

Algerian forces kill 100 militants

ALGIERS, Mar 3: About 100 armed Islamic extremists have been killed by security forces during an ongoing sweep in western Algeria, the daily newspaper *L'Authenticité* reported Monday, reports AFP.

The paper said the operation was carried out in Saida, Sidi Bel Abbes and Tiemcen.

Security forces announced Saturday that they shot and killed 19 armed Islamists after the assassination of four villagers by an armed group between Saida and Sidi Bel Abbes.

"This large-scale operation eliminated a large number of terrorists, given the number of dismembered or charred bodies which could not be identified," said the paper.

A first toll spoke of 42 killed Islamists, and 15 others later reported dead, the paper said, adding that "the pursuit of the operation in the north and east will have raised the toll beyond 100."

Security forces made several arrests among fleeing Islamists who reportedly sought to reach the Moroccan border.

A large group of Islamists was encircled at Mount Asfour, near Maghnia, while another group lost four men at Sidi Bel Abbes.

On Friday, a self-defense group also killed an armed Islamic extremist at Sidi Ahmed Benyahia, near Tissemsilt in the southeast, and wounded two others.

Algeria's president Liamine Zeroual on Sunday announced a reconstruction and aid programme for areas worst hit by the six-year-old Islamic insurgency.

Zeroual gave precise figures for the sums to be allocated to some 20 regions that have suffered from the violence that the government attributes to armed Islamic groups. But he said the programme would begin this year.

Netanyahu against 'imposed' solution to ME crisis

JERUSALEM, Mar 3: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday rejected what he said were Palestinian expectations that the United States would put pressure on Israel to advance the stagnant peace process, reports Reuter.

"Today they seem to believe that they need not negotiate because the Americans will pressure us, so they think, to make concessions and that the threat of Saddam and his ilk will scare us," Netanyahu said in a dinner speech.

"An imposed solution is neither desirable nor viable. It simply will not happen. It never happened in the 50 years of Israel's life. It won't happen now," he told members of the conference of presidents of major American Jewish organisations.

His remarks followed reports that Washington might go

public with "take it or leave it" proposals for a further Israeli pullback from the West Bank to counter Arab assertions of US "double standards" in dealings with Israel and Iraq.

Ha'aretz newspaper said the Iraq crisis had delayed presentation of the plan, which would seek a troop pullback from 13.1 per cent of the West Bank phased over three months in return for Palestinian compliance with security obligations.

Washington failed in the crisis with Iraq to win broad Arab support for threatened military action to force President Saddam Hussein to comply with UN resolutions on weapons inspections.

Many Arab leaders accuse Washington of setting one standard on honouring UN resolutions for Iraq and another for Israel, which they blame for the

peacemaking freeze.

Talks have been deadlocked for a year over Jewish settlement building on occupied land and what Israel says is Palestinian failure to prevent violence by Islamic militants.

US President Bill Clinton failed at separate talks with Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in January to break the impasse, which was deepened by sharp differences over the terms and extent of a further West Bank withdrawal.

Netanyahu's perceived hard line has alienated some US Jews but his insistence that Israel will not bow to outside pressure was well received at Monday's dinner.

Melvin Salberg, the chairman of the conference, said success in peace talks would come only when the parties themselves met and dealt with the issues "eyeball to eyeball."

"Only the people of Israel can determine what their security needs are and no third parties can impose what it should have as its security needs," Salberg said.

Netanyahu renewed a proposal, already rejected by Arafat, for intensive summit talks similar to those held at the US presidential retreat of Camp David which led to Israel's historic peace treaty with Egypt in 1979.

"What we should do, is to sit down, Palestinians and Israelis, Arafat and myself, and work out a solution to the interim questions and move as rapidly as possible to the final settlement," Netanyahu said.

Truce may be short-lived: Ranariddh Defeat in July polls will bring disaster: Hun Sen

PHNOM PENH, Mar 3: Cambodian leader Hun Sen told top members of his political party Tuesday that defeat in July elections would mean disaster for both of them and the country, reports AP.

