

HK legislator refused entry to mainland

HONG KONG, Sept 13: A prominent Hong Kong legislator who has championed the rights of mainland Chinese...

Lawyer Margaret Ng, who holds a British passport, was told by Dragonair staff her China visa had been revoked...

Ng has been a strong critic of Beijing's decision to overturn a January ruling by Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal...

Ng refused to speculate whether the ban was related to her views, but she said it would be worrying for freedom in Hong Kong if it turned out to be the case.

I would be extremely disappointed if Beijing cannot even tolerate different views based on law and reason expressed candidly and openly, Ng told reporters.

I have done no more than express my views very strongly and as often as I could. I don't think I have done anything that could in any way harm order.

2 Chinese officials executed for spying for Taiwan

TAIPEI, Sept 13: Chinese authorities have executed a major general and a senior colonel for trading top military secrets to rival Taiwan, a newspaper reported here Monday, says AFP.

The selling of the classified military information to the Taiwanese authorities aborted the plans to invade Taiwan during the 1995-96 strait crisis, the United Daily News said, quoting an unnamed Chinese official.

The major general, only identified as Liu, and the senior colonel were executed in late August and early September, the paper said.

It said a group of military officers were implicated in the spying allegation.

China lobbed ballistic missiles into the shipping lanes off the Nationalist island and held war games near Taiwan during the strait crisis to intimidate Taipei's first direct presidential elections in March 1996.

The sabre-rattling ended only after Washington sent two battle carrier groups to waters near Taiwan.

Taiwan Defense Minister Tang Fei told legislators in May that China would have invaded an offshore island near the mainland if the weather had permitted.

S Arabia won't cancel arms deal

RIYADH, Sept 13: Saudi Arabian Defence Minister Prince Sultan was quoted on Sunday as saying the kingdom has no intention to cancel its arms deals, reports Reuters.

The official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said the minister was responding to a question about reports that the oil-rich Gulf Arab state had frozen the long-running al-Yamamah arms-for-oil deal with Britain and a 4 billion dollars contract with France for tanks and other military hardware.

Saudi Arabia "will not hesitate and will never stop developing its armed forces whether they are the four sectors of the armed forces or the national guard or general security or all the military sectors in the kingdom ...", SPA quoted Prince Sultan as saying.

Since al-Yamamah was signed in 1985, some 120 Tornado warplanes and 90 Hawk jet trainers have been delivered, as well as ground facilities and other military equipment.

There was also an open-ended "shopping list" of other items, including tanks and mine hunting ships.

Clinton, APEC leaders offer help for E Timor peacekeeping

Protesters storm Australian consulate in Indonesia

AUCKLAND, Sept 13: US President Bill Clinton offered American help Monday for a peacekeeping force for East Timor, while a fiery advocate for the troubled territory called for the force's urgent deployment to end terror by pro-Indonesian forces, reports AP.

Vows to support the peacekeeping poured in from Pacific Rim leaders ending an annual two-day summit, Asian governments in the forum are likely to contribute many peacekeepers, given that Indonesian President BJ Habibie asked late Sunday for a force from "friendly nations."

Clinton, Japan, New Zealand and other leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum welcomed Habibie's decision to allow an international force to help end a rampage by pro-Jakarta militants. Habibie conceded the Indonesian military could not stop the chaos that erupted after East Timorese overwhelmingly voted for independence.

With Habibie staying home, Indonesia's ranking official at the APEC summit, economics minister Ginandjar Kartasamita, said his government would welcome an early deployment of peacekeepers and urged East Timorese to return to their homes and start building their new nation.

"We have to implement what the people of East Timor have decided. They have cast their vote," Ginandjar said in an interview with Associated Press Television News.

Ginandjar chatted briefly with Clinton at the informal summit of 21 APEC leaders, held this year in stately Auckland Museum.

Clinton said the United States would supply planes and pilots to transport troops from other nations and help with logistics, communications and intelligence. He also said US officials might have a "command and control" role to play.

All of that would require some presence on the ground in East Timor, Clinton said. "But no one has asked us for any combat troops."

Foreign ministers from Southeast Asian nations, in a meeting late Sunday, agreed their governments would play a prominent role in any force. The United States, Australia, China and Russia also took part in the meeting.

