

Militants extend deadline to kill Romanian envoy

CHANDIGARH (India), Oct 21: Sikh militants who kidnapped Romanian diplomat Liviu Radu have extended their deadline for reaching a deal with the Indian government on returning him alive, police said on Monday, reports Reuter.

The first deadline set by the militants expired on Saturday with no word from either side on whether a deal would be struck.

In a new message sent to a Punjabi-language newspaper, the militants said they would kill Radu, who is 53 and has a heart condition requiring daily medication, by Wednesday evening unless three jailed colleagues were released.

"If these three people are not released, then the government will find the dead body of Radu," said the message, delivered to a reporter of the Ajit newspaper in Chandigarh capital of the northern state of Punjab.

The extension of the deadline should not be treated as weakness by the militants, but as a commitment to honesty and humanity," it said.

The message set a new deadline of 7 pm (1330 GMT) on Wednesday for the government to concede to demands for the release of three militants, two of them sentenced to death for the 1986 killing of former army chief Arun Vaidya.

Officials, who have been told not to discuss the negotiations, say they doubted the government would release the three militants in exchange for the first foreigner kidnapped in the decade-old Sikh independence campaign.

India has exchanged detained militants for kidnap victims in Kashmir and Assam, where other campaigns against Indian rule are under way, but freeing the convicted killers of a former army chief would anger the military, they said.



RAWALPINDI: Pak Chief of Staff of Pak Air Force Lt Gen Farooq Faroz (L) talks to his Chinese counter-part, Lt Gen Yu Zemin (R) during a courtesy call on October 19.

Lankan planes bomb LTTE controlled Jaffna

COLOMBO, Oct 21: Troops backed by Air Force bombers were poised to take the Tamil rebel-controlled town of Jaffna on Sri Lanka's northern peninsula, an independent newspaper said today, reports Reuter.

The rebel stronghold, could fall "any moment now," the island quoted Jaffna Commander Brigadier Wijaya Wimalaratne as saying.

Military sources in Colombo declined to comment. Troops have gained control of five islands of Jaffna and destroyed rebel bunkers and strategic outposts, Wimalaratne said.

The military sources said only that rebels had fled the islands in operation Valampuri, an offensive that began on Friday.

They said 42 rebels were killed in the fighting and seven soldiers wounded.

Jaffna, main base of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels, has so far withstood troop attacks. The rebels have fought since 1983 for a separate state for minority Tamils in the north and east.

BRIEFLY

US hostage likely to be freed: The Shiite Muslim group holding Americans Alann Steen and Jesse Turner said early Monday that it would release a hostage within 24 hours, reports AP from Beirut.

The declaration by the Organization of Islamic Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine came hours after the United Nations office here said the release of an American hostage and a group of Arab prisoners being held by Israel were imminent.

The kidnappers' statement, delivered to the Beirut newspaper An-Nahar and a Western news agency, was accompanied by a photo of Turner, a 44-year-old mathematics professor.

The statement did not mention Turner or Steen by name, but they are the only hostages the group has claimed to hold. Both were kidnapped from the campus of Beirut University College on January 24, 1987.

The typewritten statement, released at 1 am Monday (2300 GMT Sunday) came 11 hours after the United Nations Information Center in Beirut announced that an American hostage would be released within 24 hours.

Three Israeli soldiers killed: Muslim fundamentalist guerrillas killed three Israeli soldiers with a South Lebanon bomb ambush on Sunday to show their opposition to the Madrid peace conference between Israel and its Arab neighbours, reports Reuter from Lebanon.

Security sources said a bomb planted in the road exploded as an Israeli patrol passed on a hill about two km (a mile) east of the town of Nabatiyeh, setting armoured vehicles ablaze.

The sources said three Israeli soldiers were killed and five wounded—the heaviest toll since an Israeli-guerrilla clash on July 17. There was no word on the attack from Israel.

The Islamic resistance, a guerrilla coalition led by the pro-Iranian Hizbollah (Party of God), claimed responsibility.

The attack was launched as the Israeli cabinet met in Jerusalem and decided to part in the October 30 conference in Madrid.

Jordan welcomes Israel's decision: Jordan on Sunday became the first Arab country to welcome Israel's decision to attend Arab-Israeli peace talks in Madrid on October 30, reports Reuter from Amman.

