

BRIEFLY



File photo dated 1978 shows Deng Xiaoping, his wife Zhuo Lin and one of their grand-daughters, Yang Yang posing in Chengdu, Sichuan province. According to Tokyo Shimbun newspaper quoting Chinese sources, Zhuo Lin, 79, had recently attempted suicide but survived and is presently resting at home. She attempted suicide might be linked to a series of corruption scandals in China involving her 43-year old son. — AFP/UNB photo

US-backed plan to extend NPT wins majority support

UNITED NATIONS, May 6: A US backed plan to extend the Non-Proliferation Treaty indefinitely won backing from 103 nations Friday, guaranteeing adoption of the keystone treaty of the nuclear age, reports AP.

Though now assured of a majority, the United States and other treaty sponsors still hope to avoid a divisive vote and instead have the decision accepted by general agreement next week at the end of a month-long global conference.

"Momentum is building toward consensus," Canadian Ambassador Christopher Westdal declared as he formally introduced the proposal to indefinitely extend the 25-year-old pact, which was designed to check the spread of nuclear weapons.

But consensus may be difficult to achieve. Immediately after Westdal spoke, 11 Third World nations submitted a counter-proposal, calling for "rolling" extensions, automatically renewed every 25 years unless treaty members decide otherwise.

The unlimited extension favoured by Washington "would imply the recognition (by) an international treaty of the perpetuation of the existence of the nuclear weapons states," complained Ambassador Agus Tarmidzi of Indonesia, a sponsor of the counter-proposal.

During the conference's first three weeks, many delegates called on the nuclear powers to make greater strides toward reducing and eventually eliminating their

arsenals. Some non-weapons states believe limited treaty extension, by leaving the pact vulnerable, would give them continued leverage over the nuclear powers.

When it took force in 1970, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty had only a 25-year guaranteed term, after which the signatory nations — now 178 — were to decide whether to extend it indefinitely, or for a fixed period or periods.

Under its provisions, five nuclear weapons states are recognised — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China and all signatories are pledged to prevent the proliferation of nuclear arms elsewhere.

In exchange, the nuclear powers are committed to "pursue negotiations in good

faith" toward complete nuclear disarmament.

Some non-weapons states seek to attach timetables for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, for example to the decision to extend the non-proliferation pact. But, whether by vote or consensus, the conference is expected to decide in favour of extending the treaty indefinitely with no legally binding conditions.

In an effort to meet some Third World demands, the United States has supported a South African proposal to establish a system of international meetings, possibly on a yearly basis, to review progress toward disarmament goals.

An early draft of the declaration included such goals as a test ban treaty by 1996.

Russia about to sell Iran nuclear centrifuge

MOSCOW, May 6: Russia is about to sell Iran a centrifuge that could produce weapons-grade nuclear material, despite objections from its own atomic regulators, a top official told the Interfax news agency Saturday, reports AP.

The dispatch quoted Yuri Vishnevsky, chairman of the Federal Nuclear Safety and Radiation Inspection, Russia's top nuclear regulatory agency.

He said his agency, the top nuclear regulatory authority in Russia, objects because Iran could use the centrifuge to turn relatively low-grade fuel from nuclear power plants into bomb-grade material.

But Vishnevsky said he expected the Nuclear Energy Ministry to brush off objections and sign a contract with Iran for a centrifuge.

Washington also opposes the deal and President Bill Clinton is expected to try and talk President Boris Yeltsin out

of going ahead with it when the two leaders meet next week in Moscow.

Vishnevsky said the nuclear safety agency has informed Yeltsin and other top members of the Russian government of its objections.

The safety agency also objected in vain to a deal with Iran to complete a nuclear power plant in Iran.

On Thursday, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Clinton will share intelligence with Yeltsin that indicates Iran plans to use Russian light-water reactors, centrifuges and other technology to develop nuclear weapons.

But Christopher said the chances of talking Yeltsin out of the deals seem slim.

"Why in the world they want to have a near-neighbour developing a nuclear weapons capability with a reputation that Iran has for recklessness" Christopher asked.

US embassy shuts visa section in Karachi

ISLAMABAD, May 6: The US embassy in Islamabad said today it had shut its non-immigrant visa section in the violence-hit Pakistani city of Karachi for security reasons, reports Reuter.

But an embassy statement, quoted by the official AFP news agency, said there were no plans to close the Karachi Consulate-General, two of whose American employees were killed by gunmen in March.

