

12 Lankan Muslims killed in Tiger car bomb blast

COLOMBO, Sept 2: Tamil guerrillas set off a powerful car bomb in eastern Sri Lanka, killing twelve Muslims as government troops backed by air cover repulsed a rebel attack on a northern army camp, officials said today, reports AFP.

A military spokesman here said a small van packed with explosives blew up in Kathankudy in coastal Batticaloa district, instantly killing four Muslim civilians and damaging four shops in the vicinity.

Local Tamil officials in the area contacted by telephone said four more civilians including an eight-year-old girl later died in hospital and that 30 other civilians were hurt.

The spokesman blamed the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the car-bomb attack in Muslim-majority Kathankudy, the scene of a suspected LTTE massacre of more than 100 Muslims inside a mosque in August last year.

"The bomb exploded about 200 meters (yards) from the police station. The van was being towed by another vehicle when the rope broke loose and the terrorists drove off leaving the van containing the bomb, the spokesman said.

He said LTTE militants simultaneously attacked the nearby Arapattai security force detachment with small arms in a bid to prevent army and police units from rushing to the scene of the car-bomb blast.

"The attack on Arapattai was repulsed. We did not suffer casualties nor do we know if the Tigers had any losses," the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, he said government troops backed by Air Force helicopters beat back another major LTTE attack late Sunday on a security force detachment in northern Vavuniya district.

Y'slav presidency, feuding republics sign truce accord

BELGRADE (Yugoslavia), Sept 2: The Yugoslav presidency and the country's feuding republics on Monday signed a European Community plan designed to stop months of fierce fighting among Croats, Serbs and the army, reports AP.

It was unclear, however, whether the latest plan would succeed in ending months of bloodshed in this troubled area. Earlier attempts at truces have failed.

"The presidency accepts the declaration of the EC ministers," a spokeswoman told reporters gathered outside the conference room where the eight-man panel met to discuss the proposal.

The plan envisages an international peace conference on Yugoslavia and the dispatch of foreign cease-fire monitors

to the battle-torn republic of Croatia. Before implementation, it had to be accepted by leaders of Yugoslavia's six republics, also gathered in the federal capital.

It was approved 7-1 by the presidency, with Montenegro, Serbia's ally, opposed, the spokeswoman said.

Leaders of the republics approved the plan shortly after the presidency.

The presidency began the closed-door session only hours after the arrival of Dutch Foreign Minister Hans Van den Broek, current president of the 12-nation European Community, who was carrying the peace plan.

But even as the peace process was going on, so was the bloodshed. Five people were killed Sunday in renewed fighting, Croatian officials said in Zagreb.

Meanwhile, all but one of Croatia's airports reopened Sunday. The republic's airspace was closed a day earlier when army jets intercepted a Ugandan plane that reportedly carried contraband arms to Slovenia, for transshipment to Croatia.

There was no word on airports in Slovenia, where airspace also was closed.

The announcement of Serbian acceptance of the EC peace plan was made Saturday by Serbian Foreign Minister Vlastislav Jovanovic. Croatia and the federal government had agreed to it earlier.

A Dutch foreign ministry spokeswoman in The Hague said Sunday that in talks last week with EC envoys, Serbian leaders had reversed their earlier objection to cease-fire ob-

Off the Record



BEKESCSABA (Hungary): Orsola Michna, Miss Hungary 1991, smiles during the coronation ceremony of the competition here late August 31. The former Miss Hungary Antonia Balint had to resign after "Playboy" magazine published nude photographs of her. — AFP/UNB photo

Major, Yeltsin talk G-7 aid for USSR, republics

MOSCOW, Sept 2: Russian President Boris Yeltsin and British Prime Minister John Major today discussed assistance from the Group of Seven (G-7), most industrialised countries, for the Soviet Union and individual republics, Major told reporters, reports AFP.

Yeltsin wishes to develop the relationship between the G-7 countries and the Soviet people but also with the individual republics, and most important of all, from his point of view, the Russian Republics, Major said after an hour of talks at the Russian Parliament.

Major said that in addition to the "future economic hangs in the Soviet Union he and Yeltsin also discussed the importance of central and clear-cut control of nuclear weapons.

Russia has the bulk of the Soviet nuclear arsenal on its territory, while the rest is held in Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belorussia.

Practical assistance between Britain and Russia was also broached.

Yeltsin said he wanted to welcome Major to the White House, as the Russian Parliament is known as it was "the centre of resistance to the coup," that attempted to oust Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Asked about the re-emergence of "Russian imperialism in the wake of the coup Yeltsin said that he categorically rejected such charges. Russia was interested in reform and democracy, he said.

