

LTTE kills 7 soldiers in attack Chandrika warns against leaking cabinet secrets

COLOMBO, Sept 20: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has warned ministers against leaking cabinet secrets to the national press and vowed "stern action" against offenders, press reports here said today, says AFP.

Kumaratunga told a meeting of her governing People's Alliance legislators Monday that proceedings of such closed-door sessions should not be divulged to the press, the English language Island Daily reported.

The pro-opposition Island quoted a senior minister saying the leaks were a poor reflection on their one-year-old government. "We know what to do to them if we

catch them," the Island quoted Kumaratunga as saying at the meeting.

There was no immediate word from Kumaratunga's office. Earlier this month, press reports said government legislators walked out of a similar meeting after demanding the resignation of the cabinet and accusing ministers of inefficiency.

Reuter adds: Separatist Tamil Tigers killed seven Sri Lankan troops today in a pre-dawn attack on an army camp in the eastern Ampara administrative district, military sources said.

They said nine soldiers were wounded in the attack on the Navamangalagama camp in Maha Oya town.

Fighting in Bosnia will stop soon, hopes US

PRAGUE, Sept 20: Croatian and Bosnian government forces have slowed down their military offensive in western Bosnia and the United States hopes fighting there will soon stop, US Defence Secretary William Perry said today, reports Reuter.

"There has been a slowdown in the military activities, which we believe and we hope is preparatory to stopping the offensive," Perry told reporters during a visit to the Czech Republic.

The United States had pressed the coalition forces to halt their steady march in western Bosnia, which is threatening the Serb stronghold of Banja Luka and

presenting a serious threat to US-led peace efforts in Bosnia.

"We do not believe that the Croatian and Muslim forces are going to attempt to occupy Banja Luka and we have urged them not to," Perry said.

In Rome, Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey said the situation in Banja Luka had stabilised although there was still no ceasefire in the Muslim-Croat offensive.

"We do not have a ceasefire. We do not have a cessation of hostilities, but I think the media is quite clear that the situation has stabilised in Banja Luka," he told reporters after meeting Italian Foreign Minister Susanna

Agnelli. In Zagreb, the Croatian state news agency Hina said Bosnia was demanding the effective surrender of Bosnian Serb forces in Banja Luka as the price for halting its advance on the city.

Hina quoted a Sarajevo government letter to the UN Security Council, forwarded by Bosnian UN Ambassador Ivica Misic. It proposed the "demilitarisation of Banja Luka and promised that if this was brokered the Bosnian forces would refrain from further actions against this town," Hina said.

AFP adds from Sarajevo: More than an additional 100 Bosnian Serb heavy guns have left Sarajevo's exclusion zone,

UN officials said, as the countdown began to the second NATO deadline, which runs out this evening.

UN officials said the Bosnian Serbs had moved the weapons during Tuesday, the second day of a second three-day period which the Serbs have been given to end their

treat to the city, besieged for over 40 months. NATO's second and last deadline for the Bosnian Serbs to pull out the majority of their heavy guns around the city expires at 10:00 PM (2000 GMT) today.

During the first three-day period UN officials said the Serbs pulled back around 160 guns, earning them a 72 hours extension to complete the withdrawal.

Off the Record



Cuban-born actor Andy Garcia poses for photographers after receiving a star on the famous Hollywood Walk of Fame on Tuesday in Hollywood, California. Garcia has starred in such films as "The Untouchables," "Godfather III," "Stand and Deliver" and "When A Man Loves A Woman." —AFP/UNB photo

Fierce fighting in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Sept 20: Indian paramilitary troops and Muslim separatist militants were locked in a fierce gunbattle on the outskirts of this Kashmir summer capital today, police said, reports AFP.

Intermittent firing could be heard as troops and Muslim guerillas clashed in the Lal Bazaar suburb of Srinagar, police said. There was no immediate word on casualties.

