

Top retired diplomat says Indo-Pak ties won't improve 'in a decade'

NEW DELHI, June 17: Relations between arch rivals India and Pakistan will not improve "in a decade" and New Delhi has to try and pursue a "working relationship" with Islamabad, a top retired diplomat was quoted as saying today, reports AFP.

Iyotindra Nath Dixit, former Foreign Secretary, said in a television interview to be aired tomorrow that Pakistan could not "abide" India.

"It cannot accept that an India which is modern, national and democratic can survive," the Press Trust of India quoted him as saying.

"So if India survives, Pakistan must prove the point that it is through some devious or wrong means."

Dixit, a former High Commissioner (Ambassador) to Pakistan, said it was futile trying to improve relations with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government.

"She is pressurized by domestic events and challenges and her only option is to point a finger towards India for everything that goes wrong," he said.

"But she represented democratic process. We certainly do not want a revival of military forces. So to the extent possible, we must try to continue a working relationship with her."

Dixit said India should "show firmness and decisiveness" in the disputed state of Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority province, which has sparked two of the three wars between India and Pakistan.

US regrets China's decision Beijing announces to withdraw its envoy to Washington

BEIJING, June 17: China announced today it was recalling its ambassador to the United States plunging troubled relations to their lowest ebb since ties were established 16 years ago, reports Reuter.

The Chinese government has decided to recall ambassador to the United States Li Daoyu to report on his work in view of the current state of Sino-US relations, the Foreign Ministry announced in a terse one paragraph statement.

Beijing had threatened serious consequences after the United States edged open an effective 16 years ban on any visits by leaders of rival Taiwan earlier this month by allowing a private trip by Taiwan President Lee Teng Hui.

It furiously denounced the visit, saying US permission for Lee's trip had gravely damaged relations, established on January 1, 1979 after Washington switched recognition to Beijing's communist government from nationalist ruled Taipei.

In Washington State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said, "we very much regret that the Chinese government has chosen to withdraw its envoy from Washington and we hope that his absence from Washington will be temporary."

"We continue to seek a constructive relationship with a strong stable and open

China, he said.

Li told Undersecretary of State Lynn Davis who is acting Secretary while Secretary of State Warren Christopher is in Canada for an economic summit he was being recalled, Burns said.

US official appeared privately to be taking heart that Li did not say he was leaving his post permanently.

But China's decision to withdraw its ambassador, even temporarily signalled a sharp deterioration in ties between the two Pacific giants.

Relations have seasawed frequently, rocked by trade disputes, human rights issues and differences over arms sales.

However, it was the first time Beijing had taken such drastic action since ambassadors were first exchanged as a result of seven years of tortuous diplomatic negotiations.

China has issued a string of increasingly vitriolic attacks in the last few days warning repeatedly of further retaliatory action and telling Washington it was playing with fire.

Beijing cancelled several visits by US officials, called off a high level military mission to the United States and postponed talks on missile controls in swift succession after Lee's visit was announced.

Clinton won't lift arms ban on Bosnia

HALIFAX, Nova Scotia, June 17: US President Bill Clinton said on Friday that although his sympathies are with Bosnians fighting to break the siege of Sarajevo, he will not lift an arms embargo unless UN troops pull out of the republic, reports Reuter.

At a news conference at the Group of Seven summit here Clinton said he could not agree to lift the international embargo as long as UN troops are in Bosnia, but if they were pulled out, he would be willing to reverse his stand.

The Muslim led Bosnian government has persistently called on the west to lift the embargo so it can fight better against the Bosnian Serbs.

Clinton sought to explain the complexities of the situation to reporters even as he acknowledged he had ceded the leadership in the crisis to America's European allies.

Several of them have complained that the United States is not willing to pay its 31 per cent share of the cost of a new UN Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) for Bosnia.

Leaders of the republican controlled Congress have agreed to the idea of creating such a force but have refused so far to approve funding for it.

Clinton pledged to do his "dead-level" best to get funding from Congress and said other countries could make voluntary contributions.

Meanwhile, the Bosnian government army appears to have gained some key ground in Friday's massive push to lift the siege of Sarajevo, but the west warned of a UN pullout if fighting escalated out of control.

BRIEFLY

Storm kills 7 in China: At least seven people were killed and 29 others injured in rare hailstorms which struck two cities in central China's Hubei province, it was reported yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The hailstorms, along with rainstorms, hit Yichang and Suizhou cities last week, leaving 520,000 people homeless, the semi-official China News Service said.

