

50 killed, 200 hurt in Ossetia clashes

TBILISI, May 14: Three days of clashes between Georgian troops and secessionists in South Ossetia have left some 50 people dead and around 200 wounded, according to various reports, says AFP.

Fifteen people were killed in South Ossetia's main town, Tskhinvali, including a 10-year-old child, and 173 wounded under artillery bombardment by Georgian forces, the South Ossetian press office said Wednesday.

It said the Georgian forces also attacked Prit, in the northeast of the region, killing eight, wounding 30 and taking some inhabitants hostages.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry said seven Georgians were killed and 12 wounded in fighting between Prit and the Georgian village of Erevdi.

On Tuesday, Russian television reported 18 Georgian troops killed in an attack on

Tskhinvali, and the Moscow-based ITAR-Tass news agency said two residents of Tskhinvali died under shelling by Georgian troops firing from the nearby towns of Nikost, Ergneti and Tamarasheni.

Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze left Tbilisi Wednesday to visit the region, the Interior Ministry announced.

It said he decided to make the trip after meeting with delegations of Georgian villagers who complained about shelling from Tskhinvali.

In a statement Wednesday the Foreign Ministry blamed Tskhinvali for the offensive it said had been launched on Georgian villages.

The Foreign Ministry statement also said helicopters from a Russian army regiment based in Tskhinvali had taken part in the bombardments.

US ban to adversely affect space plans Delhi may seek China's help

BANGALORE, India, May 14: New Delhi may seek China's help to pursue a satellite project hit by US sanctions, the head of India's space programme said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The United States said on Monday it was imposing limited sanctions against the Russian space company Glavkosmos and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for going ahead with a US dollars 250 million deal.

Washington says the rocket deal violates the Missile Technology Control Regime, and agreement by western states to limit the spread of missile technology.

ISRO Chief UR Rao told reporters that the US sanctions would adversely affect India's space programme, and might delay its satellite project. "We will have delays and

cost overruns but we hope to overcome and march ahead — we will do our damndest best to meet our requirements," Rao said.

He said the US sanctions would force India to look for the technology in other countries, including China.

"I hope wisdom will prevail and sanctions are withdrawn," Rao said.

In Moscow, a Russian government spokesman on Wednesday described as unfair the US decision to impose sanctions over the sale of Russian rocket engines to India.

"In my view this is somewhat unfair," Deputy Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Rozanov said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed regret at the US decision and at

Washington's refusal to allow independent experts to vet the deal.

"It must be noted that the decision was taken before the holding of an independent and unbiased expert enquiry, the need for which we raised repeatedly in consultations with the American side," the statement said.

India said the engines, powered with liquid nitrogen, would be used primarily for non-military purposes and it called the US action and "avoidable irritant" in relations.

Rao said it was "ridiculous" to say the rockets from Russia would be used to power missiles.

India was importing electronic components such as radiation-hardened integrated circuits and beryllium reflectors for its satellites from the United States, he said.

Glavkosmos said last week Washington was trying to block the sale to pave the way for a US firm to pick up the contract.

Penalties would make little difference in practice because the firm had always been subject to US restrictions, it said.

The US penalties include two-year bans on US licensed exports to the Indian and Russian companies, and on imports from the two by the United States.

Rao said India's space programme was peaceful and Russian-supplied cryogenic engines had no military applications.

"It does not stand technically. Nowhere cryogenic engines are used for missiles, only solid propellants are used."



KABUL: Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Massoud (R) confers with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev (L) makes the first official visit from Moscow to Kabul to discuss how Russia can help with the reconstruction of Afghanistan after 13 years of war. — AFP/UNB photo.

Armenia thanks UN Council

UNITED NATIONS, May 14: Armenia on Wednesday thanked the Security Council for sending a fact-finding mission to Nagorno-Karabakh, but said UN peacekeepers are still urgently needed to help defuse the conflict with Azerbaijan, reports AP.

The Security Council showed no interest Tuesday in sending peacekeepers to the disputed enclave within Azerbaijan, which is mostly inhabited by Armenians.

Armenian Ambassador Alexander Arzumanyan told reporters that "the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh now requires urgent action by the international community."

More than 1,500 people have died in the fighting for Nagorno-Karabakh, and shelling of villages on both sides of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border has become common place.

Suharto urges NAM to reorder priorities for facing challenges

NUSADUA, Indonesia, May 14: Indonesian President Suharto called on the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) today to revise its priorities realistically in order to face the rapid political and economic changes in the international situation, reports AP.

"In facing both the opportunities and challenges subsumed in the evolving international situation, our movement will have to make a clear-sighted and realistic assessment of their implications and to adapt our policies and agenda accordingly, he said.

He was opening a two-day ministerial meeting of the movement's coordinating bureau, attended by foreign ministers or their representatives of its 103-member states

which is drawing up an agenda for the heads of state summit in Jakarta in September.

