

NAM should continue to exist: Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 6: Malaysia today said the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) should be maintained in case of a North-South conflict in the future, reports PTI.

The Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi said NAM Foreign Ministers had agreed on this at their meeting in Bali earlier this year because they felt a conflict could be expected between the developed and Third World nations in the future.

The chances of such a conflict taking place was more now than the Cold War had ended, he said.

He told newsmen: "If at such time, the smaller countries are unable to unite under a single movement such as NAM, we will face problems in settling the conflict."

Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said on Monday that NAM should continue to exist to serve as a check on the dominance of the powerful West.

Abdullah said the general outlook of NAM foreign ministers was that the group should continue to function as a platform from which smaller and developing countries could defend their interests and rights against bigger powers.

Russia to go ahead with rocket technology deal

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: Russia will fulfill its agreement to provide rocket technology to India and not allow "anyone" to interfere in its bilateral relations with other countries, Russian I. Khaubulov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation said here Wednesday, reports PTI.

The agreement must be fulfilled, he said replying to a question on the proposed sale of Russian cryogenic engines to India and the US retaliatory action against the two countries.

He said "we should not allow anyone to interfere in bilateral relations."

He was of the opinion that the Russia and India should develop the traditions of past and reach new levels of cooperation in the fields of economic cooperation and science and technology.

Replying to another question, Khaubulov said the Russian President, Boris Yeltsin's future would depend on the success of the economic policies being pursued by him.

Party being victimised for political reason: Altaf Hussein

MQM ready to sit with Govt, army to solve problems

KARACHI, Aug 6: The Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) which was forced underground following a recent army crackdown on its supporters, has offered to hold talks with the government to solve problems in Pakistan's troubled southern Sindh province, reports AFP.

Party sources here said the MQM high command has appointed a three-member committee, headed by ousted Karachi Mayor Farooq Sattar, to hold talks with Sindh government representatives and the army, which has an ongoing operation in the province to clean up rebel MQM elements and other political activists.

The MQM is ready to negotiate with every one, a party spokesman said. "We want to show that despite all atrocities the MQM 'instead of adopting any other way, is still looking for peaceful and democratic solutions."

The MQM represents Pakistan's Urdu-speaking Mohajir community.

Leaders of the MQM went into hiding after party mem-

bers were arrested and their headquarters were attacked by a dissident group, which was believed to have had the support of the government and army. Army operations against the group uncovered alleged torture camps where MQM opponents were said to have been kept.

However, MQM Chief Altaf Hussein, who is now living in self exile in London, has repeatedly denied the allegations and maintained that his party was being victimised for political reasons.

In response to perceived "state terrorism" against them, MQM legislators in the ruling provincial and national government coalitions resigned from their positions.

Analysts said that the government's desire to open a political dialogue with the MQM was motivated by the constitutional necessity of holding by-elections for the seats vacated by MQM members.

Officials were said to fear that a MQM chief might again sweep the polls and create

fresh problems for the government. The movement enjoys continued popularity in major cities Karachi and Hyderabad.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and other government officials have reassured MQM leaders that the army's operation in Sindh was against bandits, kidnapers, terrorists and other criminals, and was not aimed at "crushing the MQM as a political force."

MQM leaders were asked to come out of their hideouts and hold a political dialogue with the government on the problems faced by the Mohajir community in Sindh province, where it settled following the 1947 partition of India.

But in the absence of a positive response from the MQM, the provincial government sacked the elected Mayor of Karachi, who belonged to the MQM.

Meanwhile, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah on Tuesday offered a place in the provincial government to the opposition

People's Democratic Alliance (PDA), led by Benazir Bhutto. However, PDA leader Syed Qaim Ali Shah rejected offer, saying that it "lacks sincerity" and is just government propaganda.

"Such serious offers are not made off the cuff on the floor of the house," the PDA leader said. "How can we trust the government when our members are harassed, implicated in false cases and even abducted."