Witnesses said Indian troops had used mortars and machine-guns against an unspecified number of Muslim militants holed up in one or more houses in the neighbourhood and reinforcements had been rushed to the spot.

A helicopter was seen hovering near the area of the gunbattle and two houses were ablaze.

Arafat, Peres resume talks

TABA, Egypt, Sept 20: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres launched today a fifth straight day of negotiations to try to wrap up a deal to extend autonomy across the West Bank, reports AFP.

Arafat and Peres, who made no statement, resumed their talks despite a Palestinian walk-out overnight over the carve-up of the territory into autonomous areas and Israeli-controlled zones.

The United States and Egypt intervened to get Arafat back to the table at a Taba hotel after an Israeli general showed him a map with an Arab village cut in two "for security reasons."

Russia keen to boost ties with China

MOSCOW, Sept 20: Russia, its relations with the West under strain, will turn its attention to improving ties with Beijing on Thursday during a visit by Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qianqichen, reports Reuter.

Qian's visit, intended to set up a trip by President Boris Yeltsin to China, continues an intensification of contacts between Beijing and Moscow designed to keep up the momentum in improving relations after years of confrontation.

"The period of confrontation lasted 25 years and neither side won from it. Both sides suffered a great deal," Grigory Logvinov, head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's First Asia Department said.



President Bill Clinton (R) and senior citizen Ginger Grossman (L) point to journalists as they greet a crowd of seniors at the East Point senior centre in North Miami on Tuesday. Clinton spoke to seniors about his Medicaid and Medicare programmes. —AFP/UNB photo

UK denies alleged collaboration with France on N-tests

LONDON, Sept 20: Quoting sources close to the Geneva test ban negotiations, an opposition Labour Party member says Britain is secretly collaborating with France on its nuclear test programme, reports AP.

The British Foreign Office denied the allegation made by Labour's defense spokesman David Clark, which appeared Wednesday in the London newspaper The Guardian.

The paper quoted Clark as saying in an interview that he had received information

from the unnamed sources in Geneva suggesting that France has agreed to pass to Britain some of the scientific data drawn from the tests.

