

International

Sharif says in televised address

India's acceptance of Kashmiris' right may result in fruitful talks

ISLAMABAD, June 12: Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said today the ongoing normalisation dialogue with India could succeed only if India accepted the "right" of Kashmiris to self-determination, reports AFP.

"The talks can lead to results only when Kashmiris' right to self-determination is recognised," Sharif said during a televised address to the nation.

Tensions with India was the only external issue touched on by Sharif in his hour-long address which focused on his four-month-old government's efforts to revive the economy and rid society of social and administrative ills.

Sharif said he had received a "positive response" from Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral when he met with him in the Maldives during a South Asian summit last month.

The two countries can resolve all outstanding issues, including the dispute over Kashmir, through negotiations, he said, adding neither had gained anything from conflict and confrontation over the past 50 years.

AP adds: A gunbattle between Pakistan and Indian security forces deployed along the tense border between Pakistan and India, left a Pakistani army major dead and several Indian border guards injured, the state-run news agency said Wednesday.

The fire fight occurred overnight Wednesday along the border that divides the Punjab province between Pakistan and India, the Associated Press of Pakistan said.

Quoting an army spokesman, the APP said Indian border guards opened fire on Pakistani civilians in the area of Harpal, a Punjabi village on

the border with India.

Pakistan Maj Mohammed Jamil went to help the civilians when the Indian border guards opened fire on his regiment. They returned fire "inflicting causalities on the Indian Border Security Force," the APP said.

The army spokesman said Pakistan has lodged a complaint with the United Nations.

Pakistan and India have fought three wars since the Asian subcontinent gained its independence from Britain 50 years ago.

Two of the three wars were fought over the disputed state of Kashmir, which was divided between the two countries when Pakistan was created as a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent.

It's not clear what sparked the gunbattle along the Punjab provincial border with India.

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, June 12: Government troops recovering from a Tamil rebel attack found more bodies Thursday from the onslaught, raising the death toll to 97, the defence ministry said, reports AP.

The toll could rise even further because body parts remained strewn around the battle field in northern Sri Lanka, the ministry said.

Rebel forces struck behind government lines and attacked the military base in Thandikulam. Both the government and rebels claimed victory in Tuesday's fighting, which killed more than 313 people.

It was the most serious fighting in a month-long government offensive to open a road link to the Jaffna Peninsula, which is now accessible only by air and sea.

The Sri Lankan army is now totally exposed and vulnerable," said Anton Rajah, London-based spokesman for the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam.

In a telephone interview, Ra-

jae warned the military could expect "major disasters in the coming weeks and months."

"Over a thousand terrorists had taken part in the abortive attack. Troops defending their positions held on and fought back repelling terrorist attempts causing very heavy casualties," said defense ministry spokesman Maj INK Dewage.

Government troops rebuilt defenses around the town on Wednesday and re-established supply lines to other bases.

An ammunition dump and a bridge were destroyed in the attack. The damaged bridge had been repaired on Wednesday, officials said.

Rebels attacked soldiers in two places 10 miles (16 kms) south of the government front line.

They were firing from all sides," said a wounded soldier, Cpl. Jays Wickremasinghe, who spoke to reporters from his Colombo hospital bed. He was wounded in the legs by mortar fire.

US renews vow to block lifting of UN ban on Iraq

WASHINGTON, June 12: The United States on Wednesday renewed its vow to use its veto to block the lifting of UN sanctions on Iraq as long as Baghdad impedes UN inspections of weapons of mass destruction, reports Reuter.

"As long as this continues — and it's continued now for seven years — as long as it continues, the Iraqis have no hope of getting the UN sanctions lifted," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns told reporters.

"We're on the Security Council we have a veto in the Security Council we will not let those sanctions be lifted until Iraq gives up its attempts to hide its weapons of mass destruction programmes," he said.

Burns was reacting to UN charges that Iraq obstructed flights by UN helicopters over its territory. Baghdad denied the charge, but Burns said the United States accepted the UN version of events.

Chief UN arms monitor Rolf Ekeus complained to the Security Council about Iraqi interference with UN helicopter flights during the inspection of several Iraqi facilities last week.

Ekeus, who heads the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM)

charge of scrapping Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, told the council in a letter that four serious incidents took place in the past few days to endanger UN crews.

Vote counting of Cong presidential polls begins

NEW DELHI, June 12: India's Congress (I) Party today started counting votes cast in presidential elections tipped to be won by incumbent Sitaran Kesri, officials said, reports AFP.

The counting of nearly 8,000 ballots polled Monday across the country began at the Congress headquarters here amid tight security, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Journalists were barred entry into the building.

Congress official Oscar Fernandes had earlier said the results would be known within four hours.

