

**Attack on army camp
Four soldiers
killed in
Kashmir**

AFP, Srinagar

Four Indian soldiers were killed early Sunday in Indian administered Kashmir when two Muslim separatist militants attacked an army camp, a defence spokesman said.

The incident took place at 4.00 am in Baramulla district, 55 km from Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar.

Two militants carrying automatic rifles, fired rocket propelled grenades at the sentries manning the Baramulla army camp gate, killing them both.

Though the two militants managed to enter the camp, they were soon detected and killed in the ensuing gun battle, which claimed two more Indian soldiers, the spokesman said.

Three Indian soldiers were also injured in the shootout, he added.

No militant outfit has so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

The attack on the Baramulla camp, which houses about 1,000 Indian army personnel, came just two days after militants ambushed a police patrol in the Jammu region on Friday, killing 15 policemen.

**Iranian deputy
minister jailed
for a year**

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Deputy Interior Minister Mostafa Tajzadeh, the designated organiser of next June's presidential elections, was jailed for a year Sunday after being found guilty of fraud in last year's parliamentary vote, a judicial source said.

Tajzadeh, a reformist and close ally of moderate President Mohammad Khatami, was given a one-year jail term by Tehran's administrative court, in addition to a 39-month bar on holding public office and a six-year ban on overseeing elections.

The deputy minister was found guilty of "complicity in electoral fraud" during the February 2000 election in which reformists were swept into the parliament.

The court also sentenced Tehran governor Ayatollahi Azami to 18 months in prison in addition to a 23-month ban from holding public office, also on charged of complicity in electoral fraud during the February legislative elections.

Tajzadeh had been charged with overseeing the upcoming June 8 presidential elections in the face of fierce opposition from conservatives, who said he could not be neutral.

He had strongly denied the charges against him.

**China releases
veteran
dissident**

AFP, Beijing

China has released Guo Haifeng, a veteran dissident and former leader of the 1989 Tiananmen movement, from jail six months early, a Hong Kong-based rights group said on Sunday.

Since Guo is a high-profile dissident well-known abroad, the early release could very well be connected with Beijing's bid to host the 2008 Olympics, the Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy said.

Guo, who was sentenced to five years in jail in 1996, was released from a prison in central Henan province in February, according to the centre.

The 1996 conviction came over charges that Guo had committed "hoiiganism" by having had sexual relations with several women.

**Fire kills 16
in Seoul**

AP, Seoul

Sixteen people were killed and three others seriously injured in two unrelated fires in Seoul early Sunday, police said.

A fire swept through a greenhouse in southern Seoul before dawn, killing ten people sleeping inside. One other woman was rescued by fire fighters.

The victims, including five children, were believed to have been suffocated by toxic gas emitted from unidentified burning materials inside the greenhouse.

Other details, including why the victims were sleeping in the greenhouse, were not immediately available.

In northwest Seoul, a two-story burning building collapsed early in the morning, burying nine firefighters who were trying to extinguish the flames.

All nine were pulled out of the debris within three hours, but six had died and three others sustained heavy injuries. The injured were taken to hospitals.

Police are investigating what caused the fires.

**Gunmen go on rampage in
Pakistan : 11 killed**

AP, Lahore

Gunmen rampaged through eastern Punjab province on Sunday killing 10 Shiite Muslims and a policeman in three separate incidents, including a shooting at a graveyard, said police.

The killings in Sheikhpura, 45 kilometres north of the Punjab provincial capital of Lahore, began in a crowded market when gunmen on motorcycles raced by firing indiscriminately, killing three people, all of them Shiite Muslims, police said.

Later gunmen killed a policeman and injured another. Within minutes there was a shooting at a graveyard outside Sheikhpura and seven Shiite Muslims were gunned down, police said.

The killings were done by six gunmen on three motorcycles. Police said they weren't certain that the same gunmen were responsible for all the killings, but the method of killing was the same — all the shootings were carried out by men on motorcycles firing automatic rifles.

No one claimed responsibility for the killings, but police suspect militant Sunni Muslims, who have been targeting Shiite Muslims here with regularity over the past several months.

The killings generated violent protests by Shiite Muslims, who fired shots in the air with automatic weapons and shouted for revenge.

Police suspect an extremist Sunni Muslim group, Sipah-e-Sahaba, or Guardians of the Friends of the Prophet, involved in the killing.

But Sipah-e-Shahaba denied the charge. "We strongly condemn the killing," Zahid Mahmood Qasmi, Sipah-e-Sahaba's chairman told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. "We have nothing to do with these attacks."

