

Tigers set ablaze HK cargo ship, kill 5 soldiers

COLOMBO, Sept 9: Tamil Tiger rebel gunboats attacked and set ablaze a large Hong Kong-owned cargo ship anchored off Sri Lanka's north-eastern coast early Tuesday, killing at least five soldiers, military officials said, reports AP.

The 60,000-ton "MV Cordiality," owned by China Ocean Shipping Company of Hong Kong, was on fire one kilometre (half mile) off Pulmoddai after the pre-dawn attack, said Commodore Mohan Wijewickrema, the navy's operations director.

Five of the 32-member Chinese crew were missing, and naval gunboats and air force helicopters were searching the surrounding seas, said Commodore Wijewickrema.

Five Sri Lankan soldiers, who were guarding the ship, were killed in a gunfight with the rebels. Their bodies were recovered by naval gunboats. Eight other soldiers were missing, and air force helicopters joined navy gunboats searching for them.

Naval sailors and soldiers later boarded the Panamanian-registered MV Cordiality and were fighting the blaze, said Commodore Wijewickrema. The ship had been loaded with 150 tonnes of ammunition, a metal mined in Sri Lanka.

Naval gunboats patrolling near the port near Trincomalee, 250 kilometres (155 miles) northeast of the capital, Colombo, fought a 3-hour battle with 15 rebel boats that attacked the vessel at 2 a.m.

Six guerrilla boats were sunk and three damaged, said Commodore Wijewickrema.

Rebel casualties were not immediately known, but each guerrilla boat usually carries at least four fighters. The surviving guerrilla boats withdrew northward to a rebel-held stretch of the coast.

Mir's crew restarts computer

MOSCOW, Sept 9: The Mir's crew restarted the space station's computer on Tuesday, a day after it mysteriously shut down and forced the Russian-American team to turn off most of its equipment, reports AP.

The crew quickly handled repairs Monday night, installing new software before going to bed, Vera Medvedkova, a spokeswoman for the Mission Control.

Despite the breakdown the third computer malfunction in as many months, the crew was not any danger, and Russian space officials played down the problem.

Unlike previous breakdowns, the station was able to maintain its orientation toward the sun, and its power supplies were in much better shape this time.

"Why do these malfunctions happen?" Vladimir Solovoy, the chief of Russia's Mission Control, said Monday. "Do you know why your car breaks down?... It's hard to say what the reasons might be."

Space agency spokesman Valery Lyndin may have put it best: "The computer has become capricious again."

Capricious is as good a word as any to describe the Mir's endless, and endlessly vexing, journey around the Earth for the past eight months or so. The space station, which has been aloft for 11 years, has spun from one mishap to the next — from a fire to oxygen system breakdowns, from a collision with a cargo ship to the repeated computer breakdowns.

Mir's computer became unplugged on July 17 when a crew member accidentally disconnected a cable, and then broke down again on Aug 18 during docking of a cargo ship.

In the latest fumble, the computer shut itself off at around 11 a.m. (0700 GMT) Monday, and the crew responded by turning off most systems to economize on power, Lyndin said.

The crew said Monday afternoon that it had enough power for normal operations.

BRIEFLY

Train mishap kills 7 in India: At least seven people were killed when a speeding train collided with a tractor-trolley at a railroad crossing near the Indian capital, newspapers said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Eleven others were injured in the accident in the state of Haryana late Monday, the Hindustan Times and other dailies said. All the victims were in the trolley which was being pulled by a tractor — a common mode of transport in rural India.

Concern over crash in price of raw jute: The Indian Jute Mills Association has expressed serious concern over the crash in the price of raw jute which, it says, will affect millions of jute growers. PTI reports from Calcutta.

In a press release issued Monday, it said that the current prices were much lower than the government's declared support level and strongly urged the centre to release funds to JCI so that it could immediately start open market operations.

Mumbai police interrogate Salman: Crime branch of Mumbai police on Monday interrogated film star Salman Khan on his Dubai visits and alleged underworld-filmworld nexus, PTI reports from Mumbai.

A senior police official told PTI that Salman was grilled by assistant commissioner of police L. Rao. Since last week, police have interrogated actors Shahrukh Khan, Aditya-Pancholi, Jackie Shroff, actress Deepthi Bhatnagar and film makers Boney Kapoor and Pahlaj Nihalani in connection with audio king Gulshan Kumar's murder case.

