

8,000 Ukrainians died in Chernobyl disaster

MOSCOW, Apr 23: Between 6,000 and 8,000 Ukrainians died in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Ukrainian officials revealed the new toll in a press conference billed under the slogan Chernobyl: six years after.

The explosion and fire at the plant on April 26, 1986 sent a radioactive cloud over large areas of Europe. The officials said that deaths among members of the emergency services involved in decontamination were running at three to five times the rates for people of equivalent age.

Only 31 people were officially reported to have died in the accident, which was initially kept secret by the old communist regime.

A study carried out for the European parliament said 150,000 people, 60,000 of them children, were exposed to high doses of radiation after the accident.

N-deterrence may bring added security

ELAHABAD, Apr 23: India and Pakistan both brought their Nuclear weapons programme out of the closet in recent months, and some disarmament experts think Nuclear deterrence may actually bring added security to this volatile region, reports IPS.

After being ambiguous about it for years, Pakistan has publicly admitted it has a Nuclear weapons capability. And in an unprecedented move, Indian officials said this month the country had a Nuclear defence plan as well.

Said a leading Pakistani military analyst: "India and Pakistan have both taken their Nuclear weapon programmes out of the basement and put it on the shelf, and the establishment on both sides of the border have accepted its role as a military deterrent."

The developments come as some military and strategic thinktanks in the West have challenged traditional notions of non-proliferation as a vital element in maintaining global peace.

Even the United States has accepted the fact that India and Pakistan are new Nuclear states. One administration official in Washington reportedly said in March "(we) hope the Nuclear standoff in the subcontinent convinces both to manage their relationship more constructively."

India conducted an underground Nuclear test in 1974 and has since said its Nuclear programme was for peaceful purposes. Pakistan has been ambiguous about its Nuclear plans. The two countries have fought three wars since they became independent in 1947.

But with the cold war over and India's rapid rapprochement with the United States, it seems it is now confession time in South Asia.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told French President Francois Mitterrand in January: "No doubt we have the capability (of building Nuclear weapons) but we are not doing it because we are concentrating on development."

In February, Foreign Secretary Sharyar Khan was even more forthright. He told the Washington Post Pakistan and Nuclear capability, but "last year permanently froze production of high-enriched uranium and of weapons cores."

Recently, Defence Minister Chois Ali Shah even hinted at Nuclear deterrence in South Asia: "Pakistan has acquired Nuclear capability for maintaining a balance of power in the region."

Pakistan has admitted its nuclear capability partly to appease domestic public opinion. The government has been criticised by its

Islamic hardline coalition partners of the Jamat-I-Islami party who feel Pakistan is buckling under US pressure to give up going nuclear.

Analysts say Islamabad's other concern may be that the emergence of Kazakhstan as an independent Muslim state could steal the nuclear thunder away from Pakistan. Kazakhstan is believed to be the only other country with possession of the dreaded "Islamic Bomb".

Another reason pushing Islamabad to go public may be China's signing of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty this year, which has increased pressure on India to follow suit. India's argument against signing was premised on China's strategic nuclear capability.

Explained one Pakistani diplomat: "Pakistan is keen to ensure that it is treated at par with India in terms of the level of development of its nuclear programme and it is the issue that reaches the conference table in South Asia."

By repeatedly stating that Pakistan has acquired nuclear capability, Pakistan is also sending a message to the United States underlining a threshold and ruling out a rollback.

Pakistani analysts say Islamabad's higher nuclear profile has induced New Delhi to shed its earlier stance that its nuclear programme is

only meant for peaceful purposes.

In February, the Indian External Affairs Ministry said atomic weapons were part of India's "Nuclear preparedness". And in an unprecedented move, India has begun talks with the United States about military cooperation and nuclear non-proliferation.

During recent discussions between US State Department officials and a senior Indian diplomatic delegation, New Delhi maintained its refusal to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. But further Indo-US dialogue on the issue is expected.

Wrote one Pakistani commentator here: "India's vegetarian bomb has suddenly become carnivorous."

