

International

Compromise on key issue of political status likely
Ceasefire across Chechnya enters into effect

MOSCOW, Aug 23: A ceasefire across Chechnya brokered between Russian and Chechen rebel leaders entered into effect at noon (0800 GMT) today, reports AFP.

The Interior Ministry forces command in Chechnya ordered its units to respect the ceasefire, agreed late Thursday between Russian National Security Chief Alexander Lebed and top Chechen Commander Aslan Maskhadov, Interfax news agency reported.

Chechen unit commanders were also ordered not to open fire and to 'show maximum restraint from clashing' if provoked, referring to the high command for orders if under attack, Interfax quoted the rebel command as saying.

Russian General Igor Rybakov also ordered 'the rapid exchange' of all prisoners and bodies of dead Chechen fighters, Interfax said.



Israeli opposition leader and former prime minister Shimon Peres is welcomed by a Palestinian delegation headed by Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in Beit Hanoun in Gaza Strip on Thursday. Peres arrived here for the first time since his election defeat to "protect" the peace process and autonomy accords. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

12 die as rains lash India : At least 12 people died as heavy monsoon rains lashed India, inundating more than 150 villages and leaving hundreds of people homeless, domestic news agencies said yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Four of the deaths took place in the northern desert state of Rajasthan, where soldiers evacuated people from about 100 villages, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. Road and rail traffic was seriously disrupted across Rajasthan. The authorities diverted several trains to adjoining states after tracks were waterlogged.

Shells from WW II fished out in Paris : Thirty shells from World War II have been fished out of the Seine River, off the nearby town of Saint-Martin-La-Garenne, police in this Paris suburb said Thursday, AFP reports from Versailles, France.

The 40-millimeter shells were discovered by a passer-by on Monday as the level of the river went down in response to a particularly dry summer in the Paris region, they said.

51 Chinese held in Japan : Japanese authorities have arrested 51 Chinese and nine Vietnamese separately on suspicion of illegal entry in southwestern Japan, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Police said they arrested 51 Chinese in Fukuoka prefecture, some 900 kilometres (560 miles) southwest of Tokyo, on suspicion of violating the immigration law by entering the country without passports. The mass arrests came after police raided sauna parlors where the Chinese stayed, police said.

Japan to train pilots in Russia : Japan will send fighter pilots to former Cold War adversary Russia next year to receive training in the Russian air forces mainstay warplane, AP reports from Tokyo.

It will be the first time Japan will dispatch Air Self Defence Force personnel to Russia for training, said spokesman Toshiaki Miyamoto. Miyamoto said the aim of getting Japanese military pilots trained in the Sukhoi Su-27 is to gain "technological information" of the aircraft for use in future development of aircraft in Japan.

Tanker blast kills 1 in Mexico: One person died and at least 10 were injured on Thursday when a tanker carrying chemicals exploded near this small village on the main highway to the central city of Puebla, 50 miles (80km) from Mexico City, witnesses and officials said, Reuter reports from San Rafael Tlanalapan, Mexico.

Firemen and Army and Red Cross rescue units rushed to the area to evacuate the injured and extinguish the burning truck, which was carrying at least 8,000 gallons (30,000 litres) of liquid propylene when it exploded. The driver of the truck was burned to death, Puebla state civil protection chief Guillermo Melgarejo told reporters.

Fire claims 5 brothers in Manila : Five young brothers were killed in a fire which gutted a house in a southern Manila suburb before dawn yesterday, Philippine police said, AFP reports from Manila.

The victims, aged between seven and 20, are members of a dance troupe which performed on local television and had just finished a rehearsal and gone to sleep in their house in the bedroom community of Las Pinas when disaster struck. Their father, air force officer Roman Miranda, and his wife were way at the time, police said. The cause of the fire was not known.

44 executed in China: China has executed 44 people including a murderer who drowned his victim, press reports received in Beijing yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

In the northeastern province of Liaoning, 29 people convicted of robbery with violence were executed in the city of Anshan, the Liaoning Daily said.

