

'Rescue operation to free hostages 'last resort'

SRINAGAR, Aug 18: As security experts gathered in Kashmir, the Indian governor said Friday a rescue operation to free four Western hostages from separatist guerrillas must be "a last resort", report AP.

K V Krishna Rao, the federally appointed governor of Jammu-Kashmir state, said a military rescue would be difficult without risking the hostages' lives, but he didn't rule out the option if negotiations fail.

"You have to have patience to see that all the diplomatic and peaceful efforts have a chance to succeed," Rao said in an interview at the governor's mansion.

"If we launched an operation to rescue the hostages in the high Himalayas, the captors would probably see it coming and have time to decide to eliminate the hostages," said Rao, a retired general and former army commander.

He said the four hostages apparently were being held in one group and moving each day through dense

mountain forests.

A previously unknown group calling itself Al-Faran has been holding the American, two Britons and a German, offering to exchange them for 15 jailed militants.

Last weekend, the kidnappers executed Norwegian hostage Hans Christian Ostro and threatened to kill the other captives by Tuesday night.

But Rao said the militants told Indian negotiators on Wednesday that all the captives were still alive and in good health, which he said was an indication that the contacts have made some progress.

In London, Tim Devlin, a member of parliament disclosed that Al-Faran promised to provide photographs, tape recordings or answers to questions only the hostages would know to prove that their captives are still alive.

India has flown anti-terrorist commandos to Jammu-Kashmir from its elite Black Cats unit.

US tanks deployed south of Amman for war games

AMMAN, Aug 18: US tanks and trucks were deployed south of the Jordanian capital today as Washington stepped up military and diplomatic pressure on Iraqi President Saddam, reports Reuters.

The Sabre-Rattling came as senior US officials, led by Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau and special assistant to the President Mark Parris, held talks with Jordan's King Hussein.

"Our purpose in coming was to have the fullest possible consultation with him at this critical juncture in the region," Pelletreau said.

Reuters television saw large numbers of US tanks and trucks from the joint US-Jordanian exercise infinite moonlight about 100 km (60 miles) south of Amman. The desert exercise, centred further south, was to include US planes crossing Israel from an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean.

The exercise, which began

today, had been previously scheduled but assumed a high profile after Washington pledged to back Jordan if it was threatened by Iraq for giving sanctuary to top-level defectors last week.

Washington, on Thursday reporting "unusual" Iraqi troop movements seemingly focused towards Kuwait, also said it was moving military equipment nearer the Gulf and raising readiness in case forces had to be moved from elsewhere.

AP adds from Baghdad: Iraq on Friday angrily denied making threatening military moves as American and Jordanian soldiers began joint manoeuvres in Jordan following the defection of several of Saddam Hussein's key officers.

"The American administration creates unfounded stories to consolidate its presence in the Gulf and to terrorise the Sabahs," the Kuwaiti rulers, the state-run

Iraqi News Agency said.

Al-Thwra, newspaper of Iraq's ruling party, derided Western concerns about Saddam's intentions as "merely a frog's croaking" and "a balloon full of lies."

The comments came after the Pentagon announced it was moving shiploads of troop supplies closer to the Gulf and making other preparations for a potential US military response following Iraqi troops movements south of Baghdad.

In Kuwait, top officials met with Ge. J H Binford Peay, commander of the Tampa, Florida-based Central Command, to discuss "possible Iraqi threats to the security of the region," the Kuwait News Agency reported.

Kuwait's Defence Minister, Sheikh Ahmed al-Humoud al-Sabah, said the emirate was closely monitoring Iraqi troop movements.

But Sheikh Ahmed said

satellite photos showed Iraqi forces had not moved south beyond a certain latitude — which he did not specify — and expressed the belief that Iraq would not stage a repeat of last October's more threatening troop movements.

In Baghdad, chief UN weapons inspector Rolf Ekeus said Thursday night that Iraq had turned over "new information" on its biological and nuclear programme. He did not elaborate.

In Jordan, a US Embassy official said the two-week joint exercises began in an army camp in the southern desert town of Qatana, 75 miles (120 kilometers) from Amman.

The media was denied access to the site, where US marines and special forces were engaged with Jordanian soldiers in combined arms exercises under seething temperatures.



South African President Nelson Mandela (R) appears with his estranged wife, Winnie, during the African National Congress (ANC) national executive council tour of trouble-torn Phola Park squatter Camp east of Johannesburg in this file photo dated 1993. Mandela filed for divorce from his wife, from who he separated three years ago. —AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Iran frees 100 Iraqi POWs:

Iran on Thursday set free 100 Iraqi prisoners of war (POWs) after they were pardoned by the country's leaders to mark the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Mohammad (SM). Tehran radio announced, AFP reports from Tehran.