Opening a four-day meeting of the Cambodian People's Party central committee, Hun Sen said all party members must be told "that the elections could mean life or death for the national interests, the party's interests and the interests of each official."

The speech underscored Hun Sen's determination to win the elections he has called for July 26. Already, opposition parties have accused the CPP — the country's most powerful party — of fomenting splits in their ranks to weaken and defeat them.

Foreign countries whose aid is vital to Cambodia have questioned whether the polling will be free and fair. Hun Sen is seen as trying to legitimise his rule after deposing his co-prime minister, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, in a coup last year.

Hun Sen told the congress that the CPP party network must be strengthened at all levels — especially local — and members should actively court voters.

"If we win, everything will improve," Hun Sen said. "But if we lose, the consequences are

beyond prediction. ... Victory or defeat of the party means victory or defeat for all of us."

Meanwhile, resistance forces loyal to Prince Norodom Ranariddh labelled terms of a government cease fire proposal "unacceptable" Tuesday, raising concerns that a truce could be short-lived.

"It looks like they are asking us to surrender," said Gen. Nhek Bunchhay, commander of Ranariddh's troops holding out at the hilly, heavily mined enclave of O'Smach in northern Cambodia.

Pakistan begins its 1st census in 17 yrs

ISLAMABAD, Mar 3: Pakistan on Monday began its first census in 17 years, using 300,000 troops, sailors and police to count a population hitherto only guessed at, reports Reuter.

Teams of enumerators began the two-week exercise by going from house to house in towns and villages from the teeming port city of Karachi to tiny snow-dusted villages on the borders with Iran and Afghanistan.

Advani elected BJP sweeps six Lok Sabha constituencies in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Mar 3: BJP today swept six of the seven Lok Sabha constituencies in the capital, snatching one from the Congress and allowing the latter to retain the other, reports PTI.

The lone Congress winner was sitting MP Meera Kumar, who defeated her nearest BJP rival and Delhi Minister Surender Pal Ratawal.

The BJP, which had won five of the seven seats in the last elections, trounced their Congress rivals in the remaining seats. With its spokesperson Sushma Swaraj defeating her Congress rival Ajay Maken by 1,16,713 votes for the south Delhi seat.

In the country's largest Lok Sabha constituency of outer Delhi, KL Sharma (BJP) outclassed Deep Chand Sharma by 98,355 votes, while former Delhi chief minister Madan Lal Khurana beat his Congress rival MM Aggarwal by 48,494 votes for the Delhi Sadar seat.

Former Jammu and Kashmir governor Jagmohan, who was the BJP nominee from the prestigious New Delhi constituency, retained his seat by defeating Congress heavyweight RK Dhawan by 32,603 votes.

Congress MP in the 12th Lok Sabha, JP Aggarwal, was defeated by BJP's youth leader, Vi-

Maneka Gandhi elected by huge margin

NEW DELHI, Mar 3: Maneka Gandhi, a contested member of the Nehru-Gandhi Dynasty, was today elected to the Indian parliament by a huge margin from her northern constituency, reports AP.

Maneka Gandhi routed her Socialist rival by a margin of 210,000 votes in Piliplith constituency in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India's political heartland, election officials said.

She had won the seat in 1996 by almost a similar margin. Maneka Gandhi is the widow of Sanjay Gandhi, younger brother of assassinated former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

A former model, she married in 1976. Four years later her husband, being groomed by his mother-cum-prime minister Indira Gandhi as her successor, was killed in a plane crash.

Soon after, Maneka Gandhi was thrown out of the family following differences with her mother-in-law.

ROK president forms cabinet

SEOUL, Mar 3: A day after opponents thwarted legislative ratification of his choice for prime minister, President Kim Dae-jung used a legal loophole Tuesday to form his cabinet, reports AP.