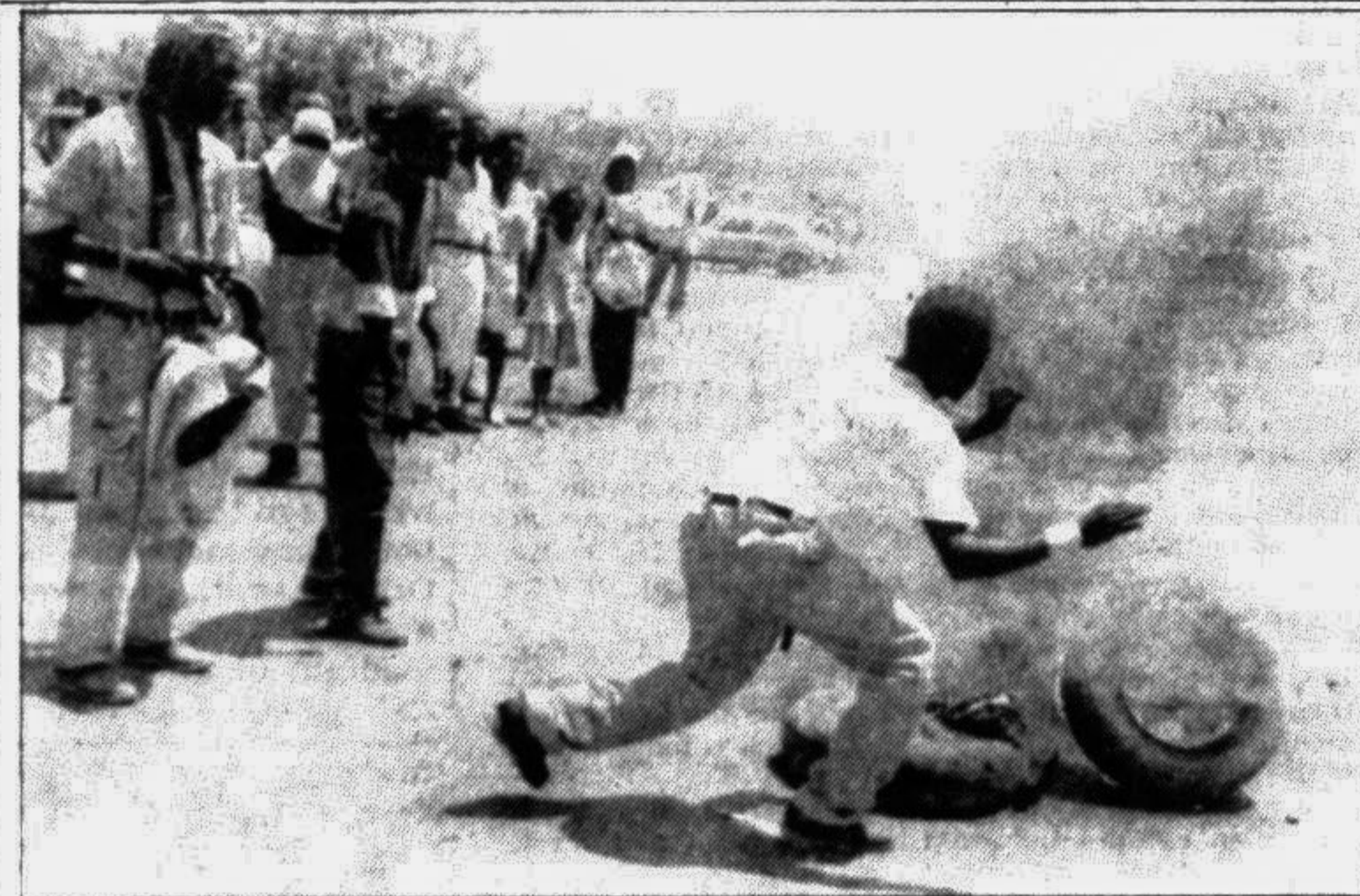
The tests programme at Mururoa in the South Pacific has been condemned by Australia, New Zealand and many other countries as well as by environmental groups such as Greenpeace. The first of the tests explosion series occurred September 5.

The Guardian quoted Clark as saying: "My information is that we are to be supplied with some of the test

results as they apply to simulation techniques.

"This seems to be part of the ongoing exchange of nuclear information between the two governments. Sources in Geneva suggest that Britain may even be contributing financially toward the cost of the French computer work."

Computer-based simulation techniques using data derived from the current programme at Mururoa are intended to replace the need for actual explosions in the future testing of nuclear devices.



A demonstrator burns tires in front of the National Palace in Port-au-Prince on Tuesday as thousands of Haitians marched on the palace. The demonstrators protested pressure by the US and the International Monetary Fund on the Haitian government to privatise state-owned businesses. —AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

France detains 30 suspects: Police detained about 30 people suspected of links to Algerian Muslim extremists in the southern city of Marseille on Tuesday, but swiftly cleared and released most of them, police sources said, Reuter reports from Marseille, France.

None was suspected of involvement in the recent wave of bomb attacks in France, the sources said. Investigators said only five of those detained in the dawn raids were still being questioned at nightfall on suspicion of being close to the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) or the armed Islamic group, fighting to overthrow Algeria's military rulers.

US, Kuwait to hold war game: The United States will conduct a two-week joint military exercise starting this month in the Persian Gulf with Kuwaiti troops, the Defence Department announced in Washington Tuesday, Xinhua reports from Washington.

About 3,900 US military personnel will be involved in the exercise, called "eager mace 96-1", the Pentagon said.

Khmers damage vital highway: Using explosives, Khmer Rouge guerillas damaged a stretch of a vital highway being repaired with US aid, government officials said Wednesday, AP reports from Phnom Penh.

