

Cross-border firing triggers exodus from Kashmir border areas

SRINAGAR, Aug 1: The renewed heavy firing between Pakistani and Indian troops in Jammu and Kashmir has triggered another large-scale exodus of local people from the border areas reports IANS.

More than 30,000 people are estimated to have fled their homes for safer places after Pakistani artillery fire left more than 30 people dead and as many injured, Indian authorities said.

Almost the entire 800 km long Line of Control (LoC) separating the Indian and Pakistani administered areas of Kashmir is "alive," according to army officials monitoring the situation. The worst hit areas are Tangdhar, Keran, Karnah and Uri in the Kashmir valley, Kargil in Ladakh and Poonch in the Jammu region.

The death toll may be much higher, authorities say. "The

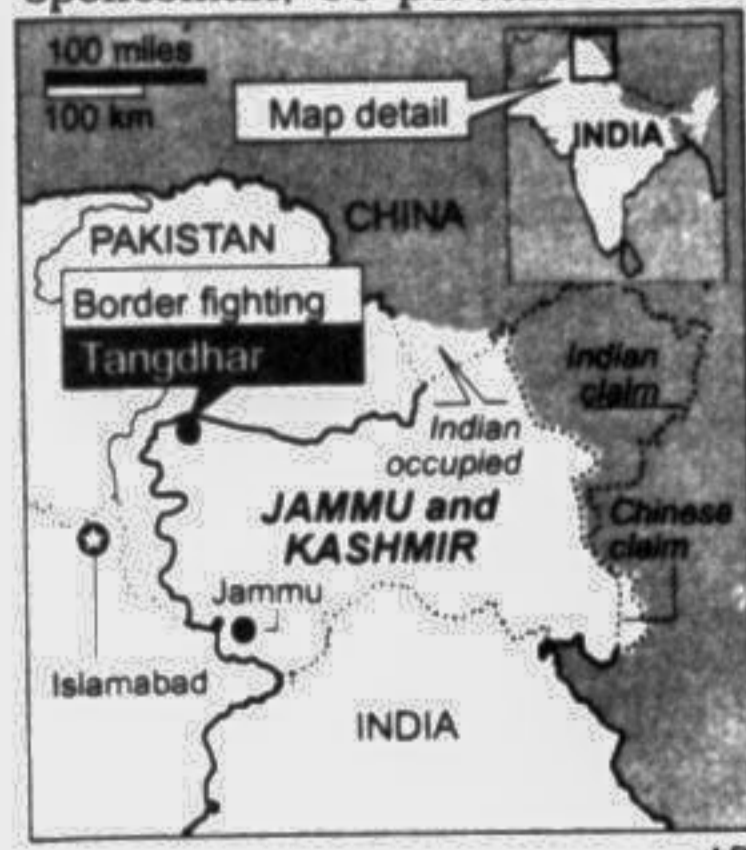
exact picture would emerge only after the firing stops," Chief Secretary Ashok Jaitly told India Abroad News Service after his visit to the border districts of Kupwara and Baramullah. His helicopter could not land in the affected areas as "shells were exploding there."

Jaitly alleged that Pakistan was "directly targeting" the civilian areas in Kashmir. He said the firing appeared to be yet another attempt by Pakistan to escalate tension when there were moves to build bridges between India and Pakistan. "Pakistan resorts to fire whenever there is a talk of peace," he charged.

The government would offer relief and compensation after assessing the damage. "Those losses can be assessed only after the firing stops," Jaitly said.

Most of the people who fled their homes had taken refuge

with their relatives and friends in Baramullah and Kupwara towns. According to an official spokesman, 80 percent of the



10,000 population of Kargil town and its surrounding villages, where shells have been pounding for the past week.

have fled their homes.

More than 20,000 others have fled their homes in the border areas and if the firing continues, their numbers may rise, authorities said.

Nearly 20 civilians were killed in Hajinar-Amrohi village in Tangdhar sector. An army hospital was also extensively damaged. It was the same story in Uri, the bowl-shaped town surrounded by mountains. Two civilians were killed and over a dozen others injured in the villages close to the LoC.