Another report says: The opposition People's Democratic Alliance said here Wednesday that more than 700 people have died in the current monsoon rains in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh, almost nine times the official estimate.

According to hospitals and district administration source, the death toll in the province since the rains started about two weeks ago does not exceed 80.

The oppositions demanded the government to declare the area a disaster area.

Nepal asks Bhutan to help repatriate refugees

KATHMANDU, Aug 6: Prime Minister Girtija Prasad Koirala has written a letter to the King of Bhutan in a bid to send back about 65,000 Nepalese living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal, officials said Thursday, reports AP.

On Wednesday, Koirala told reporters that Nepal is doing its best to repatriate the refugees, who are of Nepalese origin. But he did not elaborate.

The refugees say they are victims of systematic persecution by the Bhutanese government, which wants to drive them out. Bhutan says they left voluntarily and that it wants to ensure only legitimate citizens return.

About 400 fresh arrivals are being reported each day in the overcrowded camps, where 870 people have died of diseases in the last 1 1/2 year.

A top government official said Koirala sent a letter to King Jigme Singye Wangchuk in the last week of July, saying "we should resolve the issue peacefully to facilitate the early return of the refugees with honor."

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, did not elaborate. He said a reply is awaited.

The refugees are ethnic Nepalese who migrated to Bhutan during the last century as farmers, labourers and bureaucrats.

More FIS supporters to be freed

ALGIERS, Aug 6: The president of a human rights group said Wednesday that more of the thousands of Muslim fundamentalists rounded up this winter would be freed shortly from Sahara desert detention camps but did not say how many, reports AP.

Abderrezak Bara-Kamel of the National Observatory for Human Rights told state-run radio that three of seven detention camps have been definitively closed following staggered releases of detainees.

The camp at Reggane, the latest, was closed Tuesday. It is located 1,600 kilometers south of Algiers.

"We must arrive at closing all the camps and freeing all the prisoners," he said, adding that conditions in the camps are "difficult but not tragic."

BRRIEFLY

Bus mishap claims 49 in Nepal: At least 49 people, including a Dutch national, are believed to have drowned when the bus they were travelling in plunged 200 feet (60 metres) into Nepal's torrential Trisuli river, state radio said Wednesday, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

Quoting Home Minister Sher Bahadur Deupa, the radio said only 28 bodies had been found since the accident, which occurred Sunday in the remote Jhapa district, 390 kilometres (240 miles) southeast of here.

The radio said the bus went off the road when a large boulder rolled down a mountain side and landed on its roof, causing the driver to lose control.

The Dutch national was identified as Mark Hekkenam, as spelled by the bus service. His home town was not known.

11 killed as Mafia groups clash: Eleven people were killed in the past 24 hours as rival Mafia groups battled for control of territory in Moscow, ITAR-Tass news agency said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Moscow.

At least five of those killed were from the Caucasus, where the most powerful criminal groups come from and guns are freely available.

Tass quoted police as saying Moscow-based criminals had launched an attack on rival Caucasian groups to win control over the capital.

Three Azeris were killed and two badly wounded on Tuesday in a cafe after a 'battle', Tass said. The attackers fled in a heavy truck, leaving behind piles of empty pistol cartridges.

24 drug traffickers to die in China: Twenty-four drug traffickers were sentenced to death in China on Wednesday at a public trial, the official New China News Agency reported, Reuter says from Beijing.

It said 1.1 tons of narcotics were burnt during the trial, which was held in a sports stadium in Guangxi province that borders the 'golden triangle' poppy-growing region of south-east Asia.

Executions in China are usually carried out with a single bullet to the back of the head and normally within hours of the sentence being passed.

Naga rebels kill 15 troopers: At least 15 security troopers, including a senior police officer, were killed in an ambush by tribal guerrillas in the northeastern state of Assam on Wednesday, a senior official said, AFP reports from Guwahati, India.

