

NATO jets hit Chinese mission in Belgrade: Three killed

BEIJING, May 8: China Saturday strongly denounced the NATO attack on its Belgrade embassy that killed three people as a "barbarian act" and a war crime which must be punished as the UN Security Council expressed shock and an angry crowd pelted the US mission here with stones, reports AFP.

The Chinese government and people express their utmost indignation and severe condemnation of the barbarian act," said a government statement carried by state media.

"The US-led NATO should bear all responsibilities arising from this," it said, adding that the Chinese government reserved the right to take further action. Xinhua news agency said three people were confirmed killed, including its own correspondent Shao Yunhuan. One person was still missing and more than 20 injured.

US ambassador to Beijing James Sasser was "urgently" summoned to receive "the strongest protest" at the bombing. Xinhua said.

In Beijing's strongest condemnation of the day, China's ambassador to the United Nations Qin Huasun denounced the attack as a "crime of war" which breached the Geneva Conventions "and should be

punished."

Qin made the statement during an open session at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council.

US ambassador to the UN Peter Burleigh responded that the attack had not been confirmed as a bombing by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. He told reporters before the Security Council meeting: "In case it was a NATO bomb, it is obviously something we deeply regret and we apologize for it."

"We never target civilians and we would never target an embassy."

However Burleigh ignored a Chinese call for a halt to the air campaign, saying the conflict was caused by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's "horrendous" policies that triggered an exodus of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo.

"We will continue to take action until he agrees to the NATO demands," Burleigh said.

NATO indirectly confirmed hitting the embassy but denied targeting it and expressed "regrets" for the incident. It said the bombing would go on.

A furious mob of more than 2,000 Chinese stoned the US embassy in a rage over NATO's bombing of Beijing's Belgrade mission, while scores of police

looked on.

More than 100 uniformed police had been deployed in the embassy area as the crowd, apparently mostly university students, continued to swell but did nothing to intervene, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

However, some 30 police formed a two-deep cordon in front of the embassy gate. The police were not equipped with riot gear.

Demonstrators also threw plastic water bottles and other debris at the building, smashing an external light, and the crowd cheered as each missile was lobbed.

They chanted anti-US and anti-NATO slogans and waved banners condemning the overnight bombing in Belgrade which left at least three dead at the Belgrade embassy, according to Chinese officials.

"USA are killers," the crowd chanted, as more than 100 uniformed police watched on. "Return Chinese sovereignty."

One banner said: "USA go to hell." "NATO Nazis," said another.

"I want to exchange blood for blood," one protestor fumed.

"Down with American Americans go home," others chanted.

The news of the attack did not emerge on state television until

midday when footage of the embassy and the injured was carried, along with the government's strong condemnation of the "barbarian action."

China's leaders should take some action. We are shocked and angry," said Feng Ping, a student in her twenties. "Chinese people love peace. Why should they bomb the Chinese embassy?"

The missile attack on the embassy further inflamed people already unhappy with the NATO campaign.

In the Chinese city of Shanghai, there was no demonstration at the US consulate, but at least 20 police were guarding the compound.

Saturday's rowdy protest at the US embassy here was unusual as Chinese authorities routinely block demonstrations, regardless of their subject. Chinese state television reported the strikes in its midday news programme, showing footage of the embassy and people hurt in the strike. It also carried the official government statement.

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Angry Chinese chant anti-US slogans in front of the United States embassy Saturday in Beijing. More than 2,000 furious Chinese protested outside the US embassy against NATO's bombing of Beijing's Belgrade mission.

— AFP photo

and concern" but noting the "regrets" expressed.

The council also noted NATO was investigating Friday night's attack. It then went into open session.

Diplomats said the statement was a watered-down version of a draft proposed by China, which initially had

sought to have the attack officially branded a violation of international law.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov cancelled a trip to Britain at the last minute because of the bombing.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was "shocked and distressed" to learn of the air

strike, his spokesman Fred Eckhard said.

NATO's air campaign will however not be affected by the bombing in error of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the alliance said on Saturday.

"It is important and necessary to keep the pressure up on President Milosevic."

Six militants killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, May 8: At least six militants were killed in an encounter with police and security forces at Saloni Village in Poonch district of Jammu region yesterday, a police spokesman said, reports PTI.

