

# Musharraf vows to teach India a 'lesson'

## Kashmir border quiet after clashes

ISLAMABAD, Jan 23: Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf has vowed to teach India a "lesson" if its troops cross the disputed border in Kashmir, a report said today, says AFP.

"We will teach them a lesson," he told The Nation newspaper.

The warning followed a serious clash between the two armies in the Chamb sector on the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Kashmir between Pakistan and India.

Pakistan said its troops repelled an Indian attack Saturday on its military post in Chamb, inflicting casualties. It said two Pakistani soldiers were killed and another five were missing.

New Delhi said 17 Pakistani and two Indian soldiers died in the clash, the worst since the

rival armies fought fierce battles in Kashmir last year.

Indians are not refraining from crossing the LoC out of any love for Pakistan. They would have done it long before if they could. We will teach them a lesson on the LoC or anywhere else," Musharraf said.

Pakistan and India hold parts of the divided Himalayan state of Kashmir, which is claimed by both. They have fought two wars over the territory since their independence in 1947.

Meanwhile, the Kashmir border between India and Pakistan was quiet today, a day after New Delhi said 17 Pakistani and two Indian soldiers died in one of the worst flare-ups since last year, officials said.

A senior army officer told AFP that "small arms firing"

was, however, continuing on a minor scale at three places on the winding and disputed border in the Himalayan state.

"Otherwise everything is quiet," said the officer, who requested anonymity. "But we feel things can flare up."

Indian officials said Saturday that fierce fighting erupted in the border region of Chamb late Friday, shortly after Pakistan thrashed India in a cricket tournament in Australia.

The two armies traded barrages of machine gunfire and mortars, leaving a junior Indian officer and a soldier and 17 Pakistani soldiers dead, according to Indian Brigadier Jasbir Singh.

Four Indian soldiers were also injured in the clash.

Pakistan confirmed the firefight but said India had

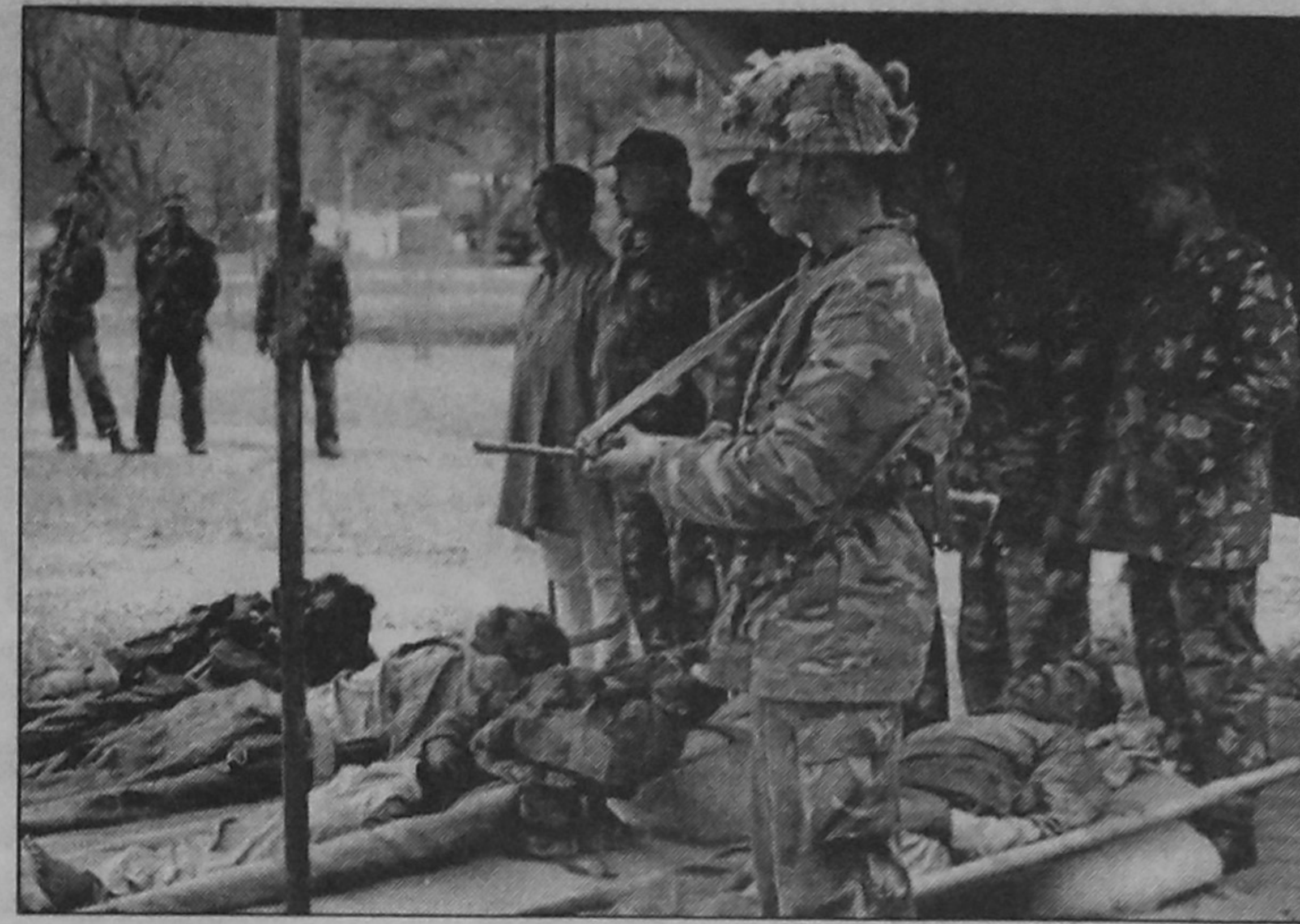
launched the attack and that only two of its soldiers were killed.