Kargil, the Shia Muslim dominated town in Buddhist-majority Ladakh region, has been reportedly the target of Pakistani troops fire since March last year. Nineteen civilians were killed in this area in September last year when a hospital, a shopline and some homes were allegedly hit by Pakistani shells.

Vajpayee upbeat about future of Indo-Pak talks despite failure

NEW DELHI, Aug 1: Though his talks with Pakistan failed, India's prime minister is sounding upbeat about the future, saying at least the two belligerent neighbours are talking again, reports AP.

"My meeting with Pakistan's prime minister has started the process of resumption of dialogue," said Atal Bihari Vajpayee, returning home Friday from a regional summit in Sri Lanka where he met privately with Nawaz Sharif. He said India was "committed to the path of discourse and discussion."

Vajpayee and Sharif met for the first time since the two countries conducted nuclear tests in May, significantly raising the stakes in the 50-year history of Indo-Pak antagonism.

Officials said the two men are likely to meet again in South Africa in September

when they attend a meeting of Nonaligned countries.

Three days of efforts by senior diplomats in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo, failed to overcome a procedural wrangle on negotiating territorial claims to Kashmir. Pakistan wants full attention devoted to Kashmir because it is the key issue, while India says Kashmir should be discussed alongside other differences.

It was the same quarrel that aborted negotiations last September in 1997. That breakdown halted formal contacts that had been revived earlier that year after a three-year hiatus.

Vajpayee took a more positive view of the encounter in Sri Lanka than Sharif, who said it produced "zero."

The Colombo summit ended in mutual recriminations, with an Indian spokesman accusing

Pakistan of being "obsessive" and "neurotic" about Kashmir, and Pakistan charging that India was "rigid and inflexible."

The summit coincided with some of the heaviest cross-border artillery duels in several years between the Indian and Pakistani armies in Kashmir, which was the battlefield of full-scale wars in 1947 and 1965.

The United States, which sent a presidential envoy to the region two weeks ago, was closely watching developments.

In Bombay, US Ambassador to India Richard Celeste said Washington was concerned about an accidental nuclear war because of the lack of command and control procedures for nuclear weapons being developed.

The cost of managing nuclear weapons safely is very high, Celeste told businessmen.

India will buy 90 anti-mine vehicles from South Africa

NEW DELHI, Aug 1: India will buy 90 anti-mine vehicles from South Africa to deal with militants and insurgents in Kashmir and north-east and will shortly sign an agreement with Pretoria for defence cooperation, reports PTI.

Talking to newspaper correspondents yesterday, Chief of Army Staff, General P Malik, who was on a week-long visit to South Africa said the deal to purchase these vehicles was finalised during his tour.

He, however, did not give details of the deal but said these vehicles would be useful in areas affected by militancy and insurgency as they had the capacity to sweep the mines laid.

The agreement will enable the two countries exchange views on strategic defence matters as also help senior defence personnel have discussions specially on subjects like Indian Ocean Rim, he said.



A Serb policeman atop an armored carrier watches traffic on the road near Podujevo, some 30km north of Pristina, in Kosovo province on Friday. US envoy Christopher Hill on Friday urged Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to allow aid workers to deliver food, medicine and blankets to tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians who fled into the hills to escape a major government offensive.

Sonia to meet party MPs

NEW DELHI, Aug 1: In a move aimed at greater interaction, Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, would meet party MPs in groups in August 3 and 4, reports PTI.

During the meetings, Sonia Gandhi, who is also the chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) would hear the problems of the states.

The announcement was made by the CPP secretary, Prithviraj Chavan.

The CPP general body meeting is being held on August 4, a day before the budget session of parliament concludes.

Indian media laments 'trivialisation' of Rajiv murder

NEW DELHI, Aug 1: Indian media today lamented the "trivialisation" of former premier Rajiv Gandhi's assassination saying New Delhi's decision to extend a probe into the 1991 murder was a step sideways, reports AFP.

The Indian Express newspaper said the Hindu nationalist-led coalition could not afford to upset Sonia Gandhi, the Congress president and widow of former premier Rajiv Gandhi nor let the assassination "issue drop."

