

India develops 2 versions of Prithvi missiles for use

NEW DELHI, May 9: Two versions of India's most controversial 'Prithvi' (Earth) missiles have been developed and are ready for use. The Hindu newspaper said today, reports AFP.

The daily quoting India's Minister of State for Defence, NVN Somu, said the 150-kilometre (93 mile) and the 250-kilometre (155-mile) range models of the indigenously-built Prithvi have been fully developed.

"The development of the 150-kilometre version Prithvi for the army has been completed successfully and subsequent activities are in progress," the Hindu quoted Somu as saying on Thursday.

"No further tests will be required before its induction into the army," Balu said and added the longer-range Prithvi has also been fully developed for the Indian Air Force.

The air force will use its Prithvi, which can carry a one-tonne warhead, against airfields, radar stations and other strategic installations in the event of war.

The army's shorter-range surface-to-surface missile, which was last tested successfully on February 23, has been developed to attack oil terminals, railway facilities and other "high-value" sites.

Both the systems have been tested 16 times since February

Political pundits predict Sonia's elevation to Congress (I) highest forum

NEW DELHI, May 9: The entry of Sonia Gandhi into the Congress (I) has come as a windfall to the party which has suffered since the murder of her husband Rajiv Gandhi six years ago, analysts said today, reports AFP.

Political pundits and the media predicted the inevitable elevation of the Sonia Gandhi, 50, to the party's highest forum and said her decision could resurrect the party fortunes.

Sitaram Kesri, who worked as Congress treasurer under Rajiv Gandhi and his mother Indira Gandhi to become the party's powerful president in December 1996.

"The Congress had become weak when it got de-linked from the Gandhi, Nehru family. Now it will regain its strength. The party will not do anything against her wishes," Kesri said and hinted he was not averse to her taking over the reins of the 112-year-old Congress.

"Way back in 1991, we had urged her to take over the reins of the party," said Kesri of an emotional appeal he himself had made in a joint gathering of members of parliament after her husband's assassination.

"Her decision honours the



Sonia Gandhi be the greatest asset to the Congress under the present circumstances.

feelings of millions of Congressmen who wanted to see her as an active member of the party."

Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, who is counted among the most powerful Indians joined the Congress as primary member on March 21, but the step was officially announced Thursday.

The Congress said her entry would "enthuse, galvanise and electrify" the party, dominated for much of this century by her mother-in-law Indira Gandhi and her husband's grandfather Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister.

The Congress which lost power last year, gives parliamentary support to a fragile ruling coalition to keep right wing Hindus in the opposition from taking power.

Sonia had repeatedly refused to be drawn into politics since Rajiv Gandhi, prime minister from 1984 to 1989 was killed on May 21, 1991 by a suicide bomber while campaigning in southern India.

She distanced herself from the Congress when it suffered a string of electoral defeats in provincial balloting under former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao since 1994.

Rabindra Smriti Puraskar for Rabin, Kumar Prasad

CALCUTTA, May 9: Rabindra Smriti Puraskar for 1997 was presented today to Kumar Prasad Mukhopadhyay and Rabin Bal for their outstanding contribution to Bengali literature on the occasion of Rabindranath Tagore's 136th birth centenary celebration here yesterday, reports PTT.

While, Mukhopadhyay has been awarded for his book 'Kudrat Rang' (Brang), and Bal has been awarded for his outstanding book 'Bangaly Bigyan Charcha'. Both the books were unique in their style of presentation and theme.

Giving away the award to Mukhopadhyay, the State Information and Cultural Affairs Minister, Buddhadev Bhattacharya, said that the writer, himself Buddhadev Bhattacharya, said that the writer, himself an exponent on classical music, has explained and analysed the delicate theme in a simple style for understanding of the general people.

Presiding over the function, jointly organised by the Ministry of Higher Education and Information and Cultural Affairs, the state's Higher Education Minister Satyasadhan Chakraborty, claimed that West Bengal had the largest budgetary allocation for education purpose compared to any other state in the country.

