

Pak army officer, Indian soldier killed in clash

NEW DELHI, May 13: A Pakistani Army officer, an Indian soldier and a Kashmiri separatist guerrilla were killed on Thursday in a clash near an army post in Indian-ruled Kashmir, the United News of India (UNI) said today, reports Reuter.

The four-hour encounter was in the Rajouri sector near the international line of control separating the two old enemies. UNI said Pakistani border troops known as Rangers fired at the Indian post while giving cover to Muslim separatist rebels sneaking into the Indian-ruled part of Kashmir. It said the Indians were forced to return fire. The domestic news agency said the rebels fled back across the border.

Rao's controversial US visit begins today Nuclear, missile issues to top the agenda

NEW DELHI, May 13: India's ambitious nuclear and missile programmes will top Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's agenda on his visit to the United States, his most controversial foreign trip in three years in office, reports AFP.

The 73-year-old Indian leader, who embarks on the visit Saturday, is under tremendous domestic pressure to stand up to persistent US demands to cap the country's nuclear regime and freeze its missile defence programme.

Opposition leaders have urged him to call off the visit to denounce what they describe as US arm-twisting over the nuclear issue, Kashmir, human rights and trade. No overseas visit by Rao has

generated so much heat and controversy. Both Indian officials and US diplomats admit that the two countries have never been so far apart on crucial policy issues, but emphasize that the trip is nevertheless important to set the course for future ties.

"There are some issues on which we agree, there are some on which we have differences," a US diplomat here said, underlining the growing chasm. "We shall try to find a common agenda."

On Thursday, Rao indicated that a common ground would be hard to find when he vowed not to roll back India's nuclear and missile policies under pressure from Washington.

"A leader would be worthless, if he changes government policies during his visit to a foreign country," he told a meeting of MPs from his ruling Congress (I) Party.

Rao is under widespread attack that he has already bowed to Washington by postponing the final trial of India's surface-to-surface Prithvi missile that had been scheduled for Saturday.

A day's secret talks between Indian and US officials in London last month on the nuclear programme added to rumours that Rao may be quietly preparing to surrender India's nuclear option.

Commentator Nikhil Chakravarty said on Thursday

in an article titled "Mr Rao, go to Washington but go with dignity" that the week-long visit "looks as onerous as climbing Mount Everest."

At the root of Indo-US differences is the refusal by New Delhi, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or agree to a pact on a nuclear-free South Asia.

Indian officials with an eye on China say any attempt at nuclear disarmament should be global and not restricted to a region.

The US administration, which fears that South Asia is a potential nuclear flashpoint, also wants New Delhi not to induct the Prithvi missile into the army, and to halt research

on the intermediate-range Agni ballistic missile.

The demands, on top of statements by US officials seen here as tacitly encouraging the Muslim insurgency in Kashmir have angered many in India, where the US is still widely seen as pro-Pakistan.

A US proposal to supply 38 F-16 planes to Pakistan, with which India has fought three wars and which it accuses of backing Muslim separatism in Kashmir, has added to the list of irritants.

The strains were evident on May 7 when the Indian Foreign Ministry in a move unprecedented ahead of Prime Minister's visit, lashed out at Washington.

"India is equally disap-

pointed that the US approach has not accepted India's position (on nuclear non-proliferation) and persists with its all-or-nothing approach," a spokesman said.

The American attempt to cap the country's nuclear programme "is bound to fail," said Brajesh Mishra of the opposition Indian's People's Party. "The Prime Minister is in no position to compromise in view of the overwhelming mood in the country."

Amid the fireworks, Indian officials say they will try to sell New Delhi's three-year-old economic reforms which have made the country an attractive investment centre, in particular for US companies.

Myanmar rebels capture six army outposts

BANGKOK, May 13: Troops of "Golden Triangle" drug warlord Khun Sa captured six military outposts and killed dozens of people in recent battles with government forces in northeast Myanmar, a guerrilla spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

"Reports from the battlefield have said our soldiers overran six Myanmar positions and killed dozens," spokesman for Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA) told Reuters by telephone.