Pakistani officials added that five Pakistani soldiers were missing and accused the Indian army of illegally crossing the Line of Control that divides Kashmir between the two countries.

Indian military officials displayed to journalists in the border area of Palanwala the bodies of five Pakistani soldiers, kept on large blocks of ice under a tent.

The fighting was among the worst since the 10-week clash that claimed 1,000 lives on both sides of Kashmir between May and July last year.

Previous cricket matches between India and Pakistan have also sparked brief clashes on the perennially tense Kashmir frontier.



Indian soldiers stand guard in Palanwala over the bodies of five Pakistani Army soldiers, who were killed in an encounter with Indian Army soldiers early Saturday. Some 17 Pakistani soldiers and two Indians were killed in heavy firing and shelling in the Chamb sector of the disputed state, 85 km south-west of Jammu. — AFP photo

# Maoist kills 6 policemen in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Jan 23: A Maoist landmine killed six Nepalese policemen in the country's far northwest, where five others were also wounded in a separate ambush, a police source said today, reports AFP.

The two incidents occurred ... on Saturday morning and afternoon, but no Maoists have been killed or arrested after the incidents," the source said.

Deputy Inspector General of Police Rajendra Bahadur Singh said six policemen were killed when a Maoist landmine exploded near Pepe village, Jajarkot district, 392 km northwest of Kathmandu.

The Maoists were able to capture eight rifles, a revolver and some ammunition in the attack.

Another five policemen were wounded in a Maoist ambush in Rupsa village in Kalikot, 398 km northwest of the capital.

# Arafat, Barak, Clinton to meet Saturday

GAZA CITY, Jan 23: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and US President Bill Clinton will meet Saturday in Davos, Switzerland, at the annual economic forum, a Palestinian official said today, reports AFP.

President Arafat, Prime Minister Barak and President Clinton are to meet on the 29th of this month in Davos, Palestinian International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath said on Voice of Palestine radio.

# Police open probe into Weizman

JERUSALEM, Jan 23: Israeli police and tax services were set to open an unprecedented criminal investigation into President Ezer Weizman's financial affairs today, a police spokesman said, reports AFP.

