Dozenshiding in woods as troops attack their village in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Mar 8: Dozens of refugees, including women and children, were hiding out Friday in woods after their village in the Serbian province of Kosovo came under attack from security forces, reports AFP.

They told Western journalists that some 40 people had been killed since Wednesday after police moved in to crush militant separatists from the province's ethnic Albanian majority.

Men who emerged from an oak forest near Prekaz in the central Drenica region said that the refugees lacked food, water or blankets in temperatures

that fell below freezing. The men looked like local farmers and were unarmed. They took the journalists to a vantage point from which they could see Prekaz. Two columns of smoke were rising from the village and some houses were burned out.

The refugees said Prekaz was

surrounded by police, who were thought to be holding prisoners in a local factory.

"Every man in the Dremica region is in danger," one man said. "We wanted to resolved the problem peacefully but the Serbs provoked us."

Another man added: "Ten years ago the Serbs drove us from our work, they drove us from everywhere, we have now rights and now they are coming to kill us in our homes."

The refugees also took the journalists to a barn which sheltered some 90 women and children, including a new-born baby. They seemed in a state of shock, and many were sobbing.

A middle-aged woman with a child in her arms said Prekaz had been surrounded by police at six am Thursday. The women had fled in panic, leaving everything behind, as tanks approached the village.

man, adding that many families had been separated in their

Other families had been unable to escape, and the refugees said they feared for their lives.

Drenica is one of the poorest regions of Kosovo, with some 70 per cent of the inhabitants living on aid largely supplied by the charity of Mother Teresa's foundation in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo.

Serbian police said late Saturday that 26 people had been killed in the last two days as they mounted attacks on a series of villages they said were the stronghold of an armed ethnic Albanian group committed to Kosovo's independence.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Madeline Albright issued a stern warning Saturday to Serbia over its crackdown in

Gunmen kill 3 in Lahore

LAHORE, Mar 8: Gunmen attacked the shop of a Shi'ite Muslim activist killing its owner and two bystanders, po-

lice said Sunday, reports AP.
No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack Saturday in the eastern Punjab province, that killed Altaf Hussein, a member of the radical Islamic group, the Movement for Shi'ite Law.

Two men standing outside the shop, both Sunni Muslims, were injured in the attack and died later in hospital, police said.

Police say the shouting in Multan, some 280 kilometres (170 miles) south of the Punjab capital of Lahore, was carried out by Sunni Muslim extrem-

In the past one year more than 300 people have died in clashes between extremist Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims. Much of the violence has taken place in Pakistan's most populous Punjab province where 60 per cent of the nation's 140 million people live.

The relentless bloodletting has prompted the government to pass a strict anti-terrorism law that gives police sweeping powers to arrest suspected mili-

NEW DELHI, Mar 8: The been proved wrong. widow of assassinated Indian It said forecasts of a "Sonia former premier Rajiv Gandhi blitzkrieg" and the checking of failed to revive his ailing party the BJP rise had been wide of in national elections despite the mark playing the starring role, a

"Poll statistics now show the BJP increased its vote share by five per cent and along with its allies its vote share went up by

'Sonia fails to revive ailing

Congress in polls'

10 per cent. "In contrast, the Congress vote share has fallen by nearly three per cent," the Express

The Congress won 140 seats in the current polls - which equals its previous performance and its worst-ever showing. The BJP and its allies claimed 250.

The newspaper said that in the "130-odd" constituencies visited by Sonia Gandhi, who had no previous political experience, "the Congress in 1996 won 50 seats and 49 seats this year."

largest number of seats in its The Congress candidate in history and is expected to the northern constituency of Amethi, a Gandhi family The Express said all prestronghold for nearly two polls predictions about Sonia decades, also lost despite an Gandhi, the heir of the Nehruelection rally there by Sonia Gandhi political dynasty, had Gandhi which attracted a

mammoth turnout.

