

International

Iranian military cargo plane crashes: 86 killed

TEHRAN, Iran, Mar 15: An Iranian military cargo plane carrying soldiers and their families has crashed in the mountains of northeastern Iran, killing 86 people, the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency said Friday, reports AP.

Thursday's crash left no survivors, the agency quoted an unidentified official as saying. The aircraft was carrying 86 passengers and crew, Iranian radio and television said. Police, soldiers and Red Crescent workers searched for the wreckage of the aircraft amid heavy snow and freezing temperature in the mountains but were unable to find any trace of the plane.

The US-made C-130 lost contact with the control tower at Mashhad airport at 6 pm (1430 GMT) Thursday, more than an hour after taking off for Mashhad from a base in western Ahvaz province.

The pilot had reported technical difficulties before losing contact with tower, Tehran radio reported.

The plane crashed 24 kilometers (15 miles) from Mashhad, the Iranian news agency reported. Mashhad, 700 kilometres (435 miles) northeast of Tehran, is a city holy to Shiite Muslims.

Iran's air force is a mix of Russian, US and Chinese aircraft. Fewer than half the US aircraft are believed fit to fly.

Under a US embargo that dates back to Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, the Iranians cannot buy US aircraft or air-planes containing US made components.

The C-130 is common throughout the world and spare parts are generally available on the open market.

Ex-DPRK PM passes away

SEOUL, South Korea, Mar 15: Former North Korean Premier Kang Song San, who was replaced last month and believed ill, has died, South Korean news reports said Saturday, reports AP.

South Korea's KBS television, quoting anonymous sources in Tokyo, said Kang had died and that former deputy premier and economic technocrat Kim Tal Hyon has been agreed upon as his replacement.

Last month, North Korea disclosed that it had named its then deputy premier Hong Song Nam as acting premier, replacing Kang.

The KBS report made no mention of when Kang is said to have died. But Seoul's national daily Dong-A Ilbo, quoting government sources, said Kang died Feb. 22, one day after North Korean Defense Minister Choe Kwang, 78, died of a heart attack.

AI urges Albanians to respect human rights

European mediator calls for int'l force to halt anarchy in Albania

TIRANA, Mar 15: With helicopters coming under fire as hundreds of foreigners fled chaos, a European mediator has called for an international force to halt Albania's anarchy, reports AP.

"There is no question of these people resisting a foreign intervention," said former Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky, who heads a team from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. "They want them to help restore order."

Vranitzky met separately with Premier Bashkim Fino and insurgent leaders Friday as US, German and Italian military helicopters evacuated foreign residents from the Albanian capital.

After two US Cobra gunships came under fire — with one of them firing back — the United States suspended its evacuation. US aircraft rescued 408 people, but dozens of Americans were stranded at a diplomatic compound under US Marine protection.

A few Albanians tried to join in, with one family running toward the open door of an Italian helicopter. As the Chopper took off without them, the father sobbed in panic and despair,

holding his ill 6-year-old daughter in his arms.

Moments later, a British helicopter landed to unload paratroopers. The family rushed again, the child's red patent-leather shoes flying across the pitch. They climbed aboard. The chopper's destination was unknown, although many were ferrying refugees and foreigners to ships in the Adriatic.

The evacuation follows weeks of violence sparked by the collapse of high-risk investment schemes in which nearly every Albanian family lost money. Anti-government anger turned into a violent revolt with only one defined aim: To get President Sali Berisha out.

The insurrection, which started in the south, spread north in recent days. Looting, arson and random gunfire were reported Friday by northern residents reached by telephone. At least 23 people were reported killed and scores injured Thursday and Friday.

Aid agencies prepared Friday to send emergency supplies to Albania's hospital and orphanages, said Michael Kliener of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The ICRC sent

enough surgical aid to treat about 400 wounded earlier this week, but has been hampered since by the closure Wednesday of Tirana's airport.

The random nature of Albanian's violence was clear Friday.

Associated Press reporters watching from a Tirana hotel saw gunfire — apparently from anti-aircraft weapons — in the direction of US helicopters.

