

10 civilians killed in military shelling: LTTE

COLOMBO, Aug 2: Tamil separatists claimed Friday that 10 civilians were killed in a government offensive to capture a northern town that is the rebel headquarters, but the military denied the allegation, reports AP.

The Defence Ministry said government troops had only aimed at "selected targets" in retaliation to Tamil Tiger mortar attack during the last one week.

"For the last seven days, the Sri Lankan armed forces... have unleashed day and night artillery shelling on the heavily populated Kilinochchi district," a rebel statement faxed by its London office said.

The rebels claimed that 10 civilians were killed and 30 were wounded in the shelling on Tuesday. They said two warplanes had also fired rockets on civilians who had taken refuge in the jungles of Puthukudiyirupu, but there were no casualties as the rockets went astray.

There was no independent confirmation of the rebel report since journalists are not

permitted to travel to the region and all communication links have broken down due to the fighting.

On Wednesday, the Red Cross joined over 100,000 civilians to flee Kilinochchi, 275 kilometres (171 miles) north of Colombo after a massive buildup by Sri Lankan forces nearby.

The five expatriates of the International Committee of the Red Cross who had been operating in Kilinochchi moved their office Wednesday to Mavali, a town about 30 kilometres (18 miles) to the southwest.

The ICRC is the last relief agency to withdraw from Kilinochchi after the military began moving tanks, armour and infantry toward the town last Friday.

The army says it plans to capture Kilinochchi, where Tamil rebels relocated after the fall of their stronghold in Jaffna City in December.

The army has advanced to within six kilometres (4 miles) of Kilinochchi from the Elephant Pass base.

'Pakistan would never yield to int'l pressure to sign CTBT'

ISLAMABAD, Aug 2: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto reiterated on Thursday her country's refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty unless arch-enemy India also signs, reports AP.

"If a solution to the nuclear issue has to be found, it would have to be mutual and regional," Benazir said in a statement carried on the official Pakistani news agency.

She said Pakistan would never yield to international pressure to sign the test ban treaty.

"We will sign only with India signing it as well," she said. Troubled neighbours India and Pakistan have fought three wars since they gained independence from British rule in 1947. Both are suspected of having the capability to build nuclear weapons.

India, which set off a nuclear explosion in 1974, wants the treaty to include a commitment from the five declared nuclear powers to get

rid of their nuclear arsenals. The five include the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China.

Differences over the nuclear issue in South Asia could jeopardise the test ban treaty, say officials attending the 61-nation Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

United States intelligence reports earlier set off alarms when they indicated India may be preparing for a second nuclear test. Pakistan, likewise, was suspected of preparing a retaliatory test.

Both denied the reports. Meanwhile, China and Pakistan insisted Thursday that any treaty to ban test explosions of nuclear weapons must keep on-site inspections to an absolute minimum.

The Chinese delegation cannot agree to allow easy inspections in its country by inspectors coming and going like international tourists, Ambassador Sha Zukang said at the 61-nation Conference on

Disarmament. John Holm, the top US disarmament official, urged all members of the conference to adopt a pending compromise treaty as the best possible solution for all. Quick approval will get the treaty to New York in time for signing next month, he said.

Holm urged the three main holdouts — China, Pakistan and India — to realise that each member of the conference has had to make major sacrifices in the compromise.

China is the only one of the five declared nuclear weapons countries that has yet to accept the accord. The others — Britain, France, Russia and the United States — have all said they will go along even though it means giving up important positions.

The compromise text also sees as essential adherence by three other countries — India, Pakistan and Israel — the "threshold" powers regarded as capable of producing atom

bombs. But of these, only Israel has declared acceptance.

Archrivals India and Pakistan have raised a number of demands.

Many of Pakistan's concerns mirror China's, especially in the desire to keep a tight rein on inspectors.

"On site inspections must be a rare and exceptional occurrence," said Pakistani Ambassador Mumir Akram.

