

International



Pakistani mourners look at the bodies of 10 out of 20 people killed in Friday's rocket attack on Forward Kahuta near ceasefire line in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir on Saturday. — Reuters/UNB photo

Villagers flee home to escape fighting Indo-Pak troops continue firing on Kashmir border

JAMMU, India Jan 28: Some 200 Muslim villagers fled the Kashmir border today as Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy fire for the second day running following a rocket strike on a Pakistani mosque, reports AFP.

Indian officials said in this winter capital of Kashmir that 40 Muslim families living near the border had taken shelter in interior villages to escape the continuing border skirmishes.

"It is the first wave" of migration from the fighting, a government official said. He said the men, women and children were from six small villages on the Akhnour border, 65 kilometres (40 miles) west of here.

The official said the villagers started to move out

after seven of them were wounded by Pakistani firing overnight.

Indian defence sources said troops were exchanging heavy mechnegun fire today at seven places along the rugged frontier that divides Indian and Pakistani-held Kashmir.

An army officer said the heaviest firing was in the border area of Chicken Neck, so called because of its shape, which was the scene of bloody tank battles in 1965 during the second of three wars between India and Pakistan.

"Heavy firing has been going on throughout the night," the officer said. "But none of our men has been killed or injured."

The Pakistanis are trying to create civilian casualties,

the officer said. They fired thousands of rounds, and we fired back." He said the firing was continuing.

The officer said artillery had not been used by either side.

Indian and Pakistani troops exchange fire daily on the Kashmir border, but the fighting escalated after two rockets slammed into a mosque in a village in Pakistani-held Kashmir on Friday, killing 20 worshippers.

Pakistan accused India of firing the rockets. New Delhi denied the charge. Indian officials said Pakistani troops began heavy firing late Friday.

They said gun battles raged at 11 places along the frontier Saturday but four of them had calmed down today.

'Arafat plans to let Hamas open HQs in Gaza

GAZA, Jan 28: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat Plans to let the Islamic resistance movement Hamas open a headquarters in Gaza a PLO official said on Saturday, reports Reuters.

The official, who wished to remain anonymous made the statement after a meeting between representatives of the Palestinian authority which Arafat heads and Hamas.

The talks, the first since the establishment of a joint committee dealt with several issues including security and the release of Hamas activists held in Palestinian jails.

"President Arafat decided to set up a joint PLO-Hamas committee in line with understandings reached in Cairo between the two sides," the source said adding: "Arafat also approved the licensing of Hamas headquarters and newspaper."

Arafat's decision to grant the license and set up a joint committee resulted from reconciliation talks in Egypt last month between the Palestinian authority and Hamas, a group which violently opposes the PLO's peace deal with Israel.



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat kisses the forehead of King Hussein of Jordan upon his arrival at Marka military airport in Amman on Saturday on Arafat's second leg of his first foreign trip since being elected in historic self-rule polls a week ago. Arafat and King Hussein meet to discuss issues concerning future negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel for the final status of Palestinian territories due to start next May. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

6 rebels killed in East Timor: Six alleged pro-independence rebels were shot dead and two detained by the military in East Timor, the official Antara news agency reported yesterday from Dili, the troubled enclave's capital. AFP reports from Jakarta.

East Timor's military Commander Colonel Mahidin Simbolon, through spokesman Captain Joko Purwadi, said in Dili that a military team shot dead five alleged rebels from the pro-independence movement Fretilin in the Viqueze area Friday and another team fatally shot one alleged rebel and detained two others in the Ermera region Thursday.

KSA prince's aid on Ramadan: A Saudi prince on Saturday donated more than five million dollars to charity organisations in Riyadh to be distributed to the needy during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. AFP reports from Riyadh.

UN ends Guatemala mission: A UN team Saturday concluded a three-day mission to Guatemala after obtaining assurance the authorities were willing to resume negotiations with anti-government rebels. AFP reports from Guatemala.

UN special envoy Marrake Gouling said that the government had reiterated "its willingness to reactivate the peace process." He said the government also made it clear it was determined "to seek a permanent accord" with the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit.

Russian HR Commissioner resigns: President Boris Yeltsin on Saturday accepted the resignation of his human rights commissioner. AP reports from Moscow.

Sergei Kovalyov, an outspoken foe of Yeltsin's brutal war against Chechen separatists, had offered his resignation last week, citing the president's final recoil from the policy of democratic reforms. Kovalyov braved Russian bombs, bullets and artillery to remain in Grozny, the Chechen capital, during the long Russian siege last year.

