

Parties plan massive pickets, marches

Leftist groups clash in Bihar : 7 killed

NEW DELHI, July 27 : Seven people were killed and 10 injured when two leftist groups clashed at a colliery in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported Saturday, says AFP.

The agency said the fighting between supporters of the Indian People's Front (IPF) and the Marxist Coordination Center (MCC) erupted at the Railgarha Colliery, 58 kilometers (36 miles) from the city of Ranchi, Friday night.

The two groups attacked one another with arrows, homemade bombs and other weapons when news spread that IPF men had killed an MCC supporter, and seven died on the spot before police could separate the groups, the agency said.

Police were camped at the Colliery, where they described the atmosphere as still tense Saturday, and the injured had been hospitalised, PTI said without giving further details.

Reuter adds: India's left-wing parties said on Friday they planned a week of protests next month against government moves away of protests next against government moves away from socialist, protectionist orthodoxy, reports Reuter.

Two communist parties and

two allied parties, which together have 54 of the 509 current votes in the Lower House of Parliament, denounced the minority Congress government for introducing a liberal industrial policy and an austerity budget on Wednesday.

The pro-big business, pro-landlord, pro-multinational capital policies of the government must be strongly resisted so that the government is forced to desist from his course," they said in a statement.

A spokesman said they planned pickets, marches and sit-in "and other forms of protest all over the country" from August 19, culminating in a mass rally on August 25, probably in Delhi.

The government, seeking a multi-billion dollar loan from the International Monetary Fund, has acted radically during just one month in office to ease a foreign exchange crisis.

Its moves, including a sharp rupee devaluation, are aimed largely at saving off any default on India's 71 billion dollar foreign debt, the third biggest in the developing world.

It all marks a big turnaround from the ideals of socialist self-sufficiency which India adopted in 1947, when it won independence from

Britain after centuries of colonial rule.

The industrial policy slashes red tape and allows foreign investors to take majority stakes in joint enterprises — even in the food processing sector, where multinational companies have in the past been made particularly unwelcome.

The budget raises transport costs. The government also plans to sell some shares in the huge state sector and to ease closure procedures for loss-making companies.

At least 40 per cent of India's people live below the poverty line and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh has promised to try to protect them from what he warned would be at least three years of painful adjustment to a more market-oriented economy.

His budget raised corporate tax rates, increased duties on luxury goods and protected food subsidies for the poor in an effort to fend off precisely the charges levelled by the left parties.

Their statement said the budget would push up prices of basic goods, putting intolerable burdens on the common people.

AP Adds : At least seven people were killed when supporters of two radical political parties clashed in the eastern state of Bihar, a news agency said Saturday.



JERUSALEM : Israeli riot police check a Palestinian youth in Jerusalem's Old City July 27. Israeli Premier Yitzhak Shamir said Friday that Israel wants to start peace negotiations now and should try to find a means of peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. — AFP photo.

Talks on ME peace confce hit snags, says PLO

STOCKHOLM, July 27 : Palestinian leaders said on Friday that talks on Middle East peace conference had reached an impasse that could only be broken by Israeli concessions over Palestinian representation from occupied East Jerusalem, reports Reuter.

They added, however, that discussions on East Jerusalem could come at a later stage of any conference.

"I believe we are facing a problem with Israeli obstacles," said Faisal El-Husseini, widely seen as the Palestine Liberation Organisation's representative in Israeli-occupied territories.

"I believe that we can solve this problem by making it clear to the Israelis that what they are asking is unacceptable," Husseini told a

Stockholm news conference.

Husseini and Nabil Shaath, a diplomatic adviser to PLO chief Yasser Arafat, were in Stockholm for talks with Foreign Minister Sten Andersson whom they asked to help persuade the United States to support the Palestinian position on East Jerusalem.

Israel insists that Palestinians from East Jerusalem cannot take part in a peace conference. It has ruled out any discussion on the future of the city, which it annexed in 1967.

Husseini, who has discussed the issue with US Secretary of State James Baker, said Palestinians from East Jerusalem must participate in any peace conference. Baker's efforts to convene Arab-Israeli peace talks have stalled over who should represent the 1.75 million Pales-

tinians opposed to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip.