India also wants the treaty to ban non-explosive nuclear tests, such as laboratory experiments, and refuses to accept a treaty that requires India's ratification to go into effect.

Pakistan, India and China want to keep negotiating, but the United States, Russia, France and Britain have ruled out re-opening the compromise to any change on the grounds that it would only mean protracted talks that would fail to achieve improvement.

Christopher for keeping restraints on arms sales to Latin America

WASHINGTON, Aug 2: Secretary of State Warren Christopher signalled opposition Thursday to any relaxation of the long-standing US ban on the sale of high-performance aircraft and other advanced weapons to Latin America, reports AP.

Christopher's statement represented a setback to some US weapons companies that hope to increase sales to Latin America as a means of compensating for losses resulting from reduced US military spending.

The Clinton administration is in the midst of a debate on the issue, and Christopher said the views he expressed were his own and not necessarily those of the administration.

"I think we should show great restraint in introducing new or higher levels of weapons into areas where they don't presently have them," Christopher said, responding to a question during testimony before the Senate Foreign Re-

lations Committee.

"We should try to encourage countries to put their money into things that are of greater benefit to their citizens."

As the second ranking State Department official during the Carter administration, Christopher had a hand in formulating the policy of limiting weapons sales to Latin America.

The main rationale at the time was that the military governments then dominating Latin America were guilty of human rights abuses and should not have access to advanced US weaponry.

While the human rights situation in the hemisphere has improved dramatically since then, Christopher said there are other reasons for restraint.

He said sales to one country could touch off a regional arms race even though relationships in the area are generally friendly. He suggested that weapons-producing countries should establish guidelines for the sale of weaponry.

Senate approves welfare overhaul, sends bill to Clinton

WASHINGTON, Aug 2: The Senate, overriding protests that overhauling welfare would run roughshod over the poor, completed congressional action on a Republican bill to end six decades of guarantee cash assistance to the needy, reports AP.

By a vote of 78-21 on Thursday, the Senate sent the bill to President Clinton, who said Wednesday he will sign it after wavering for weeks and having vetoed two previous welfare bills. All 53 Republicans were joined by 25 Democrats in passing the bill; 21 Democrats voted against it.

"This legislation is the best chance we have today to provide hope for a future for those families and children in our society who are otherwise without hope," said Senate Budget Committee Chairman

Pete Domenici, a New Mexico Republican.

The vote followed hours of debate in which outraged Senate opponents — knowing in advance that their effort was futile — waged a furious and sometimes sarcastic battle targeting the White House as well as the Republican-designed legislation itself.

As the vote began, 10 protesters shouting, "Shame! Shame!" and blowing whistles from the visitors gallery shocked senators into silence. About two dozen US Capitol Police officers — prepared for the outburst in advance — briefly struggled with them and carried some from the chamber.

The bill would end the six-decades-old federal guarantee of open-ended assistance to

US urged to avoid equating Islam with terrorism

WASHINGTON, Aug 2: The head of Algeria's moderate Hamas Islamic Movement said on Thursday he had urged senior US officials to avoid equating Islam with terrorism and applauded US support for steps toward democracy in his homeland, reports Reuter.

Mahfoud Nahannah, the runner up in Algerian presidential elections last November, told a news conference he was visiting the United States to advertise an image of moderate and tolerant Islam.

"We were received as representing more than 3 million votes," he said, speaking through an interpreter. He said he pressed his US hosts for help in ending the political violence that has killed an estimated 50,000 people since 1992, when the army backed authorities cancelled a general election that fundamentalists were expected to win.



Government employed nurses protest on Thursday in New Delhi against the wearing of white uniforms, maintaining that, aside from difficult to maintain, the wearing of white by women is considered inauspicious in India (white is the colour of mourning worn by widows in Hinduism). Approximately 1000 nurses took part in the demonstration demanding that their white skirt uniform be replaced by a more conservative — and less inauspicious — camel-coloured saris. — AFP/UNB photo

Burundi's coup leader defends his takeover

BUJUMBURA, Aug 2: Burundi's new military leader defended his army takeover and appealed on Thursday to the world not to impose sanctions arguing they would only deepen ethnic divisions, reports Reuter.

