

Govt-LTTE talks on release of 39 securitymen resume

COLOMBO, June 21: The Sri Lankan government today resumed stalled talks with Tamil Tiger guerrillas to secure the release of 39 security personnel in rebel custody, official sources here said, reports AFP.

Government negotiator Ananda Weerasekera, who held talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) over the weekend, flew back to their stronghold in the northern Jaffna peninsula today to resume negotiations, the sources said.

"He went back this morning with a good response from us," Defence Secretary Walter Fernando said, without disclosing the government's response to the conditions laid down by the LTTE.

13 ANC activists killed in Natal

DURBAN, South Africa, June 21: At least 13 people were killed in a series of attacks in Natal province's troubled Murchison area late Sunday, police said today, reports AFP.

A local spokesman for the African National Congress (ANC), Dumisani Makhaye, said the dead were all ANC members.

Police spokesman Major Bala Naidoo said hooded men raided a house in the Lusaka district of Murchison on Sunday evening, killing six people.

EC pledges efforts to keep Bosnia as unified state

COPENHAGEN, June 21: The European Community pledged efforts Sunday to keep Bosnia-Herzegovina as a unified state and dusted off an old plan to divide the battered republic into separate Serb, Croat and Muslim regions, reports AFP.

EC mediator Lord David Owen presented the latest diplomatic gambit at a meeting of the community's foreign ministers ahead of its two-day summit opening Monday, said Luxembourg chief diplomat Jacques Poos.

Poos said that the proposal, to be presented by Owen in Geneva after discussions at the summit, would be a "substantial change" over a partition scheme unveiled last Wednesday by Serbia and Croatia.

That plan called for a loose confederation of three ethnically distinct nations to end the brutal 14-month conflict but was immediately rejected by Alija Izetbegovic, President of Bosnia's Muslim-led government.

The latest EC proposal would call on the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, who currently control all but 10 per cent of the former Yugoslav Republic, to cede land to the Muslims, Poos said.

He did not say how much, but the aim would be to create "viable" Muslim entities around the northwest Bosnian enclaves of Bihać and the south-central capital of Sarajevo, with access to the Adriatic sea.

Izetbegovic was due here Monday to discuss the plan, based on a proposal advanced by the EC in March of 1992 and first accepted, then rejected, by the Sarajevo government. A month later Bosnia's independence was recognised and war broke out.

The scheme was subsequently overtaken by a blueprint crafted by Owen and UN envoy Cyrus Vance to divide Bosnia into 10 semi-autonomous provinces. This idea is now dead in the face of the Serb's rejection.

Izetbegovic was also due Monday in Zagreb for talks with other members of the Bosnian presidency amid growing speculation that he was to be replaced by rival Fikret Abdic.

Danish Foreign Minister Niels Helveg Petersen, whose country holds the rotating EC presidency said his colleagues here agreed the "basic principles of the territorial integrity of Bosnia must be implemented".

Petersen told a news conference he would have preferred to see the Vance-Owen plan implemented but "things have happened, the situation has deteriorated very considerably and we have to face up to that fact."

He said the community would press efforts to "protect UN-designate Muslim 'safe areas' in Bosnia, keep up its campaign of sanctions against Belgrade."



SARAJEVO: Regular Bosnian soldiers run under sniper fire towards the front line June 20 near the centre of the besieged capital. Fighting and Serb sniping continue despite ceasefire. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

She sends muted apology!

LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth has sent a muted apology to a family she frightened by roaring past them at the wheel of her luxury Jaguar limousine as they strolled in a royal park, reports Reuter.

In a letter written by her Private Secretary, thought to be the first of its kind to a subject, the Queen expressed "concern for any alarm or inconvenience" she may have caused. The Sun tabloid newspaper splashed the letter on its front page along with a picture of the Dawson family posed in front of Windsor Castle, one of the Queen's homes near London.

Nigel Dawson, 34, shouted as she sped through the park surrounding Windsor Castle at 60 MPH (97 KPH).

But the Queen ignored his protests, the Sun said.

Dawson who was having a day out with his wife and three sons, complained to police.

The speed limit on roads in the park is 38 MPH (61 KPH).



Bride dies two hours after marrying

LEEDS, England: A British woman, who was determined to be a bride despite her heart problems, dropped dead just two hours after marrying the man she loved, reports Reuter.

Irene Guy, 48, was adamant that she would marry Brian Holmes at a village near the northern city of Leeds and left a hospital where she was being treated for angina against doctor's advice.

