

International

Development of 8 far-eastern states

Vajpayee offers '2-pronged' package in talks with CMs

NEW DELHI, May 8: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee today promised to improve infrastructure in India's remote far-east where decades of separatist strife have cost thousands of lives and shattered the economy, reports AFP.

Vajpayee offered a "two-pronged" package in unprecedented talks with chief ministers of the region's eight states that share borders with China, Tibet, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar (BURMA), officials said.

The states — Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Assam and Sikkim — have complained that successive governments neglected the region since India's independence from British

rule in 1947.

Assam, the largest state in the region, argues that its resources such as petroleum products, timber and tea have been siphoned off by the central government without any benefit to the local population.

Together, the eight states account for about 35 million of India's 950-million-plus population. Large numbers of them are tribals, the original inhabitants of the Sub-continent. Many are Christians.

The prime minister also said he would try and set up direct communication and trade links with the adjoining countries for "developing social infrastructure" of the far-eastern region.

Vajpayee, however, said his Hindu nationalist-led coalition

government could not ignore that the region was "beset with multi-dimensional problems including those having external focus."

These problems are worsening for want of timely and effective redressal," Vajpayee told the eight ministers.

"We cannot entirely lose sight of the political, social, cultural, educational and even security matters that have a direct bearing on the region's economic growth."

"We have to especially pay very serious attention to the international security issues in the region," Vajpayee said of militant and ethnic violence that has claimed thousands of lives in the past 50 years.

Vajpayee, however, said: "My

government does not look upon the region as an area of problem. Rather we see it as an area of unique potential for India's overall development."

He said New Delhi would spend almost 400 million dollars a year to build up the economy and upgrade communication links between the eight remote states with the rest of India.

The government is also examining the feasibility of creating a central pool of unutilised resources for accelerating the implementation of projects in the region," he added.

Vajpayee told his Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani to hold a similar meeting with the eight chief ministers on ways to end extremist violence and cross-border infiltration.



Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi lights candles to inaugurate a function held to celebrate the birth anniversary of N S Hardikar, the founder of the Congress Volunteers Corps in New Delhi Thursday.

—AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Judge shot dead in Germany:

A German judge was shot dead in his court office in the city of Essen on Thursday by a man he fined 17 years ago for minor fraud offences, police said. Reuters says from Essen Germany.

The 69-year-old attacker then shot himself on the spot. "The man fired several shots at the judge, at first missing as the judge sought to flee by the door, he was hit in the head by one shot and by another as he lay on the floor," state prosecutor Bernd Schmitzhausen told a news conference.

Clinton cancels N Ireland visit:

President Bill Clinton has scrapped plans for visit to Northern Ireland out of concern that his presence might disrupt the campaign for a May 22 referendum on a peace accord, the White House said Thursday, AP reports from Washington.

The president planned to meet to meet during the day with victims of violence in Northern Ireland and announce initiatives to spur economic development in the area. He also was calling on Congress to approve the administration's request for 75 million dollars over two years for an international fund for Ireland. Clinton had considered visiting Belfast and Dublin in mid-May at the end of the annual summit of industrialized nations.

Australian jets to leave Gulf:

Part of Australia's contribution to the international coalition of forces in the Persian gulf will be withdrawn, Defence Minister Ian McLachlan said Friday, AP reports from Canberra.

Two Australian Air Force refueling aircraft, both 707s, and support personnel will be recalled, McLachlan said. He did not name a withdrawal date as said they will return soon. That will leave an Australian contingent of about 30 commandos and 110 members of the elite Special Air Services Regiment in the Gulf region.

20 die as bldg collapses in China:

At least 20 people were killed in a building collapse in the southern Chinese city of Zhuhai, it was reported in Hong Kong yesterday. AP says from Hong Kong.

Another 15 were also said to be missing after a row of five residential buildings ranging from two to five storeys, tumbled on Wednesday, a Chinese language Apple daily citing reports in Guangzhou said.

