

Tamil-speaking regiment to be set up Chandrika to form advisory council to rule Jaffna

COLOMBO, Aug 6: Days after proposing a peace plan to end a Tamil separatist war, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has moved to implement an interim plan in a region formerly held by the rebels, reports AFP.

Kumaratunga told Tamil legislators over the weekend that she will use her executive powers to establish a "northeast advisory council" to help run the region until her peace plan, which will give the Tamils autonomy, is approved.

"It will be a board of 21 members that will advise the President on running the northeast," Tamil legislator Dharmalingam Sidhathan said today.

Sidhathan said the President said she would create the interim council

soon.

The peace plan proposed by Kumaratunga last week calls for creating eight autonomous regions in Sri Lanka, including in areas where Tamils dominate. It must be approved by a two-thirds majority in Parliament and a referendum, a process that could take some months.

Officials said the President was keen to restore normal civilian life in large parts of the embattled northeast where security forces recently drove out the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The region has been without a provincial council for nearly five years.

The rebels have been fighting for a separate nation in the northeast in a war which has claimed 50,000 lives since 1972.

Reuter adds, President Chandrika Kumaratunga has accepted a proposal to set up a Tamil-speaking regiment in the 100,000-strong Sri Lankan army, a former Tamil militia leader said today, reports Reuter.

"We proposed that a Tamil-speaking national regiment should be set up in a manner which would manifest the multi-ethnic nature of the Sri Lankan army," Douglas Devananda, a leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party and a member of parliament, told Reuters.

The army, fighting a 12-year war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), is almost entirely drawn from the majority Sinhalese community, Devananda said.

Another Reuter reports says: Elite police commandos

beat off a Tamil Tiger guerrilla attack on their base in eastern Sri Lanka by launching a counter-attack on the raiders from the rear, a military spokesman said yesterday.

"As soon as the attack by the Tigers started our troops sent out a patrol from one end of their base and counter-attacked the enemy from behind," he told Reuters.

The special task force commandos at the base 220 km (140 miles) east of Colombo killed one rebel and recovered three weapons after the 30-minute firefight late on Saturday and early today, he said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels are fighting for an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the north and east of the island.

World population growth declines in last 4 yrs

PARIS, Aug 6: The world's population has risen less than expected in the past four years, leading demographic experts to lower their predictions of world growth by 330 million people, according to a study published Saturday, reports AFP.

Although there are now 5.7 billion people in the world, the growth rate of 1.5 per cent in 1995 represents a decline from the 1991 rate of 1.7 per cent, the Institute of Demographic Studies said.

Using figures from the private US research body Population Reference Bureau, it says projections for the world population in the year 2025 have fallen from 8.64 billion to 8.31 billion.

The average fertility rate is 3.1 children per woman — ranging from 8.1 in the Gaza Strip to 1.2 in Italy — with Africa the only continent where the rate — at 5.8 — was higher than the world average.

Life expectancy is highest in Japan at 79 years and lowest in the central African republic at 41. Across Africa the average was only 54 while the world average was 70. In

European Union (EU) countries it was 77.

The four most populous countries of the world will retain their positions in the year 2025, the study predicted. They are China (1.218 billion in 1995 and a predicted 1.523 billion), India (930 million and 1.385 billion), the United States (263 and 338 million) and Indonesia (198 and 277 million).

The total projected population of all 15 EU countries will remain stable at around 372 million.

Population Reference Bureau figures are calculated using data from the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union, the Council of Europe and National Census Bureaus.

Region	1995 population (Millions)	2025 population
Africa	720	1,510
Americas	774	1,081
USA	263	338
Asia	3,451	4,939
China	1,218	1,523
India	930	1,385
Japan	125	126
Europe	581	590
EU	372	372
Russia	147	153
Oceania	28	39

'US gives Croatia advice on offensive against Serbs'

ZAGREB, Croatia, Aug 6: The United States gave Croatia advice on how to conduct its massive assault on rebel Serbs, and gave tacit approval for the operation, Croatia's foreign minister indicated Saturday, reports AP.

The offensive, which captured the rebels' self-proclaimed capital, grew out of Croatia's thrust into western Bosnia, which it said was intended to protect the UN "safe area" of Bihać.

The United States signed a military cooperation agreement with Croatia in November, and a company

staffed by recently retired US military officers has been advising Croatia on military organisation.

"The Americans understood our operation in Bosnia and our concerns for Bihać," Foreign Minister Mate Granic told The Associated Press, speaking in English.

Granic didn't give details of the US contribution, but Ambassador Peter Galbraith attended the July 22 meeting where Croatian and Bosnian leaders agreed to military cooperation in the Bihać area.

Naturally, they gave some very strong suggestions regarding the 'Serb' civilians,

UN peacekeepers in Croatia and... regarding the quantity (size) of the operation."

"They did not give a green light, but they understood our concerns to help Bihać," Granic said.

The thousands of Croatian army troops who poured into western Bosnia focused their attack far south of Bihać, making stunning gains against the rebel Serbs and winning positions that let them shell Knin, the Serb stronghold in Croatia.