3 Muslim rebels killed in Algeria: Algerian security forces have shot dead three Muslim guerrillas suspected of killing a leading French bishop in western Algeria, Algerian state-run television said on Thursday, Reuter reports from Paris.

Security forces also arrested four other men sought for supporting the three slain Muslim rebels, the report added. The television, which did not say when security forces killed the three rebels, showed the four arrested men seated near a table where seized arms were displayed.

Yeltsin's grandson to study in Britain: Russian President Boris Yeltsin's 15-year-old grandson is to become a student at exclusive Millfield School in southwest England 130 miles (200 km) west of London, AP reports from London.

The private, fee-paying boarding school, which has a long roll call of children of rich and powerful families it has educated, said Thursday that Boris Okulov, son of Yeltsin's eldest daughter Yelena, will enroll at the start of the school year next month.

1 dies of food poisoning in Japan : A 59-year-old woman died of food poisoning yesterday in western Japan's Nara prefecture, bringing the total number of deaths this year from a killer germ to 11, a prefecture official said, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Mother Teresa's condition worsens

CALCUTTA, Aug 23: Mother Teresa's health has deteriorated and the ailing Nobel Peace Prize winner now has malaria, one of the doctors treating her said today, reports Reuter.

"Her cardiac status is unstable and is closely monitored by a team of doctors," said Dr AK Bardhan, one of a team of physicians caring for the 85-year-old Roman catholic missionary.

Bardhan said a parasite, AP Vivax, which causes malaria, had been found in her blood. Mother Teresa suffered with malaria in 1993.

An official at Woodlands Nursing Home, a hospital in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta where Mother Teresa has been under treatment since Tuesday, said "her condition has deteriorated since the morning."

Bardhan said Mother Teresa was conscious but continued to have a fever and was on a respirator in the intensive care unit.

Sweden expels 3 North Korean diplomats

STOCKHOLM, Aug 23: Sweden said on Thursday it had expelled three North Korean diplomats from Stockholm, accusing them of smuggling cigarettes into Sweden.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Staffan Björck told Reuters the three men were ordered to leave the country on July 12 after they were caught smuggling in the Estonian capital of Tallinn.

Pyongyang's Ambassador to Sweden had not been expelled, he added.

"We called the ambassador to the Foreign Ministry and told him that three of the diplomats at the embassy in Stockholm were no longer welcome in Sweden," Björck said.

"We did this because they were smuggling cigarettes from abroad to Sweden," they left the country within a week or so. This is not the way a diplomat should behave."

NATO troops end destruction of Bosnian Serb munitions

SARAJEVO, Aug 23: NATO troops have completed the destruction of nearly 400 tonnes of unauthorised Bosnian Serb munitions and mines, a spokesman for the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) said today, reports AP.

Major Hervé Gourmelon said the last controlled explosion took place Thursday afternoon, and IFOR was now returning the site to its original condition, which it was likely to finish over the weekend.

It was the biggest single operation to destroy unauthorised material since IFOR was deployed in Bosnia in December following the Dayton peace accords.

The operation to destroy the dump in a derelict school near Margetic, 40 kilometres (24 miles) northeast of Sarajevo, was fiercely criticised by Serb leaders who accused IFOR of bias.

However they did not try to block the destruction, merely complaining that the explosions were damaging the local environment.

Police storm Paris church to remove immigrants

PARIS, Aug 23: French police stormed a Paris church today to try to remove 300 African immigrants, 10 of whom are on a 50-day-old hunger strike to protest against moves to expel them from the country, reports Reuter.

Hundreds of helmeted police struggled with hundreds of sympathisers of the protesters who had surrounded the Saint Bernard Church in the heavily immigrant Goutt D'or district for days.

Witnesses said police appeared to have broken down the church's main gate.

They used tear gas and batons to try to clear the crowd outside the church as activists confronted them, chanting "French people, immigrants, solidarity."

Four ambulances rushed to the scene but it was not immediately clear if anyone was injured. Police cordoned off the area.



