

14 Tamils shot dead in Lankan clashes

COLOMBO, May 20: Security forces shot dead at least 14 Tamil guerrillas in three separate clashes in Sri Lanka's northeast where the militants are leading an independence campaign, officials said today, reports AFP.

Nine rebels were killed when troops attacked dozens of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas who planned a strike an army defence line in Watappola in northeastern Mullaitivu, military officials here said.

More than 20 LTTE cadres were wounded when troops fired mortars into a large concentration of "terrorists" on one side of a lagoon located opposite the defence line, officials said.

They planned to attack us. But our men took pre-emptive action. We confirmed their casualties by way of intercepts from LTTE Radio Transmission," a military official said.

Also reported from the war zone in the past 24 hours was a security force ambush on LTTE activists in Unnichchi in eastern Batticaloa district in which three rebels were killed, officials said.

Elsewhere in Batticaloa two more Tiger guerrillas were gunned down by troops when they tried to escape a cordon and search operation by the army, officials said.

Asian states protest attack on pro-democracy forces
US suspends joint exercise with Thailand

HONG KONG, May 20: The United States suspended a military exercise with Thailand, and Asian countries stepped up the rhetoric against Bangkok's use of force against pro-democracy protesters, reports Reuters.

International human rights groups also hit out at the Thai government today as the capital reeled from the worst unrest in two decades.

WASHINGTON: Washington has not directly condemned the military for firing on thousands of people protesting Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon's government.

But Defence Department Spokesman Pete Williams said cancellation of the US military part of a joint exercise known as "Cobra Gold" was sensible. "We just think it makes common sense in a time of problems in Bangkok not to have pictures of US forces storming the beaches in Thailand," he added.

AUSTRALIA: Australia today added some venom to its denunciation of the Suchinda government, summoning Thailand's ambassador to protest against the upsurge in violence. Prime Minister Paul Keating said Canberra was "appalled at the widespread use of

excessive force" by the Thai military.

NEW ZEALAND: New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon told the Thai Charge d'Affaires in Wellington he was horrified by the events in Bangkok and the shooting of a New Zealander.

Earlier in the day, he said Bangkok had to "satisfy everybody that the parliamentary elections they held can work, and the government selected can be responsible to the people and acceptable to the people."

MALAYSIA: In Malaysia, the New Straits Times newspaper,

whose view normally reflect those of the government, said in an editorial that the demonstrations showed that popular acceptance of coups as a way of political life in Thailand had ended.

"Suchinda Kraprayoon should resign as Prime Minister as it is a mockery of Thai democracy that a person who is not elected could hold the highest office in a democratic government," Malaysian Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang said on Tuesday.

JAPAN: Japan, Thailand's largest aid donor, has said it supports lawful efforts to

amend the constitution but officials said it was not considering suspending aid.

Many newspapers around Asia were harshly critical of the Bangkok bloodshed.

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's Ta Kung Pao, a pro-Beijing daily, said the protests showed that the nation of democracy was gaining ground in Thailand.

"People hate corruption in the country and they are tired of military intervention in politics," it said.

CHINA: The South China Morning Post criticised the

United States and Japan in an editorial for their relatively mild stance towards the Thai government compared with their reaction to the suppression of Beijing's pro-democracy protests in June, 1989.

TAIPEI: In Taipei, the China Times said Asian leaders must not let the opportunity of introducing reforms pass by. "Otherwise we will see a repeat of Thai-style unrest, instability in southeast Asia could spread, affecting the stability and prosperity of the entire Asian-Pacific region," it said.

INDIA: The Times of India said, "The Thai people are growing weary of the Pretorian rule of their military."

PAKISTAN: Pakistan's independence Dawn newspaper said Thailand had made remarkable progress over the past few years. "It would indeed be a pity if this growth rate is allowed to be thwarted by self-seeking politicians and Myopic military leaders," it added.

SINGAPORE: Singapore's Business Times recalled that Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej played a key role in ending student-led violence in 1973.

India invites Pak army chief

NEW DELHI, May 20: India has again invited the army chief of its arch-rival Pakistan, General Asif Nawaz Janjua, to make a goodwill visit, newspapers here reported today, says AFP.

