

BRIEFLY



A British IFOR soldier gives school children a lecture on the danger of mines at the start of a mine-awareness training in Donji Vakuf on Monday. Mines are one of the biggest threats to the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina with around six million live devices littering the country.

— AFP/UNB photo

10 drown in Pak boat capsizes: Six women and four children drowned when a boat capsized in river Chenab near Shujabad in Pakistan's Punjab province late Monday, officials in the area said yesterday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

The boat was carrying a wedding party of 27 people, they said, adding that the bodies of the victims had been recovered.

US, Pacific nations to hold war game:

Maritime forces from the United States and five other Pacific nations will conduct a major month-long joint military exercise in waters near Hawaii beginning on May 22, the Pentagon said. Reuter reports from Washington.

At least 44 ships, 200 aircraft and 30,000 factors and other personnel from Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, South Korea and the United States will participate in biennial exercise Rimpac 96 through June 21, the announcement said yesterday.

Rain plays havoc in China: Torrential rain in parts of China's southern province of Guangdong have caused losses of 100 million yuan (about 12 million dollars), the Portuguese news agency, Lusa, reported Monday. AFP says from Macau.

Kuwait to modernise its Air Force: Kuwait is considering a new arms deal to buy a fleet of US attack helicopters as part of an ongoing programme to rebuild and modernise its air power. Air Force Commander Saber al-Suweidan said in remarks published on Monday. AFP reports from Kuwait City.

"We are studying at present implementing a deal to get squadrons of the most modern helicopters of the type Black Hawk and Apache," Suweidan said in an interview with the Daily Al-Anba. He said the US built attack craft would join the country's existing fleet of helicopters which include Puma, Super Puma and Gazelle, and will provide ground and air support.

Rebel, govt sign deal in Guatemala: Guatemala's government and rebel negotiators signed a deal Monday on land reform and social issues seen as a key step toward a definitive UN mediated peace. AFP reports from Mexico City.

Sonia's intervention sought to keep Cong united

Kashmiris go to polls defying rebels' boycott call

JAMMU, India May 7: Voters went to the polls amid heavy security in strife-torn Kashmir today for the first parliamentary elections in seven years, defying a boycott call by Muslim separatist groups, officials said. reports AP.

They said the first leg of the staggered polls for six parliamentary seats began peacefully in this state winter capital and the Buddhist-dominated region of Ladakh in the north of the state.

B K Goswami, adviser to Kashmir Governor K V Krishna Rao, told the news agency here that the voter turnout was about 15 per cent in the first five hours of voting, which began at 7:00 am (0310 GMT).

An estimated 1.3 million people are eligible to vote in Hindu dominated Jammu and Ladakh on Tuesday for two representatives to the 545-seat federal parliament. A total of 33 candidates are in the fray in Tuesday's election.

Voters in four other constituencies in the troubled Himalayan state are scheduled to vote on May 23 and May 30 for representatives of the Lok Sabha, the upper house of parliament.

Muslim separatist groups have vowed to sabotage the polls and have demanded a UN-supervised referendum on whether Kashmir should remain within India, seek independence or merge with Pakistan.

Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state has been under the direct rule of New Delhi since the Muslim insurgency began in the state in 1989.

Goswami said turnout was low in several Muslim-dominated areas of Jammu. He said nearly 30,000 soldiers and paramilitary troops had been deployed in Jammu and Ladakh to pre-empt violence.

PTI adds from New Delhi: Senior Congress leader and former Tamil Nadu governor

Bhisma Narain Singh, today sought Sonia Gandhi's intervention to keep the party united in this hour of crisis and underlined the need for having an acceptable leader.

There was no dearth of intelligent and dedicated people in the party who would dedicate themselves to work hard for unity, Singh said adding but there has to be necessary effort and acceptable leader who can be the unifying factor.

In a two-page letter to Sonia Gandhi Singh said "a louder call is for you to play the expected role in favour of unity in the party in this hour of crisis."

"It is for you to determine in what manner this steering will be done, he said and remarked 'this should be done by you before it is too late or before the damage becomes irreparable'."

Singh had written a similar letter to Sonia Gandhi last year.

Singh, who was a cabinet minister in the Indra Gandhi government, recalled the role played by Rajiv Gandhi as the prime minister and said "a remedy has to be found — a remedy in the interest of the great nation and a remedy for the invigoration and rejuvenation of the Congress Party."