As the couple strolled arm-in-arm after their wedding reception on Thursday, Guy's legs gave way after she suffered a heart attack. Ambulance staff struggled in vain to revive her.

"I told her I didn't mind if we had to postpone the wedding," Holmes, 44, told reporters on Sunday. "But she just insisted on going ahead that day."

"I just cannot believe it," he said. "One minute I was the happiest man in the world and then the next minute my wife was dead."

BRIEFLY

Dalai Lama in Montreal: The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet, arrived in Montreal Sunday to take part in an international congress on psychology, and for talks with religious and political leaders, reports AFP from Montreal.

Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs Barbara McDougall welcomed the 1989 Nobel peace laureate, who is on a six-day private visit. The two held a brief private meeting at a downtown hotel.

The Dalai Lama, who is on his third visit to Canada since 1980, later Sunday was to meet with Chinese students active in the alliance for democracy in China.

As a guest of the Canada-Tibet Solidarity Committee, he was scheduled to take part from yesterday through Wednesday in an international symposium on trans-cultural psychology here.

Armed Pole held in Rome: A Pole armed with a sharp sword was detained on Sunday after it was found in his rucksack just before Pope John Paul was due to pass by, police said, reports Reuter from Rome.

The man, identified as Jan Bulka, 33, made no attempt to extract the sword and the Polish-born pontiff was never in any danger, they said.

A spokesman for the para-military Carabinieri said Bulka was released after a few hours but would be charged with illegal possession of offensive weapons. He told investigators he kept the sword for self-defence.

The fact that he was quickly released appeared to indicate that police were not treating the incident seriously. But security around the Pope, who was on a visit to mountain areas of central Italy, was immediately heightened.

Quake claims 24 in Iran: Twenty-four people were killed and 49 others injured when an earthquake rocked northwestern Iran early Sunday, press reports said yesterday, AFP says from Tehran.

The reports said the quake, which registered 4.6 on the open-ended Richter scale, struck the town of Moandowab and the area south of the Orumtyeh Lake in Iranian Azerbaijan at 10:18 am (0548 GMT).

There were no further details.

Three Sikhs killed in Punjab: Three militants were killed in separate incidents in Punjab since last night, reports PTI from Chandigarh.

Two militants who were being escorted by the police were killed when a gang of militants ambushed them near village Sehbaz in Jagraon police district Sunday night. The killed were identified as Nirmal Singh and Gora.

Another militant Major Singh was killed in an encounter with a police patrol party near village Ghatta Wali in Ferozpur district. One AK-27 rifle with three magazines and some cartridges were seized from the spot.

UN resumes relief supply to Kabul: The United Nations said on Sunday it has resumed relief convoys to Kabul from neighbouring Pakistan after a two-month suspension because of fighting between rival guerrilla groups, reports Reuter from Islamabad.

For the first time since the end of April, UN convoys transporting urgently needed relief supplies have successfully reached Kabul, the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA) said.

Two convoys of 27 trucks carried 373 tonnes of wheat and wheat flour, 10 tonnes of medical supplies and 20,000 litres of fuel for displaced persons in Kabul, a UNOCHA statement in Islamabad said.

Kabul's municipality and non-governmental organisations based there were distributing the supplies, it said.

800 bandits killed, 5600 arrested Pak army completes Sindh clean-up operation

KARACHI, June 21: The Pakistani army has completed one year of a controversial operation against terrorists, bandits and anti-social elements in Sindh, claiming a sharp drop in the crime rate, reports AFP.

But major ethnic groups in the southern province are aggrieved by the political fallout of the operation, which involves thousands of troops, para-military rangers and police.

Since May 23 last year when the clean-up operation began, 800 bandits have been killed, 150 gangs, 70 per cent of them bandits, rounded up and huge quantity of weapons seized, a senior military officer said. Some 5,600 people were arrested and 11,000 illegal arms seized during the period, he said.

The officer also said car thefts had dropped by 80 per cent in urban centres of the province.

Sindh chief Minister Syed Muzaffar Hussain Shah has said, the army had brought down the crime rate to an extent that people are able to travel between different cities without any fear.

He also recommended that the army, which has said its job is complete but has yet to withdraw, should continue to handle the law and order job assigned to it by the Federal Government.

But Altaf Hussain, founding father of ethnic-based Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), which lost its power in the urban centres as a result of the operation, is bitter about the deployment.

In a statement from London where he resides, Hussain said the operation had targeted Mohajirs, Urdu-speaking migrants from India after the 1947 partition of the Sub-Continent.

The MQM was formed by Hussain in the early 1980s to protect the interests of the settlers.