Israel's government earlier voted overwhelmingly to attend the peace talks. Only 3 of the 20 cabinet members voted against.

"With this (Israeli acceptance), all the parties to the talks have agreed to attend and the convening of the conference has become a reality," Information Minister Mahmoud Al-Sharif told Reuter.

"We hope this will be the beginning towards laying the basis of a true peace in the region," Sharif added. Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians will attend the conference with Israel, with who they are technically still at a state of war.

6 killed in Mexico oil plant blast: Six workers were killed in a blast at a Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) oil plant in southeast Mexico during work on a pipeline. La Jornada daily newspaper reported on Sunday, reports Reuter from Mexico City.

The explosion occurred on Saturday as workers were repairing a pipeline near the Samaria oil field in the state of Tabasco, it said quoting PEMEX officials in the area. It said two other workers were injured.

PEMEX officials were not immediately available to confirm the report of the explosion, the second in the area in less than a week. On Wednesday, a maintenance worker was killed when a PEMEX oil storage tank caught fire in Cunduacan, Tabasco.

Five Chinese shot dead in Vancouver: Five Chinese people — including a baby — were found shot to death on Sunday in what police believe to be the third murder-suicide in the Vancouver area in the past three days, reports Reuter from Vancouver.

The bodies of the 14-month-old infant, a 10-year-old boy, their mother, father and a second man were discovered in the bedroom of an east Vancouver home riddled with bullets from a machine-pistol.

Police said the weapon was found underneath the body of the second man who, they think, shot the other four before killing himself. The names of the victims were not released.

On Friday, a man in the nearby community of Abbotsford shot to death his estranged wife in a car parked off a major highway and then killed himself.

On Saturday, a man in the Vancouver suburb of Surrey murdered his ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend and then turned the gun on himself.

Vancouver criminologist Neil Boyd said these murder-suicides may have been triggered by last week's shooting massacre of 22 people by an unemployed man in Killeen, Texas. "We are talking about people who are on such an edge to begin with," said Boyd, a Simon Fraser University professor.

USSR to axe Armed Forces strength by 7 lakh troops

from Vladimir Radyuhin
Special to Daily Star

MOSCOW, Oct 21: The arms race is fast turning into a disarmament race. Merely a week after President Bush announced unilateral cuts in American short-range nuclear arms Mikhail Gorbachev responded with an even more sweeping disarmament initiative.

In addition to fully reciprocating the removal of the US land and sea-based battlefield nuclear weapons the Soviet Union will scrap one thousand more long-range nuclear warheads than the two countries agreed to do under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed last summer, bringing down their total number to 5,000. Gorbachev also promised to cut back the Soviet Armed Forces by 700,000 men to a total of 3 million.

Moreover, the Soviet President kicked the ball back into the American yard by offering to negotiate a further 50 per cent reduction of intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (IBM) down from the level fixed by the START treaty and destroy all battlefield nuclear arms, including short-range airborne missiles which President Bush had excluded from his plan.

There are still major differences between the two plans that have to be bridged before more cuts may come. While the Soviet Union proposes a balanced reduction of all types of strategic nuclear weapons, the United States would rather concentrate on curtailing the land-based component of the nuclear triad, where the Soviet Union has an edge, and keep

intact the submarine-launched IBM missiles, which constitute the main strike element of the American forces.

Nonetheless, the ball has been set rolling and in terms of global stability and greater security the peace move is going to be tremendous. However, it will be some time before common people feel any easing of the economic burden imposed by the arms race.

In the first few years instead of saving money the cuts will involve considerable additional expenses. It will cost a lot of money to withdraw and

dismantle thousands of nuclear warheads and build depots to store thousands more that are being taken off active duty but not yet destroyed. No figures have been mentioned so far, but Soviet Army Chief of Staff Vladimir Lobov believes the cost of disarmament will be enormous. In contrast to the healthy US economy, the crumbling Soviet economy may find it hard to endure this cost.

Gorbachev's rightist critics have already hit out at his latest initiative as too costly and untimely in view of the dire

Sikh militants set ablaze bank, kill 4 in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, Oct 21: Militants set on fire 14 branches of various banks and killed four persons in Punjab since last night, according to police, reports PTI.