"It would not have troubled you by writing another letter, since the past communication itself would not have gone out of your memory," Singh said.

"Apart from the decaying symptoms of the party" the problems of the country are multiplying. Rajiv with his dedication and sense of involvement had brought about peace in the north-east and Assam, Mizo and TNV records were reached," he said.

In his previous letter written on May 17 last year Singh had requested Sonia Gandhi to intervene to save the party by using her good offices.

Lebanon, Syria come up with counter proposal on truce monitoring

Peres to resume talks with Syria if reelected

JERUSALEM, May 7: Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said he would resume talks with Syria as part of a push for a comprehensive Middle East peace if he was re-elected in national polls on May 29, reports Reuter.

"The first thing I will do is renew the peace process with the Syrians," Peres told Israel's Channel One Television on Monday.

"I want to arrive at a comprehensive peace in the Middle East in the next four years," he added.

Peres and right-wing challenger Benjamin Netanyahu used key television interviews to try to sell their visions of how peace and security could be achieved.

Israeli law prohibits broadcasting images of candidates three weeks before national elections.

Peres, leading Netanyahu by about five points in opinion polls, said his platform also included keeping the Jordan river as a security border and maintaining Jerusalem as a united capital of Israel.

He seized on what he saw as discrepancies in the message of Netanyahu's Likud Party, which has opposed the peace deal that Peres's Labour Party struck with the Palestinians.

While Netanyahu said he would accept the Oslo agreement, Israel television quoted a prominent Likud member, ex-general Ariel Sharon, as saying he could not recognise it.

Peres, with a picture of him and his slain predecessor Yitzhak Rabin visible in the

background, said any plans to go back on the self-rule agreement signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1993 would be the "end of the peace process."

Asked why he was delaying Israel's troop withdrawal from

the West Bank town of Hebron, Peres said it was important to work in stages for security reasons.

"Our problem is not the timing of the promised redeployment, but the Iranians, the fundamentalists and the Hamas who want to destroy the peace process," he said.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, meeting a condition for the Israeli redeployment, has convinced his Palestine National Council colleagues to change chapters of their covenant calling for Israel's destruction.

Netanyahu said in his television interview that he would allow the Palestinians to control matters in self-rule areas.

That's the difference, it this (Labour) government will be elected. God forbid, they will elect a Palestinian state," he said.

AP from Beirut adds: Lebanon and Syria have come up with a counter proposal to a US blueprint for establishing a five-nation group to monitor the Israel-Hezbollah cease-fire, officials said Tuesday.

The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the agreement resulted from talks held Monday in the Syrian capital of Damascus between Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and Foreign Minister Faris Bweiz and Syrian government leaders.

The counter-draft, details of which remained secret, will be conveyed to the United States and France, the two major Western powers to be represented in the monitoring committee said the officials.

New moon of Jupiter found

WASHINGTON, May 7: The Jupiter's volcano-pocked moon 10 has been found by the Galileo spacecraft to have a giant iron core that takes up half of its diameter, reported the May 3 issue of the Science magazine, says Xinhua.

From the data taken by Galileo, scientists have determined that 10 has a two-layer structure. At the centre is a metallic core, probably made of iron and iron sulfide, about 560 miles in radius, which is overlain by a mantle of partly molten rock and crust.

The probe also has detected a large hole in the Jupiter's magnetic field near 10, leading to speculation about whether 10 possesses its own magnetic field. If so, it would be the first planetary moon known to have one.

This new information of 10 may be related to the intense heating of the moon caused by the constant squeezing and distortion of 10 in the Jupiter's powerful gravitational grip, according to Galileo project scientist Dr Torrence Johnson of NASA's jet propulsion laboratory.

European defence arm will not take over peacekeeping in Bosnia

BIRMINGHAM, May 7: Europe's defence arm will not take over peacekeeping in Bosnia when NATO-led forces pull out but it should have a real capability to mount small military operations by the end of the year, British officials say, reports AP.

As European foreign and defence ministers gather in Birmingham, central England, on Tuesday, the British hosts are trying to put aside the thorny debate over Europe's future defence structure and focus on giving its weakest link the nuts and bolts of carrying out operations.

While the question of what happens next in Bosnia will undoubtedly be on the ministers' minds — since it is the most pressing defense issue in Europe today — it is not on the agenda at the one-day ministerial meeting of the Western European Union.