The tacit US approval for the strike was clear in Washington's reaction to the Croatian offensive.

France unlikely to carry out final N-test

PARIS, Aug 6: France's European Affairs Minister, Michel Barnier, has hinted that France might not carry out the eighth and final explosion in its nuclear testing programme, according to early editions of a French Sunday newspaper, reports AFP.

"It is necessary to remember the tests are part of the final series limited to seven or eight tests at the most. Perhaps we will not carry out the eighth," Barnier said in an interview published in Le Journal du Dimanche.

French President Jacques Chirac sparked international anger when he announced shortly after taking office in May that France would resume nuclear tests in the French Polynesian islands in September.

DPRK for global N-disarmament

SEOUL, Aug 6: North Korea, widely suspected of nuclear weapons development, on Sunday urged complete nuclear disarmament worldwide, reports AP.

The communist party newspaper Rodong Sinmun, quoted by the official Korean Central News Agency, singled out Japan for criticism, saying it has collected all the materials and technology necessary to make nuclear weapons.

To check and frustrate Japan's attempt to realise nuclear armament is an important requirement for ensuring peace and security in Northeast Asia and the world at present," Rodong Sinmun said.

North Korea has repeatedly denied it has a nuclear weapons programme. But US

officials have said they believe the communist country has enough weapons-grade plutonium to make at least two bombs.

At the height of tensions on the Korean Peninsula last year, the North threatened to turn Seoul, the capital of capitalist rival South Korea, into a "sea of fire."

And during recent negotiations with US officials on dismantling its nuclear programme for economic and diplomatic benefits, the North threatened to start reprocessing used fuel rods into more weapons-grade plutonium.

The Demilitarised Zone that separates the North and South is the world's most heavily guarded border, and tensions between the two countries remain high because

no peace treaty was ever signed at the end of their 1950-53 war.

Nevertheless, the North used the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima to call for world peace.

"Today, when the confrontation structure between the East and the West has been destroyed and the Cold War terminated, there can be no reason to possess nuclear weapons or develop new ones and no condition to justify such acts," Rodong Sinmun said.

Japan and North Korea have long been enemies. Tokyo has been hoping relations will improve, particularly in the wake of its decision to send rice to the North on a humanitarian basis.

India impounds book critical on Kashmir policy

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: The Indian government has impounded a book which is critical of its policy in troubled Kashmir in a move the US author said appeared to be an attempt to muzzle public criticism, reports Reuter.

Indian customs confiscated a box containing about 75 copies of the book, "Double Betrayal: Repression and Insurgency in Kashmir," when it arrived in New Delhi from the United States in the second half of July, Indian officials said.



Some 15,000 people march through the streets of Sydney on Sunday during the Hiroshima Day rally to mark the 50th anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb. Australia has hosted huge anti-nuclear rallies around the country strongly condemning France's decision to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific. — AFP/UNB photo

'Horror of Hiroshima may be repeated if bombs exist'

HIROSHIMA, Japan, Aug 6: With the deep, clear tolling of a bronze bell, a flight of doves into the blue-gray sky and a moment of tearful silence, tens of thousands of people on Sunday marked the moment 50 years ago that the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, reports AP.

"Memory is where the past and future meet," Hiroshima Mayor Takahashi Hirooka said in a declaration appealing for peace and the abolition of nuclear arms. "So long as such weapons exist, it is inevitable that the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will be repeated."

On a morning whose steamy heat recalled the day the bomb fell, an estimated 50,000 solemn mourners milled through the sprawling park built near ground zero — the centre of the blast — making offerings of chrysanthemums and incense. Shinto priests in white silk robes and saffron-clothed Buddhist monks intoned chants and beat prayer drums.

Standing rank upon rank, schoolchildren in uniform, women in subdued kimono and men in ties and short shirtsleeves against the heat bowed deeply before the arch-shaped monument enshrining the dead, with the eternal flame to the victims flickering in the background.

The crowd fell silent at 8:15 am, the moment of the explosion. Only the cooing of

doves, the bell's tolling and the buzz of cicadas broke the hush.

Nearly half of Hiroshima's wartime population — 140,000 people, plus or minus 10,000 according to the city's own estimate — died outright or of bomb-related causes in the six months after the bomb was dropped.

In the few fatal seconds following the explosion, human beings were vaporised where they stood or suffered agonising flash burns that ripped skin from bone. Buildings were blasted from their foundations and streetcars blown off their tracks.

In what had been a thriving business district, a huge firestorm erupted. The rivers

were clogged with corpses. The horribly injured died crying for water.

Mourning the dead, Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama laid a wreath of yellow chrysanthemums and pressed his government's opposition to atomic weapons and nuclear testing.

"As the only country in the history of humankind to experience the devastation of atomic bombing, Japan has held a firm determination that the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never happen again," he told the crowd.

Anti-nuclear activists from around the world converged on Hiroshima for the anniversary, with harsh criticism directed at France, which has announced plans to resume nuclear weapons tests in the Pacific next month. Japan and other nations have urged Paris to call off the tests, and those calls were repeated Sunday.