It was the first reaction by Buyoya who took power a week ago after the Tutsi-led army deposed Hutu President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, to Wednesday's sanctions decision by East and Central African leaders.

The threats of sanctions, the verbal raising of the stakes will only deepen the fracture which already divides the nation, the retired Tutsi army major said in a statement.

"We ask the entire international community to do all it can to avoid attitudes that could extinguish this ray of hope and the positive dynamic (started by the coup)," he said.

Bosnian PM blames UN for fall of Srebrenica to Serbs

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Aug 2: Bosnia's prime minister on Thursday blamed UN officials for last year's fall of Srebrenica to Bosnian Serbs and demanded they testify to the war crimes tribunal, reports AP.

Hasan Muratovic's attack on the United Nations came at a five-hour parliament session that centered on the fall of Srebrenica and another east Bosnian enclave, Zepa, to Serbs in July 1995.

Both enclaves were UN "safe areas". Srebrenica's fall was a turning point in Bosnia's 3 and half year war.

The debate, broadcast live on state television, followed a charge last month from a parliamentary deputy that the Bosnian government deliberately sacrificed Srebrenica. The deputy, Ibran Mustafic, survived Srebrenica's fall and alleged Serb massacre of thousands of its Muslim men.

If true, his accusation would not directly lay responsibility on the government for any massacres. But it would erode the moral stand of the Bosnian government, and be a political bombshell as Bosnian elections approach on September 14.

Muratovic said Srebrenica was traded for UN soldiers taken hostage by the Bosnian Serbs in May and June 1995. He said the government could prove this, but revealed no new evidence.

"We should ask the Security Council and the war crimes tribunal in the Hague to question Janvier, Akashi and Boutros-Ghali in the Hague as witnesses of genocide, and later we will see if they will only be witnesses," Muratovic said.

He was referring to Gen. Bernard Janvier of France, UN commander in former Yugoslavia in the summer of 1995.

Sharma okays sweeping bill to clean up Indian polls

NEW DELHI, Aug 2: Indian Prime Minister Shankar Dayal Sharma late Thursday approved a sweeping bill to clean up elections in the world's largest democracy, officials said, reports AP.

Sharma also gave his nod to amend the Jammu and Kashmir Representation of People Act as a part of the electoral reforms bill, in a bid to enforce a strict code on contestants in the upcoming legislative polls in Kashmir.

The electoral reforms bill, which came into effect Thursday, has hiked the security deposit for candidates 10-fold to 5,000 rupees (142 dollars).

"However, in the case of candidates belonging to backward classes the security de-

posit will be 2,500 rupees (71 dollars)," said KL Mohanpuria, legislative secretary.

The new law also brought down the campaigning period of candidates from 20 days to 14 days in a bid to slash election expenditure and has incorporated provision to keep out "non-serious" candidates.

"A candidate not fielded by a recognised political party will have to file nomination papers duly subscribed by 10 proposals by registered voters in his constituency," Mohanpuria said.

A recognised political party is one whose election symbol is recognised by India's autonomous Election Commission, he added.

"The bill also gives statutory

powers to election observers to stop counting in the event of booth capturing and other irregularities."

The new law also prohibits the sale and distribution of liquor during the 48-hour period before polling and has made possession of arms near polling booths an offence.

It also provides for the delimitation of constituencies, empowers the Election Commission to appoint independent observers to guarantee fair polls and limits candidature to a maximum of two constituencies.

Officials said the legislation would pave the way for the early announcement of dates for legislative elections in the troubled Himalayan province

Iraq warns Iran against further incursions

BAGHDAD, Aug 2: Iraq warned Tehran on Thursday against any further Iranian incursions into its northern territory saying it had the right to take measures to defend its sovereignty, reports AP.

