

India willing to hold talks with Kashmiri Muslim militants

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 10: The Indian government is willing to hold talks with Kashmiri Muslim militants on finding a solution to the separatist rebellion in the northern state, Home Minister Indrajit Gupta said Friday, reports AFP.

Police said meanwhile that 15 people were killed in continuing violence overnight in the strife-torn Himalayan province where militants also attacked a relative of the National Conference Party leader Farooq Abdullah.

Gupta, who is touring Kashmir ahead of next month's legislative elections, told political leaders in the town of Doda that the government was ready to open a dialogue with Kashmiri Muslim separatists.

"Our doors are open and the government is ready to have a

dialogue with anybody within the framework of the constitution," Gupta said. "If you are ready to forget the past and wish to join the mainstream it is welcome."

The gun culture is not going to solve any problems and solutions have to be worked out through negotiations only," he said.

The government's offer comes ahead of state assembly elections scheduled on September 7, 16, 21 and 30, the first since the Muslim insurgency began in late 1989. Kashmir has been under the direct rule of New Delhi since 1990.

"I appeal to the people to take the elections as a weapon to install their own representatives had restored democracy in the state," Gupta said.

"We don't pay taxes, but we have to change the tax culture," she told reporters.

Trade and export companies called for Saturday's strike to illustrate the damage

BRIEFLY

Nepali FM to visit India tomorrow:

Nepal's Foreign Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani will visit India on Monday to discuss bilateral trade with the new United Front coalition government, an official statement said. Reuter reports from Kathmandu.

The statement said Lohani will meet officials from India's trade, tourism, civil aviation and water resources development ministries. New Delhi had recently eased restrictions on import of Nepali products to help the Himalayan kingdom to ease its 304 million dollars trade deficit with India.

More Khmer guerillas defect to govt:

Another major division of Khmer Rouge guerillas has defected to the Cambodian government, co-premier Hun Sen said yesterday. AFP reports from Phnom Penh.

"Division 519 has now declared that they will join the two other divisions," he said, referring to rebel divisions 450 and 415, which late Thursday declared themselves no longer be loyal to the Khmer Rouge central leadership.

3 publicly beheaded in KSA:

Saudi Arabia Friday publicly beheaded three citizens found guilty of sodomy, an Interior Ministry statement said. Reuter reports from Dubai.

It said the three had kidnapped a young boy and committed sodomy with him by force after threatening to kill him. The statement was carried by Riyad: Ra'do and reported by Gulf Arab news agencies. Friday beheadings bring to 23 the number of people executed in the conservative kingdom so far this year for various crimes.

25 more executed in China:

China has executed another 25 people accused of various crimes in the southern city of Guangzhou, according to the Guangzhou daily seen yesterday in Beijing. AFP reports from Beijing.

Those executed were found guilty of murder, injury leading to death and repeated theft, the newspaper said. More than thousand people have been executed in China since the launch of the strike hard campaign against crime at the end of April.

US blamed for prolonged Pacific War:

A Japanese politician has said that the United States was partly to blame for the prolonged Pacific War, which ended on August 15, 1945 with Japan's unconditional surrender, a report said Saturday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

"There is a view of history that Japan is solely responsible for the Pacific War, but the US side also has a pro-war attitude of trying to bring Japan into war," Tokuchiyo Tamazawa of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the main force of the ruling coalition was quoted by the Yomiuri Shimbun as saying.

7 killed in ROK chopper crash:

Seven people were killed when a rescue helicopter crashed in driving rain to the foot of mount Chiri in southern South Korea late Friday police said. AFP reports from Seoul.

The helicopter from a fire station in the southern city of Chinnju was on its way back after picking up an injured climber and his friend from a shelter on the mountain when it went down in storm weather the police said.

Tamil families from north of Lanka fleeing to India

COLOMBO, Aug 10: Tamil families from the war torn north of Sri Lanka are fleeing to India, raising the prospects of another refugee exodus, foreign aid workers said today.

"Some Tamil families have been seen crossing the Palk Straits on Indian trawlers," an aid worker told Reuters. "If this continues, it could become a serious issue."

Aid workers said the people were feared to be leaving from Sri Lanka's northwestern island of Mannar due to alleged harassment by Tamil rebels and government troops there.

"It does not seem to be linked with the food shortages," another aid worker said. "It's probably a desperate bid to get out of a bad situation."

Twenty-one Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka landed by boat in southern India this week. K Rajeswaran Nair, director general of police in the southern Indian state of Tamil

Nadu, told Reuters.

Some 50,000 Sri Lankan Tamil are living in camps in Tamil Nadu since they fled the country in the 1980s.

