

International

ROK warns DPRK against border violations

SEOUL, Apr 27: South Korea has warned North Korea for its increasingly frequent "unusual" troop movements along their heavily guarded border, the Defence Ministry said on Thursday, reports AP.

South Korea delivered a letter to the communist north on Monday, warning it would have to "take full responsibility for any emergencies resulting from violations of the ceasefire treaty," the ministry said.

Last week, it said, North Korean soldiers twice crossed into the South Korean side of the demilitarised zone that separates the two Koreas. They were immediately warned away by South Korean border guards.

"Unusual front-line movements throughout the border became more frequent amid a deadlock in US-North Korean nuclear talks," a Defence Ministry spokesman said.

The North might be deliberately trying to trigger armed skirmishes in a scheme to increase the stakes in the negotiations with the United States over its suspect nuclear programme, ministry officials

UN plane forced to turn back in midair
Serb rebels claim ownership of Sarajevo airport

SARAJEVO, Apr 27: Serb rebels flaunted their stranglehold of the Bosnian capital Wednesday, bluntly claiming ownership of Sarajevo airport and forcing a UN plane to turn back in midair, reports AP.

Despite claims of progress in talks between UN and Serb leaders, the Serbs appeared determined to make sure officials of the Muslim-led government and most other civilians no longer use the front-line airport.

The UN operated airport, which receives most of the capital's food aid, has been closed to humanitarian flights for nearly three weeks since an attack on a UN plane and veiled threats of further shooting.

The acting US ambassador to Bosnia, John Menzies, arrived in Sarajevo on Wednesday via a treacherous

land route. He first arrived Friday with other diplomats aboard a UN plane, angering Serbs who kept the group at the airport and forced them to fly back over the next day.

The Serbs seem less likely than ever to compromise since their top leaders, Radovan Karadzic and Gen Ratko Mladic, were named by an international war crimes tribunal in the Netherlands as war crimes suspects.

The tribunal's preliminary hearing Wednesday drew a blistering verbal attack from the Bosnian Serb "Ministry of Information," which called it a biased attempt to deny Serbs their "legitimate right to self-determination."

Tension remained high around the besieged capital, just four days before the end of a four-month truce increas-

ingly ignored by the combatants.

Several explosions shook the city, and fighting broke out just to the north, along the edge of a 20-kilometre (12.5-mile) buffer zone in which heavy weapons technically are banned. The Bosnian Serb news agency, SRNA, reported that mortar fire from government troops killed one civilian and wounded four others in Serb-held parts of Sarajevo.

Four UN military flights arrived at the airport Wednesday. But Serbs, who hold front-line positions near the airport and often shoot at planes, refused to guarantee the safety of a fifth flight carrying UN civilian officials.

Bosnian government officials claimed the Serbs were hindering use of the airport in an attempt to seal off Sarajevo completely. There is only one

land route into the city, also exposed to Serb fire.

But the Serbs said they won't compromise. Negotiator Momo Mandic charged that Bosnian government officials had used the airport "to fly all over the world to raise funds for ammunition and arms."

The United Nations concedes that with few exceptions, civilians are not supposed to use the airport under a strict interpretation of the 1992 agreement under which Serbs relinquished control of the airport. That agreement allowed the United Nations to open the airport for a humanitarian airlift.

With the UN mission now critically short of fuel because of the reduced number of flights, UN officials said Tuesday it would be difficult to continue to fly civilians in and out of the airport.

NAM meet fails to reach common stand on NPT

BANDUNG, Apr 27: Non-Aligned Movement ministers meeting here failed today to reach a common position on the proposed permanent extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a delegate said, reports AFP.

There is a single NAM position on the way to approach the treaty in its totality, but there is no single position how to vote, a key Asian delegate said following a general session to discuss the topic.

The delegate, who declined to be identified, said a statement would be issued on the treaty later today.

The discussions on the treaty were the longest on any single topic during the three-day ministerial meeting of NAM's Coordinating Bureau. The discussions started after lunch on Wednesday and lasted until the early hours today, then resumed in the morning and lasted until noon.