Pakistan's nuclear confession was a tactical move that has now put it in the category of countries like India and Israel which have been branded New Nuclear States (NNS). Some analysts here think this will make policy-makers in Islamabad less apologetic about the country's nuclear weapons programme.

The nuclear issue has always been a sensitive one here. The United States slashed military and economic aid to Pakistan in 1990 after Islamabad failed to get a certification from the US Congress that it was not making a bomb. It marked the beginning of worsening relations between Washington and Islamabad.

Bush, Clinton, Brown clash on environment

WASHINGTON, Apr 23: President Bush, Bill Clinton and Jerry Brown clashed on the environment Wednesday with the democratic challengers accusing Bush of ignoring his promise to be the environmental president, reports AP.

Former Nazi and Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke withdrew from the Republican nomination race after his candidacy received little support.

And billionaire businessman Ross Perot received another boost for his independent run for the presidency when he was preferred over Bush and Clinton in a poll in the state of New Mexico.

Brown, running way behind Clinton, marked Earth Day with a blast at the Arkansas governor's record on pollution control in his state.

Brown rode an electric car, delivered petitions calling for energy independence and warned that if Clinton becomes the Democratic nominee, environmentalists may turn to Perot.

BRIEFLY

Truck mishap leaves 24 dead: A truck carrying workers to a construction project crashed into a gulch, killing at least 24 people and injuring 40, the Red Cross said Wednesday, reports AP from San Salvador.

Red Cross officials said the driver lost control of the truck when he tried to avoid a bus parked on the road and plunged into a gulch at the base of a bridge in the San Vicente region some 35 miles (50 kilometers) east of the capital.

15 killed in US plane crash: A twin-engine plane crashed on takeoff Wednesday at a rural airfield east of Los Angeles, killing 15 people from a skydiving club and injuring seven, authorities said, reports AP from Perris.

The crash was reported at 11:15 a.m. (1815 GMT) at the southwest end of Perris Valley Airport's runway, said Beatriz Lozada, spokeswoman for the California Department of Forestry-Riverside County Fire Department dispatch office.

Fifteen deaths were confirmed and seven people were taken to hospitals with major injuries, said Ruth Bahler, another spokeswoman. There were 22 people aboard.

Alan Lee, a traffic reporter for Los Angeles radio station MFMB said both wings were broken off the plane, which appeared to have hit nose-first. There was no fire, officials said.

CIS meet postponed: The Commonwealth of Independent States heads of government meeting, which was due to take place in Chisinau, Moldova, on April 24, was postponed for three weeks and moved to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, news agency reported in a dispatch monitor in London by the BBC, reports AP.

The complex situation in the Dniestr region, where Slavs have broken away from the Romanian-dominated republic, has made it necessary to postpone the meeting, the agency said.

The meeting will coincide with a previously scheduled meeting of CIS heads of state in Tashkent, the Uzbek capital. Ivan Korochenya, coordinator of the working group preparing the summit, said an agenda had been worked out for a joint sitting of the heads of state and of governments on 15th May followed by separate sittings.

UN to send team to Bosnia: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has approved plans for sending a UN team of some 100 observers to Mostar in southern Bosnia-Herzegovina, officials said Wednesday, reports AP from New York.

The deployment recommended by General Satish Namibia, head of the UN protection force in Yugoslavia, will become effective April 30, according to spokesman Francois Gtuliiani.

The unarmed team will patrol the tons of mostar, Capljina, Stolac and Trebinje in an attempt to ease tensions in the region torn by civil war, said Gtuliiani.

More than 200 people have been killed in Bosnian-Herzegovina and over 1,000 are missing in violence which has accompanied the republic's recognition as an independent state earlier this month.

Quake rocks California: A strong earthquake rattled Southern California on Wednesday night, rocking buildings from the Mexican border to Santa Barbara, 200 miles (312 kilometers) up the coast. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, reports AP.

The quake measured 6.3 in a preliminary Richter scale reading, said Lucy Jones, a seismologist at the California Institute of Technology's seismology lab in Pasadena. A magnitude 6 quake is capable of severe damage.