2 killed in Lebanon: Two people were killed in a Hizbollah held village in Lebanon by a missile or artillery shells fired from Israel's self declared security zone in south Lebanon security sources said yesterday, Reuter reports from Tyre Lebanon.

They said Khalil Saeed and Radwan Rashid were killed late on Friday when their car was hit in Majdal Zoun village facing a post manned by the Israel backed south Lebanon army (SLA) militia on the edge of the occupation zone.

UK traffic warden wins top award: A British traffic warden won a top police award on Friday after writing out 471 parking tickets in a year or about 20 every working day, Reuter reports from London.

"It doesn't matter who you are, I would ticket my own father or even my husband," said Angela Hallam the scourge of motorists in the southern English town of Southeast.

Kurds kill 20 troops in Turkey: Rebel Kurds killed 20 government soldiers in two night attacks in southeast Turkey but lost some 17 of their own men in subsequent clashes, officials said on Friday, Reuter reports from Diyarbakir, Turkey.

The emergency rule governors' office in Diyarbakir said in a statement that guerrillas of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) had killed 15 soldiers after a raid late on Thursday on a post in Hakkari province by the Iraqi border.

Thai PM supports F 18 purchase: Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai Friday pledged full support for the Royal Thai Air Force's plan to buy F-18 jet fighters from the United States, local press reported yesterday, Xinhua says from Bangkok.

"The government must provide financial support for the acquisition of the 18 aircraft," Chuan said in a speech during a visit to the air force headquarters.

Floods claim 28 in Nepal: Increasing numbers of floods and landslides in Nepal caused by the onset of the monsoon have left 28 people dead since May and destroyed three million dollars worth of property, an official said Saturday, AFP reports from Nepal.

Home Ministry spokesman Keshav Rajbhandari said the landslides and flooding in different parts of the kingdom had also affected some 276 families.

Troops-LTTE clash leaves 4 dead: Tamil guerillas yesterday killed two soldiers and lost two of their men in fresh fighting in northeast Sri Lanka, just hours after the military concluded an offensive in the north, officials said, AFP reports from Colombo.

Guerillas from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) killed the soldiers during a fierce gun battle in thick jungles in northeast Trincomalee district, military officials said. The LTTE also lost two of their own fighters.

53 Filipino rebels surrender: Fifty-three communist rebels, including a high-ranking provincial leader have surrendered to the Philippine government with formal peace negotiations to open in Belgium on June 26, the presidential palace said yesterday, Reuter reports from Manila.

In a statement, the palace said Melencio Salamat, a district committee secretary of the Communist Party of the Philippines in the main island of Luzon, surrendered to the regional police command recently.

Call to boycott French products: The British anti-nuclear group campaign for nuclear disarmament called Friday for a boycott of French products, particularly wine, in the wake of France decision to resume nuclear testing, AFP reports from London.

In a communique received in London it urged people to put economic pressure on France to try to persuade it to reverse its decision. France has been subject to mounting international criticism after President Jacques Chirac announced Tuesday it this year with eight tests to be carried out in the South Pacific by May 1996.

Russian commandos storm Budennovsk Hospital

BUDENNOVSK, Russia, June 17: Russian commandos stormed a hospital in Budennovsk where Chechen guerillas held about 1,000 hostages today, but failed to take the building and suspended the assault after being offered negotiations, reports AFP.

There was no immediate death toll, but the intensity of the fighting raised fears of a bloodbath.

