

Fresh fighting on Tajik-Afghan border

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, July 21: Artillery shells hit Tajik border posts on the tense frontier with Afghanistan, wounding two Russian soldiers and raising fears of another major cross-border attack, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Foreign Minister Rashid Alimov said Islamic militants were waging an "undeclared war" on his country and on Russia, its ally. Artillery guns on the Afghan side fired on at least four border posts in the Moskovsky region of Tajikistan during the night, officials said.

The Russian commander in the district, Lt. Col. Vasily Matyuk, told the ITAR-Tass news agency the border posts in his area, which is southeast of Dushanbe, were undermanned and vulnerable to what he described as well-trained, well-armed Tajik rebels and their Afghan fundamentalist allies.

Last week, 33 Russian and Tajik servicemen died in one of the bloodiest border attacks since civil war broke out last

year in Tajikistan, an impoverished former Soviet republic in Central Asia.

The war pits provincial gunmen and pro-Communist forces against mostly Islamic opposition guerrillas.

Russia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are all helping Tajikistan's pro-Communist regime, which says Afghan fundamentalists are helping its opponents.

The Afghan government consistently denies any involvement in the Tajik civil war. Afghanistan's official media have accused Russian aircraft and artillery of almost daily attacks in northern Afghanistan, alleging hundreds of casualties. Russia denies the reports.

Soviet troops fought for a decade in Afghanistan to prop up a pro-Moscow government against Islamic guerrillas. The Soviets pulled out in 1989. Afghanistan's communist government was eventually ousted and an Islamic state was established.

Yeltsin, Kravchuk agree to summit meet UNSC rejects Russian claim on Sevastopol

NEW YORK, July 21: The UN Security Council on Tuesday rejected a parliamentary decree by Moscow claiming Russian control over the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol, reports AFP.

The Security Council said in a statement that a decree adopted by the Russian parliament on July 9 was invalid, saying it was against the UN charter.

Russia's conservative-dominated parliament declared unilaterally that the Crimean port city, home of the disputed Black Sea fleet, belonged to Russia and not Ukraine.

The fate of the city, like that of the fleet, has been disputed by Moscow and Kiev since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev gave the crime to Ukraine in 1954.

British UN Representative David Hannay, speaking for the 15-member council, said it

shared the concerns expressed by the Ukrainian authorities over the decree.

The Security Council supported Ukraine's territorial integrity, in line with the UN charter, he said.

He noted that Russia and Ukraine had signed an agreement in November 1990 pledging to respect each other's territorial integrity. He said the Russian decree was incompatible with that agreement.

AP from Moscow adds: Russia's hard-line parliament on Wednesday rejected a United Nations call for it to abandon a claim to Sevastopol, home port of the disputed Black Sea fleet, the ITAR-Tass news agency said.

Sevastopol is populated mainly by Russians and is historically a Russian city, but it is located on the tip of the Crimean peninsula, which has been

part of independent Ukraine since the 1991 Soviet collapse.

President Boris Yeltsin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk have agreed to a summit meeting on the bitter dispute over the once powerful Soviet fleet and its home port, news reports said.

The two leaders spoke by telephone after the UN Security Council met Tuesday in New York.

ITAR-Tass said parliament, which is dominated by pro-Communist hard liners, voted down a proposal to suspend a July 9 resolution claiming that Sevastopol belongs to Russia.

Yeltsin has said he was ashamed of the action and the Foreign Ministry has said the resolution is invalid.

The 15-member UN Security Council, which includes Russia, sided firmly with the Yeltsin administration, declaring parliament's decree was "without effect."

Ukraine had asked the Security Council to intervene because it said the dispute could threaten international peace and security. Russia and Ukraine both inherited vast stocks of nuclear weapons from the Soviet Union.

The two have been wrangling for months over nuclear arms, the fleet and critical economic issues. Yeltsin and Kravchuk agreed in principle last month to divide the fleet's 350 warships in half but the agreement angered nationalists on both sides.

The Soviet Union transferred the Crimea from Russia to Ukraine in 1954 in what was then merely a symbolic gesture. Russian nationalists now insist the city was too strategically important to be part of the transfer and is still Russian territory.

Off the Record



Gina Capwell, a sly character in the TV soap Santa Barbara, gangs up with another notorious character Keith Timmons in an attempt to bring down C C Capwell. — Star TV photo

13-yr old Romeo expelled from school

BANGKOK: A 13-year-old boy has been expelled from his Bangkok school after filling a request with the police to marry a 12-year-old girl from another school in the Thai capital, a news report said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The boy's request was turned down, the minimum age to get legally married in Thailand is 17 and marriages must be registered at district offices. The Nation newspaper said.

