

Troops trade gunfire in Kashmir border

51 Pak, 3 Indian soldiers killed

JAMMU, India, Aug 24: At least 51 Pakistani troops have been killed in heavy fighting with the Indian army across their Kashmir border, a military spokesman said here today, reports AFP.

Forty-five other Pakistani soldiers have been injured in the fighting which started Saturday evening and "is still continuing", the spokesman said in this winter capital of Kashmir state.

The spokesman said the Indian army had lost three men, including a major, while six soldiers had been injured.

In Islamabad, the Pakistani Defence Ministry confirmed the fighting but denied Pakistani soldiers had been killed.

Earlier AFP said, at least three Indian and 10 Pakistani soldiers were killed in heavy fighting across their disputed Kashmir border, Indian Defence sources said today.

Around 20 others were

wounded on both sides as the two armies traded heavy machine gun and artillery fire from Saturday evening in Uri and Kargil sectors, the sources said.

The firing is still continuing, a military official said in this winter capital of Kashmir state.

An official said the Indian soldiers were killed in Uri, about 400 kilometres (250 miles) northwest of this winter capital of Kashmir, Saturday evening.

Two Pakistanis died in Uri and eight in Kargil, about 500 kilometres (312 miles) northeast of Jammu, when the Indian army retaliated. Indian and Pakistani troops deployed along their disputed Kashmir frontier regularly exchange fire. The latest fighting was the worst since April when three Indian civilians were killed in Pakistani attacks.

Earlier Reuter said, Pakistan on Saturday accused India

of killing three people with unprovoked heavy weapons fire along the line separating the two sides in disputed Kashmir and said the attacks seemed aimed at sabotaging planned peace talks.

Defence Ministry officials, confirming reports from residents in the region under attack, also said three people were wounded by the Indian artillery and automatic weapons fire on several villages near the United Nations monitored line of control.

An earlier ministry statement had quoted a spokesman as saying the firing began in the morning and went on into the evening with the villages of Chakothi, Sankh and Pandu being worst hit.

The spokesman said the attacks "seemed to be a known Indian pattern of sabotaging dialogue whenever it was initiated to ease tension" between Pakistan and India.

Steps suggested to put down ethnic violence in Assam

CALCUTTA, Aug 24: The West Bengal left Front on Saturday urged the Asom Gana Parishad government to take firm steps to put down violent extremist attacks on Bengali and non-Bodo communities in Assam, while the state BJP accused some of the members of the Mahanta ministry of having "secret links" with the terrorists, reports PTI.

The left front chairman, Sailen Dasgupta, condemned the heinous killings by the Bodo extremists in Assam, and said the extremist groups had been systematically launching attacks on the Bengalis and non-Bodos with a view to driving them out of their areas.

There is a sinister motive of provoking inter-ethnic clashes. Many lives have been endangered by acts of sabotage and bombs blasts on railway lines," he added. The BJP state secretary Rahul Sinha, alleged that the Mahanta government's "failure" to contain extremism led to spread of ethnic violence in Assam. "Moreover, some of the

ministers in his cabinet are having secret links with the terrorist elements," he alleged.

Sinha, however, expressed happiness at the appointment of K P S Gill as security advisor by the Assam government to deal with the situation.

Another report adds: The scheduled caste communities are living in fear in West Bengal, the Bahujan Samaj Party chief and Member of Parliament, Kanshiram, has claimed.

The upper caste people Grabel all coveted posts in the state after partition, and thereby relegating the SCS to the background, the BSP supremo said at a rally here yesterday.

The SCS of the state were forced to live in faraway places like Andaman and Dandakaranya as a result of the migration and "subjugation" he said.

Warning of fresh agitation by the SCS for their rights, Kanshiram said the BSP would implement its own "ism" after finishing off the "Manuvada".

