

Time has come to free Jerusalem: Gaddafi

TRIPOLI, Mar 29: Libyan leader Colonel Moamer Gaddafi has called on Arabs and Muslims to liberate Jerusalem through a holy war, the official news agency JANA reported Friday, reports AFP.

"The time for the holy war to liberate Al-Quds (Jerusalem) has come," said Gaddafi late Thursday at a ceremony to mark the 27th anniversary of American and British forces leaving Libya.

Gaddafi's call followed a meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference's (OIC) Al-Quds Committee in Morocco on Thursday which urged Arab

nations to close all representative offices in Israel because of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's settlement policy in Jerusalem.

The Al-Quds Committee meeting was called to confront Netanyahu's decision to start building a new Jewish neighbourhood in disputed East Jerusalem, which the Jewish state seized and annexed in 1967.

East Jerusalem contains Islam's third holiest shrine, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Palestinians want the eastern sector of the holy city as the capital of a future independent state.

UNSC okays multinational force for Albania

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 29: The UN Security Council voted late Friday to approve a resolution sending a multinational force to Albania, the latest Balkan nation to erupt in political flames, reports AFP.

The United Nations did not create a force to send to Albania, but voted to authorise Italy and other member states to intervene. The force will have an Italian commander.

In Vienna, a member of the Italian delegation to the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe said the force could be comprised of 2,500 troops at the outset with an additional 2,500 in reinforcements.

Diplomatic sources also said Austria, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain could provide troops to the force for a total of 5,000.

Fourteen members of the UN Security Council voted in favour of the resolution, with China abstaining. Beijing also abstained from a ballot creating a UN force for Bosnia for 1992-1995 on the grounds that the force constituted interference in domestic affairs.

The Italian-led operation would be limited to three months and the multinational force whose make-up is as yet uncertain would, at France's insistence, be authorised to use

force, diplomats said.

At an experts meeting Thursday Britain was unenthusiastic about the mission and the United States said Albania was a matter for Europe alone.

Its task would be to protect humanitarian aid convoys and international organisations working in the stricken nation.

Albania has been rocked by a month of violence after armed rebels looted weapons from military barracks, seized a string of southern towns and called for the resignation of President Sali Berisha, whom they blamed for the collapse of a pyramid investment scheme.

Alleged involvement in plot to topple govt Bahrain's court sentences 22 people

MANAMA, Mar 29: Bahrain's state security court today sentenced 22 people accused of involvement in an alleged pro-Iranian plot to topple the government to prison terms ranging from three to seven years, lawyers said, reports Reuters.

They said 11 other suspects were acquitted. There was no immediate official confirmation of the verdicts.

"The court passed verdicts on 33 suspects today (Saturday)," one lawyer told Reuters. "Eleven people were acquitted and the rest received between seven and three years in jail," he added.

The court, whose rulings cannot be appealed against, on

Wednesday sentenced 15 people to prison terms ranging from three to 15 years in connection with the alleged plot.

They included two main suspects, Aihali-Mutquawi, who received 15 years jail and was fined 7,000 dinars (18,568) and Sheikh Jassim Al-Kayat, who was sentenced to 12 years and was fined 5,000 dinars.

The trial of 81 suspects — 22 of them in absentia — began on March 1. They were accused of joining the military wing of the Bahraini Hezbollah (Party of God), creating an organisation aimed at toppling the government, possessing weapons without permission and contacting a foreign country.

50,000 registered for PNG polls in June

POR MORESBY, Mar 29: At least 50,000 people on Papua New Guinea's civil war-torn island of Bougainville have registered to vote in general elections to be held in June, the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) reported today, reports AFP.

Electoral Commissioner Reuben Kaifulo, who will visit Bougainville next week to review the registration process, hailed the "great job" that was being done on the island to encourage voters.

The war on the island, home to 160,000 people was triggered in 1988 by a land dispute over the Australian operated Bougainville Copper Ltd mine at Panguna.