The encounter between ultras and a joint police and army party started at 1100 hours and continued for over six hours, he said. Troops gunned down six militants during the encounter, the spokesman said.

The identity of slain militants was yet to be ascertained, he said, adding some arms and ammunition including six automatic rifles were recovered from the encounter site.

Blair to meet Dalai Lama in London

LONDON, May 8: British Prime Minister Tony Blair has agreed to meet Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, who flew into London Friday, the Foreign office said, reports AFP.

Blair will meet the Dalai

Lama "in his religious capacity" rather than as a political leader, a spokesman said.

It will be the Tibetan spiritual leader's first meeting with British government leaders since Blair took office in 1997. He will also meet British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.

No date has been given for the meeting during the Dalai Lama's weeklong visit to Britain.

By meeting the Dalai Lama only in his religious capacity, the British officials hope to avoid upsetting China, especially in view of a planned visit here by Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

Iraq lacks will to normalise ties: Iran

TEHRAN, May 8: Iraq lacks the political will for a rapprochement with Iran, nine years after the end of their war, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi charged today, reports AFP.

"Iraq does not have the political will to resolve its problems with Iran," Kharazi said in an interview with the English-language newspaper Kayhan International.

"As long as there is no strong political will on the part of Iraq, normalisation of relations cannot be achieved."

Iraq and Iran have yet to sign a peace treaty nine years after the end of the 1980-88 war with the fate of thousands of prisoners of war the main bone of contention between the two countries.

Tehran also accuses Iraq of supporting Iran's main armed opposition group, the People's Mujahideen.

"We want the lingering problems with Iraq to be resolved amicably," Kharazi said. "We have taken steps for normalisation of relations with Iraq but at the same time, there are a lot of obstacles."

Rebels release 7 hostages in Colombia

MONTERREY, Colombia, May 8: Colombia's second largest rebel group Friday released seven of the 32 hostages it has held since hijacking a commercial airliner last month, and asked them to deliver a message for the government, reports AFP.

Among those released was an Ecuadorian nun, Josefina Menosay, and Venezuelan national Otto Duarte, taken along with 39 other hostages April 12. The other five people released were Colombian men, held since the Avianca flight from Bucaramanga to Bogota was hijacked and forced to land on an airstrip in the jungle.

The 25 people remaining in the hands of the National Liberation Army (ELN) are being held in two groups in the same region near here where the release took place, the freed hostages told journalists.

350 Mexicans died in 1998 trying to cross into US

OAXACA, Mexico, May 8: More than 350 illegal immigrants died trying to cross Mexico border with the United States in 1998, an effect of measures to counter crossings that "we cannot tolerate," an Interior Ministry official said Friday, reports AFP.

The death of immigrants "is one of the effects that we can not tolerate" of US policies which treat immigration as a "political phenomenon and not a human one," Interior Deputy Minister Fernando Solis said.

The fences put up by US border patrol and political actions "have not reduced and will not reduce the immigration flow which is reaching an historic level," Solis told a conference here on immigration.

Above all, he said, immigration along the 3,200-kilometre common border with the United States is a "work phenomenon." "Immigration is not a criminal action, and the immigrant is not a criminal, but a person who leaves his home to look for better living conditions," Solis said.

Every day, an estimated 2,000 people try to cross the border illegally, to join the 17 million Mexican who live in the United States.

Since 1994, 1,187 people have died as they tried to cross the Rio Grande in remote areas,

PA seeks US help for speedy implementation of Wye peace accord

RAMALLAH, West Bank, May 8: The Palestinian Authority has called upon the US government to draw up a blueprint for peacemaking after the Israeli election, a senior Palestinian official said on Friday.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told Reuters he had asked senior US officials during his recent visit to Washington to prepare plans for the implementation of the Wye peace accord.

"We asked the US administration to put forward mechanisms for the implementation of the Wye deal immediately after the new Israeli government is set up," Erekat said.

Israelis vote on May 17 for a new parliament and prime minister in a general election that could be decided in a second round if none of the prime ministerial candidates get more than 50 per cent of the vote.

The new dam, capable of generating up to 6,400 megawatts, would cost more than \$3.0 billion to be shared equally between Kathmandu and New Delhi.

They make empty promises but forget everything once they win the ballot," Prem Jairu said.

