

DPRK-US nuclear talks in Kuala Lumpur likely

SEOUL, May 15: North Korea has accepted a US proposal to hold high-level nuclear negotiations in Malaysia this week, a South Korean official said Monday, reports AP.

The talks have been called to break the deadlock over North Korea's refusal to accept South Korean-made reactors, promised under a deal aimed at dismantling Pyongyang's suspect nuclear programme.

The North Korean refusal has jeopardised the October 21 deal, raising tensions again on the Korean peninsula. The communist North has threatened to revive its nuclear programme, which was frozen under the accord, unless the United States makes concessions.

Washington and its Western allies warn that any North Korean moves to restart its nuclear facilities would invite UN sanctions or other retaliation.

"We have no objection to Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) as a

meeting site," the South Korean Foreign Ministry official said speaking on condition of anonymity.

The high-level talks were proposed by the United States after lower-level meetings broke down in Berlin three weeks ago over the North's refusal to accept reactors made by its capitalist rival to the south.

Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper reported the negotiations would start Friday.

North Korea originally proposed that the talks be held alternately in Washington and its own capital, Pyongyang. Beijing and Geneva also were considered as sites.

As a compromise, the United States last week suggested Kuala Lumpur, which North Korea accepted through its UN mission in New York over the weekend, the South Korean official said. There was no immediate comment from US officials.

China conducts N-test just after UN confce on NPT

BEIJING, May 15: China conducted an underground nuclear test Monday, just days after the United Nations ended talks on indefinitely extending the international treaty to prevent the spread of atomic weapons, reports AP.

The test was the first of five China is expected to conduct this year. The last test explosion occurred October 7.

China has continued to conduct nuclear tests in defiance of an international moratorium and calls from the United States and other nations to stop.

The official Xinhua News Agency did not say when or where the test was conducted. The Japanese news agency Kyodo, however, reported that it was at 1 pm (0500 GMT) at Lop Nor, in western China, where such tests are usually staged.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman, who announced

the explosion, said China will stop nuclear testing once a comprehensive test ban treaty is implemented.

China claims it has exercised "great restraint" in nuclear testing for military purposes. However, it has defended its right to continue testing until a Comprehensive Test Ban treaty is implemented.

China "stands for the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons," the spokesman said.

China strongly calls on other nuclear-weapon states to reach a treaty banning the first use of nuclear weapons, the spokesman added.

Reuter adds: China has closed its oldest nuclear weapons development base, which helped to prepare the country's earliest atomic and hydrogen bomb tests, Xinhua news agency said today.

The research base China's

first in remote western Qinghai province provided major — but unspecified — contributions to China's first atomic bomb and hydrogen bomb, Xinhua said.

China carried out its first nuclear test in the Lop Nor desert in neighbouring Xinjiang province in 1964.

The environment around the Qinghai nuclear site, whose specific location was not disclosed, has been cleared in line with national regulations and approved by government inspectors it said.

The base, previously under the control of the military, has been handed over to the local government, the agency said.

No other details were given.

China continues to conduct nuclear tests at Lop Nor. The most recent underground test blast was in October 1994, the latest in a string of more than 40 tests.

Strong quake kills one in East Timor

JAKARTA, May 15: Indonesian officials said Monday that one person was killed and 11 others were missing after a major earthquake struck East Timor near Eastern Indonesia Sunday, reports AP.

"One person died on the way to the hospital because of a heart attack during the earthquake," said Dr. Hartati Tarigan of a general hospital in Dili, the capital of East Timor.

She said that of 20 people hospitalised, five remained in the hospital a half-day later due to injuries suffered from falling beams and walls in their homes.

Jabar, a spokesman of the Meteorology and Geophysics Agency said nine people were reported missing in the coastal village of Marine near Dili.

The village was swept by tidal waves caused by the quake, whose epicenter was 130 kilometers (81 miles) southeast of Dili and 33 kilometres beneath the Timor Sea.

Washington vows to stop N-sales to Tehran

WASHINGTON, May 15: The United States vowed Sunday to press China and Russia to renounce planned sales of nuclear technology to Iran, insisting that the deals were "not acceptable" to Washington, reports AP.

White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta said the Americans had made "good progress" towards halting Russia's deal and had "begun the process" of putting pressure on Beijing.

"It is not acceptable for them to sell nuclear technology to the Iranians. That is the point," Panetta said in a televised interview.

He said Secretary of State Warren Christopher had advised Beijing of the United States' "great concern" over the sale of nuclear know-how to Iran, which Washington fears is working on building atomic weapons.

"We have begun the process of putting pressure on them (the Chinese) to move away from this deal," Panetta said.

The Chinese are currently negotiating to supply two 300 megawatt reactors to Iran, according to US press reports. The Sunday New York Times said Iran had made a down payment on the project, which would cost 800 million to 900 million dollars and involve training by Chinese experts.

Christopher discussed the matter with his Chinese counterpart Qian Qichen in New York on April 17. But Beijing's chief diplomat replied coolly that the deal violated no international law.

Washington is unconvinced and has worked hard in recent months to persuade Russia to call off its sale of at least one reactor to Iran as well as a gas centrifuge that could be used to enrich uranium for nuclear bombs.

Panetta said that during last week's Moscow Summit, Russian President Boris Yeltsin had promised Bill Clinton he would scrap the deal.

BRIEFLY

Iran urges peace in Kashmir: Iran expressed concern on Sunday over the tense situation in Kashmir and the burning of an Islamic shrine there, the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported, AFP reports from Tehran.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Mahmud Mohammadi said increasing tension in the disputed region would not benefit any of the sides involved in Kashmir's long-running conflict and called for a peaceful solution to the problem, IRNA said.

Pavel Grachev in Beijing: Russian Minister of Defence General Pavel Grachev arrived in Beijing last morning for a five-day official visit aimed at promoting military cooperation between the two side diplomatic sources said, AFP reports from Beijing.

At an official ceremony held in his honour at Tiananmen Square, Grachev, accompanied by his Chinese counterpart, General Chi Haotian, reviewed a navy, army and air force honour guard.

Tornado claims 2 in Indiana: Gary Heimbach and Linda Kelp were home when the storm hit Sunday. It tossed their trailer 200 yards (metres) and left their bodies in a field, AP reports from Linnburg, Indiana.

The suspected tornado destroyed the family's barn, workshop, garage and silo and did severe damage to Heimbach's parents' house.

Tajik rebels kill 1 Russian guard: A Russian border guard was killed and three of his comrades were wounded Sunday when Muslim militants shelled their post on the Tajik-Afghan border, military officials reported, AP says from Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

The statement from the border guards command, carried by the ITAR-Tass news agency, said the clash occurred at the border post called "Mercury," but did not give its exact location.

Japan arrests Aum member: Police arrested Yoshihiro Inoue, "Intelligence Minister" of the Aum Supreme Truth Cult, Japan broadcasting corp. (NHK) said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Inoue is believed to have led the March 20 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway, Japanese media reports have said.

Algerian forces kill 46 rebels: Algerian security forces killed 46 Muslim rebels, including 12 in one battle in a western village, during five days of search operations, Algeria's official news agency, APS said on Sunday, Reuter reports from Tunis.

The 46 were killed between Tuesday and Saturday, with the 12 dying in Hassi, some 340 km (210 miles) from Algiers, said APS, monitored in Tunis, quoting Algerian security forces.

Mahathir leaves for Japan: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed left Kuala Lumpur for a six day official visit to Japan, Xinhua reports from Kuala Lumpur.

He is scheduled to meet his Japanese counterpart Tomiichi Murayama on Wednesday and address the Nikkei International Conference on Friday, the Malaysian national news agency said in a brief report.

Bear kills 2 in Iran: A bear attacked three brothers hiking in a region in western Iran, killing two of them and seriously wounding the third, a newspaper reported here Sunday, AFP reports from Tehran.

Yusef, Hiedar and Saïd Darvishi — aged 27, 23 and 17 — were returning from a hiking trip in Kabir-Kuh Heights in Ilam province when they confronted the animal, the Daily Kayhan said, only Saïd survived the attack.

14 die in Pak bus plunge: At least 14 people were killed and 24 injured yesterday when a passenger bus plunged into a deep ravine in the northwestern town of Dir, the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) reported, AFP says from Islamabad.

The bus was on its way to Rawalpindi from the mountainous town of Dir, when the driver lost control while negotiating sharp turn, the agency said.

PLO to confiscate illegal arms: The Palestinian authority said Sunday it would begin to confiscate illegal weapons in self-ruled Gaza and Jericho as a deadline to register all guns expired with hardliners refusing to comply, AFP reports from Gaza Strip.

Islamic Jihad, one of the two main militant groups opposed to the PLO, ruled out a surrender of weapons and, like the other main group, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), vowed to keep up the armed struggle against Israel.

Filipino bus mishaps claim 13: Thirteen people were killed and 36 injured in two bus accidents near this eastern city late Sunday and early yesterday, police said, AFP reports from Legaspi, Philippines.

A bus bound for the eastern island of Samar smashed into the side of an oncoming bus near Irosin town early yesterday, killing 10 people and injuring 12, Superintendent Romeo Mapalo told reporters.



Palestinian Bedouins from the Jahalin tribe and left wing Israelis protested yesterday near the Jewish settlement of Male Adumim against government plans to evict them from the area on the occupied West Bank to allow the expansion of the settlement. — AFP/UNB photo

Syria-Israel talks on Golan Heights

US offers defence system to inspire peace treaty

CAIRO, May 15: The United States has offered to install a sophisticated air defence system on Israel's border with Syria to encourage a peace treaty between the two neighbours, an Arabic daily reported Sunday, reports AP.

The system, which would satisfy Israel's demands for security guarantees to accompany a withdrawal from the Golan Heights, could be "the key to any Israeli-Syrian peace accord," the London-based Ash-Sharq al-Awsat said.

The United States recently invited Israeli military officials to study an ultra-sophisticated military system which guides air battles, it said, quoting a published US report.

"This military system, dubbed 'j stars,' has the capacity to repel several simultaneous air attacks coming from different angles and will be granted to Israel if it withdraws from the Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Syria.

The system operated with success in the January-February 1991 Gulf War when a US-led coalition ousted Iraqi occupying troops from Kuwait, the paper said.

Security arrangements following an Israeli pull-out from the Golan, which the Jewish state captured from Syria in 1967, have proved one of the

main sticking points in peace talks between the two countries.

Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Sharaa set off Sunday on a visit to the United States for talks with President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

AP adds: Trying to clear the way for an Israeli pullback, the Clinton administration has prepared proposals for security measures to be taken on the strategic Golan Heights and is presenting them to Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa.

The arrangements would be implemented in the event of an Israeli withdrawal.

Russian warplanes resume attacks on Chechen hideaways

TUCKER, Russia, May 15: Russian warplanes resumed rocket attacks today on rebel hideaways in the mountains of Chechnya where separatists are setting up guerrilla bases, reports Reuter.

The jets, flying at high altitude, sent rockets screaming into the settlement of arlo-aul in the foothills of the mountains near Chechnya's border with Russia's ethnic region of Dagestan.

Loud explosions sound from the area under attack and smoke billowed into the air.

Russian forces, who rolled into the north Caucasus territory of Chechnya last December to break a bid for independence, have driven Chechen fighters out of the main towns and taken control of most of the lowland regions.

Since a Moscow-declared ceasefire expired on May 11, they have stepped up efforts to stop the rebels setting up bases and a command structure in the mountains from which they can wage a partisan war.

Fierce battle grip N Bosnia

SARAJEVO, May 15: Fierce battles gripped northern Bosnia early Monday around a key Serb supply corridor, U.N officials warned that food was getting scarce in Sarajevo, reports AP.

U.N spokesman Lt. Col Gary Coward said heavy fighting went into its third day in the northeast, where Bosnian-Serb forces launched attacks on the Orasje pocket, held by Bosnian Croat militia.

After hitting the area with 5,000 shells, Serb forces on Sunday broke through Bosnian Croat lines at Vidovice, about 85 miles (140 kilometers) north of Sarajevo near the Croatian border, said the local Bosnian Croat command.

Croats said they later retook the small town, seven miles (11 kilometers) north of the Serb town of Brcko, after hand-to-hand combat. They said two of their soldiers were killed and dozens wounded. The Croats called it the most "vicious" fighting in the region since the war began more than three years ago.



The newly re-elected President of Argentina Carlos Menem with Vice President Carlos Ruckauf on Sunday in Buenos Aires during a press conference in the State House following his victory in the presidential elections. Menem was re-elected for 4 years and won the re-election with 47 per cent of the votes. — AFP/UNB photo

Free Democrats suffer setbacks in German polls

BERLIN, May 15: The centrist Free Democrats suffered severe setbacks in two state elections Sunday and the leftist Social Democrats looked as if they would hold both state governments after arduous coalition-building, reports AP.

The Free Democrats failed to make the 5-per cent minimum in North Rhine-Westphalia and in Bremen, and now appear to be increasingly weak partners in Chancellor Helmut Kohl's national coalition.

Free Democratic leader Klaus Kinkel, who is Kohl's foreign minister, is likely to face a leadership challenge at his party's convention starting June 9.

Off the Record

'Better than Jurassic Park'

HEMET: More than 10,000 years ago, the Domenigoni Valley was a lush watercourse where warm-blooded creatures came to drink, hunt and roam. Now it's just an arid basin, reports AP.

But on Wednesday, engineers plan to set off a series of explosions, beginning construction of Southern California's biggest reservoir and opening a bonanza for scientists.

Preliminary cuts at the 1,800-hectare (4,500-acre) lake site promise a treasure of fossils, said paleontologist Eric Scott.

"This is better than 'Jurassic Park,'" said Scott. "Jurassic Park" is a movie. This is real life — or real death. Scientists just scratching the surface already have catalogued bones of extinct giant sloths, mastodons, mammoths, sabertoothed tigers, bison, camels and dire wolves in the valley 120 kilometers (75 miles) southeast of Los Angeles.

Eventually, 9 million cubic metres (12 million cubic yards) of earth will be excavated, down to a depth of 18 metres (60 feet).

Last week, Scott was ecstatic over the most recent discovery, a hip bone from an American lion, a slightly bigger relative of the modern African lion.

"We've found this incredible amount of material, and it's just going to get better and better," said Kathleen Springer, a colleague of Scott's at the San Bernardino County Museum in Redlands.

Scott, who began his career as a teen-age volunteer cleaning bones at the La Brea tar pits, believes the finds here will rival that Los Angeles collection.

La Brea, he said, doesn't offer a true slice of California life from the time glaciers began their slow retreat. At La Brea, tiger and wolf remains outnumber some species of prey because the asphalt deposits trapped both hunter and hunted.

Artistic error!

SEOUL: Two jobless men cut up four sculptures on a Seoul University campus with an acetylene torch and sold the metal to a junk dealer, saying later they mistook them for scrap iron, news reports said on Sunday, says Reuter.

The two 39-year-olds were charged with burglary but not detained after selling the sculptures which Sangmyung Women's University said were worth 45,000 dollar for just 27 dollar, the Korea Times quoted police as saying.

It said the two loaded the pieces weighing a total of 230 kg (500 pounds) into a one-ton truck after cutting them up early on Thursday evening.

"I can hardly believe these were artistic works," one of the men was quoted as telling police. "I thought the school authorities were too lazy to dispose them."

A police officer said the two were not taken into custody because the university did not want them punished and because the police department also had difficulty judging that the sculptures were artistic works.

... behind the grace of games

LONDON: Thousands of Pakistani "child slaves," some as young as six, earning a mere 10 pence (15 cents) an hour to make top name footballs, sold for up to 50 pounds (78 dollars), the Sunday Times newspaper said Sunday, reports AP.

The footballs are snapped up by household names such as Adidas, Reebok and Mitre and were used in the last two world cups and in most European competitions, said the paper.

Another will grace Wembley on Saturday for the FA Cup final between British sides Everton and Manchester United, it added.

According to the Sunday Times report, the children sew the footballs in workshops around Sialkot, a Punjabi town near the border with India.

The sports companies say they are striving to stamp out child labour.