A Cobra pilot spotted a man carrying what appeared to be a shoulder-mounted surface-to-air missile. The missile was never launched, contrary to initial Pentagon reports, and the threat faded after the Cobra fired its guns.

As a German chopper hovered, two police vans drove by firing wildly and sending the crowd diving for cover. The Germans returned fire. A bullet hole was later discovered in one of six German choppers taking evacuees to Podgorica, the capital of neighbouring Montenegro. Gunfire also hit an Italian helicopter, the Defence Ministry said in Rome.

The Germans safely evacuated 120 people, including 11 German diplomats and foreigners from 20 other nations.

Britain, France and Greece also evacuated nationals. An Italian ferry with more than 1,000 people landed safely in Brindisi, Italy, late Friday night.

Britain firmly ruled out military intervention in statements issued in London, and in Washington, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said, "I don't believe there's an outside force anywhere in the world that could impose order on every village" in Albania.

Reuters adds from London: Amnesty International issued an urgent appeal to Albanians on Friday to respect human rights and refrain from mutilation, murder and torture as the country spirals into anarchy.

"We hope all concerned to respect fundamental principles of human rights and humanitarian law, which are applicable to all persons, at all time and in all circumstances, whether in time of peace or armed conflict," the London-based rights group said in a statement.

Amnesty said basic respect for human rights should extend to members of the armed forces who lay down their arms or are unable to fight.



French paratrooper commandos evacuate a mother and her two children during an airlift operation on the beach of the Albanian locality of Durres, Friday. Foreign nationals continued to pour out Friday of Albania shaken by civil unrest.

— AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

He did it to make his mark on history

TAIPEI: A Taiwanese journalist who hijacked a civilian passenger airliner to mainland China was a unhappy loner who desperately wanted to make his mark on history, newspaper reports said here today, says AFP.

Liu Shan-Chung, 46 was described by some friends and former colleagues as a hard-working person but temperamental with a drinking problem, who had suffered a string of professional and personal failures.

He was orphaned at an early age after his parents were killed in the civil war between Communists and nationalists, the Min Chung Daily news, where he worked for 10 years said.

"His miserable early years had made it difficult for him to integrate himself in the society... a tragic figure caused by history," Min Chung said.

Liu had told friends that he was to "do something big for history... if being pushed too hard," the paper said.

On Monday he doused himself in gasoline and forced a Far East Air transport corp. aircraft on an internal route to land in China's southeastern city of Xiamen.

Divorce becoming common in Shanghai

BEIJING: Divorce is becoming more common in Shanghai while remarriages remain low, according to the findings of a survey reported today by the official Xinhua news agency, reports AFP.

The number of divorced people stood at 45,300 in 1995, an increase of 40 per cent from 1990, according to results quoted by the agency.

One out of every 100 people above 25 is divorced, the findings showed. Shanghai has a registered permanent population of just over 13 million.

About 20,000 people a year had remarried since 1990 — more than in the 1980s, but still far below the number of people divorced annually.

The survey concluded that difficulties involving property, housing and children, as well as a traditional negative attitude toward remarriage among older people posed the major obstacles to remarriage.

Jakarta won't allow int'l observers to investigate May 29 polls

JAKARTA, Mar 15: The Indonesian government said foreign observers invited to monitor the country's May 29 general elections would not be allowed to investigate or pass judgement, the Jakarta Post newspaper reported today, reports Reuters.

"We are letting foreigners come to see how the election proceeds. But it is our right to judge the election," Soetjo, Director-General of Socio-Political Affairs at the Interior Ministry, was quoted as saying on Friday.

"We did not do anything but watch when we were invited by governments of neighbouring countries to observe their elections," he added.

Interior Minister Yogie Menet said last week that Indonesia would invite neighbouring and other countries to monitor the election to be contested by the ruling Golkar Party and the two minority parties, the Indonesian Demo-

cratic Party (PDI) and the United Development Party (PDP).

It will be Indonesia's first election to be monitored by foreign observers, the Jakarta Post said. The decision appeared to be a compromise to the two minority parties which have complained about irregularities in the past elections.

Soetjo said the foreigners would be considered to be meddling in Indonesia's internal affairs if they went beyond the granted privilege of observing the polls.