Mamata announces 67-member Trinamul Youth Congress body

CALCUTTA, Aug 24: In her determination to strengthen the "Trinamul Congress," Ms Mamata Banerjee, MP, on Saturday announced a 67-member committee for the youth wing of the organisation she floated on August nine, reports PTI.

Ms Banerjee named Sanjay Bakshi, a trusted lieutenant, as president of the "Trinamul Youth Congress" committee which would have two working presidents, 12 vice-presidents, five general secretaries, seven secretaries, 10 joint secretaries, one treasurer and 40 executive members.

The 67-member "Trinamul Youth Congress" would include 14 women members, Ms Banerjee told newsmen here.

She said that Subhanv Chattopadhyay, Mohd Asfaq and Swapan Deb Nath would be heading the labour, minority and panchayat cells of the organisation respectively.

This apart, names of 20 district unit presidents of the organisation were also announced.

On August 13, Ms Banerjee announced formation of a 117-member steering committee. There would be organisational elections within September 13, she said.

Meanwhile, Ms Banerjee threatened to block roads in the state if the centre resorted to petroleum price hike. "The leftists are exposed by supporting the proposed price increase," she alleged.

Claim to return Kohinoor diamond to India renewed

AMRITSAR, Aug 24: Beant Singh Sandhanwalla, asserting himself to be the legal heir of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in a letter to the British Prime Minister on Saturday renewed his claim to the Kohinoor diamond, reports PTI.

Sandhanwalla said that if his request for the claim of the diamond was rejected by the queen and the British government, he will go to the courts to prove his claim.

The diamond was in the possession of Maharaja Dalip Singh, the last reigning emperor. Sandhanwalla claimed that his great grandfather Thakur Singh Sandhanwalla and Maharaja Dalip Singh were cousin and that the former was the prime minister in Dalip Singh's government-in-exile.

Being the only indirect heir of Maharaja Dalip Singh, Sandhanwalla claimed to be the legal heir of Kohinoor and said the diamond should be returned to him.

Dr Sandhanwalla also challenged the statement of Teraa Wickam that Kohinoor was gifted to the Viceroy. It was taken away by a planned forgery from minor Dalip Singh, he said.

Kenneth Kaunda shot while holding rally in Zambia

JOHANNESBURG, Aug 24: Zambian police shot and wounded former President Kenneth Kaunda in the central town of Kabwe on Saturday when he had tried to address an opposition rally, one of Kaunda's chief aides said.

Rabison Chongo, a leading figure in Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP), told Reuters by telephone from the Zambian capital Lusaka that Kaunda was being treated in hospital in Kabwe, but his life was not in danger.

Kaunda told BBC radio from Kabwe that he had been slightly injured but no immediate official version of events was available.

Chongo said police had fired at a vehicle carrying the 73-year-old Kaunda, who led Zambia from independence in 1963 until 1991, and other opposition leaders including Liberal Progressive Front leader Roger Chongwe who was also wounded.

UN chopper comes under fire in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, Aug 24: A UN helicopter carrying military observers along with Tajik opposition and government representatives came under fire in eastern Tajikistan, officials said Sunday, reports AP.

No casualties were reported in the attack Saturday, a government spokesman said. The helicopter, which was hit by three bullets, safely landed 77 miles (125 kilometres) east of the capital Dushanbe.

The aircraft's passengers included government officials and members of the Tajik opposition, according to the ITAR-Tass and the Interfax news services.

They flew to eastern Tajikistan to resolve technical questions linked to the planned deployment of an armed opposition unit in Dushanbe, where it is supposed to guard meetings of the National Reconciliation Commission.

Government officials suspected that the attack was meant to thwart peace efforts in Tajikistan, the reports said.

A peace deal was signed in June between Tajikistan's hard-line government and mainly fundamentalist Muslim rebel groups. The accord formally ended a civil war that broke out shortly after the Soviet Central Asian republic gained independence in 1991.



