

BRIEFLY

Vajpayee to visit Kashmir today:

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will visit Kashmir where a Muslim separatist insurgency has left over 20,000 dead since 1989, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Srinagar. Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah said Vajpayee, who will arrive today, will tour the regions of Ladakh and Jammu in his first visit since assuming power in the head of a Hindu nationalist coalition in March.

Prof Subodh Chandra dead:

Scholar and educationist Professor Subodh Chandra Sengupta died at his south Calcutta residence on Friday after prolonged illness, family sources said. PTI reports from Calcutta.

Sengupta ex-professor of Presidency College and ex-professor of Jadavpur University, was 95 and is survived by three sons and two daughters. He happened to be one of the select few writers on Shakespearean authority. His book 'Aspects of Shakespeare's Tragedy' is taught at Oxford.

Iranian wargames begin:

Iran's navy yesterday launched manoeuvres in the gulf involving 50,000 sailors and marines with a message of friendship to Arab neighbours across the strategic waterway. Tehran radio reported. Reuters says from Tehran.

It said the main stage of the Vahdat-77 (unity-77) exercises started with a six-gun salute to the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with which Iran has been trying to improve ties.

Turkish troops kill 22 Kurd rebels:

Turkish troops killed 22 Kurdish rebels in clashes overnight in southeastern Turkey, officials said yesterday. Reuters says from Tunceli.

The heaviest fighting was in the rugged eastern province of Tunceli, where 10 Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) rebels were killed in a sweeping offensive backed by US-made Cobra and Sikorsky helicopters, military officials said.

Voting begins in Taiwan:

Voting opened at 13,472 polling stations yesterday all over Taiwan for crucial parliamentary and local elections seen to determine the island's future relations with Beijing. AFP says from Taipei.

Polling for city mayors, city council and legislative seats opened at 8:00 AM (0000 GMT) and will continue until 4:00 PM (0800 GMT).

Plane crash kills 2 in Taiwan:

Two Taiwan air force pilots were killed when their fighter plane crashed in eastern Hualian country, the military said yesterday. AFP says from Taipei.

The accident occurred Thursday night during a routine training mission when the pilots tried to land the twin-seater F-5F on a runway at the Chih Hang air base, the air force said in a statement.

3 ROK soldiers die in explosion:

Three South Korean soldiers were killed and five more injured when a gun shell exploded in a barracks, the Defence Ministry said yesterday. AP reports from Seoul.

Cpl Kang Chang-won, 21, and other soldiers were tinkering with the shell of a 90 mm recoilless gun they picked up in a range when the device exploded late Friday, the ministry said.

Jeremy Irons gets European award:

British Actor Jeremy Irons was given a European Film Academy special achievement award on Friday night at a glittering ceremony designed to be Europe's answer to the Hollywood Oscars. Reuters said from London.

Irons landed a Hollywood Oscar for "Reversal of Fortune" and sparked controversy with his latest role, that of a man obsessed with a young girl in "Lolita."

China detains 7 dissidents

BEIJING, Dec 5: Chinese police have questioned or detained seven dissidents in a widening crackdown on organizers of a political opposition party, a human rights group reported Saturday, reports AP.

Police took Wang Zechen and Wang Wenjiang from their homes in Anshan city in the northeast Friday night and their whereabouts Saturday were not known, family members and the Information Center of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said.

Wang Zechen organized a petition signed by Wang Wenjiang and 188 other dissidents Wednesday demanding police release Xu Wenli and Qin Yongmin, two of the most influential members of the dissident community.

Xu and Qin were arrested Monday night and along with a third dissident, Wang Youcai, were accused of endangering state security, apparently for spearheading a five-month campaign to form the China Democracy Party.

The accusations were the most serious leveled against campaigners lobbying to register the party legally and challenge the ruling Communist Party's 49-year ban on opposition politics.

Wang Zechen was taken away for questioning by members of the State Security Bureau, China's secret police, his family members said in a telephone interview.

Police in Beijing and Wuhan also questioned three other dissidents on Friday, veteran activist Ren Wanding, and Chen

Zhonghe and Xiao Shichang, the Hong Kong-based Information Center said.

Ren had already been warned on Wednesday to stop working for the China Democracy Party. Chen and Xiao had been arrested along with Qin Yongmin on Monday but were released after two days.

They and the two Wangs had been among dozens of dissidents trying to organize the China Democracy Party in at least nine provinces and major cities.

Two other dissidents interrogated Friday in two separate provinces had been taking part in fasts to pressure authorities to release Wang Youcai.

Anti-Milosevic politicians meet EU leaders

VIENNA, Dec 5: Prospects for peace in Kosovo and progress in the rest of Yugoslavia are dim as long as President Slobodan Milosevic remains in power, opposition politicians said Friday, reports AP.

"We must make it clear to the people that such a bad government as we have now has not served the (Yugoslav) people," Zoran Djindjic, a former Belgrade mayor, told reporters.

Djindjic made his remarks following a meeting of Serb opposition figures and Austrian Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schüssel, whose government currently holds the European Union presidency.

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