A sense of urgency pervaded the diplomatic maneuvering, with fears that any delay could allow the violence in East Timor to worsen.

"Each hour that goes by means many more lives lost," Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jose Ramos Horta said. "If not by the killing by the Indonesian army, then by starvation."

Since the United Nations announced 10 days ago that East Timorese had backed independence, Indonesia's mili-

tary and police have stood by as pro-Jakarta militias burned buildings and killed supporters of independence or forced them to flee.

Sandy Berger, Clinton's national security adviser, told reporters there were 200,000 displaced people in East Timor, many far from food distribution areas.

Ramos Horta, an East Timorese lawyer, travelled to Auckland on Friday to lobby APEC leaders for intervention and an international war crimes tribunal. In a 20-minute meeting with Clinton Monday, Horta urged US participation, in a peacekeeping force.

Ramos Horta said he invited Clinton to visit East Timor and said the president accepted.

Meanwhile, about 400 protesters stormed the Australian consulate in Indonesia's second-largest city, Surabaya, on Monday, angered by that country's leading role in a proposed peacekeeping force for East Timor, witnesses said.

The consulate's staff had already abandoned the building before the mob entered and smashed computers and other equipment. A squad of 50 police were present but did little to stop the attack.

Protest organisers said their group was opposed to what they said was "unwarranted Australian meddling in Indonesian and East Timorese affairs."

Earlier, the same group protested outside the city's US consulate and burned a US flag along those of Australia, New Zealand and the United Nations.

Police stopped them from entering the US mission. In the capital, Jakarta, 50 members of a government-backed youth group marched on the Australian Embassy. Some carried signs that read: "War - Indonesia vs Australia."

At 80 riot police blocked the demonstrators from entering the embassy compound. Indonesia caved in to global pressure on Sunday, and said it would accept an international peacekeeping force to restore order in violence-wracked East Timor.

Most of the troops in the force are expected to come from Australia. US President Clinton said the United States would supply mainly logistical support.

The violence in East Timor started after UN officials announced that most of the territory's people had voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia in an August 30 referendum.

Immediately after Sunday's announcement, Dewi Fortuna Anwar, a senior aide to President BJ Habibie, warned the deployment of peacekeepers could trigger a nationalist and anti-western backlash if it was done without regard to Indonesia's sensitivities.

N Korea freezes missile test

AUCKLAND, Sept 13: North Korea will freeze its long-range missile program after Washington promised to lift economic sanctions in a "different kind of relationship" with Pyongyang, US officials said Monday, reports AFP.

North Korea will refrain from testing any long-range missiles, US National Security Advisor Samuel Berger told journalists here following a summit of Asia-Pacific leaders.

He said the freeze, agreed to in bilateral talks in Berlin, would remain in effect during negotiations on improving relations with the United States.

In exchange, Washington will lift basic economic trade sanctions in a deal which Berger said averted a "very destabilising event" for Asia with major implications for South Korea, Japan, China and the United States.

"If we are going to embark on a different course, a course which could conceivably lead to a long-term moratorium on the (North Korean) missile program, that suggests the possibility of a different kind of relationship with North Korea," Berger said.

"It's very much in the US strategic interest and in any negotiations, any discussions, obviously the question is 'what is the reciprocal benefit to the North Koreans?'"

"The reciprocal benefit is there will be some easing of economic sanctions but I hasten to add that if they tested obviously we would be going down a different path."