Secretary of State for Public Works and Transport Tram Iv Tek said the guerillas attacked national highway 4 Tuesday night, creating a traffic jam Wednesday morning.

The highway links the capital of Phnom Penh with the country's only deepwater port, Sihanoukville.

Fumes sicken 4 in Japan: Four men were hospitalised after being sickened by fumes in a train station restroom in western Tokyo Wednesday morning, police said, AP reports from Tokyo.

The four complained of eye and nose irritation, but showed no serious symptoms, said a Metropolitan Police Department official. The cause of the fumes was not immediately clear.

23 women to die in China: China has sentenced 23 people to death for trafficking in women, the Shanxi Daily reported, AFP reports from Beijing.

Police arrested the 23, all women, in a summer crackdown in northern Shanxi province that netted another 400 suspects, said a recent issue of the paper, which was received in Beijing yesterday.

Lanka seizes large haul of nests: Sri Lankan customs agents seized a large haul of nests that were to be smuggled out to dining tables in Hong Kong and Singapore, official said yesterday, AFP reports from Colombo.

On a tip-off by a wildlife and environmental protection group, customs officials seized three large boxes containing 4.9 million rupees (98,000 dollars) worth of edible swiftlet nests, official said.

Quake rocks Wellington: An earthquake was felt in the New Zealand capital of Wellington yesterday but there was no immediate sign of damage, Reuter reports from Wellington.

The quake was felt as a powerful tremor lasting about 30 seconds at about 10.55 am (2255 GMT).

Varsity for disabled in China: China is planning to establish an university for disabled people in this coastal city of east China's Shandong province, Xinhua reports from Yantai.

The university is one in China which will open only to disabled persons. The first phase construction of the university will need an investment of 180 million yuan.

Return of Romanian valuable urged: Romanian politicians want Russia to return a fabulous treasure of gold, jewels and precious objects sent to Moscow for safe-keeping during World War One, Reuter reports from Bucharest.

Parliament sources said on Tuesday that some 90 opposition politicians signed a letter urging parliament to appoint a commission charged with "returning home all Romanian valuable which are now outside Romania, especially in Russia."

'West using HR, democracy to dominate small states'

YANGON, Sept 20: The leader of the military government said some super-powers were using human rights and democracy as a pretext for dominating smaller nations. He urged his countrymen to make Myanmar more self-reliant, reports AP.

The remarks by Gen Than Shwe, chairman of the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), were from a speech to other council members published Wednesday in the state-owned New Light of Myanmar.

They come less than two weeks after a visit to Myanmar by Madeleine Albright, the United States ambassador to the United Nations.

Albright delivered a blunt message to Myanmar's rulers that they must institute serious democratic reforms and engage in a dialogue must institute serious democratic reforms and engage in a dialogue with Myanmar, she said. Albright said she would be returning to Myanmar in the next few days and would be meeting with Myanmar's leaders.

restoring aid and economic privileges.

"Democracy and human rights vary because culture and tradition and their practices in the Eastern and Western culture are not identical," Than Shwe said.

He stressed Myanmar should not rely heavily on other countries for development assistance.

"It is important for the country to strive for national strength and self-reliance," Than Shwe said.

The government has been seeking foreign aid and investment since coming to power in a coup in 1988. Their stance has been a stark contrast to the nation's self-imposed isolation, and disastrous economic policies, under the 26-year rule of Gen. Ne Win, which ended in 1988.

Nonetheless, many western nations, Japan and international financial institutions such as the World Bank, have refused to grant aid or loans to Myanmar. They are demanding the government free political prisoners

Several MPs back Pilot in campaign against Chandraswami

NEW DELHI, Sept 20: A minister's order to arrest a Hindu mystic who is close to Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao has sparked a new bout of infighting in the country's ailing ruling party, reports AP.

Several MPs have quietly thrown their weight behind Environment Minister Rajesh Pilot's campaign against the controversial holy man, Chandraswami, in what observers see as an indirect attack on Rao.