Assam state Home Secretary Tapan Lal Barua named the police officer killed as Inspector B K Bora and said the other 14 were all paramilitary Border Security Force men.

The guerrillas, from the outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland, opened fire on the troopers when they were travelling in a vehicle on patrol duty late Wednesday, he said.

The attack took place outside Achatu village in Assam's remote north Cachar district, bordering Nagaland, some 430 kilometres from Guwahati, Assam's main town.

7 newborns die in maternity home: Seven newborns died and three others were in critical condition Thursday in a maternity hospital south of Moscow but the cause remained unknown, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, AP says from Moscow.

Doctors said they suspect a poor quality glucose solution prepared in a drugstore in Bryansk, the city of 385,000 about 200 miles (300 kilometers) south of Moscow where the hospital is located.

All 14 newborns at the hospital were fed the liquid. Epidemiologists and forensic specialists were analysing samples of the solution.

The first baby died on Monday night, and six more had died by Wednesday night. Three others were listed as critical and the four remaining newborns were in fair condition, doctors said.

Israeli minister slates use of undercover squads

JERUSALEM, Aug 6: Education Minister Shulamit Aloni on Wednesday criticized the use of undercover squads in the occupied territories, saying soldiers were being forced to 'swiftly issue death sentences' against Palestinians, reports AP.

A right-wing lawmaker called on Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to fire the minister, who heads Israel's left-wing Meretz coalition, on grounds she was undercutting morale in the army.

The statements were part of a broadening controversy over the units designed to seek out leaders of the Palestinian uprising in the occupied West Bank and Gaza

Bush says he's better-suited to set America's moral tone

NEW YORK, Aug 6: President George Bush, claiming America's moral compass has gone awry, said on Wednesday the president needs to set a moral tone for the nation and he was better suited to do it than democratic rival Bill Clinton, reports Reuter.

Bush's speech on the need to demonstrate moral leadership came just two days after he sought to distance himself from a campaign statement that resurrected charges of marital infidelity against Clinton.

"I look at this office that you've entrusted with me as a lot of things, as more than managing the economy, more than being Commander in-Chief," Bush told about 1,000 people attending a convention of the Knights of Columbus, a group of Catholic

laymen. "I stake my claim to a simple belief. The president should try to set a moral tone for this nation and all around us we see evidence that America's moral compass has gone awry."

Although stopping short of mentioning Clinton by name, Bush drew cheers from the crowd when he asked: "When you're looking to restore America's moral fibre, why buy synthetic when you can get 100 per cent cotton?"

In an interview with USA Today published on Wednesday, Bush said he disapproved of an anti-Clinton statement issued on Sunday by his campaign's political director, Mary Malinin, that mentioned possibly "Bimbo Eruptions".

"It looks like we're trying to interject sleaze into the campaign," said Bush, who had disavowed the statement on Monday.

Opinion polls show Bush far behind Clinton in the November 3 presidential race but in the USA Today interview Bush said he was confident of winning a second term.

"I fell very, very confident about it... I like to take on the odds. And let the big front-runners coast along. We're going to fight back and win," he told the newspaper.

Bush attributed his deficit, in part, to the fact that Clinton has been "ill-defining" him for six months.

"Six months of attack, constant attack. And of course, that's going to make a difference. But that's going to change. I'm in this thing for the next four years, and will be here for the next four," he

said. Despite Bush's repeated statements that he wants to wage his campaign on the high road, the timing of his claim to be a moral leader seemed clearly aimed at nurturing doubts about Clinton's character - an area where Republican strategists believe the Arkansas governor is vulnerable.

Besides allegations by a former Arkansas state worker that she had a 12-year affair with Clinton - charges he denies - there have been questions about his efforts to avoid military service during the Vietnam war and his use of marijuana.

The charges dogged Clinton early this year and almost drove him from the race for the democratic nomination but, for now at least, he seems

to have put those problems behind him.