He said the government was completing the registration of invitees, who are likely to come from Southeast Asian countries.

The draft agenda will be circulated among member countries before its adoption, said the sources, adding that preliminary talks will start on May 5 with a SAARC foreign secretaries meeting.



US President Bill Clinton leaves St Mary's Medical Centre in West Palm Beach, FL, in a wheelchair after being treated for a damaged quadriceps tendon in his knee Friday. Dr Joel Cohen, (L-front), a St Mary's orthopedic surgeon, escorts the president to his car. — AFP/UNB photo

Israel accused of undermining ME peace process

BEIRUT, Mar 15: Lebanon on Friday marked the 19th anniversary of Israel's first invasion of the south with a five-minute work stoppage in the capital and rallies and marches throughout the country, reports AP.

President Elias Hrawi accused Israel of undermining the US-sponsored Middle East peace process by refusing to end its occupation of a border enclave and insisting on building Jewish settlements in traditionally Arab east Jerusalem.

Israel has said the border zone is needed to protect towns in northern Israel from cross-border guerrillas raids.

Hrawi repeated Lebanon's offer to deploy its small army in the south to stop the attacks, but only after an unconditional Israeli withdrawal.

Govt, mediators meet on Peruvian hostage crisis

LIMA, Peru, Mar 15: Mediators met with the top government negotiator Friday in an attempt to restart talks aimed at freeing the 72 hostages held in the Japanese ambassador's house since December 17, reports AP.

The mediators met with leaders of the Tupac Amaru rebels on Thursday. They did not release details of either meeting. The government and the rebels have failed to make progress in 10 face-to-face meetings.

The main stumbling block appears to be the rebels' demand that the government release hundreds of their jailed comrades in exchange for the hostages' freedom. The government has refused to do so.

Move to curb smuggling S Africa to close 30 int'l airports, revamp 120 border posts

MIDRAND, South African, Mar 15: South Africa will close nearly 30 international airports and revamp its nearly 120 border posts in efforts to clamp down on cross-border smuggling, Deputy Finance Minister Gill Marcus said on Friday, reports AP.

Marcus told a conference here that the South African government views smuggling as the biggest hurdle to the country's economic transformation, the domestic Sapa news agency said.

Officials will likely out about 28 of the country's 36 international airports, and eliminate cargo transfers through 112 of the country's 118 border posts, the deputy minister added.

Finance minister Trevor Manuel identified high import tariffs in his 1997-98 budget speech Wednesday as a major incentive to smugglers, who ship large quantities of illicit goods into the country.

Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic expected to join in '98 US govt rejects any limits on NATO expansion

WASHINGTON, Mar 15: The US government rejected on Friday any limits on NATO expansion or the weapons arsenals new members may bring into the military alliance, reports AP.

Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, all former allies of Russia, are expected to be invited this summer to join NATO in 1998, and a senior US official said Romania and Slovenia also were candidates for membership.

While the administration has offered several concessions to counter Russia's objections to NATO's expanding to its western border, the official told news agency reporters, "What we are not going to do is to negotiate with the Russians limits on the new members."

France is promoting entry of Romania, another former members Russian ally, and Slovenia, a former Yugoslav republic is also under consideration, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Slovenia was not in the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact as the other leading candidates were.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his foreign minister, Yevgeny Primakov, who are holding talks in Washington this weekend with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Defense Secretary William Cohen, have warned that expanding NATO could divide Europe again as it was during the Cold War.

Trying to placate Moscow, the administration has offered

a charter that would link Russia to NATO but without a veto over any military moves by the alliance. The two sides also are working on guidelines for reducing their nuclear weapons arsenals beyond the sharp cuts provided by the 1993 START II treaty.

The Russian parliament is balking at ratifying the agreement, which strips Russia of its most potent long-range warheads and permits a buildup in single-warhead missiles that its economy cannot afford.

A follow-up treaty would

Main suspect in Multan mosque attack held

ISLAMABAD, Mar 15: Pakistani police have arrested the main suspect in an attack on a mosque about six months ago, when 25 worshippers were gunned down, police officials said today, reports AP.