The epicenter was nine miles (14 kilometers) east of Desert Hot Springs, which is 110 miles east of downtown Los Angeles. Lesser quakes had struck that area earlier Wednesday evening.

Buildings swayed in downtown Los Angeles, and shaking was felt at Dodger Stadium during a baseball game.

Tornadoes claim 94 in China: At least 94 people were killed and nearly 4,000 injured in Tornadoes which hit the southern province of Hunan earlier this week, a spokesman for the local foreign affairs office said, reports AP.

A total of 44,900 homes were destroyed and 240,000 damaged, said the spokesman reached by telephone Thursday.

He said of 3,796 people injured, 891 were in a serious condition.

The provision was hit Monday and Tuesday by violent rainstorms and Tornadoes accompanied by hail swept through some districts. Winds of up to 115 kilometers per hour were recorded and some hailstones measured 5.5 centimeters (two and half inches) in diameter.

Fujimori plan rejected

LIMA, Apr 23: Opposition leaders Wednesday rejected president Alberto Fujimori's announced schedule for a return to democracy, accusing him of playing for time while consolidating power, reports AP.

Meanwhile, government and opposition representatives met with an Organization of American States delegation in the second day of talks aimed at bringing both sides to the bargaining table.

Police used tear gas, water cannon and baton charges to break up anti-Fujimori demonstrations by mothers clubs and trade union workers outside the hotel where the OAS delegation was staying.



NEW DELHI: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali (L) calls on Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on Wednesday. Boutros Ghali met with Indian officials to review the situation in Afghanistan and attempts by his special envoy for a peaceful transfer of power in Kabul. —AFP/UNB photo

OIC for urgent UN Council steps to protect Bosnians

JEDDAH, Apr 23: The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on Wednesday called on the UN Security Council to adopt urgent measures to protect the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports AP.

The Secretary General of the Jeddah-based organisation, Hamid Algabid, warned the United Nations over the tragic situation in the former Yugoslav republic, where Muslims made up more than 40 percent of the population.

The call coincided with visits to Saudi Arabia by the Foreign Ministers of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, Haris Siladzic and Zvonimir Separovic, who have been touring the Gulf.

Fighting in Bosnia pitting Serbs backed by the Yugoslav army against Bosnian and Croat militias has reportedly killed more than 200 people and wounded some 1,600.

Siladzic said after talks in Riyadh with Saudi officials that the kingdom had pledged to work for a ceasefire and to provide humanitarian aid to the civilian population.

The minister was on his second visit to Saudi Arabia in less than three months. Riyadh recently announced its recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina following a visit in March by Bosnian President Alija Isetbegovic.

Reuter adds: European Community peace envoys arrived in Bosnia-Herzegovina

today seeking to end fighting which has cost some 250 lives in seven weeks and bringing an implied threat of sanctions if the bloodshed does not stop. Lord Carrington, Chairman of the EC conference on Yugoslavia, and Portuguese Foreign Minister Joao De Deus Pinheiro, whose country is current President of the community, will talk with leaders of all three Bosnian communities at Sarajevo airport.

The Bosnian capital itself is considered too dangerous for them to visit.

Despite heavy fighting throughout Wednesday which caused an estimated 20 deaths, the EC team is determined to bring its message that both sides must lay down their arms or face the consequences.

Bosnia's Muslims and Croats voted last month for independence from Yugoslavia, a prospect feared and opposed by the Serb minority, who are violently resisting it.

Despite denials from Belgrade, the EC believes Serbia and the Serb-led Yugoslav army are adding them, and Carrington called on Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to pull his forces back.

If he did not do so, then I think that you have to go down the road of some sort of sanctions whatever they may be, Carrington told the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Israeli opposition fears war with Arabs ME talks resume Monday

JERUSALEM, Apr 23: Palestinian negotiators left Jerusalem today for Middle East peace talks resuming in Washington on Monday, reports Reuter.