The soldiers were handed over to Iraqi officials at the border post of Khosravi, 700 kms (460 miles) southeast of Tehran, it said. Their release was ordered by Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is also commander of the armed forces.

Flood kills 2 in Vietnam:

Rivers have swollen to dangerous levels after heavy rains and flooded large areas of northern Vietnam, killing at least two people, reports said Friday, AFP reports from Hanoi.

Water levels on the Red River were dangerously high and had flooded areas in northern provinces, submerging at least 2,000 hectares (4,800 acres) of land and thousands of houses. The Vietnam News reported.

13 die in Indonesian bus mishap:

Thirteen people were killed and 33 injured, 18 of them seriously, in a collision between a bus and a truck in the central Sumatra province of Jambi, the Antara news agency said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The accident occurred on a Sumatra highway near Muara Bungo after the truck, trying to overtake a vehicle at high speed, collided head-on with a speeding bus coming from the opposite direction, Antara said. The injured were rushed to a hospital in Muara Bungo, it said.

Clash leaves 4 dead in Egypt:

Egyptian security forces late Thursday killed four presumed leaders of an outlawed Islamic militant organisation in a gunbattle near Minya police reported, AFP says from Minya, Egypt.

They said security units went to the village of Al Khergigeen 220 kilometres (137 miles) south of Cairo, to arrest the four men, alleged to have been senior members of the group Jameaa Islamiya.

Swedish PM to resign in March '96:

Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson will resign in March 1996 at a special congress of his Social Democratic Party (SDP), Swedish political sources said, Reuters reports from Stockholm.

Carlsson called a surprise news conference at short notice Friday, to announce what his office said was "important information."

KSA refuses visas to Iranians:

Saudi Arabia has refused to issue visas to Iranians who want to go on pilgrimage to Makkah, Iran's official news agency IRNA said on Thursday, Reuters reports from Nicosia.

It said applicants complained that the Saudi Embassy in Tehran was refusing to issue visas to Iranians who wanted to perform Umrah, a minor Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah.

Sudan to free imprisoned women:

Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir has ordered the release of all women prisoners who have children, the official Sudan news agency Sana said yesterday, Reuters reports from Khartoum.

Lieutenant-General Bashir issued the order in a speech on Thursday to the delegation that will represent Sudan at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing next month.

Bashir said his government cared about women's issues because Islam honoured women and made them equal to men.

Calm returns to Taipei streets:

Calm returned to Taipei streets Friday after about 30 hours of rioting among hundreds of rival cab drivers wielding rocks, firebombs and clubs, police said, AP reports from Taipei.

The rioting left at least 23 people injured and 110 cabs damaged, police said. State radio said seven of the injured were in serious condition.

Quakes shake southeastern Turkey:

Two moderate earthquakes with preliminary magnitudes of 4.9 and 4.3 shook this southwestern province on Friday morning, AP reports from Denizli, Turkey.

There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties in Denizli, some 475 kilometres (300 miles) south of the capital Ankara. The epicentre was about 30 kilometres northeast of Denizli, Istanbul's Kandilli observatory said. Turkey's southwestern and eastern regions sit atop an earthquake-prone belt known as the Anatolian fault.

UN Asst Secy General in Myanmar:

The United Nations' assistant secretary-general has met with Myanmar officials and visited inmates at Yangon's Insein prison where political dissidents are held, government radio said Friday, AP reports from Yangon.

Alvaro De Soto met Thursday with Maung Aye, vice chairman of the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council, it said. Also among those present was Ohn Gyaw, minister of foreign affairs.

4 burnt to death in Cape Town:

Four elderly people died and 15 were hurt when a fire raged through the frail-care section of a retirement centre in Cape Town, South Africa overnight, a spokesman for the centre said yesterday, AFP reports from Cape Town.

Jet crashes in Philippines:

A military twin-engine plane crashed into the sea during acrobatic manoeuvres Friday, air force officials said. The pilot was killed, AP reports from Puerto Princesa, Philippines.

The OV-10 Bronco aircraft, used by the military in counter insurgency operations, was conducting acrobatic manoeuvres with two other OV-10s over the Puerto Princesa Bay when it failed to pull up during a dive, a radio reporter who witnessed the accident said.

Israel to close all PLO offices in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM, Aug 18: Israel's police minister said Friday he will close all PLO offices in east Jerusalem, arguing that the Israel-PLO accord limits the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, reports AP.

The announcement by Police Minister Moshe Shahal came one day after police questioned employees of eight Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem. Israel's government decided earlier this week to adopt a tougher position on PLO activities in the disputed city.