The paper did not identify the children. It quoted a teacher at the boy's school as saying he had been expelled following the incident.

The girl's mother took her daughter out of her school because she was embarrassed by the incident. The Nation said.

Sacrificing a part to save the whole

PUNXSUTAWNEY, PA: A man used a pocket knife to hack his leg off below the knee after a tree rolled onto him while he was clearing timber, reports AP.

After cutting through broken bones and torn skin Tuesday, 37-year-old Donald P Wyman of New Bethlehem crawled 200 feet (60 yards) to a tractor, which he rode to his pickup. He drove the truck about two miles (three kms) to a farm and found help.

"He was so sharp and mentally strong," said farmer John Huber Jr., who called paramedics.

Wyman told Huber he screamed in vain for an hour and tried to dig his leg out from under the tree. He finally put a tourniquet around the leg and started cutting.

Wyman underwent surgery at Punxsutawney Hospital, where he was listed in serious condition. It was not immediately known if surgeons tried to reattach the leg. Firefighters had to cut apart the tree to get the limb out from under.

Mubarak heading for third term in office

CAIRO, July 21: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is headed for a third six-year term in office as his government battles Islamic militants and faces opposition calls for more democracy, reports AFP.

Today, parliament was set to designate Mubarak officially as the sole candidate for a presidential election in early October. He already gained the support last week of 441 MPs from the 454-seat house.

The 65-year-old president is bound to run unopposed since his National Democratic Party dominates parliament.

Twelve years after taking power in 1981 after the assassination of his predecessor Anwar Sadat at the hands of Islamic fundamentalists, Egypt is once again battling the militants.

Amid accusations from Am-

nesty International of "unfair trials and torture of political detainees, the government has stepped up its campaign to wipe out the militants with 15 hangings since May, the latest on Tuesday.

The militants aim to overthrow Mubarak's secular government and set up an Islamic state. They have attacked the tourism sector, a vital source of foreign revenue, in a bid to wreck the economy.

Their battle with security forces has killed more than 170 people since March 1992, including three tourists.

On the political front, the opposition has stepped up calls for reforms and direct presidential polls with a choice of candidates. They are also demanding an end to the emergency laws in force since Sadat's assassination.



SARAJEVO: A wounded Bosnian woman waves good-bye as she is evacuated by the UN with some eight other wounded people from Kosevo Hospital Tuesday. They will be transferred to Germany for medical treatment. — AFP photo

US troubled by fresh attack on Sarajevo

WASHINGTON, July 21: The United States said Tuesday that it was deeply troubled by renewed attacks on Sarajevo but planned no new steps at the United Nations to stave off Serbian assaults, reports AFP.

"Clearly, the fighting around Sarajevo presents a very difficult situation, something that the United States is deeply troubled by," said State Department spokesman Michael McCurry, who described the situation as very serious.

But they said the United States had not thought to take the issue to the UN Security Council.

"I'm not aware of any planes in the UN Security Council to pursue that type of measure," said McCurry.

In Sarajevo, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic warned that Serb forces were planning a massive attack on Sarajevo

Clinton asks Myanmar Junta to release Suu Kyi, others

WASHINGTON, July 21: Myanmar's military rulers should unconditionally release pro-democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi President Bill Clinton said Tuesday, reports AFP.

In a statement issued by the White House on the fourth anniversary of the opposition leader's arrest, Clinton called on the Junta to "release unconditionally Aung San Suu Kyi and all other prisoners of conscience, to respect the results of the 1990 elections, and to undertake genuine democratic reforms."

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy Party overwhelmingly won the 1990 general elections but the military leaders refused to hand over power and began jailing hundreds of the followers.

"This is a tragedy for Myanmar and a cause of outrage in the international community," Clinton said.

Little has changed for the 48-year-old Noble Peace Prize Laureate over the past four years of incarceration in her family home, where armed guards and barbed wire ensure her isolation.

Over the past year foreign governments, human rights organizations and prominent individuals have pressed for her release.

Last February eight fellow Peace Prize winners gathered in neighboring Thailand after Myanmar denied them entry visas.

They brought an open letter signed by 13 Noble Laureates, including former Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev and Tibet's Spiritual Leader, the Dalai Lama, which called for the

"immediate and unconditional release" of "our sister".

The Laureates also publicly chided Myanmar's ruling generals.

"I hope the military government there — which is scared of a little woman — is made to quake in their boots because of our mission," said Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. "I say, the world is watching you — watch out."

Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest on July 20, 1989, shortly after she vehemently criticized the country's former Dictator Ne Win in a speech.

No formal charge has ever been brought against her, but she is being held under a law aimed at suppressing "destructive" elements opposing the military, which has ruled Burma since 1962.

56 pc Japanese for LDP-led coalition govt

TOKYO, July 21: Fifty-six per cent of Japanese favour a coalition government led by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), according to a poll published by the Asahi Shimbun today, reports AFP.

The telephone survey, conducted Monday and Tuesday covering 2,500 eligible voters, showed that 33 per cent of respondents would prefer a non-LDP coalition government.

Only five per cent said they favoured an LDP-only government, the newspaper said.

Asked about the make up of the potential LDP-led coalition government, 51 per cent said they would support the participation of two new conservative groups, the Japan New Party (JNP) and Sakigake (Pioneer party), while 34 per cent opposed their participation.

Fresh Israeli warning to Hezbollah men

JERUSALEM, July 21: Israel yesterday renewed a warning to Muslim guerrillas of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, or party of god, that the Jewish state would hit back if attacked in south Lebanon, reports Xinhua.

Israeli chief of general staff of the armed forces Ehud Barak said here that if Hezbollah launches additional attacks on Israeli troops in the "security zone" in south Lebanon, the reinforced army present would deal them a blow.

He was addressing a three-hour session of the Knesset (parliament) foreign affairs and defence committee, which was told of the details of the army deployment in the Israeli self-proclaimed security zone.

Israel established the 1,100-square-kilometre security zone in south Lebanon in 1985 as a buffer against cross-border guerrilla attacks on its northern Jewish settlements. The zone is routinely patrolled by Israeli troops and South Lebanon Army (SLA) militiamen.

Barak confirmed that the troops in the zone had been reinforced and were ready to act against the guerrillas based north of the security zone. He did not clarify what kinds of operations would be taken.

Press reports said that since attacks by guerrillas on July 8 and 9 killed five Israeli soldiers and wounded eight, Israel has sent an additional 1,000 troops, 12 Merkava tanks, 44 armoured personnel carriers and 35 artillery pieces to reinforce the zone.

Barak said that the reinforcement enabled Israel to operate promptly beyond the zone if necessary, hinting ground assault against targets further north.

BRIEFLY

Clinton's counsel found dead: President Clinton's deputy legal counsel was found dead Tuesday night in a roadside park from an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound. White House officials said, AP reports from Washington.

US park police said Vince Foster's body was found at Fort Marcy, a small Civil War park overlooking the Potomac River in suburban Virginia outside the nation's capital.

The initial investigation indicated the 48-year-old Foster, a friend of the Clinton family and former law partner of Hillary Rodham Clinton, died of an apparently self-inflicted gun shot wound, according to Lt. Patrick Gavin.

Foster was married and the father of three children, the White House said.

Clinton left the White House after learning of the death to be with Foster's family, officials said.

Another rebel hanged in Egypt: An Islamic militant was hanged Tuesday in Cairo for the murder of a police officer in the southern city of Faiyum in March 1992, the official news agency Mena announced, AFP reports from Cairo.

Morsi Ramadan was sentenced to death by a higher state security court in Faiyum, 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of Cairo.

His hanging raised to 15 the number of Muslim fundamentalists executed since May, with all but the latest ordered by military courts as part of a crackdown on the militants.

Discovery blasts off Saturday: The US space agency scheduled a Saturday liftoff for space shuttle Discovery on a mission that had to be postponed a week because of a bad switch. Liftoff is set for 1327 GMT, reports AP from Cape Canaveral.

During the nine-day flight, the five astronauts will release a communications satellite and an ultraviolet telescope. A six-hour spacewalk also is planned to test tools needed for December's Hubble Space Telescope repair mission.

A launch attempt last Saturday was stopped with less than an hour to go because of a faulty electronic switch in a system that frees the bolted-down spacecraft from the launch pad. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration replaced the switch.

Massage parlour cashier shot dead: A member of Philippine President Fidel Ramos' security force shot dead the cashier of a Manila massage parlour, police said today, reports Reuters from Manila.

The presidential guard fled the Broadway health centre after the shooting early on Tuesday but was subdued by residents and turned over to the police, investigator Efrén Ilaos said.

Ilaos said the man was apparently drunk and dissatisfied with the girl's performance.

He emerged from his session with the masseuse and ran in to the cashier who asked him what his problem. He then shot the cashier in the head, Ilaos said.