Defence Minister Sharad Pawar was quoted as telling reporters the Pakistani General had been requested to come to New Delhi "and see for himself that we have nothing to hide."

Pawar said the invitation, a follow-up to Indian Army Chief General SF Rodrigues' suggestion, was sent to Janjua on the weekend and that Islamabad had yet to respond.

China keen to resolve border dispute with India

BEIJING, May 20: Chinese Premier Li Peng said today that India and China should boost consultations and should continue to work to resolve a long-standing dispute over the demarcation of their mutual border, reports AFP.

The Xinhua News Agency quote Li as telling visiting Indian President Ramaswamy Venkataraman in a meeting late today, that by doing so peace in the border area could be guaranteed that the right atmosphere created to resolve the dispute which led the countries to war in the 1960s.

He said an eventual solution would be found provided the two sides continued to make a "concerted effort," the official news agency said.

For his part Venkataraman said the Tibet issue was the internal affair of China and required no interference from a foreign country, the agency said.

Following the meeting Li hosted a banquet for the Indian president.

Earlier today Venkataraman

wrapped up his talks with China's leaders with both sides stressing Third World unity and opposing western criticism on human rights issues.

"Third World countries should unite together to protect their interests. In this process, India and China have important roles to play," state television quoted Venkataraman as telling Communist Party Chief Jiang Zemin.

Venkataraman met the general secretary on the second day of a six-day visit, the first by an Indian head of state to China.

The two men expressed a common view on human rights issues, China Central Television (CCTV) said.

For developing countries, the first priority is for people to have employment and be guaranteed a basic standard of living," the CCTV newscaster quoted Venkataraman as saying.

"No country has the right to make gratuitous accusations against another," the Indian president was quoted as saying. The television added that



Jiang agreed with the remark, apparently aimed at western government.

AP adds: Chinese President Yang Shangkun told Indian President Ramaswamy Venkataraman on Wednesday that his visit is expected to lead to improved relations between China and India, the world's two most populous nations.

In bidding farewell to Venkataraman, Yang said his visit to China was "a new landmark" for Sino-Indian re-

lations, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported.

"The talks should convince his excellency the president that China strongly hopes to further its relations with India," Yang was quoted as saying.

Venkataraman, the first Indian president to visit China, left Beijing Wednesday for the ancient capital city of Xian. He also planned to visit the cities of Hangzhou and Shanghai during his six-day China visit, Xinhua said.

The official newspaper China Daily reported Wednesday that Venkataraman said New Delhi does not support "anti-China" activities by the Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibetan Buddhism who lives in India.

During a one-hour meeting Tuesday with Chinese Premier Li Peng, Venkataraman said the Indian government considers Tibet a part of China and that problems in the remote Himalayan region are China's internal affairs, the paper added.



KABUL: Russian Prisoner of War Sergei Fateef (R), 24, and a Jamiat-I-Islami Mujahideen smile as Fateef is released May 19 after being held over six years. Fateef is the first Russian POW to be freed since the Mujahideen seized power last month. —AFP/UNB photo

Bosnia offers confederation with Croatia

ZAGREB, May 20: Bosnia-Herzegovina's President Alija Izetbegovic, said Tuesday he would welcome a confederation between his republic and Croatia, the Croatian News Agency HINA reported, reports AFP.

He confirmed a newspaper report that delegation of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslim Slav party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), led by party Vice President Salim Sabic, and of the Croatian Democratic Community (CDC) met at the weekend in the

Croatian port of Split for talks on creating a confederation.

Izetbegovic said the parties also talked about the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and co-ordination of defence. The newspaper report of the meeting said this was a prelude to forming joint armed forces.

Both parties declared that such a move would be "an acceptable basis for future negotiations," Izetbegovic said.

Izetbegovic, who is president of the DAP, declared the idea "has always been an option entertained by the DAP."

Amnesty int'l asks China to free detenus

GENEVA, May 20: Amnesty International called on China today to release all prisoners of conscience and give its political prisoners a prompt and fair trial or free the too, reports Reuters.

The Human Rights group also urged the Chinese government to take steps to stop torture and killings by security forces.

Government opponents in Tibet were arbitrarily arrested and frequently tortured as Chinese authorities cracked down on opposition, amnesty said.