The congress, however, said in a statement after the elections that Sonia Gandhi's "herculean efforts" had stemmed the rot in the party, wracked by recent factionalism, dissension and corruption charges against top leaders.

It praised her "tireless and strenuous campaigning across the length and breadth of the country" and added the party "owes all its electoral gains to

It argued she should have "more direct, enlarged and meaningful" role in the

Congress There have been repeated offers to Sonia Gandhi, who married into the Gandhi-Nehru family in 1968, to take over the party's leadership - which she

has declined. It also asked Sonia Gandhi to help pick the leader of the parliamentary party.

India was ruled by the Congress for most of the 50 years following the end of colonial rule in 1947.

Iraqi FM heads to NY for talks with Annan

BAGHDAD, Mar 8: Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Syed Al-Sahhaf is heading to New York for the first meeting between an Iraqi official and Kofi Annan since the UN chief's successful peace mission to Baghdad last month, reports

Sahhaf and his delegation left by road for Amman on Saturday from where they will travel to New York for Monday's meeting, the official news agency INA reported.

The formal agenda for the meeting is the implementation of the expanded programme of humanitarian imports for Iraq approved by the UN Security Council at the height of the crisis over weapons inspections last month.

But INA said Sahhaf would also hold talks with Annan on the implementation of the new memorandum of understanding signed by Iraq and the United Nations last month regarding weapons inspections.

The accord established special arrangements for the inspection of the eight president sites at the heart of the crisis which have since been endorsed by a Security Council resolu-

Russia to complete N-power station in S Iran

MOSCOW. Mar 8: Russia will complete the construction of a nuclear power station at Bushehr in southern Iran despite Ukraine's decision to pull out of the controversial project under US pressure, the Kremlin said Saturday, reports AFP.

President Boris Yeltsin's spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky told Interfax that the project "will be fully implemented, and Russia "I counting on its own strength" to build the 1,000 megawatt nuclear plant on Iran's Gulf coast.

Russia is moreover planning to build two further reactors at the Bushehr site once the first is completed, according to the Daily Kommersant, which said Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Bulgak signed a deal to that effect in Tehran on Fri-

Yastrzhembsky made no mention of the two new reactors Saturday.

The Kremlin spokesman said Kiev's decision announced Friday not to supply the turbines for the nuclear power plant was "not a surprise for

He said Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, who met Yeltsin last week in Moscow, had earlier "Indicated that Ukraine would not participate directly in the project due to massive pressure from the United States."

Japanese, Russian naval forces to hold war games

TOKYO, Mar 8: Japanese and Russian naval forces plan to stage joint search and rescue drills in the sea of Japan this year, in another step of confidence building between the two countries, a news report said today, says AFP.

ernment officials from the two countries will open talks in Moscow on March 16 to prepare for the drills, the newspaper Yomiuri quoted senior officials in Japan's self-defence forces as

It will be the first full-scale joint exercises between the defence forces and any foreign military, except for the US forces, the newspaper said. In June last year, a Russian

missile destroyer conducted a joint communications drill with Japan when it made a goodwill port call at Tokyo

The projected drills will include rescue operations in marine accidents, evacuation of people and transport of goods during earthquakes or other natural disasters, the report

The exercises will be modeled after similar drills which have been jointly conducted by US and Russian naval fleets since 1994, it said.



Anti-narcotic force officials burn confiscated narcotic, Saturday, in Peshawar. Drugs were seized in different raids including 5,500 kilograms of hasish, 1,200 kilograms of opium and 14,000 kilograms of chemicals using in drugs manufacturing. Pakistan's northwestern province is a supply line for drug trafficking from Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal areas. Pakistani government is trying its best to control drug trafficking due to international

price for its conduct in Kosovo

and we are urging our allies to

follow suit at the Contact Group

meeting on Monday, Albright

said. She was referring to the in-

ternational Contact Group on

former Yugoslavia, comprising

Britain, France, Germany,

Italy, Russia and the United

Italian Foreign Minister Lam-

berto Dini, Albright said we did

not discuss armed intervention

... we have a broad range of op-

tions available to us and we do

give wholehearted support to a

US call to punish Serbia for its

economic punitive measures,

insisted a senior official travel

Italy apparently failed to

"The focus is now on strong

not rule anything out."