The main reason is that the WEU has been totally overshadowed by NATO, does not yet have any military clout, and is currently wrestling over its future relationship with both NATO and the European Union.

The 42-year-old military alliance was revived in the 1980s and given the dual role in 1991 of being the European Union's defense component and helping to strengthen the European pillar of NATO. The 10 WEU members are belong to NATO.

While Britain wants NATO, with its strong leadership from the United States, to remain the primary pillar of European defense, other European countries including Germany, France and Belgium support closer military ties among EU members.

The WEU has proposed three options for its future to EU Ministers currently considering the next moves toward closer integration: continued independence, subordination of the WEU to the EU, or eventual merger.

It has participated in three small operations in former Yugoslavia — enforcing United Nations sanctions in the Adriatic and on the Danube river and setting up a unified police force in the divided Bosnian city of Mostar.



Congress (I) Party candidate for the Anantnag constituency in South Kashmir, Taj Mohidin, shows weapons on Sunday which he claims were recovered from a surrendered militant who wanted to assassinate him. Voting in Kashmir's first polls in seven years begins Tuesday and ends 30 May.

Mandela postpones local polls in KwaZulu-Natal

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, May 7: President Nelson Mandela's government on Monday postponed local government elections in the traditional Zulu kingdom due to chronic violence and logistical difficulties, reports AP.

The voting for town and rural councilors in KwaZulu-Natal province would take place not later than June 30, instead of on May 29 as planned.

"The decision will contribute toward enhancing the legitimacy of the electoral process, improving the atmosphere for greater political tolerance," said Constitutional Development Minister Chris Fismar of the white-led National Party.

Israel denies targeting UN camp in Lebanon intentionally

UNITED NATIONS, May 7: Israel's artillery commander insisted Monday that his forces never intentionally targeted a UN base in South Lebanon and blamed the deaths of at least 91 civilians on human and technical errors in the heat of battle, reports AP.

Brig. Gen. Dan Harel flew to New York to brief UN officials on the April 18 incident at the UN camp at Qana after UN military investigators tentatively concluded that the attack was intentional.

Diplomatic sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States was pressing Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to delay referring the report in written form to the Security Council, a move which would require the council to take a public stand on it.

A US official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said Washington feared that release of the report would inflame passions and undermine the tenuous ceasefire in Lebanon.

Boutros-Ghali said he had formed a high-level working group to finalise the report. "How this report will be presented will still have to be decided," he told reporters.

Israel maintains the stand that shelling was an accident. Both Israel and UN officials say that pro-Iranian Hezbollah guerrillas had been firing at the Israelis from positions about 200 to 300 yards (meters) from the camp.

But an amateur videotape aired Monday has reinforced claims that the camp was purposely targeted. The videotape, taken by a UN peacekeeper a mile (1.6 kilometers) away

away, shows a series of puffs of smoke emerging from the base, indicating when shells hit.

UN peacekeeping spokesman Timor Goksel said in Lebanon that the tape shows the shelling is not one or two rounds that overshoot, as we've been told for the past two weeks... but that it was a targeted shelling.

But Harel told reporters a drone plane had been flying another surveillance mission a few kilometres (miles) away and was diverted to the Qana area to assess damage after the United Nations told the Israelis the camp had been shelled.

There was shooting from near the Qana base with a mortar and Katyusha (rocket) toward one of our forces," Harel

said. "We shoot back. We didn't know at the real time that the people of the Hezbollah were running inside or outside to the camp or from the camp. So we didn't have any initiative to shoot on the camp."

Harel said that even if the Israelis had seen Hezbollah guerrillas seeking shelter in the camp, "we wouldn't shoot at it. This is a UN camp and we put parameters of safety around each and every UN compound in south Lebanon when the operation was going on."

He said deliberate firing at a UN camp would have been "out of the question."

Russia calls for expulsion of 9 British diplomats

MOSCOW, May 7: Russia today called for the expulsion of nine British diplomats accused of spying under diplomatic cover, a spokesman for the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) told ITAR Tass news agency, reports AP.

Spokesman Alexander Zdanovich said British Ambassador Sir Andrew Wood had been handed a list of the nine British intelligence officers who were accused of working under diplomatic cover and had been declared persona non grata.

The document described in detail the activities of each one and provided documentary confirmation of their contacts with a Russian agent arrested by the FSB, Zdanovich said.