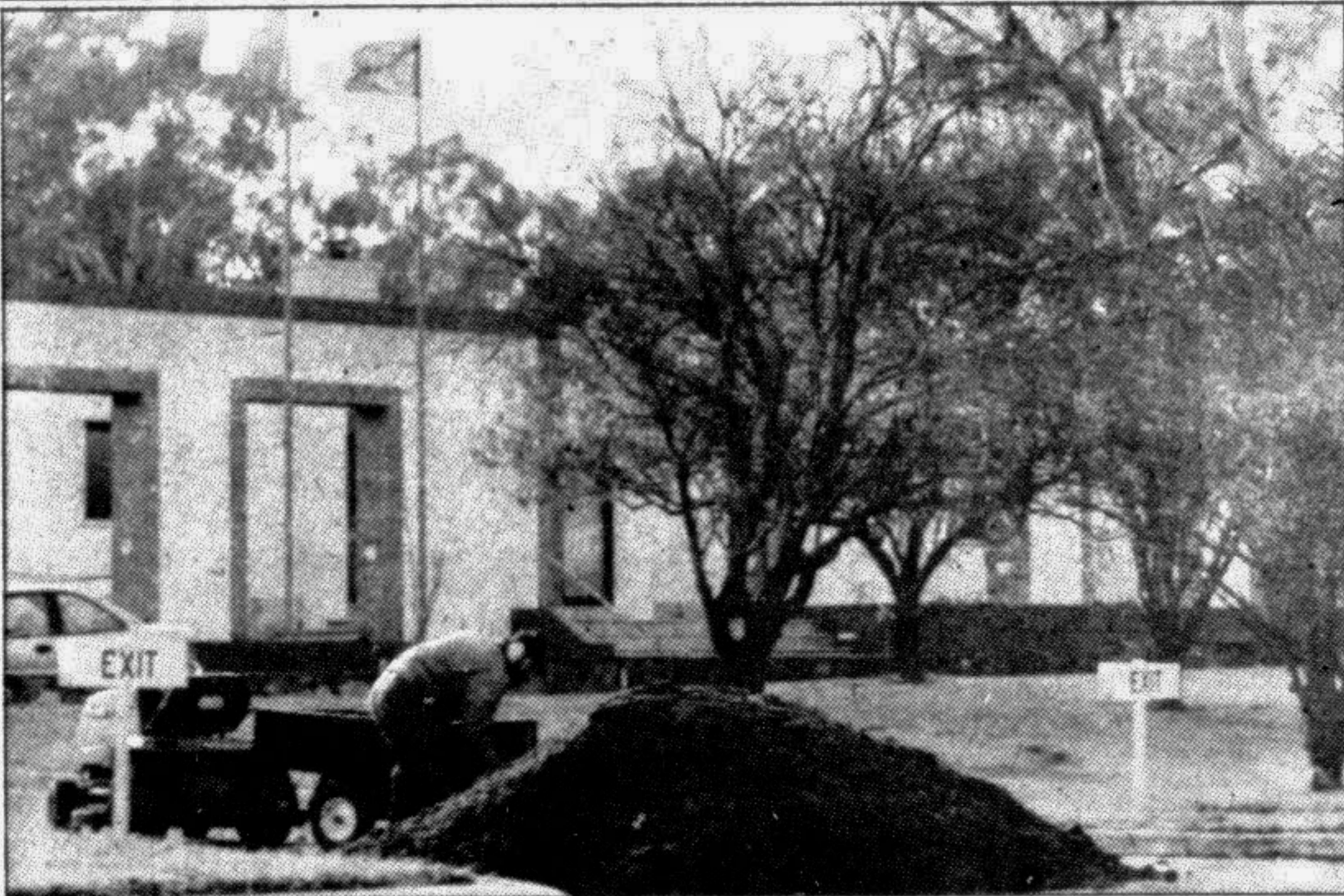
Talks between guerillas and Russian officials began after four hours of fighting during which special forces only captured two outbuildings and the ground floor of the main three-story building, Itar-Tass news agency said.

The attack was launched at 5:00 am (0100 GMT) to end a standoff that began Wednesday when about 60 heavily armed Chechen guerillas took the city hospital with about 1,000 hostages. They demanded an end to the war in Chechnya and the withdrawal of Russian forces from the separatist republic.

The Chechens asked for a break in the fighting and for talks, promising to free some women and children being held, a source at the interior Ministry in Moscow told AFP. Shooting in the city, just north of Chechnya, stopped at 9:00 am (0500 GMT), an AFP correspondent reported.

About 150 people had been freed after about two hours of talks, raising the total to 255, Itar-Tass reported.

At least 105 of the hostages were freed by commandos in the initial assault



A groundsman removes two tonnes of cow manure, blood and bones from the driveway of the French embassy in Canberra Friday dumped to protest the resumption of French nuclear testing in the South Pacific. The French ambassador to Australia, Dominique Girard, brushed off the demonstration, saying, "manure is a very ecological way to work in the agricultural field, it could be useful"

Washington plans to resume nuclear testing

LOS ANGELES, June 17: Senior US Defence Department officials are seeking to resume underground testing of small-scale nuclear bombs, the Los Angeles Times reported today, says Reuter.

The newspaper, quoting unnamed officials of President Bill Clinton's administration, said a high-level White House meeting to set US policy on the issue is expected as early as next week.

It quoted senior Pentagon officials as saying the "hydro nuclear tests" are necessary to guarantee that vital components in nuclear weapons do not deteriorate over time.

The Pentagon proposal follows France's recent decision to stage eight underground blasts from September to May which triggered disappointment and anger around the world.