Speaking after talks with

States.

actions.

- AP/UNB photo

Netanyahu rejects claim

ME peace process going backwards, says Arafat

GAZA CITY, Mar 8: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat warned yesterday that the peace process was "going backwards" due to Israeli intransigence and called for an urgent Arab summit to review dealings with the Jewish state, reports AFP.

Addressing the opening 1998 session of the Palestinian legislative council, Arafat acknowledged that "significant failures" had been committed in his fledging self-rule government but stopped short of announcing a long-awaited cabinet reshuffle or other reforms.

I won't be revealing any secrets when I say that we are going through a dangerous situation, where the peace process is almost dying. Arafat told the deputies.

"Nothing in the peace process is moving forward, in fact it is going backwards and our lonely commitment to the process will not change anything," Arafat said, placing the blame on the intentional stalling of the Israeli government in implementing its signed commitments.

Arafat called for "an urgent Arab summit to review the Arab position and the comprehensive Arab interests" in the dead-

daily said today, reports AFP.

* The Indian Express said that

Italian-born Sonia Gandhi.

who travelled about 60,000 km

in 34 days to try to win back

voters to her husband's Con-

gress Party, "came, saw but did

at her rallies, which began in

early January at the southern

town where her husband was

assassinated in 1991, did not

may have boosted Congress

morale but had failed to stem

the march of the Hindu nation-

alist Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP, Indian people's party),

which topped the polls with the

The daily said Sonia Gandhi

It said impressive turnouts

not conquer."

translate into votes

launch a coalition.

locked peace efforts with Israel. He said the summit was needed to coordinate the Arab position concerning not only the stalled Israeli Palestinian negotiations but also the Syrian and Lebanese gracks of the peace process.

Meanwhile Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's claim that the Middle East peace process is almost dying, accusing Arafat of spreading gloom. Speaking to journalists in

Oslo following talks with Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek yesterday, Netanyahu said Arafat's comments are meant to cast an attitude of gloom.

I don't think it's very useful to talk about the death of the peace process, or the reversal of the peace process, he said, and called for increased efforts to find a way to unblock and implement the interim agreement.

Modernisation of British monarchy



Family members tend the body of Lal, belonging to the Hindu community, as they bring the body back to his home in Karachi, Saturday. Lal was shot dead by paramilitary forces after an argument between small group of Hindus and census takers turned violent leaving one person dead and two others injured in the troubled area of Karachi. - AP/UNB photo

EU's call to help Afghan women: Women in Afghanistan have suffered a drastic setback in

human rights, and other countries should work together to help improve conditions for them, a senior European Union official said Saturday, AP says from Madrid.

Afghanistan's women used to be doctors and engineers but are now "subjected to the whim of a group of lunatic men," EU Human Rights Commissioner Emma Bonino said, referring to the extreme conservatism of that country's current leadership.

Colombians ready for polls: Rebels trying to undermine congressional elections stepped up attacks Saturday, but authorities promised that even one of the most violent weeks of Colombia's civil war wouldn't stop the vote, AP reports from Bogota.

Colombians choose 102 senators and 161 representatives Sunday, following a campaign marred by rebel violence, reports of widespread vote buying and an apparent infusion of millions of dollars of drug money. About 240 of the 5,000 candidates are under criminal investigation. In the election run-up, Colombia's newly invigorated guerillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as the FARC, have kidnapped three congressional candidates and 10 local mayors.

NZ climber killed in India: A mountain guide and a heli-skking instructor from New Zealand was killed in an avalanche in the Himalayan valley in northern India, police and diplomats said Sunday, AP reports from Chandigarh.

