

China denies link to Pak missile plant

BEIJING, Aug 26: China today denied a US newspaper report linking it to the construction of a missile plant in Pakistan, reports Reuters.

Asked to comment on a Washington Post report that China had supplied blueprints and equipment for the plant, a Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said: "The US newspaper report is entirely groundless."

The spokeswoman had no further comment.

The Washington Post reported on Sunday that US intelligence officials had concluded that Pakistan was secretly building a medium-range missile factory in a suburb of the northern city of Rawalpindi near Islamabad.

The newspaper said that the development raised the prospect of a new Sino-US dispute over arms proliferation.

The partially completed plant was expected to be capable of producing most of the major components of a missile modelled on the Chinese designed M-11 in a year or two.

Some US officials believed the factory would produce precise duplicates of the missile, according to the Washington Post.

The United States has twice imposed limited economic sanctions against China for selling M-11 missile launchers and finished missile components to Pakistan, but withdrew the curbs after Beijing promised to stop such deliveries.

A White House spokesman said he could not confirm the story but said the United States took such reports seriously.

"We do not believe it is in the best interests of the United States or of any other country to supply Pakistan with the capacity to manufacture or deploy weapons of mass destruction," the spokesman said.

Liberal Democrats and Socialists. But even if he did decide to bolt it seems unlikely that he would have enough supporters to deprive the coalition of its majority in Parliament.

Still, a sudden departure by Hatoyama and his followers could cause turmoil in the short term by sharply weakening one of the member parties of the coalition.

Hatoyama is hoping to set up his new party ahead of national Parliamentary elections, which must be held by next July but are likely to be called sooner, possibly around the end of the year.

Political analysts questioned the long-term impact of Hatoyama's repositioning efforts, but acknowledged that he could cause trouble for the government of Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto.

"Knowing how wishy-washy Hatoyama is, it seems unlikely he would be able to carry off a defection," said Christopher Redl, an analyst who follows politics for ING Barings Securities. "Already the press is poo-pooing him for being so vague."

It remains unclear whether he would keep the new party in the current coalition with the

President of Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat (R) and Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda shake hands after their press conference in Arafat's office in Gaza City Sunday. Japan has sought to contribute to the Middle East peace process primarily through economic assistance, including more than 200 million dollars in aid to Arafat's Palestinian Authority over the past two years and pledges another 200 million by 1997.

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President Clinton (R), First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton (C), and daughter Chelsea (L), wave from the "21st Century Express" campaign train Sunday in Huntington, West Virginia. The train will carry Clinton 400 miles across the US to Chicago and the Democratic National Convention.

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Peace process on track in Chechnya: Lebed

GROZNY, Aug 26: Despite a setback in negotiations with Chechen rebels, Russia's security chief insisted the peace process was on track, reports AP.

"The peace process is in motion," Alexander Lebed told Associated Press Television on Sunday. The joint patrols are working, local commanders have started to withdraw troops. And on the 29th, the real withdrawal will begin."

Lebed returned to Moscow on Sunday, interrupting peace talks and casting doubt on the future of a political agreement to end the 20-month war. Lebed said he was only working out "legal difficulties."

The fate of an earlier ceasefire accord signed by Lebed and separatist commanders also appeared uncertain, with the Russians citing truce violations and a top commander refusing to meet with his Chechen counterpart.

Chechen and Russian units were supposed to start pulling out of Grozny Sunday. Next week, the Russians are to leave several southern regions and, eventually, Chechnya altogether.

The rebels said the attack was a "provocation" by a fringe group and Maskhadov repeatedly pledged to return the weapons.

AFP adds, thousands of civilians who fled Grozny last week began flooding back into the shattered capital over the weekend, apparently placing utter faith in the peace-making ability of security supremo Alexander Lebed.

"Lebed is a good lad. All the Chechens have 100 per cent confidence in him," said Alisha 37, who returned to her home in a northern district of Grozny which she had fled last Wednesday.

There were no casualties, but the rebels forced 56 servicemen to disarm, the Russian army said. Russian officers said they would halt the withdrawal of troops from the Chechen capital due to the incident, the Interfax news agency reported.

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650 pilgrims still remain on Himalayas in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 26: Some 650 Hindus remained on the Himalayas in Kashmir today insisting on resuming a pilgrimage wrecked by snow and rains which have killed 160 people, officials said, reports AFP.

About 150 pilgrims were camped on the Panchtarni Peak and 500 more on the nearby Sheshnag mountain, both at a height of 3,380 metres above sea level and close to the sacred Amarnath Cave.

An official spokesman said the two groups had refused to be lifted by military helicopters after disastrous conditions hit the tough Himalayan trek, leaving at least 160 pilgrims, porters and border guards dead.

