

International

Five killed in mine explosion in Lanka

COLOMBO, Mar 14: Tamil Tiger guerrillas set off a powerful landmine in northern Sri Lanka, killing four soldiers and a civilian, the Defence Ministry here said today, reports AFP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) exploded the mine near Atchchuvelli in the peninsula of Jaffna on Friday afternoon, the ministry said adding that four more soldiers were wounded.

The Tiger ambush came as the air force bombed two bases of the LTTE near the northern rebel held town of Mankulam, the ministry said.

Aerial reconnaissance of the locations was carried out prior to engagement by high-tech surveillance equipment," the ministry said adding that Israeli-Kfir jets were used in the bombing raids on the two Tiger bases.

There was no immediate word from the LTTE about the attacks.

Thousands of government forces are engaged in a major drive to open a key highway through the town of Mankulam to the northern peninsula of Jaffna.

However, intense rebel resistance has slowed the military campaign which began in May last year.

More than 1,000 soldiers have been killed in the fighting so far and the military said it has killed more than 2,500 Tigers.

Tiger guerrillas are leading a drawn out campaign for an independent homeland in the island's north and east where the

two million Tamil minority is concentrated.

More than 55,000 people have been killed in fighting in the past 25 years.

Suharto announces new cabinet

JAKARTA, Mar 14: Indonesian President Suharto announced his new cabinet today, consolidating top-level support in the face of an economic crisis ravaging the country of 200 million people, reports Reuter.

He named Ginanjar Kartasasmita as the co-ordinating minister for the economic and planning chief, and the former director-general of taxes Fuad Bawazier as minister of finance.

Suharto also appointed his close associate, timber tycoon Mohammad "Bob" Hasan, as industry and trade minister, and named his eldest daughter Siti Hardianti Rukmana social welfare minister.

Political analysts said the president appeared to be consolidating his support at top levels after another lose friend, former research and technology minister Jusuf Habibie, was elected the nation's vice-president following Suharto's inauguration for a seventh term in office earlier this week.

With the new line-up, Suharto runs the risk of being charged with cronyism, considered a contributing factor to Indonesia's economic troubles.

In unveiling the cabinet, a weary-looking Suharto said the country was experiencing a serious economic and financial crisis.

Bid to cope with acute situation DPRK will reduce overseas diplomatic operations

SEOUL, Mar 14: Strapped for cash, North Korea said Saturday it will sharply reduce its overseas diplomatic operations until the food shortage and other economic conditions improve, reports AP.

To cope with the acute situation, we have decided to reduce and readjust missions abroad some by 30 per cent until the food and economic problems are solved," a spokesman for North Korea's Foreign Ministry was quoted as saying by the official Korean Central News Agency.

Years of disastrous weather have brought grave damage to the agricultural and all other economic sectors, rendering the food problems and the country's economic situation very difficult," the government spokesman was quoted as saying.

The KCNA dispatch gave no further detail and did not identify the spokesman by name.

The announcement came one day after the communist North said it had begun a "wartime mobilisation," accusing the United States and South Korea of plotting a war against the isolated country.

South Korea dismissed what was going on in the North as a routine military exercise. Its military took no special mea-

sures to bolster the nation's defenses.

In Washington, State Department spokesman James P. Rubin suggested the exercises in North Korea were not a cause for concern because, in many respects, the levels of operations and training are both down.

Similar exercises are held in South Korea as well. The military goes on heightened alert, sirens wail, and streets empty of traffic as people scurry into underground air raid shelters.

The Rome-based UN World Food Programme issued a new appeal in January for 650,000 tons of food for North Korea over the next year.

The United States has pledged 200,000 tons and the South Korean government promised 50,000 tons.

North Korea has diplomatic ties with about 130 countries, according to South Korean officials.

Former North Korean diplomats, who have defected to South Korea in recent years, testified North Korea has been reducing staff and operation in its foreign missions for years. They even said some diplomats were involved in drug trafficking to make up for the dwindling financial assistance from Pyongyang.

