

CIA to buy back 300 missiles supplied to Afghan rebels

NEW YORK, July 24: The US Central Intelligence Agency has earmarked 55 million dollars for a new effort to buy back more than 300 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles it gave to guerrillas fighting Afghanistan's Soviet-backed government in the 1980s, the New York Times said, reports Reuter.

The report in today's editions of the newspaper quoted government and intelligence officials as saying the effort reflects the CIA's fear that it may be outbid by terrorists and hostile governments in the black market for the Stinger, a light-shoulder-carried, highly accurate missile considered the best weapon of its kind.

They said Iranian and North Korean espionage agents and Islamic militant groups were bidding to buy Stingers from demobilised Afghan rebels shattered by years of war and privation.

The Iranians have already captured or otherwise obtained some Stinger and continue to try to accumulate them, Edward Juchnicwicz, the CIA's Associate Director for covert operations from 1982 to 1986, told the newspaper. "I understand why people are exercised. I wouldn't want one to hit the airplane I'm on."

Nearly 1,000 Stingers the CIA and the Defence Department secretly shipped to Afghan rebels.

Ghali asks NATO to delay new aerial operation over Bosnia

BRUSSELS, July 24: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has asked NATO to delay its new aerial operation over Bosnia-Herzegovina in defence of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), a senior NATO diplomat said here Friday, reports AP.

The request came in a letter which ambassadors of the 16-country North Atlantic Treaty Organisation were studying as informed sources said there had been "conflicting reports" from the United Nations of late which NATO was trying to clarify.

The diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Boutros-Ghali's message stated, in essence: "I don't want NATO to do anything until I give the go-ahead."

He was speaking as Sarajevo — the base for close to 3,000 UN troops — came under heavy artillery attack from separatist Serbs, who were also pressing a fierce attack around the north-eastern town of Brcko, according to UN and Bosnian army sources.

The UN chief wanted forward air controllers to be in place in Bosnia before the air cover operation began from bases in Italy, and meanwhile suggested there should be no training for the moment, the diplomat said.

About 50 air controllers would be needed, according to informed sources. Their task would be to guide the NATO warplanes called in by UNPROFOR in case its troops

are attacked.

NATO sources pointed out that training was already under way in Italian airspace for the new mission and would have to continue.

Once the United Nations gave the word, US, British, French and Dutch planes were ready to go into action, they said. About 60 warplanes are involved.

In Sarajevo, UNPROFOR spokesman Barry Frewer said Friday that there were already "a limited number" of air controllers "in-theatre."

The Canadian navy commander added that "within the Bosnia-Herzegovina command we have not given any consideration to air strikes at this time."

He said, in response to a question, that low cloud cover over the valley capital would not necessarily preclude air strikes on Serb positions on surrounding mountains.

Reuter says: The three warring parties in Bosnia have agreed to halt their offensives throughout the former Yugoslav republic from Sunday, the new Commander of UN peacekeepers there said Saturday.

General Francis Briquemont declined to describe the accord as a ceasefire because he could not guarantee regional armed factions would not break it as has happened in the past, but said rival commanders had pledged to halt formal offensives.

Off the Record



Spectators and photographers gather around the fence, as mother Giraffe Rosa caresses her newborn offspring Franz who saw the light of day around 12.00 o'clock at the Schoenbrunn Zoo in Vienna July 22 weighing 40kg and measuring 1.70 in height. —Photo: AFP/UNB

Arrest warrants against rats

BANGKOK: Wanted: Suspects with pointed faces, brown hair and white bellies. The bounty? Fifty satang (two US cents) a tail, reports AP.

Wet, hairy and mighty hungry, hordes of Laotian rats are padding across the Mekong River into Thailand, devouring acres of rice, corn and bean crops.

Authorities have issued arrested warrants and jokingly tacked up "wanted" posters in Nong Khai province, 510 kilometers (317 miles) northeast of Bangkok, the Thai-language newspaper Matichon reported.

Villagers have heeded the call, killing more than 100,000 of the vermin and turning in tails for reward money.

Rampaging rodents have damaged more than 8,690 acres (3,520 hectares) of farmland in northeastern Thailand since July, officials said Friday.

Chuchart Rattansuwan, an agricultural officer, said villagers and fishermen in Mong Khai saw legions of rats streaming across the river, which forms the boundary with Laos.

Wife wants husband killed for stealing \$5m

PHILADELPHIA: A gynecologist is in jail after asking a policeman to refer her to a hit man who would kill her husband, reports UNB.

Dr Laskahmi Nadgir of Villanova said she wanted her husband killed because he had fled to India with 5 million dollar of her money, according to police.