Activists of the faction led by Hussain were charged with criminal activities and running torture cells to ensure MQM control.

A Sindh nationalist of the Jyoti Sindh Organization, who asked not to be named, also complained about the operation and alleged it had political overtones.

"Many Sindh youth were arrested and tortured to death on false allegations of terrorism, banditry and other crimes," he said.

Rival leaders in Cambodia to share ministries

PHNOM PENH, June 21: Phnom Penh government Prime Minister Hun Sen and FUNCINPEC leader Prince Norodom Ranariddh have agreed to jointly head the key interior and defence ministries in the new coalition government currently under negotiation, Phnom Penh spokesman Khieu Kanharith said Sunday, reports AFP.

In addition to Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh there will be two executive ministers, one from each of the two former warring factions, Khieu Kanharith said.

An arrangement for general staff of Cambodia's new unified armed forces has also been reached.

"The general staff will come from the Cambodian People's Party and the Deputy General Staff from FUNCINPEC," he said.

The decisions were made Friday in a two hour meeting between the two leaders.

Security forces kill 17 Kashmir militants

SRINAGAR, India, June 21: Security forces killed 17 separatist militants and lost two of their own men in gunbattles in Kashmir at the weekend, police said on Sunday in Srinagar, the Indian State's Summer Capital, reports Reuter.

The clashes erupted in the Kupwara and Baramulla districts along the border with Pakistan after security forces intensified operations to flush out militants.

Three civilians were also killed in separate incidents, the police said.

The latest killings take the past week's death toll in separatist violence to more than 90.

The police said, that during the week security forces also killed about 40 militants in the latest drive, to stamp out rebellion aimed at securing independence for the divided northern state or its union with Pakistan.

Some 30 unarmed civilians were killed in separatist grenade or bomb attacks or shot by security forces, and five soldiers were killed in clashes with the rebels, the police said.

Senior Jammu and Kashmir state officials said, "The new Government offensive was aimed at creating suitable conditions for the region's first state assembly elections in six years."

Both India and Pakistan claim sovereignty over mountainous Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in predominantly Hindu India, and have fought two wars over the region since independence from Britain in 1947.

Police and hospital sources say a total of about 12,000 people have been killed in more than three years of rebellion.

Settlement impossible without Jerusalem, says Ashrawi

WASHINGTON, June 21: Jerusalem emerged this past week as a stumbling block in the Middle East peace talks after negotiators sidestepped the sensitive issue for 20 months, reports AFP.

There can be no settlement without Jerusalem, Hanan Ashrawi, spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation, said in an interview with Israeli reporters.

The Palestinians see autonomy for the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as necessarily also including the eastern part of the city.

In Ashrawi's view, Israel has forced Palestinians to put the city's status on the negotiating table with its policies in the area, particularly by cutting off East Jerusalem from the other occupied territories.

Since the tenth round of talks began between Israel and its Arab neighbours on June 15, the Palestinians consistently have raised the Jerusalem issues, both with the

Israelis and officials with President Bill Clinton's administration.

Israel's Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, accused the



Hanan Ashrawi
Palestinians on Saturday of using the Jerusalem question to block the peace talks.

Blast rocks Madrid again

MADRID, June 21: A second explosion rocked central Madrid early today, shortly after a car bomb killed at least seven people and seriously injured 10 others in the same area, police said, reports AFP.

They added that five of the dead were soldiers. The two other victims were civilians driving through the area when the bomb went off, police said.

It was not known whether the second explosion caused any casualties, initial reports said, the car bomb went off as a military lorry was passing through downtown Madrid at the height of the morning rush-hour.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the explosion although police indicated that the Basque separatist group Eta was responsible.

The attack came two weeks after the general election in which Premier Felipe Gonzalez was re-elected but his Socialist Worker's Party lost its overall majority.

Gonzalez has been holding talks with Basque and Catalan parties to urge them to take part in a coalition government.

Ramos expects no more coup attempts

NEW YORK, June 20: Philippine President Fidel Ramos says he doesn't expect a repeat of the military coup attempts or violence from communist insurgents and Muslim separatists that plagued predecessor Cory Aquino, according to Newsweek international magazine, reports Reuter.

Ramos, who marks his first year in office June 30, was interviewed by the magazine for its issue going on sale today. The interview was released on Sunday.

"Since I was elected we've been able to bring leaders of the Muslim secessionists and the military rebels to the conference table and we've had a meeting abroad with communist insurgency leaders," he said.

"We want to talk as brother Filipinos. I think we've moved forward quite a bit."