Suharto said that the 31-year-old movement should engage in realistic re-ordering of its priorities to pursue its goals and safeguard the fundamental interests of member states.

Noting that the NAM's basic principles and objectives "have lost nothing of their validity and relevance," Suharto said the movement should continue to strive for a new international order where peaceful co-existence, democratization, co-operation and equitably-shared development prevailed.

He said if the aim was to turn into a tangible reality, then the United Nations constituted the most effective instrument. So he urged NAM

members to help strengthen, revitalize and democratise the world body.

Suharto also stressed the importance of south-south economic cooperation based on the concept of self-reliance to open "new avenues of growth and reduce undue dependence vis-a-vis the north."

Adverse development in the world economic situation have "further compounded the difficulties confronting the developing countries," Suharto said. The movement, Suharto said, cannot afford to be passive on new global concerns as in the environment, the promotion of human rights, democracy and "so-called good governance."

He urged NAM to formulate common positions and ap-

proaches in view of the "growing tendency among developed countries to link these issues as political conditionalities to the sphere of development cooperation."

The NAM ministerial meeting is expected to set up the agenda for the group's upcoming summit in Jakarta in September.

Indonesia, who will officially take over NAM chairmanship from Yugoslavia in September, has already held the de-facto leadership of the movement following the severe internal problems in Yugoslavia.

Foreign Minister Zvonimir Separovic said in a letter to the coordinating bureau this would allow Croatia to make a constructive contribution to the movement.

'Peace not possible until Israel recognises Palestinians' rights'

OTTAWA, May 14: Palestinians attending an international conference in Middle East refugees on Wednesday blamed Israel for their plight and asserted they had an inherent, natural right to return to their homes in what is now the Jewish state, reports Reuter.

In a lengthy statement to the conference, the head of the Palestinian delegation, Elias Sanbar, said there could never be peace between Arabs and Israelis until the Palestinians' right of return to what is now Israel was recognised.

"Without the solemn recognition of the refugees' right of return, the life of the Palestinian people as well as the affairs of the region cannot be normalised," said Sanbar, an

academic at the Sorbonne in Paris. His statement was made available to news media.

Israel is boycotting the three-day meeting because Palestinian "exiles" from outside the occupied territories were invited to take part and because it, refused to accept the concept of Palestinian repatriation.

The issue ignited a major storm between Israel and its guardian ally the United States on Tuesday when Washington formally confirmed it still backed the 43-year-old UN resolution setting out the Palestinian right of return.

US State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler some what qualified the statement on Wednesday, saying the issue had to be settled in direct negotiations be-

tween Israel and Palestinians.

Asked about the decision by Syria and Lebanon also to boycott the multilateral talks, Hallaj said Palestinians shared "the apprehensions of those who fear" that no progress could be made in the multilateral talks without progress in parallel bilateral negotiations.

As far as the Palestinians were concerned, however, he said: "We cannot very well not be here. We can't don't the fate of our people discussed behind our backs."

Delegates from 35 countries have registered for the Ottawa talks, said the Canadian department of external affairs. But most of the delegations were remaining tight lipped about the lack of progress on the first day of talks.

Canadian spokesman

Rodney Moore read a brief statement — pointing out that only 16 of the 35 delegations had made a presentation so far. The other 19 delegations were expected to make presentations today before any substantive talks get under way.

A Vienna report adds: Israel and Jordan, thirstily competing for scarce water supplies. Opened talks on water-sharing with more than 30 other states.

The closed-door conference, co-chaired by Austria and the United States, is one of five meetings on regional issues which are part of multilateral Middle East peace talks.

Organisers described the conference as a working meeting intended to be a starting point in unilateral debate of the region's pressing water problem.

BRIEFLY

Blast kills 5 in Philippines: Five people died and 11 were wounded Thursday when a World War Two bomb they were trying to saw up for scrap metal exploded in the southern Philippines, police said, Reuter reports from Davao. Four people were killed instantly and one died in hospital after the accident in Davao on Mindanao Island. Dozens of bombs left over from fighting between American and Japanese forces are still being dug up all over the country. Scrap-hunters were killed in a similar incident in the Philippines earlier this year.

Protest against power cuts: In an unique protest against the severe power cuts, nearly 200 people Wednesday gheraoed the state electricity board's office at New Barrackpore and forced the employees to work in the dark after disconnecting the power supply, reports PTI from Calcutta.

Official sources in Calcutta said that the crowd was agitated over Thursday prolonged load-shedding in the area and forcibly entered the office and disconnected the power line and broke electric bulbs, fans and tube lights. They also forced the employees to work six hours from 1000 hours.