Before leaving for talks with Jordanian negotiators in Amman ahead of the negotiations, team spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi told reporters: "I think its going to be a very difficult round but I am fully determined. As we said earlier, we are going to pursue the Israelis with peace."

The negotiations will be the fifth round since the United States launched Arab-Israeli

talks in Madrid last October. A sixth round, expected after Israel's June 23 election, will take place in Rome.

AFP adds: Opposition Labour party leader Yitzhak Rabin warned in an interview published here today of the increased risk of another Arab-Israeli war from stalemate in the peace process.

With the fifth round of Middle East peace negotiations due to open in Washington on Monday, Rabin said: "Once stalemate is the situation in the Arab-Israeli conflict, it might lead to an entirely different way of thinking among more Arab countries' leaders."

"I'm not saying automatically war, but no doubt a long period of stalemate increases the dangers of war," he told the Jerusalem post.

"Not two years from now, it might be five to seven years from now."

Rabin, whose party threatens to oust the ruling Likud in the June 23 general elections, re-advocated his policy of territorial compromise to achieve peace.

On the Golan heights, seized from Syria in 1967, he said: "There is limited room for a territorial compromise."

Israeli opposition fears war with Arabs

provide any information it is holding. Beugiere said he would be up to him to decide whether the documents are authentic.

Reuter adds: Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi wants the two suspects in the Lockerbie bombing case tried in Cairo and has again ruled out extradition to the United States or Britain, according to an interview he gave to the Chinese official news agency.

"Gaddafi said today that his country wants to have the two Libyan bombing suspects tried in Cairo, against refusing to extradite them to the United States or Britain," the New China News Agency said in a Tripoli dispatch dated Wednesday.

In reporting what it said was an exclusive interview held in a tent outside Libya's second city Benghazi, the news agency quoted Gaddafi as saying the court trying the two men should be mixed.

There are many parties involved in the disputed bombing case and all could participate in the investigation and trial of the

Lankan monks start talks with Tamils

COLOMBO, Apr 23: A ten-member delegation of Buddhist monks on a peace mission to the Tamil Tiger rebel northern stronghold of Jaffna began talks with the guerrillas Thursday, Tamil travellers said, reports AP.

Anton Ralasingham, the Tiger theoretician, participated in the talks with the delegation, which was headed by the chief monk of a Buddhist temple in Colombo, Madampagama Assaji, said the travellers reaching northern Vavuniya town.

"We came here to bring peace and understanding between the two communities,"

Off the Record

Crash course on safe sex

NEW DELHI: Thirteen Indian naval officers have tested positive for the Human-Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV) in Bombay, prompting officers to plan a crash course on safe sex to prevent AIDS in the ranks, reports AP.

The Pioneer newspaper today said the incident involving the 13 officers, who are likely to contract full blown AIDS, has triggered an "AIDS-scare" among 1,200 officers at Bombay's naval headquarters.

Bombay's naval medical services chief Ranjit Das recently disclosed that 23 officers had tested HIV positive, but a navy spokesman later said only 13 were down, the daily said.

City naval officials have asked several anti-AIDS groups to help organise seminars and conferences for the enlisted men on measures to avoid the disease, it said.

"Most people have the false impression that only sailors are guilty of visiting brothels," the naval spokesman said.

Adding that the disease was affecting the country's military and civilian populations alike.

Quit politics or go to heaven

TOKYO: One of Japan's top politicians received five bullets through the mail along with a letter telling him to retire, police said today, reports Reuter.

The hate letter went to Shin Kanemaru, 77-year-old vice-president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, just one month after a rightist gunman shot at him during a provincial political rally. He escaped that attack unhurt.

"Traitor Shin Kanemaru, retire immediately from the political world or heaven will inflict its punishment on you," the letter read.

A member of the household at Kanemaru's central Tokyo house took it to police.

A police spokesman said investigators were looking into the possibility that rightists were behind the incident, the latest in a string of attacks on the politician.

A petrol bomb was hurled at his home last November and Kanemaru has received threatening phone calls and previous hate mail.