Christopher Jillet, 33, of Wanaka, was leading a group of about eight adventure tourists on a ski slope when he was hit by a huge mass of falling ice that buried him nearly two meters on Friday. Jillet was found by his teammates and other skiers and flown in a helicopter to the nearby resort town of Manali, about 500 kilometres (300 miles) north of the Indian capital New Delhi. Doctors at the hospital pronounced him dead on arrival.

Plane wreckage found in Indonesia: A search aircraft Sunday spotted the wreckage of a small plane that went missing with an Australian and two Indonesians over Sumatra island two days ago, the local Search and Rescue Agency said Sunday, AP reports from Jakarta.

King Hussein tones down proposal for US-Iraq talks

AMMAN, Jordan, Mar 8: Jordan's King Hussein toned down on Saturday his proposal for the United States to strike up a dialogue with Iraq, saying it could be left to the future, reports AP.

Hussein this week visited the United Arab Emirates and Oman, where his foreign minister said he would try to mobilise support for the dialogue he suggested in a television interview last month.

Speaking to reporters on his return from the Gulf states, the king said: "I have expressed what I thought was right, and what will come in a certain period, after Iraq implements to the letter and spirit all the existing agreements with the United Nations.

The remark contrasted sharply with the Feb. 24 interview when Hussein said a US Iraqi dialogue was "necessary" to end the standoff between Baghdad and Washington over UN inspection of suspected weapons sites.

"Neither the inspection teams nor others can lead to a final end to the crisis," the king had said. He added that Iraq had sought such a dialogue since 1990 — when the United Nations imposed sanctions on Baghdad after its troops overran Kuwait.

Queen at odds with family members LONDON, Mar 8: Queen Elizabeth II is caught in the middle

of a profound disagreement between her husband and her three sons over the modernisation of the British monarchy, a press report said today, says

said that the Queen was being advised by her conservativelyminded husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, that the royal family should hold onto its long-established traditions. But the monarch faces

strong pressure from her second son, Prince Andrew, and to a lesser extent, Prince Charles, the heir to the throne, and youngest son Prince Edward, to speed up the pace of reform to safeguard the monarchy by keeping it in step with public opinion, the weekly newspaper

Pressure for reform has been spurred by the outpouring of grief and criticism of the royal family in the wake of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales last vear in Paris. The split emerged at a recent

meeting of the "way ahead group" of senior royals and their advisers, where a radical suggestion was made to restrict the title "royal highness" - now held 18 family members — to the monarch and his (or her) immediate heir, the Mail Today It added that some factions

in the royal family wanted that

process of slimming down the monarchy to begin by stripping princesses Beatrice and Eugenie, daughters of Prince Andrew and the former Sarah Ferguson, and others of their "royal high-

This chimes in with a report in the Sun mass-circulation The mid-market Mail Today daily on Saturday, which said the proposed reforms would include restricting the style "his or her royal highness" to senior

royals and making bowing and curtseying to royals voluntary. Commenting on The Sun report, a palace spokeswoman said: "There have been a number of issues under discussion. but nothing is confirmed."

The Mail said that Andrew Forces kill 18 Hutus in Rwanda

LONDON, Mar 8: The Rwandan army said Saturday that it killed 18 Hutu rebels and calm has returned to central Rwanda where serious fighting erupted a week ago, the Rwandan news agency RNA reported, reports

The agency, monitored by the BBC, said the Hutus were killed Thursday.

"Although there has been some disruption, life has returned to normal," the agency quoted Col. Karenzi Karake, deputy commander in the central Gitarama-Kibuye area, as

was the driving force behind the proposed changes, and he could well agree that his daughters should relinquish their HRH titles, making it difficult for other minor royals not to fol-

The reported plans followed Friday's announcement that Queen Elizabeth II is to allow the British national flag, the Union Flag, to fly over Buckingham Palace at all times when she is not in residence.