Kesri, 77, became the Congress president in September 1996, was pitted against strongman Sharad Pawar and Rajesh Pilot, a parliament member, in the polls.

Australia defends bid to slash immigration

SYDNEY, June 12: Australia's Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock today used new figures showing migrant unemployment to be higher than overall unemployment to defend his government's decision to slash its immigration intake, reports AFP.

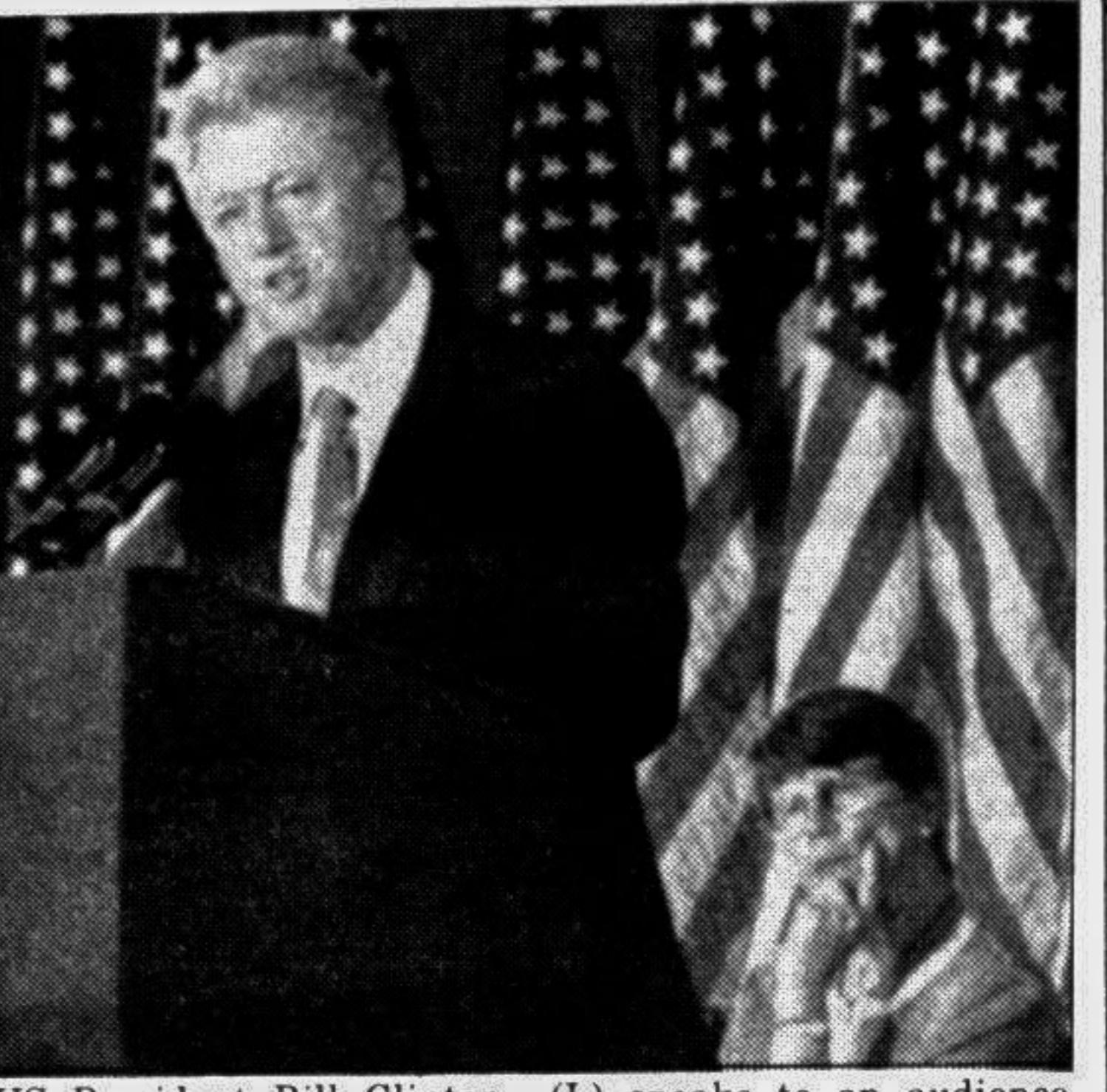
"They report shows that migrants who arrived with a high level of skill tend to have a lower unemployment rate," he said in a statement.

5000 Rwandan children repatriated from Congo

NAIROBI, June 12: Relief workers have repatriated more than 5,000 unaccompanied Rwandan children from the former Zaire since the end of April, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported Wednesday, says AFP.

It said in a newsletter that 2,620 family reunions had been arranged since the beginning of May.

"In the areas where security is a concern," it said, "the ICRC has implemented a system of outposts, whereby local staff operated out of their home communes to trace families and arrange their transportation to larger centres for the reunion with the children."