(FILES) Iran's new moderate President Mohamed Khatami named Massumeh Ebtekar, pictured here in this photo taken last week as vice-president in charge of environmental protection. The 36-year-old is the first woman nominated to such a post since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. — AFP/UNB photo

Thai forces on alert fearing push in from Cambodia

CHONG CHOM PASS, Thailand, Aug 24: Thai soldiers guarding the frontier with Cambodia took up firing positions Sunday as it was feared troops loyal to Cambodian strongman Hun Sen would push a rival armed faction across the border, reports AP.

Fighting was visible from the border. An armoured personnel carrier manned by forces loyal to deposed First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh could be seen at 2.15 pm on a ridge 200 metres (yards) inside Cambodia firing its machine gun.

Slightly earlier, about 60 soldiers loyal to Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party were seen retreating to a position in the village of O'Smach within sight of observers at the border. The village is the last stronghold of

Ranariddh's forces. It was the first time since fighting began nearly two weeks ago that such a large number of troops in full battle gear were seen so close to the frontier. Reports that O'Smach village had fallen could not be confirmed.

Thai soldiers said fighting began at 5 am and Hun Sen's artillery went into action three hours later. Intense shelling continued past noon. More than 100 shells from both sides had been fired by early afternoon, the heaviest exchanges so far.

Thai officers ordered their men to be prepared to fire. They expressed fear that if the FUNCINPEC forces sought refuge on Thai soil, Hun Sen's men would keep shooting in the heat of the battle.

China lashes out at US legislator's criticism on Tibet

BEIJING, Aug 24: A top Chinese Communist Party official in Tibet has responded angrily to criticism by a US legislator who visited the Himalayan territory in secret and described rampant human rights abuses, reports AP.

Rep Frank Wolf, R-Va, said Wednesday that Tibetans told him of "unspeakably brutal conditions," torture of political prisoners and Chinese efforts to suppress Tibetan culture.

All people with a sense of justice, including the Tibetan people, are enraged by his actions," said Raidi, chairman of the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region, said in comments reported late Saturday by the official Xinhua news agency.

Raidi, an ethnic Tibetan who uses one name, said Wolf "spreads irresponsible remarks intended to upset and confuse the international community," Xinhua said.

Opponents of Chinese rule say the Beijing is flooding Tibet with ethnic Chinese settlers and trying to eradicate its language and culture. Many Tibetans say the region was independent before communist troops arrived in 1951, and they remain loyal to the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan leader who fled into exile in 1959.

Raidi insisted that Tibet has been part of China for centuries, and that communist forces had brought "democratic reform" to a backward region.

China has tried for years to discredit the Dalai Lama, who received the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent campaign for Tibetan autonomy.

China has announced plans to show a television documentary proving he accepted Chinese rule and then became a subversive. Official news reports say the documentary includes extensive material on his early life.

Palestinians protest Bethlehem siege, clash with troops

BETHLEHEM, West Bank, Aug 24: Cooped up and boiling over, Palestinians protesting Israel's three-week blockade of this biblical city threw stones and bottles at Israeli troops, who responded with tear gas and rubber bullets, reports AP.

In Hebron on Saturday, hundreds of armed, masked Palestinians met in the air — some firing bullets into the air — to protest the Israeli border closure that is crippling their economy.

Israel has gradually lifted some of the restrictions it imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip after a July 30 suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed 16 people. But the 60,000 residents of Bethlehem are still barred from leaving their town.

Israel reportedly suspects that the masterminds of the blast, leading figures in the Islamic militant group Hamas, are hiding in Bethlehem, five miles (eight kilometres) south of Jerusalem.

About 300 Palestinians

marched from the center of town to Rachel's Tomb, an Israeli enclave guarded by Israeli troops. About 150 people threw stones and empty bottles at the soldiers, and some burned an Israeli flag.

"The Israeli government should know that we as a nation will never be humiliated," said a 19-year-old stone thrower, his face masked by a white T-shirt. "They will lift the closure or we will burn the ground underneath their feet."