"If any of these institutions (in Jerusalem) is connected with the Palestinian Authority, it will be closed," Shahal told Israel radio.

Smoking causes half of heart attacks in adults

LONDON, Aug 18: Smokers in their 30s and 40s have five times as many heart attacks as non-smokers the same age, a study released today found, reports Reuters.

Smoking is responsible for half the heart attacks in younger adults the world over, the study, sponsored by Britain's Medical Research Council and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, shows.

The report in the British Medical Journal — claimed to be the most exhaustive ever into smoking and heart attacks — showed that youth offers no protection from the deadly effects of tobacco.

"This study shows that smoking causes even more premature heart attacks than we previously supposed," said Dr Rory Collins of the British Heart Foundation.

"The younger you are, the bigger the proportion of heart attacks caused by tobacco. When a habitual smoker in their 30s or 40s has a heart attack, there's an 80 per cent chance that tobacco caused it."

Delhi, Yangon to check insurgency firmly

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: India and Myanmar would firmly deal with insurgents and narco-terrorists operating along their border and felt that their cooperation had resulted in checking inadvertent intrusions into their territories, reports PTI.

This was agreed to at a two-day meeting between the delegations of Myanmar and India on cooperation between the civilian border authorities which concluded here yesterday.

Doors to econ, political power are barely open for women

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 17: Despite two decades of material progress, no country in the world treats its women as well as its men, although Scandinavian nations come close, according to a major UN report released on Thursday, reports Reuters.

"Over the past 20 years, doors to education and health have opened rapidly for women, but the doors to economic and political power are barely ajar," said Mahbub ul Haq, a former Pakistani finance minister who prepared the study.

The UN human development report, aimed this year at providing country by country statistics for the fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing next month, con-

Delhi-Beijing discuss troops cut along Himalayan border

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: Concerned about the latest Chinese nuclear test, India began another round of talks with Beijing Friday on reducing their forces along their disputed Himalayan frontier, reports AP.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan met his Indian counterpart, Foreign Secretary Salman Haider, for the eighth session of the Joint Working Group since 1988.

Tang also will meet Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who may raise India's concern over China's fourth nuclear testing in 14 months, and over reports that China is providing Pakistan with M-11 missiles that could be armed with nuclear warheads and threaten India.

India often cites China's nuclear arsenal as a reason for its refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. About 200 Tibetan stu-

dents demonstrated in New Delhi and burned the Chinese flag to protest Tang's visit and China's rule over Tibet.

"China has no legal right to discuss and negotiate on the border. This is the region which demarcates the common border between India and Tibet before China's forcible occupation of Tibet," said the Tibetan Freedom Movement.

India and China fought a bitter border war in 1962 and relations, though considerably improved in recent years, are still strained at times.

There was no official comment after the opening session of the border talks, which are scheduled to conclude on Sunday.

The boundary settlement, clarifications on the line of control, troop reduction and confidence building measures form part of agenda for discussions, an Indian Foreign Ministry official said

on condition of anonymity.

Previous sessions resulted in agreements to move back some forces from confrontation positions and to open some border checkpoints to trade.

But after seven years of periodic meetings, progress has been slow toward resolving the boundary dispute along the 4,000-kilometre (2,500 mile) frontier.

The Indian army has 11 mountain divisions, or 154,000 men, along the frontier. China is believed to have as many or more.

Beijing claims India is holding 36,000 square miles (90,000 sq kilometers) that belongs to China in what is now India's eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh.

India says China illegally occupies 14,500 square miles (90,000 square kilometers) that it seized in the 1962 war in the northwest, a barren Himalayan region adjoining India's Kashmir state.



Indonesian President Suharto (L) hands over the national flag to a representative of the flag raising team composed of selected high school students during the flag raising ceremony at the presidential palace Thursday. Foreign dignitaries and military representatives attended the ceremony to mark the country's 50th independence anniversary. At left is the president's wife Tien Suharto. — AFP/UNB photo

'Prabhakaran ordered killings of Lankan president, politicians'

COLOMBO, Aug 18: A high-ranking Tamil rebel has told police his leader ordered the assassinations of a former Sri Lankan president and two senior politicians, police said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Sivagnanam alias Nath, said President Ranasinghe Premadasa, presidential hopeful Gamini Dissanayake and senior politician Lalith Athulathmudali were all killed on the orders of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, a senior Crime Detective

Bureau (CDB) officer said. Sivagnanam, a close associate of LTTE intelligence chief Pottu Amman, was arrested while working as a waiter in Maho in Central Sri Lanka on August 11.