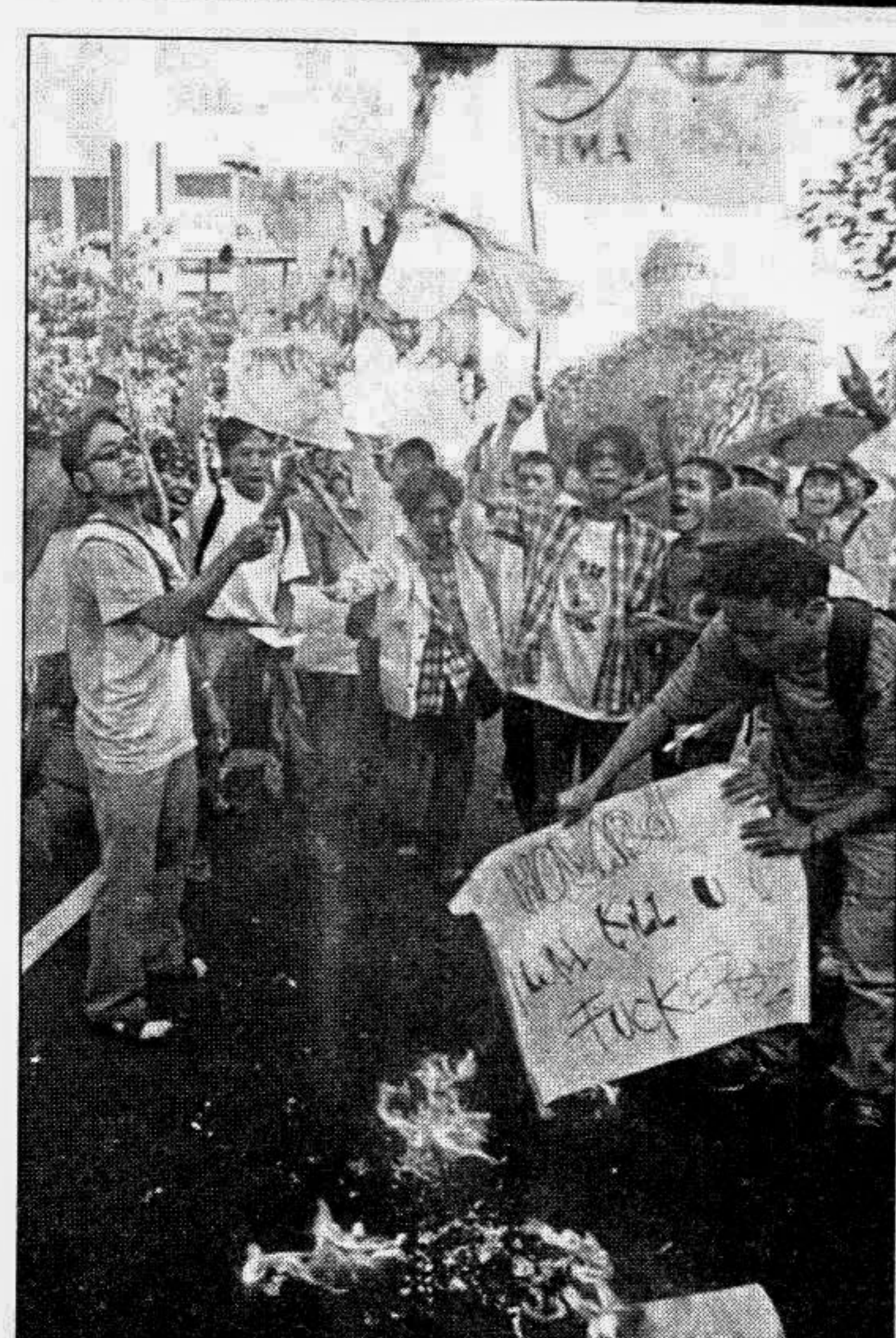
The sanctions to be lifted applied to "trade and ordinary goods and services and investment" but would not affect "sensitive items," he said.

Berger warned that if North Korea carried out its plans to test a ballistic missile capable of hitting parts of the United States, the repercussions would be "one of the most destabilising events for Asia."

"Its proceeding with a long-range missile program would be one of the most destabilising developments for Asia and for the United States," he said.

"It would have an immediate effect on Japan, which would feel its own security threatened and might then therefore feel it has to develop certain theatre measures which in turn might lead China to feel it has to respond."

"It would affect our relations seriously and we would have to take action. I believe the Japanese would take action. I believe the (South) Koreans would take action."



Indonesian activists burn an effigy of Australian Prime Minister John Howard and placards Monday during a demonstration outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. Successive groups of demonstrators picket the embassy in protest of Canberra's alleged interference in East Timor. —AFP photo

Kashmir state minister escapes assassination

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 13: Kashmir state health minister Mubashir Kamal survived an assassination attempt Monday by Muslim separatists, who kept up their campaign to disrupt India's general elections, witnesses said, reports AFP.

