

Russia to destroy N-wastes thru' underground blast

OSLO, May 15: Russia is planning to destroy chemical and nuclear wastes through underground nuclear explosions in the Arctic, the environment group Greenpeace said yesterday, reports Reuter.

A demonstration blast is planned on the Russian Arctic test site of Novaya Zemlya if the nuclear testing moratorium, declared by President Boris Yeltsin in 1991, is not extended, Greenpeace said in a statement.

The moratorium expires in October this year, it added.

Greenpeace said it had obtained a secret video tape made by scientists in the Russian "closed city" of Arzamas-16, which is engaged in making nuclear weapons.

"The video demonstrates how quantities of chemical and radioactive wastes would be packed around a number of nuclear warheads deep underground," the organisation said.

The video claims the heat and pressure of a nuclear detonation would destroy the wastes.

Retaliation to arrest of top rebel leader Kashmiri militants kill six

SRINAGAR (India), May 15: Six people were killed as Muslim gunmen launched random attacks in Srinagar Friday to protest the overnight arrest of a top rebel leader in the troubled northern Indian state of Kashmir, reports AFP.

Gunfire continued to rattle the city as masked rebels sprayed residential districts and security bunkers with Kalashnikov rifle fire to protest the arrest of Muhsan Ahmad Zargar, commander of the Al-Umer Mujahideen, witnesses said.

Police called for reinforcements to control the situation in the city where shops were closed and vehicles were off the road as the firing intensified, officers said.

Four civilians and two securitymen fell to the hail of bullets by 10:00 am (0430 GMT) since scattered firing intensified some nine hours ago after Zargar's overnight arrest from a militant hideout in Srinagar.

The picturesque city is Kashmir's summer capital and a hub of Muslim militancy.

State police chief B S Bedi describing the situation as "serious" confirmed the death of the four civilians, but said he had no information that two troopers had also been killed in the fighting.

One of the four civilians killed was dragged out from a house and shot in the streets, eyewitnesses said, adding that the other three were hit by stray bullets.

Police sources said Indian troopers killed two unidentified militants in a gunbattle at one place and engaged the rebels in similar fire-play in other downtown districts.

Kashmiri women supporters of the prominent arrested secessionist leader came out on the streets, beat their chests and tore at their hair in an Islamic gesture of protest, the witnesses said.

AFP adds: The Police raid followed a tip-off that Zargar was present and police were checking the detainees' identities to be certain that he was among them, police said today.

The house was raided on information that Zargar was using it as a hideout, Kashmir police Chief B S Bedi said. Srinagar is the main town of the pro-rebel Kashmir valley.

Gunfire echoed through Srinagar, summer capital of India's Jammu and Kashmir state, as militants struck at the security forces' Sandag bunkers around the city in apparent anger at Zargar's capture.

Parliamentary reinforcements were immediately drafted in to the city to help contain the attacks, police officials said.

BRIEFLY

India rejects CIA statement: The Indian government on Thursday rejected a statement by the chief of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) calling India a "model proliferator" for other countries with nuclear ambitions, AFP reports from New Delhi.

India's nuclear programme was for peaceful purposes and not designed for military use, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said, denying the CIA's claim.

He denied the statement made by CIA Director Robert Gates before a US congressional committee that New Delhi had tried to manufacture or acquire chemical weapons.

Gates in the testimony on May 9 said India like Pakistan was a "model proliferator" for other countries harbouring nuclear ambitions.

5 Russians hurt in blasts: A series of explosions lasting more than six hours through a vast ammunition dump near Valadivostok in Russia's Far East ITAR-Tass News agency said Friday, Reuter reports from London.

Five Russian servicemen were injured, said the agency, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, adding that families near the dump were being evacuated.

A local journalist was quoted as saying the blasts were still resounding through the Pacific port city more than six hours after the initial explosion on Thursday.

There is a reddish-orange glow over the city. I can hear explosions going off the whole time, he said. The depot is 10 km (seven miles) from the centre of the city, a major naval base.

US-Kuwait jt exercise May 18: US Patriot missiles are being sent to Kuwait for a seven-day US-Kuwaiti air defence exercise starting May 18, the Pentagon announced Thursday, reports AP from Washington.