But the Union is not the same as it was before the coup Yeltsin said, adding that Gorbachev too was not the same person as before the putsch.



MOSCOW: Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev stands next to British Prime Minister John Major (L) shortly after they met at the Kremlin here September 1. At center is an unidentified translator. — AFP/UNB photo

Americans prefer Gorbachev

NEW YORK, Sept 2: Americans prefer Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to Russian President Boris Yeltsin and want US recognition of Baltic independence, but oppose giving financial aid to the Soviet Union, a Time CNN poll has found, reports Reuter.

According to the telephone poll to be published today, 53 per cent think it more in the US interest to have Gorbachev, rather than Yeltsin, in charge of the Soviet government.

Twenty-two per cent preferred Yeltsin.

Yeltsin increased his power base by leading the resistance to the August 19 hardline coup against Gorbachev that lasted just three days.

Sixth-eight per cent of those polled opposed giving quick, large-scale financial aid to the Soviet Union and 67 per cent thought the United States should recognise the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from the Soviet Union.

Japan to provide aid to Cambodia after peace pact

TOKYO, Sept 2: Japan will host an international conference on aid to Cambodia when a peace agreement is concluded, a Japanese Foreign Minister Official said Monday, reports AFP.

"Japan plans to hold a meeting after peace is achieved in Cambodia," the official said.

KYODO, news service quoted sources as saying that the meeting may take place this year, adding that Japan would approach the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and major industrialised countries.

The move follows a meeting last week in Thailand among the Vietnam-backed Phnom Penh regime and the Tripartite resistance coalition, who were later joined by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

Indo-Pak troops clash again : 50 killed

ISLAMABAD, Sept 2: Indian and Pakistani troops clashed for the second time in less than a week, raising the death toll to 50 and heightening tension along the Kashmir border, officials and informed sources said today, reports AFP.

Defence Ministry sources here said three Pakistani soldiers were killed when Indian troops mounted a large scale assault to capture Pakistani border posts in Kashmir.

The Indian attempts early Sunday were effectively foiled resulting in heavy Indian casualties, the Pakistan army's Inter-services Public Relations (ISPR) Department said.

It said the attack, supported by heavy artillery, was launched on Neza Pir posts in Poonch sector on the Pakistan side of line of control, which divides the state between the hostile neighbours.

"Heavy firing continued overnight in the area," a Defence Ministry official said today. He did not give the exact number of Indian losses.

Informed sources in Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistani-administered Kashmir, said at least 25 Indian soldiers died in their second attempt to capture Pakistani positions in Neza Pir.

A similar clash last week left more than 20 Indian soldiers dead, according to the official AFP news agency.

The Defence Ministry had put Pakistani losses at two dead.

The Directors General of Military Operations (DGMO) of the two countries last week agreed to a ceasefire along the fragile border.

An ISPR statement said the latest Indian action is in violation of the earlier understanding to de-escalate the situation along the line of control.

"The failure of the Indian attack on our posts in Neza Pir sector on August 26 has led them to further desperate action along the line of control in Kashmir," it said.

Army Chief General Asif Nawaz Janjua, said Friday that the situation at the border was calm and disagreed with assertions from several opposition leaders that India might go to war if the insurgency in Kashmir got out of control.

The Defence Ministry official said, "So far the skirmishes are localised, but we don't know what their intention is."

In answer to a question concerning fears of a wider conflict, the official said: "We are trying to defuse the situation."

He said the DGMOs again established contacts Sunday.

Sikhs boycott elections in northern Punjab

NEW DELHI, Sept 2: Sikh political parties have decided to boycott elections due this month in India's strife-torn northern province of Punjab to protest alleged repression by the state, reports AFP.

The boycott was announced late Sunday after a marathon conclave of 86 Sikh political and religious organisations in the Punjab town of Anandpur Sahib, as New Delhi indicated it would postpone the September 25 elections anyway.

Sikh separatist organisations fighting violently for an independent homeland in Punjab had backed the conclave, whose outcome was seen here as an indication that moderate political factions were veering increasingly toward militancy.

Participants included members of all mainstream Punjab parties and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), regarded as the Sikhs' religious parliament, which plays an influential role in state politics.

SGPC Chief Baldev Singh Sibbia told reporters after the nine-hour meeting that Sikh parties had decided to boycott the elections because of repression of the faithful by the federal government, which he dubbed "state terrorism."