There was no immediate confirmation of the claims.

At least five MTA soldiers were killed in heavy fighting on Wednesday morning, Khun Sa's spokesman said.

He said six of seven government outposts in the northeastern town of Mong Kyaw were captured.

Power struggle paralyses Lebanese govt

BEIRUT, May 13: A power struggle between the prime minister and president has paralysed Lebanon's government as it struggles to rebuild the war-shattered country, reports AP.

The confrontation between Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the Sunni Muslim tycoon-turned politician, and President Elias Hrawi, the Maronite Christian head of state, underlines the fragility of sectarian relations 3 1/2 years after the 1975-90 civil war ended.

Much hinges on the outcome: Whether political power will lie with the president or the premier, whether sectarian rivalries can be overcome and whether hard-won international confidence in postwar Lebanon's future can be sustained.

Hariri, in office since October 1992, and Hrawi have been at odds for some time as the burly prime minister, a self-made billionaire, increasingly

has taken over the reins of power traditionally held by the presidency.

Their confrontation boiled over last week when Hrawi objected to a planned Cabinet reshuffle by Hariri and sought instead to cut Hariri's support with a virtually new government.

The premier retaliated Sunday by boycotting government meetings, cancelling Wednesday's weekly Cabinet session and going home. He refused to come out of his heavily guarded luxury villa in Beirut's Koreitem district.

If he wins his game of brinkmanship, he will become the most powerful prime minister since Lebanon gained independence from France in 1943.

If he compromises and stays on, he could well be a lame-duck premier. That would be bad enough at such a critical time, when the country needs firm leadership.



US actor and president of the jury of the film festival Clint Eastwood, poses with French actress and vice-president Catherine Deneuve, on Thursday, for a photocall before the festival opens. — AFP photo

Cannes film festival opens

CANNES, May 13: The world's biggest cinema festival opened here Thursday with Asian filmmakers vying to retain their position as holders of the industry's most prestigious prize, reports AFP.

But in the quest for the Golden Palm, awarded jointly last year to Chinese and Australian films, they face daunting competition from Europe and the Americans in the 47th Cannes film festival.

Meanwhile other traditional Cannes activities will no doubt go ahead as ever. The list of stars to watch include Gerard Depardieu, Bruce Willis, and Isabelle Adjani — and of course jury president Clint Eastwood.

The West's bid to retake the top award is launched with the festival Thursday evening — Joel Coen's the Hudsucker Proxy, starring Paul Newman and Tim Robbins.

The film is an attempt by brothers Joel and Ethan Coeh hope to repeat their 1991 golden palm success.

Off the Record

All westerners in Libya spies?

TUNIS: All westerners in Libya — diplomats, businessmen and tourists — are spies, a government newspaper said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

"Whenever an event or death occurs for a westerner in the Arab world, his state officially acknowledges through the media 'that he was a spy,'" Achams said, quoted by the official Libyan news agency Jana.

"...This confirms to US that all the citizens of states who enter our country are intelligence officers, or agents to them, and that all of them move for worse aims, for sabotaging, for dividing, spreading rumours and influencing the morale of our nation."

"Exchanges of interests, tourism, and knowledge are only a cover used by western states in introducing caravans of spies and agents and to build bases to plan dirty operations and intelligence gathering," it said.

The paper listed tourists, traders, diplomats, and employees of humanitarian organisations as suspected spies. Achams gave as an example the case of a German tourist who was killed in Libya in March and reported by the German media to be a member of Germany's intelligence services.

Taiwan drops dog killing plan

TAIPEI: Bowing to protests from religious groups, Taipei City Hall has abandoned plans to let private business kill an estimated 200,000 stray dogs plaguing the capital, reports AP.

But city dog-catchers will continue rounding up the animals and poisoning them if they are not claimed within three days, said Hsu Hai-Hsiang, an official of the Bureau of Environmental Protection.