The fraud squad has been charged with the inquiry and is to begin its work today. In principle, it will question various witnesses on the suspicious weighing against the head of state," the spokesman said.

It is the first time in Israel's history that a head of state -- whose role in the country is essentially ceremonial -- has been the subject of a judicial inquiry.

# Heavy security for Indian Republic Day

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: The Indian army is putting out all the stops to prevent any breach of security at its annual display of military might next week amid fears of suicide attacks by Kashmiri guerrillas, reports AFP.

The Republic Day Parade on Wednesday, to be crowned by a flypast by warplanes used against Muslim fighters who infiltrated Kashmir from Pakistan last year, will be accompanied by security on an unprecedented scale, police and army officials said.

Republic Day is an event where we cannot take any chances," said Joint Police Commissioner R.K. Niyogi. "We have planned elaborate security arrangements."

The military extravaganza will see troops, truck-mounted missiles and tanks march down a three-km parade route in an annual ritual which began in 1951.

# Taliban FM in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 23: Afghanistan's Taliban Foreign Minister Mawlawi Wakil Ahmad Mutwakil arrived here today on an official visit to Pakistan, flying on board a United Nations plane, reports AFP.

Mutwakil, who was accompanied by two officials, will hold talks with his Pakistani counterpart, Abdul Sattar, and senior officials on bilateral ties and issues of mutual concern, officials here said.

# British Airways jet bogged at Perth airport

PERTH, Australia, Jan 23: More than 200 passengers were transferred from a British Airways jet after it became bogged in mud at the international airport here at the weekend, reports AFP.

The Boeing 747 ran off the side of the airport's secondary runway while taxiing for take-off on a routine flight to London late Saturday.

But airport director of operations Ric Gates said the plane became stuck when its wheels ran off the shoulder of the runway while executing a turn.

He said when the aircraft settled into the mud the pilot decided to leave it there and get it towed out rather than attempt to drive it out.

The plane had been forced to use an alternative runway while taking off in bad weather.

The 205 passengers were stranded aboard the aircraft for three hours.

# Lanka detains 12 would-be suicide bombers

COLOMBO, Jan 23: Sri Lankan police detained at least 12 suspected Tamil Tiger rebels, including two suicide bombers, during a massive search operation conducted under the cover of a curfew, a press report said today, says AFP.

The arrests were made during the major cordon-and-search operations carried out during a 10-hour curfew Saturday in the district of Gampaha near here and a suburb of Colombo, the privately-run Sunday Island newspaper said.

It gave no details of the would-be bombers of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are held responsible for three suicide bombings since last month.

However, official sources said police did not find any arms, ammunition or explosives during Saturday's search operations.

Tamil legislator R. Yogarajan, who visited most of the schools where the detainees were photographed and video filmed, said 3,000 Tamils had

been taken to a school in Wattala, just north of the capital Colombo.

"This time there is a slight improvement in that the detainees were not asked to take off their shirts to be photographed," said Yogarajan, who protested against such filming during a similar search here on January 7.

He said those detained were asked to walk past masked men who acted as informants.

The snap curfew announced over state radio was aimed at helping security authorities conduct a cordon and search operation to look for members of the LTTE, officials said.

The Kolonnawa suburb of the capital was also brought under curfew in addition to the district of Gampaha, which borders Colombo, officials said, adding the curfew was strictly enforced.

The country's main oil storage depot is located at Kolonnawa. The LTTE staged a daring attack against the facility in October 1995, devastating more than a dozen storage tanks.

Search operations here have been intensified amid fears the LTTE had infiltrated the city to carry out more suicide bombings.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga was wounded in a suicide bomb attack at an election rally here on December 18. Twenty six people were killed and more than 110 others wounded in that attack.

On the same day, another suicide bomber carried out an attack at an opposition rally in Gampaha district, killing 12 people, including a retired army general.

**Fighting kills 21**

At least 21 Tamil Tiger rebels were killed in fresh fighting in northeastern Sri Lanka over the weekend, the defence ministry said here Sunday.

Fourteen members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed in several confrontations in the northern peninsula on Saturday while another seven were killed the previous day, the ministry said.

