

US sends another warship to monitor mounting tensions

China to invade Taiwan if it declares independence

BEIJING, Mar 11: Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen warned the United States today it could not treat Taiwan like a "protectorate" and reaffirmed his country's intention to invade if Taiwan declares independence, reports AFP.

Qian's comments came after the United States ordered the Aircraft Carrier Independence and its battle group moved "closer" to Taiwan in reaction to China's war games around the island.

According to the Washington Post, President Bill Clinton has ordered a second aircraft carrier, the nuclear-powered USS Nimitz and another support group, to the region.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said the sending of the Independence was to avoid any "miscalculation" by China.

Qian, addressing a televised press conference at the National People's Congress, said there was no change in China's "consistent policy" of seeking peaceful reunification with Taiwan, which Beijing re-

gards as a renegade province. But, he added, "we have never undertaken not to resort to force."

If foreign forces invaded Taiwan of the island declared independence, "we will not sit back idly indifferent," he said, adding the main purpose of the exercises was to demonstrate the Chinese government has the determination and ability to safeguard our territorial integrity.

"On this matter, no foreign party should make irresponsible comments," he said, referring particularly to US criticism of the exercises as "erroneous and reckless."

Reuter from Washington adds: The United States said on Sunday it was adding a guided-missile frigate and a destroyer to a naval task force monitoring mounting tension between China and Taiwan.

The frigate, the McClusky, and the destroyer Hewitt got under way on Sunday from Yokosuka, Japan, to join the Aircraft Carrier Independence and the destroyer O'Brien, off

Taiwan, the US Pacific Fleet said.

Earlier on Sunday, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said the Independence battle group was being moved closer to Taiwan as he warned China against "risky" acts.

China began missile tests off Taiwan's two main ports on Friday. It said on Saturday it would stage additional war games from Tuesday to March 20 in the 220-km (137-mile) Taiwan Straits.

The Independence is a forest-class carrier of a type that typically carries 70 to 80 aircraft and 4,500 service personnel. It entered international waters between Taiwan and Okinawa late last week.

South of Taiwan, the US Aegis Cruiser Bunker Hill is conducting operations in an area where it may monitor China's missile firings, the Pentagon said.

Christopher, speaking on the NBC programme "Meet the Press," said the United States was eager to make sure that

the Independence and its support ships "are in a position to be helpful if they need to be."

Asked whether the United States would come to Taiwan's aid militarily if it were attacked by China, he replied: "I don't want to get into operational details."

Meanwhile, Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui said today that his government would handle mounting tensions with China carefully, adding that the island has made "complete" preparations.

"For the safety of the people, we will handle every single thing very carefully," Lee told a campaign rally.

They are testing if the 21 million in Taiwan will be frightened. Let me tell you all, the government already has made complete preparations," added Lee in a speech shown on state-funded television.

China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping now backs the use of force to "safeguard" reunification with Taiwan, a leading Hong Kong newspaper said today quoting Beijing sources.

Off the Record

Unlucky 18!

JERUSALEM: In 20 years on Jerusalem's No. 18 line, driver Ephraim Yezzer had never seen his bus so empty.

"I have no passengers except for soldiers and journalists," he sighed as he rolled by one of two sites where suicide bombers killed 44 at exactly the same day and time on two previous Sundays.

"They have achieved their goal," he said. "They have filled people with terror."

The No. 18 bus is one of Jerusalem's best known routes, a snake path that circumnavigates the predominantly Jewish western half of the city.

Most early Sunday mornings, soldiers on their way back to base after weekend leaves fill the buses to capacity.

That was probably why Hamas, the militant Islamic group behind the two Sunday morning No. 18 bombings on February 25 and March 3, spoke of "military" targets on the buses.

E=mc2 in auction

NEW YORK: Everything is relative — in auctions as well as physics, reports AP.

A description of the theory of relativity — E=mc2, or energy equals mass times the speed of light squared — handwritten by Albert Einstein, brought dirhams 1.2 million the last time it was sold. It's going on the auction block again and this time, nine years later, the mass of money it is expected to bring has grown to dirhams 6 million. "Nine years, at least in this world, is an eternity," said David Redden, a senior vice president of marketing at Sotheby's.

The 72-page manuscript going up for bids March 16 is a lengthy review of what is now known as Einstein's special theory of relativity. The famous equation changed physics by demonstrating that time was not absolute and that mass and energy were equivalent.

The yellowing pages are covered with the scientist's meticulous penmanship, including neat corrections, diagrams and mathematical formulas.

Israel praises PLO for crackdown on Hamas

JERUSALEM, Mar 11: The Israeli government praised Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's crackdown on Muslim militants ahead of a "summit of peacemakers" intended to encourage efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict peacefully, reports Reuter.

"I must say that in the last few days, Arafat has made a bit of a beginning — but we hope for more," Prime Minister Shimon Peres said in a speech in Tel Aviv on Sunday.

"I don't want to hand out grades but the mosques have been checked, imams (Muslim priests) have been arrested and hundreds of top Hamas people have been arrested," he said, referring to the PLO's response to Islamic suicide bombings in Israel.

Peres and Arafat, with leaders of 31 countries including US President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin are to meet in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh on Wednesday.

Tickets of Chun, Roh's trial session fetch \$640

SEOUL, Mar 11: The price of scalpers' tickets for the opening session of the trial of former South Korean president Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo soared to a high of 640 dollars today, reports said.

Scalpers have demanded up to 500,000 won (640 dollars) for admission tickets for today's trial, from the 100,000 won asked for Roh's first graft trial on February 26, Yonhap News Agency said.

Hectic competition to get admission to the tightly controlled Seoul district criminal court has forced hundreds of people to queue for two nights outside in zero temperatures.

"It's not just that the trial is extremely important, but people had to spend two nights to get a ticket," a citizen complained.

Russia to sign accords with China in April

BEIJING, Mar 11: Russian President Boris Yeltsin will visit China in late April and sign several agreements, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen said today, reports Reuter.

The last few years had seen peace along China's long border with Russia and other independent former Soviet states and ties with Moscow were developing normally, Qian told a news conference.

He gave no details of expected discussions with Yeltsin during his long-delayed visit to China and did not say what agreements would be signed.

However, he said China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan had recently initiated an accord on military links to guarantee peace along the borders with China and this was expected to be signed later by the heads of state involved.



The EU foreign ministers pose for the traditional family picture on the second day of their informal meeting in Palermo on Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

'Pakistan to conduct N-test only if its survival threatened'

ISLAMABAD, Mar 11: Pakistan will conduct a nuclear test and develop atomic weapons only if the country's survival is directly threatened, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said Sunday, reports AP.

Despite increased tensions with neighbouring rival India, Benazir said the worsening relations would not trigger a nuclear arms race in South Asia.

"We have a clear policy about our peaceful nuclear programme and will stick to it unless threatened," Benazir was quoted as saying by state-run media. "Presently we don't feel there is any threat to Pakistan's security."

Benazir was responding to a Washington Post article reporting Pakistan's alleged preparations to conduct an underground nuclear explosion.

Satellite photographs show that a mountain in the southwestern province of Baluchis-

tan near the border with Afghanistan has been excavated for an atomic blast, the Post story said.

United States intelligence officials fear Pakistan may detonate a nuclear test device if India follows through with a suspected test of its own.

India conducted a nuclear test in 1974, and in December sources in the intelligence community indicated India may be preparing to test a second device.

Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao denied the reports.

Benazir would not rule out matching an Indian test, saying "it could have serious consequences." The Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

Both Pakistan and India say they have the technology to build atomic weapons.

Analysts in Pakistan fear an Indian nuclear test would leave Benazir no choice but to shift

the country's atomic energy programme towards weapons development.

"If the Indians are going to do this, it is going to be very difficult for any government to resist responding," said Institute for Strategic Studies analyst Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema.

There is a strong lobby in Pakistan that does not want to weaponise its nuclear programme, but they could be totally disarmed if India tests again," he said.

South Asia's delicate balance of power between arch-enemies Pakistan and India has been teetering toward an all out arms race in recent months with New Delhi's recent successful test of an advanced surface-to-surface missile.

The medium- to long-range Indian Prithvi missile is capable of delivering a nuclear warhead into Pakistan.



Palestinian policemen show mines to the media confiscated from the armed wing of the Islamic Hamas movement "Ezz El-Din Al-Qassam", at the police centre in Gaza City on Sunday. A group of armed Hamas members, wanted by Israeli army, was arrested by the Palestinian police in Gaza City Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

Velayati to meet Mahathir: Iran's foreign minister arrived Sunday to meet with Malaysia's prime minister and talk about cooperation between the two nations and the reconstruction of Bosnia, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Alli Akbar Velayati said he would convey a message to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad from Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani inviting Mahathir to attend the opening of a railway network between Iran and Turkmenistan in May.