Bush, who officially becomes the Republican nominee for a second four-year term at the party's August 17-20 convention in Houston, has begun stressing the theme of "family values" in his campaign appearances.

The term has become a catch phrase for Conservatives and other Americans searching for ways to deal with such social problems as crime and drug abuse.

Speaking to the Catholic audience, the president renewed his opposition to abortion, calling it a "national tragedy" and he reminded delegates he has vetoed seven pieces of legislation related to abortion.

"I promise you again today, no matter what the political



SARAJEVO: A building is burning in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo after the shelling during the night August 5. The United Nations decided to suspend for 72 hours all UN operations to keep the Sarajevo Airport open because heavy shelling of the Bosnian capital is preventing humanitarian aid airlifts. — AFP/UNB photo

Clinton for air strikes against Serbs

EAST ST LOUIS, Illinois, Aug 6: Democratic Presidential Candidate Bill Clinton said on Wednesday the United States may have to use air power against Serbian forces to end their alleged atrocities in the former Yugoslavia, reports Reuter.

Speaking in this economically depressed and predominantly Black city at the start of another bus tour into the American heartland, Clinton also told residents the drive to succeed academically was akin to the will to win in sports.

While most of his remarks focused on domestic issues, he reiterated a statement he made on Tuesday calling for an

immediate session of the UN Security Council to try to end Bloodshed in former Yugoslav republics.

According to some US press reports, which have not been confirmed, Serbian forces have set up Nazi-like death camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina and are torturing and executing Muslims and Croats.

Clinton called for investigations under international law of Human Rights violations.

"And we may have to use military force I would begin with air power against the Serbs to try to restore the basic conditions of humanity," he said.

"I don't think we can pre-

determine the outcome of political events in those republics but history has shown us that you can't allow the mass extermination of people and just sit by and watch it happen."

Clinton's bus trip - dubbed "on the road to change America" - will take the Arkansas governor, his running mate, Tennessee Senator Al Gore, and their wives into Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The tour which will run along the Mississippi river, will be closely watched for comparisons with the first 1,000-mile (1,600km) campaign trip that followed the Democratic convention last

Clashes stall 11-nation talks on Nagorno-Karabakh

ROME, Aug 6: International Peace Talks to settle the ethnic struggle in the Transcaucasian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh broke up in disarray on Wednesday while Azerbaijan reported more clashes with Armenian fighters, reports Reuter.

After six days of acrimonious negotiations the former Soviet republics remained far apart over the future of the predominantly Armenian and Christian enclave in Muslim and Turkish-speaking Azerbaijan.

Armenia said it was clear the Rome talks had failed.

The 11-nation talks, hosted by Italy, were supposed to lay the groundwork for a full-blown peace conference in the Belarussian capital Minsk, but by the end of Wednesday's round they could not even agree when to meet again.

The fourth session of Rome Talks this year lurching to an glorious end as Russian proposed hosting an UN official meeting with Azerbaijan and Armenia on Friday.

"While we reaffirm our readiness to pursue the Minsk process, we have to register the failure of the Rome Talks,"

chief Armenian delegate Christian Der-Stepanian said.

"What on Earth is the point of meeting again if the Armenians of a Nagorno-Karabakh do not take part?" He asked.

The enclave's Armenians walked out of the negotiations on Tuesday saying the meeting's Italian hosts had reneged on a promise to grant them a special status.

In the enclave itself, where Azeri and Armenian troops regularly use heavy weapons and even aircraft in pitched battles, the Azeri new Agency Turan said on Wednesday

Belarus forest fires increase radiation levels

MOSCOW, Aug 6: Prolonged forest fires in Belarus have sharply increased radiation levels by kicking up dust and ash from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant explosion, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported Thursday, reports AP.

Fallout from the April 1986 explosion at Chernobyl in neighboring Ukraine contaminated dozens of villages in both republics.

