



A smiling Donatella Versace arrives with The Prince of Wales to the De Beer and Versace "Diamonds are forever" charity fashion event in London on Wednesday. A host of international celebrities turned out for the event which will raise funds for three charities including the Prince's Foundation for architecture and the environment.

— AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Seven die in chopper crash:

A sightseeing helicopter crashed into a glacier in Alaska, killing all seven people aboard. AP reports from Juneau, Alaska. The helicopter went down with six tourists and a pilot near Herbert Glacier, 32 kilometers north of the popular tourist destination of Juneau. The cause had yet to be determined. The weather was cloudy in Juneau, and fog also was present. Worsening weather in the afternoon forced the troopers to suspend efforts to recover the bodies.

3 Jailed for trafficking women:

A 61-year-old Vietnamese man has been jailed for 14 years for trafficking women to China, a report said today. Nguyen Thi Mai and two accomplices who received eight and seven year terms sold 22 women to China between 1995 and 1998 under the pretext of finding them jobs. Tuoi Tre newspaper said. The sentences were passed on Wednesday by Hanoi people's court. AFP reports from Hanoi.



Jordan's King Abdullah II and his wife Queen Rania arrive at a reception to mark his formal accession to the throne, at Raghadan palace in Amman on Wednesday. Abdullah became king after the death of his father, King Hussein on February 7.

— AFP photo

Quake hits eastern Taiwan:

An earthquake measuring 4.9 on the Richter scale shook eastern Taiwan Thursday but no casualties or damage were reported, seismologists said. AFP reports from Taipei. The tremor hit at 3:16 p.m. (0718 GMT) with its epicenter located 25.7 kilometers south of the coastal town of Hualien. It originated 26.3 kilometers (16.3 miles) under the earth's surface. The island sits on an earthquake belt but most quakes are centered deep below the surface, toning down their destructive strength.

OIC to meet in Burkina Faso:

Foreign ministers of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) states are due to meet here from June 28 to July 2, officials said today. AFP reports from Ouagadougou. Ministers from the 56-member organisation will discuss the theme of "peace and partnership for development". The Ouagadougou conference is due to reinforce cohesion and cooperation among member states, a statement from the ministerial secretariat said. The meeting was originally scheduled for May 25, but was delayed for logistical reasons.

ROK escalating tension, accuses DPRK

TOKYO, June 10: North Korea today accused Seoul of raising tensions in a naval standoff that has entered its third day, reports Reuters.

"South Korean authorities have brought the situation at the sea to an extreme pitch of tension by moving warships from Taechong islet and around Incheon, toward Taeyonphons islet from Monday onward," the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a report monitored in Tokyo.

"The South Korean authorities Wednesday repeatedly committed military provocations by intruding their reinforced warships into the north side's territorial waters off the west coast of Korea," KCNA quoted North Korean military sources as saying.

Pyeongyang also accused the United States and South Korea of using the alleged naval intru-

sions, joint military exercises and the NATO action in Yugoslavia to create a "scenario" for a second Korean War.

"The latest intrusions which (are) timed to coincide with such moves, cannot be construed otherwise than an attempt to find and excuse for unleashing a war," the agency said in a separate report.

Tensions escalated between the two Koreas after North Korea accused three South Korean warships of entering its waters in the Yellow Sea on Saturday while chasing North Korean fishing boats. South Korea denied the accusation.

North Korea on Wednesday declined an offer by the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission to discuss the ongoing standoff, the South Korean defence ministry said.

The war has ended: Y'slav Gen

Serb troops prepare to leave Kosovo

BELGRADE, June 10: After 11 weeks of intense NATO airstrikes, Serb forces prepared Thursday to leave Kosovo as part of a peace deal signed by Yugoslav and Western generals, reports AP.

"The war has ended," Yugoslav Col Gen Svetozar Marjanovic said Wednesday in Macedonia, after lengthy negotiations at a French military base.

NATO Secretary General Javier Solana said the alliance endorsed the deal at a late-night meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, but would stop the bombing of Yugoslavia only once it is certain the Serb troops are leaving Kosovo.

"We have said from the beginning we are ready to suspend air operations, once we have verified the beginning of the withdrawal of the Yugoslav forces," Solana said.

NATO appeared to cease its

air attacks even before the pull-outs began, however Yugoslav's state-run Tanjug news agency reported that the last air strikes anywhere occurred in the early evening on Wednesday, when the city of Urosevac in southern Kosovo was hit.