14 more freed in Myanmar: Myanmar's ruling military government released 14 imprisoned political opponents on Wednesday, official radio Yangon said in a broadcast monitored in Bangkok, reports AP.

The 14 opposition members, including seven men and seven women, were freed from Yangon's infamous Insein central prison and other provincial jails, it said.

Sama Duwa Kyaukpha Naw, Chairman of the ethnic minority's Kachin National Democratic Party (KNDP), and three senior members of main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), were among those freed, the radio said. The seven young women released were dissidents arrested by the authorities in May 1991 for their involvement in anti-junta movements, it said.

UN confce on hunger in Dec: The United Nations is to hold a major world conference on hunger and nutrition in December, with Rome as its venue, the UN official in charge of the event said here Wednesday, reports AFP from Geneva.

Conference Secretary-General Vulimiri Ramaltn Gaswami said the meeting, to be organised by the World Health Organisation and the food and agriculture organisation should focus on the fact that "The world can produce enough food for everyone. But some 950 million people do not get enough to eat."

In a preliminary document for the conference, called "nutrition, the global challenge," the two UN agencies stressed that aid, except for that given in emergency situations, should be above all used to improve security of long-term supplies for the affected populations.

95 Nepalese to perform Hajj: A total of 95 Nepalese Muslims are going to Makkah to perform Hajj this year, local newspapers reported Thursday, says Xinhua from Kathmandu.

Two senior officers of the Foreign Ministry of Saudi Arabia will come to Kathmandu at the request of Nepal to issue free visas to them.

Muslims made of a very small portion of the some 20 million population in the Kingdom, the only Hindu nation in the world.

3 astronauts step into space: In a delicate and unprecedented manoeuvre, three astronauts of the shuttle endeavour stepped into space Wednesday and successfully retrieved a wayward Intelsat satellite, AFP reports from Texas.

In the first three-man spacewalk, astronauts Pierre Thuot, Richard Herb and Thomas Akers Grabbed the 157-million dollar communications satellite by hand at 2359 GMT.

The next, more complicated procedure was to lock the satellite to the shuttle's robot arm to bring it in to position over a 23,000-pound (10,430 kilogram) rocket motor, which will be used to blast it in to its correct orbit.

Rains bury one in Lanka: COLOMBO, May 14: Heavy rains destroyed dozens of houses in southern Sri Lanka burying at least one man alive, just before expected international assistance for drought relief could arrive, officials said Thursday reports AFP.

The coastal districts of Galle and Kalutara were the worst affected by thundershowers which ended a prolonged drought that had destroyed crops and forced people to walk miles for drinking water, officials said.

Rehabilitation Secretary Christie Silva told reporters here that there had been minor flooding in the two districts since Tuesday and said he might have to transfer drought relief to help flood victims.

Filipino EC halts publication of unauthorised results

MANILA, May 14: President Corazon Aquino halted today the success of the Philippines' biggest elections, saying the high turnout showed "the vitality and viability of our democracy," reports Reuter.

The neck-and-neck presidential race has developed into the closest in the country's history, with former defence chief Fidel Ramos edging ahead of charismatic anti-graft crusader Miriam Santiago in the vote tally.

Share prices rallied to a record high for the year on the Manila stock market, as finance secretary Jesus Estanislao predicted the mostly trouble-free elections, would be good for the economy and anticipated stronger growth.

The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) halted publication of all unauthorised vote tallies from midday today to avoid confusion over results, during the laborious week-long vote-

counting process.

Just before the ban went into effect, the Roman catholic church-backed Radio Veritas showed that with 5.5 million of an estimated 25 million votes counted, Ramos was just ahead with 22.9 per cent, against 22.2 per cent for Santiago.

Business tycoon Eduardo Cojuangco, a close ally of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos was third with 17 per cent.

Leading the Vice-presidential race was popular senator and film actor Joseph Estrada, who is Cojuangco's running mate.

Ramon Mitra, head of the Philippines' biggest political party, today admitted defeat in the bitterly fought presidential election, saying local leaders abandoned him in the campaign's last hours.

Political analysts had predicted that Mitra, as standard bearer of the heavyweight struggle for a democratic Philippines Party (LDP),

would put up a powerful showing but he never figured in the race once the first results came in.

"The whole thing collapsed may be another time, another lifetime," he stated.

Mitra, a wealthy, 64-year-old rancher and one-time crocodile hunter, pledged to support the winner, whoever it was.

Aquino, swept to power in a popular revolt in 1986 that ousted Marcos after fraud-marred elections, said turnout in Monday's polls had been very high, possibly around 85 per cent.

"This high voter turnout is indeed a sign of the vitality and viability of our democracy," said the 59-year-old widow who survived six coup attempts during her six years in power. She steps down on June 30.

or Italy," Aquino said in a statement.

"The Filipino has come of age as a responsible, mature voter," she declared.