Later in the day, Kim was expected to name his coalition partner, Kim Jong-pil, 72, as acting prime minister in a move that would not require parliamentary approval.

Opponents threatened court action to stall the appointment of the conservative politician to the nation's second-highest post and demanded that the president retract his Cabinet nominations.

In line with his campaign promise of a slimmer, more effective administration, the new president reduced the number of ministries in his government from 24 to 17.

Close aides were given the defence and national security portfolios and the Finance Ministry went to Lee Kyu-sung, 49, a university professor who briefly held the same post in the former government.

US blames Serb police, Albanian 'terrorists' for Kosovo violence

WASHINGTON, Mar 3: The United States said Monday it was "appalled" by the explosion of violence in Serbia's Kosovo province and urged Serbian authorities and leaders of the Albanian community to begin talks immediately on steps to defuse tensions, reports AP.

"The United States expects the Serbian police in Kosovo to act with maximum restraint," State Department spokesman James Rubin said. "Further state-sponsored violence would only deepen Belgrade's isolation and dim prospects for the integration of (Yugoslavia) into the international community."

Diana-Dodi's car crash in Paris Rees-Jones feels guilty for being sole survivor

LONDON, Mar 3: Bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones says he feels guilty for being the sole survivor of the Paris car crash that killed Princess Diana, companion Dodi Fayed and chauffeur Henri Paul, The Mirror newspaper reported Tuesday, reports AP.

"I'm sure that anyone who survives an accident where people have died feels a certain sense of guilt," the newspaper quoted Rees-Jones as saying in a two-page interview.

"But in my case the people who died were special people. It doesn't seem right that I should be the only one who lived," he said.

On Monday, the newspaper quoted Rees-Jones, 29, as saying that Diana was conscious after the August 31 crash, that she cried out for Dodi Fayed, who was already dead, and that Henri Paul did not appear to have been drinking.

The Mirror interview, which will continue Wednesday, is Rees-Jones' most extensive comment to date.

The French doctor who treated Diana as she lay dying in the Pont de l'Alma tunnel said in November the princess had been semiconscious, and did not say anything precise. Paul was later found to have

been legally drunk.

Rees-Jones' remarks are sensitive because he works for multimillionaire Mohammed Al-Fayed, father of Dodi and employer of driver Paul. Rees-Jones' psychiatric and medical treatment has been paid for by Al-Fayed, who also arranged The Mirror interview, according to rival newspapers.

The Mirror quoted Rees-Jones as saying he was told of the accident by his own mother while recovering in Pitié-Salpêtrière, the hospital where Diana died.

The newspaper said his mother told him: "There is no easy way of saying this Trevor, but Diana and Dodi were both killed in the crash and so was the driver, Henri Paul. You were the only survivor."

"I was absolutely devastated, obviously. There is no easy way to tell someone such dreadful news, is there?" the newspaper quoted Rees-Jones as saying. "It was like a hammer blow — I just sat there in total shock."

The newspaper did not say exactly when Rees-Jones was told of Diana's death, but reported that the bodyguard had been heavily sedated for ten days after the crash, and was taken off sedation for several days before he was told.

BRIEFLY

Dozens of Palestinians held in WB: Israeli troops surrounded a refugee camp outside the West Bank town of Hebron on Monday and rounded up dozens of Palestinians for questioning about recent stone-throwing riots, AP says from Hebron.

Last week, soldiers fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse Palestinian protesters along the road from Hebron to Beersheva. Two Palestinians were injured. Military sources said only some of the Palestinians remained under arrest after initial questioning.

Iranian probe team in Pakistan: Senior Iranian investigators arrived in Pakistan to probe the Feb 21 shooting death of two Iranian construction workers in the troubled port city of Karachi, Iranian Embassy officials said Tuesday, AP reports from Karachi.