"The enemy aircraft fell silent after that," said Tanjug.

The private Beta news agency carried a similar report. A Serb official said Belgrade would begin withdrawing its forces Thursday.

NATO spokesman Jamie Shea said the agreement calls for the Serbs to withdraw from the most northerly part of Kosovo within 24 hours. As soon as the alliance verifies the partial withdrawal is underway, the air campaign will be halted.

That would clear the way for the UN Security Council to approve a resolution which would

authorise advance units of the peacekeeping force to move in quickly from Macedonia.

Early Thursday, the first group of some 2,000 US Marines who are to participate in the Kosovo peacekeeping force, landed on a beach in northern Greece and began moving toward Macedonia.

The deployment from USS Grunston Hall, an amphibious assault vessel, came after several days of delay because the Greek government, fearing escalation of anti-NATO protests, insisted that the military agreement between the Yugoslav army and NATO be signed first.

The troops were greeted by signs that read "Baby Killers" and "NATO go home." Many Greeks, who share cultural and religious ties with Yugoslavia's Orthodox Serbs, have opposed the NATO airstrikes.

In a statement early Thursday, Kosovo rebels fighting Serb

troops in the province declared a ceasefire once the Yugoslav forces stop their operations in Kosovo and start to withdraw.

Refugees in northern Albania embraced one another as they heard news of the agreement.

In the Yugoslav capital, thousands of people streamed into the streets, celebrating what their government sought to proclaim as a victory, despite the devastation of their country and acceptance of terms President Slobodan Milosevic had vowed never to accept.

US President Bill Clinton called the agreement "another important step toward achieving our objectives in Kosovo."

Under the military-technical agreement signed Wednesday, Serb troops will have 11 days, rather than the original seven, to withdraw.



A Serbian child flashes the three-finger sign under a Serbian flag during celebrations in Belgrade late Wednesday night. A military agreement on the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops from Kosovo was signed earlier in Kumanovo, Macedonia.

— AFP photo

US Senate votes to suspend sanctions on India, Pakistan

WASHINGTON, June 10: The US Senate has voted to suspend economic sanctions on India and Pakistan for five years but keep a ban on military and nuclear technology sales, two senators who led the campaign said Wednesday, reports AP.

The measure easing sanctions on both nations was attached to a defense budget bill passed overwhelmingly late Tuesday. Republican Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts said in a joint statement.

Lifting the punitive measures, which were automatically triggered by both nations' 1998 nuclear tests, still requires approval from the House of Representatives and US President Bill Clinton.

Republican Representative Benjamin Gilman, the chairman of the House International

Relations Committee, has introduced a similar measure in that chamber.

The senate measure suspends all economic sanctions for five years, after which it grants the president a national interest waiver to renew suspension of these sanctions.

It allows limited economic assistance to support non-governmental organizations, democracy or the start-up of democratic institutions and humanitarian assistance, as well as peacekeeping operations' assistance.

Also permitted are credit, credit guarantees or other financial assistance; loans and financial or technical assistance by international financial institutions; US bank loans or credits to both governments; and credit in support

of US exports to India or Pakistan.

The measure calls for granting the president a national security waiver for sales of defense articles and services, foreign military financing and dual use technologies not primarily used for missile development or nuclear weapons programs.

But the senate measure also urged that there be no such waiver with respect "to any party that initiates or supports activities that jeopardize peace and security in Jammu and Kashmir."

"This will allow the United States to move forward with a broad-based relationship with both India and Pakistan -- two of the world's largest democracies," Brownback said.

Both of these countries, for different reasons, are of strate-

gic importance to the United States. We should not be sanctioning our friends," he added.

The senators warned that a White House waiver on the sanctions -- which stem from a 1994 US law mandating sweeping US sanctions on any "nuclear nation" that explodes a nuclear device -- expires in October.

In February, the US State Department said Indian moves toward signing the 1996 global Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) had led the United States to consider lifting some of its sanctions.

Washington wants India and Pakistan to sign the CTBT, halt further missile material production, strengthen export controls and exercise mutual restraint in missile and weapons development.

Heavy Indian artillery assault in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, June 10: India staged heavy artillery strikes against Muslim guerrilla infiltrators in Kashmir Thursday, two days before talks with Pakistan on the month-long conflict in the disputed Himalayan region.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said he was "confident and hopeful" the talks would yield results, but added fighting would nonetheless continue.