SAARC summit kicks off in Maldives May 12 Security chiefs worried at ban on carrying guns

MALE, May 9: A ban on guns carried by foreign bodyguards has caused anxiety for the security chiefs of South Asian leaders who are to hold a three-day summit here from Monday, diplomats said today, reports AFP.

The Maldives government said it will provide "strict security" for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit but diplomats said more needed to be done.

"Foreign security officers are not permitted to carry weapons in the Republic of Maldives," the government said in an advance information sheet to visiting delegations.

It said the weapons of bodyguards for visiting heads of state or government must be handed over to the Maldivian National Security Service (NSS) to be returned on their leaving the country.

Diplomats said the ban was not practical as some of the world's most vulnerable leaders will be attending the summit and the tiny NSS may not have the specialised skills to protect them.

Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaratunga is a potential target of separatist Tamil

Tiger guerrillas and is constantly guarded by a huge retinue of bodyguards.

India's Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral is also guarded closely by his Special Protection Group (SPG) personnel. Gujral is to meet Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for a rare meeting between the leaders of the arch-rivals.

Diplomats said they were talking to the Maldivian security authorities in a bid to ensure that the there were "joint security" arrangements involving NSS staff and foreign armed bodyguards.

There is no visible sign of tightening of security in the capital island Male where there is a large expatriate workforce from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Leaders from Bangladesh, Butan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are to be brought to the capital from the airport island of Hulule, 10 minutes away by speed boat.

The summit pens at the Dharubargue conference hall on Monday and on the following day the seven leaders retreat to a resort island, the full moon beach, which will be off limits to everyone else.

BRIFELY

Li Peng arrives in Gabon: Chinese Premier Li Peng arrived in Libreville late Thursday for a 48-hour visit on the fourth leg of a six-nation African tour, bringing aid and the prospect of more investment in Gabon, officials said, AFP reports from Libreville.

His schedule included attending with Gabonese President Omar Bongo the laying of the foundation stone of a new parliament building, being funded by Beijing to the tune of some 24 million dollars and constructed by a Chinese firm. Li was also to sign five agreements on promoting and protecting investment, extending credit on preferential terms of some 10 million dollars and rescheduling Gabon's debt to China.

Floods claim 25 in China: At least 25 people have died in floods near the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, a Hong Kong newspaper reported on Thursday, Reuters says from Hong Kong.

Torrential rain battered much of southern Guangdong province on Wednesday, marking the start of the annual rainy season.

Sat from US arrives in Taiwan: The first batch of a satellite and its ground support facility bought by Taiwan from the United States arrived in Taipei yesterday for dynamics testing officials said, AFP reports from Taipei.

The state of the art equipment was transported in three separate shipments with the satellite itself due to arrive on May 15, the National Space Programme Office (NSPO), officials said. After completing testing for any problems in integrating the payloads the satellite will be shipped back to Florida for a planned launch in late 1998 or early 1999, they said.

65 kg cocaine seized in US: An officer who pulled over a car that had a bad light discovered 65 kilos (143 pounds) of cocaine inside the vehicle, police reported Thursday, AFP reports from New York.

The find is worth an estimated 10 million dollars, police said. "The car was a hazard," New York police officer Steven Genovese told reporters, explaining why he stopped the vehicle.

Media urged to boycott Zhirinovsky: Russian journalists organisations called for a media boycott of coverage of ultra-nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky after he assaulted two Russian television journalists Thursday, AFP reports from Moscow.

Vsevolod Bogdanov, head of the Union of Russian Journalists and Alexei Simonov of the Glasnost Protection Fund, called on colleagues of the written press, radio and television, to "ignore the existence of this shameful character." Simonov said "a boycott would be very effective as Zhirinovsky is the result of the love of the Russian media for scandal."

LTTE kills 727 soldiers in '97: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas said yesterday they had massacred 727 soldiers in fighting since the start of 1997, AFP reports from Vavuniya.

The clandestine Voice of Tigers radio said in a broadcast monitored that the troops were killed across the north and east of Sri Lanka where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is waging a separatist campaign. The LTTE broadcast also claimed shooting down nine Sri Lankan military aircraft between January 1 and April 30. It said the list included three spy planes.