Palestinian police wearing gas masks looked on but did not intervene. Israel Radio said three Palestinians were slightly injured in the clash.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat predicted Saturday that relations with Israel would deteriorate further, saying his people should prepare for the worst.

In a veiled threat of violence, he said the Palestinians' options were open, but would not say what those options were.

Presidents of Argentina, Brazil say Latin America should have permanent UNSC seat

ASUNCION, Paraguay, Aug 24: Latin America should have a permanent seat at the UN Security Council to give the region more clout in the world body, the presidents of Argentina and Brazil said, reports AP.

But what Latin American country should occupy the seat was not resolved Saturday during the 11th annual meeting of the Group of Rio in Asuncion, the Paraguayan capital.

Before adjourning the meeting one day earlier than planned, the 12 regional leaders also signed a joint declaration criticizing the Helms-Burton law, which tightens the

decades-old US embargo on Cuba.

The measure, approved last year, "threatens relations of friendship and cooperation," the declaration said.

Argentina and Brazil have been at odds over the Security Council seat, with the former suggesting it should rotate among the nations of the region and the latter wanting to occupy the post itself.

77 Tigers killed as troops move further into LTTE stronghold

COLOMBO, Aug 24: Sri Lankan troops pushed further into Tamil Tiger rebel-held territory, leaving 77 killed overnight and raising the death toll in the latest military advance to 437, the Defence Ministry said today, reports AFP.

Security forces Friday moved north-westwards from the key Puliyankulam Railway Station they captured from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) a day earlier, the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

The progress on Friday was slow due to the fact that the terrorists were engaging troops from well prepared defences," the ministry said in a statement.

"However, very satisfactory

results are being achieved since troops have been able to draw and kill large groups of terrorists from their concentrations."

The ministry said 70 Tigers were killed Friday, raising rebel losses since the latest military push was started on Tuesday to 360. Seven soldiers were also killed Friday, pushing military losses to 77.

Government forces began their latest advance into rebel territory on Tuesday but intense resistance has slowed down the push, officials said.

Tiger guerrillas are leading a drawn-out campaign for independence in the island's northern and eastern regions, where the two million Tamil minority is concentrated.

More than 50,000 people

have been killed in bitter fighting in the past 25 years.

There has been no immediate reaction from the LTTE to the army claims but the rebels in a statement received here Friday from their London office said they returned the bodies of 10 government soldiers through the Red Cross.

Government forces are engaged in a major drive to capture a key highway through rebel-held territory in the north of the country.

Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it was preparing to mediate in the release of a 3,000-tonne North Korean merchant vessel, the MV Morang Bong, seized by the LTTE last month.



Masked Palestinians parade waving weapons in the West Bank city of Hebron Saturday during a ceremony in memory of an official of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah Party, Maamon Mereish, who was assassinated in Athens in 1983. — AFP/UNB photo

Bosnian Serb leaders refuse to cooperate further with Plavsic

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Aug 24: The hard-line Bosnian Serb government has said it would no longer cooperate with President Biljana Plavsic, intensifying the power struggle between her and her rivals, reports AP.

The government, made up of supporters of Plavsic's rival Radovan Karadzic, accused Plavsic of violating the constitution by suspending the national assembly and calling for elections.

In a statement issued Saturday through Bosnian Serb state media, the Bosnian Serb government said it would regard all Plavsic's decisions from now on as "irregular, illegitimate and non-binding."

The announcement seemed to rule out any hope of compromise in the rivalry between the government in Pale and Plavsic, raising fears that Bosnian Serbs were headed for a showdown that could end in

either a territorial split of their half of Bosnia or an armed conflict.

The outcome depends in part on how the foreign powers guaranteeing Bosnia's peace, particularly the NATO-led peace force, respond to the crisis.

Western nations have increasingly backed Plavsic in her campaign to discredit Karadzic. She has accused the former Bosnian Serb leader and his allies of impoverishing their people through corruption and black-market deals.

