

SAARC can play role like EU in ending national conflicts, says Queen

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: The media here on Monday unanimously interpreted Queen Elizabeth's call for greater Asian regional co-operation as a clear reference to India's blighted relationship with neighbouring Pakistan, reports AFP.

The Queen, here on a six-day state visit, told a banquet held in her honour that SAARC could play a similar role to the European Union in ending national conflicts and ushering in economic prosperity.

All the newspapers reported that the British monarch's comments about the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) had been a veiled reference to New Delhi's continuing strained ties with Islamabad.

She said SAARC's goals "of closer regional co-operation and economic integration, should provide the key for peace and prosperity in South Asia."

"If countries in the region share a goal, and understand that by working together they give themselves a better chance of achieving it, then historical hostilities can be buried for good," she said.

Last week the Queen, addressing the Pakistan parliament during her state visit there, praised New Delhi and Islamabad for their efforts to improve their relations.

The 12-year-old SAARC groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The Hindustan Times, however, reported that the Queen "urged India and Pakistan to bury their historical hostilities — namely Kashmir — in order to achieve peace and prosperity."

Tuesday's newspapers also rubbished official claims that a controversy over a reported British offer of mediation in Kashmir had been based on inaccurate media reports.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said on Monday that he had made no such offer while with the Queen in Pakistan last week, while Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral denied he had, in response, branded Britain a meddling "third-rate power."

The Asian Age reiterated that Gujral had made his anger clear to reporters over Cook's reported comments but said that the Indian Foreign Office was forced into a "volte face" when it realised the controversy could overshadow the Queen's state visit.

Queen's scheduled speech cancelled

NEW DELHI, Oct 15: A speech scheduled to be given by Queen Elizabeth in the Indian city of Madras has been cancelled at the last minute by the Indian government, British officials said today, reports Reuter.

The abrupt cancellation comes hard on the heels of a diplomatic row over Kashmir between the British and Indian governments that has overshadowed the queen's state visit to India.

The queen was to have spoken at a banquet given in her honour on Thursday by the governor of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, Fatima, Beevi, as part of the programme for the royal visit that was drawn up months ago.

A British official said the Indian government in New Delhi had told the Tamil Nadu state government that it was not protocol for the queen to make a speech in a state capital. Such speeches had to be made in the national capital.

"It is late in the day," said one British official, "it is not the norm, I admit."



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is given a guided tour by officials at the Golden Temple of Amritsar, Tuesday when she and the Duke of Edinburgh visited the Sikh shrine in the Punjab. — AP/UNB photo

Biography of Diana top selling book in UK

LONDON, Oct 15: The controversial biography of Diana, Princess of Wales, by Andrew Morton has become the top selling book in Britain this year in just a week, industry book sales monitoring sources said Tuesday, reports AFP.

His biography, an undated version of a first book, which appeared in 1992 quotes Diana directly, as Morton says she recorded answers to his questions over a series of six interviews and sent them to him by cassette.

Richard Knight, of the monitoring body, said the biography had sold more than 41,000 books in one week.

"This is a truly phenomenal total," he said.

Earlier versions of "Diana, her true story," contained only sources close to her, as she did not want to be accused by Buckingham Palace of revealing intimate details of her life and marriage.

Congo's capital Brazzaville falls to opposition rebels

KINSHASA, Oct 15: The Congolese capital Brazzaville was reported to have fallen to forces loyal to opposition militia leader Denis Sassou Nguesso late Tuesday in one of the fiercest battles of their four-month war, reports AFP.

Isidore Myouba, a spokesman for the United Democratic Front, a coalition that supports the former military strongman, said in Libreville that Sassou Nguesso's forces had taken the capital.

Independent sources contacted by telephone from Kinshasa, the capital of the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, said his troops had "probably" wrested the entire city from the militias of president Pascal Lissouba and Prime Minister Bernard Kolelas.

Myouba said "the last pocket of residual resistance fell around midday."