Shaath accused Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of trying to avoid a peace conference by raising obstacles.

"There is an impasse," Shaath said. "Shamir now is trying to find points here and there to find a way to say 'No'."

Husseini said East Jerusalem Palestinians must be represented from the start of any conference, but the city's status could be reserved for later sessions, as proposed on Thursday by French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas.

"We understand very well that the matter of Jerusalem is so sensitive, and maybe it will be discussed at a later stage, but representation from East Jerusalem must be from the beginning," Husseini said.

Vietnam's assembly opens to elect PM, amend Constitution

BANKOK, July 27 : Delegates at the opening session of Vietnam's National Assembly prepared Saturday to elect a new Prime Minister and amend the 1980 Constitution, the official Vietnam News Agency said, reports AP.

The assembly Chairman, Le Quang Dao, told delegates to Vietnam's legislature they would enact bills on education, taxation, agriculture and forest protection and amend the nation's penal code, the agency said.

The agency's report, which was monitored in Bangkok, did not say what constitutional changes might be made or describe pending legislation.

The current chairman of the Council of Ministers, or prime minister, is Do Muoi. He was named to the more powerful post of head of the Vietnamese Communist Party at last month's national party congress, replacing Nguyen Van Linh.

Smugglers kill top customs official in Karachi

KARACHI, July 27 : Suspected drug smugglers ambushed and killed a top Pakistani customs official in a hail of bullets at a petrol station outside the southern port of Karachi, police said today, reports Reuter.

Saleem Malik, Director of Customs Intelligence, was investigating the theft of six tonnes of acetic anhydride, a chemical used for refining opium into heroin.

Malik was killed and his driver wounded when gunmen armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles sprayed their jeep with bullets at a petrol station on the outskirts of Karachi on Friday night, police said.

Malik was hit several times in the abdomen and legs. Malik had arrested four people in mid-July suspected of involvement in the theft of the chemicals, which were part of a shipment imported from Belgium in October, 1990, a customs spokesman said.

The chemicals, also used in the leather industry, were impounded in a Karachi warehouse but stolen on May 12.

Drug smugglers had threatened Malik but he had ignored them, the spokesman said.

'UK govt used us when it needed' Gurkha troops furious over British cuts in regiment

LONDON, July 27 : Gurkhas in the British Army have reacted sharply to the cuts in their inclusion in the regiment attacking Britain's decision as a "grave injustice" and accusing it of reneging on promises to maintain Gurkha levels at 4,000 until after 1997, reports PTI.

Lt Col Lalkaji Gurung, chairman of the Ex-servicemen's Association and a member of the Nepalese National Assembly, said the 69 per cent reduction was an injustice inflicted on men who had shed blood for Britain.

"The British government used us when they needed us to defend British sovereignty and they throw us out when they don't need us" said Col Gurung, in an interview with

the "Daily Telegraph", who served with the Gurkhas in Malaysia.

"We demand that the Nepalese government and the British government cut the Gurkhas on a par with the rest of the army. So some alternative arrangement can be made for the Gurkha soldiers' future," he added.

Col Gurung, who also served with the 2/4 Indian Gurkha regiment said the "abrupt and heavy reduction" in the number of Gurkha soldiers would hit the finances of their families.

Col Gurung said they did not expect a permanent attachment with the British army, but the government should stick by previous assurances that their number would

not drop below 1,000 until after 1997.

A Nepalese Foreign Ministry source said under the 1947 Tripartite Treaty Gurkha recruitment signed between Nepal, India and Britain, the British government should have informed the Nepalese government 24 hours before making any important decision on its Gurkha regiments.

In Hong Kong, where up to 5,000 Gurkhas are stationed, talk is not of recruitment but redundancy, of the 35 per cent to be pared down, only half will be by natural wastage. Some 2,000 will be made redundant on terms yet to be announced by the treasury.

Thirty years ago Maj Chinta Bahadur Gurung walked for seven days to reach the British army recruiting centre from his farming village of Syangar just south of Pokhara in the Nepalese Himalayas.

The flight to Hong Kong, where he is now stationed with the Queens Gurkha rifles, took less than seven hours. Although only 14 at the time, he was confident of success. "I lied about my age, but because I was rather tall I was taken on", said the 5 ft 5 inch soldier.