Harsh repression had led to serious and long-standing Human Rights violations in Tibet, the London-based group said. Tibetans who speak out against the Chinese government are at risk of imprisonment, possibly for years, and torture.

India launches ASLV

NEW DELHI, May 20: India successfully launched a research satellite today using its own rocket and satellite technology, Indian news agencies said, reports Reuters.

The Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV) blasted off from the Indian space research organisation's launch pad at 6 AM (0030 GMT) on an island in the Bay of Bengal off the southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

The launch vehicle put a 150 kg (330 lb) satellite into a near-Earth orbit at an altitude of 450 km (280 miles), the Press Trust of India said, quoting official sources.

Off the Record

Liz's latest husband sentenced

CORONA, California: Elizabeth Taylor's husband, Larry Fortensky, was sentenced Tuesday to three years' probation and was barred from driving his car for non-business purposes after pleading guilty to 1987 charges of drunken driving, reports AFP.

It was the second time he went up on such charges in the recent past. In November, a month after he married the Hollywood screen star, Fortensky was fined 200 dollars and participated in a six-month alcohol abuse programme.

The construction worker Tuesday was also fined 1,178 dollars and ordered to attend another alcohol abuse programme.

Fortensky and Taylor met in 1988 at the Betty Ford center, where they were undergoing treatment for substance abuse.



NZ grandfather kills family

PUKEKOHE, New Zealand: A Family patriarch fatally shot his wife, three sons and two other relatives after an argument Wednesday morning, then killed himself, police said, Reports AP.

His 9-year-old granddaughter barricaded herself in an upstairs room and talked with police by phone for three hours, describing the dying moments of her 11-year-old brother, before she was taken to safety.

Police spokesman Senior Sgt Graham Bell said the 66-year-old gunman, identified as Brian Schlaepfer, was the eldest member of the three-family group that lived in two farm houses about 45 kilometers (30 miles) south of Auckland.

Schlaepfer had farmed in the area all his life, and neighbors called the family close-knit.

Bell said Schlaepfer man was involved in a heated argument and began firing around dawn with three weapons, including a shotgun and a .22-caliber rifle.

"There has been a domestic upheaval of some sort this morning. This has unhinged him and he started shooting," Bell said, adding that Schlaepfer had been suffering from bout of depression.

Doctor without certificates

JOHANNESBURG: A bogus doctor who practised undetected as a paediatrician for some eight years was jailed for 18 years by a court at Kemplon Park near here Tuesday, reports AFP.

Andre Esterhuizen, 41, was convicted on three counts of culpable homicide, relating to the avoidable deaths of three babies under his care, and for assaults on other babies.

He left school at 16 with bad grades, but learned about medicine from textbooks and passed himself off as a doctor.

Even after he was found out, he moved to the east coast city of Durban and issued medical fitness certificates to divers, the court heard.

June Veal, whose three-month-old son Garreth died under Esterhuizen care, told the domestic news agency SABA. "He does not have a conscience. He bluffed everyone, including other doctors and specialist."

Just for his obsession with buses

ROTHERHAM, England: A British woman was kicked out her husband of just nine months because of his obsession with buses, Reports Reuters.

Mark Smith, 29, dragged his new bride around a tour of bus garages on their honeymoon and became livid when she failed to clean his treasured collection of 36,000 bus photos.

"I should have realised what I'd let myself in for when we went on honeymoon and he told me we were going to have a look at the buses," she said.

The final straw came when Mark, who lives in the town of Rotherham in northern England, put 38-year-old Anne in hospital with head wounds by crashing her car as he looked at a bus.

Anne wants an injunction to ban the unemployed driver and former coach cleaner from coming near her home.

She said, "he is more interested in buses than me — I've had enough."

Mufti of Egypt for fight against fundamentalist

CAIRO, May 20: Mufti of Egypt Mohammed Sayed Tantawi has called for a relentless struggle against religious extremism and terrorism to maintain national security and stability, reports Xinhua.

In an interview published by the Egyptian newspaper "Al-Akhar" yesterday, the Mufti, who is the chief judge in Egypt for explaining the Islamic Law, stressed that this principle should be firmly established in society.

