC. Standing alongside King Hassan II are US First Lady Hillary Clinton (2nd L) and the King's children, Prince Moulay Rashid (2nd R) and Princess Lalla Hasna (R).

US refocusing attention on Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Mar 16: Washington is refocusing its attention on Bosnia, where the "clouds of war are clearly darkening," after a crisis over UN forces was averted in neighbouring Croatia, a senior UN official said Wednesday. Secretary of State Warren Christopher will begin the process today when the brings together key Balkan players to mark the first anniversary of a federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which linked feuding Bosnian Croats and Muslims.

The president of the federation, Kresimir Zubak, as well as two members of the Bosnian collective presidency, Ejup Ganic and Tadjana Ljubic-Mijatovic, will attend. From Croatia they will be president Franjo Tudjman, Foreign Minister Mate Grancic and Defence Minister Gojko Susak. The event marks the Washington accord that established

the fragile, US-brokered federation which linked Bosnia's Muslims and Croats, who had previously been at war, and created a hoped for bulwark against further Serbian war gains. The United States regards the effectiveness of the federation as crucial to heading off a resurgence of fighting in Bosnia when a truce that took hold there in January expires at the beginning of May. "If we neglect the federa-

tion, everything else we are doing would fall apart. Its success is a prior condition for dealing with the other problems that we're facing, the official, who declined to be identified, told a news briefing. To bolster the year-old entity, which has been strained by ethnic tensions, the United States and the European Union have put together an informal support group called "friends of the federation."

Mubarak reiterates objections to unlimited renewal of NPT

TOKYO, Mar 16: President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt reiterated today his objections to unlimited renewal of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) so long as nuclear-armed Israel refused to sign up to the accord, reports AFP. Mubarak, speaking at a press conference at the end of a four-day visit to Japan, also called for efforts to ease suffering for the people of Iraq, whose government has been hit by a United Nations trade embargo.

The time has come for the international community to study how to relieve the daily life of innocent people," Mubarak said, without elaborating. Members of the UN Security Council are divided over whether to ease the restrictions against Baghdad, imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. The United Nations has offered to let Iraq sell some oil and use the proceeds for social needs, but this has been refused by its government. Mubarak's main message, however, was that it was "inconceivable for the time being" that Egypt could endorse renewal of the NPT, an issue that will be debated by the treaty's signatories at the United Nations in New York. "I cannot accept that Israel could be the only country in the region which could possess mass-destruction weapons, if all countries agree to

that, there will be no problem in agreeing to indefinite extension of the NPT." In other comments, Mubarak issued a new warning to Israel that failure to uphold the agreement, it signed with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) on Palestinian autonomy could lead to disaster. "One of the most fearful scenarios is to see (Muslim) extremists taking control," he said. Mubarak refrained from saying whether Egypt, the most populous Arab nation, would back Japan's bid to secure a permanent seat on the Security Council, saying "I don't think the time is ripe to discuss this question."

US officials in Karachi ordered to send kids home

WASHINGTON, Mar 16: The US State Department on Wednesday ordered US officials in Karachi to send their school-age children home and authorised other family members to leave Pakistan if they wished, reports Reuter. The department, announcing its first move to evacuate Americans after an attack last week that killed two US consulate officials and wounded another, also said it would continue to review the situation. Spokeswoman Christine Shelly said private US citizens "may wish to consider our ordered departure when making their travel plans" adding members of the non-official community in Karachi would be given guidance if they needed assistance leaving the country.



US military police and a crowd of Haitians gather around the body of a man killed by vigilantes on Wednesday in Port Au Prince. Eleven people have been reported killed by vigilantes since Saturday.

Van Gogh, Picasso, other's 14 stolen paintings found

JERUSALEM, Mar 16: Forteen paintings or drawings by Van Gogh, Picasso, Matisse and Degas have been found in Israel following a tip-off, police announced on Wednesday, reports AFP. Six works were discovered in a car on Saturday in Jerusalem and eight others in the Tel Aviv apartment of one of the vehicle's passengers. "Police believe the paintings were stolen during an armed robbery in Paris." Two passengers 53 year old Marc Sibbon, a tourist from France, and Muriel Ben Harush, 48, an Israeli art gallery owner are under arrest. Investigations have spread to France through Interpol, said police spokesman Eric Bar Chen.

Palestinian leaders sit to assess peace deal

TUNIS, Mar 16: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian leaders began four days of talks in Tunis on Wednesday to assess the peace deal with Israel. PLO officials said, reports Reuter. Arafat was due to brief his colleagues on his recent discussions with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and progress in implementing the 1993 accord on Palestinian self-rule. A two-day meeting of the PLO's mainstream movement the Fatah Central Council, was to be followed by a two-day PLO Executive Committee meeting. It was the first time exiled Palestinian leaders still based in Tunis have taken part in meetings of Fatah and the executive committee since Arafat and other PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) leaders moved to the self-ruled Gaza Strip last year. Previous PLO meetings held in Gaza and Cairo were boycotted by several leaders, including Farouk Kaddoumi and Mahmoud Abbas. The Fatah's meeting is also to evaluate the way the negotiations are and conducted with