US, DPRK officials to meet in China: Senior US and North Korean officials will meet Wednesday in China to discuss the peace process for the Korean peninsula, the State Department said Monday. AP reports from Washington.

Attending the meeting will be the State Department's top Korea expert, Charles Kartman, and North Korea's vice foreign minister, Kim Gye Gwan. Lower level US and North Korean officials have been meeting in New York in recent days.

Viper militia jailed for 5 yrs: A US Army veteran who was third in command of the Viper Militia was sentenced to nearly five years in prison for taking part in the group's paramilitary explosives exercises, AP reports from Phoenix.

US District Judge Earl Carroll on Monday ordered Charles Knight to spend 57 months behind bars and fined him 5,000 dollars. Knight will be on probation for three years once he's released. A jury convicted Knight in June of conspiracy to make or possess unregistered destructive devices.

NY to host Grammy Awards ceremony: The 1998 Grammy Awards ceremony will be held in New York City, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Grammy officials announced on Monday. Reuters reports from New York.

The celebrity-studded ceremony will be staged at Radio City Music Hall, said the mayor and Michael Greene, head of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, which is responsible for the music industry awards. "More and more each year, New York distinguishes itself as a vibrant creative and business centre for music," Greene said.

India for, Pakistan against new nuclear waste treaty

India accepted but Pakistan rejected a new international convention which requires countries with nuclear facilities to comply with high standards of radioactive waste management.

Pakistan, South Asia's second major nuclear power nation, voted against the convention, titled Joint Convention on Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management. New Zealand joined Pakistan in opposing the convention. Russia and China abstained from the vote.

When the treaty was put to vote in Vienna after a five-day high-level diplomatic conference India, along with 61 other nations, voted for it.

At the conference hosted by the Vienna-based Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), China had lobbied hard to curtail Taiwan's rights to export its radioactive waste to North Korea.

The convention will open for signature by countries at the annual general conference of the IAEA later this month. The treaty will come into force after it is ratified by 25 states, at least 15 of them with nuclear facilities.

Indian officials said they were happy with the outcome even though their proposals could not be accepted.

The convention says that in principle, the nuclear waste generated in a country should be disposed of in the same country. India is already doing this with its nuclear power plants mostly disposing of their waste near their location.

The convention obliges signatories to maintain high standards in storing and eventual disposal of wastes from nuclear activities such as power generation or medical use. Taking the cue from the 1994 Nuclear Safety Convention, the IAEA will hold periodic meetings where signatories will submit

Israeli intelligence under fire over botched raid in Lebanon

JERUSALEM, Sept 9: Israel's intelligence agencies, already embarrassed by the failure to identify the perpetrators of the latest bombings in Jerusalem, are now also being scrutinized over a botched raid in Lebanon, reports AP.

The string of disasters seemingly linked to intelligence failures have fed a growing feeling in Israel that the country's vaunted security services are losing their luster.

"Israel seems to have lost its magic touch. Its security services are no longer a wonder child," wrote analyst Chemi Shalev in the Maariv newspaper.

The Palestinian terrorists are so sophisticated that after a month's intense investigation we know nothing about them, and their colleagues in Lebanon have the needed knowledge and courage to wipe an elite commando unit off the face of the earth."

Shalev referred to growing speculation that the failure of a raid in Lebanon early Friday, which cost the lives of 12 Israeli commandos, was due to either poor intelligence about the target or a leak to Lebanese guerrillas about the mission.

Yossi Melman, an Israeli intelligence expert, said all of Israel's intelligence agencies — the Mossad, Shin Bet and military intelligence — have declined in quality over the last few years.

"They have lost their footing in the West Bank and something has gone awry in Lebanon," said Melman, who writes for the Haaretz newspaper.

Intelligence officials themselves have warned that their ability to gather information on militants and prevent terrorist attacks has been greatly



People view a floral greeting to the late Mother Teresa Monday on the grounds of St Thomas Church where the mortal remains of the Nobel laureate Roman Catholic nun lie. —AFP/UNB photo

Probe into massacres in ex-Zaire still facing major obstacles

KINSHASA, Sept 9: UN sources in Kinshasa said on Monday the investigation into alleged massacres in the former Zaire is still faced with major obstacles despite a written go-ahead from President Laurent Kabila, reports Reuters.

The source said Kabila's letter to the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, while confirming the probe can proceed in principle, had imposed more constraints which would alter the mandate of the mission.

"The letter did not mention the last set of obstacles imposed by the government, nor did it indicate specifically they had been withdrawn or maintained," a UN source told Reuters.

