

Army officer killed in Kashmir battle

SOPORE (India), June 7: Guerrillas ambushed an army patrol after it searched a village in Jammu-Kashmir state, and one officer was killed and another injured, police sources said Monday, reports AP.

The soldiers who survived the ambush Sunday night jumped out of their vehicles on a dirt road and opened fire on the militants, killing three of them in a 40-minute gun battle, the sources said.

A colonel was killed and a major general injured, the sources said. The Hindustan Times identified them Monday as Col. J. Singh and Maj. Gen. Inder Verma. Two other soldiers and two civilians were injured, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

The patrol had spent Sunday searching Budhan Rafabad, a village 15 kilometres (nine miles) north of the city of Sopore.

As they do in many other areas of Jammu-Kashmir, the soldiers forced all men in the village out of their homes, sat them in the street, and had a disguised guerrilla informer drive by in a car so he could identify suspected rebels among the civilians.

After they are taken into custody, the soldiers search all the homes in the village for hidden guns and weapons.

As the soldiers were returning to Sopore in four or five military vehicles, rebels ambushed them from behind trees.

Militants in Jammu-Kashmir, India's only state with a Muslim majority, have been fighting for independence for three years.

More than 6,000 people have been killed in clashes involving army and paramilitary forces from India, a nation whose population of 875 million people.



Jamsheed Marker, Pakistan's ambassador to the UN answers questions as he arrives for Security Council consultations Sunday. At least 22 Pakistani troops were killed in battles in Somalia and nonessential UN personnel were told to prepare to leave the country. —AFP/UNB photo

Flash flood in Tripura

NEW DELHI, June 7: Thousands of people have been stranded and left homeless as flash floods caused by heavy monsoon rains submerged vast tracts of India's remote northeast, the Press Trust of India reported today, says AFP.

Officials in Tripura state told the news agency that uninterrupted showers for the past three days had caused the Manu and Deo rivers to spill over, inundating scores of low-lying villages and towns.

They said some 10,000 villagers had been marooned as the gushing waters engulfed four districts.

Twenty-five relief camps have been set up for the victims, they added.

Assam and Meghalaya states, which border Bangladesh, have also been hit by the floods with rivers crossing the danger level and still rising.

Off the Record

Witch doctor to catch thief

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's central bank will investigate complaints that a local bank forced staffers to drink a witch doctor's potion in efforts to find a possible thief, the newspaper The Star reported Sunday, says AP.

The witch doctor was called in after the bank discovered 5,000 ringgit (dhs 1,923) was missing and a body search of staffers did not turn up the money, the paper said.

Some Malaysians believe that an unrepentant thief who drinks a witch doctor's "magic water" will throw up, have stomach cramps or even suffer from an incurable mystery illness.

The Star quoted an unidentified officer of the central bank, Bank Negara, as saying: "We view the matter seriously and we will take action based on the outcome of our investigations."

The paper did not identify the local bank in Kelantan state, on the northeast coast of peninsular Malaysia.

It said the money was discovered missing on March 31. Bank employees complained to the National Union of Bank Employees over what they called the manager's primitive methods, and the bank management formally apologized to the employees on May 10, it added.

The money still has not been found, the paper said.

Free-falling president

TOKYO: U S President Bill Clinton's popularity took another dip Monday, this time across the Pacific ocean in Japan, where a poll showed his numbers plunging to almost 20 per cent, reports AFP.

Clinton, whose popularity in his home country is free-falling following a series of gaffes by his young administration, is now seen in a negative light by more than half of Japanese, said the poll.

The survey, conducted in May by Nippon Research Center Ltd. showed that the healthy 62 per cent approval rating Clinton enjoyed in February had tumbled to 44 per cent.

His negative ratings, expressed in a polite Japanese "not favourably impressed," went up to 51 per cent, shooting up from 34 per cent in February.