"... I don't see any more coup attempts. Our people are tired of revolutionary violence and look forward to peaceful growth and development as the better alternative," Ramos said.

He also said he thought his country was poised for development.

"We have put many reforms in place — better political stability and peace and order, new incentives for expanded trade and investment. We can compete at higher levels."

Channel tunnel's first test train makes journey

LILLE, France, June 21: Slowly but surely, a French high-speed TGV train passed through the channel tunnel to reach English soil for the first time on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Tunnel operator Eurotunnel SA/Plac and French state railway SNCF said the train a grande vitesse conducted the first of a series of trial runs ahead of the tunnel opening, set for between December 1993 and June 1994.

Work trains operate in the tunnel but the TGV, dubbed Eurostar, was the first passenger train to pass under the channel.

The TGV can cruise at 300 KPH (190 MPH) on special fast track in France and will eventually move at 160 KPH (100 MPH) through the tunnel. On Sunday it was towed at the relative snail's pace of 30 KPH (19 MPH) per hour through the tunnel.

It left from Coquelles in northern France and took two hours to complete the 37 km (23 mile) journey to Folkestone in southern England. Eurotunnel said that when the route opens the journey will take less than 30 minutes.

The TGV, which had seven coaches, was about half the length of the trains that will run on the public service.

It is set for four months of tests in south east England.

Israeli choppers blast houses in S Lebanon

MARJAYOUN, Lebanon, June 21: Israeli helicopters blasted houses in two South Lebanon villages on Sunday in retaliation for guerrillas firing rockets into northern Israel, reports Reuter.

Two helicopters fired three rockets into two houses in Yater village and three rockets into three houses in Jbel Al-Batoun outside Israel's "Security zone" in the south, security sources said.

There were no casualties in the air raids, launched in revenge for guerrillas firing six Katyusha rockets into northern Israel and a dozen others into the security zone, the sources said.

Russia's struggle to bury communism makes kids vulnerable

MOSCOW, June 21: "I've got no dad, and my mummy drinks ... she's always hitting me, and I run away from her," said the little girl matter-of-factly, reports Reuter.

Sashaka, a shy, pretty six-year-old with a fringe of mousy hair, is sitting on the knee of a care worker at the Moscow Police Detention Centre for children who are battered, abandoned or have run away from home.

Living here alongside victims of parental cruelty are truants, young offenders, child thieves and even prostitutes as young as 12. Police bring in 30 to 50 youngsters a day.

Some, like Sashaka, will be taken away from their parents and placed in orphanages. Most will be sent back home.

"They bring us kids from three to 18 who for some reason have left home. Either they've been left destitute or abandoned by their parents with nowhere to live and no adult care, or they've committed some crime and require immediate detention," said Deputy Director Pyotr Layenko.

"Our job is to help that destitute child, establish where he lives and send him home."

Russia's struggle to bury communism and build a new free market has brought hard times to millions of families and made children specially vulnerable.

According to one medical expert, some 2,000 children and adolescents committed suicide in 1992, most of them

victims of cruelty in the home. About 5,000 homeless children were picked up from the streets of Moscow alone.

The police centre houses about 300 children at any one time, at least one and a half times as many as in Soviet times. About 30 are of preschool age, including several who were simply abandoned.

"They come from broken families or those where the parents are alcoholics," Layenko said.

"They abandon them in train stations, or they leave them behind at home and go off somewhere ... the child wants to eat and none pays him any attention."

The centre provides a temporary home to children from all over the former Soviet

Union, including Caucasians and central Asians who speak little or no Russian but come to Moscow to run away from home or enjoy the romance of travel, Layenko said.

Boys and girls are segregated in separate four-storey white concrete blocks surrounded by high walls. The population fluctuates.

Three-fifths have broken the law in some way — the boys mostly stealing, the girls frequently engaged in prostitution.

Lately they've been getting much younger. We get 12 and 13-year-old girls with venereal disease, but most begin about 14. Before it was about 16 or 17, but nowadays they're taking up the oldest profession at a younger age, said the Deputy

Director.

Children suffering from illnesses like measles and rubella, diphtheria are increasingly frequent. Most of the children have their heads shaved to get rid of lice.

But despite the grim background to its work, the centre is more like a school than a prison, and the staff appear caring and concerned.

The children get up at eight o'clock and fill their day with craftwork, sports and films as well as counselling and traditional schoolwork.

Examples of their handiwork are mounted on the walls of corridors, as in any other Russian school. Letters to parents, touchingly pathetic, are displayed on the wall of one classroom.