One of the most violent and heavily armed religious groups in Pakistan, the Sipah-e-Sahaba has been staging demonstrations to protest the hanging of its activists, executed last Wednesday for the killing of an Iranian diplomat.

Police accuse Sipah-e-Sahaba of killing scores of Shiite Muslims throughout Pakistan in recent months.

Most of Pakistan's 140 million people, who are Sunni Muslims, have no quarrel with their Shiite Muslim brethren. But small and heavily armed groups belonging to both sects of Islam routinely clash.

Sipah-e-Sahaba accuses Iran of arming and financing Shiite Muslims in Pakistan. Iran has denied the charge.

**LTTE gets fresh support in
India amid British ban**

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels were to appeal the British ban against their organisation which received support from a ruling coalition party member of the Indian government, reports here said Sunday.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which was outlawed as a "foreign terrorist organisations" by the British Home secretary Jack Straw, was expected to use the two-stage appeals process, press reports said.

Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran had reportedly told his supporters that they should spare no expense to have the ban lifted in Britain where they maintain their "international secretariat", the private Sunday Island said.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said here Friday that he too expected the LTTE to try to appeal against the British ban which he said would seriously affect the guerrillas' fundraising activities in Britain.

However, the LTTE won a vote of confidence from a key ally of the

ruling coalition in neighbouring India with the government there coming under pressure over the country's own ban against the Tamil Tigers.

The southern Indian regional MDMK party has demanded New Delhi lift a ban on the Tamil Tigers who were held responsible for the May 1991 assassination of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi.

"Our party has been prevailing on the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to announce a lifting of the ban," India's junior federal minister for finance Gingee Ramachandran was quoted as saying Sunday.

The MDMK has four members in the lower house of parliament and is supporting Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party. The party has two ministers in Vajpayee's cabinet.

India banned the LTTE shortly after the May 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi during an election campaign in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu which during mid 1980's provided safe sanctuary for Sri Lankan Tamil separatists.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister

Lakshman Kadirgamar told reporters last Friday that India had also lobbied Britain to ensure the Tamil Tiger rebels were banned as an international terrorist organisation.

Sri Lanka had sought India's assistance to mount pressure on London, but New Delhi had on its own taken up the issue, Kadirgamar said.

"I took it up with India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh and he told me they had already taken up the matter with Britain," Kadirgamar told reporters here.

"That is a particularly friendly gesture by India."

"We owe a deep debt of gratitude to India. Unsolicited by us, Jaswant Singh made representations to the British government for the banning of the LTTE."

Though Ramachandran declined to comment on London's decision last week to ban 21 "terrorist organisations" from operating from its soil including the LTTE, he said his party was firm in its stand that the ban on the Tamil rebels should be lifted by New Delhi.

**Norwegian
peace envoy
arrives in
Sri Lanka**

REUTERS, Colombo

A Norwegian envoy arrived in Sri Lanka yesterday in an effort to keep a fragile peace process on track after Britain's decision to declare Tamil Tigers fighting for independence a terrorist group.

Envoy Erik Solheim was expected to meet President Chandrika Kumaratunga and other political leaders, just days after Britain put the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on a list of groups to be proscribed under a new anti-terrorism law.

"I can confirm he's here and will meet political leaders but I can't say anything more," one Norwegian diplomat said.

Sri Lanka had been pushing hard for the British move, while LTTE leaders had said they would pull out of the nascent peace process if the group was declared a terrorist organisation.

LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham later backed away from that, saying progress on the peace initiative would depend on how severely the British law was enforced, but added the LTTE would "continue with the peace process."



PHOTO: AFP

The remains of what is likely a suicide-bomber are placed by Israeli medics and police into a body-bag in Netanya north of Tel Aviv yesterday. Three people were killed, including the perpetrator of the attack, and 45 injured in the powerful rush-hour bomb blast. Police say the bomber blew himself up amid a crowd of people crossing the road not far from a filling station.

**3 killed in
suicide bomb
blast in Israeli
town**

AFP, Netanya, Israel

Three people were killed including a suspected suicide bomber and dozens hurt in a powerful blast in the Israeli coastal resort of Netanya at rush-hour on Sunday, the latest attack since the eruption of the Palestinian uprising more than five months ago.

Israel vowed to strike back at the culprits and said it held Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority responsible due to its release of members of hardline Palestinian groups.

The attack, which came despite tighter police controls, was the fourth in Israel since the election on February 6 of hawkish former general Ariel Sharon as the nation's prime minister on a pledge to restore security, and the third in Netanya in little more than a year.

The Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas, while stopping short of claiming responsibility for the attack, said it represented the continued "resistance against Israeli occupation" and that its armed wing had not halted its actions.



PHOTO: AFP

The damage caused to the outside the BBC Television Centre, Wood Lane by White City underground station in London yesterday, following an explosion which destroyed a taxi in the early hours of the morning. Coded warnings were received by the police and bomb disposal teams attempted to carry out a controlled explosion when the bomb went off.

**Destruction of Afghan Buddha statues
UNESCO special envoy starts
talks in Afghanistan**

AFP, Kabul

UNESCO special envoy Pierre Lafrance arrived in the Taliban militia's southern bastion Kandahar Sunday for urgent talks with top officials who have ordered the destruction of ancient Buddhist statues.

Lafrance immediately began meetings with officials including Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel, who earlier told AFP there was no way the Islamic militia would reverse its order.

Officials said the destruction, designed to stop idolatry, was nearly complete despite an international outcry.

"The edict will be implemented Inshallah (God willing)," Mutawakel said shortly before Lafrance's arrival from neighbouring Pakistan.

"We would like to see the UNESCO envoy. It is good that we can explain to him that what we are doing is an internal issue and we do not want to confront the world."

Afghanistan's most famous



PHOTO: AFP

Taliban Minister of Information and Culture Mawlawi Qudratullah Jamal speaking to journalists in Kabul yesterday, confirming the continuation of the destruction of ancient statues throughout the country.

monuments are two statues of Buddha in central Bamiyan province, which stand 50 metres (165 feet) and 34.5 metres tall and were carved into sandstone cliffs between the second and fifth centuries AD.

Officials said Sunday large portions of them had already been destroyed and the "work" would be finished soon.

Thousands of other ancient statues had also been destroyed throughout the country in line with the edict issued Monday by Taliban Supreme Leader Mulla Mohammad Omar, they said.

In New Delhi, Buddhism's most prominent leader, the Dalai Lama, has said he was "deeply concerned" about the destruction of the two statues of Buddha in Afghanistan's Bamiyan province by the ruling Taliban.

"I am deeply concerned about the possible destruction of the Bamiyan statues of the Buddha at a time when there is closer understanding and better harmony among different religions of the world," the Times of India on Sunday quoted the Dalai Lama as saying.

"As a Buddhist, I feel it is unfortunate that objects of worship are targets of destruction."

**21 killed in US military
plane crash**

AFP, Washington

A military aircraft belonging to the National Guard crashed in the US state of Georgia Saturday, killing all 21 people on board, Air Force officials said.

The C-23 Sherpa twin-engine propeller plane, which carried 18 passengers and three crew, went down near the town of Unadilla, about 70 km south of Robins Air Force Base, at 10:00 am (2100 BST), base spokesman Major Jerry Herbel told AFP.

"There were no survivors," he said. "The cause of the accident is unknown."

As darkness fell and thunderstorms threatened, military investigators sealed off the crash site, set to continue work the following day. Experts from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) were to join them, according to CNN.

"The scene has been secured. We have no further understanding of the cause of the crash," Lieutenant Colonel Greg Moore of the Florida

National Guard told AFP.

President George W. Bush issued a statement late Saturday from Camp David, the presidential retreat outside Washington, saying he was "deeply saddened" by the loss of the 21 National Guard members.

"This tragic loss on a routine training mission reminds us of the sacrifices made each and every day by all of our men and women in uniform."

"The price of freedom is never free. Today's events remind us that it is sometimes unspoken high," the statement said.

The plane was en route from Hurlburt Field, Florida, to the Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia, carrying three crew from the Florida National Guard and 18 passengers from the Virginia National Guard, according to the military officials.

"The purpose of the flight at the moment remains unknown," said Herbel.

The C-23 is designed to carry 25-30 people but can also be reconfigured to ferry cargo, according to

military officials.

They are routinely used by the National Guard but not the Air Force, said Herbel, adding he could not explain why the Air Force did not use the plane.

The spokesman said the Air Force did not have information about the age of the plane that went down and had not yet examined its maintenance records.

But Florida National Guard Commander Major General Ronald Harrison said the plane had been with his troops since 1997 and had an "excellent" safety record.

"It just does exactly what we need," Harrison told reporters at an impromptu press conference in St. Augustine, Florida. "We've had no difficulty at all with it."

Stormy weather was reported in central Georgia early Saturday, but it was not immediately clear if weather conditions were a factor in the crash.

Dooly County Sheriff Van Peavy told AFP by telephone that three people from the area had witnessed the crash and were to be questioned by investigators.