The accused, identified as Ijaz Hussain, was arrested late Friday in the central city of Multan, where September's attack on the Sunni mosque took place, the said.

The government had announced a cash reward worth 12,500 dollars for information leading to the arrest of the suspect.

Police said Hussain was taken into custody from the home of a relative in Multan, a major city in Punjab province, after a tip of from a source.

ease the pressure by cutting weapons ceilings on both sides further. The administration, meanwhile, has offered to reduce the ceilings set in a 1990 treaty on American tanks, helicopters and other conventional weapons deployed in Europe.

But the official said the administration would not agree to exclude any European nation from NATO, limit the arsenals new members could bring into the alliance or make legally binding the charter being offered to Russia to link it to NATO.

Instead, the United States is offering a set of assurances, including a pledge to keep nuclear weapons out of Central and Eastern Europe. It would be issued by the leaders of the 16 NATO nations at a summit with Yeltsin.

The senior official said the aim is to correct the "nightmare vision" of NATO held by Russians.

President Clinton is due to meet with Yeltsin at the White House on Monday, then fly to Helsinki, Finland, on Tuesday for two days of talks with Yeltsin on NATO expansion and arms control.

But the meeting and the trip are on hold pending the results of Clinton's knee surgery Friday.

Jack Mendelsohn, deputy director of the private Arms Control Association, said the administration may offer to delay for four or five years the 2003 deadline set by the START II treaty for reducing nuclear arsenals by about 50 per cent.

BRIEFLY

King Hussein to visit Israel:

King Hussein plans to visit Israel this weekend to offer his condolences to the families of seven Israeli schoolgirls shot dead by a Jordanian soldier, AP reports from Amman.

The monarch on Friday postponed a visit Tuesday to the United States to supervise an investigation into the shooting. Hussein's office said Friday the king and President Clinton agreed to meet soon, but set no date. An Israeli Embassy source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said no day has been set yet for the Israel visit because technical arrangements are under discussion," He did not elaborate.

Hillary postpones Africa tour by 1 day: Hillary Rodham Clinton decided on Friday to postpone her departure for a six-nation Africa tour by one day until Sunday because of President Bill Clinton's knee surgery, her office said, Reuters reports from Washington.

A spokesman for the first lady, Neel Lattimore, said Mrs. Clinton would depart on Sunday morning instead of Saturday morning but would still carry out a foul schedule on the two-week trip.

Pak govt to send 38 Indian kids back: The Pakistani government announced yesterday it would repatriate 38 Indian children detained in Islamabad in a goodwill gesture aimed at improving the atmosphere for the forthcoming bilateral talks, AFP reports from Islamabad.

The minors were apprehended on Indian boats which "trespassed" into Pakistani territorial waters recently.

The government has decided to make the "unilateral gesture on humanitarian considerations" to create a "propitious climate" for the forthcoming talks between Pakistani and Indian foreign secretaries, the announcement said.

US navy deserter held in Japan:

A US Navy deserter has been arrested for allegedly robbing a bank customer of 16,000 yen (130 dollars) at the point of a toy gun at an automated-telling machine in Tokyo, police said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Enouch Singleton, 20, who was discharged from the US Navy after his desertion, had been sought by Tokyo police since the robbery on February 24.

Russian border troops kill 7 gunmen:

Russian border troops shot and killed seven gunmen as they tried to cross into this former Soviet republic from Afghanistan, the Interfax news agency reported Friday, citing the border troops' press service, AP reports from Dushanbe.

The incident began Thursday morning when a convoy of Russian troops, who patrol Tajikistan's southern border with Afghanistan, arrived to halt a group of 100 gold prospectors who were crossing illegally into Tajikistan across the Pyanj River, the press service said.

UNSC agrees to keep observers in Tajikistan till June 15

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 15: The UN Security Council agreed unanimously Friday to keep its military observers in Tajikistan until June 15 on condition the parties abide by an agreement signed this month to end the five-year conflict, reports AP.

The Tajikistan government and the rebels signed a pact in Moscow on March 8 which could be the first stage of a peace agreement. The conflict began with a 1992-93 civil war in which hard-liners drove out their opponents, who regrouped in the rugged mountains and across the border in Afghanistan.