The exercise, code-named Intrinsic Flare, will involve about 80 US soldiers from the 2nd Battalion of the Army's 43rd Air Defense Artillery Regiment whose home base is Hanau, Germany.

The Patriot battery, consisting of four missile launchers with a total of 16 missile tubes, is now based in Saudi Arabia, according to a military source who said he did not want to be identified because of Saudi government sensitivity. The source said the battery would return to Saudi Arabia after the exercise.

Kuwaiti soldiers will use the exercise to learn how to operate the Patriot system, which includes the launchers, a radar and an automated control station. The system is designed to defend against aircraft and tactical ballistic missiles.

Pickering new US envoy to India: Edward J Perkins, a veteran diplomat with extensive experience in Africa, replaced Thomas Pickering on Thursday as US ambassador to the United Nations, AP reports from UN.

Pickering, who represented the United States in the world body throughout the Gulf War and postwar problems, has been appointed ambassador to India.

Perkins, 63, has been a senior State Department official, and was ambassador to South Africa from 1986-89 and ambassador to Liberia in 1985-86. He was director of the Office of West African Affairs in the State Department from 1983-85; deputy chief of mission in the US Embassy in Liberia in 1981-83; and a political affairs counselor in Accra, Ghana, from 1978-81.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali officially accepted Perkins' diplomatic credentials on Thursday. Perkins had been appointed by President Bush and confirmed by the Senate several weeks ago.

1.8m get US residence: A record 1.8 million immigrants were given permanent US residence last year, most under a six-year-old amnesty programme for illegal aliens, the government said Thursday, AP reports from Washington.

More than 1.1 million of the immigrants were already living in the United States when they received permanent resident status, said the Immigration and Naturalization Service. There were 704,005 arrivals in fiscal 1991 who were also given immigrant status.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act provided amnesty to illegal aliens living in the United States at the time a chance to apply for permanent residency. So far 2.5 million illegal aliens have received permanent residency and an additional 300,000 will be eligible to apply for the status, the INS said.

2 UN peacekeepers wounded: Muslim militias broke the ceasefire in Sarajevo on Thursday, provoking heavy artillery shelling by the Yugoslav army that has wounded two UN peacekeepers, the United Nations announced, AP reports from United Nations.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said he deplored "the further casualties and destruction inflicted upon the residents of this suffering city."

He called on all forces to halt the fighting and cooperate with UN efforts to arrange a ceasefire.

24 killed in Taiwan bus mishap

TAIPEI, May 15: A bus carrying kindergarten students to a zoo caught fire Friday in northern Taiwan. Twenty children and four adults were killed, police said, reports AP.

Eight other children suffered burn injuries, and five of them were hospitalized in stable condition, said police in Lungtan, 30 kilometers (18 miles) south of Taipei.

Police suspect mechanical problems started the fire. The Taiwan Television station reported that the fire broke out in the starting motor.

The victims included a teacher and two relatives of the children from Chienkang Kindergarten in Taipei, which rented five buses for a trip to the zoo in Lungtan.

Mutalibov declares state of emergency in Azerbaijan

MOSCOW, May 15: Azerbaijan President Ayaz Mutalibov, who resigned amid charges he failed to act forcefully in the Nagorny-Karabakh dispute, declared emergency rule immediately upon being reinstated by a cheering parliament, reports AP.

Mutalibov's decree Thursday, which will remain in force at least two months, imposes censorship and a curfew in the former Soviet republic, bans demonstrations and suspends political parties, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.

"It's necessary to establish order in the republic and if I have no other way, I will set up a dictatorship," he told the Turan news agency.

He also vowed that "all our lands would be retaken" in Nagorny-karabakh, a predominantly Armenian enclave located within Azerbaijan.

The lawmakers' decision to restore Mutalibov to power, denounced by the opposition Popular Front as a "state coup," came just two months after he stepped down under fire for his handling of the Nagorny-Karabakh conflict.

Mutalibov had been severely criticized by the Popular Front for backing talks to stop the fighting, which has claimed more than 1,500 lives in the bloodiest ethnic conflict in the former Soviet Union.