BRIEFLY

Plane crash kills 1 in Guatemala:

One person died, four were missing and five injured when a small plane crashed in a river as the aircraft attempted to land in northern Guatemala, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Guatemala City.

The single confirmed fatality was a person who drowned after becoming trapped in twisted metal when the plane crashed. Four other passengers were swept away by the river and their whereabouts are unknown.

Explosion claims 1 in Bangkok: One woman was killed and two men were injured when a bomb planted in a luxury car went off on an expressway in the Thai capital, police said yesterday. Reuter reports from Bangkok.

The explosion late Friday killed Saeng-arun Kham-suwat, 40, police said. The two injured men who were in the same car were identified as Chakrit Mett.

4 drowned, 20 feared dead in Albania: An Albanian refugee ship carrying more than 50 people sank in the Adriatic Friday after colliding with an Italian warship, AFP reports from Rome.

The latest toll given by the Italian Red Cross said four people including two children had drowned and about 20 more were unaccounted for and feared dead. Port officials said 34 people, two of them injured, had been rescued. But the rescue operation by eight naval ships and a helicopter was hampered by the darkness and heavy seas.

Rioters ruin 60 bldgs in Indonesia: Rioters vandalised over 60 buildings and burned two trucks in a small town in Central Java during three days of violence that left eight people injured, a report said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Over 1,000 rioters vandalised 60 shops, three houses and one bank in Pekalongan, a coastal town in Central Java, during the violence that started late Monday. Central Java military spokesman Sugeng Suryanto said in the media Indonesia Daily, Lieutenant Colonel Suryanto said 31 people were arrested in connection with the unrest and eight people including three security members, were injured and hospitalised.

US embassy to close in Bangui: The United States Embassy in Bangui is to close temporarily amid fighting between mutineering soldiers and forces belonging to an intra-African peacekeeping mission, the State Department said Friday. AFP reports from Washington.

2,111 quake research centres in China: China has established 2,111 research stations in an effort to predict deadly earthquakes in 10 regions where a seismic activity is heavy, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

"It is estimated that 60 per cent of the earthquake in China, are likely to occur in these regions over the next 10 years," said Zhang Yiqian, Deputy Director and researcher in the state seismology Bureau. "Earthquake predictions, especially precise ones, are very difficult, but not completely impossible," Bureau Vice Director He Yongnian was quoted as saying.

Clinton to visit Africa: US President Bill Clinton will visit Africa during his second four-year term, his wife Hillary Rodham Clinton announced on Friday as she neared the end of her own tour of the continent, Reuter reports from Kampala.

Mrs. Clinton, in a speech to members of the Ugandan Parliament, prominent women and students and faculty from the Makerere University, did not say when her husband would be visiting Africa. But aides ruled out this year as Clinton has a busy foreign travel schedule and is recovering from knee surgery.

Filipinos vow to save maid in UAE: Filipino official and lawyers vowed to save the life of a 16-year-old Filipino maid convicted by an Islamic court in the United Arab Emirates of murdering her Arab employer, Reuter reports from Abu Dhabi.

A court in Al Ain on Saturday sentenced Sarah Balabagan to death for the premeditated murder of her employer Almas Mohammed Al Baloushi, it rejected her testimony that she stabbed him 34 times in self-defence after he raped her.



French daredevil Alain Robert scales a 14-story hotel as part of his training in Kuala Lumpur Friday. The 34-year-old Robert who was arrested last week but later freed for illegally attempting to climb the world's tallest building is expected to scale the 88-story building owned by national oil company Petronas in Kuala Lumpur for charity April 5.

— AFP/UNB photo

Muslim states blast Jewish housing

Ross finds PA, Israelis in no mood for compromise

JERUSALEM, Mar 29: A US presidential envoy appealed for calm after finding Israelis and Palestinians in no mood for compromise during an emergency mission to salvage crumbling Middle East peace moves, course, Netanyahu said.