In a message addressed to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and issued by official Iraqi news agency INA, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Said as-Sahaf condemned Iran's incursion last week into northern Iraq.

"The Iranian aggression is against the integrity and sovereignty of Iraq and constitutes a flagrant violation of UN Security Council Resolution 598 on the ceasefire between the two countries in 1988," said.

Raj Kumar wins 'Dada Saheb Phalke' film award

BANGALORE, Aug 2: Veteran Kannada film star Raj Kumar, who has cast a spell over millions of Kannadigas as an actor, yesterday expressed joy over being chosen for the coveted 'Dada Saheb Phalke Award', saying "it is God's wish," reports PTI.

"I have not achieved anything real, I never expected it," Raj Kumar, apparently overcome by being a recipient, told PTI here, on a humble note.

A heart throb of millions of his fans, Raj Kumar, who is known for his riveting performance in whatever character he portrayed, said "the fruit (award) has come on its own," implying he never aspired for it.

He said the happiness of his fans who "have always showered affection on me and blessed me, is my happiness too."



Filipina maid Sarah Balabagan escorted by Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon (L) after a news conference on Thursday. The 17-year-old returned to the Philippines after serving two years in jail in the United Arab Emirates for the killing of her Arab employer who had raped her. She was sentenced to death in 1995 but a royal decree commuted the penalty. — AFP/UNB photo

US House passes official English language bill

WASHINGTON, Aug 2: Almost all federal government business would have to be conducted in English under a bill the House passed 259-169 Thursday after emotional debate. It would mean an end to such services as Spanish or Chinese-language voter instructions, reports AP.

To become law, the bill also must be passed by the Senate and signed by President Clinton, who threatened a veto.

During a rare appearance as a debate participant, House Speaker Newt Gingrich said English is the tie that binds the country together, and mastery of the language is critical for immigrants who expect to do well.

"Our greatness in part comes from our ability to be a melting pot," Gingrich said. "While I cherish every person who comes from anywhere who comes here legally and seeks to pursue happiness... I want them to become American, and part of becoming American involves English."

The bill, which was sponsored by Republicans, as divisive, anti-immigrant and disrespectful of minorities.

Rep Jose Serrano drew Democratic applause after suggesting that the bill be amended to bar presidential candidates from using the federal campaign funds to advertise in Spanish. His idea was voted down 257-171.

The Clinton administration threatened a veto. "This highly objectionable bill is unnecessary, inefficient and divisive," said a statement released by the White House Office of Management and Budget.

Under the bill, the federal government would have to print most of its documents in English. No longer would the Internal Revenue Service, the tax agency, print information in Spanish, for example.

Citizenship ceremonies would have to be conducted in English, but government employees and officials would not be barred from speaking with a person in a foreign language.

The bill makes exceptions for agencies involved in international relations, trade, the census and national security. Agencies also would be allowed to communicate in other languages during emergencies that threaten public health or safety.

The bill also would kill part of the Voting Rights Act, which requires that ballots be printed in foreign languages in areas with large numbers of people whose native language is other than English. It would not prohibit state or local officials from using foreign languages.

Supporters said the bill was needed because the federal government shouldn't have to print documents in all of around 320 languages residents speak.

Some also expressed fear that language difficulties reported in bilingual nations such as Canada would erode US unity.

Gingrich said that public schools routinely provide in-

struction in dozens of languages in parts of the United States that are home to pockets of immigrants of a specific nationality.

"This is a level of confusion, which, if it was allowed to develop for another 20 or 30 years, would literally lead, I think, to the decay of the core parts of our civilization," Gingrich said.

Democrats spoke passionately against the bill. They said it would keep hard-working, tax-paying, patriotic Americans from getting information they need from the federal government only because they're unable to speak English fluently.

Democrat speakers also called the bill a slap in the face for thousands of immigrants who can't enrol in overcrowded English-language classes.