Israel," said a member of Kaddoumi's office. "Some members of Fatah's council... are in favour of observing a pause in the negotiations as a protest against Israel's continuing refusal to continue implementation of the peace deal," he added. Palestinian sources said such a decision was unlikely but added that Arafat would be under growing pressure to share decision-making powers with the Palestinian leadership based in Tunis. Palestinian and Israeli negotiators wrapped up a round of talks in Cairo on Wednesday with no breakthroughs, although there were signs of enthusiasm about the chances of meeting a July deadline for Palestinian elections. Israeli leaders have yet to make up their minds on the main issue holding up full agreement — withdrawal of Israeli troops from towns in the West Bank before the vote is held. Both parties said they had agreed on the structure of an elected Palestinian council and for the first time had begun joint drafting rather than exchanging papers.

Off the Record

"Bombay" banned HYDERABAD: Authorities in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad, fearing communal violence, have banned a movie after Muslim groups protested that it upset their feelings, official said on Wednesday, reports Reuter. They banned the Telegu language version of "Bombay," a lavishly mounted love story that locks a Hindu Brahmin man in a relationship with a Muslim woman against the backdrop of religious strife which rocked India two years ago. Mohammed Amanullah Khan, a local Muslim leader said his community was upset by a sequence showing Hindu fanatics destroying a disputed mosque in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya in December 1992. Khan said Muslims objected to a scene in which the father of the male protagonist presses his grandchildren to follow Hindu customs although their mother is Muslim. They also disapproved of the main female character being shown without a Muslim veil. After "Bombay" was released on March 10, Muslim youths ransacked cinemas showing the movie, and one hall received a bomb threat that proved to be a hoax. Book on clerical crime VATICAN CITY: A scholarly book on clerical crime, including murder, witchcraft and sex, has outraged the Vatican — even though the sins are five centuries old, reports AP. The Vatican press office recently declared "Saints and Sinners" an "abuse" that should be "strongly deplored." It said author Filippo Tamburini, a priest, had published Vatican documents without permission. The Vatican rarely issues such condemnations, and three decades have passed since the Church discontinued its index of books forbidden to Catholics. After the book came out to lurid newspaper headlines last month, Tamburini was called onto the carpet by a high-level archbishop in the Vatican administration. The condemnation is all the more surprising because the book was formally presented in a Vatican meeting hall. Tamburini collected 100 supplications to the Sacred Penitentiary, the Holy See tribunal. The documents, dating from 1451-1586 and in Latin, were public statements of penitence from sinners who sought a return to their church or secular positions.

Armed Hutus preparing to attack Rwanda, Burundi

LONDON, Mar 16: BBC television on Wednesday broadcast "the first real evidence" so-called refugees camped on the Zaïrean border are actually armed Hutu guerrillas, training covertly for attacks in Rwanda and Burundi, reports AFP. The report for the programme Newswatch, focussing on the Kamayola refugee camp, near the borders of Burundi and Rwanda, contained footage of militia training at night. It reported that men in the camp, which contains about 27,000 refugees, were armed and already launching cross-border raids, and said that, ultimately, the Hutu wanted to destabilise the minority Tutsi powers in both Rwanda and Burundi. The report commented that its "first real evidence" that training was going on would be severely embarrassing for the

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, but particularly for the commanders of the defeated Rwandan army, now exiled in Zaïre, and for the Zaïrean government, who have steadfastly denied rumours of training. The military training witnessed in the report took place along the shores of the River Rusizi, bordering Burundi and Rwanda. "Increasingly this looks like flash point — a base from which both Rwandan and Burundian militias are operating, and to some extent operating together," said the report. Last September, under pressure from the Zaïrean authorities, aid agencies cleared thousands of refugees out of Bukavu, on the border between Zaïre and Rwanda.

EC condemns death threat against Rushdie

LONDON, Mar 16: The council of Europe urged its 34 member states on Wednesday to suspend ties with Iran until Tehran lifted a death threat against British writer Salman Rushdie, reports Reuter. Rushdie, who has been in hiding since Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini imposed a fatwa (death edict) six years ago saying Rushdie blasphemed against Islam in his 1988 novel "The Satanic Verses," broke cover to make a rare public speech at the meeting. Thanking the Council for its resolution condemning Iran, Rushdie said: "I do not see myself in this struggle so much as a victim, but as a combatant. I would not so much ask for your sympathy as for your solidarity in that fight." The Council passed its resolution at a meeting of its 80-strong standing committee.

But the director of Russia's largest fish processing company disagreed, blaming high federal taxes and poor government policies for the industry's woes. "The problem is a lack of good leadership in Moscow," said Yuri Didenko, general manager of the Vladivostok-based Dalmoreprodukt. "The attitude toward the fishing industry and food production in general is very bad. There is a hatred in our government toward anybody who wants to produce." Other industry experts say Russia's fleet of large factory ships and processor-trawlers are inefficient and costly. They say subsidies during the Soviet era only masked the Russian industry's unprofitable methods. Russian officials said pollock now accounts for 90 per cent of the Russian Far East fish harvest, with cod, flounder, herring and shellfish accounting for about 10 per cent.