3 firefighters killed in US: Three firefighters died and 16 people were injured following an explosion at a chemical packaging plant near West Helena, Arkansas, states police officials said Thursday, AFP reports from Washington.

The blast at BPS Inc, three miles (five kilometres) south of the West Helena occurred at around 1:30 pm (1730 GMT), started a chemical-fueled fire that generated huge clouds of black smoke, the officials said by telephone.

Plane crashes in China: 35 die

SHENZHEN, China, May 9: A plane crash in south China has killed 35 people, and official in the city of Shenzhen said Friday, reports AP.

Thirty-three passengers and two crewmembers were killed in the crash Thursday, said the official from Shenzhen, a southern Chinese city which lies just across the border from the British colony of Hong Kong.

Speaking by telephone, the official from the city's foreign affairs department, who gave her name only as Ms Zhu, said one Taiwan citizen and a Hong Kong citizen were among the seriously wounded.

A total of 35 people were still in the hospital, but the condition of the 33 other people hospitalised was not immediately known, she said.

A total of 74 people — 65 passengers and 9 crew — were on the flight, Zhu said. She was not immediately able to explain what happened to four people unaccounted for.

The passengers included a Thai tour group of "about 20 people," Zhu said. It was not immediately clear what was the nationality of the dead.

The Boeing 737, on a domestic flight, burst into flames after landing at Shenzhen airport in south China on Thursday night.

The accident ended a relatively long spell of accident-free flying for Chinese commercial

carriers. The most recent crash of a commercial flight was on June 6, 1994, when a China Northwest Airlines flight from Xi'an to Guangzhou crashed shortly after takeoff, killing 159 people.

The China Southern Airline landed at 9:35 pm (1335 GMT) Thursday at Shenzhen's Huangtian Airport, near the Hong Kong border, Zhu said.

Flight CZ3456 arrived from Chongqing in the central province of Sichuan.

Reports from the scene said it broke up into three sections after landing.

By morning Friday, rescue operations at the crash site were over, with what appeared to be the wreckage of the Boeing 737 lying on a grassy verge by the runway.

The nose sections was covered with a green cloth.

The airport had returned to normal operations, an official in its control tower said.

The cause of the accident, the first at the airport since it was opened about three years ago, was unknown, Zhu said.

The airplane veered into the grass by the runway and burst into flames, the government-funded Wen Wei Po newspaper reported.

"Amid the fierce flames, the plane split into three parts," the newspaper said.

Ta Kung Pao, another government-funded newspaper, reported the plane broke up into front, middle and tail sections, with the front and tail sections lying 100 meters (yards) apart.

Shenzhen has developed from a fishing village to a metropolis in just 17 years since the Communist government in Beijing launched economic reforms there.

Tribal rebels kill 2 in Manipur

NEW DELHI, May 9: Tribal guerrillas shot dead a senior police official and his armed guard today in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur, the Press Trust of India reported, says AFP.

It said Deputy Inspector-General of police A C Kumar and his security guard were gunned down while the official was out on a morning walk in the state capital of Imphal.

Two unidentified guerrillas on a bicycle followed Kumar on a high-security zone in Imphal and pumped several bullets into the two before riding away, the news agency said.

Both died on the spot.

Police have launched a manhunt for the killers, the agency said.

Sources said Kumar was specially deployed in Manipur by New Delhi to combat tribal insurgency in the state which borders Myanmar.

African leaders hail Mobutu's decision not to seek reelection

LIBREVILLE, May 9: Central African leaders on Thursday welcomed a decision by President Mobutu Sese Seko not to seek reelection, saying it opened a way for a peaceful end to Zaire's civil war and gave its transitional parliament a key role, reports Reuters.

Mobutu and the presidents of Gabon, Chad, Congo, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea urged the parliament to fill the vacant post of Speaker — Mobutu's constitutional successor in the event of death or incapacity.

The heads of state of Central Africa took note of the important statement made by President Mobutu Sese Seko, according to which, because of his health problems, he will not stand for reelection," a statement issued after a summit in Gabon's capital Libreville said.

This provided "new prospects for a negotiated political settlement of the conflicts", it added.