Under pressure to curb the spread of stray dogs which bite people, snarl traffic and spread disease, the municipality proposed to pay private entrepreneurs 300 Taiwan dollars (11.30 US dollars) for each dog killed.

But the idea was shelved after Christian and Buddhist groups protested that it was cruel and would diminish respect for living creatures.

'Propaganda for Happiness'

ST PETERSBURG: Yevgenia Petrova reflected on her mother and grandmother while designing "Propaganda for Happiness," a new exhibition of Soviet art during Stalin's reign, reports AP.

"They gave everything to that epoch and now feel they were deceived," said Petrova, a deputy director of the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, where the exhibition is on display.



Two Miss Universe candidates Koong Sun-Young (L) of South Korea and Brenda Robles (R) of Puerto Rico slice their birthday cake during a break from the pageant rehearsal on Thursday in Manila. Koong, a senior university student in Seoul turned 22 while Brenda, a model and student turned 19. The 1994 Miss Universe will be crowned on May 21 from among the 77 contestants. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

11 killed in Colombia: Nine alleged bank robbers and two bystanders were killed when police foiled a bank robbery early Thursday, leaving bodies strewn along a five-block stretch of road, authorities said, AFP reports from Cali, Colombia.

The bank robbers entered a Banco de Colombia branch and took about 20,000 dollars before they were surprised by police.

Police and the alleged bank robbers exchanged fire, and the nine were shot and killed as they attempted to flee.

2 US citizens jailed in China: A Chinese court has sentenced two US citizens to prison terms of 20 and 14 years for their part in a major fraud case, involving Letters of Credit totalling some 10 billion dollars, Xinhua said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

Hung Moy and Raymond Lee, both Chinese-Americans were sentenced to 20 and 14 years respectively by a court in the northern province of Hebei, the official news agency said.

A local Agricultural Bank of China official was sentenced to 11 years for "revealing state secrets" as part of the swindle.

6 Malaysians hanged: Six Malaysians who were convicted of drug trafficking in three separate cases were hanged in Changi Prison Friday, AP reports from Singapore.

Officials identified them as Hanafiah Bedullah, who was arrested as he arrived by train from neighbouring Malaysia in December 1990 while in possession of 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of cannabis.

8 killed in Thai fire: At least eight people were killed and one injured early yesterday morning in a factory fire in Bangkok, police said, Reuter reports from Bangkok.

The death toll was expected to rise, rescue workers at the scene said. Police said the fire broke out in a six-storey building housing the furniture factory in Kananyao Precinct, on the city's northern outskirts.

Radioactive capsule stolen: A capsule containing highly radioactive Cesium 137 was stolen from a factory in Ukraine, Interfax quoted security officials as saying Thursday, AFP reports from Moscow.

Police had no indication as to who stole the capsule in what they described as a serious incident. A spokesman said the capsule may have been opened.

Three employees at the factory in Nikolayev were taken to Kiev and Kharkov for check-ups after displaying symptoms of radiation contamination, while ten others were undergoing on-the-spot tests.

Psychoanalyst Erikson dead: World renowned psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, an expert on human development who coined the phrase "identity crisis", died Thursday at the age of 91, Reuter reports from Boston.

Harvard Professor Diani Eck, a long-time friend of Erikson, told Reuters he died Thursday morning at the Rosewood Manor Nursing Home in Harwich, Massachusetts. The cause of death was not known.

Born in Germany in 1902, Erikson graduated from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute in 1933 and emigrated to the United States the same year.

European polls: Labours to end infighting to ensure victory

LONDON, May 13: Britain's opposition Labour Party, stunned by the death of leader John Smith, moved quickly to make sure infighting doesn't foul up an expected victory next month that could help unseat the governing Conservatives, reports AP.

Smith, 55, died suddenly Thursday of a heart attack.

The death leaves Labour without its affable Scottish captain ahead of next month's European Parliament elections.

