

Pakistan for strengthening UN mission in Kashmir

UNITED NATIONS, May 9: Pakistan has called for strengthening of the UN Observers' mission in Kashmir, alleging that Indian forces had killed 22 civilians in Seri village in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) on the night of April 26, reports PTI.

In a letter to the Secretary General Kofi Annan, Pakistani Ambassador to UN, Ahmad Kamal, alleged that "thorough week-long investigation into the massacre has been conducted, after a careful evaluation of all evidence, it has been established beyond any reasonable doubt that it is a trans-line of control, act of terrorism by the Indian armed forces."

The Pakistani letter, which was released by the United Nations yesterday, apparently has been sent as support for disbanding the United Nations Group in India and Pakistan (UNOGIP) is mounting.

Kamal said this "blatant incursion across the line of control by Indian military personnel has raised tension at even higher level, increasing further the threat to peace and security of the region."

Mudslide death toll rises to 112 in Italy

SARNO, Italy, May 9: As daylight broke Saturday rescue workers picked up bodies with full force, after using the quiet of the night listening for noises from any survivors buried under rivers of mud that claimed at least 112 lives, reports AP.

Civil defense officials in Sarno, the hardest hit town, said more than 200 people were likely still buried. Four days after the mudslides, it was considered highly unlikely there would be many survivors, although one young man was found on Friday evening at the bottom of a well here.

2 Indian doctors arrested for stealing kidney

NEW DELHI, May 9: Two Indian doctors have been arrested for allegedly stealing a man's kidney while he was under sedation as part of a racket in human organs, newspapers said today, reports AP.

The Hindustan Times newspaper said the two doctors from the eastern city of Ranchi, in the state of Bihar, were arrested on Friday following a complaint by a young man named Nasir Ali who accused them of removing one of his kidneys without his consent.

Ali said he was later told that the kidney had been sold to an Arab and was promised 50,000 rupees (1,282 dollars) — a sum he has yet to receive.

Police said the two doctors have been arrested on charges of wrongful confinement, cheating and endangering the life of a person they have denied involvement.

In recent years India had become a favourite for foreigners seeking kidney transplants.



President Clinton addresses military personnel and their families at Dover Air Force Base in Dover, US, Friday. Earlier, the president addressed the Delaware legislature where he urged them to embrace school accountability proposals and reduce class sizes. Defence Secretary William Cohen is seen at right. — AP/UNB photo

US envoy still trying to salvage Washington talks

RAMALLAH, West Bank, May 9: With a round of Washington talks thrown into doubt, a senior US envoy was holding last-ditch meetings Saturday with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, reports AP.

The American mediator, Dennis Ross, failed to reach an accord with Netanyahu Friday on a West Bank troop pullout, and a senior Israeli aide said afterward that Netanyahu would not attend the Washington talks, which the Clinton administration had hoped to convene Monday.

Ross was meeting with Arafat in the West Bank town of Ramallah and was to speak to Netanyahu again Saturday evening, after the end of the Jewish Sabbath.

A senior Clinton administration official in Washington, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Ross was working on "refinements" of the US pullout plan.

President Clinton had set a Monday deadline for Israel to accept the American plan, which calls for an Israeli troop pullback from 13 per cent of the West Bank, which Israel captured from Jordan in 1967. In return, Clinton had promised to begin talks on a permanent peace settlement, something Israel has pushed for.

"It's quite obvious we won't be able to reach an agreement by Sunday, which means we won't be able to be in Washington on Monday," Netanyahu's

senior aide, David Bar-Ilan, told The Associated Press on Friday.

The Palestinians have accepted Clinton's offer. By rejecting it, Netanyahu is setting himself up for an open confrontation with the administration and possible blame for a breakdown in the peace process.

In Washington, US State Department spokesman James Foley said Friday that, as far as he knew, Israel had not yet "closed the door" on the Monday meeting. If there is no breakthrough in the 14-month stalemate the United States will "re-examine" its approach to the peace process, Foley said.

It was not immediately clear

Bodo rebels torch 2 villages, kill 14 in Assam

GUWAHATI, May 9: Bodo militants gunned down 14 sahtals and wounded 19 others and torched two villages in a fresh ethnic flare up in Kokrajhar district of Assam today. Ultras stormed Borbeel village under Gossaigaon police station area at around 0330 hours and fired on sleeping villagers. Killing 10 on the spot before torching their houses, official sources said.

Of the 23 admitted to hospital, four succumbed to their wounds in hospital.

The militants also set ablaze adjoining Karagaon village before fleeing, the police said.

what other options the Clinton administration was considering.

Palestinian peace negotiator Saeb Erekat said Israel had not informed the Palestinians of their decision not to attend the Washington summit.