The heads of state invite Zaire's political forces under the direction of the high council of the republic transitional parliament to proceed with the election of its president to allow normal functioning of institutions and favour an orderly and democratic transition."

Off the Record

Di as guardian angel

LONDON: Diana, Princess of Wales, has repaid the man who came to her aid by grabbing a photographer and forcing him to hand over a film, by buying him a flight ticket to visit his mother, it was reported on Friday, says AFP.

The Sun said unemployed Kevin Duggan, 28, called Diana's office with his last 10 pence (15 cents) coin to ask the princess for help to return to Northern Ireland, and she responded with the 82-pound (120 dollar) ticket because "one good turn deserves another."

Last month Duggan pinned a photographer against the wall when he saw the princess arguing with the man after he took pictures of her as she left her gym in London.

Diana described the incident with the photographer as a "distressing intrusion" into her private life — but her tussle was splashed across newspapers as another photographer filmed the encounter.

"To be honest I did not think she would help — but she was my last chance and she really came through for me. She is my guardian angel," said Duggan, whose mother Mollie lives in county Armagh.

Woman hatched swan egg!

LONDON: A woman who found a swan egg abandoned in a deserted nest hatched it after carrying it around for days in her bra, it was reported on Friday, says AFP.

Several newspapers told the story of how Liz Sharratt, 37, hatched the cygnet after discovering egg by a canal near her home in Ilkeston in central England.

The parent swans had apparently given up hope of a ninth baby bird and had swum off with their eight offspring, but Sharratt heard chirping noises coming from the egg and on being advised to keep it warm, decided the best place was her bust.

"I kept it there for two days and only took it out at night. We even kept the egg in the bed with us and when I had a shower I put it in the airing cupboard," said Sharratt. Her boyfriend also took turns by holding it under his armpit, she said.

The egg hatched on Wednesday. The couple have called their bird cecy "because it is so amazing."

2 live grenades discovered in Calcutta airport

CALCUTTA, May 9: A major disaster was averted on Thursday afternoon when two live grenades were discovered by a sweeper at the domestic terminal of the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport here, reports PTT.

According to airport sources, the grenades had the potential to destroy at least four aircrafts and a major portion of the terminal.

The grenades were discovered from the bottom compartment of a tall ashtray inside the gents lavatory of the domestic terminal, airport sources said.

According to officials of the Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDS) of the Civil Aviation Department, the grenades of size 90 could have exploded had it come in contact with any lighted article.

The grenades were desensitized and removed by BDDS personnel, airport sources said.

Libya violates air embargo again Gaddafi launches violent attacks on UN, West

NIAMEY, May 9: Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi launched a violent attack on the United Nations and the West after arriving in Niger on Thursday by plane in violation of the UN air embargo against his country, reports AFP.

He told a congregation of 20,000 during the midday prayer (Johr) at the capital's main mosque, in the presence of Niger's President Ibrahim Bare Maïnassara, that the "satan" incarnated by the United Nations and Western colonialism was nearly finished.

Addressing the midday prayer at the capital's main mosque, Gaddafi told more than 20,000 worshippers including Niger's President Ibrahim Bare Maïnassara, "We are going to attack, and to mobilise Muslim forces which are much more powerful than those of the enemy, and we will conquer."

Speaking in Arabic, he

ashed out at "The resolutions and decisions of the United Nations and the Security Council" which he said had not been able to prevent wars that are raging.

"If man had obeyed divine resolutions and decisions peace would have prevailed upon earth," Gaddafi said. "We Muslims must reject from now on those decisions which are imposed by colonialism."

"The Libyan leader also attacked French, the official language in Niger, a former French colony which is 99 per cent Muslim populated.

"It is shameful and worrying," he said, as his words were translated into French by an aide and broadcast over loudspeakers to the crowd.

"A Muslim must not forget the Arabic language, the language of the Koran," he said.

Gaddafi arrived in Niamey aboard a Libyan Arab Airlines plane in the latest in a series of such violations.