He was one of many Tamils detained for questioning after a Tiger suicide bomber, identified by police as an Indian Tamil, killed 24 people in Colombo last week by detonating a carload of plastic explosives.

The rebels have infiltrated the Indian Tamil community working on tea estates in the

Central Hills, the CDB officer said.

Dissanayake was the opposition United National Party's candidate in the November 1994 presidential election when he was blown up by a suicide bomber.

All three deaths, and the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and many senior Sri Lankan political and military leaders, have been widely blamed on the LTTE, who are fighting for a separate homeland in the north and east.

Off the Record

Ape protests the arrest

BOMBAY: A monkey slapped and scratched a policeman who was trying to "arrest" the animal for disorderly behaviour in a town near here, a newspaper reported Thursday, says AFP.

The Daily Saamna said policemen were trying to tie the monkey up outside a bus stand in the town of Lanja when "the monkey became angry and slapped one of the policemen across his face."

The ape then scratched the policemen's face, drawing blood, much to the delight of a watching crowd and confusing the policemen. In the confusion, the ape quickly escaped," the newspaper said.

Saamna said the monkey frequently hitched rides on the backs of trucks and "entertained" people with his pranks.

A few days earlier, the monkey drank some liquor at a local vendor's shop and went about vandalising everything in his path.

To prove their innocence!

NEW DELHI: Seven girls accused of theft were forced by a sorcerer's family in northern India to dip their hands into boiling oil to prove their innocence, a newspaper reported Friday, says AFP.

The teenagers girls were accused of stealing 40 rupees (1.30 dollars) from the sorcerer's house in a village 80 kilometres (50 miles) from Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh state in northern India, on August 7, the Indian Express said.

The girls protested that they had not taken the money, the daily said.

The sorcerer's son allegedly insisted that the girls prove their innocence by dipping their hands in a boiling pan of mustard oil, saying that "those who are innocent won't be harmed."

When the girls remained adamant, the sorcerer's family forced the girls to put their hands into the oil, The Express said. Villagers were alerted when the girls began screaming in pain.

Abuse of trust

SAN FRANCISCO: They say they were sexually abused by those they trusted most — their clergy — then ostracised in their churches for speaking out. Now they're banding together to help each other heal, reports AP.

Against the backdrop of an imposing Gothic cathedral, about 25 survivors of alleged clergy abuse gathered Wednesday to recruit members for SNAP — Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests.

But they said clergy abuse isn't limited to Catholics: It happens in all church denominations, and to people of all ages.

"It seems like it's everywhere," said Rickey Richard-Walker, who claims she had a sexual relationship with her pastor during what were supposed to be counseling sessions.

Richard-Walker, 39, said she turned to a Baptist church in Oakland to kick a drug habit.

"I believed it was a place of hope that would help me live a changed life," she said. "It was supposed to be the place where you turn your life around and turn your heart around."

Chechens ready to resume full talks with Moscow

MOSCOW, Aug 18: Chechen rebels have signalled they are ready to resume full scale peace talks with Moscow, including negotiations over the separatist region's political status, reports Reuters.

The leader of the Chechen delegation to the talks, Khodzakhmed Yerikhanov, met leading Russian negotiator Vladimir Zorin in the Chechen capital Grozny on Thursday evening and the two men agreed to resume talks soon, Interfax news agency said.

"The Chechen delegation will base its work in forthcoming political talks with the Russian government delegation exclusively on the military agreement reached and signed by both sides on July 30," Yerikhanov told ITAR-Tass news agency.

The ministry agreement left the most difficult political issues including Chechnya's future status unresolved. Moscow has made clear there can be no question of granting full independence to the mainly Muslim north Caucasus region.

Women's paid employment has increased only 4 per cent in the last 20 years

He noted that job preference programmes were difficult when all jobs were scarce and that nations should think of sharing jobs. "It is not ordained by God that only one partner is going to look after the family and get child leave."

Among the report's other findings are: — Unpaid women's labour — whether in a household or in agriculture — adds a staggering 11 trillion dollar to the total global economic output of 23 trillion dollar. In almost every country women work longer hours than men without economic rewards, which if acknowledged, would change their status appreciably.

— Women's paid employment has increased only 4 per cent in the last 20 years compared to a two-thirds increase in female literacy and school enrollment. Arab states have shown the biggest increase in literacy rates but lag in equal rights and equal employment.

— Among the 900 million illiterates in the world, women still outnumber men 2:1. For every year of schooling, her fertility rates drop and wages rise at least 10 per cent.

— Credit is limited from formal banking institutions. The figure for approval in Latin America is only 7-11 per cent.

— Women occupy only 10 per cent of the parliamentary seats worldwide