

Send relief to Kashmiris, Sharif urges Islamic nations

ISLAMABAD, June 5 : Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday called on Islamic countries to send relief to Kashmiris opposing Indian rule in their Himalayan state, reports Reuter.

He made the call in a meeting in Islamabad with the visiting Secretary-General of the 46-nation Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), Hamid Al-Gabid.

A Pakistani government statement quoted Sharif as accusing India of committing "mounting atrocities" against Kashmir's predominantly Muslim population and calling for "urgent relief assistance" for them.

"The Prime Minister stressed that in order to save the people of Kashmir from starvation and extreme suffering, the Islamic countries should give top priority to this matter," the statement said.

More than 2,500 people have been killed in Kashmir since a Muslim separatist campaign turned into open revolt 17 months ago. Militants want independence or union with Islamic Pakistan.

Pakistan denies Indian charges that it is training or arming Kashmiri militants, saying its support for them is only political and moral.

Two of the three wars between India and Pakistan since their independence from Britain in 1947 were fought over Kashmir, two-thirds of which is ruled by India and the rest by Pakistan.

New Delhi regards the whole of Kashmir as an integral part of India. Islamabad says Kashmiris must be allowed to decide their future in a UN-supervised referendum.

Chinese engineers released

AP from Karachi says: Three Chinese engineers kidnapped in Pakistan's Sindh province nearly a month ago

were released Wednesday, government officials said.

The three, identified as Zho Zheng Geng, 52, Lee Gang, 26 and Tai Shiyu, no age given, were abducted on May 10 and taken to a forest hideout.

They were working near the village of Phan Sacedabad, 144 miles (240 kilometers) north of the port city of Karachi, when they were snatched from their vehicle, police officials said on condition of anonymity.

The engineers are among about 30 Chinese nationals employed with a Chinese-based power generation firm working on contract for the Pakistani government in the interior of Sindh, where kidnappers roam with virtual impunity.

For weeks the kidnappers taunted police, daring them to come into the thick forest. Police officials originally thought the kidnappings were revenge for police crackdowns on armed gangs in the area.

It wasn't immediately known whether a ransom was paid. Police said the kidnappers had demanded a ransom but a figure was never given.

During negotiations, the kidnappers also demanded immunity and a promise that police would not launch a crackdown in the area. The police refused to say whether any of the demands were met.

Thousands of people have been kidnapped in the past two years in Sindh, and police say at least 30 kidnappings are reported every month. Most are released after paying ransom. Others have been killed.

In January, Pakistan imposed the death penalty for kidnapping-for-ransom.

The government warns foreigners against travelling in Sindh and rarely do residents leave their homes after sunset.

Late last month police recovered two Japanese students, who had been kidnapped almost six weeks earlier from Sukkur, near Phan Sacedabad. It is believed that a 63,000-dollar ransom was paid to the kidnappers for the Japanese students.

A Swedish and a Pakistani hostage were killed on April 10 in a gunbattle between their kidnappers and police.

Peter Schubert, an engineering consultant for the Danish Company Kampsax International and Mohammad Shafi Junejo, the Pakistani hostage, were killed when police stormed the vehicle in which they were being held.



ISLAMABAD : Opposition leader and ex-premier Benazir Bhutto leaves a hotel in Islamabad June 4. Few hours earlier Bhutto led an opposition walkout in the National Assembly to protest the government's failure to rescue three kidnapped Chinese engineers. — AFP/UNB photo

US blasts Soviet show of force in Lithuania

WASHINGTON, June 5 : The United States on Tuesday criticised a Soviet show of force in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, saying it would raise tensions in the breakaway Baltic Republic, reports Reuter.

"We do not understand how this display of force can be consistent with the expressed in tensions of Moscow to avoid violence," said State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler.

"We continue to urge that all outstanding issues between Lithuania and Moscow be settled by good faith negotiations, that measures be taken to prevent incidents of this kind in order to lower tensions and actively pursue peaceful negotiations," she said.

The show of force, in which Soviet troops briefly set up check points near the Lithuanian parliament building, came a day after the Soviet state prosecutor's office issued a report exonerating the Soviet army from any blame for a crackdown in Vilnius last January in which 13 civilians were killed.

Tutwiler also criticised the report, saying the State Department "found the conclusions... to be at odds with facts as has widely been reported."

The United States never recognised the Soviet incorporation of Lithuania and the two other Baltic republics of Latvia and Estonia in 1940 under the terms of a secret pact with Nazi Germany.