Separately, the International Committee of the Red Cross said a halt to food shipments to the northern Wanni region, dominated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), could trigger a crisis for some 200,000 Tamils who fled from the Kilinochchi area, where the army has launched a major operation.

The army has not allowed food shipments into the northern areas for more than two weeks as troops and LTTE guerrillas engage in fierce fighting near Kilinochchi for the 16th day today, aid officials said.

AP adds: The military attacked rebel positions with artillery fire on Saturday as it tightened its siege of guerrillas' northern stronghold.

NATO to destroy unauthorised Serb ammunition storage site

SARAJEVO, Aug 10: NATO said on Friday it would destroy the contents of a large unauthorised Bosnian Serb ammunition dump discovered by Italian peacekeepers this week, reports Reuter.

The site was never authorised by NATO spokesman major Brett Boudreau said.

It is our intent to destroy the material. The sheer volume and variety of ammunition and mines held at this one site make this destruction and involved operation."

The ammunition dump is in a school in Markovici, near Sokolac in eastern Bosnia.

The NATO led peace force first believed the contents would fill 200 ten-ton trucks but has since revised its estimate to a total of 300 tonnes.

Yeltsin begins second term under cloud of doubt

MOSCOW, Aug 10: Boris Yeltsin is beginning his second presidential term under a cloud of doubt about his health and ability to lead Russia for four more years, reports AP.

Yeltsin spoke in a strong, deep voice when he delivered the presidential oath, which lasted less than a minute. But he gave no inaugural address, looked weary, and seemed to slur his words at times. He stood woodenly throughout the 20-minute ceremony Friday in the State Kremlin Palace.

Aides said the president, who has made few public appearances since the end of June, is exhausted from his energetic re-election campaign and now plans a long vacation.

Yeltsin looked better at a reception later in the day and made some upbeat comments about his second term — but opposition leaders have openly questioned whether he

Two-day strike in Pakistan begins Opposition to force govt to withdraw new taxes

ISLAMABAD, Aug 10: Many shops and businesses were closed across Pakistan on Saturday as political opposition parties and industrial leaders began a two-day strike to protest new taxes, reports AP.

It was the latest in a series of strikes aimed at forcing the government to withdraw additional taxes introduced in the federal budget in June.

Doctors in southern Sind province also went on a partial strike on Saturday to protest income taxes.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto defended the new taxes and said Pakistan had to come to grips with the growing budget deficit by providing additional government revenues.

"We don't pay taxes, but we have to change the tax culture," she told reporters.

The government tax package and allegations of widespread corruption have led to growing discontent with Benazir.

Trade and export companies called for Saturday's strike to illustrate the damage

More than 1.1 billion dollars in additional taxes were introduced in the budget to cut the deficit. Even with the added taxes, government spending still exceeds revenues by about 5.9 billion dollars.

Benazir accused opposition parties, led by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League, of using the tax issue to cripple the country.

Sharif last month formed a loose coalition of opposition parties with the common aim of ousting Benazir's government by the end of the year.

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Trade and export companies called for Saturday's strike to illustrate the damage

they claim new taxes will do to their businesses.

The All Pakistan Traders Convention are demanding the withdrawal of taxes on export goods.

Police in the capital, Islamabad, stepped up security in anticipation of violence against shops that opened in defiance of the strike.

Most shops throughout the city were closed Saturday.

Truck drivers and other transportation workers walked off the job for three days at the end of July.

The strike was called off August 1 when the Benazir government gave in to union demands and revoked several taxes that the drivers said were tripling their operating costs.



Palestinian protesters perform Junina prayer on their land in Rafah in protest to the Israeli confiscation of their land in Rafah. Israel announced a confiscation order of the land to build a road for the Israeli settlers of Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip. — AFP/UNB photo

Saddam's prospect for holding onto power declining: CIA

WASHINGTON, Aug 10: The CIA has concluded that Saddam Hussein's prospects for holding onto power another year are declining, but the assessment is not shared by two other agencies, reports AP.

A key element of the CIA analysis appeared to be that talks between Saddam's regime and the United Nations to ease the international embargo on Iraq would fail.

Negotiations on arranging emergency oil sales succeeded after the CIA report was compiled.

The agency said it sees no "immediate threats" to the Iraqi President but reported

"change could come suddenly and violently, as it has throughout Iraq's history."

The CIA, the State Department and the Defense Intelligence Agency provided written responses on foreign policy in May to the Senate Intelligence Committee. The panel recently released the assessments.

All three agencies agreed that signs Saddam's regime is weakening and disaffection are intensifying. But only the CIA suggested Saddam may not survive a year. The State Department said he still could be in power a year from now, and the CIA said he was likely to continue ruling Iraq in the coming year.