Political analysts said Filipinos had voted against traditional politics in a country renowned for its nepotism and corruption.

"The Filipino people voted resoundingly against traditional politicians and their votes were cast in favour of people who were perceived to be non-traditional," said Ramos's press spokesman Rafael Alunan.

As election fever gripped the nation, both front-runners maintained a high media profile telling journalists and television interviewers they were assured of victory and discussing their plans for the country.

Some politicians feared that Ramos, whose campaign was backed by Aquino, would stand by the result.

"Of course he will concede graciously if defeated. That remains unchanged," he stated.

Off the Record

Diana apologises to crowds

CAIRO: The Princess of Wales apologised in French today to crowds of tourists being herded out of her way by security men during a visit to Pharaonic treasures in the Egyptian museum, reports Reuter.

Some of the European tourists cramming the narrow halls of the museum booed but others clapped when the security men cleared a path for the Princess.

Her spokesman said the Princess told one group in French she was sorry they had been held up.

British Ambassador Christopher Long, recently transferred from Geneva, also used his fluent French to mollify a sweating crowd outside a room where the Princess was viewing the golden death mask of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun.

A boat load of French tourists hooted, whistled and sang the French national anthem when the Princess visited a 2,000-year-old temple to motherhood in upper Egypt on Wednesday.



Preach on hips, thighs

MOSCOW: Jazzercise guru Judi Sheppard Missett came to Russia to preach reform, around the hips, thighs and stomach, reports AP.

Flexing and jumping on stage in Moscow's Central Lenin Stadium, Missett told about 200 mainly female Russian aerobics instructors they should exercise more to compensate for all those potatoes, sour cream and blinis.

"I believe whole-heartedly you have to combine nutrition with fitness," the 48-year-old American fitness expert said later in an interview. "It's going to be difficult here because the nutrition isn't there."

Jazzercise, a form of aerobic dancing that combines elements of jazz with exercise techniques, has in the past 20 years become a household word among international fitness specialists and turned Missett into a millionaire.

Missett's visit to Moscow, her second, marked the conclusion of a two-week European Jazzercise tour. She hopes the trip won't be her last.

At last Gorby sings anti-semitism song

NEW YORK: Mikhail Gorbachev was blessed in Hebrew, stood on a stage with an Israeli flag and condemned anti-semitism, reports AP.

Gorbachev acknowledged the extraordinary moment Wednesday by stating: "Just a few years ago, such a meeting would hardly have been possible."

"I resolutely reject and condemn anti-semitism," Gorbachev said after receiving the Democracy Award from Yeshiva University in Manhattan. "It is one of the worst manifestations of national socialism."

Gorbachev was given the Democracy Award for allowing Jews to emigrate freely and for his role in reforming the political and economic structure of his nation.

But there was at least one critic, Rabbi Avi Weiss, a local activist who heads the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry.

"Gorbachev is not, as the Democracy Award intimated, the man who let the Jews go," Weiss, said in a statement. "The credit goes to those who forced his hand."

He was her brother

ALASKA: Inupiaq translator Margaret Glastetter knew it was time to quit three years ago, when she had to tell an Alaska Native Medical Center patient he had lung cancer and only three months to live, reports AP.

The man did not speak English. He was her brother. "I explained everything for him," she recalled, "the chemotherapy, the radiation."

"I had to translate that he was dying. That was a turning point for me."

The words are not easy in any language. And as a group of North Slope Borough translator in Barrow found out medical terms are more likely to frighten when they are misunderstood.

To help both patients who spoke little or no English and medical staff who spoke little or no Inupiaq, the borough paid for a three-year project to translate dozens of symptoms and parts of the body into Inupiaq — the indigenous language of North Slope Inupiaq Eskimos.

The result is a 71-page book let with entries for everything from (lliaq) — womb — to 'kavigruqsimmagnik irrak' — bloodshot eyes.



FRANCE: Senegalese film director Djibril Diop Mambety (R) and Japanese actress Kaoru Eguchi share a joke on May 13 on the pontoon of the Hotel Majestic in Cannes after the press screening of Mambety's film 'Hynes' at the 45th Cannes International Film Festival. — AFP/UNB photo.

Abortion now a big question

LOUISVILLE: A legislative committee of the United Methodist Church has recommended that church groups quit a religious coalition supporting abortion rights, reports AP.

But a committee minority at the church's governing General Conference on Wednesday urged that the groups remain members of the Religious Coalition on Abortion Rights.

As delegates of the 9 million-member denomination plowed through day nine of the 11-day legislative conference, the abortion issue originally scheduled for a night session was deferred until later.

Abortion has become a hot topic in American Protestantism, and some denominations have limited the circumstances under which they maintain abortion is an acceptable practice.

The United Methodist position on abortion states, "Our belief in the sanctity of unborn life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy."