

BRIEFLY

Kohl meets King Hussein: German Chancellor Helmut Kohl met King Hussein on Sunday to discuss the Middle East peace process and relations between their two countries, a Jordanian official said. AFP reports from Amman.

They discussed "the support that the European Union and Germany in particular can give to the peace process and regional development," the official said.

6 soldiers buried alive in Nepal: At least six soldiers were buried alive early Sunday morning around 3.30 am (0930 GMT) at Siresi village in Udayapur district, 240 kilometres (150 miles) southeast of Kathmandu, state-run radio said Sunday evening. AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The soldiers who died had been engaged in road construction in Udayapur district and were sleeping in their tents when the landslide came," it said.

SLORC chairman in Indonesia: The chairman of Myanmar's ruling junta, Thanshe, arrived in Jakarta yesterday for a four-day state visit aimed at boosting economic and trade ties. AFP reports from Jakarta.

Indonesian State Secretary Mardiono Saed Thanshe, chairman of Myanmar's State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), paid a courtesy call on President Suharto. The two are to hold official talks on Tuesday.

Fresh violence claims 8 in SA: At least eight people, including two toddlers, were killed in fresh violence in South Africa's Zulu heartland at the weekend, police said yesterday. Reuter reports from Durban, South Africa.

Police spokesman Captain Dawood Kader said the killings took place at Inzingolweni rural district 120 km (75 miles) south of the Indian Ocean port city of Durban.

'Strong' quake hits Greece: Greece recorded a "strong" off-shore earthquake early yesterday in the Ionian Sea, the Athens Observatory said. AFP reports from Athens.

The quake, the latest in a long series since May 13 to hit Greek territory reached 4.8 degrees on the open-ended Richter scale, on which seven is a major quake. It took place at 0520 GMT off the island of Lefkas (Saint Maura) and was also felt in Corfu, Zante and Cephalonia islands.

US to hold war game with Ukraine: US Marines will hold joint exercises with Ukrainian marines in the Black Sea from July 25 to 28, a Ukrainian navy spokesman said Monday. AP reports from Kiev.

The exercises mark a growing military relationship between the United States and Ukraine. Early last month, US Army troops took part in joint operations in western Ukraine. The aim is to help provide military training for Ukraine's armed forces.

Silajdzic meets Kuwaiti Emir: Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic held talks in Kuwait City, Sunday with the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, on improving ties between the countries, the official KUNA news agency said. AFP reports from Kuwait City.

Silajdzic, accompanied by a Bosnian delegation of eight including the ministers of defence, industry and social affairs, also met his Kuwaiti counterpart Crown Prince Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah at the talks.

Rushdie's Himachal home gutted: The family home of Indian-born writer Salman Rushdie, who lives in hiding for fear of being murdered by Muslim fundamentalists, has been destroyed by fire, a newspaper in Delhi reported yesterday. AFP says from New Delhi.

The Rushdie summer residence in the northern hill resort of Solan in Himachal Pradesh state was gutted in the blaze late Saturday which spread from a nearby forest, the Indian Express said.

45 militants held in Jerusalem: Israeli security forces arrested 45 Islamic militants in the Jerusalem area suspected of planning a car bombing and other attacks in the holy city, the army said Monday. AP reports from Tel Aviv.

The group, rounded up in recent days, was led by Mohammed Daya or Abu Khaled, a leader of the military wing of Hamas from the Gaza Strip, Israel radio said.

Rain claims 22 in China: Torrential rain which fell in Hunan province, southern China, during the last week of May left 22 people dead and more than 10,000 homeless, the China Daily said yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

Benazir's stand over Karachi unrest risks fresh violence

ISLAMABAD, June 5: Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto has adopted a hardline over the unrest in Karachi at the risk of provoking fresh violence in the city over the coming days, reports AFP.

But the country's powerful army, the final arbiter in the tense game, has remained obstinately silent on the explosive question.

Two players are face to face in the standoff Benazir, 41, in power in Islamabad since October 1993, is a native of the Sindh, the southern province where Karachi is located.

Against her, Altaf Hussain, the charismatic head of the "Mohajirs", the Urdu-speaking immigrant community that came from India after partition in 1947, that make up the majority of the 10 to 13 million inhabitants of Karachi.

Last week Benazir raised the stakes by closing the door to all compromise over the ethnically sensitive issue.

She said there will be no political dialogue until the violence, which has left 600 dead in Karachi since the beginning of the year ends, and until the MQM (Mohajir Quami Movement), representing the Mohajirs lays down its arms.

But Hussain who faces several charges, including murder, kidnapping and torture — has warned that there will be further violence in Karachi if the "repression and murder of Mohajirs continues."

From London where he lives in exile, he launched a call for a series of strikes beginning June 11, which Karachiites fear will coincide with a new escalation of violence.

The question now is which of the two will blink first, a diplomat said.

The 15,000 paramilitary troops and 23,000 police in the city have indeed come down hard on the MQM with

hundreds of activists being put behind bars. Accusations of torture and mistreatment against them are rife.

But armed confrontations in the strife-torn city have become steadily more spectacular, with the incidents taking on the appearance of a full scale urban guerilla war.

Two police stations were attacked last week with rocket launchers while a 'booby-trapped car exploded near the Sindh provincial assembly. Every day, newspapers highlight a litany of violent deaths.

Altaf Hussain has proved that he commands an undivided power over the Mohajirs, if Altaf says sleep a million Mohajirs will sleep if he says vote, a million Mohajirs will vote, a Karachi based journalist said.

Hussain's aim — to secure eventually real power for the Mohajirs in Karachi Pakistan's powerhouse and the country's main port — its jugular vein.

But the question for him now is how far he should go in the pursuit of his ideal.

He could paralyse the whole of Pakistan, a diplomat said, adding "all he would have to do is order his activists to blockade the unloading and transport of oil to the rest of the country."

If this happened — the army, the guarantor of security in the strategic game, and the indispensable joker in any political establishment here — would be forced to intervene.

"The army would then have a choice either it could get rid of Benazir or it could crush the MQM" a diplomat here said.

Analysts say that it is equally clear that Benazir Bhutto — a Sindh and therefore playing both judge and accused in the eyes of the Mohajir is not the most appropriate prime minister to settle the problem of ethnic violence in Karachi.

Off the Record



Newly crowned Miss Hong Kong Winnie Young Yuen Yee sits pretty after winning the 1995 contest on Sunday. The 25-year-old university graduate wishes to become a television anchor woman. — AFP/UNB photo

New port new wife

CAIRO: A 38-year-old former sailor who used to have a wife in every port is looking for his 61st spouse as well as a place in the Guinness Book of Records, an Egyptian magazine reported Sunday, says AFP.

"The Guinness Book of Records contacted me and I gave them all the documents proving that I have had 60 wives," Khaled Ashta told the Youth magazine Shabab.

Ashta said he had divorced his 60th wife out of 17 Egyptians and 43 foreigners of 28 nationalities, including an English doctor, a Swedish and a Georgian beauty queen — and was looking for a new one.

He first married at the age of 17 in Lebanon but the woman and their son died in Lebanon's civil war, I was devastated, he said.

Ashta then went on to work as a barman, a salesman, a salesman of old books and now an extra in commercials.

"I married in every port. But I have never had more than four wives at the same time. He said, referring to Islam which allows a man to have up to four spouses.

His shortest marriage lasted just 48 hours because "she was very boring" and the longest three years. "I tell every one of my fiancées the number of wives I have had before them, but it doesn't put them off," he said.

Pakistan should vacate Pak occupied Kashmir: Sharma

SANTIAGO CHILL, June 5: President Shankar Dayal Sharma has said that Pakistan should vacate Pak occupied Kashmir and give up its policy of confrontation and belligerence, reports PTI.

In an interview to Chilean daily 'El Mercurio' yesterday, the visiting Indian President said it was India's avowed policy to do everything to eliminate terrorism, usher in peace and ensure democratic governance involving all communities — Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and others.

As a country which respects the territorial integrity of all nations India would like this unauthorised occupation of Jammu and Kashmir to be vacated, he said.

Sharma said the current problem in the state is of terrorism sponsored by Pakistan and there should be an end to it.

He said Pakistan clandestinely chose to pursue its nuclear programme and, given its record of hostility to India, has aroused apprehensions magnified by the statements of important Pakistani leaders that nuclear weapons had actually been fabricated.

Sharma said unlike India where civil authority responsible to parliament directs a programme for generation of energy, the Pakistan programme is kept secret and for military purposes, naturally Pakistan's clandestine programme is a source of anxiety to all.

Embargo push Iran, Iraq to improve ties

DUBAI, June 5: The UN sanctions against Iraq and the US ban on trade and investment against Iran which come into force from today appear to have brought the once bitter foes in the region closer than ever, say observers, reports PTI.

Both Iraq and Iran have stepped up diplomatic initiatives recently for mending fences so much so that even a summit between the heads of state of the two countries seems distinct, even if distant, possibility.

Ah Khorrarn, a top adviser to Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati who headed an 11-member delegation to Baghdad last month told an Iranian newspaper that he did not rule out the possibility of a meeting between the two leaders in the future.

Canada urges LTTE to resume peace talks

COLOMBO, June 5: Canada has urged Tamil Tiger guerrillas fighting for an independent homeland in Sri Lanka's north and east to resume peace talks, a Canadian High Commission statement said today, reports Reuter.

"We urge the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) to come back to life negotiating table," it quoted Raymond Chan, Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific) as saying.

At the same time we have encouraged the government to continue with their peace initiative.

More than 50,000 people have been killed in the fighting since 1983.

US-India will review military ties

NEW DELHI, June 5: India and the United States will review military ties, five months after they signed a historic accord allowing for joint exercises, training and defence research, the Press Trust of India said today, reports AFP.

Defence Secretary K M Nambiar will visit Washington for two days from June 21, in a follow-up trip to New Delhi by US Defence Secretary William Perry in January, the news agency said.

The two sides are scheduled to discuss a "time bound review of ties covering civilian to civilian, service to service cooperation and cooperation in defence production and research, it said.

Perry had described the Indo-US accord, signed during his visit, as "historic" and also assured Indian leaders that Washington had adopted an even handed approach to New Delhi and Islamabad in the post Cold War era.

The enhanced defence cooperation between our two countries is designed to make a positive contribution to the security and stability of Asia, the agreement said.

India was the Soviet Union's most trusted ally outside the communist bloc and the Indian armed forces the world's fourth largest, are largely Russian equipped.

ICRC may stop work in Lanka

COLOMBO, June 5: The International Red Cross said on Monday it must decide whether to stop work in Sri Lanka now that one of its ships has been sunk, apparently by a Tamil rebel mine, reports AP.

"We are willing to continue... but it is clear we have to reassess the situation before taking a decision," said Paul Sruh, a leader of International Committee of the Red Cross operations in Sri Lanka.

Sruh said that ICRC would seek reasonable guarantees and assurances after holding discussions with all parties concerned.

"The ICRC headquarters in Geneva is also discussing the issue and will advise," Sruh told the Associated Press.

One sailor was missing and feared dead after the ICRC-hired tug "Sea Dancer" exploded and sank on Sunday. Navy gunboats rescued nine of the 10 Indonesian crewmen, a Red Cross official and a United Nations official. Two sailors had been wounded.

"The 'Sea Dancer' is believed to have been blown up by a floating mine planted by Tamil rebels that could have been intended for naval vessels," said Brig. Sarath Munsinghe, the Sri Lankan military's spokesman.

It was the first time a Red Cross ship had been involved in violence in the war zone since the relief agency began working in Sri Lanka in November 1989.

The Tamil rebels, who are mostly Hindu, are fighting for an independent homeland in the north and east. They say Tamils are discriminated against by the predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese majority that controls the government and the military.

The ICRC has been supplying food to more than a million civilians in rebel-held areas. Last week, it condemned a Tamil rebel attack which killed 42 civilians.

The civil war has escalated since rebels broke off a three-month cease-fire and pulled out of peace talks on April 19. Since then, at least 785 people have been killed in the fighting.

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4000 Vietnamese protest KL's forced repatriation

KUALA LUMPUR, June 5: About 4,000 Vietnamese refugees broke out of their camp Monday, but returned to their barracks after a daylong noisy protest against their imminent repatriation, reports AP.

Clapping hands, singing Vietnamese songs and strumming guitars, the refugees marched back through the front gate into the camp on Kuala Lumpur's outskirts.

The leaders carried a banner saying, "Suppression Will Bring Mass Suicides." Another banner had a picture of the statue of liberty with the inscription, "All for Freedom."

What appeared to be a tense standoff in the morning was resolved before dusk in talks between representatives of the refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, police and a US Embassy official.

They have achieved what they wanted. We are hoping to resolve this as soon as possible," said Erika Seller of the UNHCR.

She said all the parties involved would hold further talks to see what options the Vietnamese have. She refused to elaborate.

But the Vietnamese have little choice except to return to their Communist homeland.

Of the 4,784 inmates at the camp, only 134 have been given asylum by third countries, including six by the United States.

The Vietnamese are among the 1.6 million who fled the US-backed South Vietnam after its defeat by Communist North Vietnam in 1975.

Many were accepted by Western nations, but 40,000 remain in camps across Asia, unwilling to go back to what they believe is a climate of political persecution.



Mother Teresa, 85, arrives with nuns of the Sisters of Charity at the Basilica of Koekelberg where Pope John Paul II celebrated the Eucharist commensates during which Father Damien was beatified on Sunday. The 9th century missionary priest, Father Damien, spent most of his missionary caring for lepers in body and soul in Hawaii. — AFP/UNB photo

Dudayev urges Clinton to intervene in Chechnya

LONDON, June 5: Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev has appealed to US President Bill Clinton requesting his immediate intervention in the conflict in Chechnya, radio Russia reported Sunday, quoting the Russian Interior Ministry, reports AFP.

Dudayev "has also sent an appeal to Mayor of St Petersburg Anatoly Sobchak requesting his mediation in the settlement of the conflict," the radio, monitored here by the BBC, said.

The report came amid conflicting claims that the Russians had seized control of the Chechen separatists' southern mountain stronghold of Vendeno.

Russian forces Chief of Staff Anatoly Kulikov was quoted by Interfax news agency as saying the separatists were driven out of Vendeno by a combined artillery and helicopter offensive.

But a separatist spokesman, quoted by Interfax, categorically denied the claim, saying it was "absurd."

If confirmed, the capture of Vendeno would mark another turning point in the six-month war, which broke out after Russian troops stormed into the Muslim republic last December to crush a three-year secession drive led by Dudayev.

It would mean the Russians occupied a major part of the breakaway republic, and the Chechen command would be forced to take refuge higher in the mountains — or to lay down their arms.

Reuter adds: Chechen rebels shot down a Russian Mi-24 attack helicopter on Sunday night, killing its two crew members, the Russian Defence Ministry said today.

Interfax news agency said the Mi-24, a type used to strafe Chechen positions, was one of several attack helicopters flying near Nozhai-yurt.

UN team in Rabat to settle Western Sahara dispute

RABAT, June 5: A UN delegation arrived Sunday on a six-day mission to break a deadlock between Morocco and Polisario Front guerrillas on a long-delayed referendum on self-determination for the Western Sahara, reports AFP.

The United Nations called for the referendum in the mineral-rich former Spanish colony in 1992. But the Polisario and Morocco have been unable to agree on exactly who should be allowed to vote.

The rebels want to stick by a census carried out by the Spanish in 1970, which showed an electorate of 70,000 people.

South Asia becomes dumping ground for toxic waste

GHAZIABAD, India, June 5: Toxic fumes rose into Mangay Rains face as his acetylene torch cut into a car battery in a few seconds, the teen-ager split open the casing and pulled out the lead plates with hands mottled by acid burns, reports AP.

Wearing no mask or protective clothing, Rains risks brain damage from the fumes and serious injury from the battery acid. Yet, alongside four other boys, he works up to 10 hours a day breaking open old batteries shipped mostly from Australia.

They need the work, however awful the job. And highly developed "First World" countries are glad to give it to them.

Instead of reprocessing their own waste, many companies ship it here, where environmental standards are lower and enforcement is lax. Environmentalists say India and other South Asia countries are becoming the world's dumping ground for toxic waste.

"Plastic bags and bottles, used car batteries, lead cadmium, metal scrap and even radioactive waste come from the United States, Germany, Britain and Canada.

"In the United States, supermarkets tell customers that the soda bottles will be recycled. But they don't tell them that the bottles are being exported to poor countries with rotten work safety and environmental regulations," said Ann Leonard, of Greenpeace, the worldwide environmental group.

"Just by closing down these factories, we can't say the problem is solved," said Indian Environment Minister Kamal Nath.

"There's the question of demand and employment. We must integrate these concerns while banning the import of these things," he said in an interview.

Nath said the import of toxic waste like batteries was allowed so long as they were recycled safely but he admitted, enforcement is difficult.

Khalid Malik, an Indian environmentalist, sees the situation in darker shades. The recycling is done under the most primitive conditions. Yet the government is not concerned because it generates jobs.

In hundreds of makeshift factories — mostly illegal — workers earn as little as 10 rupees (30 cents) a day working under appalling conditions to melt the plastic bags for new bottles, toys, buckets and other goods.

The production of plastic emits dangerous chemicals into the air, such as sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide compounds, which can cause cancer, birth defects and damage the kidneys, nervous and immune systems, and blood.

Health hazards go beyond just those who work with waste products. Sulphuric acid from recycled batteries is dumped into gutters or rivers. Lead-based ash from other recyclers fouls the air.

No one knows how much toxic waste reaches India, since it is usually categorised as raw material for recycling. But a Greenpeace analysis of export documents from many countries revealed that Australia alone exported nearly half a million tons of used batteries to India in 1993, and the United States sent nearly half its plastic waste exports to the subcontinent.

Much of the US import was in the form of soft drink bottles. Greenpeace said 23 shiploads of plastic bottles were sent to India to be melted

US-DPRK N-talks fail to bridge gap

KUALA LUMPUR, June 5: Despite consultations with their governments, US and North Korean negotiators failed Monday to bridge differences over implementation of a landmark nuclear accord, reports AP.

"Unfortunately, the gap between us remains very wide," chief US negotiator Thomas Hubbard said in what is becoming a routine statement after every round of talks with his North Korean counterpart Kim Gye Gwan.

"The differences on both sides remain wide," echoed North Korean delegation spokesman Chung Sung Il.

"We plan to take stock of our positions and meet again tomorrow," Hubbard said.