Algerian Hamas leader shot dead: An Algerian Hamas leader, Mouloud Bezzaz, was shot dead as he left a mosque where he had attended Ramadan prayers in the town of Kasar El Boukhari South of Algiers, his party said Saturday. AFP reports from Algiers.

The assassination of Bezzaz, 46, a professor of Arabic, overnight Thursday, came at the end of a week in which 15 civilians were killed and mutilated in attacks blamed on Islamic groups. It was the first assassination of a political militant since the fasting month of Ramadan, considered by Islamic groups as auspicious for a Djihad holy war, began on January 21.

Clash leaves 6 dead in Haiti: Slumdwellers clashed with suspected thieves at dawn Saturday in violence that left at least six dead and about 100 shacks burned, AP reports from Port-Au Prince, Haiti.

It began around 5 a.m. in the La Saline slum, shortly after residents discovered the bullet-riddled body of militant grass-roots organizer Guy Jean-Pierre, a member of Fond-Touren Youth Solidarity, was killed by robbers. An infuriated mob began setting fire to a section of the slum considered home to thieves.

Quake jolts Philippines: An 5.5 magnitude earthquake rattled the southeastern Philippines early Sunday, officials said. AP reports from Manila.

Recorded at 1:48 a.m. (1748 GMT Saturday), the temblor was centered in the Philippine Sea, 127 kilometers (79 miles) northeast of Bhutan City of 848 kilometers (530 miles) Southeast of Manila.

France conducts 6th N-test in French Polynesian atoll

PARIS, Jan 28: In what could be the end of its highly unpopular nuclear testing programme in the South Pacific, France set off its sixth underground nuclear blast on a French Polynesian atoll, reports AP.

France's Defence Ministry announced that the blast had taken place at 10:30 pm Paris time on Saturday (21:30 GMT) on Fangataufa Atoll, about 750 miles (1207 kilometres).

The energy released by the blast was less than 120 kilotons. This test was carried out in order to guarantee the safety and reliability of weapons in the future," the ministry said in a statement.

Fangataufa is one of two remote atolls in French Polynesia where France has been conducting its nuclear tests.

Saturday's test was the sixth and most powerful in a series that began last September, when France broke a three-year moratorium on nuclear testing. The blasts prompted an international outcry by environmental groups and governments in the region.

Following those protests, the French government said it would scale back the number of tests it had planned from eight to six.

However, the government has refused to say exactly how many tests it will conduct. Defence Minister Charles Millon has said only that the last of the tests will come by the end of February. The fifth was on December 27.

France insists the tests are needed to ensure the vi-

ability of its independent nuclear force and to develop simulation technology making further tests unnecessary. It has promised to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty by May.

On Thursday, Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans predicted that the sixth blast, which has now been detonated, would be France's last.

He said the French government had been highly embarrassed by world condemnation of the tests and wants to end the series "sooner rather than later."

Both Australia and New Zealand as well as tiny island states were outraged over the tests, which they claim could harm the fragile environment of the South Pacific.

Rebels take control of Tajik town, want President to quit

MOSCOW, Jan 28: One of the warlords who helped bring Tajikistan's president to power on Saturday took over a southern town in the war-scarred Central Asian nation, reports AP.

The rebels were reportedly in control of the police station in Kurgan Tyube, key government buildings, and part of the road leading to Dushanbe, the capital.

News reports said they were demanding the resignation of President Emomali Rakhmonov.

It was the former Soviet republic's second internal uprising in as many days and it underscores the fragility of Rakhmonov's hardline regime, which is propped up by thousands of Russian soldiers and border guards.

Rakhmonov has for years been contending with armed opposition from the Islamic and democratic forces his gunmen defeated in Tajikistan's bloody 1992 civil war. He is also trying to cope with restive tribesmen in Tajikistan's rugged mountains.

The new uprising among the ranks of Rakhmonov's

own forces came as Russia's defense minister, Gen. Pavel Grachev, was on a visit to Dushanbe. Russia's foreign minister, the head of the security service and several other top officials were due there on Sunday.

Grachev, clearly unhappy with the situation in impoverished Russian client state, complained of infighting in the Rakhmonov regime.

"The internal political situation is getting more and more tense," he told the Interfax news agency. "And the trend is toward deterioration."

The rebellion in Kurgan Tyube is led by warlord Mukhammad Khudoberdiyev.

According to news reports and sources in Moscow that follow events in Tajikistan, Khudoberdiyev commands about 1,000 men in a so-called "special" Tajik army brigade based in Kurgan Tyube.