Foreign Minister Herve de Charette said in Paris on Friday the planned tests at the Mururoa Atoll in French Polynesia were essential to guarantee France's nuclear deterrent and to yield data to allow computer simulations to replace live tests.

The Pentagon proposal calls for the testing of nuclear bombs with maximum yields of 500 tonnes of high explosives, relatively small by nuclear standards, the Los Angeles Times said.

It said experts at the Energy and State Departments were strongly resisting the Pentagon proposals on the grounds that US testing would represent a major setback to nuclear disarmament and to efforts to control nuclear proliferation.

The United States agreed to a moratorium on underground tests during the George Bush administration and since then has been negotiating a comprehensive test ban treaty in Geneva through the conference on disarmament.



Twenty-one contestants of the Miss Queen Of The Year International 1995 pose for photographers during a preview in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday. The annual pageant's final will be held in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday. The pageant was held for the first time in Kuala Lumpur in 1993.

Analysts call for return of 'Reagan Doctrine' to end Bosnian conflict

WASHINGTON, June 17: As the war in Bosnia rages into its fourth year, some US analysts and politicians are calling for a return to the "Reagan Doctrine" with a "covert buildup of the Bosnian government army," reports AP.

During the 1980s, President Reagan's administration successfully countered the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and destabilised a pro-Soviet regime in Nicaragua by supplying local resistance fighters with sophisticated weapons.

Administration officials say their goal is to end the war by supporting diplomatic efforts to persuade the Bosnian Serbs to accept an international peace plan.

The Institute of Peace and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe co-sponsored a briefing last week on Capitol Hill to determine the exact military balance in Bosnia and to find ways to alter it in the Bosnian government's favour. Jensen expects to publish a summary of the debate next week.

The government army and its Bosnian Croat allies outnumber the estimated 100,000 Serb troops by 2:1. But the Serbs have 450 tanks compared to 135 for the government side. They also have up to 1,800 artillery pieces — about double the number available to the government and the Bosnian Croats.

"The embargo policy has worked to the advantage of the aggressors," said Zalmay Khalilzad, a programme director at the Rand Corp. "If that were replaced by an active strategy of arming the Bosnians and helping them defend themselves, that would probably be a good alternative to going in" with ground troops or air power.

Even assistance in non-lethal equipment not banned under the arms embargo — including transport helicopters, trucks and anti-artillery radars — would go a long way in helping government forces, Khalilzad said at last week's briefing.

While the United States chose to supply Afghan rebels

Fire ruins French consulate in Perth

PERTH, Australia, June 17: The French consulate in Perth was destroyed today in what was believed to have been a deliberate fire to protest France's decision to resume nuclear tests, officials said, reports AFP.

A fire service spokesman said people who telephoned the emergency services had reported hearing the sound of explosions and that a bomb could not be ruled out. He added though that the sounds could have been breaking glass or gas.

Only the shell of the building in the western Australia port city was left after the fire about 4:40 am (2140 GMT Friday), the fire spokesman and police said.

French honorary consul, Robert Pearce, a doctor who lost his consulting rooms in the blaze, said he believed the fire was deliberately started as a protest against the new nuclear tests to be staged in the Pacific.

18 more killed in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, June 17: Eighteen more people including three Indian security personnel died in separate overnight clashes in the northern Indian state of Kashmir, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported Friday, says AFP.

It said five Muslim militants were among those killed in the Kashmir valley in the past 24 hours and added that the remaining 10 casualties occurred among civilians of the state bordering Pakistan.

Thirty other Muslim guerillas were detained during the period by security forces engaged in operations aimed at stamping out the separatist rebellion in Kashmir. PTI quoted a Kashmir administration spokesman as saying.

Clashes leave 27 dead in Afghanistan

KABUL, June 17: The Afghan government said on Friday four people were killed in an overnight air raid on Kabul and 23 had died in the central province of Ghor, reports Reuter.

Government controlled Kabul radio, monitored in Islamabad, also reported that three people had been wounded in the bombing.

Defence Ministry sources said northern warlord general Abdul Rashid Dostum had sent one plane to bomb Kabul and another to hit the northern city of Kunduz. No details of the reported raid on Kunduz were immediately available.

The radio said Dostum's militiamen had attacked two villages in the central province of Ghor, about 600 km (375 miles) west of Kabul, on Thursday, killing about 19 civilians.

Off the Record

Jews make him apologise

LOS ANGELES: Pop superstar Michael Jackson apologised on Friday for using lyrics, that Jewish groups said could promote anti-semitism, and agreed to include an explanation in unshipped copies of his new album, reports Reuter.