But the PLO insisted the only way out of the crisis was for Israel to order its bulldozers to stop ripping up and Arab east Jerusalem hillside to build a new Jewish settlement.

The White House called mediator Dennis Ross two-day emergency shuttle "constructive" but said more work was needed as Israelis and Palestinians hardened their positions in a deepening peace crisis and the West Bank seethed with unrest.

Ross headed back to Washington on Friday without scoring a breakthrough after talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in Ramat, Morocco.

Netanyahu said after meeting Ross that only a sustained Palestinian crackdown on "terrorism" — not just a pledge to fight militants — would salvage peacemaking.

"We want immediate action... if the Palestinian side

meets its commitments — again not for just a day or two — but if we see a basic change during the coming period, we will be able to put the peace process back on course," Netanyahu said.

The move has sparked Palestinian rioting and posed a threat to the Mideast peace process.

Arafat told the committee's one-day meeting that the "Judaisation" of the city of Jerusalem is a "dangerous" threat.

But at the close of the meeting Thursday night, a final statement was not released. The official Moroccan news agency MAP said only that the committee discussed a proposed resolution.

The head of the Organisation for the Islamic Conference, which had urged a suspension of ties, said in his report Thursday that Muslim nations should "bring all forms of aid and support to the cause" of an Arab Jerusalem.

But Azzedine Laraki only called for "a serious Islamic position and the mobilization of Islamic moral and material means" to promote "future negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis."



Chinese policemen watch as steam-roller crushes the 40,000 pirated compact discs, cassettes, video and audio tapes Friday seized during recent raids on vendors in Beijing. Chinese police have seized almost two million pirated goods in thousands of raids over the past year as China intensified its campaign against abuses of intellectual property rights.

— AFP/UNB photo

Clinton appeals for racial harmony

WASHINGTON, Mar 29: Lamenting the brutal attack on a black Chicago boy, President Clinton is asking Americans this Easter weekend to reject the "constant curse" of racial hatred, reports AP.

"In this season of renewal, I ask all Americans to reaffirm their commitment to this central ideal — that we are many people, but one nation, bound together by shared values," the president said Saturday in his weekly radio address.

Looking ahead to both Easter and next month's Passover holiday, he used the morning broadcast the nation's prayers for 13-year-old Lenard Clark, the Chicago boy kicked unconscious last week in what Clinton called a "savage, senseless assault driven by nothing but hate."

He also worried that black Americans would see in Clark's alleged attackers — three white teenagers — the faces of all white Americans. "The acts of a few people must never become an excuse for blanket condemnation," Clinton said.

The divide of race has been America's "constant curse in pursuit of our ideals."

The president, recovering from knee surgery, planned a work-weekend at the White House, capped by the Sunday morning homecoming of his wife and daughter from their tour of Africa and a traditional Easter dinner with visiting relatives, spokesman Mike McCurry said.

KINSHASA, Mar 29: Air Excellence co-owner Phillip Gonda says the company isn't involved. "My conscience is fully clean," he said in an interview, describing the cargo he used to regularly ship for sale in Angola as humanitarian — beer and food.

He believes the letter he received from airport officials, denying him permission to fly to Angola, was the product of rumours that his planes were carrying weapons to the An-

golian rebel force known as UNITA.

Western governments and Angola's neighbours suspect the gunrunning is going on, and fear it could lead to renewed fighting in Angola, a country long divided by civil war where negotiators are trying to patch together a peace.

"I made the decision — that's it. There's no why," Kikunda told The Associated Press. "We are putting things in order."

Kikunda is believed to have responded to pressure from Western governments and from Zaire's neighbours.

For many Zaireans, there is nothing shocking in reports that relatives and friends of President Mobutu Sese Seko were involved in weapons trafficking that could endanger Angolan efforts. They have been long convinced the country's

elite was more interested in enriching itself than in the well-being of Zaire and the region.

