

Heavy battle in Colombia

SANTAFE DE BOGOTA, May 25: The Colombian armed forces clashed with rebels in the northwest of the country Sunday, in heavy fighting that has left at least 13 soldiers dead, a military spokesman said, reports AFP.

Troops backed by helicopters have been battling about 600 rebel soldiers of the Colombian revolutionary armed forces (FARC) in a zone between Dabeiba and Mutata in Antioquia Department, 600 kilometers northwest of Santafe de Bogota, for the past two days.

Fierce fighting has prevented the recovery of the bodies of the 13 victims, army spokesmen said in Medellin, the capital of Antioquia.

Fourteen soldiers were injured and 20 have gone missing, the army said.

It was not known how many rebels had been killed, but witnesses and rebel sources said the number was high.

The unconfirmed rebel reports seemed to lend credibility to telephone calls by self-identified rebel spokesmen to Medellin radio stations, asking the Red Cross to help wounded rebels on the battlefield. The rebels' plea was the first of its kind in more than 40 years of armed conflict.

Authorities in Dabeiba declared a curfew and banned sales of alcohol, fearing the guerrillas would try to occupy the town.



ISLAMABAD: Indian diplomat Rajesh Mittal (R) is helped to undress for a medical examination by an Indian High Commission doctor Sunday after he was kidnapped and beaten by Pakistani security officer, according to allegations made by the High Commission. Pakistan expelled Mittal, the High Commission's number four man, charging him with espionage — AFP/UNB photo

India seeks extradition of Prabhakaran

NEW DELHI, May 25: India has moved to seek the extradition of the chief of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from Sri Lanka in connection with the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, newspapers said here Monday, reports AFP.

The National Herald quoted Home Minister S B Chavan as saying Sunday his ministry had forwarded the request for the extradition of Velupillai Prabhakaran and "other extremists" to India's Ministry of External Affairs.

Prabhakaran, the supreme for Sri Lanka's Tamil separatist last week as the primary and secondary accused in the May 21, 1991 assassination of the former Indian Prime Minister. They are among 41 people

charged, 26 of them Sri Lankans, asked whether Colombo was likely to accede to the request, Chavan told the United News of India: "We hope so. At least it had admitted prime facie Prabhakaran's involvement in the crime and hence there should not be any problem."

India outlawed the LTTE on May 14 after accusing the group of assassinating Gandhi and supporting secessionist movements in southern India.

Although Sri Lankan security forces are currently battling the LTTE in the island's northeast, Colombo has ruled out banning the guerrillas, arguing that it would prejudice a possible solution to the island's dragging ethnic conflict.

Though the Sri Lankan government may agree to the extradition of Prabhakaran and Anman, there is still the major problem of arresting them from the Tiger-controlled Tamil heartland of the Jaffna peninsula.

Hekmatyar men clash with Uzbeks: Several killed

KABUL, May 25: Fighting erupted again in Kabul overnight between Uzbek militia and opposition Mujahideen guerrillas, leaving several people dead, residents and guerrilla sources said Monday, reports AFP.

Uzbek fighters of general Abdul Rashid Dostam clashed for several hours with guerrillas of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami late Sunday in the city's three southern districts, they said.

Hekmatyar insists that the militia leave Kabul, saying he will not participate in the interim government that came to power with their help a month ago unless they do.

"At least 18 Dostam men were killed in the fighting," said a spokesman from Hekmatyar's headquarters in the Prime Minister's office here.

The spokesman said he did not have exact details of the fighting, nor would he give details of casualties suffered by the Hezb guerrillas in Kabul's Bin Hissar, Kalaachar and Shau Shahid districts.

Residents from Bin Hissar

told reporters that there was no electricity in the area when the fighting broke out.

"There were many civilian casualties," said one resident, adding that the two sides fought with rockets and guns from their respective bunkers.

Dostam has placed his men in the south of the city to keep the Islamic fundamentalist fighters out, but the residents said the Hezb guerrillas had occupied portions of the three districts.