The final report of the official probe, compiled by a panel headed by Judge Milap Chand Jain on Friday, exonerated three former premiers who were accused of involvement in the killing which has been blamed on Sri Lankan separatist guerrillas.

The government said a new panel would be formed to look into the alleged role of a regional party from southern India, the DMK, as well as that of a mysterious Hindu guru named Chandraswami.

The Indian Express newspaper editorial, headlined "The Ongoing Trivialisation of Rajiv's Death," said it was in the government's interest to keep the case in suspended animation.

Former Khmer general held for murder

TAKHMAU, Cambodia, Aug 1: Cambodian leader Hun Sen said Saturday that a former Khmer Rouge general wanted for the abduction and murder of three Western tourists in 1994 has been arrested and will stand trial in Phnom Penh, reports AP.

"This is a success for our national police," Hun Sen told reporters at his residence after briefing the ambassadors from France, Britain and Australia about the arrest. "We asked those countries to send lawyers on behalf of those victims for the trial."

Nuon Paet led a band of Khmer Rouge guerrillas who halted a train in 1994 and abducting three young Western tourists: David Wilson of Australia, Mark Slater of Britain and Jean-Michel Braquet of France.

The guerrillas, hold up on rugged Vine Mountain in the southern province of Kampot, held three months of protracted negotiations with the government before allegedly killing their captives.

KLA rebels, Belgrade troops continue fighting in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Aug 1: Kosovo Albanian separatists and Belgrade government troops fought battles on Friday in western Kosovo, near Junik close to the border with Albania, Kosovo Albanian Information Centre (KIC) said Friday, reports AFP.

According to KIC, heavy fighting continued between Serb units and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) rebels in Junik, one of the last rebel bastions in Kosovo for a sixth day.

"Local Albanian resistance forces including KLA units have been fighting strong forces of Serbian military, paramilitary and police troops," the KIC a body close to the main Albanian party in the province.

Briefly

Blast kills 2 in India: Two people, including a child, were killed and 10 others injured when a fireworks factory blew up in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, the Press Trust of India said yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Police said the explosion occurred overnight and three of the injured were in a serious condition. They said the owner of the factory had no licence.

Floods claim 12 in S Korea: Twelve people were confirmed dead and 22 others were missing following flash floods in southern South Korea as rains that have battered central and eastern China moved eastward, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Seoul.

Four people were killed when their house was buried in a landslide at Mount Chiri, while five others, who were camping on the same mountain, were swept away by torrents and presumed drowned.

Hiroshima bombing survivor dies: Japan's oldest person A A Takii, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, died at the age of 114, hospital officials said yesterday. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Takii died of heart failure on Friday. She was born in April 1884 in Hiroshima. Takii was 61 when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Chopper crashes in Russia: A helicopter crashed outside the south-central city of Penza, killing four people, a news agency reported Saturday. AP reports from Moscow.

The accident occurred around 6 pm (1400 GMT) Friday at the Sonsnovka, airport in the Penza region, about 550 km southeast of Moscow, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported citing the Emergencies Ministry.

Song remains the same as new govt takes over in Japan

TOKYO, Aug 1: Japan is a nation thirsting for change. The economy is sinking deeper into recession, its leaders are widely accused of inaction and mismanagement, and the mood is growing gloomier by the day, reports AP.

But Japan's new government will be anything but revolutionary.

In electing ruling party favorite Keizo Obuchi as prime minister Thursday, lawmakers picked an inconspicuous consensus-builder to try to rouse Japan from its malaise and win the confidence of its allies.

The choice only intensified spreading discontent among reformist lawmakers and urban voters who want to thrust the governing Liberal Democratic Party from power.

While opposition leaders kept up demands for immediate general elections to pick a new Parliament, voters were even less diplomatic.

"The person I least wanted to become prime minister won," said Yoshiki Yamaoka, 51, a trading company worker in Tokyo. "He won't be able to make decisions by himself. He'll just follow the instructions of party elders."

To be sure, Japan's economic problems seem so deep that no leader could reasonably be expected to roll into office and turn the financial mess around with a few quick reforms.