US President Bill Clinton (L) speaks to an audience attending the Juvenile Justice Conference Wednesday at Georgetown University in Washington DC as US Attorney General Janet Reno (R) looks on. Aiming at disarming teen gangs, Clinton ordered new regulations forcing licensed gun dealers to post signs and give warnings against passing off firearms to minors. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Fujimori to visit Japan in July:

Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori will visit Tokyo in July to strengthen ties, his first visit to Japan since the hostage crisis at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, AP reports from Tokyo.

During his July 2-7 visit, Fujimori will meet with Emperor Akihito, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and several other top Cabinet members, a Foreign Ministry official said Thursday. No other schedule details were immediately available. Several Japanese Foreign Ministry officials have been admonished for the crisis. Tupac Amaru rebels the mansion on Dec. 17, and held 72 people, including Japanese diplomats and businessmen, captive for about four months.

ROK to build refugee camp by '98:

South Korea said Thursday it will build a large refugee camp by late next year to house North Koreans escaping widespread hunger in their homeland, AP says from Seoul.

South Korea fears that looming famine might trigger a mass exodus of refugees out of its reclusive communist neighbour. Seoul announced last year it had plans to build a refugee camp, but released no details, afraid it would further strain relations with the North. Pyongyang already has denounced the South's plan as an "undisguised challenge."

Thailand to get 107 US tanks:

The United States plans to sell 107 tanks to Thailand as part of a 100-million-dollar deal that also includes personnel training and other equipment, the defense department said Wednesday. AFP reports from Washington.

The Pentagon notified congress of the proposed sale of M60A3 tanks that will come from US army excess inventory, saying that it will not affect the military balance in the region.

Land dispute claims 6 in Mexico:

Six people were killed when a land dispute erupted into a shootout between peasants and paramilitary supporters of a local political boss in the southern state of Chiapas, officials said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Tuxtla Gutierrez.

The gunfight flared on Sunday when peasant supporters of the leftist party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) tried to claim land near Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan, 55 miles (90 km) north of this state capital. News of the battle reached state officials late on Tuesday. "The peasants arrived on the morning of June 8 armed with AR-15 rifles and were greeted with gunfire from white guard (Paramilitary) gunmen hired by a local landowner," Pueblo Nuevo Mayor Carlos Rojas told Reuters.

Belgium to cooperate with Congo:

Belgium Defence Minister Jean-Pol Poncelet said on Wednesday he could envisage resuming military cooperation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire. Reuter reports from Brussels.

"In the perspective of a resumption of official (Belgian) cooperation with the Congo, according to the conditions fixed by the (Belgian) government, I am disposed to respond favourably to an eventual request for cooperation coming from the new Congolese authorities," the Belgian news agency Belga quoted Poncelet as saying. He was speaking to an Association of Graduates of Belgium's Royal Military School.

Columbia to rerun space mission:

The US Space Shuttle Columbia was moved to its launch pad on Wednesday for a rerun of a mission cut short in April by mechanical trouble, Reuter reports from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

A giant truck transported hauled Columbia the 3.4 miles (5.4 km) from its assembly building to the launch pad on Wednesday morning in preparation for the planned July 1 blast off. The Shuttle and its crew of seven astronauts were to repeat a mission curtailed after only five days because of trouble with an electrical generator.

Abortion pill marketing to be delayed:

Marketing of the abortion pill in the United States will be delayed because of a dispute between the European manufacturer and the organisation in charge in US distribution, the distributor said Wednesday. AFP reports from Washington.

"We have a serious dispute with this European company," said Sandra Waldman, spokeswoman for the non-profit Population Council. "Our counsels are still negotiating," the spokeswoman for the New York-based group said by telephone.

Yeltsin orders evacuation of Russians

Congolese ex-president seeks ceasefire

BRAZZAVILLE, June 12: Congolese ex-president General Denis Sassou Nguesso went on the radio late Wednesday to call for a ceasefire after seven days of fighting between his supporters and government forces in the capital, reports AFP.

He called for "arms to fall silent" and expressed the hope that "the other side will keep its word this time at least."

Earlier Wednesday President Pascal Lissouba ordered his own troops to observe an immediate ceasefire, though heavy weapons fire continued round the airport where hundreds of French troops drafted into the capital have set up their command centre.

Reuter adds, mortar blasts and grenade explosions echoed around some areas near the Brazzaville airport early Thursday despite a ceasefire called to end a week of fighting between forces of dissident Congolese militia leader Denis Sassou Nguesso and the army of President Pascal Lissouba.

The city saw a few hours of quiet after Lissouba ordered his troops to stop firing on Wednesday afternoon and Sassou Nguesso urged his supporters to

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