In particular, he was accused of failing to come to the defence of the town of Khodzhal, Azerbaijan claims 1,000 people were killed by Armenian fighters in the February 25-26 attack. Armenia claims the death toll was much lower.

Military setbacks in the fierce fighting over Nagorny-Karabakh continued even after Mutalibov's downfall, and his resignation plunged Azerbaijan into a political crisis.

Parliamentary spokesman Rasmis Agayev said 240 of 300 Azerbaijan lawmakers voted to reverse their March 6 decision accepting Mutalibov's resignation.

Parliament also voted to annual presidential elections which had been set for June 7 to choose a successor to Mutalibov, ITAR-Tass reported.

Commonwealth television showed lawmakers giving Mutalibov a standing ovation following his reinstatement.

The 53-year-old former Communist Party boss told lawmakers the main task was for the country to unite in the face of the threat of Armenian aggression, Agayev told The Associated Press by telephone from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku.

The Popular front, which mobilized large anti-Mutalibov demonstrations leading up to his resignation, said it would launch a civil disobedience campaign, ITAR-Tass reported.

A Popular front leader, Arif Gajyev, was quoted by Turan as calling the decision to reinstate Mutalibov and the cancellation of the elections a "state coup."

The fighting in Nagorny-Karabakh took on a new intensity last week with Armenian forces on Saturday capturing Shusha, the last Main Azerbaijani stronghold in the disputed enclave. Shusha also had been the site for rocket launchers used by Azerbaijani forces to shell Stepanakert, the regional capital of Nagorny-Karabakh.

New fighting broke out Thursday around the Azerbaijani town of Lachin, which is located outside the borders of Nagorny-Karabakh, Turan reported. Armenians attacked the town with armoured vehicles with the goal of opening a corridor on Azerbaijan territory between Nagorny-Karabakh and Armenia, the agency said. The report could not be independently confirmed.

Armenia has called for UN peacekeepers, but Azerbaijan consistently has refused to agree to a peacekeeping mission to Nagorny-Karabakh on the grounds that it is Azerbaijani territory.

The vote to restore Mutalibov followed a discussion of a report on the February massacre in Khodzhal. Many of the people were killed as they tried to escape the town, which had been surrounded by Armenian fighters.

Mutalibov at the time was held personally responsible for not responding to appeals for extra military help and not launching reprisals against Armenia.

But Agayev said the report on the killings presented to parliament found that the events surrounding Khodzhal could not be blamed on Mutalibov. After discussing the report, lawmakers voted to restore him.

Gorby seeks US support for Russia

WASHINGTON, May 15: Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev appealed to the US Congress Thursday to pass a bill aiding the people of his disintegrated country, saying the assistance is crucial in a time of crisis, reports AP.

"This is an historic moment and an historic opportunity," Gorbachev told about 300 members of the House of Representatives and Senate assembled in a vaulted hall near the House floor. "It should not be allowed to slip by."

Gorbachev was greeted with a warm standing ovation by members of Congress, a sharp contrast with the controversy that flared five years ago.



ENGLAND: Policemen struggle with a youth during a crackdown on various gangs at a riot troubled housing estate in the city of Coventry on May 14. The latest outbreak of violence included the throwing of firebombs at police vehicles which led to the arrest of 16 youths. Police blame the high unemployment rate among young people for the nights of violence. — AFP/UNB photo

Move to end insurgency in Nagaland

GAUHATI, May 15: Christian clergymen are helping with efforts to negotiate an end to the 40-year-old tribal insurgency in Nagaland, the most remote Indian state, reports AP.

Indian officials believe the Naga rebels may be more receptive to peace because of military pressure from the military government in neighbouring Myanmar, where some Nagas live.

About 1,400 Nagas have fled Myanmar for India since December, when the Myanmar government began cracking down on minorities in its border regions.

Separatists have fought a sporadic guerilla war since 1952 to achieve an independent homeland for Nagas, members of Mongoloid tribes that once were headhunters. At least 5,000 guerillas and 4,000 Indian soldiers have been reported killed.

About 85 per cent of Nagaland's people are Christians, most of them Baptists. The Nagaland Peace Council includes leaders of all Christian denominations and is led by the Rev. V.K. Nuh, who has been associated with peace efforts in Nagaland since 1965.