German troops off to Somalia: Two hundred German soldiers left this morning for the Somali capital Mogadishu to join the UN humanitarian operation there in a historic mission for the German Bundeswehr, reports AFP from Bonn.

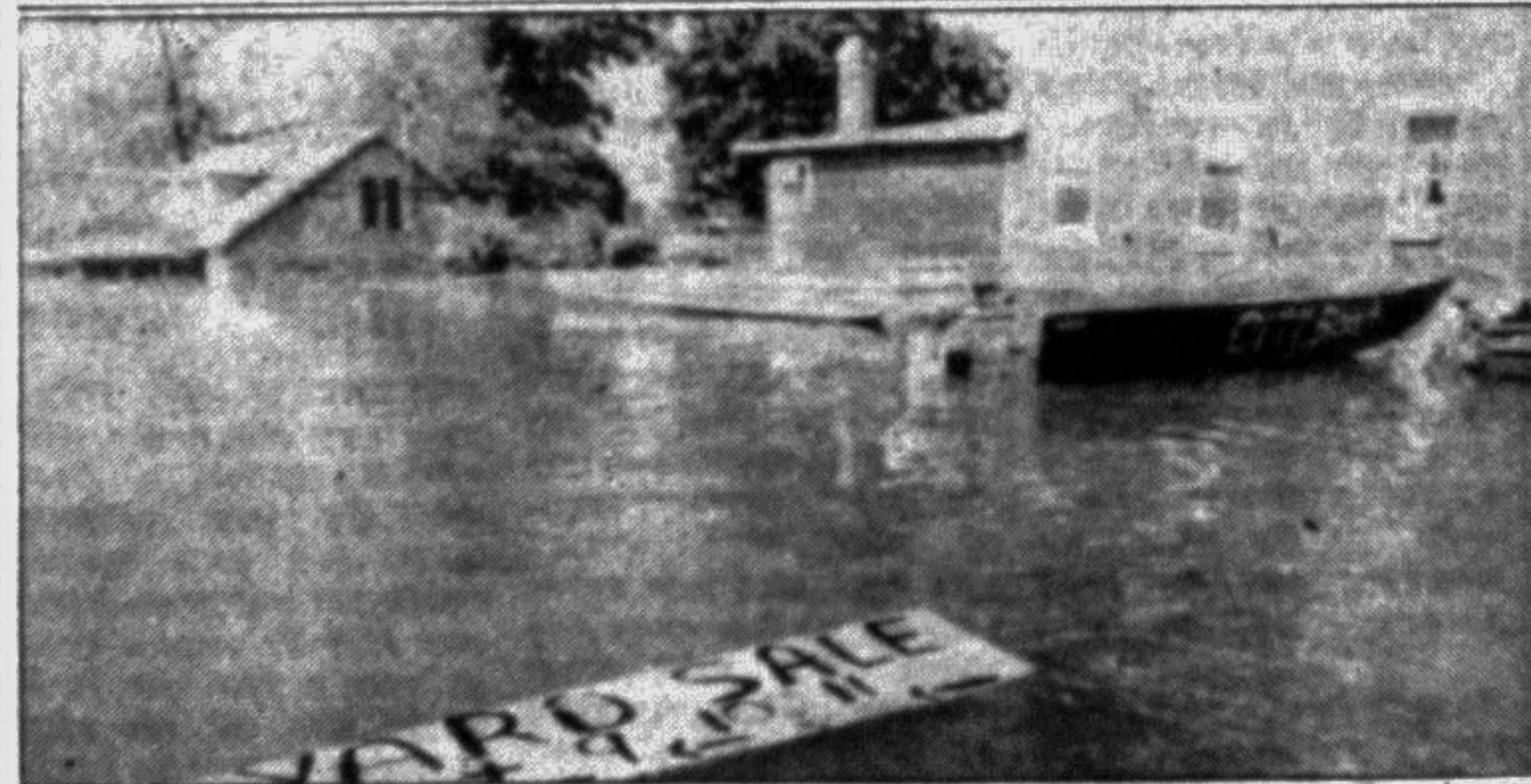
The contingent, which took off from Cologne military airbase, was the first of some 1,500 German troops due to be deployed by mid-August in the Somalia region of Biet Huen, 300 kilometres (200 miles) northwest of Mogadishu.

A small group of 51 soldiers had already left Tuesday evening on the mission, Germany's first military operation abroad outside the framework of NATO since World War II.

India launches satellite tomorrow: India's Insat-2B satellite is set for the Friday morning launch, according to a message received here from Ariane Space in Paris, reports PTI from New Delhi.