"We call for an immediate and comprehensive test ban and the establishment of a new nuclear-free zone in the Asia-Pacific," the mayor said in his declaration.

For some, the passing of half a century marks a catharsis.

"I come here every year, but I feel a bit different this year," said 59-year-old Hiroshima native Toru Sukita, whose older brother, a junior-high student, died in the

blast.

"We never found out exactly what happened to him, but we believe he died in this river here," he said, pointing to the river that runs through Peace Park.

"I prefer not to look back," Sukita added. "That's not why I came here — I came to force myself to think about the present and the future."

The Japanese government has spent much of the year arguing over whether Japan was an aggressor in World War II or fought in self-defence, and over the years, many Japanese have tried to forget or justify the war of aggression that preceded the bombing and led to the deaths of millions across Asia.

Israeli police shut Temple Mount

JERUSALEM, Aug 6: Israeli police shut Jerusalem's Temple Mount to all visitors today to defuse tensions between Muslim and Jewish worshippers, a police spokesman said, reports Reuter.

Earlier, Muslims shouted four Jews off the mount as thousands of Israelis gathered at the adjacent western wall to observe a holy day commemorating the destruction of ancient Jewish temples once situated on the site.

The amount is the third holiest site in Islam, the location of Al-Aqsa Mosque, and once site of the Jewish temples.

BRIEFLY



Residents of the Croatian port of Split flash the V-sign and wave the Croatian national colours, in celebration of the capture of the rebel Serb "capital" Knin in the Krajina region by Croatian forces on Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

ROK launches its first sat:

South Korea launched its first satellite from Cape Canaveral Saturday but a problem with a booster rocket meant the apparatus might not be able to remain in orbit for its full 10-year life span, AFP reports from Florida.

The Korea Sat-1, one of the world's most advanced communications satellites, failed to reach its intended preliminary orbit after one of the nine booster rockets did not separate from the larger Delta II rocket.

Mine claims 20 Afghans a day:

More than 20 civilians are killed or maimed by landmines in Afghanistan every day, a report from Kabul said Saturday, Xinhua reports from Islamabad.

We appeal to the international community to stop the production, use, export and stockpiling of landmines, said Sayed Aqa, director of the Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA) while launching a campaign to ban landmines.

Kurd rebels kill 8 in Turkey:

Militants of the banned Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) killed eight civilians, including two children under 10 in an overnight rocket attack on a village in western Turkey, Xinhua reports from Ankara.

Turkey's Anatolia News Agency reported yesterday that four others were injured in the Friday night attack in the southern province of Hatay and six of the dead were from one family. "This is a massacre," said Utku Acun, Governor of Hatay province.

5 Americans abducted in Tanzania:

Five Americans, including two children, were abducted Saturday by gunmen along a remote game park road in the East African country of Tanzania, officials from a Baptist mission said, AFP reports from Richmond, Virginia.

The State Department said it was investigating the incident that occurred in the early afternoon about 160 kilometres (100 miles) from the capital Dar-es-Salaam.

UNITA rebels clash with troops:

Angolan army forces and soldiers of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) have clashed in Lunda-Norte, northeastern Angola, the Portuguese news agency Lusa reported Saturday, AFP says from Lisbon.

Quoted by Lusa, Brigadier Jacques Raul, military commander of the region, said violent clashes had been underway since Wednesday in the diamond mining area.

Algerian forces kill 15 rebels:

Algerian security forces have killed 15 Muslim guerrillas, including 10 in four areas of the capital Algiers, in the past three days, the official Algerian news agency APS said on Saturday, Reuter reports from Paris.

APS, quoting a statement by security officials, said five more were slain in Blida and Boumerdes, near the capital, and in the eastern region of Djel and Relizane in the west.

2 publishers held in Gaza:

Palestinian police on Saturday detained the publishers of two newspapers in the Gaza Strip identified with the militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups, newspaper employees said, Reuter reports from Gaza.

Police released Imad al-Flauji of Al-Watan after questioning him for several hours but were still holding Alaa al-Saltawi, publisher of Al-Istiklal, employees said.

Violence claims 6 more in Karachi

ISLAMABAD, Aug 6: Six more people died in a new wave of violence in Pakistan's port city of Karachi on Saturday as Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto urged a "give-and-take" effort to restore peace, reports Reuter.

"We want peace and there can be give and take for peace," Bhutto told reporters in the Punjab province capital of Lahore.

But she said that in a final settlement the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) must end "the politics of violence" and members must surrender their weapons.

15 die in Peruvian mishap:

A bus serving to miss a trailer truck smashed into a concrete wall along the Pan-American highway Saturday, killing at least 15 people and leaving more than 30 injured, hospital officials said, AFP reports from Lima.

The driver of the Ciba Inter-City survived the crash and was being investigated to determine whether alcohol played a role in the accidents, authorities said.

Floods claim 20 in Pakistan:

Some 20 people were killed in torrential rains and flooding in two tribal districts in northwest Pakistan overnight, it was reported yesterday, AFP says from Islamabad.