

Instant fire fighting system in India

NEW DELHI, May 16: Defence scientists in New Delhi, have developed a fire fighting system that can detect and put out fires in less time than it takes to blink an eye, reports PTI.

All T-72 tanks have been fitted with this Automatic Fire and Explosion Suppression System (AFESS) developed at the 43-year old Defence Institute of Fire Research (DIFR).

Maj Gen B S Kataria director of the institute said the system will protect tank crew from getting roasted alive in case of diesel fuel or ammunition catching fire and exploding during enemy attack.

The diesel fire spreads extremely fast but AFESS reacts even faster and "dumps" Halon-1301 on the burning fuel. Each tank carries three gas cylinders.

In a recent demonstration, the AFESS extinguished tank fire in less than one-fourth of a

second Gen. Kataria said. The fire fighting system has been integrated with another system which alerts the crew in the event of a nuclear, biological or chemical (NBC) attack. The NBC system has been developed by DIFR's sister laboratory in Jodhpur.

The fire protection system is also being fitted in ships and armoured personnel carriers. According to Gen. Kataria, the institute in about six months will come out with protective suits for firemen. Currently India imports about 500 suits per year, each suit priced at about Rs 40,000.

It is also developing an emergency chute through which people trapped in tall building can escape in the event of fire.

Gen Kataria said the institute is training 400 people each year in fire fighting. It has been hired as consultant to the proposed metro project for Delhi.



A woman weeps upon arriving in Karachi from Yemen on Monday in the first batch of 232 Pakistani nationals to be evacuated from the strife-torn country. Some 30 Pakistani nationals remain. — AFP photo

UN hopeful of implementing new peace plan for Bosnia

SARAJEVO, May 16: The United Nations hopes to start implementing a new peace plan for Bosnia this week by getting the rival commanders together to agree on a temporary truce lasting four months, reports Reuters.

UN sources said civilian officials of the world body planned to meet political leaders of Bosnia's warring factions to set up the ceasefire negotiations.

It would be the first concrete step on the road to peace under an initiative launched in Geneva last Friday by foreign ministers from the West and Russia.

Portents from the battle fronts were not hopeful. Clashes reported in northern Bosnia over the past week suggested the opposing forces on the ground were not yet in a mood for peace.

The Muslim-led Bosnian government and the Bosnian Serbs both publicly criticised

the call for a four-month truce, the Muslims saying it was too long and the Serbs too short. Muslims fear an open-ended truce would lock in Serb battlefield gains.

But UN sources said both sides appeared willing, despite public statements to the contrary, to consider such a truce during which a political settlement could be negotiated.

The Geneva initiative, the first joint strategy adopted by the United States, Russia and the European Union for ending the 25-month Bosnian war, called for a four-month truce with political negotiations to start within two weeks.

They proposed that the Bosnian Serbs should get 49 per cent of the former Yugoslav republic — they now hold more than two thirds — and a new Muslim-Croat federation 51 per cent.

The Bosnian government described the Geneva plan as flawed, saying it lacked provisions to force the Serbs to

yield land under a settlement.

"We have had agreements before, but the instruments to carry them out did not exist," Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Siladzic said on Sunday.

A Bosnian Serb leader said the Serbs would not even negotiate until UN sanctions imposed on rump Yugoslavia, comprising Serbia and Montenegro, for its role in the Bosnian conflict were lifted.

But Miroslav Kraljic, speaker of the Bosnian Serb parliament, added in a radio interview: "The Serbs are ready to concede certain territories to the other side, but much less than the Muslims hope for."

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, on an optimistic note, suggested that objections to the peace plan were predicament posturing.

"I'm not surprised to see them not put all their cards on the table," Christopher told reporters. "We're going to see some posturing on all sides."

ASEAN invitation to junta angers Myanmar dissidents

BANGKOK, May 16: Myanmar dissident groups have called on ASEAN to cancel an invitation to Myanmar to attend a July meeting in Bangkok, saying continued cooperation with the Yangon regime will be a great setback for the Myanmar people, reports Reuters.

"The ASEAN nations should not ignore the plight of the Myanmar people while hoping to win financial gains from an illegitimate regime," the dissidents said in a statement received in Bangkok on Monday.

The Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), which groups Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, has invited Myanmar to attend this year's ministerial meeting as a guest of host country Thailand.

The dissidents, including elected members of Aung San

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), student guerrillas and dissident Buddhist monks, said the regime which took power after crushing a 1988 democracy uprising does not represent the people of Myanmar.

The junta in Yangon — the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) — held elections in May 1990 but ignored the result, the landslide victory for the NLD.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, placed under house arrest in July 1989, remains in detention.

"The people of Myanmar chose their legitimate government in the 1990 May elections which the regime has refused to honour," the dissidents said in their statement.

"It will be a great setback and loss for the Myanmar

people if ASEAN countries continue to cooperate with the regime... It will also have a profound and lasting impact on mutual understanding and relations of people in the region."

"We strongly urge the ASEAN nations not to create the SLORC as a legitimate government and to cancel the invitation... to the Bangkok meeting in July."

A Karen guerrilla official also said it was wrong to invite the Yangon regime to the ASEAN meeting.

"It is too early. The democratic countries of ASEAN should wait for changes in Myanmar for the return of democracy," he told Reuters.

Diplomats in Yangon say the most significant change introduced by the regime is that it has opened up the economy to foreign investment.

Bandaranaike under pressure to step down in favour of daughter

COLOMBO, May 16: Sri Lanka's main opposition leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike will soon decide whether she or her daughter Chandrika should run as Freedom Party (SLFP) candidate at the next presidential election, party sources here said today, reports Xinhua.

Bandaranaike was unanimously named party presidential candidate few months ago but the 78-year-old leader who was twice premier in the island country is under increasing pressure to step down in favour of her 47-year-old daughter Chandrika who is now the Chief Minister of

Western province.

But no one in the decision making central committee of the party will openly ask Bandaranaike to withdraw from the candidacy, and it is very much at her discretion to continue as party presidential candidate or to step down in favour of her daughter, a party insider told Xinhua.

Chandrika's chances as potential leader of the main opposition Freedom Party received a new boost when she led her party into a sweeping win at the March 23 southern provincial elections, the SLFP's only formidable election success against the ruling United National Party (UNP) for last

seventeen years.

Her chances in the party to succeed the mother also increased greatly since brother Anura Bandaranaike, her only challenger crossed over to the government after much infighting, and accepted higher education portfolio few months ago.

A national level meeting of SLFP's different organisational bodies and elected members to be convened next week is expected to discuss party strategy for next presidential election due before December this year, and Bandaranaike is likely to make an important speech there, the sources said.

Mandela protests Sunday Times report

JOHANNESBURG, May 16: South African President Nelson Mandela has dismissed a report published in "London Sunday Times" on May 15 which said he would retire as head of state within two years, reports Xinhua.

"The article has absolutely no factual basis, and is nothing more than rumour mongeringly written with the intention to create uncertainty about South Africa's first democratically elected government," said Mandela, who was sworn in as new South African President on May 10.

Mandela expressed his displeasure with the totally unfounded and malicious disinformation published by the newspaper.

He said he wished to "state categorically" that he intended to remain in office for the full term.

The African National Congress (ANC), led by Mandela, in a statement said, "the people of South Africa have given President Nelson Mandela a clear mandate, and he intends to fulfil that mandate to the fullest."

Japan deported 70,404 foreigners last year

TOKYO, May 16: Japan deported a record 70,404 foreigners last year for violating immigration laws, according to the Justice Ministry, reports AP.

The deportees were from 90 countries and territories. Though most had worked illegally in Japan, they were deported for overstaying their visas, according to a ministry report released Sunday.

It said 12,654 of the deportees were Thai — the largest nationality group — 11,913 were Malaysians, and 11,865 were South Koreans. About 70 per cent of the total were men, it said.

A total of 3.75 million foreigners entered Japan last year, it said. That number represents a 4.6 per cent decrease from the previous year. The number had been increasing for the previous four years.

The report said cases where foreigners tried to enter the country with falsified documents doubled over the previous year.

Tens of thousands of foreigners came to Japan during the economic boom of the late 1980s when expanding production left many companies short of workers.

Many found jobs and stayed in Japan without the proper visa, but were tolerated partly because their labour was needed in jobs disdained by many Japanese.

After three years of recession, however, thousands are out of work and no longer needed by industry. Non-Japanese make up more than one per cent of Japan's population of 125 million.