Militants shot dead one Surjit Singh of village Khalchaitan in Majitha police district and one Mukhtiar Singh alias Bhola was gunned down in village Rampur in Bhatinda district. A Nirankar Ujjabar Singh was gunned down in Nawan Shahar area of Jalandhar district. Militants shot dead Sarparth Mohinder Singh of village Bhorawal last night.

Militants set on fire eight branches of various banks in Ludhiana district yesterday.

The six other branches of various banks were set on fire in Sangrur district.

Red Crescent official to lead Palestinian team to ME confce

CAIRO, Oct 21: Haidar Abdel Shaif, chairman of the Red Crescent in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip, will head the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East peace conference opening in Madrid later this month, a political advisor to PLO leader Yasser Arafat said here Sunday, reports AFP.

Abdel Shaif, 72, earlier said in an interview with Agence France-Press: "If I am chosen, then I will assume this responsibility."

Arafat advisor Nabil Shaath said after talks with the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Amr Moussa, that the definitive list of the 14-member Palestinian delegation to the conference will be handed

over to the US Consul General in Jerusalem by Palestinian leader Faisal Hussein.

Hussein would be general coordinator of the Palestinian delegation and Hanane Ashrawt his spokeswoman, he added.

A list comprising 14 names of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip was handed Saturday to the US Consul General in Jerusalem, Molly Williamson, according to Arab sources.

Abdel Shaif, who was the first vice-president of the Palestine National Council, or parliament-in-exile, when it was created in 1964, said Palestinians had to attend the conference, due to open on October 30 "to defend our rights."

Vietnam keen to end hostile relations with neighbours

BANGKOK, Oct 21: Vietnam is keen to end years of hostile relations with its non-Communist neighbours and become incorporated into the southeast Asian community, Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet said in an interview published here today, reports AFP.

The declaration came just before the signing in Paris of a peace agreement ending the Cambodian conflict and a visit by Kiet to three of the six members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore.

"Under the new regional situation it is very necessary for all neighbouring countries in southeast Asia to promote mutual understanding and cooperate with each other," Kiet told the Bangkok Post in Hanoi on the weekend.

"Close cooperation in economic, political and other fields will contribute to the peace and stability of this region, which corresponds with our own renovation policy," Kiet added.

Relations between Vietnam and its non-Communist neighbours nosedived after Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978 to oust their former Khmer Rouge allies and install a pro-Vietnamese government in Phnom Penh.

Vietnam has been the main supporter of the Phnom Penh government during almost thirteen years of war while the ASEAN countries, particularly Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, have backed the three-party guerrilla opposition.

Diplomats in Hanoi told the Bangkok Post that Vietnam wanted to build friendly ties with its ASEAN neighbours now that the Cambodian conflict was finally on the verge of settlement.

Vietnam also wanted to align its economy more closely with the ASEAN countries because its former main backers, the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, had slashed assistance.

Hollywood actor in US Presidential poll race

WASHINGTON, Oct 21: Hollywood actor Tom Laughlin and anti-abortion activist Reverend Pat Mahoney added their names this weekend to the list of democrats to become presidential candidates in next year's elections, reports AFP.

"America cannot survive four more years of President George Bush, 60-year-old Laughlin told reporters Sunday in front of his boyhood home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He now lives in a suburb of Los Angeles.

The star of karate-packed "Billy Jack" movies of the 1970s, said he was seeking the democratic presidential nomination "to send a clear message to Washington that the American people are fed up."

He called Bush cynical, callous and indifferent to the millions of hard-working Americans. He said he first tried to

convince Desert Storm General Norman Schwarzkopf and journalist Bill Moyers to take up the presidential challenge, but opted to run himself when they both declined.

On Saturday, reverend Pat Mahoney, who heads anti-abortion operation rescue, announced he would be vying for the democratic presidential nomination because anti-abortion activists were unrepresented in the opposition party.

The 37-year-old reverend has recently led demonstrations blocking three abortion clinics in Wichita, Kansas, and has been arrested three times.

Senators Bob Kerrey of Nebraska and Tom Harkin of Iowa, former senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder and former California governor Jerry Brown are also in the race.

Off the Record

Ian Smith still fighting the war he lost

HARARE: At 72, Ian Smith, Rhodesia's last White leader, is still fighting the war he lost: tilting bitterly at Zimbabwe's black rulers from his suburban home next door to the Cuban Embassy, reports AP.