Sunday's fighting followed shelling of the area Thursday and Friday despite a neutral Mujahideen commission's announcement that the battle for Kabul had ended.

Hospitals in Kabul report receiving several casualties and injured people every day from the city's suburbs where rival guerrillas are entrenched in face-to-face positions.

Sporadic shelling in the south continued today, but details of casualties were not known.

"We are trying to find out," said another official from Hezb's headquarters here.

Mujahideen guerrillas hit

jacked another staff car belonging to the United Nations in the unpoliced city of Kabul after beating up the vehicle's driver, sources said here today.

Three Mujahideen fighters held up a car belonging to the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) late Sunday at gunpoint in the city's Kalafatullah district and ordered its occupants to get out, UN sources said.

The hijackers clubbed the car driver when he tried to resist, dragged him out of the vehicle and drove it away, they said.

Sunday's hijacking was the second incident involving UN vehicles in Kabul, where several complexes belonging to the world body have either been occupied by guerrillas or looted by unidentified people since the April 28 handover of power to an interim Islamic government.

Afghan residents too have reported scores of car thefts from the city's Mircorayn district. Many have begun selling their automobiles because of the security situation in the city.

Off the Record

She's more a writer than a rock star

MINNEAPOLIS: Don't confuse Ingrid Chavez with Sheila E, Vanity Apollonia or other Prince proteges. The singer-poetess says she's more a writer than a rock star, reports AP.

"If I lived in a different era, it would be Paris in the 20s," said Chavez, a fan of Parisian cafes and silent-screen actress Louise Brooks. "I fell in love with the people there."

Chavez, 27, is an American with a big following in Europe and Japan. Her self-titled debut album, co-written, co-produced and co-performed by Prince, has received some US airplay but has gotten a better reception overseas.

Marketing Chavez in the United States may be a challenge. Her dreamy song-poems have a pulsating rhythm well-suited to clubs and discos, but they're a bit offbeat for top 40 radio.

Her ex-husband convicted wrongfully

SYDNEY: Lindy Chamberlain, wrongfully convicted of the 1980 murder of her baby daughter Azaria, was finally granted compensation yesterday, but the amount fell short of her Australian dollar 5 million (US dollar 3.8 million) claim, reports Reuters.

Chamberlain, who maintained the nine-week-old child was taken by a Dingo from a campsite near Ayers rock in August 1980, was paid a dollar 900,000 (US dollar 680,000), the northern territory government announced.

Her ex-husband, Michael, wrongfully convicted of complicity in the murder, received a dollar 400,000 (US dollar 300,000).

"This matter is now at an end," Northern Territory Attorney-General Daryl Manzie said in a statement.

Lindy Chamberlain, whose pent three years in jail after one of Australia's most bizarre and controversial criminal cases, was not immediately available for comment.

US to become outcrop of new monuments

WASHINGTON: The people of America are giving their capital an outcrop of new monuments, reports AP.

There'll be one to honour Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one for Francis Scott Key, one for the blacks who fought in the War of Independence, one for combatants of the Korean conflict, one for the 11,000 women who served in America's wars and one for all women who aided the cause in America's wars.

And amidst the granite and bronze, one leafy garden will be built, intended to invoke thoughts of peace.

Ground was broken last September for the FDR Memorial, ending decades of debate over how the nation should pay distinct tribute to a leader who changed the relationship of the people to their government.

Previous designs — two abstract columns, dubbed "Instant Stonehenge," and rose garden — had been discarded. And Congress was slow coming up with the money.

The memorial now is to be completed by 1995.

Like all it has a beginning and an end

ROME: Giovanni Falcone, the magistrate killed by an alleged Mafia bombing, was a good-humoured, handsome hero who believed that organized crime could be defeated despite the tough odds, reports AP.

"The Mafia isn't unbeatable," Falcone once told an interviewer. "The Mafia is a human entity, and like all humans it has a beginning and an end."

Falcone began fighting organized crime in the 1960s when he was assigned to a small Sicilian town.