"The unity effort by the church is a very serious exercise," Vizol Angami, a former rebel leader who is now a minister in the state government, said in a telephone interview from Kohima, the Nagaland capital.

At one time, the rebellion by Nagas threatened India's hold on the strategic north-east, a cluster of seven states rich in forests, tea and rubber.

Bangladesh lies between the region and the rest of India, which are linked only by a narrow strip called the "chicken neck." Kohima, is more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) east of New Delhi.

An accord was reached between the government and some of the guerilla groups in 1975, but it did not bring peace because rebels based in Myanmar refused to honour it. Four major rebel groups operate in Nagaland.

'Filipino polls not clean, honest'

MANILA, May 15: International observers said Friday this week's national election "cannot be considered clean and honest" because of documented instances of fraud, vote-buying and intimidation, reports AP.

Similar charges have been raised by Filipino groups since voters went to the polls Monday to choose a successor to President Corason Aquino and to fill more than 17,000 other positions.

Troops rushed Thursday to guard election offices in several towns after mobs stormed them to protest alleged vote fraud.

On Friday, four days after the balloting, anti-graft crusader Miriam Defensor Santiago was locked in a tight race with Aquino's chosen candidate, former Defence Secretary Fidel Ramos. Businessman Eduardo

"Danding" Cojuangco trailed in third.

Official results were not expected until next week. If the race remains tight, the new president may not be decided before Congress convenes May 25 to certify the results.

The 19-member observer team led by Anthony Joseph Wilson of Britain visited polling stations in two provinces of central Luzon, Cebu and Misamis Occidental province on Mindanao island.

They told reporters voting had been peaceful, but irregularities appeared so extensive that they "hampered the process of democratization."

"We observed incidents of electoral manipulation and intimidation as well as inadequate implementation of electoral safeguards," the group said in a statement.

Suu Kyi for reconciliation, change in Myanmar

WASHINGTON, May 14: Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, in her first public statement in nearly three years, expressed hope Thursday for reconciliation and change in military-ruled Myanmar, reports AP.

The statement, to be read by her son as Suu Kyi receives a human rights award Thursday, does not directly attack the government that has kept the Myanmar opposition leader under house-arrest since July 1989. It prevented her from formally accepting the 1991 peace prize.

But Suu Kyi, allowed to see her family this month for the first time since her arrest in



July 1989, said reconciliation requires more than "token

gestures of appeasement." She said she has never doubted the ability of her people to bring change "once national reconciliation has been achieved."

Myanmar rulers kept Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy from taking office after it won 1990 nation elections. They recently have been releasing some political prisoners and promised a constitutional convention within six months.

Suu Kyi's statement was to be read at award ceremonies of the International Human Rights Law Group by Alexander Rits, 18. He, a brother and their father visited Suu Kyi, who is 47, on May 2.

The one-and-a-half day meeting in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent was expected to focus on the divisive military issues which have bedeviled the commonwealth since it replaced the Soviet Union

CIS summit marred by absences

TASHKENT (Uzbekistan), May 15: The fifth Commonwealth of Independent States summit opened Friday, clouded by the absence of one-third of its leaders and by Russian President Boris Yeltsin's prediction it would not resolve much, reports AP.

Striding into the meeting, Yeltsin said he would insist on the "signing of a collective security agreement." He did not elaborate, but Kazakhstan also wants a more stable commonwealth defense system.

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Off the Record

Thornton second US woman to walk in space

CAPE CANAVERAL: Astronaut Kathryn Thornton on Thursday became the second American woman to walk in space when she floated into the open cargo bay of Endeavour to test techniques for building a space station, reports AP.

Thornton was accompanied by Thomas Akers, one of three men who captured a wayward satellite the day before. She got a late start because of a problem with instruments on her suit.

The rescued Intelsat-6 satellite was boosted into high orbit Thursday. The seven shuttle astronauts watched in delight 470 miles (756 kilometers) away.

"It was really kind of neat to look at here," said shuttle commander Daniel Brandenstein. "It left a kind of a reddish glow 'round it as it took off, and a red cloud."