6 killed in Grozny mine blasts: At least four Russian soldiers and two elderly women were killed in a mine blast near the Mikrorayon district of the Chechen capital Grozny on Monday, correspondents and witnesses said, AFP reports from Grozny.

An AFP reporter who was at the scene shortly after the blast saw the bodies of the two dead women at nearby house and a wrecked Russian Kamaz truck with blood over the driver's seat and cabin. A witness said at least four Russian soldiers were killed.

8 scientists win King Faisal Award: Eight scientists and scholars received the 1996 King Faisal Award on Sunday, AP reports from Riyadh.

The award, instituted in 1979, is the Gulf region's equivalent of the Nobel Prize. It includes a commemorative 200-gram (7-ounce) gold medal and cash award of 750,000 Saudi riyals (dirhams 200,000).

Italian columnist Rosselli dead: Colette Rosselli, an artist and longtime advice columnist, has died. She was 83, AP reports from Rome.

She died Friday, said associates of her husband, Indro Montanelli, a veteran journalist and commentator. Rosselli suffered a stroke in January and returned last week from the hospital to the couple's Rome apartment, the ANSA news agency reported Sunday.

Turkish Islamic leader held: Police have captured the leader of an outlaw Islamic group for the 1990 killing of a prominent journalist who denounced Islamic fundamentalism, a report said Sunday, AP reports from Istanbul.

Irfan Cagirci, leader of Islamic Action, the Turkish branch of Iran's radical Hezbollah, was caught Friday in Istanbul's residential Kadikoy district, the Hurrivet newspaper said.

US warns Serbs against aggressive moves

TUZLA AIR BASE, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mar 11: Calling Serb leaders' threats to NATO-led forces irresponsible, a top US Army official warned Sunday that the Americans would respond forcefully to aggression by any faction, reports AP.

The 1st Armored Division is heavily armed and fully equipped to deal with anything in the nature of a military threat, Army Undersecretary Joe R. Reeder told a new conference after visiting US forces.

Reeder also serves as the Army's focal point for international affairs, especially those involving NATO.

His comments came in response to statements by Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and military commander Gen. Ratko Mladic that the NATO-led peace force would pay heavily if it tried to arrest them for war crimes and trial at the international war crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

The two Serb leaders were interviewed by the private Mega channel network of Athens, Greece. According to the Mega reporter, Mladic grew irritated when a guard reported that a Bosnian Serb area had been surrounded by NATO-led forces.

"For the first one that approaches, use weapons," Mladic was quoted as saying. "That will be a message for all the rest of them."

Karadzic said NATO forces, which include about 18,000 Americans, "can't arrest me. They should not even think of that. I am going to travel whenever I feel need to travel... I don't know how long this farce of a court in the Hague is going to last. But I think it is going to last until our elections or elections in the US."

Reeder warned Karadzic he would face arrest if spotted by American troops.

Despite the renewal of democracy in 1988, Pakistani censors remain hyper sensitive, often butchering scripts with political overtones. Under Pakistan law, all productions have to be passed by the state censor board.

Prominent playwright and journalist Imran Aslam, whose trail-blazing "Lao to Qatal Nama Mera" (bring me my death warrant) paved the way for politically based plays here, has had several scrips completely slashed.

"All scrips are vetted for political content," Aslam says. "They (the censors) are happy to see vulgarly flourish but are scared of plays that draw the unconverted masses."

Street theatre has come of age in Karachi in recent years with dozens of small amateur groups taking entertainment and theatre to people's doorsteps. The small one act plays are usually a satire, biting indictments of society and politics.

"A certain ambiguity has crept in. It is harder to write plays with no tangible enemy," Aslam says.

"The anguish has not come out yet. People are still trying to come to terms with the violence," he adds.

"People leave such plays extremely disturbed and agitated," says Shirvance. He does not see any catharsis value emerging yet.

Karachi's bloodshed has also stained canvasses with anguished works reflecting the prevalent sombre mood.

"There are a number of artists whose work is being affected by the environment,"

New Australian govt sworn in

SYDNEY, Mar 11: Prime Minister John Howard and his Conservative government were formally sworn in today, reports AP.

Howard, who romped to victory nine days ago in an election which ended 13 years of Labour rule, was sworn in as the nation's 25th prime minister along with his 27 ministers by Governor General Sir William Deane in Canberra.

Reuter adds from Canberra, Australian Conservative Prime Minister John Howard, who won power with a landslide election victory a week ago, officially assumed power today.

Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer told reporters the new government would be tighter and more efficient than the outgoing 13-year-old Labour administration.