Protesters demonstrating on behalf of the National Organisation of Women (NOW) march in front of the White House in Washington on Thursday in opposition to US President Bill Clinton's signing of the welfare reform bill. The women's organisation disagrees with the bill because it takes away benefits from needy families such as federal cash assistance and nutrition allotments. — AFP/NUB photo

US destroying stockpile of chemical weapons

TOOELE ARMY DEPOT, Utah, Aug 23: A decade behind schedule, the army began destroying the US stockpile of chemical weapons Thursday in a high-tech incinerator, starting with nerve-gas rockets that were reduced to ash and molten aluminium, reports AP.

By day's end, the army planned to incinerate 60 M55 rockets containing the deadly nerve agent GB — the first weapons to go in a 12 billion dollars effort to eliminate 31,000 tons of mustard and nerve gas packed into 3 million rockets, land mines, bombs, mortars, missiles and canisters stored in eight states.

Congress ordered the army to destroy all chemical weapons by 1994, but that deadline was extended to 2004 because of changing regulations, environmental challenges, congressional mandates and what the Pentagon acknowledges was

poor management.

The United States and the former Soviet Union pledged to destroy their chemical arsenals in the late 1980s, deciding that burning off the gases was the safest and most efficient method.

Even after the burning began Thursday, environmental groups continued their fight, claiming the government suppressed or ignored the dangers. Two hours after the first rockets were destroyed, a Utah hazardous-waste board rejected 5-2 a last-minute plea for a shutdown from opponents of the incinerator.

The 650 million dollars incinerator was built to destroy the 14,000 tons of chemical agents stored at this desert installation 50 miles (80 kms) southwest of Salt Lake City. Tooele's arsenal contains 44 per cent of the total US chemical stockpile.

The burning will continue for 10- to 15-weeks, followed by a period of about six weeks during which the state of Utah will analyse emission levels and safety procedures. Then the state will decide whether to issue the army a permanent license for 24-hour-a-day operations.

The army hopes to complete the destruction operation at Tooele in 2004.

Much hinges on the success of the incineration at Tooele: Seven other states have smaller shares of the chemical stockpile and the army plans to build similar incinerators there to destroy those weapons.

Some of the weapons date to World War I and are leaking. At Tooele (pronounced 'Too-El-uh'), where the weapons are stored in 208 earth-covered concrete bunkers, there have been 1,510 reported leaks since 1967, 32 this year.



An IFOR "Humvee" vehicle passes a road sign used as a small arms target with a fresh poster of indicted war criminal and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic in Thursday. Karadzic has been banned from all political activity by the UN. — A) P/UNB photo

Australia to take draft CTBT to UNGA

CANBERRA, Australia, Aug 23: Australia said Friday it will ask the United Nations General Assembly next month to endorse a draft treaty to ban nuclear testing, reports AP.

Negotiations for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) went out with whimper at a 61-nation conference on Disarmament in Geneva on Thursday after India vetoed the accord.

However, the five declared nuclear powers — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — said there is enough support for it to be opened up for signing at the United Nations anyway.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said his government will take the draft treaty to New York for endorsement by the General Assembly.

"I am deeply committed to an end to testing and I am convinced that this historic opportunity to secure a CTBT should not be lost," he said in a statement issued from Beijing where he is on an official visit.

"Therefore Australia has taken action in New York to have the CTBT text put to the UN General Assembly for endorsement," he said.

Downer said Australia is deeply disappointed at the breakdown in the Geneva negotiations.

He said the draft treaty is "the best outcome achievable in the negotiations" and is supported by the vast majority of countries, which took part.

"I believe that the CTBT text represents an historic achievement by the international community," Downer said.

"The many commitments and compromises embodied in the text reflect more than two and a half years of intense multilateral negotiations."

"Australia and many other countries worked hard to balance the interests of all countries participating in the negotiations in Geneva."

Lebanon rejects offer of Netanyahu's conditional troop withdrawal

BEIRUT, Lebanon, Aug 23: Lebanon on Thursday repeated its rejection of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's offer of a conditional troop withdrawal from Southern Lebanon, reports AP.

President Elias Hrawi restated Beirut's longstanding demand for an unconditional withdrawal from the border strip which Israel has controlled for nearly two decades to protect it from cross-border guerrilla attacks.