Members were split into several positions on the treaty extension.

Some, such as host Indonesia, wanted a temporary exten-

sion of the treaty, while others, such as South Africa and Singapore, were bent on an indefinite extension.

The meeting here is attended by delegates from 97 member countries plus observer and guest nations and organisations.

The US, which wants an indefinite extension to the NPT, claims a majority of the 169 signatories support it.

A meeting for the reviews and renewal of the treaty is underway in New York but is considering the question of how to make its decision, by consensus or vote.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas has said the Non-Aligned Movement would attempt to reach a common position on the issue.

The NPT, which came into force in 1970, was designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons beyond the five acknowledged nuclear powers who signed the agreement, as well as to promote disarmament.

BRIEFLY

Clinton to visit Russia in May: Early next month, President Clinton will visit Russia to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day, the official end in Europe of what Franklin Roosevelt called the "mighty endeavor," a struggle in which Americans and Russians stood side by side. USIS reports from Washington.

EC for halting EU aid to Rwanda: The European Commission on Wednesday called on the 15 member states to suspend direct EU aid to Rwanda over the weekend massacre at the Kibeho Refugee Camp. AFP reports from Brussels.

But the Commission believes aid from humanitarian organisations should continue, a spokesman said. The Commission is to take steps "as soon as possible" to remind the Rwandan government that aid from the EU depends on respect for human rights, and the pursuit of national reconciliation in the country, added the spokesman.

16 die in Burundi violence: A Hutu opposition group said on Wednesday at least 16 people had been killed in clashes in the Burundian capital Bujumbura between Hutu extremists and the Tutsi-dominated army. AFP reports from Nairobi.

The violence occurred late on Monday and Tuesday in the Kamenge Quarter of the city, a statement from the National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD) said.

Labour Party leads opinion poll: The position Labour Party will go into the local elections in England and Wales on May 4 with a commanding 30 point lead over the ruling Conservatives, according to an opinion poll published in London on Thursday, AFP reports from London.

The Mori poll for the times gave Labour 56 per cent, one point down on a month before, while the Tories were one point up on 26 per cent. The Liberal Democrats — Britain's second largest opposition party — were also up by two points, on 15 per cent.

5 miners die in Jaipur: At least five persons including two women were killed and two others injured when a marble mine collapsed on some labourers in Thursday afternoon, according to reports reaching police headquarters, PTI says from Jaipur.

The accident occurred at village Malawar in mine number three at Makrana. The owner of the mine has been taken into custody, the police added.

Severe drought hits China: A severe drought throughout northern China has left nearly 10 million people and 4 million head of livestock without enough drinking water. It was reported on Wednesday, AP says from Beijing.

Rainfall is 50 per cent to 80 per cent below normal in the affected regions, and strong winds and higher than usual temperatures have parched the soil, damaging some 14 million hectares (34.6 million acres) of crops, the newspaper China Daily reported.

Deng's wife hospitalised: Deng Xiaoping's wife, Zhou Lin, is in hospital being treated for an unknown ailment, a Hong Kong newspaper reported yesterday. Reuter, says from Hong Kong.

Quoting Beijing political sources, the South China Morning Post said it was the sickness of Zhou, who is 11 years younger than Deng, 90, that has caused the recent nervousness in the Deng household and among senior cadres.

Bootlegger hanged in Tamil Nadu: Notorious bootlegger-turned criminal 'Auto' Shankar was hanged to death at the Salem Jail on Thursday morning, PTI reports from Salem, Tamil Nadu.

Shankar, whose last minute bid to get his execution postponed by the Supreme Court and Madras High Court on Wednesday failed, was hanged at 0530 hrs.

'Peace train' to leave for Beijing: A "peace train" carrying 240 women will leave Helsinki for Beijing for the World Conference of Women, the International League of Women for Peace said in Geneva on Wednesday, AFP reports from Geneva.

The train due to leave Helsinki on August 7 and to arrive in Beijing 22 days later. On the eve of the conference's opening, will also mark the 80th anniversary of the Geneva-based League, which has some 40,000 members spread over 42 countries.