# Russians claim capture of Grozny district

MOSCOW, Jan 23: Russian troops intensified their push into Grozny today and announced they had captured the rebel Chechen capital, reports AFP.

Russian generals said only three federal troops died in the close-range street fighting.

But the Russians' optimistic reports on progress in the wrecked city were countered by news that their forces had suddenly switched the top interior ministry commander whose soldiers are leading the Grozny push.

The official explanation for switching Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov for Vyacheslav Tikhomirov was that Russia needed closer coordination between their interior troops fighting the street battles and defence ministry soldiers supporting them with rocket and artillery fire from the outside.

Interior ministry troops in Grozny had earlier complained that defence ministry artillery gunners were often targeting

buildings held by the rebels which were not the ones they had intended to storm.

They blamed that poor coordination for most of the Russian casualties, but their accounts were impossible to verify.

Russia also backtracked from earlier promises that the campaign to take Grozny, held by an estimated 700 to 3,000 rebels, would be swift and over by the weekend.

One defence official told NTV television that Minutka Square would be taken within a week. Situated just southwest of the city centre, commanders had already claimed to have held control over the important junction on Thursday.

Russian media also said that the federal troops Sunday had taken control of portions of the Mikromirov district -- the same ones they had reportedly held for the past week.

The Russian reports of progress in the war, linked closely to the political fortunes of acting President Vladimir

Putin ahead of the March 26 national elections, were optimistic.

An NTV correspondent reporting from the main Russian military base Mozdok in Chechnya's neighbouring North Ossetia cited generals as saying their forces had captured the Staropromyslovsky district.

It was the region of Grozny in which in which Russia suffered its most embarrassing loss so far, on Tuesday, when a general leading the charge into the capital disappeared. He is now feared dead.

Defence Minister Igor Sergeev conceded on Friday that Major General Mikhail Malofeyev should not have been on the front line.

But he added that the top Grozny commander had "carried out an abnormal task aiming to boost the soldiers' action."

Staropromyslovsky juts out of the main portion of the city to the northwest and was the first Grozny district to come under Russian attack.



Hundreds of sympathisers of Ecuadorian ex-President Jamil Mahuad protest in Quito Saturday. Mahuad stepped down as president and Vice President Gustavo Noboa took over the office. — AFP photo

# Ecuador's Congress okays Noboa as new president

QUITO, Jan 23: Ecuador's Congress approved Gustavo Noboa as the country's new president in an emergency session Saturday following a bloodless military coup that removed elected president Jamil Mahuad from office, reports AFP.

With cries of "long live democracy" the congress approved Noboa, who was Mahuad's vice president, as the country's new leader by 87 votes in favour, two against, and one abstention. Thirty-four legislators were absent for the vote.

The president of congress, Juan Jose Pons, said the legislature "would fight to the end so that we can maintain a democratic system in Ecuador."

The vote grants Noboa's regime the legitimacy needed to avoid global isolation: the United States, the European Union and virtually every Latin American nation had condemned any attempt at imposing a government by non-constitutional means.

"The United States is watching closely the efforts being made by the leaders of Ecuador to return their country to the framework of constitutional order," US State Department spokesman James Foley said in

a statement.

"The United States calls on all parties to continue to work together to address the severe economic and social challenges which played a central role in bringing about the current crisis and that Ecuador will continue to face," Foley said.

Noboa took control early Saturday, after a three-man military junta that deposed Mahuad handed power over to him. He will remain in office until January 2003, completing Mahuad's term.

Noboa accepted office around 7:30 a.m. (6:30 pm BST) Saturday.

To ease the transition Mendoza announced that he was retiring as head of the armed forces and would join the army reserves.

An angry Vargas, however, said that the CONAIE would not recognize Noboa as president. Mendoza had "betrayed" the Indians by dissolving the junta, Vargas told AFP.

However, the massive Indian protest was over, and all day Saturday buses loaded with CONAIE members made the long trip from Quito to the small villages where most of their members live.