When the Queen is there, the royal standard will be flown as usual.

Although ostensibly cosmetic, the move was seen as significant as the lack of a Union Flag at half mast became the focus of public criticism of a royal family seen as aloof and uncaring in the immediate aftermath of Diana's death.

Eventually, at Diana's funeral, the Union Jack was flown at half mast over the palace for the first time in his-

In another more fundamental change, the Queen in February agreed to drop the right of princes to take precedence over princesses in the line of succession to the throne, meaning succession would pass to the eldest child, whatever the sex.

Elizabeth II succeeded to the throne only because George VI had no male heirs. Traditionally Andrew and Edward would have had precedence over their elder sister Anne.

Passengers not hurt as KL airliner skids KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 8: A

Malaysian Airlines Boeing 747 from Tokyo skidded when landing in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday evening and came to a halt on the grass at the end of the runway, the airline said in a statement, reports Reuters.

None of the 318 passengers of 21 crew was hurt and the plane was not damaged, according to the statement, issued by the official news agency Bernama late on Saturday.

After the landing at Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang outside the capital, the jumbo jet was positioned at the parking bay at 7:35 pm (1135 GMT) and baggage taken off The statement gave no rea-

had been raining. "All is alright. There is also no damage to the aircraft."

son for the incident but said it

Bernama quoted Deputy Transport Minister Mohamed Ali Rustam, who had arrived at Kuala Lumpur's International Airport on a domestic flight at around the same time, as saying at the site.

4 die as forces, rebels clash in Lanka

COLOMBO, Mar 8: Government forces clashed with Tamil Tiger guerillas in northern Sri Lanka, killing at least four rebels, the Defence Ministry said today, reports AFP.

Troops killed the four men from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) outside army defence lines in the village of Olumadu on Saturday, the ministry said in a statement.

The LTTE's clandestine radio, monitored in the northern town of Vavuniya, said that a Tiger "captain" known as Navendan was killed in a clash with troops in the north of the country on Saturday but gave

no further details. The voice of Tigers radio said another rebel cadre called Mayuran was killed in an explosion in the rebel-held region of Mullaitivu on Saturday.

The radio said that Tigers also clashed with marines in the Jaffna lagoon on Friday night but did not say if there were any casualties on either

The clash came a day after the LTTE ambushed a group of security personnel in the northern village of Mathiyamadun on Friday, killing nine troopers and wounding six others, officials said.

The LTTE, which is cam-

paigning for an independent Tamil homeland in the north and east, has been accused of carrying out a devastating suicide bus bomb attack in the capital Colombo Thursday which killed 38 people and wounded 260.

Question mark over durability of India's upcoming govt Mahesh Uniyal writes from New Delhi Speculation has begun about

the life of India's new government even before it has assumed

While it seems reasonably certain that a coalition government, led by Bharativa Military officers and gov- Janata Party (BJP) leader Atal Behari Vajpayee, will be asked by President K R Narayanan to prove its majority in Parliament, its disparate composition is expected to give it a shaky

foundation. "The question today is not so much who will form the government as how long it can last," said the lead story in today's Indian Express.

"We are about to get an invitation to form the government. There should be no apprehension about the BJP in anyone's mind," Vajpayee declared today after being unanimously chosen their leader by the newly elected BJP lawmakers.

Insisting that "hate" was not on the party's agenda, Vajpayee said a BJP government would not discriminate between people on the basis of religion. A conclave of the BJP and its allies was chalking out a common governance plank from which contentious goals of the Hindu nationalist party would be

dropped, the BJP declared.

These include the building of a Hindu temple at the site of the demolished Babri mosque in Ayodhya, replacing separate personal laws for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc by a uniform civil code and scrapping Article 370 of the Constitution which confers a special status on Jammu and Kashmir.