Clinton suffered most in the area of trade, where there has been discord between the Clinton administration and Japan. The survey found that five per cent of those polled had confidence in Clinton's trade policies toward Japan, while 56 per cent did not. Thirty-nine per cent said they do not know.

The Japanese also appeared leery of Clinton as a world leader, with only 15 per cent saying they could expect Clinton to show leadership in global politics.

Thirty-eight per cent said they "cannot really expect" world leadership from Clinton, and 47 per cent said they did not know, the survey said.

The poll covered 2,000 men and women aged 18 or older, of which 69 per cent responded, the company said.

Study on homosexuality

ORLANDO: After years of divisive debate, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is considering launching a three-year study on homosexuality, reports AP.

The Committee on Human Sexuality of the 205th General Assembly voted 32-3 Sunday to recommend a church-wide study in response to more than 30 requests from regional church bodies that want the church to either strengthen or relax its ban on homosexual clergy.

Under the proposal, the ban on openly gay clergy would stand, but homosexual Presbyterians who have not made their sexuality public would be allowed to participate in the study without retribution.



West's human rights dangerous to Yangon?

BANGKOK, June 7: A senior Myanmar junta member said Sunday that people who support western-style human rights should be weeded out of local government and other jobs in Myanmar that deal with the public, state-run Radio Yangon reported, says AFP.

It quoted Lieutenant General Tin Oo, who spoke to a gathering of local government officials one day before the nations constitutional convention reconvenes in Yangon, as saying western-style human rights were dangerous to Myanmar.

The government should clean out those people as soon as possible, the broadcast.

monitored here, quoted the general as saying. He did not specify what should be done with these people.

Government officials should promote Myanmar ethics, heritage and culture, said Tin Oo, who is second secretary of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the formal name of the ruling junta.

SLORC is following its own plan to develop Myanmar and people should adhere to its teachings, the general said.

"We must rule ourselves our own way according to our traditions," Tin Oo said.

BRIEFLY

Kabul denies Tajik charges:

The Afghan government on Sunday denied allegations that it launched an artillery attack on the Tajik border last week, the official Kabul radio said, reports Reuters from Islamabad.

The radio, monitored in Islamabad, quoted a Foreign Ministry statement as saying that no such attack was made on the territory of the "brotherly country of Tajikistan."

Three Russian border guards were killed and four wounded at a border post on the frontier between Tajikistan and Afghanistan last Saturday in an attack the Russian foreign ministry said was launched from Afghan territory. The Russians were guarding the border under an accord with Tajikistan's pro-Moscow government.

Tajikistan threatened Kabul with retaliation if there were any further attacks on border posts.

Sanchez claims victory: Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada of the opposition Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) claimed victory Sunday in Bolivia's presidential race. AFP reports from La Paz.

He made the announcement on Channel 2 television, which minutes earlier announced the "unquestionable victory" of the MNR in at least six of the country's nine departments.

Channel 2 said the latest results showed Sanchez de Lozada leading by seven percentage points over second-place Hugo Banzer, a former military ruler-turned-democracy advocate with the ruling Patriotic Accord coalition.

7 Ossetians shot dead:

Seven Ossetians were shot dead early Sunday by unidentified attackers who then stole their three tankers full of petrol, the deputy interior minister of Russia's northern Ossetia region said, reports AFP from Moscow.

The killers fled in the trucks after the attack in the mountain village of Chmi, Colonel Soslan Sitkovoy told the Itar-Tass news agency.

A Caucasian republic of the Russian Federation, northern Ossetia was last autumn the scene of bitter ethnic clashes between Ossetians and Inguches which left several hundred dead.

A state of emergency is still in force over a large part of the country.

Cop kills 4 Filipinos:

A policeman went berserk and killed four people in a shooting spree before he was shot dead later by authorities, officials said Monday, AP reports from Iligan.

Sgt. Jimmy Baltinga stepped out of a bar Sunday and opened fire with a M-16 rifle, killing four passers-by and wounding five others, said police chief Fidel Bolano in the town of Malaybalay, 830 kilometres (520 miles) south of Manila.