Some 8,000 other pilgrims were, however, evacuated from the snow-capped mountains on Saturday and Sunday by soldiers and border guards to join several thousand rescued earlier from other places in the Kashmir valley.

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'US monitoring China's missile tech exports'

WASHINGTON, Aug 26: Amid reports that Pakistan is getting help from China in building a missile factory, Vice President Al Gore says the United States has a "very active, vigorous programme" of monitoring Chinese technology exports, reports AP.

Gore, however, refused to comment on a Washington Post report "Sunday" that Pakistan was secretly building a medium range missile factory using blueprints and equipment supplied by China.

"I'm not going to comment on the intelligence reports," Gore said on ABC's "The Week with David Brinkley." "We have an active ongoing dialogue with the Chinese on this very point."

The Post, citing unidentified US intelligence officials and a classified document, said the factory near Rawalpindi, Pakistan, is expected to be capable of producing most of the major components of a missile modelled after the Chinese designed M-11 in a year or two.

Clinton said he and his wife will consider adopting a child after the election, but added that he's hesitant to bring another child into the White House spotlight, reports AP.

"We've talked about it on and off over the years," Clinton said Sunday in an interview with CNN, adding that the couple always had wanted another child. Their daughter, Chelsea, is 16.

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a May interview that the couple had been discussing the possibility of adoption.

But first, Clinton said the couple must get the election behind them.

Then, "We need to really sit down and seriously think about what the implications of this would be for a child. Do you want to bring a child into the White House? I mean, adopted kids have enough trouble adjusting as it is, unless they're just infants."

In the interview, Clinton also gave a spirited defense of himself and his wife in the Whitewater controversy.

Clashes leave 6 killed in Lanka

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, Aug 26: Six people, including three soldiers, were killed in several clashes between government troops and Tamil Tiger guerrillas in northeastern Sri Lanka, the military said Monday, reports AP.

In the northern Jaffna Peninsula, two soldiers died when government troops waiting in ambush in the jungles, mistakenly fired at a military patrol in darkness on Sunday night, said Major Tilak Dunuwille, a military spokesman.

A member of a former rebel group which has given up arms and become a political party, was killed early Monday in a rebel grenade attack. Six others were wounded in the attack on the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation office in northeastern Trincomalee town.

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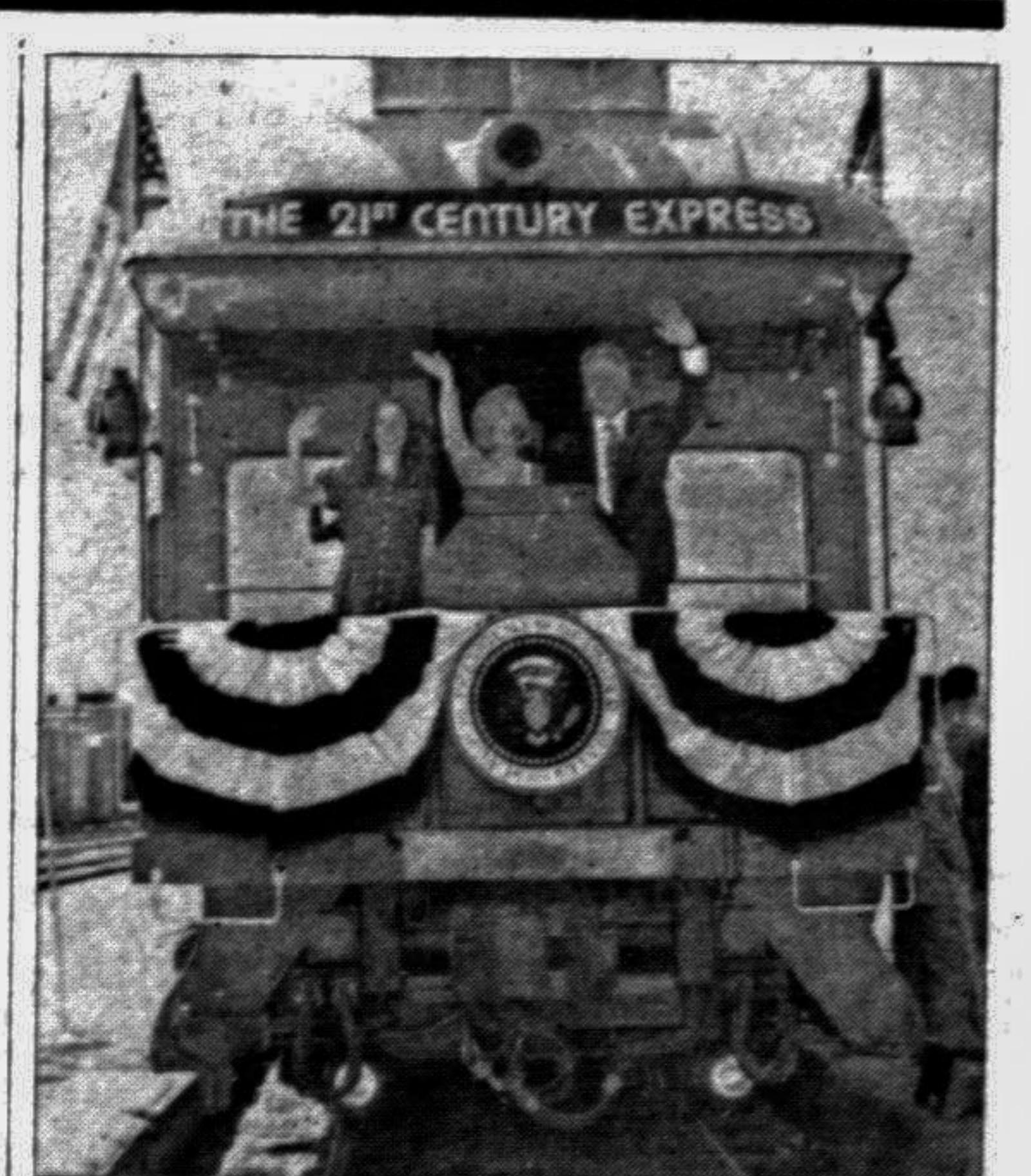
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Democrats kick off their '96 convention in Chicago

