

Saddam's autonomy offer not to be trusted: Opposition

PARIS, May 7: Iraqi opposition leaders touring Europe said on Monday they opposed talks between Kurdish rebels and President Saddam Hussein and had warned them not to trust his promises of autonomy and democracy, reports Reuter.

"We believe these talks can produce no good... we asked them not to give any credence to promises," Diawal al-Maliki, leader of the Al-Dawa Party, told a news conference.

Maliki is touring Western Europe with four other exiled politicians, including a representative of the United Front of Kurdistan, to seek support for bringing Saddam to trial and restoring democracy in Iraq.

The Kurd, Izz Al-Din Pirwari, did not attend their joint news conference.

Kurdish leaders have said Saddam agreed to Kurdish autonomy in talks in Baghdad and is ready to assume its monitoring and observation duties, a UN spokesman announced on Monday.

This clears the way for the departure of United States troops from the zone, extending 10 km (six miles) into Iraq and five km (three miles) into Kuwait.

The force, called the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), was set up in accordance with a ceasefire resolution which the Security Council adopted on April 3. UNIKOM is commanded by

Major-General Gunther Grindl of Austria.

It comprises some 300 military observers from more than 30 countries and about 680 infantrymen to protect them, as well as engineering, logistics and air units.

A refugee camp run by the United States army near Safwan, on the Iraqi side of the border, has been closed after about two months and all the inhabitants flown to a camp in Raifia, Saudi Arabia.

The refugees sought US protection after Iraqi President Saddam Hussein crushed revolts which swept the mainly Shi'ite Muslim south of Iraq and the Kurdish north in the wake of Iraq's defeat in the Gulf war.

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Captured Afghan governor escapes

PESHAWAR, May 7: The captured Governor of an Afghan garrison town overrun by Mujahideen guerrilla a month ago has escaped along with a number of government generals held by rebels, the rebel news agency media said on Monday, reports Reuter.

It quoted Mujahideen commander Muafi Khan as saying Sadar Gul and the generals had escaped from Mujahideen bases. Another guerrilla news agency said the escape took place last week.

Gul was not among the senior government officials put on show by the Pakistan-based Mujahideen after they captured the eastern Garrison of Khost at the end of March.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has said guerrillas captured around 2,700 government soldiers and officials in Khost.

Ethnic riots in Washington: 10 policemen injured

WASHINGTON, May 7: Rioting youths set six police vehicles ablaze and injured 10 officers in the first big outbreak of ethnic or racial violence in the US capital in more than 20 years, officials said on Monday, reports Reuter.

The rioting, three miles (five km) from the White House, erupted on Sunday night after an Hispanic man was shot in the chest by a police officer who said he had lunged at her with a knife while she was arresting him for disorderly conduct.

The shooting set off a five-hour rock-and-bottle-throwing melee in a racially mixed neighbourhood known as

mount pleasant, in northwest Washington. Eight people were arrested, police said.

"A person or persons spread a false rumour that the wounded man had his hands cuffed behind his back and then was shot," Haydee Mazariegos, a police spokeswoman said.

She said the suspect had only been "partially cuffed" when he drew a knife and thrust it repeatedly at the arresting officer, ignoring orders to halt.

In the riot that followed 10 officers were injured, including one stabbed in the shoulder, she said. Five police cars and one police van were set ablaze. Youths hurling bricks,

bottles and rocks also damaged and unspecified number of other police and private cars. Several areas stores were broken into and looted.

The incident was the city's first outbreak of large-scale ethnic or racial violence since The 1968 Assassination of Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King triggered rioting by Blacks, who make up a majority of Washington's population.

Mayor Sharon Pratt Dixon met religious and community leaders on Monday before touring the mount pleasant area, just east of the National Zoo. The area has a large Hispanic population. Whites and Hispanics appeared to be involved in the rioting.

Gorbachev cedes coal fields to Yeltsin

MOSCOW, May 7: Mikhail Gorbachev ceded key coal fields to Russian republic leader Boris Yeltsin, easing a long-standing domestic conflict, and won pledges of foreign support from French President Francois Mitterrand, reports Reuter.

Under an agreement born of recent cooperation accords between the two rivals, the Kremlin handed over the

striking Siberian. Rostov and Komi mines to Russian control. The move could end a two-month-old strike and open the way for broader powersharing between republics and the "centre".

"The mining industry is in working condition and that will allow a quick end to the strike," Yeltsin told parliament.

But Gorbachev's success in forging agreement, in the face of hardline pressure in his Communist Party, seemed tempered by doubts over his international standing.

Gorbachev echoed comments he made to Tass news agency on Sunday accusing some media, Western and Soviet, of drawing hasty conclusions about a lagging in perestroika. He urged western countries not to write off his reforms and said there were dangers of a new cold war if they turned their backs.

He told a joint news conference with visiting President Mitterrand he had a firm grip on the rudder of the Soviet ship.

"We're charting new courses in perestroika in very bad weather. The instruments are out of order and the crew is not as united as it might be," he said. "But it follows the course we set."

Mitterrand, clearly eager to dispel suggestions that support for Gorbachev was waning in the west, praised the Soviet President's achievements.



SAI-WAN, Iraq: A US military convoy leaving Iraq, rolls past burning oil wells May 6 on the highway leading to Kuwait, 100 km north of Kuwait city. — AFP/UNB photo

Cambodian ceasefire to be reviewed

UNITED NATIONS, May 7: UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, France and Indonesia announced on Monday they would send three military officers to review the first ceasefire in Cambodia's 12-year civil war, reports Reuter.

The team is expected to arrive in southeast Asia this week, led by Major-General Timony Dibauama, military adviser to the Secretary-General, plus Colonels from France and Indonesia.

The mission is in response to a request from the Cambodian government, which asked the United Nations for observers acceptable to both sides to come to Cambodia and pave the way for a formal ceasefire, UN sources said.

Delhi a brother, Beijing only a friend 'India factor' stalks Nepali electioneering

KATHMANDU, May 7: With less than one month to go for Nepal's first multi-party elections in 32 years the Himalayan kingdom's relations with its giant southern neighbour, India, as emerged as a major electoral issue, reports IPS.

Till recently, Nepal used to be ruled by a dynasty of absolute monarchs who strived to steer an equidistant course between India and China, often playing one off against another.

The monarchy also bent over backwards to be friendly with China to balance Nepal's closer economic and cultural affinity to India.

But a popular uprising last year stripped King Birendra of his absolute powers, lifted a ban on parties and turned the King into a constitutional monarch.

The centrist Nepali Congress and an alliance of communist parties which led the revolt took over and share power.

The two are also the main contenders in the May 12 elections and one of the chief issues dividing the two parties is the sensitive and highly emotional subject of Nepal's relations with India.

The Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), which is composed of the united, Marxist and Leninist factions, has used the Nepali Congress perceived closeness to India as a whip to flog its rival.

"Our nation is in danger because of the pro-Indian stand taken by the Nepali Congress,"

said CPN leader Nirmal Lama in a newspaper interview last week.

Hiranya Lal Shrestha, a retired university professor and a sympathiser of the moderate Marxist line, feels the Nepali Congress is soft on India.

"The Nepali Congress has contributed to the cause of democracy, but it is work in

closeness and there were allegations then that the Nepali Congress was about to "sell out" Nepal's water resources to India.

Aside from suspicious here that India has "designs" to dominate Nepal politically is the fear that New Delhi wants leverage in harnessing Nepal's Himalayan rivers for power and irrigation projects that would benefit India more than Nepal.

The elections are crucial because under a new constitution, whichever party gets a two-thirds majority can ratify a new treaty on joint water projects with India.

"The Nepali Congress wants a two-thirds majority because it wants to sell out water resources and nationalism to India, thundered CPN leader Sahana Pradhan at a leftist rally here this week.

Bhattarai himself has tried to explain his stand, saying his party is no less devoted to nationalism than the left.

But statements like the one by Nepali Congress supreme, Ganesh Man Singh, that "Nepal is India's brother, but China is a friend" have not helped clear his party's pro-Indian perception.

In theory, a pro-Indian image would be an electoral liability among Nepal's 18-million people who are proud that their country has never been colonised.



King Birendra reduced to a figurehead?

safeguarding our national interests," he said.

The left's main concern is that Nepali Congress stalwart and interim Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai is beholden to his friend, Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, for support.

Shekhar's visit to Nepal earlier this year highlighted this

Chlorine gas leakage creates panic in Nevada

HENDERSON (Nevada), May 7: A chemical plant spewed chlorine gas for nearly six hours Monday prompting thousands of people to flee their homes and shutting down much of this city of 70,000, reports AFP.

No serious injuries were reported, but at least 29 people sought treatment at a local hospital and others went to fire stations complaining of soreness of breath.

Fire department spokesman Bob Leinbach said the chlorine gas leaked from the Pioneer Chemical Plant, which produces chlorine compounds for swimming pools. The leak began at 2:30 am (0630 GMT) and stopped at 8 am (1200 GMT).

A Greenish cloud hung over the city, said Joe Mack of radio of Henderson.

It's real eerie on the streets because most of the businesses are closed, said Mack.

Highways in and out of the city were closed, schools were shut down, and two school gymnasiums were turned into shelters.

Clark county manager Pat Shalmy said authorities were treating the spill as a very serious emergency.

3 CBS newsmen missing in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, May 7: Three members of a CBS news team assigned here have been missing since Saturday and were last seen on a road leading to the southern Iraqi city of Basra, a spokeswoman for the US network said Monday, reports AFP.

The three men left the Hotel International here at around 9:00 am (0600 GMT) Saturday, heading north on their day off.

Off the Record

Madonna nervous

NEW YORK: Madonna said she's a little nervous about her straight-laced father's reaction to her new movie, "Truth or Dare," reports AP.

"He should definitely see it, but at a private screening," she said. "I think it will be painful for him but ultimately necessary and growth-provoking, like all truth."

Madonna said the movie, in which she curses like a truck driver, swaps sexual gossip with pal Sandra Bernhard and mocks Kevin Costner behind his back, is not just a ploy for media attention.

"The point of the movie is not so much to reveal my personal life, but to reveal life in general," she said in an interview published Sunday in the New York Times.

The film, which opens Friday, was shot during her 1990 "Blond Ambition" tour.

Jerry Lewis' son in trouble

LOS ANGELES: Jerry Lewis' son, Christopher, is under investigation for alleged possession of stolen limited-edition artworks, police said, reports AP.

Lewis, 33, of Pebble Beach, was released on 5,000 dollars bail Wednesday after surrendering to authorities in northern California, and will be arraigned in Los Angeles Municipal Court on June 3, Detective Bill Martin said.

Lewis was booked by sheriff's deputies in Monterey County for investigation of receiving and concealing stolen property, Martin said.

His arrest stems from a Nov. 28 burglary of 16 limited-edition graphics that were stored at a facility in suburban Van Nuys by American Designs Limited, Martin said. The prints were valued at 200,000 dollars.

In an undercover operation, police purchased 19 of the stolen prints in suburban Sherman Oaks and the San Francisco area and "learned that the suspect selling the graphics was Christopher Lewis," Martin said.

Armed with a search warrant, detectives combed Lewis' Pebble Beach home and his fine-arts business in nearby Del Rey Oaks, Martin said. Detectives would not disclose if anything was recovered.

Lewis did not return a phone message seeking comment.

Fat is dangerous

SEATTLE (Washington): People who reduce the amount of saturated fat in their diet could substantially cut their risk of developing three of the most common forms of cancer, according to a Hawaiian medical study released here, reports Reuter.

A separate study presented over the weekend here by researchers at Montreal's McGill University, however, concluded that following recommended dietary fat and cholesterol levels would only lengthen a person's life an average of 44 days.

The Hawaii study concluded that people consuming low levels of fat, such as a traditional Japanese diet, rather than a diet high in fat would reduce their risk of developing lung cancer by 20 per cent, cut their prostate cancer risk by 14 per cent and breast cancer by 15 per cent.

The findings were released at a weekend meeting of the American Federation for Clinical Research.

66 Kashmiris killed

NEW DELHI, May 7: Indian troops intercepted and killed at least 66 Muslim militants who clandestinely crossed the Pakistan border into Indian Kashmir a government spokesman said here Monday, reports AFP.

Sunday's operation was the largest ambush of its kind by security forces battling a violent secessionist campaign in the northern province, India's only Muslim majority state.

The 66 killed were members of a 300-strong group of militants ambushed by the army in Kupwara district, near the line of control demarcating Indian- and Pakistan-controlled parts of Kashmir, the spokesman said.

He said Indian forces had seized 66 AK-47 assault rifles, five machine guns, four rocket launchers nine pistols and re-

volvers and 8,000 rounds of ammunition after a three-hour shoot-out.