The non-immigrant visa section in Karachi, which processed applications from the provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan, "has been closed effective May 5" under a consolidation plan, the embassy said.

Visa applications from Sindh will now be processed at the US Consulate-General in the Punjab province capital of Lahore and from Baluchistan at the US embassy in Islamabad, it said.



Opposition senatorial candidate Ferdinand Marcos Junior popularly known by his nickname "Bong Bong" is mobbed by supporters during a campaign rally in Manila on Friday as the May 8 election nears. The son of the late-ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos who ruled the Philippines for 20 years is attracting huge crowds in his political rally. — AFP/UNB photo

Joshi warns of holding polls in Kashmir

HYDERABAD, May 6: The BJP leader Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, MP, on Friday warned against holding elections in the trouble-torn Jammu and Kashmir till militants were "wiped out from every inch of the valley," reports PTI.

Delivering a talk on Kashmir situation, organised by Prajna Bharati, a voluntary organisation here, Dr Joshi said unless the voters list in the state was updated and the displaced Kashmiri pundits were sent back to their homeland, elections could not be held there.

Pointing out that the situation in the valley was not conducive to polls in view of the noncooperative attitude of the state administration, growing militancy aided and abetted by Pakistan and the centre's failure to delimit the constituencies, the BJP leader called for scrapping of article 370 which provides special status to the state.

Accusing the centre of "surrendering meekly" international pressure on Kashmir issue, he said "unless we take a firm stand to ensure liberation of Pak-occupied Kashmir, there can be no solution to this problem."

Sri Lanka unhappy over US diplomats' LTTE contacts

COLOMBO, May 6: Sri Lanka, bitter at the breakdown of the ceasefire two weeks ago with Tamil rebels, is unhappy that US diplomats have made contacts with rebel leaders, reports AP.

The island newspaper on Saturday quoted unidentified officials as saying that it is very strange that the US government after condemning the rebels gave recognition to their organisation.

There was no government statement but officials privately said the newspaper report reflected the government thinking on the issue.

Timothy Carney, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs had met Lawrence Thilakar, a Europe-based rebel leader, at

the latter's request, on Thursday, said Nicholas Burns, a US State Department spokesman.

During the talks, Carney reiterated the US policy on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, deploring the rebels' resumption of hostilities and urging them to return to the negotiations, Burns said.

The United States has long supported dialogue and a negotiated solution to the Sri Lankan conflict that would provide dignity and security for all Sri Lankans while preserving the integrity of the country, Burns said.

The rebels shot down two military planes using missiles for the first time, destroyed gunboats and attacked military bases after unilaterally ending

a three-month truce on April 19. The fighting has killed at least 240 people including 183 soldiers.

Tamils claim they are discriminated against by the majority Sinhalese who control the government and military. More than 34,000 people have been killed in the ethnic conflict since 1983.

AFP adds: Tamil separatist guerrillas kept up a wave of attacks on Sri Lankan security forces, killing four more soldiers in separate attacks in the northeast, military officials here said today.

Gunmen from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) late Friday surprised a group of soldiers in the jungles of Well Oya region.

Jiang goes to Moscow today

President Jiang Zemin leaves Sunday to join world leaders in Moscow to commemorate the end of World War II in Europe. But Jiang has no plans to meet formally with President Clinton, AP reports from Beijing.

Relations between the two countries have been troubled by disputes over nuclear proliferation, particularly China's decision to build nuclear power plants in Iran.

Arafat arrives in Cairo

PLO leader Yasser Arafat arrived in Cairo early yesterday for an emergency meeting of Arab League Foreign Ministers on Israeli plans to seize Palestinian lands to build homes for Jews in east Jerusalem, AFP reports from Cairo.

Arafat, accompanied by his "minister" of International Cooperation Nabil Shaath, went straight into talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and foreign minister Amr Mussa ahead of the meeting later yesterday, Egyptian officials said.

Russian border guards kill 8 Tajiks

Russian border guards killed eight Islamic Tajik rebels when they tried to enter Tajikistan from Afghanistan, a spokesman for the border guards told Interfax News Agency yesterday, AFP reports from Moscow.

The rebels tried to seize a border post at Mars in the western Moskovski region over night Friday but then were halted by a minefield and the border guards opened fire on them with artillery.

Storm kills 2 in Texas

Storms with hail as big as softballs and winds above 110 kph (70 mph) swept through northern Texas, killing two workers and trapping as many as 30 people in the building, said Fire Department Deputy Chief Steve Bass.