In 1978, he was assigned to Palermo, and he soon began handling the island's top Mafia cases, including the 1982 assassination of another national hero, General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa.

Like Dalla Chiesa, Falcone was killed along with his wife, 46-year-old Francesca, a Palermo judge. She died a few hours after her husband did in the same hospital.

Falcone was sent to Sicily by Rome just 100 days ago to lead the state's war against the Mafia.

Iran-Contra scandal

Clines first man to serve 16-month term

WASHINGTON, May 25: Arms middleman and retired CIA officer Thomas Clines on Monday will become the first participant in the Iran-Contra scandal to go to prison, reports AP.

Clines is scheduled to serve a 16-month term at Camp McLean, a minimum-security federal correctional facility in Bradford County, his lawyer, Tom Spencer, said Sunday night.

A federal appeals court refused to tell Clines remain free while he appeals his convictions for failing to disclose to the US government some of the profits he made from arms deals for the Nicaraguan Contras.

Clines is asking the US Supreme Court to review his case.

In 1985 and 1986, Clines assisted the secret Contra aid network run by White House aide Oliver North, who was assigned by Reagan administration higher-ups to help the rebel force when Congress cut off military aid.

Clines used his contacts in the Communist East Bloc and western Europe to arrange the purchase and delivery of rifles,

machine guns, grenades and explosives to the Contras fighting Nicaragua's then-leftist government.

A federal court jury in Baltimore found Clines guilty on September 18, 1990 of four felonies, including failing to report to the Internal Revenue Service more than 260,000 dollars in profits from the arms shipments.

He also was convicted of failing to tell the IRS about overseas financial accounts.

"He basically failed to file a piece of paper with the government," said Spencer. "This was a situation in which the prosecutors decided they were going to get him and then they scoured hundreds of thousands of federal statutes to determine what they could get him on. This is the best they could come up with."

A federal appeals court in Richmond, Va, upheld Clines' convictions in February.

Spencer said he expected his client to serve about half of the 16-month term.

Clines is an executive for Panex Corporation of McLean, Va, an international security consulting firm.

Wan in Tokyo to normalize relations

TOKYO, May 25: Wan Li, chairman of the National People's China's Parliament, arrived here today for an eight-day stay amid a deepening dispute over a possible visit to China by Japanese Emperor Akihito, reports AFP.

Wan, accompanied by Vice Foreign Minister Xu Dunxin, is to meet Japanese leaders including Prime Minister Kishii Miyazawa, Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe and the emperor.

US may offer to limit N-test

WASHINGTON, May 25: The United States is considering proposals to limit nuclear weapons testing, the Washington Post reported today, says Reuters.

The proposals range from halving the number of underground nuclear explosions from six to three a year to a more sweeping plan that would virtually halt nuclear testing by 1995, the paper said quoting unnamed officials.

No US agency supports Yeltsin's demand that Washington immediately join the nuclear testing moratorium that Russia announced last October.

Red alert in Poonch, Rajouri

POONCH, May 25: A red alert was sounded in the border districts of Rajouri and Poonch after police found explosives in several areas, reports PTI.

An explosion was averted as the police and intelligence wing of the border security force defused an anti-tank mine planted along the Mendhar-Balnot road before it could cause any damage, official sources said.

The sources described this incident as the handiwork of the Pak military intelligence network. Interservices intelligence, to intensify insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, especially the border districts of Poonch and Rajouri to create panic and harassment among people in general.

Winnie suspended from Women's League

JOHANNESBURG, May 25: The African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) in the Johannesburg region suspended its President Winnie Mandela and the entire executive, her powerbase, an ANC regional spokeswoman said today.

A regional meeting of the ANCWL Sunday decided on the suspensions after half the executive offered to resign, the spokeswoman told AFP.

It was felt suspending the entire executive, which was re-elected with Mandela as president only on May 3, would permit a thorough review, and was preferable to piecemeal resignations, the spokeswoman said.