All three main parties, Labour, the conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, announced Friday that campaigning for the European elections had been suspended as a mark of respect for Smith. The parties did not say when campaigning would resume.

Smith's death comes as the Labour Party appeared, ready

to take advantage of divisions within Prime Minister John Major's Conservative Party, which has held power since Margaret Thatcher swept to victory in 1979.

The traditionally left-wing party, injected with confidence and more middle-of-the-road appeal under Smith, now goes into the June 9 European elections anticipating a rout of the Tories, but unsure about who leads them after.

"John Smith was one of the outstanding parliamentarians of modern politics," Major told a House of Commons packed with saddened lawmakers Thursday, praising his frequent sparring partner during parliamentary debates.

High-ranking Labour members rallied behind Smith's acting replacement, Deputy Leader Margaret Beckett, a

labour loyalist known for her adept handling of internal party politics.

Smith's permanent successor will be chosen by ballot sometime after the June elections — offering the prospect of a bruising battle for the leadership between Beckett, home affairs spokesman Tony Blair, treasury spokesman Gordon Brown and Labour spokesman John Prescott.

But Smith's predecessor, Neil Kinnock said Friday a leadership election would be conducted without conflict, simply because Labour is now party of great maturity.

"The first thing we've got to do is to fight and win the European elections.... Before then nobody's going to be declaring themselves candidates," said Frank Dobson, Labour's spokesman for London affairs.

ROK villagers protest N-waste dumping plan

SEOUL, May 13: Some 5,000 villagers staged a protest Friday against government plans to build a nuclear-waste dump in their village, police said, reports AP.

In the second day of protests, some 4,000 riot police were dispatched near Changahn village, 320 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Seoul.

The protesters, mostly women and senior citizens, shouted 'no nuclear waste', and waved white flags, the national news agency Yonhap reported.

The protesters also ordered children to boycott classes, and only 30 per cent of students showed up for school for the second day, it said.

South Korea has nine nuclear reactors in operation and is building seven more. It hopes to construct as many as 70 more by 2030 to reduce its dependency on imported fuel. Villagers vowed to continue to protest until the plan to build a waste dump is nullified.

Iraq lobbying at UN for lifting embargo

UNITED NATIONS, May 13: Iraqi Vice Prime Minister Tarek Aziz lobbied UN members in New York Thursday to lift the oil embargo against his country, reports AFP.

Next week the security council is to review the sanctions imposed against Baghdad following the invasion of Kuwait, and Western Diplomats are predicting that the four-year-old embargo will remain in force.

Aziz said the council should acknowledge that Iraq has complied with UN resolutions and that conditions for lifting the sanctions have been met.

Some members of the Council refuse to recognise the progress Baghdad has made towards meeting the UN demand, Aziz said following a meeting with Nigeria's Ibrahim Gambari, who holds the Council's rotating presidency.

Iraq is particularly keen on getting rid of the oil embargo

in return for its agreement to meet UN disarmament requirements and has argued that the allied nations had not kept up their end of the bargain.

Aziz said the United States and Britain should "decide if they are in compliance with the resolutions they themselves voted or are using those resolutions to reach special, unilateral, political objectives."

The vice-prime minister is to meet with several security council members before Tuesday's session to review the embargo as well as with the head of the UN Commission to oversee Iraq's disarmament, Rolf Ekeus.

A six-month probationary period would be required before the Commission could verify Baghdad's compliance with all the conditions to the Security Council, which would then consider lifting the sanctions, sources said.

US urges UN not to send troops to Kigali

UNITED NATIONS, May 13: Applying new Clinton administration guidelines for UN peacekeeping, the United States is pushing for limits on two operations in Africa, reports AP.

Washington is trying to persuade the United Nations not to send peacekeepers to Kigali, Rwanda's capital and the center of tribal warfare. Instead, it has proposed sending the troops only to Rwanda's borders, where there is little evidence of the fighting that has killed up to 200,000 people within the past month.