**UK launches new programme
to fight child poverty**

IPS, London

The British government has launched a new programme to fight child poverty.

The announcement of specific plans came at a conference in London to overcome child poverty. Chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown, announced a government-funded plan that would seek to ensure that all children in Commonwealth countries get at least primary education.

The British programme was announced to mark the golden jubilee next year of Queen Elizabeth II's ascension to the throne. The Commonwealth a group of 54 countries that were once a part of the British Empire is a particular favourite of the Queen.

Brown's announcement can become a gift for millions of children in the Commonwealth. It is also the government's gift to the Queen.

"I am pleased to announce that the British government will create, in her majesty the queen's jubilee year, a fund to speed the introduction of universal primary education in the Commonwealth," Brown announced at a conference last

week.

"It is a fund to help the 75 million children in Commonwealth countries who lack a basic education, by building fair and effective education systems and creating new opportunities for girls and disadvantaged groups." The government will find money for it but Brown said "we will call on business to support this effort."

The minister said: "The future we want for our own children is also what we want for all the world's children." In this era of prosperity for the West, "more than ever, the world's children must become our cause."

The move on the Commonwealth came with strong support from Nelson Mandela who addressed the conference on a video link from Tanzania. Nelson Mandela said: "I warmly welcome Gordon Brown and (International development secretary) Clare short's conference as a start of a new initiative calling for collective action. And I say to the delegates find the courage to be bold."

The conference was called to announced specific moves to meet the international development

targets of 2015. Brown said: "over 10 million children will die before the age of five. And 120 million children are not in primary school. Each of us, as partners, must be prepared to make radical changes in the way we act so that the goals of 2015 can be achieved."

Gordon Brown set out bold new initiatives on health to match those in education. He set out the plan for a new international initiative to combat killer disease particularly HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB, which are responsible for five million deaths a year.

Brown announced plans for new tax incentives for research and development into effective and affordable drugs and vaccines for the diseases, linked to increased commitments by the industry itself.

He promised tax benefits if the pharmaceuticals industry could make increased commitments in support of health strategies of developing countries.

Brown proposed a new global purchase fund, both to encourage the development and delivery of effective and affordable treatments that do not yet exist, and for the treatments already available.

**Plane blast an assassination
attempt : Thai PM**

AFP, Bangkok

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said Sunday he was the target of an assassination attempt and a bomb was responsible for a fire which gutted a Thai Airways flight he was on board.

"The incident was caused by an explosive device and was not an accident," he told reporters in the northern city of Chiang Mai, referring to Saturday's incident in Bangkok's domestic airport which destroyed a Boeing 737-400.

"The blast went off under the VIP seats," he said. "The authorities have to speed up the investigation as this was against the prime minister. They should not delay," he added.

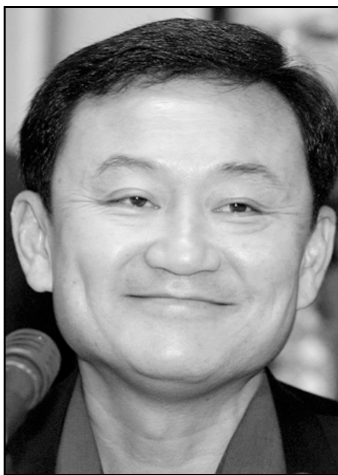
One airline staff member was killed and seven others injured when the Thai Airways plane bound for the northern city of Chiang Mai exploded in flames on the tarmac.

Airline ground staff and a close aide to Thaksin told AFP they believed a bomb had gone off under two seats in business class of flight TG114 which had been reserved for the prime minister and his son who were travelling north to Chiang Mai on family business.

Thaksin -- who became Thailand's richest businessman having made a fortune in the telecoms industry -- took the top job last month after his party won January elections in a landslide victory.

Thaksin did not say why he might be the subject of an assassination attempt, but said he would meet top police officials later Sunday and discuss the incident and possible security threats.

Thai armed forces Supreme Commander Sampaoo Choosri said the investigation results may be known as early as by Sunday evening, and that intelligence agencies had been caught off guard by the incident.



An hour behind schedule, a factor which may have thwarted a much bigger disaster.

The regular flight was set to take off at 3.15 pm local time, with 149 people aboard. Thaksin's motorcade was on the expressway heading for the domestic terminal. He was some 20 minutes from boarding.

Thai Airways executive vice president Chusak Bhachaiyudh said as the engines had been off it would have been impossible for the explosion to be caused by malfunction.

Bangkok's deputy chief of police Major General Jongrak Jutanon said Sunday that forensic experts were analysing evidence from the explosion site.