The final launch preparation or Ariane Space flight 58 is underway at the Guiana Space Centre in Kourou in French Guiana, the report said.

The launch readiness review took place yesterday and the launch is nominally scheduled between 0417 and 0522 hrs (IST) on Friday, the report said.



GRAFTON (Illinois): A sign floats in the flooded downtown of this small town Tuesday as boats used to transport residents to their water-surrounded homes are tied to the dock. Residents say the water levels are still rising here at the confluence of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. — AFP photo

US still top arms supplier to Third World

WASHINGTON, July 21: The United States continued its post-cold war dominance as top arms supplier to the Third World in 1992, increasing its share of the market to 56.8 per cent from 48.9 per cent in 1991, according to a congressional study made public on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The report said Russia's share of the market continued to fall sharply to 5.4 per cent, with arms deals in 1992 of 1.3 billion dollars versus 5.9 billion dollars in 1991.

The study points up the problems President Bill Clinton faces in reconciling his stated support for halting the spread of weapons worldwide with the

demand for arms from US friends and allies and the US arms industry's need to find new overseas markets in an era of shrinking defence budgets.

Also, it could exacerbate simmering friction between the United States and Russia over Washington's efforts to persuade cash-starved Moscow to stop selling arms and missiles to countries — mainly in the Third World — considered to be destabilising.

The reports said that continuing a general post-cold war trend, the value of all American and non-American arms transfer agreements to the Third World in 1992 fell to 23.9 billion dollars, the lowest yearly total for any of the years during the

1985-1992 period.

The value of United States arms deals fell also from 1991 to 1992, but only slightly, from 14 billion dollar to 13.5 billion dollar.

Even with that decline, "the United States has become the predominant arms supplier to the Third World since the cold war's end," accounting for 49.8 per cent of all deals in the 1990-92 period and for 56.8 per cent in 1992 alone.

The overwhelming majority of the US arms sales to the Third World — 86 per cent — resulted from major new orders by Taiwan (6.4 billion dollars), Saudi Arabia (4.2 billion dollars) and Kuwait (1.1 billion dollars).

By comparison, France, the number two arms supplier in 1992, made Third World agreements totalling 3.8 billion dollars.

The other eight top suppliers were: Britain (2.4 billion dollars), Russia (1.3 billion dollars), Germany (700 million dollars), Spain (600 million dollars), Italy (400 million dollars), Israel (300 million dollars), Iran, (200 million dollars) and China (100 million dollars).

Before the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia had been annually the number one or number two arms supplier to the Third World, recording a high of 28.8 billion dollars worth of agreements in 1986.

12 Buddhist nuns jailed in Tibet

BEIJING, July 21: Twelve Tibetan Buddhist nuns have received prison sentences of up to six years for taking part in a pro-independence demonstration a year ago, a Western human rights group said Wednesday, reports AP.

Two 21-year-old nuns received six-year sentences and the 10 others received sentences ranging from two to five years, the London-based Tibet Information Network said in a news release.

The nuns were jailed for participating in a protest against Chinese rule in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa in June 1992, the report said, citing unnamed sources. The group

said it did not know when the sentences were handed down.

Nuns have led many of the pro-independence protests in recent years. The human rights group said 84 nuns were believed serving sentences in Tibetan prisons for political offences as of April.

China says Tibet has been a part of its territory for 700 years, but many Tibetans say they had de facto independence for much of that time.

Communist Chinese troops entered Tibet in 1950, and put down an anti-Chinese uprising in 1959. The Dalai Lama, who Tibetans consider a god-king, fled to India after the failed rebellion.

US threatens sanctions against China

WASHINGTON, July 21: The United States is ready to slap economic sanctions on China if it sells long-range missiles to Pakistan, the State Department said Tuesday, reports AFP.

State Department spokesman Michael McCurry said Secretary of State Warren Christopher would take the matter up with his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen during a meeting Sunday in Singapore.

The sanctions would not threaten China's most favoured nation trade status which permits its goods to enter the United States at the lowest tariff levels.

McCurry said that the

United States had not yet determined if Beijing had delivered M-11 missiles with a 300-kilometre (200-mile) range to Islamabad.

A State Department official said privately that Lynn Davis, the Under Secretary of State for International Security Affairs, will travel to China to find out if China had sold restricted technology to Pakistan.

China has denied delivering any missile to Pakistan which has a range in excess of 300 kilometres (200 miles) or a payload of 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds).

McCurry declined to say what sanctions were being considered.