Paula Jones' lawyers accuse Clinton of conspiring to suppress evidence

WASHINGTON, Mar 14: Attempting to keep their lawsuit alive, Paula Jones' lawyers charged that President Bill Clinton took part in a vast conspiracy to suppress evidence of sexual misconduct and denied Mrs Jones job advancement because she refused his request that she perform a sex act, reports AP.

In 700 pages of explosive depositions and legal briefs, the Jones lawyers said Clinton engaged in a pattern of sexual relationships, rewarded with jobs women who submitted to him and made "a veritable orgy of false and misleading statements" to the judge in an effort to get the case dismissed.

The Jones lawyers were responding Friday to the Clinton filings, and asked US district Judge Susan Webber Wright to proceed to trial in Little Rock May 27.

Robert Bennett, Clinton's lawyers, immediately described their case as "colton candy" and said that "when you bite into it, there's nothing there."

In their motion, Jones' lawyers said: "The record before the court provides good reason to believe that Mr Clinton and those acting on his behalf have engaged in a vast enterprise to suppress evidence in this case and otherwise corrupt these proceedings."

Clinton and his wife, Hillary left the capital for a weekend at the presidential retreat in Maryland as the papers were being released. His chief spokesman, Mike McCurry, when asked how Clinton felt about the new legal filing, said "he's a human being and he has human reaction when he reads stuff like that."

Citing testimony from Clinton's deposition, the Jones lawyers argued that last December 28, after Monica Lewinsky was subpoenaed in the Jones case, Clinton suggested to her in a private meeting how she could avoid subpoenas and testimony. He has said that he never told her to lie.

Five women besides Mrs Jones are mentioned in the court papers, including Eliza-

49 Chinese held in Japan: Japanese coast guards arrested 49 Chinese men and women after they entered Japan's territorial waters aboard a South Korean fishing boat, the maritime safety agency said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The agency's patrol boat spotted the vessel off Fukui prefecture facing the sea of Japan late Thursday and questioned the Chinese and four South Korean crew members, an agency official said. The four crew members were also arrested after they admitted their attempt to smuggle the Chinese — 44 men and five women — aged between 17 and 45 who were mostly from the southern province of Fujian, the official said.

Zuyganov arrives in Hanoi: A delegation of the Communist Party of Russia headed by President Gennady Zuyganov has arrived in Hanoi for a four-day official visit, the press reported Saturday, AFP says from Hanoi.

Zuyganov was received by Vietnam Communist Party General Secretary Le Kha Phieu on Friday at the office of the party central committee, the official English-language Vietnam News said. Vietnam attached great importance to strengthening relations with traditional allies in general, and with Russia in particular, Phieu was quoted by the Vietnam News as saying.

Over 22.3m rats killed in Vietnam: More than 22.3 million rats were killed in an all-out campaign to get rid of the rodents devastating Vietnam's crops in the first two months of this year, nearly half the total amount last year, a report said yesterday, AFP says from Hanoi.

In January and February, Vietnam's provinces spent more than 120,000 dollars on killing rodents which destroyed around 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres) of paddy fields of the country's spring crop, the Nhan Dan daily reported.

US Senate for indicting, prosecuting Saddam for crimes against humanity

WASHINGTON, Mar 14: The US Senate on Friday approved a nonbinding resolution branding Iraq President Saddam Hussein a war criminal and calling for his indictment by an international tribunal to be set up under the authority of the United Nations, reports Reuter.

The measure approved by the Senate 93-0 called on the United Nations to form an international tribunal for the purpose of "indicting, prosecuting, and imprisoning Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi officials who are responsible for crimes against humanity, genocide, and other violations of international law."

At the United Nations, Iraq's Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed Al-Sahhaf called the action "trash."

"This is trash, if it is for the local consumption that this is shameful," he told Reuters television in answer to questions.

Arlen Specter, the Pennsylvania Republican who sponsored the resolution, said it would serve as a test of support by US allies for the American position. If they did not agree to try Saddam as a war criminal it would signal the United States should go alone against Saddam.

AP adds: Secretary-General Kofi Annan agreed Friday to lobby with the Iraqi authorities to get them to accept a UN proposal for financing Iraqi pilgrimages, which Baghdad has rejected.