Police arrested her at a suburban hotel after she met an undercover agent Friday night. She was being held in lieu of 500,000 dollar bail.

Trooper McRay Bostick said Nadgir had approached another officer when she went to a police barracks on July 12 to have her fingerprints taken for personal use. While there, she asked an officer for references for a hired gunman, according to police.

The hired gunman was to fly with her to India, kill the husband, and then travel on to Singapore and kill her husband's business associate, according to Bostick.

The nationality of Nadgir and her husband was not immediately disclosed.

BRIEFLY

Mitterrand to meet Hussein: French President Francois Mitterrand will meet Jordan's King Hussein and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres next week, his office said on Friday, Reuter reports from Paris.

The meetings, scheduled for Tuesday with Peres and Thursday with the Jordanian monarch, would focus on efforts to negotiate peace in the Middle East. France was willing as always to help to smooth the way forward, officials said.

49 die in Turkish road mishap: Forty-nine people were killed when two passenger buses collided head on in central Turkey yesterday, Turkish state television reported, Reuter says from Istanbul.

It said another 33 people were injured when the two buses rammed each other at high speed near the town of Avanos, in Nevsehir province.

NBC News producer Toombs dead: Robert Toombs, a veteran NBC News producer whose assignments spanned the globe from southeast Asia to the United Nations, died early Friday. He was 62, AP reports from United Nations.

Toombs suffered a massive heart attack, just hours after he had finished a day's work at UN headquarters, where he had been on contract for NBC News. He had retired from NBC in January 1990.

Toombs was always eager to share stories about his worldwide travels with younger journalists, particularly his assignments in Vietnam. He also spoke often about singing, his great love. He sang with the Berkshire Choral Institute.

Toombs joined NBC in 1961 as a news writer and from 1971-1973 served as bureau chief in southeast Asia. He later worked in NBC's Beirut bureau.

3 Algerian police officers killed: Arsonists hurling firebombs set fire to three town halls Friday, while gunmen killed three police officers in a pair of attacks. Authorities blamed Islamic extremists, reports from Algiers.

Town halls in Medea, south of Algiers, and in the eastern communities of Emir Abdelkader and Kaous were set alight, officials said. The assailants escaped. Details on damages and casualties were not available.

Meanwhile, two police officers were killed in an ambush in the Algiers neighbourhood of Eucalyptus, and another slain by gunmen on a bus in Blida, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of the capital.

Tamil rebels kill 9 cops: Tamil rebels attacked a police outpost in northwestern Sri Lanka Saturday and killed nine constables, military officials said Saturday, AP reports from Colombo.

Troop reinforcements were searching for the rebels after the attack at Ilavankulam village in the Puttalam district, said military officials who cannot be identified under briefing rules.

The region is about 150 kilometers (93 miles) northwest of Colombo.

The killings occurred as security forces were placed on high alert throughout Sri Lanka fearing revenge attacks by the rebels to mark the 10th anniversary of an anti-Tamil carnage by the Sinhalese in 1983.

ROK offers help to convert DPRK's N-plan to reactors

SEOUL, July 24: South Korea offered Saturday to help North Korea convert its nuclear power programme to reactors that are less adaptable to military applications, reports AP.

Tensions have increased along the heavily fortified Korean border since last March, when North Korea threatened to withdraw from an international nuclear safeguards accord.

The North backed away from the threat after talks with the United States. But many experts believe North Korea was developing nuclear weapons.

South Korea eased its tough policy toward North Korea this week following North Korea's promise to begin talks on inspections of its suspected nuclear sites.

In talks Monday's with U.S. officials in Geneva, North Korea also promised to reopen dialogue with the South.

South Korean officials worry they may lose leverage over North Korea if Pyongyang deals only with Washington. They want the nuclear problem settled in inter-Korean talks.

Unification Minister Han Wan-san, in an interview Saturday with South Korea's national news agency, Yonhap, said South Korea would consider helping North Korea build light water reactors.

Such reactors are considered less adaptable to military applications, and Washington also made an identical offer in talks with North Korea Monday.

Han also said South Korea would resume inter-Korean economic exchanges once Pyongyang allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect its two disputed buildings believed to house nuclear waste.

Han said South Korea would consider proposing new inter-Korean talks on non-nuclear issues.

South Korea will begin full-scale economic cooperation with North Korea once Pyongyang agrees to carry out inter-Korean nuclear inspections under a nuclear arms ban treaty.

The two Koreas concluded a historic peace accord in December 1991, but their implementation has been stalled because of disputes over how to carry out nuclear inspections.