The CIA said talks on resuming the sales helped relieve pressure on the regime and produced a temporary upswing in the economy. But the spy agency expected the negotiations to fail and took that into account in its conclusions.



Some 300 South Korean protesters burn an effigy of Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and Japanese cigarettes Mild Seven in Seoul on Saturday during the anti-Japanese protest. They demanded an apology from Japanese Prime Minister for visiting the controversial Yakusuni Shrine to Japan's war dead. — AFP/UNB photo

Bob Dole chooses Kemp as his running mate

RUSSELL, Kan, Aug 10: Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole has chosen former New York Congressman Jack Kemp as his vice presidential running mate, a Republican party source confirmed on Friday, reports Reuter.

Earlier, Dole's Press Secretary Nelson Warfield said that Dole had telephoned his choice and the offer had been accepted. But Warfield would not confirm that it was Kemp.

Dole telephoned Kemp from his hometown of Russell, Kansas, a former announcement of the choice was scheduled for today in Russell.

Local television in Dallas, where Kemp had flown from Florida, showed him boarding a chartered airplane on Friday evening, apparently to Kansas to join Dole for the announcement.

He said a column of tanks was making its way towards the central market about two km (one mile) away after a night of attacks by Russian helicopter gunships and fighter planes.

Yeltsin names Lebed as his representative in Chechnya

MOSCOW, Aug 10: Russian President Boris Yeltsin today named Alexander Lebed as his representative in Chechnya, presidency spokesman Sergei Medvedev announced, reports AFP.

The appointment of Lebed, the secretary to the powerful Russian security council, to replace Oleg Lobov came as heavy fighting between Chechen rebels and federal troops for control of the Chechen capital Grozny entered a fifth day.

On Friday, Yeltsin said attacks by Chechen separatists would be suppressed, but insisted the war in the breakaway republic would only be ended by peace talks.

Lebed, who stood against Yeltsin in presidential elections before joining his team, has been a firm critic in the past of Russian policy in Chechnya.

Mubarak urges Netanyahu to lift closure of WB, Gaza

CAIRO, Aug 10: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to lift the crippling closure of the autonomous Palestinian territories, he told journalists Friday, reports AFP.

The president said he had appealed to Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister to lift the blockade and to start the final phase of negotiations said the government daily Al Akhbar in its Saturday edition.

Netanyahu replied that he had begun to ease the measure of the closure and he pledged his commitment to all the accords signed with the Palestinians, the Egyptian leader told journalists. Mubarak was briefing journalists on the plane journey back to Cairo from an official visit to Saudi Arabia.

The military blockade of the territories was imposed by Israel in February 25 after the first of four Islamic militant suicide bombings in Israel which left 58 people dead.

Once and for ever

DUBAI, Aug 10: A newspaper said today United Arab Emirates' oldest man died days after his first visit to a doctor at the age of 135, reports Reuter.

Gulf News said Obain Mubarak Bin Suwaidan Bal-Jafali's health began to deteriorate a week ago. "Only then was he forced to see a doctor. He had never visited one before," it said.

The former desert tracker died on August 6 in Dubai. The paper said at 135 he was the oldest man in the UAE since Ali Mater Bin Ghurair died last month at 136.

The Guinness Book of Records recognises French woman Jeanne Calment as the oldest person in the world with birth certificate providing she is 121.

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All day long speculation has centred on Kemp, the former New York Congressman who has been a rival of Dole's for years.

The rebels raided Grozny on Tuesday and have seized large parts of the city, trapping thousands of Russian forces and civilians and fighting battles in which hundreds of people have been killed or wounded.

The fighting is the worst in months in Chechnya, where more than 30,000 people have been killed since President Boris Yeltsin sent troops to crush the southern region's independence drive in December 1994.

Meanwhile Russian President Boris Yeltsin declared today a day of national mourning for the hundreds killed in this week's fighting in Grozny that wrecked plans for a triumphal start to his second term in the Kremlin.

In the devastated Chechen capital, mourning seemed premature as the battle raged on late on Friday despite tentative discussions on a ceasefire to evacuate the wounded.

The rebels raided Grozny on Tuesday and have seized large parts of the city, trapping thousands of Russian forces and civilians and fighting battles in which hundreds of people have been killed or wounded.

Yeltsin declined a request from parliamentary leaders to appear in person to nominate Chernomyrdin.

The Communists have said they intend to press the government hard on improving social services and ordinary people's living standards. Although Russia's market reforms have brought wealth to some people, others have lost their savings, jobs and sense of security.

Yeltsin's re-election campaign added new strains to the budget. He promised hundreds of millions of dollars in repaid debts and lavish new projects.