Oleg Panfilov, a human rights activist who monitors events in Tajikistan, said Khudoberdiyev's rebellion was the latest sign of increasing unhappiness among some warlords with how the Rakhmonov regime has divided the spoils since the civil war.

Journalist gets 35 lashes for insulting Khamenei

TEHRAN, Jan 28: A court cancelled the license of a monthly magazine and sentenced its director to six months in prison and 35 lashes for insulting Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, reports AP.

Abbas Maroufi also was banned for two years from engaging in journalism, the official Islamic Republic News Agency and several newspapers reported.

The publication license of his monthly magazine, Gardoon, was cancelled effectively shutting it down. The reports did elaborate on how Maroufi was deemed to have insulted Khamenei but they added that he also was convicted of printing fabrications.

Off the Record

Mystery of 'Man in Black' discovered

LONDON: A "mystery man" who visits the Princess of Wales at night in her Kensington Palace home is a millionaire property tycoon, Christopher Whalley, the News of the World reported Sunday, says AFP.

The mass-circulation paper said that Whalley, 40, was the "man in black" spied on several occasions getting in the back of Princess Diana's car in De Vere Gardens, next to the palace.

It published pictures of Whalley in the early morning in the same street, and leaving Diana's gym club in Chelsea within minutes of the princess, estranged wife of the heir to the British throne.

The paper quoted an unnamed friend of the princess as saying "she" determined that people will not see her out and about with men, even if they are just friends.

Statue dating back to Roman era unearthed

DAMASCUS, Syria: A marble statue of a Roman commander has been unearthed in northeastern Syria, the official news agency reported Saturday, reports AP.

The arms and head of the 2-metre (6-foot-6) figure were missing. But the short military uniform suggested it depicted a Roman commander, the Syrian Arab News Agency said.

It was discovered at an area known as Al-Fukhairiya in the Al-Hasaka region, some 640 kilometres (400 miles) northeast of Damascus.

Nearby, archaeologists found a collection of earrings, bracelets and other gold jewelry dating to Byzantine era, the agency said.

Suu Kyi denies junta's accusations

YANGON, Jan 28: Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi denied government accusations that she has become dictatorial in her running of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, reports Reuters.

"There is no practice of dictatorship in the NLD party," the Nobel Peace laureate told supporters late on Saturday.

Suu Kyi's remark was made after official, state-run Burmese-language newspapers carried a commentary asking her to step down because she had become dictatorial.

In the commentary entitled "give up little sister," Suu Kyi was accused of ignoring the will of the people in her leadership of the pro-democracy party.

The commentary, the latest in a series of criticisms against the democracy leader, said 50-year old Suu Kyi

used "feminine wiles" over other party members to get her way.

"I would like to request you give up little sister, in order to raise the political impression of the party," said the commentary.

It suggested the NLD try to find a way to change its decision to withdraw from military-sponsored constitutional talks.

Suu Kyi said late last year the NLD, which she helped found, was pulling out of the talks because they did not represent the will of the people.

About 590 delegates, mostly mostly hand-picked by the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), are involved in the constitutional convention which has been meeting intermittently since 1993 to draft guidelines of a new constitution.



Israeli soldiers stand near a corpse of a Palestinian fighter member of the Damascus-based Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine General Command headed by Ahmed Jibril. An Israeli army patrol killed on Saturday four Palestinian guerrillas as they tried to infiltrate the Israeli-occupied "security zone" in South Lebanon. — AFP/UNB photo

Jerusalem won't be divided again, says Peres

JERUSALEM, Jan 28: Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said late on Saturday that Jerusalem, claimed as a capital by both Israel and the Palestinians, will never be divided again, reports Reuters.

"It will be idiotic to make out of Jerusalem a Berlin — to put a wall in her heart, we are not going to do it," Peres said in a speech to a convention in Jerusalem of orthodox Jews from the United States.

"Jerusalem is not on my agenda for the following reason: Jerusalem was never in history an Arab capital, yet the Jewish people have never had a capital but Jerusalem," he said.

Israel and the PLO, which in 1993 forged a framework deal on Palestinian self-rule, agreed to defer the issue of Jerusalem to talks due to begin in May on a permanent peace settlement because it was so problematic.

Unrest on in Bahrain despite govt crackdown

MANAMA, Jan 28: Bahrain on Saturday reported more arrests and fresh arson attacks in Shiite Muslim villages despite a government crackdown on unrest in the Gulf Arab state, reports Reuters.