Disturbing form of theatre, art emerging in Karachi

KARACHI, Mar 11: A disturbing form of theatre and art is slowly emerging in this violent city with avant-garde plays and brooding canvasses reflecting the chaos and mayhem of Pakistan's commercial capital, reports AP.

Several upcoming plays use the backdrop of Karachi's violence, in which more than 2,000 people have been killed over the past fourteen months.

Last November's highly acclaimed "Marnay Ke Baad Kya Hoga" (What will happen after Death) showed to packed audiences every night. Penned by a journalist, the Macabre play touched a chord in the audience.

The play focussed on four characters gunned down on Karachi's streets, who rise from their graves demanding

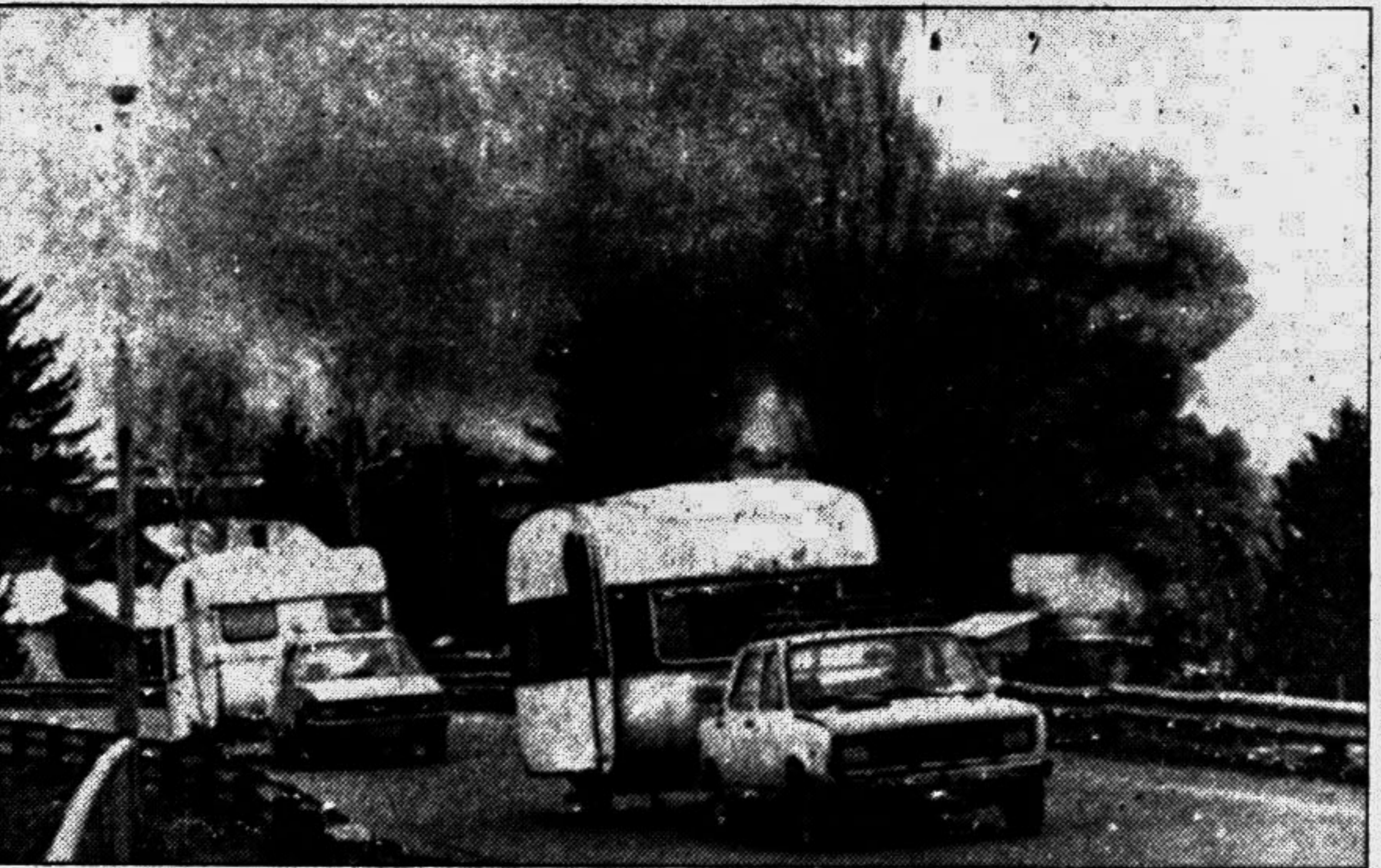
Wanted MQM leader killed in Karachi

KARACHI, Mar 11: One of Karachi's most wanted militants was killed along with one of his colleagues in an armed clash with security forces in Karachi early today, police said, reports AP.