The storms Friday night caused a 100-by 250-foot (30-by 75-metre) section of roof to cave in at a Dallas clothing warehouse, killing two workers and trapping as many as 30 people in the building, said Fire Department Deputy Chief Steve Bass.

Mishap claims 11 in Brazil

A commuter train slammed into a crowded bus early Friday, killing 11 passengers and injuring at least 20 others, police said, AP reports from Rio De Janeiro.

The accident occurred during the morning rush hour in Japeri, a poor district on Rio's north side.

94 Indonesians die during Hajj

The annual Saudi Hajj has claimed the lives of 94 Indonesian Muslims even before the main events of the pilgrimage have started, the official Antara News Agency said yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

Antara said most of the deaths were caused through illness, old age and the effects of the intense Saudi heat.

Last year more than 500 Indonesians died on the Hajj.

Vendetta leaves 24 dead in Egypt

Twenty four people died and 12 others were wounded on Friday when two families involved in a vendetta opened fire on each other outside a Mosque, police said, AFP reports from Egypt.

The Marei and Abdel Hakim families began shooting at each other after leaving Friday prayers at the mosque in the village of Maasarat Haggag, near Beni Mazar, 200 kilometres (124 miles) south of Cairo, they said.

Blast kills 15 in Ethiopia

A grenade killed at least 15 people in eastern Ethiopia on Thursday, three days before the country's first multi party general election witnesses said on Friday, Reuter reports from Addis Ababa.

They said the blast hit crowds in a market where the mild stimulant qat is sold in the town of Dire Dawa. It was the worst reported violence in the run up to the polls.

AI condemns reintroduction of chain gangs

LONDON, May 6: Amnesty International (AI) on Friday condemned the reintroduction of chain gangs by a US prison this week as "cruel, inhuman and degrading," reports AFP.

More than 300 prisoners in a detention centre in Huntsville, Alabama began work shackled together on Wednesday after the state reintroduced a practice which was "last used in the US more than 30 years ago," the Human Rights group noted.



Danish Queen Margrethe (C) bends down to avoid getting entangled in a parachute while an official (R) tries to clear the matter Friday during a ceremony in Hadsten, marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II in Denmark. The parachuter almost fell on the queen as he jumped from an airplane to demonstrate how British RAF planes dropped weapons over Denmark during the war. — AFP/UNB photo

N Korea threatens to restart N-programme

SEOUL, May 6: North Korea on Saturday renewed threats to reactivate its frozen nuclear programme unless the United States make concessions on providing the communist state with replacement reactors, reports AP.

Negotiation have stalled over the North's refusal to go along with a US demand that it accept a lead role for rival South Korea in replacing its plutonium-producing facilities with safer light-water reactors.

"It is entirely dependent on the US stand whether we restart the frozen nuclear programme or not," the North's Rodong Sinmun newspaper said in a commentary carried by the official news agency, KCNA.

If Washington insists on

South Korean reactors, it said, the North has no intention to stick to the October 1994 agreement, under which it promised to freeze its nuclear programme in return for modern reactors.

The US State Department said Friday that North Korea has sent to the United States suggestions of a time and place for a high-level meeting proposed by Washington.

The United States had suggested Geneva in mid-May, but the North Koreans developed alternate proposals, spokesman Nicholas Burns said.

Burns did not provide details, but news reports in South Korea said the North proposed the talks be held in its capital, Pyongyang.

Thai troops retaliate Karen border raids

MAE HONG SON, Thailand, May 6: Thai soldiers have retaliated for cross-border raids by guerrillas aligned with Myanmar's ruling junta by following them back into Myanmar to raze their camp, authorities said Saturday, reports AP.

The ethnic Karen guerrillas have been illegally crossing into Thailand over the past two weeks to launch sometimes fatal attacks on and near refugee camps holding fellow Karen, who are opposed to the Myanmar junta, and the Thai soldiers protecting them here, about 650 kilometres (405 miles) north of Bangkok.

Thai soldiers, who demanded anonymity, said that on Thursday they pushed about 60 of the guerrillas back into Myanmar with artillery and helicopter gunships and then followed them inside to burn 13

of their camps and their weapons' cache.

Many guerrillas were killed in the counterattack and one Thai soldier was injured, the soldiers said.

They have since reinforced the border with more soldiers to prevent further encroachments but have declined to say how many troops are now defending the area.

Thai authorities have identified the attackers as members of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organisation, a guerrilla group whose members split from another Karen rebel group, the Karen National Union, last December and aligned themselves with the Myanmar government.