A Security Council resolution last month to double the amount of oil Iraq can sell included an allowance for 44 million dollars to help 22,000 Iraqi Muslims make the annual "Hajj" to the holy city Makkah, in Saudi Arabia.

Iraq wants the money transferred from the UN escrow account, which holds the "oil-for-food" revenues, to the Iraqi central bank.

But the United States and Britain protested, saying transferring the money to the Iraqis would violate UN economic sanctions on Iraq.

In an effort to resolve the issue, UN officials recommended that the money be transferred to the Jordanian government, which would in turn issue vouchers to Iraqi pilgrims which they could redeem for cash in Jiddah, the Saudi entry point for those making the annual pilgrimage.

But Iraq's Foreign Minister, Mohammed Saeed Al-Sahhaf, rejected the voucher offer and repeated his insistence that Iraq get the money. Iraqi diplomats said the issue was one of national dignity since the money came from the sale of Iraqi oil.

The UN committee which oversees Iraqi sanctions met Friday and endorsed the voucher proposal even though the Iraqis have rejected it.

Committee Chairman Antonio Monteiro of Portugal briefed Annan about the dispute and afterward said the UN chief would intervene personally with the Iraqi leadership to try to convince them to accept it.

"The secretary-general knows the proposal, knows the committee endorsed the proposal, and he told me he would work with Baghdad to help explain that this proposal is a good one," Monteiro told reporters.

The committee agreed to meet again Monday to see if the Iraqis had changed their position.

Every Muslim is expected to make at least one pilgrimage to the holy city during his lifetime if at all possible. The 22,000 Iraqis expected to take part this year would receive 2,000 dollars each under the proposal.

Iraq has been under sweeping economic sanctions since 1990 when President Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, touching off the Persian gulf War. In December 1996, Iraq was permitted to sell limited amounts of oil to buy food and medicine for its people.

But the oil revenues must be deposited in a UN-controlled account. The United Nations then authorises payment of funds for each purchase of humanitarian goods so that the Iraqis have no control over the funds at any stage.



UNSCOM Chairman Richard Butler, left, looks on as United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, centre, greets UNSCOM inspector Scott Ritter at the United Nations in New York Friday. Ritter's Membership on the UNSCOM inspection team in Iraq fueled the recent crisis between the US and Iraq over UN sanctioned inspections. Iraq called Ritter a spy for the United States and refused to allow the inspections to continue. Annan brokered an agreement with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to solve the standoff. — AP/UNB photo

Yet another Taliban decree on women

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 14: Afghanistan's religious Taliban government will not let foreign Muslim women working for UN and private agencies enter the country unless accompanied by a close male relative, UN sources said Friday, reports AP.

Taliban authorities informed the United Nations of the new regulation in a letter last week to Sergio de Mello, humanitarian coordinator for Afghanistan, said the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

De Mello protested the regulation and asked them to reconsider in a letter delivered Tuesday, the sources said. By Friday, no response had been received.

UN officials said that if the regulation is enforced, it could have a significant impact on UN and other humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, especially those directed at women and girls.

No figures were available on the number of Muslim female staff working for the United Nations in the landlocked Central Asian country.

But the United Nations has been quietly increasing the number of Muslim female staffers working in Afghanistan, believing they would be more acceptable to the strict Islamic Taliban, which controls more than two-thirds of the country.

UN rules forbid gender-based discrimination in employment or assignments.

Congress urged to settle US debts to UN

WASHINGTON, Mar 14: President Bill Clinton urged Congress on Saturday to settle US debts to the United Nations, "right now, in the next several days," reports AP.

In his weekly radio address, Clinton criticised Republican efforts to attach an anti-abortion measure to a spending bill that would pay off 1 billion dollars in past-due UN dues.

Noting that Congress has 68 work days remaining in this session, Clinton said: "We must act now — not over the next 68 days, but right now, in the next several days."