He said Sassou Nguesso's forces had "taken total control of Brazzaville, with the help of some of Kolelas men who had switched sides, and many were now grouped on a bridge marking the southern edge of the capital."

They had been greeted as "liberators" in parts of the city formerly under the control of government forces, he added.

Myouba said dozens of enemy troops had been killed, but very few among Sassou Nguesso's militia because "our men were preceded by several tanks" without specifying their number or type.

A French diplomatic source in the city said he could not confirm or deny the claims, but added that the heavy shooting which had gone on all day had stopped late afternoon.

AP adds: Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked the Security Council to slap an arms embargo on the Republic of Congo and send a military team to the region as a first step toward a UN peacekeeping force to halt the fighting.

Impose travel ban on Iraq, US asks UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 15: The United States on Tuesday called for the UN Security Council to impose travel sanctions against Iraq for failing to cooperate with UN arms inspectors, diplomats said, reports AFP.

The proposed measures were contained in a preliminary version of a draft resolution circulated informally among Security Council diplomats.

But Western diplomats said it was not certain that the United States would hold fast to the demand in discussions before the Security Council formally considers the draft text next week.

"It's a negotiating position," one diplomat said.

In a resolution adopted in June, the 15-member council vowed to impose "additional measures" against specific Iraqi officials if the six-monthly UN report on progress in Iraqi disarmament pointed to continued Iraqi non-compliance.

11 die as bomb explodes in downtown Colombo

COLOMBO, Oct 15: Bomb explosions and gun battles left at least 11 people dead in downtown Colombo Wednesday as Tamil rebels brought their secessionist war to the capital for the first time this year, reports AP.

Maj. Gen. Sri Lal Veerasuriya, the army's deputy chief of staff, said the dead included a security guard shot by rebels as they forced their way into the parking lot of a luxury hotel to set off a truck bomb, seven other civilians and three Tamil rebels. In was not clear how many of the victims were killed in a series of explosions, one of which left a 20-foot by 10-foot (six-meter by three-meter) crater in the hotel parking lot.

The general said 105 people were injured. They included 31 foreign tourists, most from Japan, Britain and France, according to the foreign ministry. Veerasuriya said a small group of rebels fled into a government building following the truck bombing and were believed to be holding an undetermined number of hostages there.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ravinath Ariyaratne blamed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main rebel group that has been fighting since 1983 to carve out an independent homeland for Sri Lanka's Tamil minority. The rebels say Tamils are discriminated against by the majority Sinhalese, who dominate the military and the government.

Hundreds of thousands throng route of Che's last journey

HAVANA, Oct 15: Hundreds of thousands of Cubans thronged the route of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's last procession as the bones of Cuba's revolutionary hero were returned to the city of his greatest victory, reports AP.

A military convoy carried the flag-draped wooden casket Tuesday past signs echoing Guevara's farewell message to Cubans: "Until forever, comrade." Sea breezes ruffled banners of Fidel Castro's revolutionary movement.

"Che has been an exemplary figure," said Bartolome Stuart, 51, one of thousands watching the procession move slowly out of Havana. "He was a very humble, very simple man."

Tears welled in some eyes, and small children waved flags as Cubans saluted the man who has become a lasting icon of the Cuban revolution and a symbol of revolt for leftists around the world.

While Cuba retains Guevara's socialist faith, it has abandoned his insistence on fomenting revolt across the Americas. The revolutionary fervor that greeted his march into Havana has been dulled by five years of economic hardship. Cuban state radio broadcast bulletins every few minutes Tuesday on the progress of the motorcade from Havana to Santa Clara, the site of Guevara's greatest personal military achievement.

Harold Robbins passes away

PALM SPRINGS, California, Oct 15: American author Harold Robbins, an orphan who became a millionaire at 20 then lost it all before writing a string of best-selling novels including "The Carpetbaggers," "The Betsy," and "Never Love a Stranger," died. He was 81, reports AP.

Robbins died Tuesday at Desert Hospital of respiratory heart failure said his publicist Dick Delson.

Robbins, who was wheelchair bound in the last few years because of hip ailments, had entered the hospital a few weeks ago because of breathing troubles, Delson said.