"By fighting extremism and terrorism we can firmly establish the principles and values deriving from the gracious Islamic Law and all religions that do not support violence and terrorism," Tantawi was quoted as saying.

'China's Lech Walesa' continues fighting to revive union

BEIJING, May 20: The man sometimes called "China's Lech Walesa" spent 22 months in jail but hasn't lost his will to fight. His latest battle is against eviction from his home, reports AP.

Han Dongfang, 29, was imprisoned after the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy movement for founding an independent labour union. He contracted tuberculosis in jail and thought he would die.

Far from being broken by the experience, the former railway worker says: "My believe are even stronger, even more firm."

Authorities said two weeks ago that Han is free to go abroad. He is not sure whether he will take the offer.

Instead, he wants to revive his banned union, believing that movement run unions fail to serve the interests of Chinese workers.

Just recently, he has been distracted from all that by a dispute with a new landlord trying to evict him and his pregnant wife from their two-room apartment.

Last Thursday, a district court summoned Han over the dispute. The meeting ended with court staff beating him and throwing him

handcuffed into a cell for an hour, Han said. He was hospitalized a few days later.

He is suing the court staff for illegal detention and assault. Several other Chinese dissidents also have tried in the best year to obtain legal redress for wrongs committed by authorities. None has been successful.

In interviews over several months, Han showed himself to be a soft-spoken man, quick to chuckle over life's ironies. But he repeatedly expressed unwillingness to compromise his sense of right and wrong, and acknowledged he can be hot-headed.

"Other people may be able to accept these things as unavoidable, but I can't," he said.

In March, for example, he boldly applied to stage a one-man demonstration during the annual meeting of the national legislature in order to press for free labour unions. Police refused permission.

At about that time, Han began openly giving interviews to foreign journalists and discussing his hopes for reviving his union.

He takes none of the precautions other Chinese dissidents usually take. He uses his name when calling foreigners on the phone,

invites them to his home despite police surveillance, and says, "Why not?" when reporters ask to quote him by name.

Han shrugs off concern that he will land back in jail.

"A dead pig doesn't fear being scalded by boiling water," he said, quoting a common Chinese saying.

That makes him a threat to the system, which has lost its means of scaring him into obedience as it does most citizens.

Before 1989, Han was an ordinary worker at the Fengtai Railway Maintenance Yard.

The son of a peasant father said an illiterate maid, Han received only a high-school education. He served in the army before starting work.

He had no grand dreams of trying to change China, only a nagging dissatisfaction with a system that fails to treat citizens equally.

When Beijing college students began demonstrating for democracy in 1989, Han and four other men established Communist China's first non-official labour union. They set up office in a tent in Tiananmen Square, the students' protest headquarters.

When troops crushed the protests, Han became one of China's most-wanted criminals.

Many protest leaders went into hiding or fled China. Han marched into police station, protested his innocence and demanded the wanted notice be retracted. Police arrested him.

After a few months in a filthy, overcrowded cell, Han became seriously ill. Guards said he was faking and took away his blankets despite severe cold.

Perot will announce candidacy soon

WASHINGTON, May 20: Texas billionaire Ross Perot, expected to announce his presidential candidacy soon after a high profile "non-campaign," is a man of action known more for hardened decision-making and a taste for rambouesque operations than for his willingness to compromise, reports AFP.

Perot, 61, maintains that he has no real desire to be president but will serve if drafted. He told supporters he would run if they collected enough signatures to get him on the ballot in all 50 states.

Virtually unknown aboard, Ross Perot first made his mark in the US public eye in 1969, when he offered to send two boeing 707s full of food and Christmas gifts to prisoners of War being held in Vietnam.

Perot will announce candidacy soon

WASHINGTON, May 20: Texas billionaire Ross Perot, expected to announce his presidential candidacy soon after a high profile "non-campaign," is a man of action known more for hardened decision-making and a taste for rambouesque operations than for his willingness to compromise, reports AFP.

Perot, 61, maintains that he has no real desire to be president but will serve if drafted. He told supporters he would run if they collected enough signatures to get him on the ballot in all 50 states.

Virtually unknown aboard, Ross Perot first made his mark in the US public eye in 1969, when he offered to send two boeing 707s full of food and Christmas gifts to prisoners of War being held in Vietnam.