The government announced Friday that unemployment hit a record-high 4.3 per cent in June. The American credit monitoring firm Moody's Investor Service is reconsidering its top rating on Japanese government debt. Bankruptcies are piling up at a record rate.

Banks, meanwhile, are struggling to write off a growing burden of bad loans left over from the real estate market crash of the early 1990s. The government estimates banks' problem loans total 76 trillion yen (dollar 535 billion), but some experts put the figure at nearly twice that.

Obuchi's answer dovetails with what many economists recommend: Tax cuts and public works spending to stimulate the economy. He has proposed 6 trillion yen (dollar 42 billion) in tax cuts and 10 trillion yen (dollar 70 billion) in extra public works spending.

He also is pushing ahead with legislation started by his predecessor, Ryutaro Hashimoto, to liquidate failing financial institutions.

"I hope the economy will recover in around two years," he told reporters Friday at his first news conference as prime minister.

Conscious of his image as a status-quo, make-no-waves operator, Obuchi tried to jazz up the new Cabinet by appointing former Prime Minister Kitachi Miyazawa as finance chief, capitalising on that party elder's credentials as an economics expert. He served as finance minister in the 1980s and prime minister in 1991-93.

The move sparked a rally in

Troops maintain blockade around Suu Kyi's house

YANGON, Aug 1: Government security men maintained a road blockade around opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's house in central Yangon today, a few days after she was forced to end her car sit-in protest, reports Reuter.

Witnesses said about 10 anti-riot policemen watched a quiet intersection near where 100 members of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party were stopped from seeing her a day earlier.

The witnesses said vehicles were allowed to move through the junction. But traffic police asked public buses to skip a few stops near the scene.

They said a no-entry signpost was placed at a corner of the intersection leading to the University Avenue and Suu Kyi's lake-side residence a few hundred metres away.

Cohen urges Indonesian military to show restraint

JAKARTA, Aug 1: US Defence Secretary William Cohen, who has urged the Indonesian military to show restraint as their nation moves toward democracy, met Indonesia's president and top military brass Saturday at the beginning of a two-day visit, reports AP.

Cohen arrived in Jakarta late Friday from Sydney, where he and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright took part in annual talks on the state of US-Australian relations.

He met Indonesia's armed forces chief, Gen. Wiranto, at the Defence Ministry and the two then joined President BJ Habibie at the presidential palace for two hours of talks.

Cohen, who had no immediate comment, planned to hold a news conference later Friday. On Sunday, he was scheduled to fly to the Philippines, the next leg on his regional tour.

Cohen suspended joint US Military training in Indonesia in May amid rioting and

Hun Sen asks security forces not to terrorise opponents

TAKHMAU, Cambodia, Aug 1: Cambodian leader Hun Sen on Saturday called on his security forces not to terrorise members of the opposition following last Sunday's parliamentary elections, reports AP.

"My appeal is that there must not be any intimidation," Hun Sen told reporters at his home just south of the capital. His comments were aired on state-run television Saturday afternoon.

"If carried out by anyone, that person must be arrested and punished according to the law," he said. "This kind of thing is dangerous."

Hun Sen deposed Ranariddh as his co-premier in a violent coup d'etat a year ago, dismantling much of his political machine in the process. Hun Sen hopes that the elections will bring a return to political stability, as well as restore his legitimacy in the eyes of the international community and foreign aid suspended after his takeover.

The human rights situation in Cambodia has deteriorated since Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party apparently won the polls, triggering fear of retribution by his forces against those who challenged him. Complete official results have yet to be released.

Scores of supporters of Prince Norodom Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party and the Sam Rainsy party have fled Cambodia's rural areas to Phnom Penh, seeking refuge at their parties' headquarters.

"Any act to intimidate anyone is illegal, immoral and unforgivable," Hun Sen said. "It doesn't matter if they voted for us, against us, or even cursed us... There must not be any retribution."

"These incidents were mostly direct verbal threats but included other forms of intimidating behaviour," he said.