"But it did mention two new conditions, that the investigation be confined in both space and time, to the east of the country, and to events leading up to but not beyond May 17 this year," the source added.

The new demands made further wrangling likely before the team could begin fieldwork, the source said.

The UN mission was originally mandated to probe charges of massacres of Rwandan refugees across the country.

Some of the most recent reports of mass killings were in the far north-west, near the town of Mbandaka on May 13, an area that would not be investigated under the new provisions demanded by Kabila.

Annan said on Monday the team, originally intended to be 23-strong, now only 18, had been given the green light by Kabila and would soon be heading east.

The US ambassador to the United Nations said earlier on Monday he found Kabila's letter troubling even though it agreed that the probe proceed.

Bill Richardson spoke after Annan, during a visit to Bern, Switzerland, welcomed the letter from Kabila. "Confirming his commitment... that the team can proceed with its work, that the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo commits itself to protecting it."

"I was disappointed in the tone of the letter but nonetheless the team is permitted to go in," Richardson said.

Richardson's comments reflected private apprehensions among some UN and Security Council envoys that the Kinshasa government would again raise obstacles to the delayed probe into alleged massacres of Rwandan refugees.



The gold-plated death mask of former Russian Emperor Peter the Great, Created in the second half of 18th century, is on display as one of the attractions at the Russian History Museum, Monday. Following some 11 years of repair and restoration work, the Museum opened five exhibition halls in a first stage. —AFP/UNB photo

R Senthilnathan writes from Vienna

reports on waste management.

The convention completes the aim of bringing all aspects of civilian nuclear activities under international norms. The first step was the 1994 Nuclear Safety Convention, which took effect last October and obliges signatory countries to maintain high levels of safety in planning, designing, construction, operation and emergency preparedness of civilian nuclear facilities.

Both conventions exclude military nuclear establishments.

The vote was preceded by some hard bargaining. Almost all efforts to change the wording of the draft convention, or to introduce new issues, were thwarted as they did not receive the necessary two-thirds majority.

The title of the convention itself underlines the conflict. First day of the meeting, Mr Yogesh Tiwari, head of the Indian delegation, complained that the

experts group had drifted from its original brief of dealing only with waste. India had opposed the attempt to include spent nuclear fuel in the category of wastes because it considers this as a resource which can be reprocessed for reuse as fuel.

India was backed by countries like Britain, France and Japan which also reprocess part of their spent fuel. The United States, on the other hand, insisted that spent fuel should be considered waste.

As a compromise, it was agreed to include both issues in the convention but under separate chapters, and each country has the right to decide how to define the spent fuel — as a waste or as a resource.

"We would have liked the issue of spent fuel management negotiated as a separate convention, but the opinion was that it will take many more years for such a convention to come into force while there was an opportunity to do something

about it," said an Indian official.

China had lobbied hard without success, to include a paragraph declaring that a country may conduct transboundary shipping of nuclear waste to and from a non-state entity without prejudice to the sovereignty and safety of the state of that entity.

What China wanted was a clear role in Taiwan's (the so-called non-state entity) efforts to ship nuclear wastes to North Korea or to any other country for that matter.

Beijing claimed that even though it had never interfered with any of Taiwan's transboundary shipping, it is a very special problem for China, affecting the safety and sovereignty of the mainland.

However, the U.S. objected arguing that China's motives were purely political, and the proposal did not have any economic or environmental aspect.

Unlike most Western na-

Buckingham Palace denies reports Queen wanted private funeral for Diana

LONDON, Sept 9: The queen wanted Princess Diana's body excluded from all royal palaces, the funeral held in private and no flag flown half-staff at Buckingham Palace, according to news reports, reports AP.

Channel 4 News said Monday night her objection to any public display of royal mourning only failed because Prince Charles, Diana's ex-husband, disagreed so fiercely with his mother. It said the row between them grew so heated at one stage that officials from Prime Minister Tony Blair's office were brought in to mediate.

But Buckingham Palace said in a statement the report was "just mischief making" and "frankly the whole story is rubbish."

Channel 4 said the report came from high level sources, which it did not identify. A similar report with less details appeared Friday in the tabloid The Sun, quoting an unidentified friend as source.

Blair's Downing St. office said it was wholly wrong to say officials there were involved in any inter-family negotiations.

Channel 4 said Charles told his mother's private secretary, Sir Robert Fellowes, to "impale himself on his own flagstaff."