He said the boycott would be extended to all future elections unless New Delhi withdraws draconian anti-terrorist legislation it has invoked to fight Sikh militancy and frees all prisoners, the Hindustan Times said.

The daily summed up the gist of his news conference: "what Sibbia meant was that Sikhs have no faith in the Indian constitution and (this belief) was backed by action."

Nine Sikh separatist organisation who sent messages of support to the conclave had stated the belief more overtly, expressing no confidence in the constitution and calling for a mass struggle to liberate Punjab.

On its part, the conclave urged the splintered separatist groups to close ranks and "see that their name was not tarnished by the killings of innocent people," hundreds of whom die daily in random separatist attacks.

The conclave called for a Punjab general strike September 7 to protest the killing of top militant Gurjant Singh Rajasthani by police Saturday.

BRIEFLY

Contra rebels kill 3 in Managua: Re-armed Contra rebels killed three children when the fighters attacked and set ablaze the house of a pro-Sandinista farmer in a Nicaraguan land dispute, police said on Sunday, reports Reuter from Managua.

About 10 re-armed rebels attacked the house of farmer Armando Garcia on Saturday night in the central province of Boaco, police said.

Garcia's nine-year-old son was killed by rifle fire while his two daughters, ages 12 and 16, were found dead in the charred ruins of the family home, apparently burnt to death, Boaco police Lieutenant Isidro Mendez said in a telephone interview.

2 dissidents on hunger strike in China: A Chinese official has confirmed that jailed dissidents Wang Juntao and Chen Ziming went on hunger strike and has pledged better treatment for them, the Xinhua news agency reported, AFP from Beijing says.

The official, Beijing No 2 Prison Deputy Director Li Jinghai, told Xinhua that the two dissidents "declared a hunger strike" August 14 because the prison refused to let their relatives visit last month.

But it appeared from the report that the two were no longer refusing food, although Wang's eating remained "irregular."

Wang showed signs of having hepatitis and would be moved to a "better hospital for further examination and necessary treatment," Mo Yishen, the doctor treating the two dissidents, was quoted as saying.

Gaddafi wants better relations with US: Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi said he wanted better relations between his country and the United States, the Libyan news agency Jana reported Sunday, says AFP from Nicosia.

Speaking before military officers, Gaddafi said that Egypt, Algeria and Morocco were making efforts to improve ties between the US and Libya. "I have no problem with that," Jana quoted him as saying in a dispatch monitored here.

He said that Libya's relations with Washington "were affected in the past by the attempts of (late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat) and the Zionists to harm them."

Gaddafi said the question of ties with the United States would be put before local people's congresses.

5 killed in Mexico shootout: Five people were killed and two wounded in a shootout following an argument at a baseball game in southern Mexico, the official news agency Notimex reported on Sunday, says Reuter from Mexico City.

Notimex quoted Oaxaca state Attorney General Bilberto Trinidad Tutierrez as saying the shootout occurred on Friday in the village of Auga de la Rosa.

He said the baseball game, between a local team and youngsters from the area who had settled in Mexico City, was part of festivities for the patron saint of the village, Santa Rosa de Lima.

Eritreans to free 13 Westerners: Thirteen Italians, Britons and Americans seized by the provisional government in Eritrea will be released in Sudan, the official Sudan News Agency reported Sunday, says AP from Khartoum.

SUNA said the six Italians, six Britons and one American were taken captive after they entered Eritrean territorial waters on the Red Sea without permission.

The agency did not say when the 13 persons were captured, when they would be released or what they were doing in Eritrean territorial waters.

China to normalise ties with Vietnam: China will normalise relations with long-time rival Vietnam in the near future, Chinese Li Peng said, reports AFP from Hong Kong.

With the approach of a political settlement to the Cambodian conflict, "relations between China and Vietnam will gradually resume to normalisation," Li said in an exclusive interview with the local Television Broadcasting Ltd. monitored here late Sunday.

The two neighbours have been at odds since January 1979, when China launched a short but bloody border war to punish Vietnam for invading Cambodia and overthrowing the Beijing-backed Khmer Rouge there.

German unification 'was good'

HAMBURG: Eleven months after they were reunited, an overwhelming majority of Germans on both sides of the former border believe unification was good, an opinion poll showed on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The poll to be published in Monday's Bild newspaper showed the 78 per cent of West Germans and 85 per cent of Easterners approve of last October's amalgamation of the two formerly separate Germanys.

Despite increased taxes to pay for unification and economic depression in the formerly communist-run East, only 12 per cent of Easterners were still against unity, while 21 per cent of Westerners opposed it.

