

# Fresh Muslim-Christian violence grips Ambon

AMBON, Indonesia, Mar 10: Columns of smoke rose over this riot-torn Indonesian city today as 45 houses were torched in fresh outbreaks of Muslim-Christian violence, residents said, reports AFP.

There were no immediate reports of casualties in the clashes, which broke out despite the heavy presence of troops flown to Ambon last week.

The fires started around 6 am, burning 20 houses in Benteng Atas and 25 in neighbouring Air Salobar, a resident at a Muslim coordination centre told AFP by phone.

Residents in Benteng Atas and Air Salobar villages are mostly Muslims. They were attacked by Christian residents from the nearby Lathuhalat, Silaleh and Amahusu villages, the source said.

"The fight is still going on and you can see thick smoke billowing up from the area," he said, adding "the military haven't done much" to remedy

the situation.

Another house was destroyed by fire in the city but the military secured the area before the flames could spread to other property, he said.

Armed forces General Wiranto on Sunday sent a special task force of 19 Ambon-born officers, both Christian and Muslim, to the city on the heels of 3,000 marine and army reinforcements flown in last week.

He said he was trusting the officers to try to defuse the ethnic and religious tensions here and bring the situation under control.

But the Muslims coordination centre resident said the military were considered by many to be "partial" in their protection.

A man identified only as Nibus at the central Al-Fatah mosque said that at around 2 am he heard about 50 explosions and several hundred rounds of gunshots.

"The explosions and the shooting lasted for about an

hour and the people here could not sleep because we were afraid there might be an attack on us," Nibus said.

He added a large number of troops were guarding the mosque which was being used as a shelter by Muslims who have lost their homes in the riots.

Meanwhile, the chief of Laha village said four police officers were arrested on Tuesday by the military police for firing without cause.

"It is true that four police officers have been arrested because they fired shots when they were not supposed to, but I am not sure whether they shot at people," chief Frankie Mewar told AFP.

The arrests would take to 15 the number of security officials detained for interfering with the unrests since January 19.

Military officials and the special press centre set up by a new task force to clarify the Ambon situation were not available to confirm the reports of the fires, shooting or arrests.

## Indian, Pakistani FMs to meet in Colombo next week

ISLAMABAD, Mar 10: Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz has said he would meet his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh in Colombo during the SAARC foreign ministers' meet next week which would be followed by talks between the foreign secretaries of the two countries in April, according to a media report here yesterday.

During the meet, the first since Indian Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif at a summit in Lahore last month agreed to take confidence-building measures, the two leaders would also finalise the date for the meeting of the foreign secretaries, The News English daily quoted Aziz as saying.

"Most likely, the two foreign secretaries will meet in April this year," he said.

Aziz said during the discussions on the sidelines of the SAARC foreign ministers' meet slated for March 18 and 19, he would discuss the follow-up actions to the prime ministers' meeting at Lahore.

## Sierra Leone's rebel leader for unilateral ceasefire

FREETOWN, Mar 10: Sierra Leone's charismatic rebel leader called on commanders of his guerrilla army Tuesday to observe a unilateral cease-fire and to release any hostages they are holding, reports AP.

Today Sankoh, who has been sentenced to death for treason, was briefly released from prison to address reporters. It was the Revolutionary United Front leader's first public address since his conviction and sentencing in October.

Speaking outside the headquarters of the West African intervention force defending Sierra Leone's government, Sankoh called for an indefinite cease-fire across the country within the next three days.

"I therefore call on you my commanders anywhere you are in Sierra Leone to immediately release all innocent civilians and religious workers, including Catholic priests you have held as hostages," Sankoh said.

Sankoh said he was also allowed to speak to his top aides by telephone, and repeated the cease-fire call to them.

## Dalai Lama for compromise with Beijing as Tibetans mark 40 years in exile

DHARMSALA, India, Mar 10: Thousands of Tibetans marched through India's capital Wednesday to mark the 40th anniversary of their exile, as the Dalai Lama sent a reassuring signal to Beijing that any compromise agreement would win acceptance from his people, reports AP.

An estimated 5,000 people, many in traditional Tibetan dress, strode behind the Tibetan flag toward the Indian parliament building, chanting slogans against what they call the Chinese occupation of the Himalayan homeland.

In the northern town of Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama told 4,000 Tibetans and international observers the Chinese government lacked the "political will and courage" to discuss the Tibet issue, and accused it of intensifying repression against his people.

Among his listeners were 600 refugees who reached

Dharamsala last month after making the dangerous trek across some of the highest mountain passes in the world in the dead of winter.

Tibetans are marking the 40th anniversary of the uprising against Chinese rule that resulted in the crackdown that forced the Dalai Lama to flee into exile. March 10 is known as Tibetan National Day in the Tibetan calendar.