"Mr Ross will be seeing President Arafat Saturday and then we will know where things stand," Erekat told reporters after a Palestinian Cabinet meeting in Ramallah.

Bar-Ilan could not provide details of Friday's meeting. But Israel TV reported that Netanyahu told Ross he was furious with Hillary Rodham Clinton for her comments earlier this week in support of the eventual creation of a Palestinian state.

Mrs Clinton deviated from the US policy of not taking a position on the final status of disputed areas in which the Palestinians hope to set up their own state.

Netanyahu has said that the US plan — a 13 per cent withdrawal from the West Bank over a 12-week period — would harm Israel's security. The US proposal calls on the Palestinians to make a greater effort to fight terrorism.

The Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot said Friday that the United States was prepared to postpone the deadline for a week if Netanyahu made a real effort to sell his Cabinet on the plan. However, Netanyahu aides said the US proposal was not on the agenda for Sunday's Cabinet meeting.

Cong expresses concern over deteriorating situation

Pakistan accused of trying to 'cleanse' Kashmir of Hindus

NEW DELHI, May 9: Indian Home Minister Lal Kishna Advani accused Pakistan of trying to "cleanse" the state of Kashmir by killing Hindus in an interview published Saturday, reports AP.

Advani, number two in the new government, and outgoing chief of Premier Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist party, alleged in the Pioneer newspaper that Pakistani-trained militants were killing Hindus in the southern Jammu region.

The Pioneer quoted him as saying that the "large design" was to create further instability in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority province, and to achieve a "demographic uniformity" in the Hindu-dominated Jammu.

"The killings are aimed at forcing Hindus to flee from Jammu," and to create an ideal situation for sustaining terrorism," he said.

More than 20,000 people have died in Indian-administered Kashmir since 1989 in violence linked to a Muslim separatist drive.

India which has fought two wars with Pakistan over the Himalayan region, accuses Is-

lamabad of fomenting militancy.

Pakistan denies the charge but extends moral and diplomatic support to the separatists terming their actions as a legitimate campaign for self-rule.

Officials say nearly 50 Hindus have been killed in the past six months in Kashmir rebel attacks which the federal government has blamed on Pakistan.

Advani reiterated the charge saying "the government was aware of this." He said, moves were under way to "nip the trouble in the bud."

"We have directed security forces not to feel inhibited and to launch a full scale offensive, he added.

During the nine-year-old conflict in Kashmir more than 300,000 Hindus have left the northern Muslim dominated areas for Jammu or New Delhi.

Muslim insurgents want a UN brokered referendum to decide the future of Kashmir, the only Muslim dominated state in Hindu-majority India. Some groups want a merger with Pakistan while others want independence.

AP adds: The top politician

of India's troubled Jammu-Kashmir travelled to the southern part of the state for talks with security officials following a series of the attacks on Hindus.

Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah told reporters in Jammu Friday that his government working with federal authority planned a major military operation against Muslim militants blamed for the massacres. He refused to say when the operation would begin or provide other details.

Days before Abdullah came from his summer capital of Srinagar to Jammu, his winter capital, suspected Muslim militants killed 13 Hindus in villages north of Jammu. Those attacks came barely two weeks after guerrillas massacred 25 Hindus in a mountainous village in the region.

No group claimed responsibility for the attacks, but police blamed guerrillas fighting for the independence of predominantly Hindu India's only Muslim-majority state.

AP adds: Congress yesterday expressed concern over the fast deteriorating situation in Jammu and Kashmir and said

growing militancy in parts of the state was making people insecure and leading to migration from some areas.

Party treasurer Ahmed Patel, who just returned from a visit to the state, alleged the Farooq Abdullah government was doing precious little to help tackle the situation.

Taking a dig at BJP, he said those who were crying hoarse about the situation in the state when they were out of power were not doing anything to check militant activities even as the presence of foreign mercenaries was growing.

Patel, who also held talks with a number of partymen in the state, said it was time for Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah to act to bring back normalcy in the state.

Patel, who visited Agham in Pulwama district of the valley where a number of houses were burnt following exchange of fire between militants and security forces, also distributed relief to people of the area. He also visited Parankot village in Udhampur district where militants had killed 28 people last month.

Ranariddh backs int'l trial for Khmers

KOMPONG SPEU, Cambodia, May 9: Prince Norodom Ranariddh said Saturday that Khmer Rouge leaders should stand trial before an international court, supporting a plan proposed by Cambodian leader Hun Sen, reports AP.

Ranariddh was deposed as co-prime minister by his counterpart Hun Sen in a bloody coup d'etat last July.

Speaking to reporters during a round of golf, Ranariddh said a trial should take place as soon as possible and no one who carried out atrocities during the guerrilla's 1975-79 reign should be excluded.

As many as 2 million Cambodians perished from execu-

tions, torture, overwork and starvation during Khmer Rouge rule.