But a source who attended the meeting told the domestic news agency SAPA the suspensions were a "concerted effort

to clip her (Mandela's) wings." It coincided with a further blow when ANC Information Director Palko Jordan told the Sunday papers she was under investigation for alleged fraud in her department.

Beset by rumours that she was involved in murders and assaults, Mandela, 58, has thrown herself into campaigning for victims of township violence, bolstering her claim to political rehabilitation.

Some 40 regional members of the ANCWL unveiled a social welfare support committee at ANC regional headquarters here Thursday to call for her reinstatement as head of ANC social welfare.

She resigned that post on April 15, two days after her husband, ANC President Nelson Mandela, announced their separation.



WINNIE MANDELA

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Sihanouk for Cambodian unity

IREY VENG (Cambodia), May 25: Prince Norodom Sihanouk launched an appeal for Cambodian unity here today, urging the Khmer Rouge to abide by a United Nations peace plan, reports AFP.

The Khmer Rouge have been accused of using delaying tactics in the Supreme National Council (SNC) in an attempt to slow down the implementation of UN peace plan.

The SNC groups the four Cambodian factions and was established to embody the country's sovereignty during a transition period leading to elections early next year.

CIS an environmental nightmare with pollution

MOSCOW, May 25: The former Soviet Union is an environmental nightmare with pollution of every sort, including the nuclear poisoning of land and water resources from the Arctic to China and from Chernobyl to the Pacific rim, official reports say.

Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, successor to the Soviet Union, will be looking to next month's earth summit in Brazil for assistance in clearing up some of the worst damage caused by decades of breakneck industrialisation, reports AFP.

The UN conference is to be attended by more than 100 heads of government and 185 delegations totalling 30,000 people.

Massive radio-active fallout resulting from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster in the Ukraine is the best known case of pollution in the former Soviet Union but represents only the tip of the iceberg.

In fact Chernobyl was only one of several such cases. Nuclear weapons testing in the 1950s left parts of the northeast of the country heavily contaminated, while accidents such as one affecting a nuclear storage facility in the southern Urals led to the interdiction on a huge area in the late 1950s.

Nuclear fallout from Chernobyl poisoned large tracts of land in the West of the former union and killed over 6,000 people, according to the latest Ukrainian Government figures.

There have also been dozens of cases of radio-active leaks from nuclear power stations, most recently near St Petersburg, official reports, long kept secret, now speak of nuclear waste, including aging nuclear submarines, dumped or scuttled at sea in the Arctic Ocean.

A coordination council for ecological questions, appointed by the Russian presidency, in

February drew an apocalyptic picture of the environmental situation in Russian federation, the largest of the former Soviet republics.

Oil leaks from pipelines criss-crossing Siberia, acid rain from giant industrial plants, and untreated chemical wastes pumped into rivers and lakes have turned large parts of the country into disaster areas, the report said.

Among the areas worst affected, the council pointed to the lower Volga Basin whose waters drain into the Caspian Sea, the coal mining Kuzbass region of Siberia, areas of central Yakutia, the Amur river bordering China and the heavily-militarized Kola Peninsula in the northwest.

Other CIS republics have also been badly hit. Armenia's Sevan Lake has turned from light blue to dark grey and produces only a few tons of fish per year, compared to 600 tons 10 years ago. Damage is blamed on the heavy use

of fertilizers in the countryside and the diverting of water from its main affluent.

In the neighbouring republic of Azerbaijan, one in three children die at birth in the city of Ismagail, a sprawling petrochemical city on the shore of the Caspian Sea, according to medical reports quoted by western experts.

The situation is as bad around the Aral Sea, in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where the diversion of waters for cotton production has resulted in the silting up of the sea and the turning of agricultural land into desert.

In Siberia, the giant lake Baikal, the largest fresh water reservoir in the world, is also threatened by pollution as wood-pulping factories and other chemical plants pour waste into its waters.

In an overall depressing picture even the cities are in a bad way, with Moscow considered one of the most polluted in the world.