A young girl protects with her umbrella the engraved portrait of Anatoly Kurguz from the rain at the Mitino cemetery in Moscow on Wednesday. Kurguz, a firefighter, who died of radiation shortly after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, was among a group of firemen that received a fatal dose of radiation while struggling to put out the fire that followed an explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant nine years ago. A memorial service was held here to mark the anniversary.

AIADMK declares war on Rao

NEW DELHI, Apr 27: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, struggling to contain a simmering rebellion in his Congress Party, faced attacks on a new front this week when a regional ally declared political war on him, reports Reuter.

As Congress leaders worked to bring dissidents into line in parliament, members of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) staged an angry demonstration outside the building, saying they would no longer support Rao.

"We have been backstabbed by the Congress and the question of our supporting the party does not arise," AIADMK parliamentary party leader G Swaminathan told reporters.

The AIADMK's 11 members of parliament opened talks to join the leftist opposition Janata Dal-National Front coalition, and said they would support dissident amendments to the government's budget.

At issue is a decision by the Rao-appointed governor of Tamil Nadu to give the go-ahead to prosecution of the southern state's Chief Minister, J Jayalalitha, on corruption charges.

The charismatic Jayalalitha, a former film star known variously by her supporters as the guardian angel, the visionary lady and the revolutionary leader, has built up a passionate following in Tamil Nadu, home to many of India's 50 million Tamils.

Jayalalitha is the political heir to MG Ramachandran, her

EC fact-finding team leaves for Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Apr 27: A team of ambassadors of European Community (EC) countries left here today on a five-day mission to Kashmir for a first hand evaluation of the state, wracked by a Muslim separatist drive, reports AFP.

The ambassadors of France, Germany and Spain — the present, former and future heads of the European Community — were accompanied by the Belgian and Greek ambassadors and the EC representative here, diplomatic sources said.

The team will visit Srinagar, the Kashmir summer capital and urban hub of the Muslim separatist drive, northern Sopore town — a hotbed of militancy — and the Hindu-dominated town of Jammu, they said.

Lankan troops kill 18 Tigers

COLOMBO, Apr 27: Eighteen Tamil rebels and two Sri Lankan troops died today when government forces attacked guerrilla-held territory in the country's north, a senior military officer said, reports Reuter.

The soldiers advanced from their forward defence lines in the northern Vavuniya district early today and attacked several guerrilla locations. The troops have since returned to base, the officer said. There were no more details.

"It was a limited operation. We also destroyed five vehicles belonging to the terrorists," the officer said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, fighting for their own homeland in the north and east, ended a 14-week truce on April 19 when they bombed two navy gunboats, killing 12 sailors.



UN soldiers stand next to some of 2,000 Hutu refugees held as hostages by Hutu extremists at the school of the Kibeho displaced persons camp, southwestern Rwanda on April 24. Holed up at the camp behind a human shield of women and children, the extremist refused to surrender on Wednesday to irate soldiers of the Tutsi-dominated army who massacred thousands of refugees on Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

28 suffocate to death in Rwandan detention centre

KIGALI, Apr 27: Twenty-eight Rwandans died in a "cachot" — a communal detention — in the Southwest of the country, UN officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

A UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) field officer stumbled on the corpses, many of whom had suffocated to death, when he visited the village of Rusatira.

Some 300 others crammed into the tiny detention centre were later released when troops from the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) arrived at the prison.

Hundreds have died over the past three months in Rwanda's prisons which are dangerously full of people suspected of taking part in last year's genocide when up to one million Tutsi and moderate Hutus were slaughtered by Hutu extremists.

Jihad vows to continue attacks on Israel

JERUSALEM, Apr 27: Islamic Jihad, under fire from Israel and the Palestinian self-rule authority, vowed on Wednesday to continue suicide attacks against the Jewish state that have dogged peace moves, reports Reuter.

In what appeared to be a rejection of dialogue with the Palestinian authority over its crackdown on Islamic militants in the Gaza Strip, the group said in a statement faxed to an international news agency.