Kamal, the younger brother of Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, was returning from an election rally when his motorcade was ambushed in the northern district of Baramulla.

The separatists sprayed the vehicles with automatic weapons fire, injuring a soldier and a civilian, a police spokesman said.

The gunbattle between police and the militants continued for more than an hour and the minister was forced to take refuge in a nearby police station, a witness told AFP by telephone.

Baramulla goes to the polls on September 18. Voting in Kashmir's six constituencies has been split over three stages in order to maximise security in the face of a separatist-led poll boycott.

Also Monday, suspected Muslim militants shot dead an electoral agent working for an independent candidate, Ghulam Nabi Azad.

Azad is contesting Anantnag constituency, where voting has been postponed until October 4 following the murder of the Hindu nationalist candidate last week.

Heavy fighting leaves 175 dead in Lanka

COLOMBO, Sept 13: Sri Lankan troops and Tamil Tiger rebels traded fire Monday, a day after fierce fighting left at least 175 killed and more than 500 wounded on both sides, defence officials said, reports AFP.

He said 92 soldiers suffered serious injuries. However, defence sources said about 400 government troops were wounded, most of them with minor injuries, mainly because of mortar bomb attacks.

Some of the seriously wounded died overnight after Sunday's intense battles in the northwestern district of Mannar, 312 km north of here, the defence ministry said.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) also raided a police post in the north-east of the country on Monday and killed two constables.

We have suffered 49 soldiers killed and intercepts of terrorist radio communications confirmed they lost 16 of their cadres," a defence ministry spokesman here said.

Another soldier was shot dead by the rebels on Monday in the northern town of Vavuniya, 254 km north of here.

The guerrillas had entered the main bus depot in the town and booby trapped eight busses with explosive devices which were later dismantled by the military, local officials said.

Another six soldiers who were listed as missing were believed to have been killed, an official said.

It was love at first sight between Sonia, Rajiv

NEW DELHI, Sept 13: It was love at first sight between Sonia and Rajiv Gandhi studying at Cambridge over 30 years ago that led to their marriage, reports AFP.

The Congress President revealed this in an interview to Ru-Ba-Ru programme on Zee TV which was telecast yesterday.

Sonia said she met Rajiv at a restaurant in Cambridge which exclusively served Italian food. I could not do without Italian food at that time, she said.

Italian-born Sonia said when they decided to marry, Indira Gandhi came to England and met her.

Sonia recalled how Indira Gandhi had put her at ease by telling her that she (Indira) too had loved a person intensely when she was of her age. These words of her future mother-in-law evaporated my nervousness and fear, she said.

The conversation took place in French as then my English was not that good, Sonia remembered.

Sonia said her food habits had undergone a drastic change as now she could not do without Indian food especially Arhar dal and Rice.

Pak govt frees 250 opposition workers

KARACHI, Sept 13: The Pakistani authorities Monday freed some 250 opposition workers and leaders who were detained in a weekend police crackdown on an anti-government rally in Karachi, officials said, reports AFP.

The release came as the opposition's strike in southern Sindh province entered its second day with a partial response in this port city, sources said.

A senior police officer told AFP that 37 women activists were also freed after the government withdrew the detention orders amid widespread criticism.

The leaders and workers were arrested on Saturday to frustrate the opposition's planned show of strength in the country's commercial hub and the provincial capital.

The opposition, criticising Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's domestic and foreign policies has launched a campaign to press for new elections.

Police had sealed the venue of the public meeting, lobbed tear gas shells, charged crowds with batons and whisked away all frontline leaders in waiting vans to thwart the rally, witnesses and opposition sources said.

The largescale arrests provoked a protest strike call for Sunday and Monday by the joint opposition in the politically volatile province.

The hurriedly given strike call, which was largely ignored in this largest Pakistani city on Sunday, received partial response on Monday, sources said.

They included PPP provincial president Nisar Khuro, senators Raza Rabbani, and Qaim Ali Shah as well as MQM lawmakers, Farooq Sattar.

Arab League slams US threats against Sudan

CAIRO, Sept 13: Arab foreign ministers on Monday condemned US "threats" of new attacks against Sudan, reports AFP.