Buckingham Palace had initially refused to fly the national flag at half-staff as a sign of royal mourning. It only relented after new stories Thursday reported public anger at the refusal.

The same stories-Thursday reported resentment among mourning Britons at the queen's public silence on Diana's death. The queen went on television the next day, telling the nation: "I share in your determination to cherish her memory."

Channel 4 said the disputes centered on disagreements between Charles and his mother that began August 31, the day Diana, her friend Dodi Fayed and their driver were killed in a car crash in Paris.

Channel 4 said the queen



Earl Spencer looks on Monday at flowers on the island on the grounds of the Spencer family home in Althorp, Northamptonshire, where his sister Diana, Princess of Wales, was buried last Saturday. —AFP/UNB photo

3rd round of talks India still awaits Pak response

NEW DELHI, Sept 9: India is still waiting for Pakistan to suggest a schedule this month for the third round of talks between foreign secretaries of the two countries, an official spokesman said today, reports AP.

"We are still waiting for an announcement," an External Affairs Ministry spokesman said here.

"They have to tell us (when the talks have to take place)," he said.

The foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan are due to meet in New Delhi this month to pursue a dialogue which started in the Indian capital in March after a gap of three years.

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Film on life of Jinnah to be released soon

ISLAMABAD, Sept 9: "Jinnah," the much publicised film on the life of the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, is expected to be released by the end of this year after a consortium of Pakistanis in US raised one million dollar to overcome the financial crisis plaguing the film, reports PTI.

The makers of the film are planning to release the film on December 25 to mark the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam, according to reports reaching here from New York.

The film's producer, Akbar S Ahmed, has said that the film had run into serious financial problem but a consortium of Pakistanis led by former prime minister, Moeen Qureshi, decided to raise an amount of one million dollars after viewing the full-length rough-cut of the film in Washington recently.

He said the several prominent Pakistanis including Pakistani Ambassador, Riaz Khokhar, watched the film and "They all liked what they saw and immediately decided to raise one million dollars needed to complete the film."

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Margaret Thatcher warns Labour govt plan for Scots parliament to split UK

EDINBURGH, Scotland, Sept 9: Former prime minister Margaret Thatcher warned Tuesday that Labour government plan to give Scotland a separate parliament risks the break-up of Britain, reports AP.

"What is at stake," she wrote in a newspaper article two days before nearly 4 million Scots vote in a referendum on the issue, "is nothing short of the union of the United Kingdom itself."

"I do not believe that most Scots want to end the union (with the rest of Britain). But separation is the destination towards which the present devolution proposals lead," Britain's Conservative prime minister from 1979 to 1990 said in the article in the Edinburgh-based newspaper the Scotsman.

"They represent a negotiation of our shared history and an abdication of our joint future. Scottish voters can do no greater service to their country than to reject them."

On Monday, Prime Minister Tony Blair ended a political moratorium which followed the death of Princess Diana, hitting the Scottish hustings in a hurry ahead of Thursday's referendum with his campaign to give Scots a their own parliament.

Blair's Labour Party government appears virtually certain to win on the principle of setting up a 129-member parliament in the capital Edinburgh. It will have legislative powers and control health, education, housing, transportation, police, courts, agriculture.

Approval of a second referendum question, whether to give the Parliament power to raise income taxes by up to three percentage points, is less sure — around 50 per cent in polls.

The measure was imposed on the back of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamads warning that a high dependence on foreign workers could pose a threat to the economy.

If we catch any employer using his maid for work in a restaurant, stalls, the market or anywhere outside the home, we will take stern action against the employers," he said.

The nation's rapid economic growth, averaging more than eight per cent per annum since 1987, has resulted in a severe labour crunch in the agriculture, construction and industrial sectors.

Tajol Rosli said the government has also allowed the recruitment of foreigners to work in the service and construction sectors and reversed its stand on the five-year working limit rule imposed recently on foreign domestic helpers.

Tajol Rosli said the maids

Malaysia lifts freeze on intake of foreign maids

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 9: Malaysia has been forced to lift its recently imposed freeze on the intake of foreign maids due to the high demand for domestic helpers, reports said today, reports AP.

"We will allow employers to recruit maids from Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines," Deputy Home Minister Tajol Rosli Ghazali was quoted as saying by the New Straits Times newspaper.

"We have to lift the ban because we have received many appeals from working mothers in the difficulties they have to endure if the freeze remained," he added.

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