17 more rebels to die in Algeria

TUNIS, May 16: An Algerian Court sentenced 17 Muslim fundamentalists to death on Sunday for attempted murder of a police officer and for armed attacks, the official Algerian news agency APS said, reports Reuters.

Fourteen of the condemned men were still on the run and were tried in their absence by Algiers Special Court, one of three set up by decree in late 1992 to battle political violence which officials blame on Islamists.

At least 450 fundamentalists have been condemned to death by Ordinary, Special and Military Courts since early 1992 after violence erupted when the army-backed authorities cancelled a general election in which the Islamists had taken a huge lead.

Algeria has executed 26 condemned men while a score of others have had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment.

The Algiers Court also sentenced seven Islamists on Sunday to life imprisonment and nine to prison terms of 10 to 20 years.

Off the Record

Lone child survives massacre

RUGENDE, Rwanda: There he was, a little boy sitting alone next to a church where hundreds had died a month before. Not a soul was in sight, just the child who managed to survive on his own, reports AP.

Lt. Emmanuel Rutaisire, a member of the rebel army fighting the government in this ravaged nation, said he was on a routine patrol Sunday when he came across the boy, who had made a small nest of adult clothing at the sight where his parents apparently had been killed with hundreds of others.

"What a surprise. I looked for somebody else, but there was nobody", he said as he cradled the child, who could not quite say his first name and who appeared to be about 2 years old.

The church at Rugende, about eight kilometers (5 miles) east of the capital, Kigali, was one of the scenes of the many massacres.

There were signs that the boy subsisted on bananas, said Rutaisire, who said the youngster would be sent to a rebel-run orphanage.

"He has an instinct for survival," he said.

For crying a lot...

PORT MORESBY: The wife of a soldier has been jailed for ten years in Papua New Guinea for beating to death her 18-month old adopted daughter, reports AFP.

The National Court in the northern town of Wewak, jailed Annette Nawen Bulongol after convicting her of the murder of Sylvia Clement on July 2 last year.

The court heard that the baby had cried a lot and the mother had been "at the end of her tether."

The court heard that Sylvia was beaten with a cassava stick when she cried a lot.

The baby was beaten several times and on three separate occasions she fell on the cement floor outside the house.

A post mortem later revealed baby Sylvia died from severe head injuries and trauma, and congestion of the lower lobes of the lungs.

"Whatever sentence I give you today cannot be anything like the sentence you gave her," said judge Timothy Hinchliffe.

Chocolate causes headache?

NEW DELHI: Chocolate can cause headache, weight gain, rise in cholesterol and heavy heart burn in many individuals, according to an Indian doctor, reports Xinhua.

As chocolate contains caffeine and other stimulants, it can aggravate migraine headache in certain people, said Dr K L Chopra, chairman of Heart Care Foundation of India.

Many chocolates have high fat contents, which is added as it dissolves quickly and holds in favour of fat being saturated.

"Chocolate is full of sugar and as it dissolves slowly in the mouth, it can cause decay in teeth," he said.

In patients with acidity, a piece of chocolate can weaken the sphincter at the lower end of food pipe and allow the food to regurgitate back causing heart burn, which sometimes can mimic a heart attack, according to the doctor.

The president of Indian Medical Association K Aggawal said that nursing mothers especially should limit the use of chocolates to avoid passing these stimulants in their breast milk.

11-yr-old saves toddler

BATON ROUGE: An 11-year-old boy dashed into a blazing apartment and rescued a two-year-old boy who had been left unsupervised, police said, reports AFP.

The boy hero said he simply ran in and grabbed the toddler, ignoring what the boy scouts taught him — to crawl under thick smoke.

"I thought it would take me too long if I had crawled," said Jason Dent, who was alerted by screaming in the upstairs apartment of his building Thursday night.

Six youngsters — the oldest was six — had been left alone in their apartment when the two-year-old began playing with matches and set fire to a book, police said.

Two mothers, one of whom was having a birthday, had each left their three children in the apartment and gone out to celebrate, police said. Both women were booked Friday and charged with child desertion.