Israel moves closer to showdown with Palestinians

JERUSALEM, Mar 15: Israel moved a step closer to a showdown with the Palestinians on Friday, saying it will begin building a new Jewish neighbourhood in east Jerusalem next week, reports AP.

Israel's 18 Cabinet ministers voted unanimously to go ahead with the project, despite a warning from the chief of military intelligence that Palestinian protests would erupt the moment construction begins.

The defence minister put troops on alert to prevent violence, according to television reports.

The United Nations General Assembly warned Israel on Thursday against building the 6,500-apartment project. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was "more de-

termined than ever" to go ahead with it.

"No government can allow itself to change its policy because of threats of violence," Netanyahu adviser David Bar-Ilan told The Associated Press. "Once a government yields to pressure, it will never be able to do anything unpopular again."

Bar-Ilan said Netanyahu asked each of the 18 ministers Friday to state their views on the project. "One speech after the other reaffirmed the necessity of doing it this coming week," he said.

The Cabinet approval came only a day after a Jordanian soldier shot and killed seven Israeli schoolgirls on the border between the two countries. The gunman's relatives said he was mentally unstable and not po-

litically motivated, but Israeli leaders blamed the incident in part on the growing tensions in the region.

The Palestinians and the Jordanians are furious over Israel's plans to build in east Jerusalem — the sector the Palestinians claim as a future capital — and over an Israeli plan to withdraw troops from less West Bank territory than the Palestinians had expected.

Palestinian leaders have warned of a new uprising should Israel go ahead with the construction plans. "Our people will defend their existence and their land," the speaker of the Palestinian legislative council, Ahmed Qureia, said Friday.

Arafat has invited foreign diplomats to the Gaza Strip on Saturday to hear his grie-

vances. Israel has protested, saying Arafat is violating the peace accords by setting up a back channel that excludes Israel. The United States has said it will attend the meeting.

In Friday's Cabinet meeting in Jerusalem, the chief of military intelligence, Gen. Moshe Yahlon, told the ministers that Arafat recently met with leaders of Islamic militant groups, who urged him to give tacit approval to new terror attacks in Israel.

Yahlon also warned the ministers that their decision to build in east Jerusalem could lead to increased international isolation for Israel, including the possibility that some countries would recall their ambassadors, according to Israeli TV reports.

Netanyahu said he would not be deterred by the Palestinians. "If they think they can frighten us, they are wrong. I am more determined than ever," he said in an interview with the Maariv newspaper published Friday.

Arafat, who calls the current dispute "the most serious crisis since the start of the Oslo (peace) process," has refused with several days to take Netanyahu's calls.

But he phoned the Israeli leader on Thursday night to offer condolences over the deaths of the Israeli schoolgirls at the Jordanian border.

Asked Friday whether the call meant he was ready to re-establish contact with the Israelis, Arafat said: "This is different."

The shooting actually served

to calm a crisis between Israel and Jordan, which peaked this week with a strongly worded letter from Jordan's King Hussein criticizing Netanyahu's policies toward the Palestinians.

On Friday, a spirit of conciliation reigned as the king made plans to travel to Israel late Saturday or Sunday to offer his condolences to the bereaved families.

King Hussein also postponed a trip Tuesday to Washington, where he was to meet with President Clinton, so he could supervise the investigation.

Hussein has named a former security advisor and the founder of Jordan's feared secret police, Mohammad Rasoul Kilani, to head the team investigating the shooting.

In one of the 11 prisons visited by the group, armed inmates fought over buckets of food.

An average of four inmates a week were killed in 1996, the report said. In October, 25 inmates were burned at La Planta jail in Caracas after guards tossed tear gas canisters into a locked cell.

In several jails, just one guard was on duty for every 150 prisoners.

Built to house 15,000 prisoners, the jails hold 25,000. Three-fourths of inmates have never had their day in court because of a badly backlogged judicial system.

Guards often sell inmates weapons, drugs and favours such as trips to court to augment salaries that aren't enough to feed their families, the report said.