One of two emergency funding bills before Congress includes more than 1.8 billion dollars to pay for keeping US troops in Bosnia longer than originally planned as well as for the recent buildup of American forces in the Gulf. It also provides 642 million dollars for recovery from storms and other natural disasters in Florida, California, New England and Guam.

Republicans do not oppose spending the money, but they want the added costs to be offset by cuts in domestic programmes.

Kennedy's nephew quits politics

BOSTON, Mar 14: Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy II became the first member of the storied Kennedy dynasty to quit politics Friday, saying his brother's death in a skiing accident forced him to re-evaluate his life, reports AP.

With his career in a slump since last summer because of family scandals, the 45-year-old six-term congressman said Friday he will not run for re-election next fall to the House seat held by his uncle John F. Kennedy.

Instead, he said, he will spend more time with his family and go back to running Citizens Energy Corp, the nonprofit agency he founded nearly two decades ago to provide heating assistance to the poor.

Kennedy had turned the business over to his brother Michael, then took back control after Michael was killed at a Colorado ski resort on New Year's Eve.

"Because of the death of my brother Michael, I have a new responsibility at Citizens Energy," Kennedy said. "This last year has brought me new recognition of our own individual vulnerabilities and the vagaries of life."

Europeans flock to Lankan beaches despite wave of bombings

COLOMBO, Mar 14: European tourists are continuing to flock to Sri Lanka despite a wave of bombings blamed on ethnic Tamil rebels, officials said Saturday, reports AP.

Foreign tourist arrivals for January were up 14 per cent from the same month last year, the Ceylon Tourist Board said in its monthly bulletin.

Six bombings in the last five months, four of them in the capital, Colombo, have claimed 85 lives.

Although no-one claimed responsibility, five of the attacks were carried out by suicide bombers, a trademark of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which is fighting to set up a separate homeland in the country's northeast for minority Tamils.

"Tour operators know that their clients are safe since they will not be going near the war zones in the northeast and will be spending almost all of their holidays away from Colombo, where most of the bombings, take place," said Prasad Gunasinghe, a local tour operator.

Most tourists stay in small resort hotels and beach houses on the southwest coast.

Bloody crackdown on Kosovans EU ministers agree to further sanctions on Belgrade

EDINBURGH, Mar 14: European Union ministers on Friday agreed the 15-nation bloc should impose further sanctions on Belgrade over its bloody crackdown on the ethnic Albanian province of Kosovo, reports Reuter.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said the ministers agreed the EU would take urgent steps to apply the same package of sanctions agreed by a meeting of major world powers earlier in the week.

Last Monday the six-nation contact group-Britain, Italy, the United States, Russia, Germany and France — condemned Yugoslavia for security operations in Kosovo in which almost 100 people have been killed.

They agreed to call for a UN arms embargo on Yugoslavia and to stop supplying equipment which could be used for repressive action.

All the nations and Russia also agreed to impose a freeze on government financed export credit support for trade and investment and a visa ban on senior officials.

"Next week EU officials will be meeting to take forward the implementation of the specific sanctions which the contact group committed itself to, in particular the visa ban and the refusal of government credit for investment," Cook told a news conference.

The contact group gave Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic until March 25 to end the crackdown and start a meaningful dialogue with the Kosovans or face a freeze on all Serbian and Yugoslav assets abroad.

The EU ministers also agreed to convene a Paris conference of countries in the region to discuss their concerns about the situation and to prevent the Kosovan crisis spreading. The United States and Russia will also be invited.

Sihanouk expects to die in self-exile

PHNOM PENH, Mar 14: Ailing and fearful a more active political role would plunge Cambodia into civil war, King Norodom Sihanouk said Saturday from Beijing that he expects to die in self-exile, reports AP.

Sihanouk, 75, said in a letter addressed to veteran politician Son Sann and released to the press that the regime led by strongman Hun Sen will not permit him to become involved in the peace process, elections, environmental or other political issues.

"Like Your Excellency, I aspire only to serve our people and die on Cambodian soil," Sihanouk wrote. "But Heaven doesn't permit us to realise all our patriotic dreams. I think that I will die far from our country."