Uday, the son of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (R), receives on Thursday a group of Bedouin poets from Qatar who attended the first Pan-Arab Bedouin Poetry Festival held in Baghdad. — AFP/UNB photo



Miss Venezuela, Marena Bencomo Almada, poses for photographers while on a break from rehearsals for the 46th annual Miss Universe Pageant on Thursday in Miami Beach. The pageant will be held on May 16. — AFP/UNB photo

Journalists need freedom to work, public trust as well

WASHINGTON, May 9: Journalists need freedom to work, but their audiences must also trust them, says Joan Mower, international programme manager for the Freedom Forum, a US media organisation dedicated to promoting freedom of expression worldwide, reports AP.

For Mower, a 20-year journalism veteran, "a free press means that journalists are free to gather information and they're free to write what they find. However, they also have a public trust" that must be maintained in order for the media to be effective.

Mower made her comments during a May 1 media round table broadcast to Africa Via Worldnet, the satellite broadcast service of the US Information Agency (USIA). The topic of discussion was government regulation of the media and journalists responsibility to be fair and accurate in their coverage. Mower and David Jones, foreign desk editor for the Washington Times, responded to questions from journalists in Swaziland and Zambia.

Mower, a former Associated Press reporter, traveled to Kigali last February, where she participated in a weeklong training workshop with Rwandan journalists organised by USIA and sponsored by the US Embassy.

For Africans who are struggling with transitions to political pluralism and open markets, Mower said, "One of the greatest challenges is to create a free press, because that is absolutely essential to a working democracy." At the same time, she added, the media have a definite "ethical responsibility to monitor themselves."

It is important to bear in mind, she said, that "the news industry is also different from other businesses in that there is this public trust angle. This means journalists must present accurate and fair facts to the best of their knowledge" if they expect to maintain their credibility, she said.

An interesting fact, according to Mower, is that "there has never been a famine in a country with a free press. People don't quite know the link, but

there is a feeling that a free press can help people get information, which is an important factor to sustainable economic development."

Asked if he considered himself a censor as well as an editor, the Washington Times' Jones said, "We ourselves decide what is going to go into the paper, and we have certain tests we apply" to stories.

"When I'm choosing stories to go into the paper each day, I apply three tests," Jones said. "I first of all ask myself: Is this news, something our readers haven't seen before? Secondly, 'Is it true?' It must be true or we won't print it. And thirdly, I ask: 'Is it interesting?'"

For this discussion, "I guess the second test is the most important," he added. "And 'there is nobody but ourselves to decide that."

In the democratic marketplace in which the US media operate, Jones asserted, "the most valuable resource for any news organisation is its credibility. If we print things that are untrue, the public will find out very quickly because there

Netanyahu holds talks with King Hussein on ME peace

JERUSALEM, May 9: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met secretly with Jordan's King Hussein overnight for talks on the stalled Middle East peace process and an Israeli-Jordan water dispute Israel radio reported today, says AFP.

Netanyahu flew by helicopter with top aides and senior military officials to meet the king at the red sea resort of Aqaba where the Jordanian monarch is recovering from surgery, the radio said.

The meeting followed a crisis in Israeli-Jordanian relations sparked when Jordan's crown prince Hassan cancelled a scheduled meeting with Netanyahu Monday due to a dispute over water sharing.

The radio said that the talks overnight focused on ways of resolving the dispute over sharing out the waters of the river Jordan as required under the two countries 1994 peace treaty.

They also covered efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations which have been frozen for the past two months due to Palestinian anger at Israeli settlement policies, the radio said.

Netanyahu flew to Aqaba after holding his third meeting in two days with US mediator Dennis Ross, who since Wednesday has been shuttling between Israelis and Palestinians in an effort to revive their peace process.

AP adds: US envoy Dennis Ross shuttled between Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip on Thursday in an attempt to resurrect the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

After meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Ross said that "difficult problems" still prevented the two sides from returning to the negotiating table.

Arafat spokesman Marwan Kanafani said the Palestinians were sticking to the condition that Israel change its policy on the construction of Jewish settlements in Palestinian areas before talks could resume.

Nothing can progress while settlements still continue, because this issue has not only caused a crisis in the talks but will be the reason for the destruction of the peace process in its entirety," Kanafani said.