Vijihollah Agha Tahri, director-general of Iran's Interior Ministry, is heading the investigation into the attack at a construction site in Karachi's posh Clifton neighbourhood. The two men were building a bridge when gunmen on motorcycles shot and killed them. No one has taken responsibility for the killings, but police officials in Karachi are blaming extremist Sunni Muslim groups. Most Iranian are Shiite Muslim, while the majority of Pakistan's 140 million people belong to the Sunni sect of Islam.

Chopper crash kills 1 in Taiwan: A helicopter crashed near an oil platform off Taiwan's outlying Tenghu Islands, killing the pilot, officials said Tuesday, AP reports from Taipei.

Rescuers were searching the sea west of Taiwan for the two other missing crewmen from the Monday night crash, the Teh-An helicopter company said. The crash, Taiwan's third air crash in two weeks, raised concerns over aviation safety.

Moderate quake shakes Japan: A moderate earthquake rocked the southern Japan island of Kyushu yesterday, registering 3.9 on the Richter Scale, the Meteorological Agency said, AFP says from Tokyo.

There were no immediate reports of property damage or casualties.

UK govt defeated in upper house over edn policy

LONDON, Mar 3: The British government was defeated in the House of Lords late Monday over its plans to abolish free education for university students, reports AFP.

The upper house voted by 143 to 102 for an amendment proposed by Conservatives aimed at ensuring the state will pay up to half the amount deemed appropriate for a student's maintenance.

The amendment would preserve the present system, a combination of grants and loans.

Next the lords also backed by 134 to 89 a Conservative call for all British students at Scottish universities — where courses last four years — to have their fourth-year tuition fees paid by the state.

Under British parliamentary procedure, the government has no obligation to accept either amendment, but the votes will force it to use its house of commons majority to reject them, which will only add to the controversy surrounding its education reforms.

UNSC endorses Annan's warning to Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 3: The Security Council unanimously endorsed UN chief Kofi Annan's deal to open Iraq's presidential palaces to UN arms inspectors and warned of "severest consequences" if Baghdad breaks the accord, reports AP.

But numerous council members, including those from countries that previously backed the US stand against Iraq, made clear that the resolution does not constitute any "green light" for a US attack.

Annan, appearing before the 15-member council, said it was now up to the Iraqis to comply "with what they have signed on paper."

"Whether the threat to international peace and security has been averted for the time is now in the hands of the Iraqi leadership," the UN secretary-general said Monday.

President Bill Clinton hailed the council's action, also saying it is now up to Iraq "to turn the commitment it has made into

full compliance."

"Tonight's unanimous vote of the United Nations Security Council sends the clearest possible message: Iraq must make good on its commitment to give the international weapons inspectors immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access to any suspect site, any place, any time," he said in a statement.

US Ambassador Bill Richardson said the vote was a victory for the United States.

But the unanimous vote came only after several council members insisted on guarantees that it would not give automatic approval for a military attack if Iraq breaks the accord.

China's UN ambassador, Qin Huasun, noted that Beijing had insisted "that there must not be any automatic authorisation of the use of force against Iraq in this current resolution."

not been removed. The passing of this resolution in no way means that the Security Council automatically authorises any state to use force against Iraq.

Envoys from France, Russia, Brazil, Sweden, Portugal and other countries underscored that only the Security Council can determine whether Iraq has violated the accord and, if so, what action can be taken.

The resolution endorsed the agreement that Annan signed in Baghdad last week with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz to allow UN inspectors, accompanied by diplomats, to visit eight presidential palaces which Baghdad had placed off limits.

Annan's agreement also reaffirmed the right of UN inspectors enter all sites in Iraq to determine if the Iraqis have complied with UN orders, issued at the end of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, to destroy all long-range missiles and nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Off the Record



Lost in the Clouds is held up by Becky Jones along with the Best-in-Show trophy won by the all-white long-haired Persian cat at the 14th Annual International Cat Show at New York's Madison Square Garden Sunday. The cat, nicknamed Louie, lives in Cherry Hill, NJ, with his owners, Becky and Howard Jones. — AP/UNB photo

Newest members of Purina Hall of Fame

TORONTO: Two Labrador retrievers and an orange cat who helped save people's lives are the newest members of the Ralston Purina Animal Hall of Fame, reports AP.