The present stage will see an escalation in the size and quality of our military operations, especially attacks by those willing to be martyred.

The statement appeared to throw cold water on weekend comments from Palestinian authority officials that talks with the Islamic Jihad on reducing tension in the area had made

Nationwide search for Aum leader ordered in Japan

TOKYO, Apr 27: Japan's national police agency ordered a nationwide search today for the leader of the religious sect being investigated over nerve gas attacks on the Tokyo subway. Kyodo news agency said, reports Reuter.

Kyodo said national police agency's chief detective had ordered refusal police forces to look for Shoko Asahara, the mysterious leader of the Aum Shinri Kyo (supreme truth) sect, and bring him in for questioning on a voluntary basis.

A police agency spokesman declined to comment on the report.

Oestrogen-like pollutants may pose hazard for health

WASHINGTON, Apr 27: A growing number of researchers are expressing concern about an emerging global problem involving certain pollutants that mimic the female hormone oestrogen and may cause damage to human and animal reproductive systems, reports USIS.

The researchers report that wildlife surveys and human studies offer evidence that oestrogen-mimicking substances found in plastics, pesticides and chemicals pose a hazard and appear to be more pervasive in the environment than ever suspected.

In what has become known as the environmental oestrogen hypothesis, many researchers argue that these substances not only trigger growth of breast cancer tumours, but also may be responsible for increasing rates of testicular cancer and decreasing sperm counts in men worldwide.

"The evidence is fairly clear that we are faced with a number of chemicals that are affecting the development of reproductive organs," said Dr Carlos Sonnenschein, a cell biologist at Tufts University. "There is other evidence that some of these chemicals are toxins that induce disorders like thyroid tumours."

This is potentially a very serious and important problem, said Pentti Suter, a pioneer in the field of oestrogen chemistry at the University of California at San Francisco. "Scientifically, the potential for harm from these oestrogens is still really not known."

Timothy Wirth, US undersecretary of state for global affairs, recently expressed the administration's concern over the problem, suggesting that a major research programme might be needed to identify substitutes for the oestrogen-like compounds. He said the issue would be discussed further at an international conference on water pollution to be held in Washington next October.

There is legislation before Congress already to replace some chlorine compounds, many of which have been identified as so-called endocrine disruptors, with feasible alternatives. Endocrine disruptors refer to synthetic chemicals that affect the workings of the hormonal, or endocrine system.

At the same time, health officials caution that no research has proved a direct cause-and-effect link between reproductive problems in people and the oestrogen-mimicking chemicals.

The natural hormone oestrogen is best known for helping to stimulate the development of male and female sexual organs in the fetus and orchestrating the reproductive cycle in women.

In the environment, many chemicals and pollutants resemble oestrogens in their effects on the body. These include various pesticides, chlorine-containing industrial chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and a family of compounds known as alkyl phenols that are used in plastics, including some food wrappings, as well as in paper, textiles, hair colourings and other toiletries.

Many scientists believe that serious reproductive problems can result when either people or animals are exposed to large doses of these chemicals. For example, alligators born in Florida's Lake Apopka following a lakeside spill of the insecticides dieldrin and DDT over 10 years ago were found to be predominantly female. The male alligators that did exist were incapable of producing sperm.

While the use of DDT has been banned in the United States for many years, it is still used widely in other parts of the world.

Wildlife biologists have found similar problems in other studies. Researchers at the University of California at Davis found gulls and terns to be feminised in parts of the United States where concentrations of PCBs are highest. And researchers at the University of Texas showed that low doses of oestrogen-like chemicals applied to the shells of turtle eggs can induce ovary formation in otherwise male turtles.

Child abuse kills 2000 in US a year

WASHINGTON, Apr 27: Child abuse has become a public health crisis in the United States, killing at least 2,000 children a year and seriously injuring 142,000, a national study said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

A comprehensive survey by the US advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect found more pre-school age children were dying from injuries inflicted by parents than from falls, choking, suffocation, drowning or house fires.

Abuse and neglect is far more widespread than experts feared, and is a leading cause of death for children age four and under, the report said.