Major Gurung's father, uncles and two brothers were also in the army but with the Gurkhas being cut from some 8,000 troops worldwide to 2,500, his son, now 18, may break the tradition.

He is not so worried, only months from retirement, he will return to his farm in Nepal. "I will put a rocking chair on the verandah of my family home face the hills and think about my past".

India denies killing of 100 troops

NEW DELHI, July 27 : India denied today that pro-Pakistan militants had killed 100 soldiers in a Kashmir ambush.

"This is apparently propaganda to boost Pakistan's morale," Defence Ministry spokesman told Reuter.

"Even if one jawan (soldier) dies, you would know about it we don't allow a jawan to die silently," he said.

The Hizb-ul-Mujahideen militant group based in Srinagar, summer capital of Indian-ruled Kashmir, that it had killed 100 people in an army convoy on July 23.

If verified, it would be the

single biggest operation since the Kashmir revolt erupted in January 1990.

The militant group's statement said members of army families were travelling with the convoy and some had been killed. It apologised for their deaths saying the militants did not know family members were with the convoy.

The attacks were carried out at Tazigund in the middle of the afternoon, it said.

The statement quoted local residents as saying that in the early hours of the next morning, troops were still removing bodies and it took two days to clear the road of damaged vehicles.

BRIEFLY

Bush lifts freeze on Kuwaiti assets: President Bush on Friday formally lifted the US freeze on Kuwaiti assets in the United States, citing a "restoration of Kuwait to its citizens," AP from Washington says.

In a separate order, the president renewed the freeze on Iraqi assets beyond the Aug 2 anniversary date, saying "the government of Iraq continues to engage in activities inimical to stability in the Middle East and hostile to US interests in the region."

Friday's action on Kuwait was merely for the record since that nation had already been permitted to resume use of its assets by the US government, said White House spokesman Roman Popaduk.

Bush had frozen both Kuwaiti and Iraqi assets last August, after Iraq invaded its neighboring country. He prohibited business dealings with both countries to prevent Iraq from raiding Kuwaiti-held assets.

Thatcher, Schwarzkopf meet Friday: US Gulf War Commander General Norman Schwarzkopf and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had a private meeting on Friday at the headquarters of the elite Special Air Service (SAS). Reuter says from London.

The meeting near the city of Hereford in western England was originally meant to be kept under wraps. But the Defence Ministry confirmed it took place after the news was leaked to a London newspaper.

A ministry spokesman gave no details of their conversation about Gulf war but said: "They wanted to meet and they did." As Prime Minister, Thatcher ordered British forces to join Schwarzkopf's command in the Gulf after Iraq invaded Kuwait last August. Thatcher was replaced by John Major in a Conservative Party leadership struggle last November.

Soviet traffic controllers call strike: Soviet Air traffic controllers on Friday called a strike for August 10 to press a claim for higher pay, shorter hours and longer leave. Reuter reports from Moscow.

The official news agency Tass said the union representing 80 per cent of the country's controllers presented official notification to the Civil Aviation Ministry.

Many international flights between Europe and the Far East pass through Soviet air space.

10 killed in Peru accident: A truck and a bus collided a dense forest on a highway along Peru's northern coast Friday, killing at least 10 people and injuring 16, police said, AFP reports from Lima.

Officials blamed the crash on bad weather along the Pan American Highway near the town of Bayovar, 900 kilometers (550 miles) northwest of Lima.

The bus, loaded with passengers, slammed head-on into the truck carrying farm produce, officials said.

Honecker leaves Moscow clinic: Former East German communist leader Erich Honecker has left a Moscow clinic after surgery and is living in a government dacha outside the Soviet Capital, a German newspaper reported, Reuter says from Hamburg.

Bild said Honecker, 78, who was spirited out of Eastern Germany to Moscow earlier this year, was recovering so well from bowel surgery that he had been able to leave the military clinic in Sokolniki park in Moscow.

He was now living with his wife Margot in a Soviet government dacha on the outskirts of Moscow, Bild said in the report in its Saturday edition, quoting well-informed sources in the Soviet Union.

US, USSR seek exchange of missile test data: The United States and the Soviet Union would like to exchange all information gleaned from missile flight tests under the arms control treaty to be signed at the Moscow summit, a Bush administration official said Friday, reports AP from Washington.