Plavsic, who supported Karadzic during the Bosnian war, has called October elections to replace the assembly, but the Constitutional Court ruled against her.

Meanwhile, the top peace envoy in Bosnia, Carlos Westendorp, threatened to shut down Bosnian Serb television because of its "deliberate misinformation, inflammatory commentary, insulting language

and highly biased reportage."

Duncan Bullivant, a spokesman for Westendorp, said the Serb government does not "have the authority or the legitimacy to issue such a statement."

He said Plavsic's decision to suspend the national assembly was in accordance with the Serb constitution. "We support that position," Bullivant said.

On Saturday, international officials indicated they were ready to move against Bosnian Serb state media, which has sided with Plavsic's rivals and broadcast blistering attacks against her and the NATO-led peace force.

A video clip broadcast repeatedly on Thursday and Friday interspersed footage of peace force soldiers and Nazi troops, portraying them as similar. Citizens in Pale who were interviewed on the video called the peace force presence, "an occupation."

will also continue when the JWG meets again in September in New Delhi," he said. Preparations are also underway to open the Phulbari Land Corridor, in northeastern India, on September 1, which would give Nepal access to Bangladesh ports and provide a boost to its economy.

Gujral approved the corridor on an experimental basis during his visit here in June. The leading English-language daily, The Kathmandu Post, said Friday that officials from the two countries water ministries are to meet soon to discuss the benefits which would automatically accrue to India whenever a dam project was built in Nepal.

The Kalapani discussions from her side on what to review in the 1950 treaty."

"We will again be discussing the issue later," foreign ministry spokesman Murari, Raj Sharma said.

"India has agreed to word the treaty to reflect the new context after Nepal forwards specific proposals," Sharma said.

that came up during the meeting of Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral and Nepalese premier Lokendra Bahadur Chand during the former's visit to Kathmandu in June," Gyanwali told AFP.

Issues included the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty, the disputed Kalapani region, the Phulbari Land Corridor to Bangladesh for Nepalese products and down stream benefits which would accrue to India from projects built on Nepalese rivers, a foreign ministry spokesman said.

According to the 1950 treaty, citizens of either nation can cross the other side without passports or visas, which observers here say has given op-

portunities to smugglers, bandits, terrorists and other criminals from either side.

Political observers here also say the treaty largely benefits India more than it does Nepal as it gives New Delhi political and economic leverage over this landlocked Himalayan kingdom.

BRIEFLY

Arafat, Mubarak talk over phone: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak spoke on Saturday by telephone about efforts to renew Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, the Wafa Palestinian News Agency reported, AFP says from Gaza City.

The conversation came after Mubarak discussed on Friday the halted negotiations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and efforts to draw the sides away from further tension. The talks have been halted since Israel began work in March on a new Jewish settlement in mostly Arab east Jerusalem. Tensions further escalated when 14 Israelis were killed in bombings in Jerusalem on July 30.

Dalai Lama to visit Sikkim: Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, will visit Sikkim from September 21 to 24, PTI reports from Gangtok.

According to an official release in Gangtok yesterday, the Dalai Lama would reach Namchi in south district on September 21 and visit Rabongla and some other places. He would lay the foundation stone of the 80 feet high statue of Guru Rimpoche Padmasambhava at Samdupche in Namchi on September 22. Later, in the evening he would attend the "Tsong Bum" in the monastery there before leaving for Gangtok. On September 23, the Dalai Lama would conduct a prayer meeting for devotees in Gangtok. He would leave on September 24.

38 drug dealers killed in Philippines: A Philippine senator on Sunday said a vigilante group has killed at least 38 suspected drug dealers in a southern city and warned similar attacks might spread in other areas, AP reports from Manila.