Among the victims were a little boy and a policeman. Baltinga then seized a bus and ordered the driver to go to a neighboring town, where he was shot dead after refusing to surrender to waiting police.

A policeman was killed and three passengers were wounded in the police attack on the bus, but it was not immediately known who was responsible for those casualties.

Bolano said police are investigating why Baltinga went berserk.

ROK agrees to hold talks with DPRK

SEOUL, June 7: South Korea said today it would accept a North Korean offer to hold talks at the border on Tuesday but insisted Pyongyang's nuclear programme should top the agenda, reports Reuters.

In a letter to the North, South Korean Prime Minister Hwang In-Sung said two southern delegates would be sent to the border village of Panmunjom at 10 am (0100 GMT) on Tuesday.

But he said the two sides should first try to resolve a dispute over the North's refusal to allow access to two suspect nuclear sites — a condition that the North has spurned in more than two weeks of haggling over setting.

Ghost of Babri Mosque continues to haunt India's politics

NEW DELHI, June 7: Six months after it was razed by hundreds of frenzied Hindus, the ghost of the Babri Mosque continues to haunt India's political landscape, reports AP.

The government is still in the dark on how to keep Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's promise to re-construct the 16th century Islamic shrine in Ayodhya, gentile reminders from the Islamic bloc notwithstanding.

Muslims, India's largest religious minority, have yet to recover from the shock of the December 6 sacrifice. The community is divided on re-building the fallen mosque.

The secular opposition blames the Rao government for failing to protect the shrine or preventing Hindu fanatics from building a makeshift Hindu temple for Lord Rama on its rubble.

The issue, after claiming nearly 2,000 lives in Hindu-Muslim violence since December, remains a powderkeg.

destruction, and have renewed claims over two other ancient mosques in northern India.

December 6 has given our youth a sense of self-confidence, said Murl Manohar Joshi of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian Peoples Party), which was in the forefront of the drive against the mosque.

Added Kalyan Singh, a party strongman: The dispute (in Ayodhya) will remain alive until a Rama temple is built there.

On Friday, a top Hindu leader announced that June 13 would be celebrated nation-wide as Hindu awakening day, while the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) is to meet June 22-23 to decide the future course of action.

The powerful RSS, or National Volunteers Corps, was one of three Hindu groups outlawed by New Delhi after the mosque razing. The ban was revoked on two of them, including the RSS, by a tribunal Friday.

"The RSS represents the resurgent Hindu movement in the country," RSS General Secretary H V Seshadri said after the court order. It must expand its network, particularly in the rural and backward areas.

Few Indians share the upbeat mood of the aggressive Hindu camp. Last month, a senior minister, Arjun Singh, shocked the ruling Congress (I) Party by demanding that it publicly apologise for the mosque's destruction.

The apology would pave the way for re-shaping the psyche of the minorities in the aftermath of the tragic events leading up to Ayodhya and beyond," he said. The Congress (I) turned down the demand saying it is the Hindu groups which should apologise to the nation.

Muslims say younger members of the community are increasingly talking about avenging the humiliation of Ayodhya.

India ceased to be a secular country on December 6, said Rashid Shaz, a Muslim theologian who organised a parliament of Indian Muslims here to discuss coping with growing Hindu fundamentalism.

Speakers at the gathering called on Muslims to start weapons training to take on Hindu militants.

The young Muslim is slowly turning militant, Shaz said. He thinks the Hindu fundamentalist is gaining strength and the state is unable to protect minorities. This is a new trend.

But Imtiaz Ahmed, a social scientist said: The large majority of Muslims are settling down to a sense of complacency that the situation has normalised and nothing more is required to be done.

New Delhi sacked four BJP state governments in December, saying their leaders were linked to the then outlawed RSS. Elections are due this year in the four provinces.

That political commentators say, only means more trouble.