Military plane crashes in ROK:

A South Korean military aerobatics plane crashed Friday after an in-flight scrape with another plane, the air force said. The pilot was missing, AP reports from Seoul.

The A-37 Dragon Fly jet went down near Chunchon, 80 km west of Seoul after scraping its wing with another plane. The other plane landed safely in a nearby military airport with a minor damage on one of its wings. The air force's six-plane Black Eagles aerobatics team was training for the second international Seoul Air Show slated for October when the accident occurred.

Constitutional council formed in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, May 8: The Cambodian National Assembly voted Friday to place three of its members loyal to government leader Hun Sen's powerful political party on the constitutional council, a body assigned to resolve election-related disputes, reports AP.

The move, critics said, further skews the July polls in favor of Hun Sen, who ousted Prince Norodom Ranariddh as his co-premier in a bloody coup 10 months ago.

Hun Sen has sought new elections to win back aid and legitimacy lost after his violent takeover.

The nine members of the constitutional council — assigned to determine the constitutionality of all laws — could be called on to examine controversial electoral and political parties laws which have been said to favor Hun Sen.

Three of the members are to be selected by the National Assembly, three by Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, and three by the Supreme Council of Magistracy.

Members of parliament loyal to Ranariddh expressed outrage after the vote.



Flanked by his wife Nane, left, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan is led by Rwandan Parliamentary President Joseph Sebarez, right, into the Rwandan General Assembly, where he gave a brief speech to the governing body, after arriving late Thursday evening into Kigali, the Rwandan capital. Annan said Thursday the world and the UN failed Rwanda by not preventing the 1994 genocide of more than 500,000 people. —AP/UNB photo

India incapable of absorbing impact of Ghauri: Pak FM

ISLAMABAD, May 8: Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub said yesterday Pakistan had gained an edge over India in missile technology after Islamabad developed a new medium-range surface to surface missile, reports Reuters.

"In the missile race, we have overtaken them," Ayub said in an interview with Reuters television.

By developing the new 1,500-km range Ghauri missile Pakistan had shattered the "myth" of India's strategic depth and could reach any Indian city, Ayub said.

India's Prithvi missile had a much smaller range of around 200 km, he added. "Their Prithvi is 200 km. It's

a crude weapon. Our Ghauri has a range of 1,500 km and goes straight into the stratosphere 350 km up and then comes straight down and hits a target at 1,500 km in 12 minutes," Ayub said.

Ayub said if Pakistan marked Indian cities, the way Indians had every Pakistani city in their range, massive destruction could take place.

Terrible devastation which should never be talked about, discussed or thought about and it should never come to this.

Pakistan can absorb the attacks of Prithvi but India will never be able to absorb the attacks of Ghauri, he added.

Two days after disaster struck, the rescuers were still using helicopters and ladders to pluck the stranded from roofs.

The worst thing is seeing

the relatives crying in despair," said Maria Grazia Salvaturi, caked up to her knees in mud. The 20-year-old volunteer from

SARNO, Italy, May 8: With shovels, shovels and fading hopes, rescuers on Thursday dug through brick-hard rivers of mud for more victims of landslides that have killed at least 74 people in southern Italy, reports AP.

Dogs trained to sniff out avalanche victims were brought in to help the 3,000 firefighters, police and soldiers searching through towns in a 60-km wide stretch between Naples and Salerno.

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The possibility of finding more people still alive is weak, even though hope is the last to die," said Andrea Todisco, a Civil Defence official.

Some 150 millimeters, or

nearly 6 inches, of rain fell

Monday and Tuesday, triggering

torrents of mud and water

through streets.

The sun shone brightly

Thursday, but the heat baked

the mud like bricks.

Salerno, 10-km away, said she pulled the bodies of two children, but no survivors, from the mud Thursday.

RAI state television reported

Thursday evening, without cit-

ing a source, said that as many as 218 people were missing.

Civil Protection Ministry Undersecretary Franco Barberi said at least 125 were missing.

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Mudslides kill 74, scores missing in southern Italy

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