The Dalai Lama has been

opposing the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and the Palestinians.

Arafat was accompanied in his meeting with Gaddafi by his International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath and Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat.

Earlier, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mussa said Arafat was sticking to May 4 as the date to proclaim a state.

Ocalan appoints two lawyers

ANKARA, Mar 10: Imprisoned Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan has formally appointed two lawyers for what will be his much-watched defense against charges of treason, according to a news agency report Tuesday, reports AP.

Turkey's Anatolia news agency, quoting police officials, said Ocalan named brothers Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu and Selim Okcuoglu as his attorneys on Monday in the presence of a notary.

Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu appealed to the prosecutor's office in Ankara on Tuesday, asking permission to see his client for what would be only the second time since Ocalan was captured Feb 15.

## Yeltsin asks Premakov to take charge of Chechnya crisis

MOSCOW, Mar 10: Coping with the abduction of Russia's top envoy to Chechnya, President Boris Yeltsin has turned to his prime minister to take charge of the latest crisis in the breakaway region, reports AP.

On orders from Yeltsin, Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov was to chair a meeting Wednesday on federal policy in the region, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

The kidnapping of police Maj. Gen. Gennady Shpigin in the Chechen capital Grozny last Friday has worsened already

tense relations between Moscow and Chechen leaders.

The two sides have never settled Chechnya's political status following a 1994-96 war in which the republic won de-facto independence.

Kidnappers dragged Shpigin off an airplane just before it was to take off last Friday from the Chechen capital Grozny. So far no one has claimed responsibility or made any demands.

Chechnya's president has called for a meeting with Russian leaders to coordinate efforts to find Shpigin.

## State Department official says US may succeed to oust Saddam by 2001

WASHINGTON, Mar 10: US efforts to remove Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from office could bear fruit by January 2001, a top US State Department official told a Senate panel Tuesday, reports AP.

Under fire from Senators questioning whether such a change could come before President Bill Clinton leaves office, Elizabeth Jones, Principal Assistant Secretary of State of near east affairs, replied "it's entirely possible."

Jones was defending the Clinton administration's Iraq policy from tough criticism by two Republican Senators, who charged not enough was being done to bring about Saddam's ouster.

"We're wasting a tremendous opportunity here" by not pushing harder for the Iraqi leaders' removal at a time when there seems to be broad support for it, stressed, Republican Senator Sam Brownback.

Brownback, who chairs the panel to which Jones testified, also deplored limiting US action to striking Iraqi installations that target American and British jets patrolling "no-fly zones" in Iraq.

Any campaign to remove Saddam requires "aggressive US leadership" without which it "may take several years, it may take 10 years," added Brownback.

Republican Senator John Ashcroft meanwhile said the White House has "not spent a single dollar" to train and equip Iraqi opposition despite the 97 million dollars that could fund such an effort under a US budget provision.

Jones painted a different picture of American policy, saying Washington was "working actively and aggressively" to bring about Saddam's removal, but stressing the need to rally opposition groups before training and equipping them.

The agency said some 200 earthquakes were registered near the south side of Sakurajima, a volcanic island inside Kagoshima Bay. The 1,117-metre high Sakurajima has erupted 15 times since earlier in the year, the agency said. It warned local residents of further volcanic activity.

# International

## Singapore govt still needs detention without trial law

SINGAPORE, Mar 10: A 50-year-old security law designed to combat communists by detaining them without trial is still necessary because other nations are plotting against Singapore, the government told Parliament Wednesday, reports AP.

"China doesn't present the same threat as before," Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged in answering an opposition member's call to repeal the Internal Security Act. "We are not in a Western-style democracy, as long as the law gives the government such draconian powers," Chiam said.

Lee, responding for the People's Action Party that has controlled Singapore for 40 years, did not comment on Chiam's reference to the effect of the law on the domestic opposition.

He said two people detained in 1997 and four in 1998 were involved in espionage. They have never been identified or tried.

"We have not published a lot of details on these espionage cases because we don't want to unnecessarily inflame relations or cause problems with these countries," Lee said.

He said the act was used in 1987 to detain four people he said were stockpiling weapons and planning a "riot."

"We can wait until we get

enough evidence in order to prove the case in court or we can act immediately before it got out of hand," Lee said. He described the law as "a precaution, a safeguard" accepted by Singaporeans as a necessary part of the political landscape.

Singapore shall forever be an authoritarian state," instead of a Western-style democracy, as long as the law gives the government such "draconian powers," Chiam said.

Lee, responding for the People's Action Party that has controlled Singapore for 40 years, did not comment on Chiam's reference to the effect of the law on the domestic opposition.

He said two people detained in 1997 and four in 1998 were involved in espionage. They have never been identified or tried.

"We have not published a lot of details on these espionage cases because we don't want to unnecessarily inflame relations or cause problems with these countries," Lee said.