China yet to explain nature of Li's illness

BEIJING, June 7: Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng's illness, officially a severe cold, entered its seventh week Monday without any explanation from the government about its true nature, reports AP.

The People's Daily reported today that Li, 65, had sent a message Sunday to the aerospace industry urging it to face up to new challenges. But the Communist Party paper said nothing about his state of health.

The Foreign Ministry has been repeating since the beginning of April that Li is "recovering" without giving any other details.

Other special Tonys were given to:

Clinton joins Kennedy family

ARLINGTON, Virginia, June 7: President Bill Clinton joined the Kennedy family and a crowd of thousands Sunday at Arlington National Cemetery to honour Robert Kennedy, who was assassinated 25 years ago, reports AP.

"May the good lord hold Robert Kennedy close and may we, too, hold on ... to the example of his life and its continuing meaning and challenge to all of us, said Joseph Kennedy, the son of the slain 1968 presidential candidate.

Lyrics: "The Who's Tommy" Pete Townshend, music and lyrics.

Director, play: George C Wolfe "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches."

Leading Chinese dissident rearrested

BEIJING, June 7: The Chinese authorities in Shanghai have rearrested leading Chinese dissident Zhang Xiaoliang, who had been held for 24 hours last week, his wife said today.

Four of Zhang's friends have also begun a hunger strike outside Shanghai's City Hall to protest his arrest, Yan Huili told AFP by telephone.

"My husband was picked up Saturday at 6-30 pm and I don't know where they took him," Yan said, adding that she had received no word on his condition.

"I believe the police are accusing him of having organised a demonstration and given interviews to foreign journalists," she said, but "no reason was given during his arrest."

US for trade ban on Haiti

MANAGUA, June 7: The United States on Sunday said it was consulting with the United Nations to clamp a worldwide oil and trade embargo on Haiti to force the military-backed government to restore democracy, reports Reuters.

President Clinton directed Secretary of State Warren Christopher ... on the possibility of creating a worldwide sanctions programme against Haiti,"

Under-Secretary of State Clifton Wharton said at the Organisation of American States meeting in Managua.

Wharton was addressing a special Organisation of American States (OAS) meeting on Haiti and US sources said he was referring to an oil and trade embargo.

Kawakita dead

TOKYO, June 7: Kazuko Kawakita, who helped introduce artistic European and American films to Japan, died of respiratory failure in Tokyo on Monday. She was 53, reports AP.

Kawakita, the only daughter of the late Nagamasa Kawakita, president of Toa Film Corp studied in Britain, France, Italy and Germany, before returning to Japan in 1959.

In 1968, Kawakita set up Shibata organization Inc a major importer of works by European and American directors.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide was toppled in a September 1991 military coup.

Ruling party wins Spanish elections

MADRID, June 7: Spain's ruling socialists garnered 38.68 per cent of the vote in Sunday's general elections, winning 159 seats in the lower house and the Peoples Party 34.82 per cent and 141 seats, according to official results with virtually all ballots counted, reports AFP.

Turnout was 77.28 per cent against 69.9 per cent in 1989.

In the 1989 legislative elections, the socialists garnered 39.8 per cent (175 seats), the Peoples Party 25.9 per cent (107 seats), the United Left 9.1 per cent (17), the CDS 7.9 per cent (14), The Catalan Party five per cent (18), the Basque Party 1.2 per cent (5), the Canary Island Coalition 0.3 per cent (1) and the Basque Separatists 1.1 per cent and four seats.

After Sunday's vote, the socialists will have 96 seats in the upper house and the Conservative People's Party 93 seats, according to an official tally of 99.80 per cent of the vote.

Tony Award winners

Winners of Broadway's 1993 Tony Awards announced Sunday in ceremonies televised by CBS from the Gershwin Theatre, reports AP.

Play: "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches."

Musical: "Kiss of the Spider Woman."

Revival: "Anna Christie."

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