

Tigers kill 8 Lankan troops

COLOMBO, May 31: Tamil guerrillas were locked in fierce combat with advancing security forces in northern Sri Lanka in which eight more troops, including a major, were killed, officials said, reports AFP.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) shot dead the eight victims as they advanced into the rebel-held town of Thellippali on Saturday, officials said.

Our advance has been slow because of the stiff resistance offered by the terrorists. Our objective is to capture territory and hold on to it, senior army officer said.

At Mullaittivum in the northeast of the mainland, security forces were inching their way forward against guerrilla resistance, the officer said.

The latest toll brought to 55 the military losses since the fresh land, air and sea offensive against the Tigers was launched on Thursday ending a near six-month lull in security operations.

Solh's cabinet wins vote of confidence

BEIRUT, May 31: Prime Minister Rashid Solh's newly formed government won a vote of confidence from Parliament Friday, empowering it to seek ways of steering Lebanon out of its worst economic crisis in 48 years of independence, reports AP.

Eighty-four members of the 108-seat house attended the 16-hour debate over the government's policy statement put forward by Solh on Thursday.

Seventy-six parliamentarians voted for the government, five against it and three abstained.

The Syrian-backed Solh pledged to seek aid from the European Economic Community, the International Monetary Fund and the Arab countries to rebuild Beirut's war-wrecked commercial center.

But he did not say in the policy statement how he would go about luring foreign aid, which has eluded previous governments since the end of the civil war almost two years ago.

Power struggle deepens in Afghanistan

Mojaddedi turns down demands for withdrawal of militia

KABUL, May 31: Caretaker President Sibghatullah Mojaddedi on Sunday rejected all demands for the withdrawal of security forces from the capital, a move likely to heighten the struggle for power within the new Islamic government, reports AP.

Mojaddedi turned down all demands for the removal of allied security forces, including a pact reached last week between renegade rebel leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Masood to peacefully resolve long-standing rivalries that have weakened the month-old administration that replaced Communist rule.

In the agreement, which is still to be implemented, the two rebel chiefs agreed that all militia forces should leave Kabul and that commanders from all rebel groups would

oversee security in the capital. The agreement was aimed specifically at a fierce Uzbek militia that engineered the rebels' rise to power and helped keep Hekmatyar's forces from seizing power.

But Mojaddedi said the accord was not binding on his government and he said the militia headed by Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum could not be withdrawn from Kabul without his consent.

Dostum, who was promoted to full general by Mojaddedi, also has said he takes orders from no one except the 70-year-old president.

Hekmatyar, the leader of the radical Hezb-e-Islami faction, insists he will not join the government until Dostum's 10,000-member force returns to its base in northern Afghanistan.

Mojaddedi's remarks for their highlight the issues within the new Islamic leader-

ship and the personal and ideological differences among the rebel leaders that assumed power April 28 from ousted President Najibullah.

Many suspect those differences may have prompted an attempt on Mojaddedi's life last week.

The plane bringing Mojaddedi, several cabinet ministers and rebel commanders back from Pakistan, was badly damaged by a rocket that slammed into the airport runway and exploded. Machine-gun fire also sheered off the nose of the aircraft.

The president was not hurt but the co-pilot was injured by shrapnel that pierced the cockpit.

Mojaddedi has blamed Hekmatyar's fighters but others suspect other rebel leaders might be responsible. An investigation is underway.



4,500 Iraqis to perform Hajj

BAGHDAD, May 31: A total of 4,500 Iraqis left Saturday for Saudi Arabia to undertake the annual Muslim pilgrimage (Hajj) which opens there next month, the official INA news agency reported, says AFP.

The Iraqi Ministry of Religious Affairs issued permits to 13 local transport companies to carry the pilgrims to the Saudi kingdom overland, since Baghdad has been faced by an air traffic embargo since its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Baghdad severed its diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia during the Gulf crisis.

INA did not say how many Iraqi pilgrims were expected to travel this year to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina for the Hajj which starts the second week of June.

ME talks after Israeli elections

WASHINGTON, May 31: Arab-Israeli multilateral talks will resume in the fall, after the Israeli general elections, the State Department said Friday.