The poll conducted by the respected IFAS institute showed, however, that it will take longer for Germans brought up in the post-war period of separation to think of themselves as united.

Sixty-five per cent of Easterners still thought of themselves as East Germans, the poll said.

AIDS Coalition stages 'sit-in'

KENNEBUNKPORT: Fifteen hundred demonstrators staged a symbolic "die in" on the road near President Bush's vacation home to protest what one called his "murderous, deliberative negligence" on AIDS, reports AP.

Scores of local police, state troopers and Secret Service agents clamped a tight security net over this resort town during the protest on Sunday.

The demonstrators, blowing whistles and carrying banners, were turned back at a police barricade on Ocean Avenue, a half-mile (one kilometer) from Bush's seaside compound.

The street was sealed off by about 40 state troopers, most wearing black winter gloves or surgical gloves that drew taunts from the demonstrators.

The march was sponsored by ACT up, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, known for its disruptive tactics and occasional use of civil disobedience. Sunday's demonstration was peaceful and police said there was no arrest.

After lying on the ground in symbolic representation of the 114,000 Americans who have died from AIDS, the demonstrators marched out of town.

Bush stayed inside his 11-acre estate and apparently did not see the protest. As he went out to dinner later that day, Bush was asked if he had any thoughts on the demonstration and replied, "No, no thoughts on it."

His daughter, Dorothy, jogged through the march at the side of the street. Accompanied by a man believed to be a Secret Service agent, she went unrecognized by the group.

Japan, North Korea talks fail

BEIJING, Sept 2: Normalization talks between Japan and North Korea concluded Monday without progress on disputes over Tokyo's insistence on nuclear inspections and Pyongyang's demands for war reparations, reports AP.

The two sides agreed to hold a fifth round of talks in Beijing in early November on establishing diplomatic relations.

North Korea signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in 1985, but has refused to agree to the required international inspections of its nuclear plants.

North Korea says it has no nuclear weapons and is not developing any.

Takenaka said Japan referred during the talks to reports that a reprocessing plant was being built in Yongbyong, North Korea. The Japanese said that if there is such a plant, of the twosides approached. "Chon told a news conference.

Japanese spokesman Shigeo Takenaka said at a separate briefing that there was no progress on Japan's demand that North Korea open its nuclear sites to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Chon Il Chol, leader of the Pyongyang delegation, said the two sides came closer together on some issues but negotiators agreed not to disclose those areas of progress.

There was no clear agreement reached at this fourth round of talks, but I can say that the exchange of opinion was deepened, and viewpoints

Cuba living through difficult times, says Castro

HAVANA, Sept 2: Cuban President Fidel Castro, in his first public statement since the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union, has said communism ruled Cuba is living through hard times but will persevere with its own ideas, reports Reuter.

"We're living difficult times, but even in the most difficult circumstances we will continue to push ahead with our projects, our ideas and our dreams," Castro told a meeting on Saturday night in remarks widely quoted by Cuba's state media on Sunday.

In his address to the meeting, held to celebrate Cuba's successful hosting of the Pan-American Games, the veteran 65-year-old Cuban leader made on direct mention of events in the Soviet Union since August 19.

But his words echoed the communist government's declared determination to maintain its orthodox socialist line in spite of the dramatic swing away from communism in the Soviet Union, which for three decades has been Cuba's political mentor and main economic supplier.

Cuba's ruling Communist Party on Thursday warned the Caribbean island's more than 10 million people to brace themselves for possible greater hardships because of the political and economic turmoil in the Soviet Union.

Disruptions to Soviet supplies of oil, food and raw materials over the last year have already worsened shortages on the island, causing the government to tighten rationing.

At the meeting in Havana, Castro hailed as "an exceptional success" the 11th Pan-American Games in Cuba, during which the island was host to 17,000 athletes, officials, journalists and tourists.

He singled out as a symbol of this success the fact that Cuba had for the first time in the 40-year history of the games won more gold medals than its arch rival and political foe the United States, 140 to the 130 gained by US athletes.

"All these achievements in the Pan-American Games are the result of the revolution and socialism" Castro said.

"History awarded those 140 gold medals to our people," he added. The Cuban leader went on: "This shows what we are capable of doing when we work well."

Cuba's rulers have introduced a strategy of austerity, a food self-sufficiency programme and a drive to boost tourism and hard-currency exports in a bid to survive the economic and political pressures squeezing the island.

Castro, who has ruled since the 1959 revolution he led that toppled right wing dictator Fulgencio Batista, has said Cuba will never abandon its one party communist system.