Heavy casualties reported 'Pak forces raid anti-Taliban bases in Faryab province'

ANKARA, Aug 1: Afghanistan's Northern Alliance said on Friday Pakistani forces backed by air power had attacked their positions in Faryab province in the north of the country inflicting heavy loss of life and damage to property, reports Reuter.

The Pakistani armed forces have made an attack on the Faryab province of Afghanistan by land and air which caused heavy loss of human lives and property damages said a statement by the former Afghan government faxed to Reuters from their embassy in Ankara.

The Northern Alliance forces often accuse Pakistan of backing the Taliban militia which controls two thirds of Afghanistan and is fighting to capture the rest of the country from opposition forces.

The statement said about 12 aircraft participated in the attack and that "at least 1,500 Pakistani Army commandos" had been deployed in the area it

Monica Lewinsky affair Clinton refuses to comment until he gives testimony

WASHINGTON, Aug 1: President Bill Clinton refused to comment on Friday on the Monica Lewinsky sex investigation, saying he would not speak publicly on the matter until he gives testimony to prosecutor Kenneth Starr, reports Reuters.

Acknowledging shouted questions from reporters on the scandal for the first time since he agreed to testify, Clinton said he was looking forward to giving his version of events in a videotaped deposition at the White House on August 17.

"I will do so completely and truthfully and I am anxious to do it. But I hope you can understand why in the interim I cannot do so," Clinton said.

Clinton's brief remarks came at the end of a week of sensational developments in the sex-and-perjury scandal, which in recent weeks had seemed to settle into endless legal wrangling between the White House and Starr.

Starr, saying his investigation had reached a critical stage, announced Friday he was taking an unpaid leave of absence from his Chicago-based law firm of Kirkland Ellis until he finished his work in Washington.

Off the Record

Birthday present went horribly wrong

VALLEJO, California: A woman posing for a photo with a tiger at a theme park suffered serious injuries on Friday when the animal attacked her after she fell off a platform, official said, reports Reuter.

Jannell Waldo, 45, received the photo opportunity with the 2-year-old Bengal tiger named Kuma as a birthday present said Stephanie Goodell, a spokeswoman at the Marine World Park.

But the well-intentioned present went horribly wrong when Waldo lost her balance and fell off the platform, and the tiger responded in what the park said was "an instinctively aggressive manner."

Waldo suffered scratches and bites to her head, neck, back and chest and was taken by helicopter to a nearby hospital, where a doctor said she was undergoing surgery.

One trainer also received minor scratches as he attempted to separate the tiger and Waldo.

Marine World said park visitors were never in danger from the incident but it cancelled all future public photo opportunities. Kuma was isolated for observation.

Party to cheer long-time love

LONDON: Princes Charles' early 50th birthday party wasn't the surprise that his sons had hoped, but there was one prominent unadvertised guest at Friday's celebrations, reports AP.

Camilla Parker Bowles, who reportedly met Prince William and Prince Harry for the first time only this summer, was there to cheer her long-time love, according to Press Association, the British news agency. She was among a hundred guests at the festivities at Highgrove, Charles' home in Gloucestershire in western England.

The party, arranged by Prince William, 16, and Prince Harry, 13, was well in advance of their father's actual birth date, which is November 14.

Contrary to some earlier reports, Queen Elizabeth II did not attend, but spend the weekend at her Sandringham estate. Charles' brothers, Prince Andrew and Prince Edward, were there and so was his sister, Princess Anne.

William and Harry had been planning a surprise party, but their plans were revealed by the Sunday Mirror newspaper.

"We are not confirming any details of this private party given by Prince William and Prince Harry for their father," said Charles' spokesman, Sandy Henney.

"There are no media facilities and members of the media are not welcome at the venue."

So journalists had to stand outside to see who went to the party. From their vantage point at the gates, they were able to report that Rowan Atkinson, star of "Mr. Bean," arrived in a BMW and Oscar-winning actress Emma Thompson came in a Toyota, while journalist Simon Sebag-Montefiore rolled past in a Peugeot with socialite Tara Palmer-Tomkinson.



President Clinton gestures to reporters in the White House Rose Garden Friday that he will take no questions concerning the Monica Lewinsky investigation. — AP/UNB photo

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