The talks, which focus on issues that concern the entire Middle East region, are held parallel to the bilateral Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. The first round of multilaterals was held this month.

In a communique, the State Department announced that a preparatory meeting hosted by the two co-sponsors — Washington and Moscow — decided Thursday in Lisbon that the meetings would resume "in early fall."

The working group on water resources was scheduled to meet in Washington, the one on refugees in Ottawa, on the environment in the Hague, economic development in Paris and arms control in Moscow.

In reviewing the previous multilaterals, the State Department said, "all the working groups have defined practical ways to make progress and we are encouraged by this."

The State Department hopes that the multilaterals will benefit the bilateral, which adjourned in April in Washington without setting a date for their next meeting, in Rome.

The June 23 general elections in Israel have frequently been cited by the Arab delegations as an obstacle to serious negotiations.

Blast kills 2 in Peshawar

PESHAWAR, (Pakistan) May 31: Two people were killed and three seriously injured in a parcel bomb attack early Sunday in this northwestern city, the Associated Press of Pakistan and police sources said, reports AFP.

The bomb was addressed to an official at the Education Department and exploded in the department's offices, killing two people instantly and damaging the building.

Bonner calls for aid to Kyrayz quake victims

BOSTON, May 31: Yelena Bonner, widow of prominent Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, on Friday appealed to the West on behalf of Kyrgyzstan officials for aid to victims of a severe May 17 earthquake which killed four people, reports Reuter.

"I appeal to the countries of the West and the international Red Cross to provide urgent humanitarian aid to the people of Kyrgyzstan that had a very severe earthquake," Bonner said.

Resentment growing over troops deployment in Sind

KARACHI, May 31: Resentment is growing in Sind over Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's deployment of the Pakistan army to restore stability in the southern province, observers say, reports AP.

Sharif last week ordered a six-month army operation to rid the province of "terrorists, bandits and anti-social elements." The Sindhi government has handed over its law enforcement functions to the Pakistani army for the period under a constitutional provision.

President Ghulam Ishaq Khan backed the decision to launch the action, which is being supervised by fifth corps commander general Naseer Akhtar, while Army Chief General Asif Nawaz said the campaign would be conducted impartially.

But Sind's main political groups are apprehensive, while former Law Minister Haji Saifullah Khan has challenged the legal basis of the federal orders for the army deployment.

Opposition leader and Former Premier Benazir Bhutto criticised the military operation, saying "there is a state of insurgency in Sind and using armed forces at this stage would be a disservice to them."

Despite government assurances that the military operation would be unbiased, leaders of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), representing the strong force of Urdu-speaking settlers within Sind's urban centres, say it could mean a direct attack on their cadres.

MQM, a coalition partner in Sharif's government, is opposed to the army going into action in its power bases of Karachi and Hyderabad and said the Sind authorities should not be made to surrender any of its executive powers.

Civilian authority in Sind might fade away if the army becomes bogged down in the province and requests more power, which could lead to

dissolution of the provincial assembly, observers said.

Some political commentators said an army action by late military ruler General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq in 1983 to contain political unrest in Sind had given birth to terrorism in the province.

But former army chief General Mirza Aslam Beg, supporting more power for the army, said the real problems would not begin until the criminals had been rounded up.

You will have to had them over to civilian courts and they will come back on bail next day, bringing the operation back to square one," he said.

The army will set a deadline for the surrender of illegal weapons before taking action to unearth hidden arms and will also carry out a purge of provincial police to remove those believed to have links with criminals, sources said.

The action would be swift against all officials suspected of abetting criminals and terrorists," a military source said.

12 injured as students, police clash in Seoul

SEOUL, May 31: Thousands of students occupied City Hall plaza Sunday after battles with riot police in one of the largest anti-government protests in recent years, reports AP.

Students roared in victory after they drove out an estimated 1,000 riot police from the plaza, rendezvous point for the day's protests.

Down with DLP — the governing Democratic Liberal Party — shouted students in unison as they triumphantly raised clenched fists into a sky filled with tear gas.

About a dozen students and police were injured in the clash in the plaza, the fiercest of the day.