Cheers erupted in the Intelsat control center in Washington and at ground tracking stations around the world. "It's on its way home!" said Intelsat spokesman Michael Newsum.

Thornton and Akers left the safety of their cabin late Thursday afternoon for a six-hour outing. Akers, Pierre Thuot and Richard Hieb caught the 4 1/2-ton satellite with their gloved hands Wednesday night and then locked the craft onto the 23,000 pound (10,400-kilogram) motor in the shuttle cargo bay. It was released later.

Engineers at the Intelsat control center in Washington issued the firing command Thursday afternoon. A short time later, it reached a 51,750-mile- (83,265-kilometer-) high orbit, nearly a fourth of the distance to the moon.

'He wants to be with his wife'

BOSTON: Magic Johnson cancelled a commencement day speech at Harvard Medical School, saying he wants to be with his wife when their first child is born, reports AP.

Johnson had been scheduled to speak at the medical school's commencement ceremonies June 4 in Boston. Harvard officials said Johnson told them he wanted to be near his wife, Cookie, who is expecting in June.

Johnson offered to speak at the school after the baby is born.

Johnson, who announced last year that he had the AIDS virus and was retiring from the Los Angeles Lakers, has said his wife and the fetus aren't infected.

The birth was unexpected

NEW IBERIA: Belinda Bodin got a real Mother's Day surprise: a 7-pound, 11-ounce (3.5-kilogram) son, reports AP.

Ms Bodin says the birth was unexpected.

Honestly, I didn't know I was pregnant," said Bodin, 20. "I was on my way out (with friends), but I started having back pains. I wasn't sure what was going on.

It wasn't until he started coming out that I realized I was giving birth."

Her father, Warren Bodin, delivered the baby at their home. She named the baby Warren.

Politics is not his cup of tea

MEXICO CITY: Some Mexicans insist on writing his name on presidential election ballots, but the popular comedian Cantinflas says politics is not his cup of tea, reports AP.

"No, not me, young man," the 81-year-old said in response to a reporter's question. "I am not, never have been and never will be. I never wanted to be president," he said in his characteristically verbose style.

Less-well known as Mario Moreno, Cantinflas was at the Teatro Jorge Negrete late Wednesday to present to the National Actors Association a colorful mural depicting the great comic actors of the 20th century.

Pavarotti won't play in 'Lucia'

NEW YORK: Tenor Luciano Pavarotti has decided to retire the role of Edgardo in "Lucia di Lammermoor" from his repertoire, reports AP.

Pavarotti will turn over the role to American tenor Richard Leech, and won't appear in the Metropolitan Opera's new production of "Lucia" during the 1992-93 season, the Met's general director, Joseph Volpe, announced Wednesday.

Pavarotti will sing six performances as Cavaradossi in "Tosca" instead, in October and November.

The new production of "Lucia di Lammermoor" will star June Anderson in the title role, as well as Leech, Juan Pons and Paul Plishka. The production is by Francesca Zambello, in her Met debut.

'She did what she had to do'

AUSTIN, Texas: A woman who slashed her breast with a scalpel to force doctors to remove her silicone breast implants said Thursday she did what she had to do, reports AP.

"I've been trying for four months to get my implants out, because doctors told me that I had illnesses that were related to it," Marlene Hooker said at a news conference at Seton Medical Center. "I feel better already."

Hooker, 46, said she was diagnosed in February with an autoimmune disease. Her doctor advised her to have her implants removed, but her insurance company had refused to pay for removal, she said.

She forced the issue Wednesday, slashing her left breast repeatedly.

"I thought if I started it, someone would finish it," Hooker said after the operation.

The act was triggered by fear the implants had ruptured, she said. She awakened Tuesday with a swollen face and a rash resembling one that followed a 1989 implant replacement, she said.

"I thought that this is God's way of telling me, the time has come. They have got to come out," she said.

Hooker said she first got breast implants in 1975 after a doctor advised her to have her breast tissue removed because of fibrocystic breast disease.

The US Food and Drug Administration, after studying the health effects of the implants, has severely limited their use for cosmetic purposes but ruled they could stay on the market for reconstructive use.