23 peace marchers held in Israel

JERUSALEM, June 5 : Israeli authorities arrested 23 members of an international peace group which set out to march from Jerusalem through the occupied West Bank to Amman, Jordan, reports Reuter.

Members of the Gulf peace team said Wednesday they were arrested late on Tuesday in the Ramallah area of the occupied West Bank for refusing a police order to leave the area.

Kathy Kelly, a coordinator for the group, said authorities detained the 23 for more than four hours and then took them back to Jerusalem.

Gorbachev in Oslo

OSLO, June 5 : Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev winner of the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize, arrived in Oslo today to give a traditional Nobel lecture and meet Norwegian government leaders, reports Reuter.

He was due to be met by Francis Sejerstad, head of the five-member Nobel Committee which awarded him the prize, and Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland.

Reward for informants in Rajiv's assassination

COLOMBO, June 5 : Indian has offered a cash reward for information in the killing of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in leaflets dropped on rebel-held areas of northern Sri Lanka, an Indian diplomat said Wednesday, reports AP.

Thousands of leaflets bearing the pictures of two key suspects were dropped Tuesday from Sri Lankan aircraft on the Jaffna Peninsula, the stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, 300 kilometers (185 miles) north of Colombo.

India's Central Bureau of Investigation offered 480,000 rupees (24,000 dollars) and a promise of confidentiality for help in identifying the sus-

pects, the diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

Informants were asked to contact the nearest Sri Lankan army camp, police station, or write the Indian High Commission in Colombo.

The photographs of a dark bespectacled young woman and a mustachioed man were taken at the May 21 election rally in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu where Gandhi and 17 others were killed.

The woman had strapped explosives to her waist and died in the blast. The man, who has disappeared, is a suspected accomplice. Police theorize he may have been part of a back-up assassination team. Both have the facial features of

Sri Lankan Tamils.

Northern Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu are separated by 40 kilometers (25 miles) of sea. Investigators say Gandhi's assassins could have travelled to Tamil Nadu along with the tens of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils fleeing the ethnic war.

Investigations have centered on the Tigers, the most powerful and sophisticated separatist group fighting for independence in Sri Lanka.

Investigators believe the Tigers' motive was linked to the peace accord Gandhi brokered in 1987 that the Tigers found unacceptable. Indian troops fought a 2 1/2-year war against the Tamil guerrillas.

Iraq running out of medical supplies, seeks urgent help

NICOSIA, June 5 : An Iraqi official on Tuesday warned the country was quickly running out of medical supplies and appealed to international organisations to send urgent relief, the Iraqi news agency INA said in a report monitored here, reports AFP.

Iraqi Minister of Industry and Military Industries Amer Hammoudi al-Saadi said supplies of pharmaceutical products needed for surgical operations as well as chemical products needed for the manufacture of widely used medicines were close to depletion.

He said there was a particu-

lar need for ammonium nitrate used in the preparation of anaesthetics.

Saadi called on the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross to have the products sent to Iraq.

He cited additional chemicals necessary to manufacture antibiotics, as well as polythene used for medical packaging.

Baghdad had appealed repeatedly to the United Nations to lift the economic embargo imposed in the wake of Iraq's August invasion of Kuwait.

Iraqi authorities have also asked that its assets abroad be

unfrozen in order to purchase food and medicines.

Reuter says: United Nations Security Council members meet informally Wednesday to discuss a draft resolution that would make Iraq pay for the scrapping of its own weapons of mass destruction.

It would also give the UN an open-ended deadline to get rid of them.

Diplomats said the draft, broadly approved by the five permanent members of the council, would also call for voluntary contributions from member states to pay for the daunting task of destroying ballistic missiles and removing nuclear and chemical weapons materials.

The Council later this week also plans to hold a closed informal meeting to review Iraq's compliance with an April 3 resolution that set terms for a permanent ceasefire.

A US official said he expected Iraq to be briefed afterwards on comments from individual members but that there would be no formal meeting or any change in the stringent trade embargo imposed after Baghdad's invasion of Kuwait.

Under the April 3 resolution sanctions and other measures against Iraq, such as the removal of its weapons, must be reviewed by the council every 60 days.