Students, in groups of 1,000 to 2,000, charged police from several directions and fought with their hands. Some students wielded steel pipes.

Police, outnumbered, retreated, firing tear gas.

The protests came at the end of a three-day rally at Seoul's Hanyang University, where 50,000 militant students pledged to step up a campaign to overthrow the government.

Students, wearing red, green and yellow face masks to identify their schools and ward off the acrid tear gas, took over major streets lined with high-rise office buildings and tourist hotels.

Students are demanding that Kim Young-sam, the ruling party's nominee in presidential elections later this year, step out of the race for the sake of greater democracy in South Korea. The students believe he will pursue authoritarian policies.

Fresh Israeli air raid on Hezbollah bases

BAALBEK, (Lebanon) May 31: Israeli jet fighters Sunday blasted a base of the pro-Iranian Hezbollah, or Party of God, near the Syrian border for the second time in eight days, police said, reports AP.

Syrian anti-aircraft batteries opened up against the raiding warplanes, but no hits were observed, local reporters said by telephone.

The raid was the seventh since the current wave of violence between Israel and Hezbollah erupted May 19. By police count, at least 25 people were killed and 60 wounded in the past 12 days of violence.

Police said the 10:25 am strike targeted a Hezbollah training base in Janta, three miles west of the Syrian frontier in east Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

Hezbollah reported no casualties among its guerrillas. The Israeli enemy repeated its air attack on Janta, but returned empty-handed," a Hezbollah statement said.

The Israeli military issued a brief communique saying the targets were a central training base of Hezbollah north of Janta, and Hezbollah bases in Majd el-Sulin and Bir a-Sanofel. It said all targets were hit and the planes returned safely. Police said six fighter-

bombers staged the five-minute raid on Janta, releasing hot air balloons to deflect heat seeking ground-to-air missiles.

But no such missiles were launched, with Syrian gunners only using conventional anti-aircraft guns. No hits were observed, local reporters said by telephone.

They said gray clouds of smoke shrouded Janta as the planes struck. The billowing smoke could be seen from Baalbek, 12 miles from the stricken base.

Reporters and photographers trying to reach Janta were turned back by Hezbollah guerrillas who warned they suspect the planes may have dropped delayed-action bombs.

In the previous raid on Janta May 23, five such bombs exploded two hours after the attack, killing six Hezbollah guerrillas and an Iranian television cameraman.

It was the 13th air raid on Lebanon this year. At least 37 people have been killed and 73 wounded in the previous 12 raids.

Earlier, Israeli troops and allied militiamen renewed their shelling of UN-patrolled villages in south Lebanon.

No casualties were reported from the three-hour barrage on Tibnin, Harris, Siddiqin, Kafra and Yater, all within the area of operations of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon.

Off the Record

FBI nabs nude Madonna pix

WEST HOLLYWOOD (Calif), May 31: An FBI sting operation has recovered 44 nude photographs of Madonna that allegedly were stolen from a collection being used for an upcoming book of erotica featuring the singer-actress, reports AP.

A man offered to sell the pictures for 100,000 dollars to an undercover agent posing as a buyer for a British tabloid newspaper, Charlie J Parsons, special agent in charge of the FBI's Los Angeles office, said Friday.

The man was detained and interviewed after the FBI confirmed the photos were authentic. He was not immediately charged, Parsons said in a statement.

The book, due in October, will be a collection of pictures by fashion photographer Steven Meisel of Madonna in various states of undress. The pictures will be accompanied by stories and poems.

Madonna, 33, is finishing the movie "Body of Evidence" with Willem Dafoe and Joe Mantegna. A spokesman said Madonna was aware the photographs had been recovered.



New idea about IBM

WASHINGTON: A senior Russian official has come up with the disarming idea of loading the world's largest intercontinental ballistic missiles with emergency relief goods, reports AP.

The magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology, in its June 1 issue, said the originator of the "bizarre scheme" is Mikhail Maley, defence adviser of Russian President Boris N Yeltsin.