"For crimes against humanity, crimes against Cambodians, it must be an international court," said Ranariddh.

He said he saw no reason to wait until after the July 26 elections for a trial.

Hun Sen originally called for an international tribunal for the Khmer Rouge, sending a letter to the United Nations asking for help in forming one.

But in recent weeks he has backed away from the issue, saying any trial should be in a Cambodian court and only after the elections.

UN war crimes tribunal drops charges against 14 Serbs

THE HAGUE, May 9: The United Nations war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia said on Friday it had withdrawn charges against 14 Bosnian Serbs, almost a fifth of those on the prosecutor's published wanted list, reports Reuters.

It said charges against the 14 stemmed from offences at the Serb-run Keraterm and Omarska prison camps, near the town of Prijedor in north-western Bosnia.

The withdrawal followed a previously announced request from the tribunal's chief prosecutor Louise Arbour that the charges be dropped.

Arbour said it followed a reevaluation of outstanding, indictment and the need to balance the resources of the tribunal to prosecute cases "fairly and expeditiously". It was not the result of a lack of evidence.

She said it was the strategy of her office to pursue those holding higher levels of responsibility or those personally responsible for exceptionally brutal or serious offences.

"Consistent with those strategies... I decided that it was appropriate to withdraw the charges against a number of accused in what have become known as the Omarska and Keraterm indictments."

BRIEFLY

China to host genetics congress:

China will host the international congress of genetics in August in a bid to increase its grain production and improve medical treatment, the official Xinhua news agency reported Saturday, AFP says from Beijing.

The congress, expected to attract 3,000 geneticists including the top 150 names in the expanding branch of science, will focus on the theme of "Genetics — a better life for all."

Nurses continue strike in India:

More than 11,000 nurses in the Indian capital defied a government order and prolonged a strike for a fifth day today, saying they would die if their demand for wage hikes was not accepted, AFP says from New Delhi.

Gurdarshan Kaur Khurana, general secretary of the Delhi Nurses Union spearheading the strike, told AFP there could be no climbdown. Khurana scoffed at a government threat to arrest the strikers under an emergency law if they did not return to work by today.

US launches spy satellite:

A top secret spy satellite blasted off on Friday atop the US military's most powerful rocket booster, Reuters report from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

The 20-storey US Air Force Titan 4B rocket, carrying the classified national reconnaissance office spacecraft, lifted off its Cape Canaveral launch pad at 0138 GMT.

Nigerian leader arrested:

A prominent Nigerian opposition leader was arrested by security agents at Lagos airport Friday after arriving back from a trip abroad, colleagues said, AFP reports from Lagos.

Olisa Agbakoba the 45-year-old national president of the United Action for Democracy (UAD) coalition, which groups 26 pro-democracy and human rights organisations, was taken off to an unknown location after his arrest they said.

17 miners killed in China:

A flood of underground water into a coal mine in central China's Henan province has killed 17 miners and left four in critical condition, the state-run Yangcheng Evening News reported, AP says from Beijing.

The May 1 flood at the Zhenxing No 1 mine struck as about 40 mine workers were heading out of the tunnel, preparing to quit for the day. More than 20 miners managed to flee, but the others drowned, said the report, published Friday and seen in Beijing on Saturday.

Gunmen kill 4 in Italy:

Gunmen, bursting into a butcher shop and then firing at a passing car, killed four people, including a child, Friday night in an area that is the turf of organized crime, Italian news reports said, AP says from Reggio Calabria.

The motive of the attack was not immediately clear, but slayings in Calabria, the southern region that forms the 'toe' of the Italian peninsula, are often the work of the 'ndrangheta, the crime syndicate that controls drug and arms trafficking and extortion rackets in the area.

UN to monitor breach of commitments Lankan govt, LTTE promise not to use children in war

COLOMBO, May 9: Now that the United Nations has commitments from both sides of Sri Lanka's civil war not to use child fighters, it will try to ensure the promises are kept, an official said Saturday, reports AP.

The United Nations will work out a monitoring system to detect if children are used as combatants, Olara Otunnu, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special representative on children and war, told reporters at the end of a week-long visit to this Indian Ocean island.

Otunnu said he raised the issue of children in combat with the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main Tamil separatist group.

Both promised not to use fighters under the age of 18, he said.

"The most important thing was the commitment," Otunnu said. "Now that we have the commitment, we will work out the modalities of how to ensure it. The government and independent human rights groups have accused the rebels of using children as combatants in their campaign in the country's north and east where they want to set up an independent Tamil homeland.

Such accusations have not been levelled at the government. But a local news report that appeared the day Otunnu arrived in Sri Lanka said the government was planning to recruit soldiers in schools.