Morphy, a 3-year-old yellow retriever from London, Ontario, alerted his owners, Esther and David Andrews, to the fact that their next-door neighbour had collapsed on his porch from an angina attack, saving the man's life. Sampson, a 1-year-old yellow retriever from Cranbrook, British Columbia, dove into a glacier-fed river in the Yukon Valley and pulled a woman to safety.

And Hobbes, a 5-year-old orange tabby from St Thomas, Ontario, yowled persistently to alert owner Sheri Coull to a fire in their apartment after a smoke detector failed to go off.

The Purina Hall of Fame, established 30 years ago to honour life-saving pets, has inducted 80 dogs, 17 cats and one horse.

Ocean on Europa!

PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island, Mar 3: The closest pictures yet of Jupiter's moon Europa bolster the possibility that an ocean exists beneath the moon's icy crust, scientists said Monday, reports AP.

"It's an incredibly exciting place because it has the potential to teach us about the origin of Earth and maybe even life," said James Head, a Brown University scientist.

The pictures, taken by the spacecraft Galileo in December, were discussed at a briefing held Monday at Brown.

Brown and Arizona State University are helping the National Aeronautics and Space Administration analyze the photos, which are detailed enough to see a truck-sized object on Europa's surface.

The new photos have a resolution up to 20 times higher than earlier Galileo pictures and hundreds of times higher than the best images taken by the Voyager spacecraft in 1979.

"We'd never seen the surface at this resolution at all," Head said. "It's a little bit like putting the surface under a microscope."

The images lead scientists to believe that an ocean, one that could contain life, exists beneath the ice.

Among the evidence is a filled 16-mile wide crater. Scientists believe it may have been filled by water that rose from below and froze on the surface.

US senator wants more visas for skilled foreigners

WASHINGTON, Mar 3: Heeding the plea of a domestic computer industry hungry for talent, a leading senate voice on immigration proposed Monday to sharply increase the number of visas granted to high-skilled foreign workers, reports AP.

Currently, the United States allow up to 65,000 high-skilled foreigners into the country annually. Silicon Valley employers and others in the booming high-tech sector contend that cap is far too low, preventing them from hiring qualified foreigners for jobs they are unable to fill domestically.

Sen. Spencer Abraham of Michigan, who chairs the Senate immigration subcommittee, said he will seek to boost that visa category to roughly 90,000 people. His legislation also would allow the government to let in 25,000 more skilled workers under a different category if the quota for high-skill visas is exhausted.

High-tech companies have been vigorously lobbying Congress and the administration to let them bring in more talent from abroad.

Last year, for the first time, the demand for "H1B" visas which entitle high-skilled workers to remain in the United States for up to six years — outpaced the availability. This year, the cap could be hit by May, four months before the end of the federal fiscal year.

Coral reefs under threat from global emission

BRISBANE, Mar 3: Coral reefs around the world are under threat from global emissions of greenhouse gases, a group of scientific experts warned Tuesday, reports AP.

Rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are reducing the ability of coral animals to make the limestone skeletons that built reefs, they said.

The warning stems from an international meeting of marine experts in Boston last week, which included scientists from the Australian Institute of Marine Science in Townsville, the Australian federal science agency and the Australian National University.

It also followed a warning from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority which said last week bleaching was killing reefs along 620 miles (1,000 km) of the Queensland coast.

Australian Institute of Marine Science principal research scientist Terry Dence said rising atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations increased the acidity of surface ocean water.



United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, left, delivers a rare speech to the Security Council at the UN Monday, after council members reached tentative agreement on a resolution warning Iraq of "severest consequences" if it violates an arms inspection deal. The council began meeting in the evening to vote on the resolution. At right is this month's Security Council President, Gambia's Foreign Minister Mamadu Lamin Sedat Jobe. — AP/UNB photo