# 16 dead in fresh fighting in Aceh, Maluku

JAKARTA, Jan 23: Outbreaks of violence in east and west Indonesia claimed at least 16 lives, police and news reports said Sunday, reports AP.

In the strife-torn Aceh province, 1,750 kilometers (1,100 miles) northwest of Jakarta, eight people were killed and scores injured in clashes Saturday between separatist rebels and security forces, military spokesman Lt Col. Priyatna said.

In one incident in east Aceh, about 20 houses were burned after soldiers attacked a village, he said. Violence also broke out several other towns and villages across the territory.

Achinese guerrillas have been fighting a struggle against Indonesian rule since the mid-1970s. At least 5,000 people have died in the violence during the past decade.

Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid is scheduled to visit Aceh on Tuesday to hold peace talks with the separatists. In the past week, at least 38 people have died as government

forces cracked down on the insurgents.

Meanwhile, on Halmahera island in eastern Indonesia, clashes between Muslims and Christians on Friday and Saturday left at least eight people dead and 18 injured, the official Antara news agency said.

The region's military commander Brig. Gen. Max Tamaela said fighting erupted in a remote part of the island and his troops were unable to quickly reach the area to separate the warring sides.

About 2,000 people have been killed in a year of religious violence in the Maluku and North Maluku provinces, collectively known as the Spice Islands, or Moluccas, during Dutch colonial rule.

The fighting, triggered by a minor traffic accident involving a Christian and a Muslim in the Maluku provincial capital Ambon, has since spread to other regions.

Last week, Muslim mobs went on a three-day rampage on the tourist island of Lombok setting fire to dozens of churches and destroying Christian-owned homes and businesses.

# Referendum in Indian Ocean island:

Residents of the breakaway Indian Ocean island of Anjouan, one of the Comoros group, began voting Sunday in a referendum on whether to ratify their independence and seek international recognition or remain in the federation, AFP reports from Mutsamudu, Comoros.

The central government in Moroni, on Grande Comore island, is offering a looser version of the Islamic federation grouping it with Anjouan and Moheli. The fourth island in the archipelago, Mayotte, elected to remain under French rule when the other islands opted for independence in 1975.

# Killer of Arkan arrested:

Yugoslav authorities on Saturday announced the arrest of a former policeman suspected of killing the Serbian warlord known as Arkan, AFP reports from Belgrade.

Belgrade police told a news conference for local reporters that they had arrested Dobrosav Gavric, 23, and two suspected accomplices, the official Tanjug news agency said. Police lieutenant colonel Mijodrag Gubic said that Gavric had fired the "killer shots," Tanjug reported.

# Clan warfare kills 6 in Somalia:

At least six people were killed and 11 others wounded after two sub-clans clashed in the Buloburte district of central Somalia's Hiran region, an elder told AFP in Mogadishu on Sunday.

The clashes, triggered by land and water disputes on Saturday, was between the Sadeh-Omerow sub-clan of the Bantu and the Badiade sub-clan of the Hawiye, Bantu clan elder Aden Mohamed Suleyman said. Suleyman said that the fighting was still going on in villages and grazing land areas, 10 km west of Buloburte town, the Buloburte district capital, and that no ceasefire had been arranged to stop the clashes.

The two sides fought several times last year for the same reasons, Suleyman said.

# Philippines to neutralise 13 groups:

Thirteen communist guerrilla fronts across the Philippines will be neutralised by the armed forces by next year under a new anti-insurgency plan, a military official said Sunday, reports AFP.

The 13 rebel strongholds were identified as "priority areas" under a "national peace and development plan" launched by President Joseph Estrada on Friday, the official said.

# Hopes for peace rise in Lanka

COLOMBO, Jan 23: Reforms aimed at ending decades of ethnic bloodshed in Sri Lanka could be finalised in two months, a senior minister said, as the local press today strongly backed the peace moves, reports AFP.

Constitutional Affairs Minister G.L. Peiris said the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas must be involved in the peace process and he hoped to have the political package ready in a couple of months.