His novels were sold around the world, and many were turned into movies. Robbins married six times, experienced much of the debauchery he depicted in his books, and was proud of it. His Los Angeles parties were legendary and he once said he took "all kinds of drugs."

BRIEFLY

7 die as quake rocks Chile:

An earthquake rocked Chile late on Tuesday, killing seven people who were crushed under collapsing buildings in the north of the country, Reuter reports from Santiago.

Interior Minister Carlos Figueroa said seven people died as a result of the quake, including a family of five who were crushed in their homes. The national emergency office (ONEMI) said the quake measured 6.2 on the Richter Scale. But the US geological survey's earthquake information centre in Golden, Colorado, said it registered 6.8 making it a moderately powerful quake.

7 prisoners escape in India:

In a daring act, seven prisoners, one of them a life convict, escaped after putting chilly powder into eyes of policemen escorting them to Ambala Central Jail in a van in Haryana on Monday, PTI reports from Ambala.

The escape occurred near Mohra, some five-km from here, police said, adding one of them was nabbed later. They said 29 prisoners of Ambala Central Jail were taken to Panipat in connection with a case, adding 15 more were put in the van on way back.

Blast kills 1 in Colombia:

A 2-year-old girl died and six soldiers and three civilians were injured when leftist rebels detonated a powerful bombing southern Colombia on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Bogota.

The attack took place in the busy river port of Puerto Rico in Cagueta province, a stronghold of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The guerrillas set off a bomb in the road and killed the baby girl and injured six soldiers and three civilians, a police spokesman said.

Quake shakes Italy:

Another earthquake shook central Italy Tuesday, destroying the dome of a medieval clock tower and several other buildings which had been damaged in a deadly twin temblor last month, officials said, AFP reports from Rome.

There were no reports of casualties following the tremor which measured 4.9 on the Richter Scale which has a theoretical maximum of nine points, according to the Italian National Geophysical Institute. The dome of the clock tower at the Foligno municipal building in Umbria province, which was damaged in an earlier quake on September 26, collapsed while the city's mayor and firefighters were studying ways to save the monument, firefighters said.

Neither Iranian nor Iraqi forces trying to challenge US warships, aircraft

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: Responding to recent increased tension in the Gulf, the United States said on Tuesday that neither Iranian nor Iraqi forces were attempting to challenge US warships and aircraft in the region, reports Reuter.

The comments to reporters by Defence Department spokesman Ken Bacon came as Iran continued annual military exercises in the Gulf. They also followed US charges that Iraqi military aircraft recently violated two "no-fly" zones over Iraq.

Bacon said, in fact, that the Pentagon had returned two B-1 bombers from Bahrain, where they were recently sent, to their domestic base over the weakened because of apparent easing tension in the area.

"We have seen no suggestion that they (Iranians) want to confront us in any way, no suggestion that they want to cause any problems with our regular deployments throughout the Gulf, he said when asked about the Iranian exercises and the recent movement of a US aircraft carrier into the Gulf.

Bacon also added that there had been no violations by Iraqi aircraft in a no-fly zone over southern Iraq in recent days.

The aircraft carrier Nimitz arrived in the Gulf last weekend five days ahead of schedule in response to Iraq's violations of the no-fly zones and Iranian air raids on Iraqi bases of an

Jones' lawyers ask Clinton to admit or deny having sex with women

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. Oct 15: Attorneys for Paula Jones asked US President Bill Clinton in legal papers filed on Tuesday to confirm or deny allegations that he had sex with numerous women who were or became Arkansas state employees while he was governor, reports Reuter.

The 22-page document also asks Clinton to say whether the allegations made by Jones in her sexual harassment lawsuit were true — namely that Clinton asked her for oral sex during a 1991 meeting in a Little Rock hotel.

The 72 questions were filed as part of the pre-trial discovery in Jones suit, which is set to go to trial in May 1998. Clinton's lawyers could ask the court to block all or some of the questions, or he could simply answer them.