The ban on withholding such data was one of the last issues to be resolved by the two sides. The agreement sets an important precedent for checking up on what the other side is doing to improve its strategic nuclear arms.

Overall, the treaty will reduce US long-range nuclear missiles, bombers and submarines by about 28 per cent and the Soviets' arsenal of such ocean-spanning weapons by about 35 per cent, the official said at a White House briefing.

The US stock of ballistic missile warheads will be cut by about 39 per cent and the Soviets' arsenal by about 48 per cent, the official said.

The treaty will be signed on Wednesday by President Bush and Soviet President Mikhail S Gorbachev at a Kremlin ceremony. It culminates nearly a decade of negotiations and provides for the first deep cuts in US and Soviet strategic nuclear weapons.

Typhoon kills 15 in China: Typhoon kill at least 15 people and injured 22 when it hit China's southern Guangdong province earlier this week, the China daily reported Saturday, reports AP from Beijing.

Losses totalled 470 million yuan (90 million dollars), with 2,000 houses destroyed and 106,000 hectares (260,000 acres) of farmland flooded by the typhoon's vicious rains, the English-language newspaper said.

The report said highways and electric cables were damaged. It added that 340,000 people were "affected," but did not say to what extent.

Pak opposition leaders to go on fast to protest decrees

ISLAMABAD, July 27 : Pakistani opposition leaders decided on Friday to stage a one-day hunger strike on August 4 to protest against laws giving Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government special powers to fight a crime wave, reports Reuter.

Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto and other leaders of the five-party People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) will fast for a day outside Parliament house in Islamabad, a PDA spokesman said. Hunger strikes will also take place on the same day in provincial cities and towns.

The spokesman said the opposition committee decided on the action in protest against a constitutional amendment passed by Parliament last week

and four decrees issued earlier this month.

He said the PDA believed they would be used against the government's political opponents.

The constitutional amendment empowered the government to set up special courts to try people accused of serious crimes and barred regular courts from such cases.

The decrees gave the government the power to hold secret summary trials and authorised police to shoot and kill defiant suspects without a magistrate's orders.

The government says it needs the extra powers to eradicate rampant crime, particularly in the southern province of Sind where kidnappings and armed robberies occur daily.

IAEA helps set stage for new US strike : Iraq

BAGHDAD, July 27 : Iraq accused the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Friday of playing politics over its nuclear programme and helping to set the stage for a new US military strike, reports Reuter.

Foreign Minister Ahmed Hussein Khudayer, in a letter to UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar published by the army newspaper Qadisiyah, rejected IAEA suggestions that Iraq had broken its rules.

He said Iraqi technicians were cooperating fully "in a practical atmosphere" with IAEA inspectors looking for evidence of a nuclear weapons programme.

The IAEA attitude had caused discomfort and concern and was politically motivated "to prepare for a new military aggression on Iraq after it had handed over its complete nuclear programme," he added.

A deadline for full Iraqi disclosure of its weapons of mass destruction passed on Thursday.

Washington, which threatened to attack Iraq if it did not fully reveal its nuclear secrets, said Baghdad had not provided details of all of them but played down suggestions that a military strike was imminent.

Iraq on Thursday said the whole debate on its nuclear programme should be left to

the scientists. It described the mission of a third team of UN inspectors as fruitful and positive and expressed the hope that "the scientific climate" would continue during the visit of a fourth team which is expected in Baghdad on Saturday.

Qadisiyah published a report on Khudayer's letter under the banner headline "our people are loyal to their principles and their leader and will resist all conspiracies".

In an editorial it accused Washington of seeking to destroy Iraq and impose a political system to suit its own plans.

The IAEA has accused Iraq of breaching the nuclear non-proliferation treaty by concealing a uranium enrichment programme.

Under the ceasefire terms imposed on Iraq after its Gulf war defeat Baghdad must declare and scrap all its weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq says that its nuclear programmes are for peaceful, scientific research.

20,000 Kurds flee Iraq

TEHRAN, July 27 : Twenty thousand Kurds have fled areas of northern Iraq that were hit by violence earlier this month and are heading toward the Iranian border, news reports said here today, says APT.