Pakistan forced to stop rebuilding F-16 engines

ISLAMABAD, June 5 : The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) has been forced to suspend a plan to rebuild the engines of its F-16 aircraft due to the suspension of US aid, Defense Minister Abdul Majid Malik said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The Minister told parliament that Pakistan had launched a project to rebuild engines of the fighter bombers domestically but the plan has been withheld because Washington has refused to provide crucial equipment and expertise.

There were certain difficulties in the purchase of its spare parts, he added, stressing that the PAF had not yet been forced to ground its F-16s.

The PAF acquired 40 F-16s in 1987 after the United States lifted its several year old aid freeze in 1981 in the wake of the Soviet invasion of neighbouring Afghanistan.

BRIEFLY

Doctors begin strike in Peru:

Hundreds of doctors at Peru's Social Security hospitals have begun a strike to back up a demand for an immediate increase in their 200-dollar-a-month wages, AP from Lima says.

Peru's Social Security system provides health care for most public and private sector workers who pay taxes. Unofficial workers, day labourers and the unemployed must go to public hospitals and clinics.

The strike marked the first time doctors have walked off the job in Peru since a cholera epidemic broke out in late January. The epidemic has killed more than 1,700 people in Peru and more than 300 in neighboring countries.

The strike is the second to affect health care in Peru this year. Some 90 per cent of Peru's 75,000 public health workers have been on strike since March, also in demand of wage increases.

Arab Forces Joint Command dissolved:

The Arab Forces' Joint Command, which directed Arab and Islamic troops during the war against Iraq, has been officially dissolved, the Al-Hayat newspaper reported Wednesday, AFP reports from Jeddah.

The paper said the Forces' Commander in Chief, Saudi General Khaled bin Sultan ben Abdel Aziz, announced the formal dissolution Monday during a farewell ceremony in Riyadh for departing Arab officers.

The liberation of Kuwait would not have been possible "had it not been for the positive collaboration between all the joint troops, their officers and commanders, before during and after the Gulf War," Gen Khaled said.

OPEC conference ends:

OPEC's bi-annual oil conference has ended, Qatari Oil Minister Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Khalifa al Thani said, Reuter from Vienna reports.

Asked by reporters if the conference was over he said, "yes... the [OPEC] President will be briefing you."

"We have completed everything. They are signing now," Abdul Aziz added.

Earlier, Iranian Oil Minister Gholamreza Agazadeh said all 13 member had agreed to roll over the group's 22.3 mln barrels per day second quarter output ceiling into the third quarter.

Former Pak minister arrested:

Pakistani drug squads raided a five-star hotel in Karachi on Tuesday and arrested a former provincial minister for carrying 50 kg (110 lb) of heroin, a spokesman said, Reuter from Karachi reports.

Amanullah Khan Kundi, Former Minister in the North West Frontier Province, was carrying the drug in three suitcases, the spokesman for Pakistan Narcotics Control Board said.

Four other people were arrested later on the information given by Kundi, the spokesman said.

Pavlov to visit Yugoslavia:

Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov will visit crisis-torn Yugoslavia to meet federal Prime Minister Ante Markovic Friday Tanjug news agency said, Reuter reports from Belgrade.

It was not immediately clear if Pavlov's visit was a Soviet effort to mediate in a quarrel between Yugoslavia's six republics which has pushed the country to the brink of civil war and left it without a President since May 15.

India offers food to Iraq on credit:

India said Wednesday it has offered food and medicine on commercial credit terms to Iraq, which has been seeking in vain to arrange food deals with western countries since the Gulf war, Reuter reports from New Delhi.

"We have offered to provide foodstuffs and medicines, which are items allowed under the United Nations sanctions regulations (against Iraq), on normal commercial credit terms," an External Affairs Ministry spokesman said.

Most of Iraq's assets in western countries were frozen after it invaded Kuwait last August.

Iraq has been trying to negotiate food deals with companies and government organisations in Australia, Canada, Thailand and the United States, but has so far failed to agree credit terms.

The Indian spokesman said no firm deal had been concluded yet, but New Delhi would give its usual credit support to exporters for food supplies to Iraq.

Kuwaitis defy ban on rally

KUWAIT CITY, June 5 : Nearly 1,000 people quietly defied the government Tuesday by gathering at a mosque for prayers and a protest against the ruling Emir's refusal to hold parliamentary elections before October 1992, reports AP.

It was the first demonstration by all seven of the country's opposition parties since the country's liberation from Iraqi rule in February.

Public gatherings are illegal in Kuwait, but the opposition parties timed Tuesday's protest to coincide with the last of five daily prayers, making the ban difficult to enforce.