Down the road, President Robert Mugabe, jailed by Smith for more than a decade and then hounded into exile, hosted a weeklong Commonwealth summit promoting democracy and human rights.

"It's a fraud. What did they achieve? Nothing," Smith said of the meeting, which ended Tuesday.

"They're too busy feathering their own nests These countries are riddled with corruption, incompetence, intolerance, nepotism," he said, calling Zimbabwe "a de facto one-party state."

Gaunt and graying, the former prime minister is without remorse.

For him, the last 25 years have been a long saga of personal betrayal: The failure of his 1965 declaration of independence from Britain to preserve white-minority rule. The civil war that followed, which cost some 27,000 lives. The 11 years since Zimbabwe achieved peace and international recognition.

"We could have won if we hadn't been betrayed by our friends," he says.

He ticks them off: Britain; Western countries knowtowing to the Organization of Africa Unity; and, bitterest of all, neighbouring South Africa.



LONDON: Willing recruits: David Tranne, from Vietnam, and Ali Shoker, a Kurd, doing the rounds in Anerley, south-east London.

Londoners refuse to do early-hour jobs

LONDON: Refugees from the Middle and Far East are being recruited as £230-a-week milkmen because Londoners cannot be found to work such early hours.

Express Dairies approached leaders of the Iraqi, Iranian and Kurdish immigrant communities when it could not fill 100 jobs.

"We were desperate to fill the vacancies, but found that while our existing staff of 2,500 are all content to work unsociable hours, we were getting no response to our advertising from the unemployed in London," said a spokesman for Express Dairies, which is part of Grand Metropolitan. "We had noticed a willingness to work shown within these ethnic communities and decided to go to them and persuade them to apply for the vacant jobs."

"We have a well established training scheme and we are training these recruits, mainly from Iran, Iraq and Vietnam, to speak English as their second language, to do their sums and to learn to drive our milk floats."

Mr Frank Beechmor-Collins, regional manager of the Grand Metropolitan Community Service trust, which runs the training scheme, said that so far 17 refugees had qualified to drive their own floats. "It is remarkable just how well this is going when you realise we have a mixture in the classes of Iraqis, Kurds, and Iranians who at home are sworn enemies. The two things that bring them together are the fact they are refugees from their past and that they are eager to work and earn money for themselves and their loved ones."

Among the newest recruits is Mr Ali Shoker, 28, an unmarried Kurd who drove a T26 tank for the Iraqis during the Iraqi-Iranian war and fled to England in 1982. "I am so happy," he said in halting English. "I have to learn enough so I can speak to the customers." Getting up early would be no problem, he added.

Among those who have successfully completed training is Mr David Tranne, 37, one of the Vietnam boat people. He came to Britain five years ago. Mr Tranne, married with two children, said: "I started this morning at 4 am and finished about 2 o'clock. It is the day we collect the money." I am just happy to have this job and although the hours are difficult — my wife does not get up to see me off to work — the job means I can do things for my family rather than be on the dole.

Arafat in Cairo to talk with Mubarak

CAIRO, Oct 21: Palestine Liberation Organisation chief Yasser Arafat arrived here today to discuss with President Hosni Mubarak a joint Arab strategy ahead of the Middle east peace conference in Madrid later this month, reports AFP.

Arafat had similar talk over the weekend with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad and Jordan's King Hussein and a senior PLO official has said an Arab ministerial conference would take place in Damascus on Wednesday or Thursday to plan common Arab strategy for the talks with Israel.

The United States and the Soviet Union on Friday invited Arab and Israeli leaders to attend a peace conference.

Fishermen rescued from Pacific after 11 days

ANCHORAGE (Alaska), Oct 21: Five fishermen who spent 11 days adrift in a life raft after their boat sank in the Pacific caught and ate a sea gull and rationed packets of water before they were rescued, one of them said, reports AP.

"We took it day by day, night by night. Every day we made it, we gave each other high-fives," Keith Pendleton, 23, of Lake Stevens, Wash, said Sunday by teoAphone from his room at Sitka Community Hospital.



ANKARA: Turkish President Turgut Ozal casts his vote for the Turkish general elections. Ozal belongs to the ruling rightwing Motherland party. At right is Ozal's wife.