Arson fires destroyed two cars in the capital Manama and 10 power transformers in four Shiite villages on Thursday and Friday, said an Interior Ministry statement carried by the official Gulf News Agency.

"The security forces, anxious to protect citizens, residents and their properties and to preserve security and stability, are continuing their extensive measures to chase and arrest elements responsible for fires and sabotage," it said.

The people arrested during riots and sabotage which took place recently stood at 180, the statement said. A list of the detainees had been sent to the Justice Ministry, it added.

The Interior Ministry said on Wednesday that it was holding 544 people, including 174 arrested in recent disturbances.

Anti-government protests by some Shiite Muslims erupted in December 1994 to demand the release of political prisoners and the restoration of parliament dissolved in 1975. The unrest faded last April but resumed this month.

AP adds two dissidents detained in the latest bout of civil unrest have been forced after they went on a hunger strike, while the health of two others is deteriorating, the opposition said Saturday.

But a government source, speaking on condition of anonymity, denied the report and said the detainees were sent to a hospital for a routine checkup.

Gorbachev nominated for presidency

MOSCOW, Jan 28: A small group of supporters on Saturday nominated Mikhail Gorbachev to the post of Russian president, Gorbachev, the last Soviet president, did not attend the meeting, reports AP.

Gorbachev has not said he'll run. But he hasn't said he won't, either. And he has been bitterly critical of President Boris Yeltsin for years.

It is highly unlikely that Gorbachev, whom polls say is one of Russia's more unpopular public figures, could be a serious candidate.

Threat of Chinese military might spurs arms buildup in Asia

TOKYO, Jan 28: The threat of China's military buildup has spurred other Asian countries to rearm at a rate not seen since the Cold War, analysts here say, reports AFP.

"A major reason for the arms build up is that many of these Asian countries have become richer and now have money to buy weapons," said Masashi Nishihara, chief researcher at Japan's National Institute for Defense Studies.

But another big reason is China's perceived military build up which is worrying Taiwan as seen as a growing threat, Nishihara added.

Regional arms purchases

have not yet reached an alarming level, analysts say.

But they point out that many Asian countries are actively acquiring sophisticated military hardware in stark contrast to most Western countries, which generally have been slashing military budgets since the end of the Cold War.

Singapore increased its military expenditure 91 per cent from 1985 to 1994 in real terms while South Korea boosted spending 59 per cent over the same period and Japan's defence budget was up 58 per cent.

The Philippines increased spending 37 per cent according to international studies.

The threat of China in the regional balance of power materialised last year in the Spratly Islands when territorial markers put up by the Chinese Navy on a disputed shoal were blown up by the Philippines.

The Spratlys which are believed to have large oil deposits, are also claimed in whole or in part by Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam.

"Chinese activity near the islands was a big shock for ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) as well as for other countries including Japan," a Japanese diplomat said.

ASEAN groups Brunei, In-

donesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Tensions between China and Taiwan have contributed to a sense of instability in Asia particularly since Beijing has repeatedly said that it does not rule out using force against the Taipei government if it declared independence from the mainland or in the case of foreign interference.

China's armed forces suffer from a high a level of obsolete equipment despite defence spending increases around 20 per cent albeit amid high inflation.

But analysts said real de-

pendence spending by China was difficult to estimate due to a lack of transparency in accounts and a modernisation drive within the navy and the air force.

China has bought state of the art weapons from Russia including powerful Sukhoi 27 Fighter planes which it reportedly plans to assemble itself later.

The current military build up in Asia began in the mid 1980s amid tension triggered by the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and with the former Soviet Union then still wielding might influence in the region.

Both of these threats have disappeared and China now

Iraq claims rebuilding its air force

BAGHDAD, Jan 28: Iraq said on Saturday it had completely rebuilt its air force after it was devastated in the 1991 Gulf War, reports AFP.

"We have managed to rebuild what was destroyed and restore the capacity of our air force so it can guarantee the defence of our country," air force Commander Khalud Khattab told the press.

"Our technicians have shown great skill in getting the planes going again," Khattab said in an interview marking the fifth anniversary of the Gulf War against US-led multinational coalition.

US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Winston Lord said last week in Manila that the mainland Chinese were clearly building up their capability for the Taiwan Strait, for South China Sea.

The Japanese government has made regular officials requests to Beijing for greater transparency of its military programme.

Defence analysts said that the regional military build up is also fuelled by competition for prestige among ASEAN members and a market which rewards purchasers