"Between us and Israel is Resolution 425," the Lebanese president said.

He was referring to UN Security Council Resolution 425 of 1978, which calls for an unconditional Israeli pullout from conquered territory in Southern Lebanon.

In recent weeks, Netanyahu has offered a plan under which Israeli troops would withdraw from South Lebanon in return for security guarantees and the dismantling of Hezbollah.

Both Lebanon and Syria have rejected the offer, accusing Israel of trying to drive a wedge between the two Arab countries. Syria has 40,000 troops in Lebanon and dominates that country's politics.

A separation of the Lebanese and Syrian tracks in Middle East peace negotiations would serve to deprive the Syrians of the leverage in their own talks with Israel over the future of the Golan Heights.

Israel captured the Golan from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war. Netanyahu's government has said it will not return the strategic plateau to the Syrians as part of a peace treaty.

Hrawi said Thursday night that both Lebanon and Syria are committed to the land-for-peace principle and to the implementation of international resolutions.

Off the Record

They are in love, want to get married, but they can't

SANTIAGO, Chile: Luis Olivares and Maria Teresa Pacheco are in love and want to get married, but a century old Chilean law won't let them, reports AP.

While they both are of age, they are also dumb, deaf and illiterate, which makes them unable to "clearly express their consent either verbally or in writing," to get married, the law says.

So when they appeared before a civilian marriage official at the Santiago suburb of Hueschuraba, they were turned again.

There is nothing to do unless the law is changed, said the head of the National Civilian Register, Berhan Belmar.

Two senators, Mariano Ruiz Esquide and Manuel Matta, quickly submitted a bill to Congress to stop what they called legal discrimination. According to their proposal, sign language or a nod with the head would be acceptable to say yes and get married.

But Luis and Maria Teresa decided not to wait for Congress — which has a reputation for slowness. Instead, they are learning how to read and write.

A handwritten draft of a song fetches \$ 17,000

LONDON: A rare early handwritten draft of a song by US guitar legend Jimi Hendrix was sold for almost 17,000 dollars on Thursday at an auction of some of the late musician's favorite possessions, reports Reuter.

A Florida restaurant paid 10,925 pounds (16,935 dollar) for the draft of "ain't no telling," which Hendrix penned on a piece of London Hotel stationery in late 1966.

At the end of a January 1967 concert in the English city of Nottingham he threw the sheet of paper into the audiences where it was retrieved by a fan.

Buyers also snapped up 16 other items that were put up for auction by Hendrix's former girlfriend Kathy Etchingham, who lived with him from 1966 to 1969.

They included a black Lacquer and Mother of Pearl inlaid box used by Hendrix to store his drugs, which an Australian purchaser bought for 5,060 pounds (7,845 dollar), the guitarist died of a drugs overdose in 1970 aged 27.

Love as an weapon to solve crisis

COLOMBO: Government soldiers are offering marriage to young Tamils in northern Sri Lanka where security forces drove out separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas, the rebel group said today, reports AP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said troopers of the majority Sinhalese community were "harassing" young Tamil girls with offers of marriage in a bid to penetrate the "people's resistance" to government forces.

"Female Sri Lankan soldiers are also pursuing young Tamil boys with offers of marriage," the LTTE said in a statement from its London office. It added that the government planned to have 10,000 such inter-communal marriages.

There was no immediate reaction from the Defense Ministry but military officials had said that civilians in the northern peninsula were co-operating with security forces to track down rebel infiltrators.

The military captured Jaffna, the main citadel of the LTTE, after a series of operations begun in October last year.

India continues to acquire military hardware thru' middlemen

NEW DELHI, Aug 23: India's ban on brokering military purchases has been in place for 11 years, but only in paper. In reality, defence brokers have never been out of business, reports IPS.

India officially outlawed brokers in defence deals in the mid-1980s after a huge scandal involving the purchase of Howitzers from the Swedish company, Bofors. But the Ministry of Defence continues to acquire military hardware through middlemen.