South Korean officials have disagreed on how to deal with North Korea, although they all agree that South Korea should not stop treating nuclear issues as its top concern.

Han, a former dissident professor, has called for inter-Korean dialogue, while others said there should be no inter-Korean exchanges until North Korea gave up its nuclear development programme.

Residents torch home of guerilla leader in Srinagar

SRINAGAR (India), July 24: Angry residents torched the home of a Muslim guerrilla leader here to protest the slaying of a senior physician by suspected Kashmiri militants, police said today, reports AP.

Hundreds of civilians attacked the home of the militant commander Friday in downtown Naushera residential district and set it ablaze after ransacking it, the police said.

Friday's attack is the first reported retaliation by civilians against the militants in the northern Indian state since the beginning of the Muslim campaign for Kashmir's accession in 1989.

The attack occurred after people brought in the bullet-ridden corpse of Ghulam Nabi Ahangar to his Naushera home



Maurizio Zifferero of Italy, head of a 16 UN experts team in charge of tracking down equipment which could be used in President Saddam Hussein's nuclear programme, speaks to journalists upon his arrival in Baghdad July 23. —UNB/AFP photo

ASEAN rejects linking aid to human rights again

SINGAPORE, July 24: The human rights records of developing countries should not be a precondition for trade and aid, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations said Saturday, reports AP.

Always sensitive to charges of human rights abuses in Asia, ASEAN again rejected the linking of aid from the industrialized West to human rights in poorer lands.

Foreign ministers from ASEAN, grouping the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore, ended their annual conference on regional matters Saturday.

"They stressed that human rights are interrelated and indivisible comprising civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. These rights are of equal importance... the protection of human rights should not be politicized" a statement said.

Development is an inalienable right and any linkage "is detrimental to international co-operation and could undermine an international consensus on human rights," it added.

This appeared aimed at the United States and the European Community, whose representatives in recent years have suggested that trade and aid could be made conditional on such non-economic issues as political rights and environmental protection.

Since there is no sign that ASEAN is prepared to accept the standard Western definition of human rights, in particular the rights of individuals, the gathering could be a regional replay of last month's UN conference on human rights in Vienna.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas told the Vienna meeting that withholding aid or investment as a weapon against alleged rights abusers would be counterproductive.

Indonesia, along with China, has been leading Asian efforts to thwart Western insistence on a single worldwide concept of human rights.

China's bloody suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations in June 1989 and the Indonesian army's massacre of unarmed civilians in East Timor in November 1991 made both Beijing and Jakarta touchy about charges of human rights shortcomings.

Washington has defined human rights as a central focus of its foreign policy.

Suu Kyi's husband Aris in Yangon

YANGON, July 24: The husband of Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's detained Nobel Peace laureate, has arrived here to visit his wife, now in her fifth year of detention, the state-run media reported Friday, reports AP.

Michael Aris flew in from Bangkok Thursday to "meet his wife", two state-run newspapers said in identical, terse reports.

Aung San Suu Kyi, 48, was first detained on July 20, 1989, for her opposition to the junta.

On Tuesday, the fourth anniversary of her detention, the junta, ignoring a chorus of international pleas for her release, posted a notice outside her university avenue home, extending her confinement for a further year.

At the time of her detention Aung San Suu Kyi was leader of Myanmar's pro-democracy opposition but she has since been stripped of all political posts.

South Africa to set up ties with Zaire

JOHANNESBURG, July 24: South Africa will establish full diplomatic relations with the government of Zairean dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, according to a joint announcement, reports AP.

The move continues South Africa's emergence from international isolation since 1990, when President FW de Klerk began dismantling apartheid.

Zaire has been in political crisis since 1991, when anti-government rioting forced Mobutu, who has ruled for 28 years, to appoint opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi as Prime Minister.

Mobutu, considered one of Africa's most ruthless and corrupt dictators, then tried to fire Tshisekedi but was rebuffed by the national legislature.

In March, Mobutu appointed Faustin Birindwa as prime minister, while Tshisekedi continued to claim the post.



Rescue workers sift through the wreckage July 23 of China Northwest Airlines BAe-146 passenger jet that skidded into a lake after an aborted take off from Yinchuan airport en route to Beijing. —Photo: AFP/UNB

China's plane crash Search for flight recorders continues

BEIJING, July 24: Chinese investigators were searching Saturday for the flight recorders from an airliner that crashed during takeoff, killing 58 Chinese and one Briton, reports AP.

The British Aerospace 146 operated by China Northwest Airlines crashed Friday in Yinchuan, about 900 kilometers (560 miles) west of Beijing. The official Xinhua News Agency said it ran off the runway into a lake and broke apart.