A central figure in Cambodian politics for more than half a century, Sihanouk has been sidelined in the confrontation between Hun Sen and Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the king's son, who was ousted as co-prime minister in a violent coup last year.

Cuba reiterates demand for Israeli withdrawal from S Lebanon

HAVANA, Mar 14: Cuba on Friday demanded again Israel's unconditional withdrawal from Southern Lebanon as required by a United Nations resolution, reports Xinhua.

In a statement on the 20th anniversary of the Israeli intrusion into Southern Lebanon, Cuba urged Israel to respect Lebanon's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The statement, by the Cuban Foreign Affairs Ministry, called for an immediate implementation of UN Security Council resolution 425 demanding Israeli troops to leave the Lebanese soil.

Condemning Israel of mistreating Lebanese residents, the statement said this violates international laws, especially the Geneva convention on the protection of civilians during wars.

The Cuban government fully supports the Lebanese people and government in their "just struggle for recovering the total sovereignty over their territories," it said.

Reuter adds, Israeli troops wounded five Palestinian journalists including two working for Reuters who were covering clashes on Friday in the West Bank town of Hebron, witnesses and hospital officials said.

Off the Record

Dolly and Holly immortalised in wool

LONDON: Dolly the cloned sheep gave the coat of her back to the National Science Museum on Friday, with a little help from 12-year old Holly Wharton, who designed a brightly colored sweater made from the wool, reports AP.

Holly won a nationwide contest with her blue, green and white design depicting two identical sheep grazing in a field.

She wore it for the presentation to the museum, accompanied by actress Jenny Agutter, who said it was a good advertisement for the pioneering work in genetics by Dolly's creators and by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, which helped organise the competition.

Agutter is a carrier of the hereditary disease cystic fibrosis, which she said might one day benefit from the technology that produced Dolly.

Dolly was created by scientists at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, Scotland, using cells from a sheep's udder. She was the first mammal to be cloned from a cell taken from an adult.

Condom machine in parliament!

LONDON: A liberal-democrat MP has called for condom machines to be installed in the "social" areas of Britain's parliament, reports AFP.

Evan Harris, a former hospital doctor and his party's spokesman on HIV and health education, noted there were no machines in the premises.

"New, younger MPs of both sexes have, probably, brought more sex to parliament. But there is still no condom machine" he told the HIV alliance's magazine.

He said he did not want people to think there was a "whole lot of promiscuity going on... and I don't want to imply it is happening in parliament itself I just don't think all MPs are celibate. I can't believe it."

Probability would be 1 in 50 million

AMERICAN FORK, Utah: The question that computer science professor Ernie Carey posed to his class was not just academic: What's the probability of three sisters giving birth on the same day? Reports AP.

His oldest daughter, Karralee Morgan gave birth at 7:18 am Wednesday to her first child, Cameron Scott. A few hours later, sister Marianne Asay also was admitted to American Fork Hospital. She gave birth to Dallin, her second child, at 3:25 pm.

By then, Carey had raised the question with his class at Utah Valley State College about the odds of a third daughter giving birth the same day.

"Then I called him and said our third daughter was going into labour," Lynn Carey said. "He threw up his hands and said, 'Number three is in labour, class dismissed.'"

At 8:58 pm, Jennifer Hone delivered Sera McKell, her second child, at Timpanogos Hospital in Orem.

While the three sisters enjoyed being pregnant together and joked about having their babies on the same day, they did not expect it. Hone was due March 15, Asay was due April 1 and Morgan was due April 4.

To gloat about winning the race, Morgan and Asay sent flowers to Hone with the message, "Ha ha, we beat you — Cameron and Dallin."

As for the odds, if the three mothers hadn't all gotten pregnant about the same time then you could say that each baby had a 1-in-365 chance of having March 11 as his or her birthday. The probability of the occurrence of the three successive births on the same date would be about 1 in 50 million.



An Israeli soldier aims his rifle at Palestinian stonethrowers, as other Palestinians watch in the West Bank town of Hebron, Friday. Clashes are continuing all over the West Bank for the third straight day after the killings of three Palestinian workers by Israeli soldiers at an Israeli roadblock. — AP/UNB photo