

Most US troops guarding Panama canal will leave by May

PANAMA CITY, Mar 21: US troops stationed along the Panama canal will be reduced significantly by the end of May, the spokesman for the US southern command said Saturday, reports AFP.

S Africa to set up diplomatic mission in Libya

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 21: South Africa plans to set up a diplomatic mission in Libya, South African president Nelson Mandela said, reports Reuters.

Airstrikes loom as fighting flares up in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Mar 21: The UN relief agency rushed supplies today to about 9,000 people displaced by a fierce Yugoslav offensive in Kosovo that prompted new warnings from the West that punitive airstrikes may be imminent, reports AP.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook described the situation as "very grave" and warned Milosevic in a BBC radio interview Saturday night that NATO attacks could begin in "a matter of days".

9,000 refugees believed to be in the area. In its account of Saturday's fighting, the government's Tanjug news agency said the army responded after ethnic Albanian terrorist forces intensified attacks on convoys and units of Yugoslav army in a wide area of northern Kosovo.



A municipal worker (R) under police protection uses a high pressure water hose to remove election campaign posters from a Colombo wall yesterday as part of a move to remove political propaganda from public places.

Osama Bin Laden located in Jalalabad

LONDON, Mar 21: Suspected international terrorist Osama Bin Laden, who vanished last month from his Afghanistan stronghold in Kandahar, is now living in the east of the country, the Sunday Telegraph reported, says AFP.

Vajpayee vows not to let 'others' capture Indian territory

CALCUTTA, Mar 21: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Saturday vowed not to let "others" capture Indian territory and said prospects for peace with arch-rival Pakistan increased after tit-for-tit nuclear tests, reports Reuters.

"(It was) good that everything came in the open... Now both have similar weapons. The prospects of peace will increase. A nuclear weapon is not a weapon for fighting, it is a weapon for peace, deterrence," he said.

strengthen ties with Bhutan and Myanmar. "To further strengthen relations, our foreign minister is going to Bhutan. We have also had talks with Myanmar," he said.

Armed gangs destroying houses in Borneo Island

SAMBAS, Indonesia, Mar 21: Hundreds of euphoric warriors, some wearing shirts stained with victims' blood, pillaged and burned abandoned homes on Borneo Island today after ethnic slaughter that left at least 73 people dead, reports AP.

has stayed clear of the conflict. Old customs of tribal war that were thriving when British and Dutch colonists ventured into the Borneo interior centuries ago have been played out in gruesome shows of public rejoicing.

homemade rifles. Gunshots boomed as Malay and Dayak men battered down doors of empty Madurese homes with heavy wooden planks and splashed gasoline inside. Plumes of smoke gushed from flaming houses.

BRIEFLY

US ultralight expert killed: A 75-year-old ultralight pilot who won nationwide acclaim as a leading expert on the unconventional planes died when his ultralight crashed onto a golf course less than a kilometre away from his flight centre, AP reports from Lakewood.

Leading British painter Heron dies: Patrick Heron, Britain's foremost abstract painter, died Saturday at the age of 79, the director of London's Tate Gallery said, AP reports from London.

Arrest of ETA men protested: More than 60,000 demonstrators marched in northern Spain on Saturday to protest the recent arrests of alleged members and supporters of an armed Basque separatist group, AP reports from Bilbao, Spain.

Costa Rican president to visit Taiwan: Costa Rican President Miguel Angel Rodriguez will begin a visit to this island today that should help Taiwan strengthen relations with one of its few diplomatic allies, the Foreign Ministry said yesterday, AP reports from Taipei.

Russia launches Chinese sat: Russia successfully launched a Chinese satellite yesterday from its rocket base in neighbouring Kazakhstan, a news report said, AP says from Moscow.

Awards for the 'worst in films' announced
LOS ANGELES, Mar 21: The 19th annual Golden Raspberry Awards were announced here Saturday for the unlucky "winners" deemed to embody the worst of their art in films, reports AFP.



Katherine Tramarin of New York City reads an entertainment magazine as she waits outside the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion Saturday to be one of the 350 fans admitted into the coveted Oscar bleacher area for the arrival of celebrities in the 71st Annual Academy Awards. — AFP photo

Netanyahu warns against unilateral declaration of Palestinian state

JERUSALEM, Mar 21: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned on Saturday that Israel would respond "sharply" to any unilateral declaration of a state by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, reports Reuters.

elaborating. In the past Netanyahu's hardline government has promised to impose Israeli law in still-occupied parts of the West Bank if Arafat unilaterally declares a state.

Clinton orders stepping up efforts to curb gun violence

WASHINGTON, Mar 21: US President Bill Clinton ordered senior administration officials on Saturday to step up the federal government's efforts to curb gun violence and to study local success stories in the fight against illegal firearms, reports Reuters.

While the numbers are declining, any child caught in the crossfire of a gang shootout, or a police officer struck down by a criminal's bullet, or a store clerk murdered in a robbery is one tragedy too many," Clinton said.

Thousands of Iraqis return home without performing Hajj

KARBALA, Mar 21: Thousands of Iraqis returned Saturday from Saudi Arabia, many angry and hurt that political differences kept them from making the annual pilgrimage to Islam's holiest sites, reports AP.

The Iraqi government ordered the would-be pilgrims, believed to number about 18,000, back from Makkah when the Kingdom refused its demand that frozen Iraqi funds — and not Saudi charity — be used to pay for the Hajj.

Hajj and then cannot make it because of political differences. Rashid Abbas complained that Saudi police had cordoned off their camps. State-run Iraqi Television charged that Saudi security forces fired rubber bullets in the air to frighten the pilgrims. The Kingdom denied any ill-treatment.

Malaysia takes all-out steps to control encephalitis virus

SUGAI NIPAH, Malaysia, Mar 21: Malaysian soldiers covered from head-to-toe in plastic overalls and face masks slaughtered pigs with shotguns today in an all-out effort to control a virus that may have killed more than 50 people, reports AP.

The tranquility of rural farms was shattered by the sound of gunfire and the squeals of frightened animals as soldiers carried out orders to exterminate hogs in villages worst affected by the outbreak of Japanese encephalitis.

insecticide on swamps where mosquitoes breed. The Star daily reported. "Our aim is to destroy the mosquito larvae in the canals and ponds," said Soh Chai Hock, the region's fire chief.

Int'l War Crimes Tribunal report Croatian Army carried out 'ethnic cleansing' of Serbs

NEW YORK, Mar 21: International War Crimes Tribunal investigators in the Hague have concluded that the Croatian Army carried out "ethnic cleansing" of Serbs during a 1995 assault, Sunday's New York Times reported, says Reuters.

The Times, quoting unpublished tribunal documents, said investigators accuse Croatia of summary executions and indiscriminate shelling of civilian populations and have recommended that three Croatian generals be indicted.

Croatian armed forces and special police committed numerous violations of international humanitarian law, including but not limited to shelling of Knin and other cities. "During and in the 100 days following the military offensive, at least 150 Serb civilians were summarily executed, and many hundreds disappeared."

Troops clash with MILF rebels in Philippines

MANILA, Mar 21: Government troops clashed with fighters from a Muslim separatist group today as they continued an offensive against a different separatist group and bandits in southern island province, reports AP.

Jailed Chinese dissident seriously ill

BEIJING, Mar 21: A Chinese dissident given a 12 years jail term in December for attempting to organise an opposition party has become seriously ill with heart and stomach problems while serving his sentence in a labour camp, a rights group reported today, reports AP.