Authorities named Naem Shaiti as one of the front line terrorists of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) which represents Urdu speaking migrants from India and Tehir descendants who have settled in the Pakistan port city.

The MQM has been at loggerheads with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government for months, accusing it of discrimination against Muslims.

The political violence which has wracked Karachi for the past 14 months and claimed more than 2,000 lives



Serbs vehicles pass burning houses as they leave the Serb-held suburb of Ildiza on Saturday before it reverts to the control of the mainly Muslim government next Tuesday. A fresh wave of arson broke out yesterday. — AFP/UNB photo

BJP to introduce state funding of polls

NEW DELHI, Mar 11: India's main opposition, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said on Sunday it would introduce state funding of elections if it was voted to power in the general election this year, reports Reuter.

"It would be in the interest of democracy if we prohibit private funding of elections altogether and take steps to bring down poll expenses," party president LK Advani was quoted by the Press Trust of India (PTI) as saying.

Advani was speaking in the southern city of Coimbatore on the second day of a country-wide campaign linked to upcoming general elections that must be held by June.

Election funding is a key issue in the elections following a

political corruption scandal linked to alleged payments by an illegal foreign exchange, or "Hawala," dealer to politicians and bureaucrats.

Advani resigned last month his lower house, or Lok Sabha, seat to face charges after being named by federal investigators in the bribes-for-favours scandal in which more than 20 ruling party and opposition leaders have been charged.

Advani says he is innocent, and his party has accused Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao of hoodwinking political opponents named in the scandal with the help of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) that he supervises.

Seven of Rao's own cabinet colleagues have quit to face corruption charges in the 18-million dollars scandal.

For surveillance flight to Iraq Jordan allows US jets to use its territory

AMMAN, Mar 11: Prime Minister Abdul-Karim Al-Kabarti said on Sunday that US fighter jets, to be briefly deployed in Jordan next month, will carry out surveillance flights over southern Iraq, reports Reuter.

It will be the first time Jordan has allowed allied war planes to use its territory to fly over Iraq — reflecting a growing closeness with Washington after being at odds over Jordan's backing for Iraq during the 1990 Gulf crisis.

Kabarti told reporters on returning home from talks in Washington the deployment of 34 US fighter jets was part of previously-scheduled war games to train the armed forces due to receive 16 F-16 aircraft later this year.

He said Amman asked for the exercises.

"But while in Jordan, the American jets will do surveillance flights over southern Iraq in implementation of UN (Gulf War ceasefire) resolutions," Kabarti said.

"Jordan is committed to these resolutions," Jordanian government officials told Reuters on Saturday the jets would help enforce the "no-fly" zone set up by the United States and its allies over southern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War.

Jordan, pursuing a tougher political line to bring about change in Iraq since top Iraqi defections in August, has stressed it will not allow its territory to be used to launch attacks against Iraq or others.

The US fighters will arrive in Jordan by mid-April for two months to augment US forces near Iraq and Iran.

Tibetan exiles protest against Chinese rule

KATHMANDU, Mar 11: More than 2,000 Tibetan refugees living in the Nepalese capital Sunday took to the streets to protest against the occupation of Tibet by China, witnesses reported.

Tibetans observe March 10 as a protest day against Chinese occupation. The day marks the 37th anniversary of the uprising against Chinese rule following which the Tibetan spiritual leader and tens of thousands of his followers went into exile.

Prior to the demonstration, the Tibetans held a public meeting and a mass prayer.

But before the Tibetans could reach the Chinese embassy here, they were stopped by Nepalese riot police who resorted to a mild baton charge to disperse the crowd. Three were briefly arrested.

AP from Brussels adds, Tibetan exiles and supporters from around Europe took to

the streets of Brussels on Sunday for a colorful but peaceful protest of Chinese rule.

Police estimated some 3,500 people joined the flag waving crowd that marched from the Chinese embassy to the European Parliament to mark the 37th anniversary of a Tibetan uprising that was put down by Chinese troops.

Tibetan exiles in traditional dress and supporters from as far afield as Hungary, Sweden and Italy joined the march, organised by various European groups.

The demonstration was led by Samdhong Rinpoche, president of the Tibetan parliament in exile. He was received outside the European Union's headquarters by EU Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Emma Bonino.

EU officials said Bonino's decision to attend the demonstration upset some other members of the Union.