Yadav's claims, however, have been greeted with scepticism by Defence Ministry officials, who say it does not square with the realities in the shadowy world of military purchases.

Military sources said purchases via agents after they were banned include armoured recovery vehicles from Slovakia, infantry training simulators from New Zealand, shell-filling equipment for India's new ordnance factory in Orissa, mine clearing equipment from Britain and spares for the navy and air force.

The paradox over procurement of defence equipment followed the ban on all defence agents by then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 when India was about to procure 155mm artillery field guns and ammunition from one of four competitors from Sweden, France, Austria and Britain.

In keeping with new government policy, India's defence minister demanded a declaration that no agents had been used to push their product. All

four contenders agreed and soon after Bofors of Sweden signed the 1.3 billion US dollar contract to supply 410 FH-77 155mm artillery pieces in early 1986.

But a year later the Howitzer deal was swathed in scandal with allegations of "kickbacks" of around 50 million dollar to senior Indian politicians and agents to facilitate the deal, a factor which strengthened premier Rajiv Gandhi resolve to outlaw defence agents.

Overnight, scores of dealers were raided by revenue intelligence officials and their premises sealed, forcing smaller representatives to shut down.

The larger ones, however, decided to sit out the ban and moved into selling equipment to the civilian sector. By early 1991 virtually all major Indian defence procurements had ground to a halt.

But the ban on private agents

spawned a new and "safe" defence brokers — the clutch of defence public sector units or DP-SUS. Being state-owned, the DP-SUS were immune from any ban and over the years have become importers and manufacturers of military equipment worth billions.

And, as a predominantly Soviet-equipped military began looking Westwards in the early 1990s to replace and replenish obsolete military equipment, the role of the DP-SUS in brokering increased.

Over the past six years DP-SUS like Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, Bharat Electronics Limited, Bharat Dynamics Limited, Bharat Earth Movers, Electronic Instrumentation India Limited, Hindustan Machine Tools and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited have profited considerably through purchasing defence equipment, often accompanied by a transfer of technology for local manufacture, usually by other DP-SUS.

Bharat Heavy Electricals, for example, has brokered deals worth over 1.0 billion dollar for armoured recovery vehicles from Slovakia, 76 mm guns from Oto Melara of Italy for the Indian Navy and armour plating Fort-72 tanks and for Arjun, India's indigenously developed main battle tank.

By equipment through the DP-SUS the Defence Ministry is legitimising agents through the back door," said military officials.

They said the DP-SUS did little other than to procure equipment through agents of major defence equipment based in India and then sell it to the ministry, clearing commissions in the process.

Senior military officials said the 11-year old ban on defence agents imposed a gross hypocrisy upon India's procurement policy. They said this

became all the more ridiculous when defence officials admitted to frequently meeting defence agents to exchange information, discuss requirements and pricing and, above all, liaisoning for equipment trials.

Yadav's declaration of doing away with defence agents is meaningless as they are indispensable to all purchases," said a senior army officer, declining to be named. He said around 80 agents, a majority based in New Delhi, were established Defence Ministry suppliers involved with the transportation and testing of systems before finalising contracts.

The procedure for procuring defence equipment in India is laborious, often taking years before contracts are signed. All military requirements are drawn up by the weapons, equipment directorate of the army, air and naval staff requirement departments.

Thousands of others have been stranded long the route and desperate efforts were being made to rescue them, a state government official said.

"We are aware of at least 15 deaths we don't know whether the deaths took place today or yesterday," he added.

Kashmir officials said more than 30,000 Hindu pilgrims had been caught in the snowfalls leading to Amarnath Cave, revered as the home of Lord Shiva, the Hindu god of death.

The deaths have occurred mainly due to biting cold and the washing away of mountains tracks," the official said.

He said heavy snow had been falling over Sheshnag

15 Hindu pilgrims killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 23: At least 15 Hindu pilgrims were killed after heavy snowfalls shed a desolate veil over a sacred Himalayan cave in Kashmir, officials said today, reports AP.

Thousands of others have been stranded long the route and desperate efforts were being made to rescue them, a state government official said.

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