The ministers "condemn American threats to attack Sudan again and reiterate their support for the country to challenge anything which threatens its stability and territorial integrity," the organization said.

In August 1998, the United States fired cruise missiles at a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum, which it alleged was used to produce chemical weapons.

The league also warned against "any foreign intervention in Khartoum's internal affairs," while condemning "any material or military assistance aimed at dividing it," an allusion to the 16-year-old north-south civil war in Sudan.

The league was holding its semi-annual meeting of foreign ministers which Iraq was chairing for the first time in 11 years, under a rotational system among the 22 league members.

Taliban launch major attack in northern Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, Sept 13: Afghanistan's Taliban army launched a powerful offensive early Monday against opposition soldiers clinging to a strategic crossroads in northern Samangan province, reports AP.

Taliban jet fighters and helicopter gun ships pounded the Dar-e-Suf area of Samangan province shortly before dawn, said opposition spokesman Ustad Alta Moharred contacted on satellite telephone.

There were no immediate casualty figures. The Taliban and opposition give contradictory claims about who controls what part of Dar-e-Suf, with both sides claiming a commanding control.

Dar-e-Suf, some 350 kilometers (210 miles) north of the Afghan capital of Kabul, is strategic because it is a supply route for the opposition. Complete control of Dar-e-Suf by the Taliban would weaken the opposition's hold on the parts of central Bamyan province that they still control.

Fighting for this crossroad has raged for several weeks. Also on Monday, another opposition spokesman Hussein Anwari said that the opposition captured the Taliban governor of northern Jozjan province, Mullah Wali Mohammed.

According to Anwari, the governor was lured to an opposition area with a promise of a mass defection by a major opposition commander. However, Mohammed was ambushed and taken prisoner.



The cast of "Ally McBeal" poses with producer and writer David E. Kelley, holding the trophy, after winning an Emmy for Outstanding Comedy Series during the 51st Emmy Awards Sunday in Los Angeles, California. —AFP photo

'The Practice,' 'Ally McBeal' win top honours at Emmy Awards

LOS ANGELES, Sept 13: Two television programs about lawyers -- the drama "The Practice" and the situation comedy "Ally McBeal" -- won the top prizes at Sunday's Emmy awards for best television series of the past year, reports AFP.

"The Practice," produced by the ABC network, received the best dramatic series award for the second year in a row at the 51st Annual Prime-Time Emmy Awards, television's highest honours.

The drama won three Emmys in all, the most of any show, snaring best supporting actor and actress in a dramatic series in addition to the top drama honour.

Oscar winner Helen Hunt earned her fourth consecutive Emmy as best actress in a comedy for her role in "Mad About You."

Hollywood actor John Leguizamo was awarded an Emmy for the best performance in a musical or variety program for his television special "John Leguizamo's Freaks."

"I'd like to thank HBO, Hispanic Box Office," he said. "The Latin voice is lacking in the media," he said, on the first night of a national TV boycott by Latino organisations.

The drama won three Emmys in all, the most of any show, snaring best supporting actor and actress in a dramatic series in addition to the top drama honour.

Comedian Chris Rock won his third Emmy for writing a variety show that aired on HBO.

Big-screen actors were much in evidence at the award ceremony. Veteran Hollywood star Anne Bancroft won as best supporting actress in a miniseries or movie, for her performance in CBS's "Deep in My Heart."

Her husband, Mel Brooks, was given the prize in earlier ceremonies a couple of weeks ago, as best guest actor in a comedy series, for his appearance in "Mad About You."

Several other Hollywood stars also vied for small-screen acting awards, including Peter Fonda, Peter O'Toole, Jack Lemmon, Woody Harrelson and Julia Roberts. O'Toole was awarded an Emmy for his role in CBS' "Joan of Arc."

Writer-producer David Kelley was behind both "The Practice," and "Ally McBeal" -- the first time a writer was nominated for best comedy and drama in the same year. Kelley is married to Hollywood heavyweight Michelle Pfeiffer.

For a fourth time Dennis Franz was awarded the best actor in a television drama for his

Indian rebels kill 3 policemen

Left-wing guerrillas attacked a police station Monday in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, killing three officers in another apparent case of election-related violence, reports AFP.