The president has denied Jones' account of their alleged meeting.

The document broadly hints through its questions that Clinton had sex with women, then got them state jobs if they were not already on the Arkansas payroll.

"Please admit or deny the following: while he was governor of the State of Arkansas, Clinton had sexual relations with a woman whom he, as governor, later appointed to a position as a judge in the State of Arkansas," asks one question.

Jones' Attorney Wesley Holmes said the questions were not meant to harass Clinton, but were important to the case.

"These issues are relevant to the case or can reasonably be expected to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence," he told reporters.



Israeli Rabbi Menachem Fruman, right, presents in Gaza Tuesday to Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, left, a letter from Israeli Chief Rabbi Eliahu Bakshi-Doron in which Bakshi-Doron proposes to set up a three-way summit between the Pope, an unnamed Muslim cleric and himself. Rabbi Fruman, a controversial Rabbi who lives in a West Bank settlement and is active in forming dialogues with Muslim leaders said he hoped the dialogue between religious figures would assist and solve some of the problems that the political leaders have difficulty with. — AP/UNB photo

Ozone hole over Antarctica reaches highest level

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: The top of the ozone hole over Antarctica reached the highest level measured so far this month as the build-up of ozone-depleting chlorine gases in the upper atmosphere approached its peak, a US agency said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said its scientists saw a complete loss of ozone — which protects the Earth from the Sun's ultraviolet rays — at altitudes of nine to 13 miles over the South Pole.

The increasing altitude of ozone depletion was probably caused by chlorofluorocarbons, man-made chemicals blamed for depleting the ozone layer, NOAA said.

These chlorine-containing gases have started to decline in the lower atmosphere because of the international agreement to restrict their use.

But NOAA said chlorine levels in the upper atmosphere would peak around 2000 as the gases take several years to reach that height, resulting in a slow recovery of the ozone layer.

The size of the South Pole's ozone hole approached 22 million square km in early October, comparable to its size at the same seasons in 1995 and 1996, NOAA said.

No N- technology for Iran, US seeks Chinese guarantee

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: The Clinton administration is pressing China for an ironclad guarantee it will provide no nuclear weapons technology to Iran or any other country trying to develop such weapons, reports AP.

The US hope is to wind up the negotiations, successfully, by Oct. 28, when Chinese President Jiang Zemin is due to begin summit talks here with President Bill Clinton.

This would give the two leaders the basis for a dramatic announcement, while airtight assurances from China could clear the way for sale of peaceful American nuclear energy, guidance systems and other technology to Beijing.

At the same time, Israel and other allies worried about Iran's weapons programmes could take heart.

Without China's commitment, the United States is prohibited from providing the country with that kind of technology.

A green light for the American nuclear energy industry to sell reactors and technology to China could be worth many billions of dollars.

American negotiators are insisting on "clear and unequivocal assurances," State Department spokesman James Rubin said. "But we are not there yet."

The US official said the negotiators had set "a very high standard" and that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has been working on the problem for some time.

"We would like to be able to get to a point where China has made a sufficient number of commitments, and we have reason to believe those commitments can be implemented, so that we can state that clear and unequivocal assurances have been provided," Rubin said.

The reason for trying to curb any nuclear technology transfers to Iran, he said, is that "we believe a nuclear-armed Iran would threaten US interests, as well as regional and international security issues. For that reason, we have continuously opposed nuclear cooperation by all countries with Iran."

In fact, Rubin said, the Clinton administration opposes sale of any such technology to Iran even if it is used in programs open to international inspection.

"In other words," Rubin said, "we want to close down any possibility, however permitted under the international guidelines, that Iran will gain knowledge in its pursuit of nuclear weapons."



Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy who won the 20,000 pounds sterling (US, 30,000 dollars) literary award with her debut novel "The God of Small Things", following the presentation of the award late Tuesday. Novelist Roy 37-year-old from Delhi, India, took the prestigious prize with her controversial novel which has brought the threat of court actions in India for allegedly corrupting public morality. — AP/UNB photo