Xinhua said there were 108 passengers and five crew on the flight, which was headed for Beijing.

The airport reopened Saturday morning, but special teams were still searching the lake for the plane's black box, Xinhua said.

Jerusalem issue must be put on peace talks agenda : PLO

TUNIS, July 24: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's Patah Group on Friday demanded that east Jerusalem be put on the agenda of Middle East Peace Talks and reaffirmed the Palestinians' rejection of US and Israeli peace proposals, reports AP.

The decision-making Revolutionary Council of Patah, the main group within the Palestine Liberation Organization, said Jerusalem as "capital of the state of Palestine" must be put on the Peace Talks agenda.

It rejected "all attempts to bypass the status of Jerusalem since it is indivisible from the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967," it said in a statement issued after a four-day meeting here.

The United States has been trying to persuade the Palestinians to put aside the issue of Jerusalem until discussions begin on a permanent solution for the Israeli-occupied territories. These talks would begin after a proposed plan for interim autonomy has gone into effect.

Israel refuses to discuss the status of east Jerusalem, which it annexed in 1967.

The Council rejected "all Israeli proposals and American projects put forth since the ninth round (of bilateral negotiations in Washington) attempting to sidetrack the Palestinian goal of ending the Israeli occupation and the dismantling of Israeli settlements."

It also said that Palestinians should exercise their right to self-determination and to build an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

During its 10th regular session, the Council stressed its commitment to international law and implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 on Israeli withdrawal from territories it occupies as well as the principle of the exchange of land for peace as the basis for the peace process.

Patah called for closer coordination between the Arab parties involved in the peace process.

It also lauded Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan for rejecting Israeli and US attempts to impose what Patah called piecemeal solutions and instead insisting on making the Palestinian problem their priority.

Jakarta denies report on plane crash

JAKARTA, Indonesia, July 24: Authorities in Indonesia on Saturday denied a report by the official news agency Antara a day earlier that a chartered plane had crashed in West Java with 20 people aboard, reports AP.

The report from the official Antara news agency had said a Vickers Viscount aircraft crashed Friday afternoon in Cianjur, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) southeast of Jakarta. It cited police in Cianjur as saying at least three people had survived.

However, the government's Department of Communications said Saturday the report was false. Spokesman Susilo Hadi said there had been no crash.

Antara had said the aircraft involved was operated by the Aircraft company. But Airfast said none of its planes had crashed.

8 street children murdered in Rio

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 24: At least eight street children were killed at dawn on Friday in the centre of Rio de Janeiro and human rights activists said they suspected police were involved, reports Reuter.

As many as 25 children may have died in the night of violence throughout the city, the Agencia Estado News Service said, quoting social worker Ivone Mello, who is known for the assistance she gives to street children.

The frightened children who survived the centre city massacre turned to Mello during the night for aid.

Brazilian President Itamar Franco said he was "horrified, as were all Brazilians" and ordered Justice Minister Mauricio Correa to immediately investigate the massacre.

Six of the children were murdered beside Rio's most famous church, the majestic Candelaria. Although the church square is located along one of the city's main avenues at night it becomes a no man's land.

The other two were found dead several blocks away in front of the Modern Art Museum, nestled on the edge of Guanabara Bay.

Meanwhile, AFP adds: Military police arrested three men from their own ranks Friday in connection with the killings of eight street children outside a church in Rio earlier in the day.

Floods engulf 15 Indian states : 30 lakh affected

NEW DELHI, July 24: Parts of India reeled under savage floods today, as heavy monsoon downpours marooned thousands of people and submerged eastern districts of the capital, officials said, reports AP.

Fifteen of India's 25 states remained in the grip of the floods which have severed road, rail and communications links and left hundreds of thousands of acres (hectares) of farmland under water.

At least 670 people have died in India and more than three million have been affected in the raging floods, which began after the monsoon settled over the subcontinent late last month.

A previous bout of flooding killed nearly 150 people in May, mostly in India's far east region.

The weather department warned today that heavy rains would continue to lash parts of India. It said 10 of the 15 flood-hit Indian states would be pounded by heavy downpours for the next 24 hours, and other regions would receive "scattered rains."

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao urged members of his party's youth chapter in Punjab to help the tens of thousands of marooned people and assured them of further federal aid.

"Punjab is currently going through a difficult phase and this is the time when you can win the hearts of the people with your devotion," Rao said.

At least 284 people have died and an untold number of cattle perished in Punjab, suffering its worst flooding in five decades. Damage to crops in the northern state has been estimated at around 670 million dollars.