In Somalia, the administration is considering proposing that the mandate of the UN force be renewed for only 45 days, and not the usual six months, when it expires May 30, unless the warring parties agree on a transitional government.

Zemin justifies crackdown on Tiananmen

BEIJING, May 13: Chinese President Jiang Zemin said five years of prosperity and stability since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown have proved that the deadly army assault on peaceful Beijing demonstrators was correct, reports Reuter.

"A bad thing has been turned into a good thing," Jiang, who also heads the communist party, was quoted in official media on Friday as telling Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

"As a result, our reform and opening programme has forged ahead with steadier, better and even quicker steps and our advantages have been brought into fuller play," Jiang told Mahathir, in a meeting on Thursday.

Jiang said history showed that the communist leadership had no choice on June 3-4, 1989 but to crush the mass protests for political liberties and against corruption and inflation that had paralysed the capital.

Afghan warlord releases two Pakistanis

QUETTA, Pakistan, May 13: Afghan warlord Mullah Abdul Salam Ricketi on Thursday released two out of some dozen people kidnapped by his men from Pakistani territory, officials said, reports AFP.

The two freed men, both employees of the Baluchistan provincial government, have reached their homes, here after more than a year, they said.

Officials said Ricketi, who is based in the Afghan province of Zabul, had freed the two men at the behest of an Afghan spiritual leader.

Anthropologists challenge theory on man's primate ancestors

WASHINGTON, May 13: Anthropologists Thursday challenged the long-standing theory that man's primate ancestors came down from trees and first walked upright as an evolutionary response to the disappearance of African rain forests, reports Reuter.

Researchers affiliated with Yale University's Baringo paleontological research project have concluded that the rift valley in Kenya — where one of the earliest fossil specimens linked to man's bipedal ancestors was found — never experienced an abrupt change from rain forest to savanna.

Evolutionary theorists from Charles Darwin onward have suggested that some drastic environmental shift may have been the driving force behind the dramatic evolutionary change that occurred when man's earliest bipedal ancestor, the hominid, diverged from other African apes and first walked upright.

After analysing carbon residue from ancient soils taken from outcroppings at 95 sites in an 800 square mile (2,070 sq km) area within the valley, anthropologists have concluded that for the past 15

million years the valley has always been a mix of grasses and forest.

"We don't see a shift in vegetation," John Kingston, a post doctoral researcher at Yale, told Reuters. "There's no evidence for a dramatic shift at all."

Kingston reports on his findings in Friday's issue of the Journal Science. Co-authors of the paper are Andre Hill, a professor of anthropology at Yale who has discovered fossils of early hominid in the rift valley, and Bruno Marino, a postdoctoral researcher at Harvard.

The accumulating consen-

sus is that bipedalism more complicated than the disappearance of a rain forest, but this is the first evidence that directly addresses the question," Kingston said.

Other factors such as competition from other animals for food, the existence of an unoccupied niche in the ecosystem, and predation probably influenced change to bipedalism, according to Kingston.

Kingston said that during the process of photosynthesis, trees, shrubs, and forest grasses produce a type of carbon isotopic "signature" that is different than the type of

carbon isotopic signature produced by grasses in open, arid plains.

"The isotopic composition suggests a heterogeneous environment" of a grassy woodland, according to Kingston, who said that this same composition "spans the last 15 million years with very few gaps."

Kingston cautioned against extrapolating his findings to other parts of East Africa and conceded that an abrupt environmental change might indeed have taken place outside of the region he studied, the Tugen hills of the rift valley.

100 killed in 2 weeks as Kurd groups clash

SALAHEDDIN, Northern Iraq, May 13: More than 100 people have been killed in the past two weeks in clashes between the two main Kurdish groups which have split northern Iraq, leaders from both sides said, reports AFP.

The fighting between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK of Jalal Talabani) and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK of Massud Barzani) ended early this week, they said.

The DPK has taken the control of northwestern Kurdistan while the PUK had seized the southeast.