"Our army will not rest till they throw out the infiltrators," the Press Trust of India news agency quoted him as saying in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Defence sources reported heavy artillery assaults in the northern mountain region of Drass, and said there were

"some advances" made ahead of Pakistan Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz's visit to New Delhi Saturday.

An air force spokesman said "some sorties" had been conducted in the morning but were later suspended due to bad weather. Defence sources in Kashmir said cross-border firing had intensified Thursday.

A defence source said the artillery assault would after some time turn the guerrillas into "sitting ducks."

But a defence expert in Kashmir said "significant breakthroughs are yet to be achieved."

"The body of an Indian major has been lying since May 29 in Batalik and another officer's

corpse has been lying in Drass since early this month and none have been recovered," he said, referring to two major conflict areas.

India has been fighting between 1,200 and 1,500 Muslim guerrillas and what it says are regular Pakistani army soldiers in the northern Kashmir mountains since May 9.

Indian army chief V.P. Malik visited the conflict zones Thursday, officials said, without giving any details.

Vajpayee is due to visit Kashmir Sunday in a morale-boosting exercise. India's main opposition leader, Sonia Gandhi, is also due to visit Kashmir Saturday to meet injured troops, officials said. Defence officials said two

senior Indian army officers -- a brigadier and a colonel in charge of the main conflict zones of Drass and Kargil -- were transferred Wednesday for failing to detect the mass intrusions in time in April.

Pakistan returned the bodies of six Indian soldiers reported missing since May 5. They were part of the first reconnaissance patrol in Kargil and were sent to check accessibility in the snow-laden mountains.

The Press Trust of India quoted a senior official in Kargil as saying the corpses bore signs of torture with the eyes gouged out and ears, noses and genitals chopped off. There was, however, no official confirmation of the report.

US, Russia urge Pakistan to withdraw infiltrators

Islamabad seeks Beijing's support over Kashmir crisis

WASHINGTON, June 10: Toughening their stand on the armed intrusion into Kashmir, the United States and Russia have asked Pakistan to restore status quo on the Line of Control (LOC) and withdraw the infiltrators, reports AP.

Rejecting the Pakistani stand that the LOC in Kashmir was no clearly demarcated, US President Bill Clinton's special assistant Bruce Riedel told reporters on Wednesday. That the infiltrators must go back to the Pakistani side of the LOC.

We think the LOC has been clearly demarcated over the years. The two sides have not previously had significant differences about where the LOC is. Those who have infiltrated from the Pakistani side must go back, he said.

In Moscow, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin called on Pakistan's Ambassador Mansoor Alam and asked Islamabad to withdraw the armed groups of infiltrators from Indian soil and restore status quo on the LOC.

Kremlin sources told PTI,

Karasin welcomed the Indo-Pak talks on defusing the situation on the LOC and suggested that the two neighbours solve all outstanding issues bilaterally on the basis of the Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration.

Clinton's special assistant and senior advisor to the national security council for near Eastern and South Asian affairs, welcomed the proposed Indo-Pak talks and urged the two sides to move forward on the basis of three rules, mutual restraint, affirmation of the LOC and intensification of the bilateral dialogue process.

We were concerned about the fighting. We have and we will continue to urge restraint on both sides, Riedel said. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz is visiting New Delhi on June 12 for talks with his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh on defusing tension along the LOC.

Riedel stressed on the importance of focusing on what needs to be done to control the situation rather than indulging in a blame-game and hoped that the

Indo-Pak talks would result in restraint and respect for the LOC.

Meanwhile, Pakistan moved to muster diplomatic support from its key ally China today before weekend talks with India aimed at ending a month of fighting in Kashmir.

Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz was due to head for Beijing around midnight today for consultations Friday with Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan ahead of discussions with his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh in New Delhi on Saturday.

Pakistani officials said the Beijing talks would focus on the conflict in Kashmir where India has been fighting hundreds of Moslem guerrillas, most of whom it says are regular Pakistani army soldiers.

An official statement said Pakistan and China "coordinate and consult with each other regularly and the visit is part of this tradition". Both countries "enjoy close friendly relations which have stood the test of time", it added.

Nigeria purges military officers

LAGOS, June 10: Nigeria's new civilian president on Wednesday pursued 29 senior brass from the military and seized hundreds of millions of dollars in stolen wealth from cronies of the late dictator Gen. Sani Abacha, officials and state television said, reports AP.