Miss Thailand, Areeya Chumsai, 22, poses in her swimsuit during the Miss Universe pageant presentation show on Sunday in Manila. Chumsai, a journalist from Bangkok, received a special award for her winning smile which encompasses charm and confidence. — AFP photo

Hariri returns to work

BEIRUT, May 16: Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri returned to work today after a week-long strike that plunged Lebanon into its worst political crisis in nearly two years, reports Reuters.

Officials said Hariri resumed his activity at the government headquarters for the first time since May 8 when he announced he was staying home after a planned cabinet reshuffle was blocked by President Elias Hraway and House Speaker Nabih Berri. Hariri would chair a cabinet meeting after today.

The prime minister decided on Saturday to return to work after talks with Syrian president Hafez Al-Assad.

60,000 Hutus try to flee Kigali after rebels block last exit

NAIROBI, Kenya, May 16: Some 60,000 Hutus reportedly were trying to flee Rwanda's capital Monday after Tutsi rebels blocked the last remaining road out of the beleaguered city, reports AP.

Their movements masked by heavy rain and fog, the members of the majority Hutu ethnic group were heading south out of Kigali, said Mark Huband, a reporter for the London Guardian.

The exodus began after the insurgent Rwandan Patriotic Front took control of the hills commanding the highway to Gitarama, 30 kilometers (20 miles) southwest of Kigali.

Gitarama is the temporary seat of the Hutu-dominated interim government. The Tutsi

led rebels also were advancing on it. It was not known if the government had fled.

Huband, speaking by phone from Kigali, said the rebels controlled a narrow valley through which the Gitarama road passes just outside the capital.

Closure of that route means the insurgents have Kigali encircled and cut off from reinforcements from army strongholds in Gitarama and Ruhengeri, about 45 miles (65 kms) to the northwest.

The Hutus Rwanda's ethnic majority, obviously feared retribution from the rebels for weeks of wanton massacres throughout the Central African nation that have taken up to 200,000 lives, mostly minority

Tutsis.

Militias directed by extremist Hutu politicians have been blamed by human rights organisations and aid workers for most of the slaughter, much of it done with machetes, spears and knives.

Meanwhile, United Nations spokesman Moutar Gueye said the rebels had "wonderfully justified" an attack on a UN convoy Sunday that came during heavy fighting that broke a four-day lull.

The United Nations had protested the attack on the army escorted convoy that included former French Cabinet Minister Bernard Kouchner, now head of the international Association for Humanitarian Action.

Kouchner was returning from a meeting with interim government officials in Gitarama when his army-escorted convoy came under fire for about 20 minutes, said Gueye, who was also on board.

They took cover between a ditch and a clay wall for an hour until an armoured personnel carrier arrived to rescue them, he said. No one was injured.

Gueye said the rebel response to the UN protest pointed out that the United Nations had not notified the Patriotic Front that it planned to use the road, that UN vehicles could have been stolen, and that Rwandan army vehicles had inserted themselves into the UN convoy.

"All their reasons seem to be wonderfully justified," Gueye said. "We do not now think it was a deliberate attack against the United Nations."

Kouchner, founder of the international relief agency Doctors Without Borders, was meeting with Rwanda's army and rebel commanders in an effort to get an agreement on routes for aid deliveries and "take out people who want to be taken away," Gueye said Monday.

A UN source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the rebels had crossed the Akanyaru River just east of Gitarama and threatened to overrun the city.

Government officials fled to Gitarama after an orgy of eth-

nic killing began in Kigali on April 7, the day after President Juvenal Habyarimana died in a mysterious plane crash near the capital airport.

The death of the president — a Hutu — sent his presidential guard, some army units and youth militias led by extremist Hutu politicians on a rampage of killing and looting. Their victims included Hutu political opponents, including the prime minister, and minority Tutsis.

The butchery also reignited a war between the Tutsi dominated rebel Patriotic Front and the Hutu-led government and army, which had been dormant since a peace agreement last August.

Aristide's men for US invasion

WASHINGTON, May 16: Supporters of ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide are increasingly urging a US invasion to restore democracy, but several leading lawmakers are arguing that it would be disastrous, reports AP.

"I think the invasion would be precisely the wrong thing to do," Senate Republican leader Bob Dole said Sunday.

The Clinton administration has said only that it's keeping all its options open, but Dole and other Republicans have already written to the democratic president pleading that he not take the military course.