In exchange for a share of the profits, members of Mobutu's entourage reportedly ensure that shipments of weapons from abroad handled by several companies aren't carefully scrutinized.

Gonda admits his airline is closely linked to one of the president's sons, Mobutu Kongou.

Mobutu Kongou is an army captain who spends most of his time overseeing a dozen businesses that range from imports to river shipping.

"He helps us with problems we have in the country — everyone in this country has a problem," Gonda said.

Word that high-ranking

Zaireans were helping UNITA re-arm is believed to have reached Angolan government officials. They retaliated by flying plane loads of Zairean dissidents who had been living in exile in Angola to Rwanda, from where they are believed to have been put at the service of Angolan rebel forces, according to the Western diplomat.

UNITA has pledged itself to peace in Angola, but has dragged its feet on agreements to disarm and demobilise. A UNITA spokesman, reached in Lisbon, dismissed reports the group was getting arms through Zaire.

The elite presidential guard is one of the few Zairean army units that can count on regular pay checks. Other soldiers were notorious for supplementing meager wages by using their guns to rob civilians.

Zaire's chief Gen. Mayele Tieko last week told reporters his soldiers lacked the equipment they needed to combat rebels who in the last seven months have taken control of much of eastern Zaire.

man's playground of southern France, far from a homeland of impassable roads and jobless youth. He returned to Kinshasa last week, but seems no less distant from Zaire's problems.

He was holed up in the handsome presidential mansion overlooking the Zaire River and surrounded by an army camp.

The elite presidential guard is one of the few Zairean army units that can count on regular pay checks. Other soldiers were notorious for supplementing meager wages by using their guns to rob civilians.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service said al-Sayegh is linked to a branch of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement.

The New York Times reported Saturday that Western officials believe Saudi Hezbollah numbers no more than several hundred people and has carried out four other attacks, three on Saudi diplomats overseas and one on a Segas plant in 1987.

Gowda meets top Pak diplomat

NEW DELHI, Mar 29: Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda met Pakistan's top diplomat today in an apparent sign that talks between Foreign Ministry officials of the rival neighbours have begun well, reports Reuters.

Deve Gowda spent about half an hour with Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shamsuddin Ahmad at his residence in New Delhi. The two men sat on separate sofas as they posed for photographs.

Talks between Ahmad and his Indian opposite number Salman Haider were expected to resume for a second day later today, an official said.

Deve Gowda told visiting South African President Nelson Mandela on Friday of New Delhi's desire to normalise ties with Islamabad to their "mutual advantage."

The talks are the first since January 1994, when a dialogue founded on Kashmir. Tension over the disputed Himalayan region sparked two of the three wars the two countries, now threshold nuclear powers, have fought since independence in 1947.

Al Gore calls on ROK president

SEOUL, Mar 29: US Vice President Al Gore met with South Korean President Kim Young-sam here today with a coordinated policy toward North Korea focusing on peace talks and food aid high on the agenda, reports AFP.

In light of the uncertainty and fluid situation in the North, it is crucial for South Korea and the United States to maintain a tight combined defence posture and policy coordination. Kim was quoted as telling Gore.

"We have to let the North clearly recognise that there is a limit to rapprochement with Washington unless inter-Korean ties are improved. Kim was quoted as saying by his spokesman.

Kim then hosted lunch for Gore, during which he expressed hope that the North accept four-party peace talks which Kim said would lead to easing food shortages in the North and increasing stability on the Korean peninsula.

The peace talks jointly proposed by the United States and South Korea, would involve the two Koreas with Washington and Beijing doing the roles of guarantors.

Its top item on the agenda would be the establishment of a new peace mechanism to replace the tense truce in which the two Koreas have been locked since the end of the Korean war in 1953.

Mediators meet MRTA rebels

LIMA, Mar 29: Mediators met with leftist rebels holding 72 hostages at the