Off the Record

Presidential cookies

WASHINGTON: As Ivy League-educated career women, veteran campaigners and political advisers to their husbands, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Elizabeth Dole have both shown they can be tough cookies, reports AP.

Now comes the bake-off. Mrs. Dole, whose husband, Bob, is challenging President Clinton for the November presidential election, has decided to challenge the First Lady in Family Circle magazine's Second National Bipartisan Cookie Cook-Off.

The wife of the Republican presidential candidate has entered her recipe for pecan roll cookies in hopes of defeating the chocolate chip cookie recipe of Mrs. Clinton, the defending champion.

The magazine's current issue contains recipes for both women's cookies and asks readers to test them at home and vote for their favourite on a postcard by September 9. Results will be announced before Election Day, November 5.

The Clinton recipe may have advantages. It calls for only 8-10 minutes baking, while the Dole cookies take 45 minutes. The First Lady's cookies also are healthier, weighing in at 65 calories and 3.65 grams of fat each compared with 91 calories and 7.68 grams of fat for Mrs. Dole's cookies.

The magazine came up with the contest in 1992 after Mrs Clinton was chastised and apologised for defending her work as a lawyer, saying, "I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas."

Neither woman volunteered for the contest, which Mrs Clinton won. Her chocolate chip recipe got 55 per cent of readers' votes over a recipe submitted by Barbara Bush. Mrs Bush later disowned the recipe, saying it belonged to a chef who worked for George Bush when he was vice president.

Ancient American-style spear point found

WASHINGTON: A gracefully tapered stone spear point, similar to those thought to have been invented by American's some 12,000 years ago, has been found in Siberia, raising new questions about how and when ancient humans developed such weapons, reports AP.

The first fluted spear point ever found west of the Bering Strait was identified in a collection of stone tools unearthed near the Siberian city of Magadan, according to Maureen King, a University of Washington archaeologist.

There is uncertainty about the age, said King. But the discovery suggests the possibility that fluted points — flaked so as to make a tapered point with sharp edges and a flat base — were first made in Asia and then brought across the Bering Strait.

"If this site dates to 12,000 years before the present, then we might look at this as a fluting that predates that of the new world," she said. "But if it postdates that time, then we may look at the possibility of this technology moving to the west."

King said there is not enough known now to challenge the belief that the fluted spear point was invented by ancient Americans living near Clovis, New Mexico, 11,000 to 12,000 years ago. Only more discoveries in Siberia might settle the issue, she said.

A report on the discovery by King and by SB Slobodin of Magadan is to be published Friday in the journal Science.

"It is an interesting find," said C. Vance Haines, a University of Arizona expert on ancient Americans. "But by itself, it is inadequate to address the larger picture."

He said the point could have been an isolated "accident" by some Asia weapons maker, or it could have been made in America and traded across the Bering Strait.

Drug that confounds doctors

DALLAS: A new substance developed to help stop heart attacks in progress has shown promise in hospital studies but also causes kidney damage, and researchers are going back to the laboratory, reports AP.

Patients given poloxamer 188, also known by the brand name RheothRx, had smaller heart attacks and less heart muscle damage, and their hearts pumped more efficiently compared with people who received a dummy medication, according to a study published Thursday in the American Heart Association Journal Circulation. All of the patients were given standard clot-busting drugs as well.

But kidney damage developed in some participants in the study and in two larger clinical trials that followed.

As a result, Glaxo Wellcome has shelved development of RheothRx as a heart attack treatment, said Dr Gary L Schaefer, one of the study's authors and director of cardiac catheterisation at Rush-Presbyterian-St Luke's Medical Centre in Chicago.

However, another company, Cytrx Corp of Norcross, Georgia, is trying to come up with a form of RheothRx that will be less damaging to the kidneys.

The compound needs to be reformulated and retested, Schaefer said.

The study took place at 11 hospitals around the country. Seventy-five heart attack patients were given poloxamer 188, and 39 got a placebo.