Sen Ernesto Herrera said the government's failure to effectively deal with the country's worsening drug menace is forcing many citizens to battle drug syndicates on their own. In the southern port city of Davao, a vigilante group calling itself "Servant of the people" has gunned down 38 suspected drug pushers, 16 of them in the last four weeks, Herrera said in a statement. He said the figures were provided by police. "If law enforcement remains weak, more vigilante killings are bound to happen," said Herrera, an anti-crime crusader. "Worse, the killings might spread."

Thailand to host int'l conf on HIV/AIDS: The eighth international conference of People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) is to be held in Thailand's northern province of Chiang Mai from November 5 to 12, local newspaper The Nation reported yesterday, a Xinhua reports from Bangkok.

Representatives of people living with HIV/AIDS from all over the world will attend the meeting. The conference committee hopes that the meeting will set the stage for a global network of PLWHA to work together to resolve the socio-economic implications. HIV afflicts more than 22 million people in the world, according to the committee's public relations working group.

Film director killed in Algeria: Algerian film director Ali Tenkhi was gunned down earlier this week near his home in a suburb west of Algiers, newspapers reported Saturday, AFP reports from Algiers.

Tenkhi, 40, was shot by his assailants on Wednesday at the entrance of his home as he was taking the rubbish out. The director had just finished his first feature film entitled, "The Butterfly Will Fly No More," a homage to an Algerian ballet dancer who died in poverty.

Republican woman leader Smith dies: Mary Louise Smith, a moderating force within the Republican Party who was the only woman to have chaired the Republican National Committee, died Friday. She was 82. Smith had been ill for several months with lung cancer. She died at a Des Moines hospital, AP reports from Des Moines.

In April, Smith said she was undergoing radiation therapy on her left lung after a tumor was found. She said it was unrelated to breast cancer, for which she was treated in 1993. "I haven't smoked for 17 years, but the early cigarettes took their toll," she said. "My message is we need to educate ourselves about smoking, which is a disaster for young people."

Sir Eric Gairy dead: Sir Eric Gairy, widely regarded as an eccentric and authoritarian leader during his 12-year term as Grenada's prime minister, has died, a close associate said. He was 77. AP reports from St George's.

Gairy died Saturday evening, said Jerry Romain, a longtime political aide. Further details were not immediately available. Gairy suffered from diabetes and glaucoma and had been stricken by a stroke last year. Gairy dominated politics on this Caribbean island for three decades, and became Grenada's first prime minister after it gained independence from Britain in 1974.

US teenager goes on trial for killing 3: A teen-ager goes on trial Monday accused of aggravated murder for killing three people in a junior high school shooting rampage that shattered a small town, Reuter reports from Seattle.

Barry Loukaitis, 16, has pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity to charges in the February 1996 killings in the central Washington town on Moses Lake. He will be tried as an adult. The attack was the worst ever in a Washington state school and has left lasting scars on the town of 13,000 people.

Outcome of Indo-Nepal talks seen 'quite positive'

KATHMANDU, Aug 24: Nepalese Foreign Secretary Kumar Gyanwali on Friday said the outcome of the talks he had with Indian official were "quite positive," reports AFP.

Gyanwali held extensive discussions on the whole range of Indo-Nepal bilateral issues during his three-day visit to India.

The foreign ministry secretary level talks between the two neighbours began on Tuesday and concluded Thursday, the same day the three-member Nepalese delegation led by Gyanwali returned home.

We discussed the whole gamut of Indo-Nepal issues during our talks with Indian foreign secretary Krishnan Ragunath and other Indian officials including the issues

that came up during the meeting of Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral and Nepalese premier Lokendra Bahadur Chand during the former's visit to Kathmandu in June," Gyanwali told AFP.

Issues included the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty, the disputed Kalapani region, the Phulbari Land Corridor to Bangladesh for Nepalese products and down stream benefits which would accrue to India from projects built on Nepalese rivers, a foreign ministry spokesman said.

According to the 1950 treaty, citizens of either nation can cross the other side without passports or visas, which observers here say has given op-

portunities to smugglers, bandits, terrorists and other criminals from either side.