CHICAGO, Aug 26: Democrats kick off their 1996 convention today, eager to exorcise the ghosts of their notorious 1968 gathering in Chicago and to launch President Bill Clinton on the way to a second term in the White House, reports Reuters.

With Clinton leading Republican challenger Bob Dole in two new weekend polls by five and 12 percentage points, one of the biggest Democratic problems will be to create enough news to persuade voters to pay attention.

The president did his part by embarking on Sunday on a four-day, Harry Truman-style whistle-stop train tour through the American heartland, stopping each day to unveil a new

policy initiative. Day one found the president chugging through coal-rich Appalachian Hills in west Virginia and Kentucky, past cornfields, cow pastures, dilapidated barns and mobile homes, and people waving flags.

At a sunset rally before several thousand people in Chillicothe, Ohio, Clinton drove home his theme of the day — that Dole's proposed 15 per cent income tax cut was irresponsible and would drive the country towards bankruptcy.

Clinton was in a feisty mood, which continued in a CNN interview on Sunday evening in which he angrily blasted Republicans for hounding many of his staff and associates over the White water affair.

Off the Record

Charles awaiting public approval for Camilla Parker!

LONDON: Prince Charles wants to win public approval for Camilla Parker Bowles, a British tabloid said Sunday, alleging the prince set up a photo opportunity of the two at a remote "love nest," reports AP.

But the photographic proof offered by the News of the World is a fuzzy picture, apparently taken from some distance, of Charles and a man deep in conversation several meters (yards) away from a pair of unidentifiable women — one of whom was said to be Mrs. Parker Bowles.

The News of the World said Saturday that the "intimate pictures" it was publishing Sunday suggested the couple were "orchestrating a campaign to get public acceptance for the illicit romance that wrecked Charles' marriage to Diana."

The divorce of the heir to the throne and Princess Diana is to become final on Wednesday. Diana, 35, has blamed Mrs. Parker Bowles, the prince's sometime lover, for the marriage breakup.

Buckingham Palace denied the photos were set up. "We categorically deny that these photographs are the result of what amounts to a photo opportunity connived at by the palace," a spokeswoman said.

Kala did it before Binti

LOS ANGELES: Binti wasn't the first gorilla to save a little boy. More than 80 years ago, Kala rescued an orphan who became "Lord of the Jungle," reports AP.

A group of fans of Edgar Rice Burroughs, who wrote the fictional "Tarzan of the Apes" in 1912, has awarded Binti its first Kala award, named after Tarzan's adoptive gorilla mother.

Bob Cook, a member of the Burroughs Bibliophiles Literary Society, said he saw the parallel when he heard about Binti rescuing a toddler who fell into the gorilla exhibit at a Chicago-area zoo on August 16.

"Kala did almost the same thing," said Cook. "She saw Tarzan lying there, and she picked him up and nurtured him."

A plaque cites Binti "for her rescue, protection and return of a male human child... and for displaying extraordinary alertness, compassion and bravery in the face of her nervous and agitated fellow gorillas."

A 3000-year-old mummy may become object of custody battle

WISCASSET, Maine: A 3,000