Regarding possible dilution of the BJP's election manifesto, party general secretary M Venkaiah Naidu declared: "Some of our promises to the people have to wait. Coalition means compromise and we (the BJP) didn't get a full mandate". Party vice-president K R Malkani boasted it will be the

"real United Front". If the Vajapayee government takes office, it would have been made possible by some 18 parties and unattached lawmakers. overtaking even the 14-party outgoing ruling United Front (UF), India's biggest ruling alliance to date. A Vajpayee government in

1996 lasted just 13 days because

of his inability to muster the

necessary parliamentary strength. His government,

formed right after the May elec-

tion, gave way to two successive

UF governments propped by the Congress from outside. Not all the BJP allies are expected to be in the government. Many of the leaders of the BJP friendly parties do not either

see eye to eye with one another. A few of them, like Subramaniam Swamy of the one-lawmaker Janata Party (different from the Janata Dal of Prime Minister I K Gujral), were inveterate Vajpayee baiters. Swamy also had problems once with Lok Shakthi leader Ramakrishna Hegde and was responsible for bringing down his Karnataka government in the eighties.

The BJP's friends had already become cause for embarrassment. Om Prakash Chautala of the Haryana Lok Dal (HLD), with four MPs who have pledged support to a BJP-led government, advised the BJP to snap ties with the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) which was the BJP's poll ally and the HLD's rival in northern Haryana state.

Samata Party leader and one

time socialist firebrand George

Fernandes, who is expected to

be entrusted with a key minis-

terial portfolio, had also caused

a flutter with his statement that

a BJP-led government would ask multinational corporations (MNCs) to leave the country. Although, Fernandes later backtracked, political observers noted that this was a pointer to the tough task of managing the BJP's allies.

According to the Indian Express, another key BJP ally, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalalitha was making one of the toughest demands for supporting a Vajpayee government by insisting on a quota of eight major portfolios. There was also talk that Jayalalitha would demand that the federal government of the BJP sack the Tamil Nadu state government of the AIADMK's chief foe, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK).

With her pack of 30 lawmakers the AIDADMK supremo would be in a position to armtwist the BJP which by itself has just 179 MPs in the newly elected 545-member Lok Sabha, lower house of Parliament. So would other regional groups like the Trinamool Congress of firebrand West Bengal breakaway Congress leader Mamata Banerjee with seven

MPs, the Lok Shakthi of former Karnataka Chief Minister Ramkrishna Hegde with three MPs and the Arunachal Congress with two MPs. Even the three unattached

lawmakers who have pledged support to a BJP-led government would be in a position to demand their pound of flesh, political observers said. A BJPled ruling coalition with its expected wafer-thin majority can fall even if two MPs supporting it are absent during the voting on financial bills in the Lok Sabha, observers pointed out. Another destabilising factor

was the reluctance of the major partners to commit themselves to joining a BJP-led government. With the Trinamool Congress, the AIADMK and the Lok Shakthi still to give a firm committment, political analysts were cautioning of the dangers of backseat driving for both the new government and its backers.

But the pundits agreed that the BJP government would be more viable than the alternative -- a remarriage of the Congress and UF. The UF and

Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu had shot down the proposal by the influential Left parties in the UF to back a Congres government and was

again just to keep the BJP out of

insisting on keeping both the

Congress and the BJP at arms

length. Naidu's southern re-

UF convenor and Andhra

gional Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has 12 MPs in the Lok Sabha and there was talk that Naidu would ask his lawmakers to abstain during the confidence vote sought by a BJP government to enable it to sail through. The UF has put off a decision on government formation till March 10. The Congress party had also deferred making up its mind with a section of its leaders declaring that they were optimistic the UF would back a Congress bid. The UF and the Congress together were ahead of the BJP and its allies in the

numbers game, but a Congress-UF alliance was considered highly unlikely with senior Congress leaders declaring that they would prefer to be in oppothe Congress, which had fought sition rather than seen to be the election as rivals, were in trying to grab power. two minds about teaming up

- India Abroad News Service