

International

BRIEFLY

Avalanche kills 46 in Tajikistan: Up to 46 people were killed when an avalanche buried a mountain pass in this central Asian nation, but emergency officials said Thursday they waited some two weeks before revealing the incident, AP reports from Dushanbe.

The avalanche hit the Anzob mountain pass earlier in this month, but the Tajik Emergency Situations Ministry only revealed the incident after abandoning hope of finding more survivors or bodies. No reason for the delay in releasing the news was given. Four people were pulled alive from a blanket of snow up to 12 metres (39.6 feet) deep and 13 bodies also were found, it said.

UN monitor hurt on Kuwait-Iraq border: Assassins opened fire on a UN checkpoint near the Iraqi-Kuwait border, wounding a monitor, AP reports from Kuwait.

The UN observer from Ghana was shot Thursday in the thigh as the unidentified assailants fired on the post from a passing car, the Kuwait News Agency reported Friday. About 200 UN observers patrol the demilitarised zone along the 130-mile (210-kilometre) frontier between Iraq and Kuwait. The zone was created after the 1991 Gulf War, when a US-led coalition drove Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, ending a seven-month occupation.

China denies missile sales to Yugoslavia: China said Thursday that military cooperation forms an important part of its relations with Yugoslavia, but denied that it was willing to sell medium-range missiles to Belgrade. AP reports from Beijing.

During Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's visit last week, China "indicated its willingness to conduct exchanges and cooperation in all areas" of military relations, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang said. "A very important part of the bilateral relations between China and Yugoslavia is military exchanges and cooperation," he said.

Portuguese DPM to resign: Portuguese Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Antonio Vitorino said on Thursday that he had offered his resignation from the socialist government because he risked charges of tax-dodging. Reuter reports from Lisbon.

He did not spell out whether Prime Minister Antonio Guterres had accepted the offer, although he implied that he had. "Until this issue is resolved, I shall not be holding any political office," Vitorino told a news conference.

5 Islamic rebels killed in Algeria: Algerian security forces killed five Islamic extremists who were about to carry out a massacre in a town near Algiers, La Tribune newspaper reported yesterday. AFP reports from Algiers.

It said the five were part of a group that was poised to attack Djiloul, a town outside Larbaa 20 kilometres (15 miles) southeast of the Algerian capital. Another armed militant was killed Wednesday by the security forces in the same area, as were three others last Friday at Douera, Southwest of Algiers. The Independent newspaper added.

Blast leaves 1 dead in Germany: A fireman was killed and nine other people were injured. Some seriously, when two rail containers carrying petrol exploded, starting a fire, police in this eastern town said Thursday. AFP reports from Elsterwerda.

The 66-year-old firefighter was seriously injured by falling debris and died on the way to hospital. Eight other firemen and a policeman were burned, some seriously.

Strong quake rocks China: A moderate earthquake rocked a sparsely inhabited area in mountainous western China early Friday, but there were no reports of damage or injuries. AP reports from Beijing.

The magnitude 5.0 earthquake struck at 12:17 am (1617 GMT) in the rugged Kunlun mountains along the border between Xinjiang and Tibet, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported. It was the second such quake in two days, following a 5.0 magnitude tremor centred in the Kunlun mountains that hit Thursday morning.

Journalist killed in Colombia: A gunner on a motorcycle killed a magazine editor Thursday in Colombia's regional capital of Armenia, authorities said, bringing to seven the number of Colombian journalists murdered this year, AP reports from Bogota.

Jairo Elias Marquez, editor in chief of the monthly news magazine El Marques, was about to get into his car when he was gunned down in the city 190 kilometres (120 miles) west of Bogota. An Armenia police spokesman told local reporters that Marquez, 40, had received telephoned death threats but that it was not clear from whom.

Y'slav army officer arrested: A Yugoslav army officer and two civilians were arrested Thursday on charges of undermining the country's defensive capacity, the daily Dnevni Telegraf reported yesterday. AFP reports from Belgrade.

The paper said the three, arrested at Nis in the south of the country, were suspected of importing inferior quality materials for use in military equipment of the highest importance for the army.

5 crushed in Beijing bldg collapse: A three-story factory building in eastern Beijing collapsed as it was being demolished, crushing at least five workers, an employee of the building's owner said Friday. AP reports from Beijing.

Four bodies were dug out from under the rubble after the brick building, formerly the Wandong Medical Equipment Factory, fell in with a huge crash Thursday afternoon, said Zhang Danshi, a Wandong employee. "People living nearby felt shaking like an earthquake," the Beijing Evening News said. The newspaper said five people were crushed in the collapse.

5 missing in Russian chopper crash: Five people were missing and believed dead after a Russian rescue helicopter searching for a fishing vessel crashed into the Black Sea during a storm, officials said Friday. AP reports from Moscow.

The Mi-8 helicopter with a crew of three and nine rescue workers aboard was trying to rescue four fishermen near the port of Sochi. The aircraft crashed shortly after the crew spotted the boat about three kilometers (two miles) from the shore and reported its whereabouts, said Emergency Situations Ministry spokesman Viktor Beltsov.

Cuba permits more foreign priests: With Pope John Paul II's visit approaching, Cuba has announced it will allow 57 more foreign priests and nuns to help the island's small corps of Roman Catholic religious workers, AP reports from Mexico City.

The announcement was made Wednesday night on Cuban state television, which also broadcast a programme commemorating President Fidel Castro's visit to the Vatican a year ago. The 28 priests and 29 nuns will come from Colombia, Spain and Haiti, Church authorities in Havana told reporters, who spoke later by phone with The Associated Press in Mexico City.