The singer's backdown followed criticism of the song "they don't care about us" from both the anti-defamation league of b'nai b'rith and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre. In it, Jackson sings: "Jew me/sue me/ everybody/ do me/ kick me/ kick me/ don't you/ black or white me."

Jackson initially said the song — from the album *History: past, present and future — book I* — which goes on sale in the United States on June 20 — was supposed to draw attention to the pain of prejudice and hate, and to social and political problems.

However the groups feared young people would hear the offensive language and not get the nuances. In response to the criticism, Jackson issued a public apology.

"I have much regret and apologise from the bottom of my heart if I have hurt anyone's feelings in conveying my own," the 36-year-old star said in a statement.

Ratcatcher in trap

LONDON: Britain's richest ratcatcher, millionaire Martin Williams, lost his battle on Friday to keep his job with a city council that sacked him for taking 10 pounds' worth (15 dollar) of extra time off work, reports Reuter.

The 44-year-old wealthy eccentric announced after losing his case at an industrial tribunal that he would set up his own rival pest-control business in Doncaster, northern England.

Martin, who inherited much of his mother's eleven million pound (18 million dollar) fortune five years ago, had claimed he took the time off work because he was ill.

Scholarship for being assaulted

WASHINGTON: George Washington University has offered a four-year scholarship to a girl who was sexually assaulted by a high school basketball star whom the college is recruiting, according to her attorney, reports AP.

But school officials said Friday the decision to offer the 100,000 grant isn't related to the assault, which prompted an apology from the basketball player and an agreement to a private settlement with the victim.

"We want to emphasise that the university's decision is based solely on the particular circumstances relating to this young woman's academic potential, and is in no way related to or contingent upon any other recruiting situation currently being pursued by the university," Bob Chernak, the university's vice president for student services, told The Washington Post.

"Her courage and resilience have made a deep impression on administrators who have come to believe she represents qualities that everyone can admire — scholarship, fortitude and the ability to rise above adversity," he added.

Arafat rejects isolated Palestinian states

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, June 17: PLO chief Yasser Arafat on Friday rejected the idea of creating isolated Palestinian enclaves on the West Bank as part of any deal with Israel on extending autonomy, reports AFP.

"If they want to give us an island here and there, that is refused," Arafat said.

There has to be a timetable for withdrawal regardless of which area we start with, Tulkarem or Jenin. Palestinian land must be under a single sovereignty.

"We do not accept that any town, village or refugee camp be excluded," he told about 1,000 Musullis at Juma prayers in the Katiba Mosque in self-ruled Gaza City.

Palestinian self-rule was launched in May 1994 in the Gaza Strip and the enclave of Jericho in the West Bank.

Israel is proposing a partial deal for the next phase of autonomy to include an initial, limited redeployment on the West Bank outside certain towns ahead of elections to a Palestinian self-rule council.

The Palestinians accept the idea of a two-phased pullback as set out in the terms of the 1993 declaration of principles, but they insist any deal struck by a July 1 target date "includes a timetable for a complete withdrawal."

Arafat said the 130,000 settlers in the West Bank would be treated in the same way as the 5,000 living in the Gaza Strip, until after negotiations on the final status of the territories.

The Israeli army guards the 19 settlements in Gaza while joint Israeli-Palestinian units patrol roads around them.

LTTE asks Muslims to quit town or face eviction

COLOMBO, June 17: Tamil rebels have told Muslims to leave an eastern Sri Lanka town by July 1 or be forcibly evicted, a Muslim legislator said today, reports AFP.

Mohamed Hisbullah, MP from the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) said he and several other community leaders had received a warning last week purporting to come from the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Police were investigating "to find out if the warning was from the LTTE or the work of an individual trying to create panic," Hisbullah said.

The ultimatum, issued on LTTE letter head, said that unless civilians in the Muslim township of Kathankudy va-

cated by July 1, they (the Tigers) will be compelled to take necessary action," Hisbullah said.

"We know by past experience what 'necessary action' means," Hisbullah told AFP. "All of us will be chased out by the Tigers. But we are not sure if this warning is really from the LTTE."

He said LTTE rebels had not harassed Muslims for "several months" and there was "no reason why they will do this now."

Following a similar LTTE ultimatum issued to Muslims in the northeast in 1990, some 80,000 Muslims fled the Jaffna peninsula while about 200 Muslim musallihy (worshippers) were massacred at mosques in Kathankudy and neighbouring Eravur.