No Indian military casualties were reported from the gunbattle which followed the army ambush in the Chokkibalarea of Kupwara, in Northern Kashmir.

The spokesman said three suspected Muslim militants were captured. Some fled back into Pakistan-held Kashmir, he said, adding the number of dead could be higher because details of the shoot-out were still coming in.

New Delhi has frequently charged that Muslim militants fighting for the secession of Indian Kashmir enjoy a safe haven in the Pakistan-controlled part of the territory.

Pakistan, which disputes the ownership of Kashmir and holds its northern third, has

expressed moral support for the secessionist campaign but denies harbouring, arming or training the militants.

The Indian spokesman accused Pakistani forces of engaging in frequent mortar, artillery and small arms fire in the Kupwara area over the past four days to distract Indian troops and enable Muslim militants to sneak in.

Islamabad has rejected such allegations in the past.

The Kashmir dispute, the chief bone of contention between the two south Asian neighbours, has taken the two countries to war twice since independence from British rule in 1947.

Tensions escalated with the Muslim militant campaign flaring in 1988, but were defused by diplomatic gestures.

BRIEFLY

6 Blacks shot dead in Johannesburg:

Gunmen ambushed a bus and shot dead six Blacks on Monday in a township northeast of Johannesburg, South African police said, Reuter reports from Johannesburg.

A Black gunman stopped the bus in Tembisa township by shooting at the driver, a spokesman said. Up to seven more Blacks then boarded the bus and opened fire with AK-47 rifles, shotguns and pistols.

The spokesman said no other details were available about the attack, which raised the death toll in township violence in the last six days to 108.

OAU favours African as UN chief:

The leader of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) expressed support on Monday for an African candidate for the post of UN Secretary-General, Reuter reports from Lagos.

OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim said Africa had people with the right credentials to succeed Peruvian Javier Perez de Cuellar, the news agency of Nigeria reported.

Salim, a Tanzanian who made an unsuccessful bid for the UN post in the 1980s, said he hoped African countries would rally behind one candidate.

Charles, Diana visit Prague:

Britain's Prince Charles and Princess Diana began a four-day visit to Czechoslovakia on Monday with a walk about to meet some Prague citizens, Reuter reports from Prague.

The heir to the British throne and his wife were met at Prague airport by the senior surviving member of the former Czech Aristocracy, Prince Karl Schwarzenberg, who now runs President Vaclav Havel's office.

After a ceremonial welcome from Havel and his wife Olga at Prague castle, where they will stay, they went to Wenceslas Square in Central Prague to lay a wreath at the Equestrian Statue of Saint Wenceslas, the Patron Saint of Bohemia.

Indo-Nepal border to be closed:

The Indian-Nepalese border will be closed for three days between May 10-12, in an apparent bid to prevent any traffic in firearms prior to Nepal's General Election, the Nepalese Home Ministry said Monday in Kathmandu, reports AFP.

The decision was taken Saturday at a meeting of Nepalese and Indian Border Security Personnel in Rupandehi, southwest of Kathmandu, a ministry source said.

Foreign tourists bound for Kathmandu and Nepalese going to India for medical treatment will still be allowed to cross the border, the source said.

The border closure was aimed at preventing any disruption of the elections on May 12, the source added.

Kurds to be repatriated to homes:

Some 200,000 Iraqi refugees, most of them Kurds, will be repatriated in the next few days to their towns and villages in northern Iraq, General Jay Garner, Commander of the US forces said on Monday, AFP reports from Zakho.

Gen. Garner told a press conference at US headquarters near Zakho that the operation intended to get refugees willing to leave back to their homes as quickly as possible.

5 Georgian regions declared disaster zones:

Five mountain regions in the north of Georgia, including Sachkhere, Oni, Ambrolauri, Dzghva and Tsageri, the hardest hit by the recent earthquake, have been declared a disaster zone, Novosti reports from Tbilisi.

According to the statement made by Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the zone has an area of 5,700 square kilometres and a population of more than 100,000. In preliminary estimates, about 80 per cent of residential buildings and production premises have been destroyed. Heavy casualties and thousands of injured persons have been reported.



KATHMANDU: Banners bearing party slogans and election symbols are now a part of urban landscape as the May 12 election day approaches.