There were no police and only a vague hint of government disapproval. The mosque's water had been shut off, making it difficult for protesters to perform the required ritual washing before prayer.

Leaders of the seven groups said turnout was an encouraging

step in their efforts to curb the power of the ruling Al-Sabah family.

"The political forces in the country want to send a quiet message to the government, a quiet expression against the... lack of democracy," said Adnan Abdul Samad, a leader of the National Islamic Alliance, a Shi'ite Muslim group.

But rank and file members were disappointed that the gathering was nowhere near the 15,000 that took part in similar protests in 1989.

Storm kills 5 in China

BEIJING, June 5 : Twelve people were killed or injured and more than 2,000 houses damaged by a severe storm that hit 15 villages in coastal China late last month, a press report seen here Wednesday said, reports AFP.

The storm, bringing hailstones the size of eggs, struck Zhejiang Province on May 21. The New People's Evening News reported from Shanghai.

The storm capsized 15 rivers boats, drowning four people, while a fifth person was electrocuted by a downed power line. Seven others were injured when their houses collapsed.

The paper quoted preliminary damage reports.

It said more than 260 houses were destroyed and more than 2,000 damaged, adding that 150 sheds and large tracts of wheat and rice fields were also wiped out.

Disruptions to electricity supply also caused some factories to shut down operations, the paper said.

West angry at apartment rents rise in USSR

MOSCOW, June 5 : Western businesses reacted angrily on Monday to a decision by the Soviet authorities to increase apartment rents at Moscow's international trading centre by between 40 and 100 per cent, reports Reuter.

Western executives said the decision was another blow to foreign firms, already faced with enormous obstacles from laws governing foreign investment.

Apartment rent at the trading centre, known among westerners as "the mezh", were expected to increase from about 3,500 dollars a month to up to 7,000 dollars, the pillar of European monetary stability, is certain to defy pleas to provide cheaper money.

Japan and the European Economic Community are also likely to oppose pressure on the politically sensitive issue of scaling back farm subsidies.

The two-day summit ending Wednesday brings together the foreign, trade and finance ministers from the 24 OECD nations.

OECD Secretary General Jean-Claude Paye said last week that the ministers will also try to reach a consensus on reconciling fiscal and monetary policies.

Executions, torture rise in China : AI

HONG KONG, June 5 : Summary executions, torture of prisoners, arbitrary arrests and unfair trials have increased sharply in China since the crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Beijing two years ago, Amnesty International says, reports Reuter.

The international community's criticism of China's human rights record has become muted but the abuses themselves have never stopped, the London-based human

rights organisation said in its latest report.

Hundreds of pro-democracy activists from 1989 were detained for months or even more than a year before being charged and possibly thousands more were still languishing in prisons and detention centres, according to the report.

Amnesty said it had the names of more than 50 people sentenced to death since June 1989 for crimes allegedly



BEIJING : File photo taken December 26, 1980 of Jiang Qing, the widow of Mao Zedong and leader of the Gang of Four during her trial. The official news agency reported that Jiang Qing committed suicide last month, in the early hours of May 14. She was tried and convicted January 26, 1981 for her role in instigating the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution. —AFP/UNB photo

committed during the protests, but the number of those secretly executed was believed to be far higher.

"According to some sources, several hundred people were secretly executed in various places within or near the capital between June and August 1989," the report said.

More than 40 crimes, including theft, smuggling and embezzlement, are punishable by death in China. Many are publicly humiliated at mass

rallies before being executed.

AP from Beijing says: With a few subtle, anonymous gestures Tuesday, the Chinese remembered the army killings of pro-democracy protesters two years ago.

A few dozen white paper flowers were scattered on a sidewalk in the early morning, and quickly snatched up by passersby who could not mistake the significance. White is the colour of mourning in China.

Bush's wax replica falls, fingers broken

CLERMONT (Florida) : George Bush — a wax replica, that is — fell at the House of Presidents Wax Museum in Clermont, breaking a wrist and two fingers, reports AP.

"He just toppled over. I was in a panic when I came in," owner-curator Steve Miller said Monday.

Miller blamed the fall Sunday night on loose screws in the ankles of the life-sized figure, which is exhibited along with those of the 39 former US presidents at the museum in this city north of Walt Disney World in Orlando.

He said the screws were tightened and the presidential likeness will soon be good as new.