Maley proposes to replace nuclear warheads in the nose cones of SS-18 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles with six or seven tons of food, blankets, tents and other rescue supplies. The idea would be to respond to emergencies in isolated parts of the world by lobbing an SS-18 over the troublespots and bombing them with sustenance.

The SS-18 is described in Pentagon literature as "the world's largest missile, an awesome combination of range, accuracy and payload."

60-year old nurse hits record \$9.3m Jackpot

RENO: A woman hit a record 9.3 million dollar jackpot playing a progressive 1 dollar slot machine system, reports AP.

The woman bet 12 dollar before hitting the Megabucks jackpot at Harrah's Reno on Saturday night, said Rick Sorensen, a spokesman for International Game Technology, creator of the Megabucks system.

The Megabucks progressive system links 628 slot machines in 127 Nevada casinos to a single jackpot that builds from a base of 3 million dollar.

The winner, a 60-year-old nurse from Sacramento, wasn't identified by name at her request, Sorensen said.

The total payoff was 9,346,450 dollar which the woman will receive in 20 annual instalments.

The previous record Megabucks jackpot of 6.8 million dollar was won in 1988 in Reno.

BRIEFLY

Major hails sanctions on Serbia:

Prime Minister John Major late Saturday welcomed sweeping United Nations sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro, saying that the Serbians must be made to understand that their current behaviour is unacceptable, AFP reports from London.

"In the light of recent developments in Bosnia, it is now right for the international community to take firm action against Serbia, Major said in a statement released by his Downing Street office. He was referring to fierce fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina and heavy bombardments of the former Yugoslav republic's capital Sarajevo which continued Saturday.

Britain's Trade and Industry Ministry meanwhile said the sanctions voted Saturday by the UN Security Council would have only an "infinitesimal" effect on British trade.

WHO call to stop smoking for 24 hrs:

The World Health Organisation on Saturday appealed to smokers worldwide to stop smoking or chewing tobacco "for at least 24 hours" Sunday to mark the UN agency's World No-Tobacco Day, AFP reports from Geneva.

This year's No-Tobacco Day focuses on a smoke-free work place. No tobacco day "is an occasion on which all those who smoke or chew tobacco should cease their harmful and wasteful behaviour for at least 24 hours," he said in a communique.

A WHO survey has found up to 40 per cent of men in industrialized countries to be smokers, against up to 60 per cent in developing countries. Between 20 and 40 per cent of women in industrialized countries, notably in the younger age bracket, smoke against only two to 10 per cent in third world countries.

Lal Singh new mayor of Kathmandu:

Ruling Nepal Congress candidate Prem Lal Singh has been elected Mayor of Kathmandu, beating off his rival from the united Marxist and Communist faction of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP-UML), AFP reports from Kathmandu.

Singh won with a comfortable majority, securing 66,874 votes against 56,810 votes cast for the NCP-UML candidate, Rajendra Shrestha.

Another Nepali Congress candidate, Nabindra Raj Joshi, was elected deputy mayor ahead of the NCP-UML's Keshav Shapit in a closely-fought contest. Joshi got 62,880 votes, while Shapit drew 61,969 votes.

Out of 35 council seats up for grabs in Kathmandu, the Nepali Congress bagged 19, the NCP-UML 14 and two seats went to independents.

17 Chinese held in Japan:

Seventeen Chinese have been arrested on suspicion of illegally entering Japan, police said Sunday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The Chinese, aged between 24 and 54 were detained while attempting to land on the coast of Nagasaki, Kyushu, on Saturday from an 86 tonne wooden boat, they said.

They were without passports and visas and some of them reportedly said they had left coastal Fujian province on May 20.

They were silent when asked to explain their arrival in Japan but were believed to be seeking work, an immigration official said.


Rabuka fails to win majority in polls:

Retired Major General Sitiveni Rabuka Sunday failed to win an outright majority in Fiji's first election since his 1987 coup, forcing the formation of a coalition government, Reuter reports from Suva.

Rabuka's Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) or Fijian political party, the country's largest indigenous Fijian party, won 30 seats in the new 70-seat parliament.

Coalition talks between the SVT, the Fiji Nationalist United Front, independents, and the General Voters Party, dominated by Europeans and Chinese, will take place today, he said.

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