A view of a gold foil-covered solar observatory satellite in the front of payload bay of the Space Shuttle Columbia during its second day in orbit Thursday, as seen in this image from television. The Spartan solar observatory satellite was scheduled to be released on Thursday, but was delayed one day because of now-corrected problems with another solar study satellite currently orbiting the sun that will take concurrent readings. — AP/UNB photo



Under the cry of "Allahu Akbar" "God is Great" around 300 opposition members holding signs during a sit-in for the first pro-Iraqi and anti-United States rally Thursday in Amman, Jordan. The crowd carried banners calling for the lifting of sanctions from Iraq and attacking the US and its policy, saying "US is our enemy," down with the US aggression against Iraq. — AP/UNB photo

US sends 32 more jets to Gulf to keep pressure on Iraq

WASHINGTON: Nov 21: The United States said on Thursday it was sending 32 more fighter jets and bombers as well as patriot anti-aircraft missiles to the Gulf to keep pressure on Iraq to cooperate with UN arms inspections, reports Reuters.

The Pentagon said 12 F-15 fighters, 18 F-16 fighters and two B-1 bombers would arrive in Bahrain over the next few days, along with a Patriot battery and about 100 US troops to operate it to protect the air expeditionary force.

The planes are in addition to six F-117A Stealth fighters and six F-52 bombers sent to the region earlier on Thursday. They will bolster the US military force within striking distance of Iraq to 281 warplanes and 22 navy ships.

The White House and the Pentagon stressed that the recent US military buildup near Iraq was continuing unabated to make sure Baghdad followed through on a promise to end a confrontation with the UN and allow American and other arms inspectors back into the country.

Naval Capt. Mike Doubleday, a Pentagon spokesman, warned that Baghdad should stop shifting its air defence missiles and radar around in a "no-fly" zone in southern Iraq because such activity was a threat to allied

warplanes policing the zone.

He said the present active movement of such defence violated a warning to Baghdad not to increase potential threats to allied jets. The warning followed missile and bombing strikes against Iraqi anti-aircraft defences in the southern zone last year.

The US military force in the Gulf region includes the navy aircraft carriers Nimitz and George Washington, each with 50 attack jets. About 120 US Air Force planes are based in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

"We are pursuing the diplomatic route to resolve the issue, but we are doing it from a position of strength," Doubleday said.

Irqi President Saddam Hussein "has set back the date by which, in my judgment, one can imagine USNCOM completing its work," Berger said, referring to the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) on Iraqi disarmament.

Thomas Pickering, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, commented: "The notion that there should be some timetable. Perhaps imposed on the UN rather than on Iraq is in my view putting the cart before the horse. It is up to Saddam to comply."

A senior administration official, who asked not to be named, said "We are a long way from even addressing that question" of lifting sanctions.

Tigers' 15 yrs of love-hate relationship with Delhi

NEW DELHI: Nov 21: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas, at the heart of India's political turmoil, have had a love-hate relationship with New Delhi spanning almost 15 years, reports AFP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), blamed for the 1991 assassination of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi, allegedly received training and weapons from successive Indian governments from 1983.

The charges have been denied by India but have been widely documented. The LTTE itself has admitted to accepting weapons as well as financial help from New Delhi.

The LTTE was a small group with barely 50 full-time members when it ambushed and killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers in the island's north in 1983, triggering a bloody anti-Tamil pogrom in Colombo.

India, home to some 55 million Tamils of its own, denounced the anti-Tamil violence and began a massive but secret operation to fund, arm and train five Tamil militant groups from Sri Lanka.

The LTTE, led by charismatic founder-leader Velupillai Prabhakaran who is today wanted by both India and Sri Lanka, was one of them.

The group maintained propaganda offices in the southern Indian cities of Madras and Madurai, from where it claimed responsibility for guerrilla attacks in Sri Lanka.

It also had numerous training camps located across the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

which is separated from Sri Lanka by a narrow strip of sea.

According to Tamil and Indian government sources, around 1,200 Sri Lankan Tamil rebels were trained by New Delhi in secret camps between September 1993 and July 1987. Many belonged to the LTTE.

During the period, the LTTE expanded to become a battle-hardened group of some 3,000 men and women fighters. It also destroyed other Tamil groups engaged in the campaign for a Tamil homeland.

In July 1987, India and Sri Lanka signed an agreement to try and end the separatist struggle. India deployed its soldiers in Sri Lanka's Tamil majority north and east to disarm the LTTE.

The LTTE, however, took on the Indian Army in October 1987, leading to a bitter hit-and-run guerrilla war that continued until the Indian soldiers returned home in March 1990 after suffering nearly 1,200 casualties.

The Tamil Tigers had, meanwhile, opened peace talks with Colombo. But once the Indian Army quit Sri Lanka, the LTTE resumed its battle for homeland against Colombo.

Within weeks, it had taken control of large areas of Sri Lanka's north and east and set up a de-facto Tamil independent state in the northern Peninsula of Jaffna.

On May 21, 1991, former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi, who had sent the Indian troops to Sri Lanka in 1987, was blown up by a woman suicide bomber at an election rally in Tamil Nadu.

India blamed the LTTE for the killing, the Tigers denied involvement the following year. The Indian government outlawed the group and carried out a sweeping crackdown in Tamil Nadu.

The report, Expenditures on Children by Families for the urban Midwest, assumes some savings from having more than one child. The estimate for raising an only child is dollars 7,322, the report estimates.

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