A tottering peace initiative unveiled by President Chandrika Kumaratunga in August 1995 received an unexpected boost last week when the main opposition did a political U-turn and offered legislative support to implement the plan.

Political analysts said the peace process was in motion following the opposition offer and moves by Norway to bring the LTTE to talks and halt the fighting that has killed more than 55,000 people in the past two decades.

"Nobody will dispute the fact that a lot of time has been lost and too much blood has been shed before we have reached the current stage when there is room for cautious optimism," the English language Sunday Island said.

The Sunday Times said the U-turn of the opposition United National Party (UNP) last week appeared to be aimed at preventing further defections and a crisis-management exercise,

# Pak regime faces bumpy road ahead

ISLAMABAD, Jan 23: After more than 100 days in power, Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf has yet to convince critics he can tackle the country's toughest problems, reports AFP.

Pakistanis were generally supportive of the general, who seized power on October 12, when he set out his agenda to revive a shattered economy, hold the corrupt accountable and devolve power to the grassroots level.

But analysts say sentiment seems to be fading, with an anti-corruption accountability campaign, launched with much fanfare in November, losing steam after an initial thrust.

"The government has failed to come up with a single case of corruption against any important figure from the government of ousted premier Nawaz Sharif," analyst Irshad Ahmad Haqqani said.

"They have intentions to improve things, but their team is not up to the mark to meet challenges in external, internal, economic, social and administrative spheres," said Haqqani, a prominent columnist.

Since the coup, a military-led National Accountability Bureau has recovered only 10 billion rupees (around 200 million dollars) from bank loan defaulters who owe a total of more than 200 billion rupees.

Only a few cases of corrup-

tion have so far been decided by about a dozen accountability courts set up in the country.

Javed Jabbar, an aide to the military ruler, defended the new government's performance at home and abroad.

"There has been positive and purposeful progress in specific areas," he told reporters.

Jabbar recalled Musharraf's "successful" visits after the takeover to Islamic states, including Iran.

And the "appropriate culmination" to the 100-day benchmark was Musharraf's two-day visit this week to Pakistan's long-time ally China, he said.

The visit showed the Chinese leadership's "very positive, supportive and understanding attitude."

Jabbar said internally "the first and foremost (priority) is continuation, if not strengthening of key institutions."

This was the first military-led government which has allowed an independent press to continue, he added.

And the judiciary was functioning independently right up to the Supreme Court without any threats, he said, referring to Sharif's bitter rows with the press and an attack on the Supreme Court in 1997.

Faced with the daunting task of promoting economic recovery, the government was implementing reforms which have pushed Karachi's stock market

up more than 40 percent since the coup, he said.

Debt worth 3.3 billion dollars have been rescheduled with donor countries and the accountability process would be improved, he said.

Jabbar said the government was committed to holding district level elections before the end of 2000.

But Najam Sethi, editor of Friday Times weekly, said the regime had to give a timetable for a return to democracy to inspire public confidence and deal with mounting international pressure.

"The uncertainty is harming the military government as well as the image of the country," he said.

Sethi, who was detained for weeks under the Sharif government in a row over his writings against high-level corruption, said he did not foresee any upturn in the economy in the near future.

"They do not seem to have any radical formula to speed up economic recovery," he said.

Sharif, detained on the day of the coup, is now on trial along with several former officials at an anti-terrorism court on charges of abduction, hijacking and attempted murder.

His party has challenged the military takeover at the Supreme Court, which is to start hearing the case on January 31.



The governor of the German federal state of Hesse Roland Koch speaks Saturday, during a press conference in Hofheim. Koch did not comment on the CDU's consideration of legal action against Kohl to force him to reveal secret donors in the funding scandal while Kohl repeated he would not talk. — AFP photo

# Heat wave claims 14 lives in Australia

BRISBANE, Australia, Jan 23: A heat wave in the tropical Australian state of Queensland had left 14 people dead in just two days, authorities said today, reports AFP.

A spokeswoman for the Queensland Ambulance Service said most of the victims had been in their 80s but one woman was only 55.