He said the act was used in 1987 to detain four people he said were stockpiling weapons and planning a "riot."

"We can wait until we get

enough evidence in order to prove the case in court or we can act immediately before it got out of hand," Lee said. He described the law as "a precaution, a safeguard" accepted by Singaporeans as a necessary part of the political landscape.

Singapore's longest-held detainee was Chia Thye Poh, now 57, who was an opposition Parliament member when he was seized in 1966 and held for 23 years. After his lease from prison in 1989, his movements, speech, writings and assembly with others were restricted, until last year.

"He was never formally tried or brought to court for trial," said Chiam. "There was only an allegation that he was a communist and called for the violent overthrow of the state, which he has consistently denied."

Lee said the government had been told by other communists that Chia "was their man," and that his speeches "implied" a call for violent overthrow of the government. He said Chia had never denied the allegations.

Ex-army chief says N-arms Pakistan's cheapest form of defence

ISLAMABAD, Mar 10: A former Pakistan army chief involved in Islamabad's nuclear programme said on Tuesday that nuclear weapons were the country's cheapest form of defence, reports Reuter.

Former chief of army staff General Mirza Aslam Beg said in a speech Pakistan had a number of nuclear weapons which he thought were sufficient to act as a deterrent against arch-rival India.

"The choice to retain that option is logical, it is the cheapest option," he said during a debate between political leaders and civilians organised by a local

group.

Beg said that as a member of Pakistan's nuclear command authority between 1988-91 in his capacity as army chief, he found that the country's nuclear programme from 1975 to 1990 cost only 250 million US dollars — less than the cost of 10 US made F-16 fighters.

But former Pakistan air force chief, retired Air Marshal Asghar Khan, slammed the country's nuclear programme and urged the government to sign the International Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) that is still being negotiated.

"It is national suicide," he said, referring to the nuclear tests carried out by Pakistan last May in response to similar tests by India.

## Mandela blasts white S Africans for continuing privilege system

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 10: In the waning months of his presidency, Nelson Mandela has reprimanded white South Africans for perpetuating the system of white privilege, reports AP.

Mandela told the mostly white, upper-class crowd Monday that many whites refuse to share their resources with the previously disadvantaged majority.

"The masses are telling us that the white minority still wants to defend its privilege," Mandela said in a speech at a primary school in the Johannesburg suburb of Houghton, where he was a house.

He faulted whites for keeping the apartheid regime in power for 40 years, and now for "shunning" the African National Congress — "the only party that can bring peace to the country."

"Don't be a supporter of lost causes. White supremacy will never come back," he said to applause and cheers.

Mandela acknowledged failings by the African National Congress leadership. "It is a serious mistake for you to think that this government fell out of heaven and landed in South Africa," he said.

## Protest marks Charles' visit to Argentina

BUENOS AIRES, Mar 10: Prince Charles bowed in tribute to Argentina's dead from a 1982 war with Britain, striking a conciliatory tone on a three-day tour intended to kindle new ties between the former foes, reports AP.

But while his visit here opened quietly Tuesday, at nightfall demonstrators clashed with police while trying to march to a hotel where the Prince of Wales was dining with President Carlos Menem.

Police fired tear gas to disperse the rock-throwing marchers and arrested 27 people, local news agency Diarios Noticias reported. Two police officers were reported injured.

Prince Charles is the most prominent British royal to visit Argentina since the war for the Falkland Islands.

Hours after he landed in Buenos Aires, he paid quiet tribute to the 750 Argentines lost in the 10-week war, laying a wreath at a monument in their honour.

Led by a member of Argentina's armed forces, Prince Charles bowed his head at the black granite wall inscribed with each Argentine soldier's name as a group of war veterans, among others, looked on.



New Miss Israel Rana Raslan (L), 21, from Haifa, the first Arab-Israeli woman to be elected as the beauty queen of Israel, poses with her predecessor and current Miss World Linor Abergil (R), in Tel Aviv Tuesday after being crowned.

— AFP photo

## Off the Record

### UN dog earns more than undersecretary-general!

UNITED NATIONS: How much is that doggie in the window? At the United Nations, he costs 150,000 dollars a year, reports AP.

And the United Nations said Tuesday he's worth every penny.

Costa Rica complained to the UN budget committee Monday that the world body was spending too much money on a high-security dog when it was so short of cash.

But Assistant Secretary-General Toshiyuki Niwa defended Jerry, the bomb-sniffing security pooch.

The costly canine is an effective security measure in light of the number of suspicious packages and letter bomb threats the United Nations receives, he told the UN budget committee.

Could be, but at the rate of 60 dollars an hour, 10 hours a day, 252 days a year, Jerry and his handler Tom were earning more than a UN undersecretary-general takes home in a year — about 140,000