The British ambassador was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry Monday to receive a "strong protest" over the alleged British spying ring, the FSB said.

Off the Record



Andrea Huillier, the 1996 Miss Universe contestant from Chile, walks down the runway at a Las Vegas fashion show on Sunday, part of preparations for the contest. The 1996 contest features contestants from 79 countries and is scheduled for May 17.

— AFP/UNB photo

Cat's monetary sense

TOKYO: A Japanese cat has surprised its owner by bringing home a plastic bag with 160,000 yen (1,500 dollars) police said Tuesday, reports AP.

Kehji Fukai, a 73-year-old resident of Saito north of Tokyo, took the cash to a police station on Monday. He said the family cat, Peru, came home carrying the plastic bag in its mouth, police said.

Under Japanese law, cash brought to police station's lost and found section is returned to the person who finds it if nobody claims it after six months.

Caution for women smokers

BALTIMORE: Women who smoke stand a greater chance of getting breast cancer and increase their risk the more they smoke, according to a new study, reports AP.

But cancer experts said Monday more studies need to be done before the findings out of Switzerland are conclusive.

The study done at University Hospital in Geneva compared 244 women with breast cancer to 1,032 women who were disease-free. The study differs from numerous previous studies by including the effects of passive smoke on women. Previous studies found either little or no increased risk of breast cancer among women who smoke. Other studies, however, have shown smoking can cause an increased risk for lung cancer, emphysema, heart attacks, strokes and high blood pressure.

The Geneva study in the current issue of The American Journal of Epidemiology, which is published by the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health in Baltimore, found that women who smoked less than 10 cigarettes a day doubled their risk of getting breast cancer.

Women who smoked 10 to 19 cigarettes a day were at a 2.7 times greater risk. For those women who smoked 20 cigarettes or more a day, the risk was 4.6 times greater. The study also found that women who didn't smoke but were exposed to passive smoke tripled their risk.

The study noted that 20 previous studies had found a tenuous connection at best between smoking and a risk of breast cancer, and nine studies had found a weak connection and 11 studies found no connection.

Chandrika to ask Japan for financial help

COLOMBO, May 7: President Chandrika Kumaratunga will ask Japan for financial help to rebuild war-torn northern Sri Lanka, an official said Tuesday, reports AP.

Kumaratunga will meet Emperor Akihito and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto of Japan during a visit to Tokyo this week, an official at her office said on condition of anonymity.

The official declined to say when the president would leave for Japan, citing security reasons, but said it would be in a few days. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgama is likely to be accompany her.

Kumaratunga rarely ventures out of her palace in Colombo, fearing assassination attempts by Tamil Tiger rebels. She cancelled a scheduled trip to New Zealand in November for the Commonwealth Heads of State Summit, due to security fears.

Japan, which is Sri Lanka's largest aid donor and investor, has pledged in principle to help the rupees 40 billion 735 dhs million project to rebuild homes, schools, roads, and power lines, ravaged for 12 years by a civil war.

Kumaratunga last week

asked foreign diplomats for financial help for the project, after 250,000 Tamil civilians returned last month to their homes in Jaffna city, the guerrillas' former capital, which the military captured in December.

The government is trying to win the support of Tamil civilians for its plan to end the war by giving more power to the country's eight regions, including a Tamil-dominated one.

The main opposition United National Party, which has not decided whether to support the plan, is more likely to fall in line with the government if Tamils support the package.

The ruling People's Alliance needs the support of the UNP for a two-third majority in a parliament vote before it goes to a referendum.

Hardline Sinhalese, led by influential Buddhist monks, want the guerrillas defeated militarily before the plan, which the rebels have rejected is implemented.

Reuter adds, a Sri Lankan navy patrol boat attacked and damaged a boat carrying Tamil Tiger rebels off the northern Jaffna Peninsula, a military spokesman said today.

Clinton takes big lead over Dole

WASHINGTON, May 7: Six months before Election Day in the United States, President Clinton enjoys a commanding lead over Bob Dole, benefiting from a giant advantage among women voters and persistent doubts about the Republican congressional agenda, reports AP.

The Democratic incumbent's big lead — roughly 20 points in recent national polls — would translate into an electoral landslide if the election were held today. And it comes despite continuing voter doubts about Clinton's honesty and convictions, and overwhelming sentiment that the United States is on the wrong track.

Given the volatility of Clinton's own standing in public opinion polls, and the dramatic swing in voter sentiment