Princess Anne obtains divorce from Phillips

LONDON: Princess Anne, daughter of Britain's Queen Elizabeth, obtained a divorce on Thursday from estranged husband Mark Phillips, the Press Association National News Agency reported.

The 1973 marriage was ended after a four-minute hearing before a judge in London.

The Princess, 41, began proceedings to divorce Phillips, 43, a former cavalry captain, earlier this month.

It was only the second divorce in the inner circle of the royal family since the 16th century when King Henry VIII spurned four of his six wives. He divorced two and beheaded two others.

News that Anne was ending her filed marriage broke only weeks after her brother Prince Andrew and his wife, "Fergie" the Duchess of York, shocked Britain by announcing plans to separate.



Temple real home of prostitution

UJJAIN: Where temple bells peal before the first flush of dawn, and ring throughout the day, the tinkle of anklets take over at dusk, reports PTI.

The Pinjarwad locality in the heart of this holy town on the banks of the Shipra, which is hosting the century's largest congregation in the month-long Kumbh-Mela since April 17, has been the home of the oldest profession prostitution.

Adjacent to the Gopal Temple, the locality today has about 150 tawdrily dressed girls and women indulging in the flesh trade.

'Libya's documents on UTA plane bombing not authentic'

NEW YORK (United Nations), Apr 23: The documents Libya provided on the bombing of the French UTA jetliner in 1989 are inconsistent and therefore are not in an authentic form, according to the judge assigned to the investigation, reports AP.

Judge Jean-Louis Brugiere said in a letter dated April 16 to French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas and released by the Security Council Wednesday that certain portions of the file submitted even contained anomalies.

The documents on the jetliner bombing which killed 170 people over Niger were received a few days before a UN embargo went into effect against Libya on April 15 for its refusal to cooperate with investigations into the bombing and that of a Pan Am jet in 1988.

Brugiere has asked to question four Libyan nationals he suspects of being involved in the bombings and Tripoli has agreed in principle to cooperate with the request.

In his letter, the judge said that in order to determine Libya's willingness to cooperate with the investigation he has asked Tripoli to

case, the news agency quoted him as saying.

It said Gaddafi told its reporters he had discussed a Cairo trial plan with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The Egyptian leader "expressed readiness to help prevent an escalation of the current tension, indicating Egypt does not want to see one more UN resolution against Libya," the agency said.

Gaddafi said the two men could be turned over to Malta or the Arab League. "Not the US or Britain," the news agency said.

United Nations sanctions against Libya came into force last week to try to force Tripoli to hand over for trial two men accused of blowing up a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing 270 people.

The sanctions ordered a halt in flights to Libya, a ban on arms sales and a scaling down of diplomatic representation, but excluded Libya's lifeline—oil exports. "We are sure, a hundred per cent, that they are innocent," Gaddafi said.

"It violates Libyan law, international law and

the Montreal convention to extradite our citizens to foreign countries," he said.

Britain and the United States, in line with a UN resolution passed in January insist on the unconditional surrender of the men for trial in either country.

Calling the current crisis "a problem of two persons, not a problem of a country," Gaddafi said "It is meaningless and unjustified to punish Libya."

Another report adds: The Arab League's justice ministers on Wednesday gave a mild endorsement to Libya but stopped short of condemning the United Nations embargo against it.

A communique issued at the end of a meeting of the ministers said they "believe the legal measures taken by Libya constitute a legal way of solving the crisis."

The ministers said "Libya has clearly condemned terrorism and says it ready to cooperate with the competent judicial bodies to fight the phenomenon."

Fiji goes to polls May 23

SUVA, Fiji, Apr 23: Fiji has set May 23 as the starting date for its first general elections since two military coups in 1987. President Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau said Thursday, reports AP.

The balloting, spanning eight days in the South Pacific country that comprises more than 300 islands, had been scheduled to get under way a week earlier. A change over to a computerized system forced the latest in a series of delays.

In May 1987, army Col Sitiveni Rabuka led soldiers into Parliament and arrested the month-old, Indian-dominated government of Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra.

Rabuka led a second coup four months later, saying the rights of the ethnic Fijians remained threatened.