Radioactive topsoil was removed from some areas, but many fields, forests and settlements were left untouched and 100,000 people abandoned their homes.

Peace talks begin in Mozambique

ROME, Aug 6: Historic peace talks opened here Wednesday between Mozambique's President Joaquim Chissano and rebel chief Afonso Dhlakama with statements of good faith on either side at their first meeting in 16 years of civil war, reports AP.

Speaking after preliminary discussions, Chissano stated his willingness "to introduce a ceasefire as soon as possible," stressing he would "guarantee the security of all Renamo members" following the signature of a peace accord, spokesmen said.

Dhlakama, for his part, said he "had confidence in president Chissano," but reiterated Renamo's insistence on security guarantees ahead of a ceasefire.

Off the Record

Dead man wins primary for County Commission

LAKIN: Voters nominated Alvin L. "Tuffy" Coerber for reelection to the Kearny County Commission even though he was dead, reports AP.

Coerber, who died July 20 from a heart attack, defeated Stephen Gestenslager 136-58 to be the Republican candidate in November for a seat on the Commission.

Coerber, who was 73, had filed for re-election earlier this year.

Write-in Democratic candidate Tom Cole got 75 votes, enough to put him on the general election ballot.

If Coerber should get the most votes in November, local election officials would nominate someone for the job. The nomination would require the governor's approval.

Sex scandal victim preaches for safe sex

LONDON: An actress involved in a sex scandal with a British Cabinet minister in July has taken part in an anti-AIDS campaign, preaching safe sex by using condoms, reports Reuter.

Antonia De Sancta 30, whose affair with National Heritage Secretary David Mellor was disclosed by newspapers after their telephone calls were bugged, modelled an anti-AIDS T-shirt at a meeting arranged by an AIDS charity.

Newspapers on Wednesday quoted her as saying during the meeting of the terrence higgins trust charity: "AIDS is an issue that affects everyone." Asked whether she insisted on partners using condoms, she replied: "Yes, always".

Mellor, who is married with two children and has never acknowledged the affair, resisted calls from some politicians to quit after receiving backing from Prime Minister John Major.

Teacher jailed for forcing students to eat cow dung

BEIJING: A court in China has jailed a teacher who became so angry with his unruly students that he forced them to eat cow dung.

Liu Deshun, age 26, was jailed for two years by a court in northern Hubei province for forcing students in his lower school class room to troop outside and eat cow dung as punishment for talking, fighting, or handing in their homework late.

"Some of the students began vomiting without stop after they ate the cow dung, which affected the normal studying process". The official Beijing Evening News said on Wednesday.

The court said Liu, who used the punishment 56 times in 1991, had resorted to "barbarous methods" to keep students in check.

He won't witness extermination of pets

An 84-year-old man, who had an estimated 300 pet rats running loose around his house, was hauled off by police so he would not witness the extermination of his pets, a newspaper reported Wednesday, says AFP.

The Winnipeg Sun quoted police officers as saying they decided to take Michael S Chumardo away when he tried to stop exterminators killing the rats.

But they were not arresting the man; they explained they were simply taking him to a restaurant for breakfast so he would not see his rodents killed.

The extermination order was made after Schumardo was forced by health authorities to leave his house which had been declared unfit for human habitation.

The rats, deprived of the food Schumardo provided them, then roamed neighbor's houses looking for tidbits.

China denies move to hold talks with Tibetans

BEIJING, Aug 6: China's foreign ministry denied today that Beijing was planning to hold high-level talks with Tibetan exiles over their decades-old demand for independence, reports Reuter.

"The report is groundless," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said in response to a reporter's question.

Karma Gyatsho, a member of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile in India, said on Wednesday a team headed by Gyalo-dundrup, brother of Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, would visit China shortly for "open-minded talks".

Dundrup was reported to have paid a secret visit to China in June following a rare official invitation from Beijing. China later denied that the visit took place.