US Senate to consider bill for more visas Quota for skilled immigrants exhausted already: INS

WASHINGTON, May 9: The Immigration and Naturalization Service said Friday the 1998 allotment of visas for high-skilled foreigners is already exhausted and it will stop accepting new applications.

The visas in the H-1B program go to jobs such as computer programmers, health professionals and college professors.

The INS said it has already given out the 65,000 visas allowed. Last year, the first time the entire allocation was used, the ceiling wasn't hit until September.

Under the procedures outlined by INS, the freeze on new applications would last until Oct 1, the start of the new fiscal year.

Microsoft, Intel Corp, Netscape and others in the information-technology sector have been lobbying Congress to expand the H-1B program, arguing that a shortage of high-skilled talent could dampen their industry's explosive growth.

"Employers will start feeling

the effects of reaching the H-1B visa cap immediately," a business trade coalition American Business for Legal Immigration, said in a statement Friday. "Putting projects on hold and reducing levels of research and development will threaten America's high-tech leadership position."

But the Clinton administration and organized labour are leery of expanding the program, arguing that an inflow of foreign talent could keep Americans out of good-paying jobs. The Labour Department contends the first solution should be to improve training and educational opportunities for Americans.

The Senate next week will consider a bill by Sen. Spencer Abraham, chairman of the Senate Judiciary immigration subcommittee, that would add 30,000 visas this year and raise the ceiling to a maximum 115,000 in each of the next four years. His legislation also authorizes \$50 million in scholarships for low-income Americans.

Student protests claim 1st fatality

Suharto appeals for an end to violent campus protest

JAKARTA, May 9: President Suharto appealed Saturday for an end to violent campus protests against his three-decade rule and economic hardship after a bystander was killed during a fight between students and police, reports AP.

Protests continued. About 300 students at the Islamic Teaching Institute in Yogyakarta 420 east of Jakarta, hurled rocks at riot police in clashes around the campus. They were supported by ordinary people living nearby.

Police responded with baton charges and beat several demonstrators. Witnesses said

at least five people were taken away. A rock-throwing student protest was also reported in the city of Bandung.

Moses Gatutkaca, a 41-year-old businessman, became the first fatality of the increasingly confrontational student protests, caught between riot officers and demonstrators in Yogyakarta on Friday.

The Legal Aid Society said Gatutkaca was fatally clubbed by police. Authorities said the circumstances of his death were unclear. His family denied reports that he was student.

Suharto ruled out an imme-

diat Cabinet reshuffle and noted that five-year guidelines adopted the 1,000-member assembly that elected him in March set out reforms that "we have to carry out."

Hours after his departure, police scuffled with about 100 students who marched onto a Jakarta highway and blocked traffic while shouting, "Reform!" Officers in helmets used riot shields to shove the demonstrators into an alley.

"It's time for the end of the Suharto era," said Sulaiman Haikal, 21, a philosophy student.

Disappearance of people Lankan govt files 8 cases against policemen, troops

COLOMBO, May 9: The Sri Lankan government has filed eight cases against policemen, soldiers and local government officials in connection with the disappearance of thousands of people since 1988, officials said today, reports Reuters.

The cases were filed after three inquiry commissions found that some 16,742 people had disappeared since 1988, most of them during a brutal government crackdown on a left-wing youth uprising from 1988 to 1990.

Eight policemen and a soldier were being detained in connection with the cases and summons had been issued for several others.

Imelda withdraws from presidential race, backs Estrada

BATAK, Philippines, May 9: Imelda Marcos formally withdrew Saturday from the presidential race and announced she is throwing her support behind front-runner Vice President Joseph Estrada, reports AP.

The widow of dictator Ferdinand Marcos made the announcement in her husband's hometown of Batak in Ilocos Norte province where her son, Ferdinand Jr, is running for governor, and her eldest daughter, Imee, is running for a congressional seat.

Imelda announced last month that she would withdraw from Monday's election, but hundreds of supporters blocked her then from submitting a letter to the Election Commission officially withdrawing her candidacy.

She had said she was concerned about fraud and violence at the polls, but she has received only small support for her candidacy. She said last month she was staying in the race out of concern for her supporters.

In a statement Saturday, however, Imelda said her supporters have decided "officially and categorically" to allow her to quit the race.

"And therefore," she said, "we now endorse and support vice President Joseph Estrada."



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan shakes hands with a Rwandan genocide survivor as he leaves a memorial site for the 1994 genocide in Mbulire, Rwanda, 50 km southeast of the capital Kigali Friday. Annan — who on Thursday failed to offer an outright apology for the UN's lack of action during the genocide, in a speech to Parliament — said he assured the Rwandans they could count on support from him and the United Nations for help in rebuilding Rwanda, which remains one of the poorest countries in the world. — AP/UNB photo