The United Nations (UN) said at least 25 guerrillas belonging to the outlawed Peoples War Group attacked the police station in the state's Medak district, which goes to the polls on September 18. According to police officials quoted by UN, the guerrillas strafed the building with automatic weapons fire, killing the three policemen.

Jordan's King Abdullah in Lebanon

Jordan's King Abdullah II arrived in Beirut Monday on the first visit to Lebanon by a Hashemite monarch in more than 30 years to "open a new chapter" in relations between the two Arab states, AFP reports from Beirut.

King Abdullah and Queen Rania were met at Beirut International Airport in a red-carpet reception by Lebanese President Emile Lahoud. The monarch was also accompanied by top government officials, including Prime Minister Abdel Rauf al-Rawabdeh and Foreign Minister Abdel Ilah al-Khatib.

224 years prison for 24 Vietnamese

Twenty four Vietnamese "reactionaries" have been given a total of 224 years in prison for "infiltrating illegally into Vietnam" and planning "sabotage activities against the revolutionary regime," a judicial source said Monday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

They were sentenced on September 8 after a three-day trial in the southern town of An Giang, the court official said. The group was arrested at the end of 1997 after being found in the possession of photographic gear, mobile phones and "reactionary" documents brought from Cambodia.

13 dead in landslide in Philippines

Thirteen people were feared dead when a landslide buried a van on a mountain road in the northern Philippines amid a tropical storm, the civil defence office here said Monday, AFP reports from Manila.

Rocks and rain-loosened earth fell on the van on a stretch of Kennon Road near the town of Tuba on Monday morning, leaving 13 of its 14 occupants missing and feared dead, civil defence officials here said.

Off the Record

Doomsday indeed!

JAKARTA: Three Indonesian cult members were beaten to death by fellow cultists when the 9/99 doomsday prediction failed to materialise, the Jakarta Post said on Monday, reports Reuters.

Like many cults across the country, members were told to prepare for the end of the world at 9 am on September 9. They sold their personal possessions and for nine days before the big day locked themselves up in their homes.

When nothing happened, the cult members lost control, the newspaper said.

"The members were really mad," said Saadi Arsam, village chief of Sukmajaya, East Java. Police are investigating.

'Fresh fish' turned out to be live cobras

JAKARTA: Indonesian customs officials have seized a two-tonne shipment of 3,500 live cobras destined for China at Jakarta's International Airport, a report said Monday, says AFP.

The snakes were on their way to Guangzhou, southern China, before being intercepted Saturday, the chief of the airport's customs and excise office Heru Santoso was quoted as saying by The Jakarta Post daily.

The deadly reptiles were found in 140 boxes marked "fresh fish" which had been in the airport's storage room for two days and were about to be loaded on a China Southern Airlines flight, he said.

"When we checked them, each of the 140 boxes contained 25 cobras," the customs chief said.

Heru said no one had been arrested yet but the consignment's sender had been brought in for questioning.

The newspaper said cobras sell locally for between 5,000 rupiah and 10,000 rupiah (0.60-1.20 dollars) depending on the size but fetch much more in China, tempting many to smuggle them abroad.

Heru estimated the value of the weekend's seizure in China at around 300 million rupiah (36,000 dollars).

In China snakes are prized for their meat and skin, and the blood and venom is used in medicines.

Lanka looks for high-tech arms

COLOMBO, Sept 13: Sri Lanka's defence ministry Monday invited foreign companies to register for the supply of military hardware, including laser-guided bombs and electronic warfare systems, reports AFP.

Local and foreign suppliers of weapons, ammunition and other services were given three weeks to register with the ministry to be eligible to bid for contracts to be awarded next year.

Anwar in 'good condition'

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 13: Jailed Malaysian ex-deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, who has been hospitalised for suspected arsenic poisoning, is in "good condition," hospital authorities said Monday, reports AFP.

A panel of specialists is conducting comprehensive tests on Anwar, National University Hospital director Khalid Abdul Kadir was reported as saying by the official Bernama news agency, but did not elaborate.

Anwar was hospitalised Friday after his lawyers told his ongoing sodomy trial that traces of arsenic 77 times normal level had been found in his urine sample tested in Australia, bringing the trial to an abrupt halt.