Because she envied the housewife's happiness

TOKYO: Police have arrested a 39-year-old woman for making 150,000 harassing telephone calls to a housewife whose happiness she envied, reports Reuter.

A police spokesman said the woman made the calls over an eight-year period, averaging 50 calls a day to the housewife who lived near her.

The spokesman said Takako Sato, a clerk in Shizuoka west of Tokyo, told them: "I felt envious of her family because they looked so happy."

The only time the couple met was when the 33-year-old housewife, a cosmetics saleswoman, visited Sato at her home.

Sato made the calls from her office, starting in August, 1986. She either remained silent or shouted abuse down the telephone.

After the housewife changed her telephone number, Sato phoned her parents, neighbours and children's school accusing the housewife of being a thief.

China to restore ancient city walls

BEIJING, May 15: The ancient Chinese capital of Nanjing, which has one of the longest city walls still standing, plans to rebuild and restore the structure to its Ming dynasty grandeur, an official report said Monday, reports AP.

During the 1366-1644 Ming dynasty, Nanjing's city wall was the world's largest and longest at 14-21 miles (46-70 feet) high and 33 kilometres (21 miles) long, the report said. Construction began in 1366 and took 21 years to complete.

Nepalese party calls for return of land granted to India

KATHMANDU, May 15: Forty-five years after the signing of the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty, a political party in Nepal is calling for the return of Nepalese territory granted to India, reports AP.

The Karnali Liberation Front (KLF), a new and small political party, has called for the restoration of Nepalese territory lost to the then British rulers of India under the Sugauli Treaty, signed in 1816.

The Sugauli Treaty deprived Nepal of more than one-third of its territory and forced it to accept a permanent British presence to monitor relations between India and Nepal. Sugauli is in the north of India.

The KLF claim that article eight of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty revoked all the treaties and agreements signed between the then British rulers of India and Nepal.

"All the Nepalese territories lost by Nepal in the Sugauli Treaty should be returned to her under the 1950," said KLF spokesman Prem Kaidi.

"Under international law and modern practice, the lost territories of Nepal should be returned to her as the Russians return some of the islands of Japan," he said.

Nepal is now divided into 14 zones and 75 districts with a surface area of 147,181 square kilometres (91,252 miles) between China in the north and India in the south.

But a spokesman of the Nepalese ministry of home described the KLF as an unrecognised body as none of its office-bearers had so far contacted the Home Ministry for official registration.

"Nepal wants to maintain close relationships with both India and China, and any attempt to disturb or hinder our relations with our neighbours will not be tolerated," the spokesman added.

The KLF also demanded that the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) government provide autonomy to the Karnali zone, 340 kilometres (212 miles) northwest of here adjoining Tibet, for the development progress and economic welfare of the people of that zone.

Up until now, no political party had demanded autonomy or a separate land in Nepal.

The KLF is backed by more

than 300,000 people in the Karnali zone, and about 15,000 of them are suspected of being potentially violent sources said.

"Before the Sugauli Treaty, Nepal's territory extended up to Kangra (now north western India) and Tista (now north eastern India) and other parts," Kaidi said.

He said the 1950 Treaty "was against Nepal's sovereignty, independence, security, self-esteem and economic progress."

The 1950 Treaty is widely seen here as giving India political leverage over Nepal. It has given rights to the people of both sides to seek jobs and

cross the border without visas.

The treaty is supposed to promote extensive cooperation between the two countries in defence matters, but Nepal has often complained that its southern neighbour has not informed Kathmandu of past conflicts with China and Pakistan.

Nepal views the treaty as needing to be reviewed under the changed political context of the world, Nepalese Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari, who visited New Delhi last month, discussed the issue with India and said it was willing to review the agreement.

British woman reaches world's highest mountain

LONDON, May 15: A 33-year-old Briton, Alison Hargreaves, has become the first woman to scale the northface of Mt. Everest alone, press reports said here today, reports AP.

Hargreaves, climbing without oxygen, reached the summit of the world's highest mountain, 8,848 metres (29,183 feet) on Saturday around 0630 gmt.

"To Tom and Kate, my two children, I am on the top of the world and I love you dearly," she radioed to her base camp.