President Olusegun Obasanjo, whose inauguration last month ended 15 years of junta rule in this oil-rich West African country, forced each of the 29 officers ranging from brigadier-generals to majors into "compulsory retirement," presidential spokesman Doyin Okupe said.

Those affected by the shake-up include Mohammed Abdallah, the former military chief of staff under Abacha, whose strong-armed rule made Nigeria an international pariah and prevented democratic reforms until his death a year ago.

A new law published in a special government gazette authorised the immediate seizure of more than 420 million dollar in Sierra Leone's state petroleum refinery, including 140 million dollar held by Abacha's former national security advisor, Ibrahim Gwarzo, state-controlled television reported.

Israeli jets attack South Lebanon

MARJAYOUN (Lebanon), June 10: Israeli warplanes struck southern Lebanon for the second straight day Thursday, hours after an Israeli army officer was killed and a soldier was wounded in some of the fiercest fighting in recent weeks, reports AP.

Two Israeli jets fired six missiles on a valley near Hadatha, a front-line village 12 kilometers north of the Israeli border, and only a few hundred meters from the Israeli-occupied border enclave in south Lebanon, Lebanese security officials said.

There was no immediate word on casualties from the 6 am (0300 GMT) airstrike, which targeted an area believed to be used by Lebanese guerrillas as a base to attack Israeli troops and allied Lebanese militiamen in the occupied zone.

In Jerusalem, an Israeli army spokesman confirmed the air raid. He said all the planes "returned safely to their bases."

The airstrike came nearly an hour after a rocket and machine-gun attack on an outpost overlooking Hadatha, manned by the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army militia, the offi-

cials said, speaking on customary condition of anonymity.

The attack was claimed by the Lebanese Resistance Brigades, a Hezbollah-backed guerrilla group fighting to oust Israeli forces from South Lebanon. The group said airstrikes in the vicinity of the post followed the attack.

On Wednesday night, just hours before the air raid, guerrillas of Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed group spearheading the drive against Israeli forces in south Lebanon, ambushed an Israeli army patrol. An Israeli military spokesman said a lieutenant was killed in the attack and a soldier was wounded.

In the heat of the battle Wednesday night, Lebanese security officials reported two Israeli soldiers were killed and four others wounded in the fighting near the outpost of Rihan, which faces the guerrilla stronghold of Iqlim al-Tuffah.

The officials, who have been generally reliable in the past, apparently got confused by reports that an Israeli attack helicopter went down during the fighting, thus leading to their higher casualty toll.



Families of victims of army shootings in last year's riots sob while holding pictures of their dead relatives, in front of a police line in Jakarta yesterday, during a demonstration in front of the country's defence ministry.

— AFP photo

Indonesia polls: Only 10 pc votes counted so far Megawati's party still ahead

JAKARTA, June 10: Nervous police bolstered security Thursday at potential hotspots in Jakarta as a painfully slow election count fed anxiety that a tradition of vote-rigging could be plaguing Indonesia again, reports AP.

Polling officials denied any improprieties, saying they have been swamped by the estimated 113 million votes cast on some 13,000 islands for Monday's parliamentary election, which was billed as the country's freest in 44 years.

By Thursday afternoon, unofficial results released to journalists showed that just over 10 per cent of the votes had been tabulated, a fraction of what had been promised by that stage. In 10 of the 25 provinces, the total was less than 2 per cent.

The Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle, headed by

opposition figure Megawati Sukarnoputri, maintained its lead with 33.7 per cent of the vote.

The ruling Golkar Party, which languished in pre-election opinion polls, moved into second place with 20.8 per cent. The National Awakening Party of Abdurrahman Wahid, head of Indonesia's largest Islamic group, was third with 12.3 per cent.

Overall, 48 parties fielded candidates.

Some rival parties worried about possible fraud. International observers, including former US President Jimmy Carter, said lingering delays could erode public trust in Indonesia's fledgling democracy.

Television stations ran public-service advertisements to explain the count and the reasons for the delays.

Police moved to prevent un-

rest, shifting security forces to potential rallying points, including the Welcome Statue traffic circle, the General Elections Commission headquarters and the Hotel Aryaduta, where the votes are being tabulated.

Hank Valentino of the Washington-based International Foundation for Election Systems, who has been helping to run the count, said Thursday that he had believed from the start it would take at least a week for the results to crawl in.

Rudini, head of the General Elections Commission, blamed the delays on slow and meticulous work by workers processing ballots in tens of thousands of villages and that he no longer had a prediction on when a final result would be available.