Off the Record

Doctor has AIDS virus

NEW YORK : An emergency room doctor in the Buffalo area disclosed that he had the AIDS virus and then stopped practicing medicine, officials at the four hospitals where he worked said Friday, reports AFP.

Neal Rzepkowski, who stopped working two weeks ago, said he had known he was carrying the virus which causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) since 1985, the same sources said.

The four hospitals which employed the physician said they planned to inform all of his patients but stressed that the chance of infection was virtually nil. They noted that there was no confirmed case of doctor-to-patient transmission of AIDS in a US hospital.

The government in July published a report advising US doctors practicing procedures to be tested for the AIDS virus and to stop performing high risk procedures if they were carrying the virus or at least to inform patients.

The Senate recently passed a bill not yet considered by the House of Representatives calling for a minimum of 10 years in prison and a fine of as much as 10,000 dollars for any doctor carrying the AIDS virus who fails to inform his patients of his infection.

The only cases of doctor-to-patient transmission of the virus known publicly in the United States are those of 23-year-old Kimberly Bergalis and four other patients believed to have contacted the disease from the same Florida dentist.

Haircut now a peril

ORLANDO (Florida) : Add haircuts to the growing list of the perils of modern life, reports Reuter.

A Florida man is suing over a haircut he says was so bad that he needed psychiatric help to overcome an ensuing panic-anxiety disorder.

Eric Graham filed suit against the J C Penney Co this week, claiming one of the store's hair stylists cut his hair so badly last March that he had been deprived of his right to enjoy life.

According to the suit, he went to the stylist after letting his hair grow for two-and-a-half years and asked that it be cut short on the sides and left long and curly on top.

The result was just the opposite he said leaving him short nine inches (18 cm) of hair, "ashamed" and an object of ridicule among his friends.

He is asking for 10,000 dollars in damages.

Great Silk Route revived

MOSCOW : Ethnologists, archeologists, historians and newsmen from 23 countries took part in the second Great Silk Route expedition across Kirghiz mountains after an international symposium, "Great Silk Route, Dialogue Route" on a UNESCO programme reflecting the world public interest in local culture, history and geography, in particular, Kirghistan, an old mountain country, reports IAN.

The Great Silk Route, an Eurasian transcontinental way 7,000 km long, crossed the Tian Shan and Pamir-Alai mountains, and the valleys of Ferghana and Issyk Kul. Its Kirghiz stretch made only a small part of the giant route, but this part is of tremendous interest to scholars.

The oldest description of this area, with its unique and severe landscapes, dates to the 2nd century BC and belongs to the Chinese traveller Chang Chien.

The expedition followed three itineraries one by one. The first included Osh, a south Kirghiz town as old as Rome, Uzen, in the middle ages the capital of the mighty Karakhanid state, and mount Suleiman, named after one of the Prophet's friends and attracting swarms of Muslim pilgrims. Ptolemy mentioned it as the main reference point for Great Silk Route caravans.

Liz marries a man 20 yrs her junior in Oct

NEW YORK, July 27: Elizabeth Taylor will marry a construction worker 20 years her junior in her eighth marriage in October and this time the violet-eyed film star, who will be given away by singer Michael Jackson, vows it will be forever, reports Reuter.

Jackson on Friday announced Taylor's engagement to construction worker Larry Fortensky, 39, and said he will give the bride away at a ceremony at his palatial California Estate, "Nevendon Valley" on October 5. The couple met four years ago.

Taylor has said, at the Betty Ford Centre, in Rancho Mirage, California, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre founded by the wife of former US President Gerald Ford.

Taylor has been married seven times to six men — twice to British actor Richard Burton who died in 1986. Taylor won her first Oscar in 1960 for the role of a call-girl in "Butterfield 8," and her second in 1967 for her portrayal of Martha in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" But she has won international fame more for her tumultuous personal life than for her acting as headlines have chronicled her passions for men and jewels, and her problems with overweight, drugs and alcohol.

The husky Fortensky and a shimmied-down Taylor have attended alcoholics anonymous meetings together. Taylor, in a November 1990 interview, said the construction worker has been her main support in efforts to cleanse herself of pills and alcohol.

In the same interview in the weekly magazine People, she dismissed the idea of marrying the previously