Rao's failure to placate warring factions of his Congress (I) party when he expanded his cabinet last week to prepare for general elections in 1996 has added fuel to the fire.

"The fireworks have begun exploding once again" in the 110-year-old party, a Congress MP, who requested anonymity, said ruefully.

"At this rate, only God can save the Congress," Pilot set sparks flying last week when he ordered the arrest of Chandraswami on charges of being linked to a

notorious gangster, Babloo Srivastava.

The next day, a miffed Rao divested Pilot of his internal security portfolio and shunted him to the relatively obscure ministry of environment.

Pilot, a vocal Congress leader who was once the premier's favourite, refused to backtrack. The opposition and a section of the Congress have rallied to his support, embarrassing the 74-year-old Rao.

"I have raised what I think is a fundamental issue," Pilot said, adding that his actions were "neither to malign someone nor to play political games."

The bearded Chandraswami, who counts kings and presidents among his acolytes and claims to be Rao's spiritual adviser, has denied accusations that he once harboured Srivastava.

But as public pressure mounted, the Central Bureau of Investigation twice questioned Chandraswami to de-

termine his links with the gangster.

Pilot said it was not enough to merely question the holy man, adding that "Chandraswami should be arrested."

Congress sources said Pilot's crusade had generated a lot of heat in the ruling party just when Rao was trying to beat back an unexpected challenge from Sonia Gandhi, widow of slain Premier Rajiv Gandhi.

Sonia Gandhi last month publicly lashed out at Rao for the first time in four years, accusing him of going slow in prosecuting her husband's 1991 assassination by a suicide bomber.

"This Chandraswami issue is giving a new handle for all those opposed to Rao to gang up," said a Congress source. "Naturally it is not good news for the PM in an election year."

External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee was asked to put off a proposed tour of the country's remote far east

to assist in damage control after Jitendra Prasad, a former Rao aide, also lashed out at the Hindu "godman."

Congress sources said Rao's induction of 16 new faces into an expanded cabinet a week ago generated fresh problems and strained his ties with two party stalwarts.

Two of the new ministers were critics of Congress leader Sharad Pawar, who had tried to challenge Rao's claim to the premiership in 1991, while another is a critic of a second Congress strongman, K Karunakaran.

"At a time when the prime minister should be building up a broad unity within the party to face the elections, his actions are causing new dissensions," said the Congress source.

"Even if the PM manages to isolate Pilot, it will do him no good," added the source. "It will only make Pilot a hero and portray the PM as someone protection a controversial godman."

China, Hong Kong urged to settle dispute

HONG KONG, Sept 20: Two visiting politicians of the British Conservative Party on Wednesday urged Beijing and Hong Kong's democrats to settle their feud by compromise, reports AP.

Pro-democracy candidates won a sweeping victory in the British colony's legislative election Sunday, sharpening the prospect of confrontation with China, which takes over Hong Kong in 1997 and dethrones the democrats.

"The democrats in Hong Kong need to show compromise both with their opponents in Hong Kong and with outside forces that are vital for the future of Hong Kong, which means Beijing," said David Howell, chairman of the foreign affairs committee in the British parliament.

"It means proceeding in a less than unilateral and less than egotistical way," he said on Hong Kong radio.

China, he said, must recognise that the democrats are "a force to be reckoned with," and drop its threat to disband Hong Kong's elected bodies in 1997.

Richard Needham, a British former trade minister, said the two sides should not "put themselves in positions from which they find it difficult to extricate themselves."

Speaking to reporters, Needham said compromise "doesn't mean you have to compromise on your principles and give everything up. But — the only solution in the end is to find some way of moving toward a common position."

The democrats champion Hong Kong's political freedoms and say they don't trust the Chinese to keep their promise of a high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong after 1997. China refuses to have any contact with them.

Emily Lau, a democracy crusader who won the highest vote in the election, called the British visitors' remarks "ridiculous."

She said it was "really quite rich" for them to expound compromise, "especially when they have sold us down the river."