The newer group has denied launching all of the attacks, including one on Wednesday.

Mitterrand, Kohl won't attend Moscow parade

PARIS, May 6: French President Francois Mitterrand and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl will stay away from military parades in Moscow next Tuesday when they attend VE Day events in the Russian capital, a presidential spokesman said on Friday, reports Reuter.

He said the two leaders would arrive in Moscow from Berlin too late to attend military parades set for the morning. He would not say if their absence was meant as a protest against the Russian suppression of Chechnya separatists.

President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl will arrive in Moscow from Berlin late in the morning.

Asia's thirst for water — 'allocation is now key issue'

HONG KONG, May 6: Industrialisation, deforestation, spiralling population growth and even climatic change are being blamed for a problem transcending national and political boundaries — Asia's thirst for water, reports AP.

Across the region, from China to Australia, from India to Vietnam, tens of millions of people are struggling with drought or water shortages that have shrivelled crops, silenced factories and ignited political disputes.

"It's an economic resource," points out Asad Shah, a senior Asian Development Bank (ADB) official. "The allocation of water is now a key issue."

In Bangladesh, the alarm bells have been ringing for

years. In the country's north-eastern Rajshahi and Khulna divisions, rainfall in April was the lowest in the past 21 years. The situation has caused 30 percent of irrigation systems to collapse, threatening the rice crop.

In the west of the country, India's unilateral withdrawal of Ganges River water through the Farakka Barrage has hit some one million farmers in the districts of Kushtia, Chuadanga, Jhenidah and Magura.

Drought ravaging eastern Australia has dried up water dams, forced restrictions on water use and devastated many farming families. Despite good rainfall in early 1995, forecasters warn the situation is again deteriorating.

Dams in Sydney had dropped to 60.2 per cent capacity, their lowest level for this time of year on record, after the driest April in more than a decade, water authority Sydney Water said this week.

Residents of the Pakistani capital Islamabad, hit last year by the worst water crisis in the 33-year history of the metropolis, are bracing for another summer without piped water.

We are seriously thinking of selling our house to move to a place where water is available," a housewife said.

Emergency measures including rationing and a fleet of water tankers were used to cope with the crisis, aggravated by an outbreak of hepatitis claiming many lives.

In northern China, 10 million people are short of drinking water and a 10-month-long drought in the eastern province of Anhui has wrought havoc with the local rice harvest.

Economic wealth is no guarantee against shortages. A record heatwave and drought in Japan last summer left five million Japanese short of water.

The causes of water shortage are as diverse as the effects. US atmospheric scientist Kevin Trenberth told a conference in Melbourne last month that the unusually high frequency of damaging weather patterns in recent years triggered by an increase in water temperature in the eastern Pacific Ocean, has caused

drought not only in Australia, but in India, Indonesia and Africa and flooding in South America.

In rain-dependent India, the annual water shortage revolves almost entirely around the monsoon rains or the lack of it, except in the western desert state of Rajasthan, which remains almost entirely dry.

Major Indian cities including New Delhi, Bombay and Madras routinely suffer from acute water shortages in summer and tankers are deployed to quench the thirst of residents.

Often the reasons for shortage are man-made.

The main cause of drought in Nepal is rapid shifts in the ecological balance, caused by

the logging of dense forests in the low and tropical region known as the Terai.

Harshamani Upadhyay, an ecologist in Kathmandu, said in the past 30 years over 35 per cent of the country's forest had been destroyed.

It's a similar story in Thailand where some 30 million people are affected.

Pramote Matklad, the Director-General of the Water Shortage Solution centre at the prime minister's office, explained: "less than 20 per cent of our national forests are left."

"Water is not absorbed into the soil and, when it rains, the water goes directly into rivers to flow to the sea," he said.

Ukraine plans to build own N-plants

KIEV, Ukraine, May 6: Ukraine is planning to build two plants to produce fuel for nuclear power plants, reducing its dependence on Russia for energy, nuclear energy officials said Friday, reports AP.

"Ukraine has already started to produce nuclear fuel rods for its own nuclear plants," said Alexander Zenyuk, a spokesman for the Ukrainian Nuclear Power Committee.

The plants are to be built by the year 2010, and will produce 40-45 per cent of Ukraine's required nuclear fuel, said Mikhail Umanets, head of the Ukrainian Nuclear Power Committee.

The project will cost about 1 billion dollars, Umanets told the Interfax news agency.