Lack of water for irrigation and electricity is a key problem in Nepal, which nestles between India and China on the southern slopes of the Himalayas.

In 1996, Nepal and India signed the Mahakali River Treaty, setting out the terms for the construction of a dam to generate hydroelectric power and provide irrigation.

The new dam, capable of generating up to 6,400 megawatts, would cost more than \$3.0 billion to be shared equally between Kathmandu and New Delhi.

WASHINGTON, May 8: Several well-meaning declarations signed between India and Pakistan over the last five decades, including the Shimla Agreement, have not improved ties between the two neighbours, a leading US think tank has said.

Declarations by national leaders have improved troubled bilateral relations between countries in some cases but not in others such as India and Pakistan, the Washington-based Henry L Stimson Centre said in a recent publication.

The work titled declaratory diplomacy: rhetorical initiatives and confidence building says conciliatory public declarations and even treaties have been largely unsuccessful in improving Indo-Pak ties.

The study by Michael Krepon and P R Chari, co-director of the institute of peace and conflict studies, discussed three agreements — the Indus Waters Treaty, the Shimla Agreement and the no-war pact of friendship proposals — and concludes that leaders of both sides have used them primarily to firm up domestic support instead of building mutual confidence.

In sharp contrast, friendly public declarations by political leaders have improved Egyptian-Israeli and Argentina-Brazil relations. Similar declarations have produced mixed results in US-Soviet ties, it says.

Close Castro aide dies: Jesus Montane Oropesa, 76, a close aide to Cuban president Fidel Castro, died Friday according to Cuban radio. AFP reports from Havana.

A trusted aide-de-camp of Fidel Castro since the 1950s, Montane reportedly died of a respiratory ailment.

Bomb blast claims 5 in India: At least five alleged antisocials were killed when a bomb went off in Samastipur district yesterday, police sources said, PTI says from Sainiastpur.

The blast took place when the victims were manufacturing country bombs inside a house in Gandsara village under Saraijanan police station, the sources said.

2 DPRK men defect to ROK: Two North Koreans defected to South Korea via a third country to arrive at Seoul's Kimpo International Airport today, South Korea's foreign ministry said. Reuters says from Seoul.

The North Korean men, a 27-year-old and 19-year-old, requested asylum to escape discrimination stemming from their father's social status, a ministry statement said.

1 killed in Brazil prison rebellion: One man died and four were injured during a prison rebellion in southern Brazil on Friday, national Globo television reported.

Reuters says from Brasilia.

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14 hurt in Brazilian supermarket: At least 14 people were rushed to Sao Paulo hospitals with injuries after a supermarket roof collapsed during busy shopping hours on Friday, authorities said. Reuters says from Sao Paulo.

Wooden beams and tiles crashed down on shoppers at the Pao de Acucar supermarket in an upscale neighbourhood in Brazil's financial capital Sao Paulo shortly after 1 pm local time (2 pm EDT/1600 GMT).

Saudi minister meets Pak president: Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan ibn Abdul Aziz held a meeting with Pakistani President Muhammad Rafiq Tarar Friday, officials said, AFP reports from Islamabad.

The Prince conveyed King Fahd's "best wishes" for the people of Pakistan and expressed the confidence his visit would reinforce the cooperative relationship between the two countries, they said.

It's time to bury UN, says Iraq

BAGHDAD, May 8: A leading Iraqi newspaper said Saturday it was time to "bury" the United Nations because it had been reduced to an instrument of US policy, reports AFP.

Announcing "the death of the UN Security Council," the daily Babel said the United Nations was no longer carrying out its international role.

"It is time to bury an organisation which has not been able to defend its name or its mission," said the paper, which is run by President Saddam Hussein's eldest son, Uday.

"The world needs a jolt to awaken it from its lethargy and to emerge from the situation of despair and weariness provoked by the US hegemony," it said.

Iraq has severed cooperation with the United Nations since a US-British air war in December and wants an immediate lifting of UN sanctions which have been in force since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Romanian President Emil Constantinescu (R) speaks to Pope John Paul II (L) during their meeting in Bucharest Friday.

The Pontiff began a historical three-day visit to Romania, the first papal visit to an Orthodox country since Christendom split between East and West nearly 1,000 years ago.

— AFP photo

Pak govt to celebrate 1st N-anniversary

ISLAMABAD, May 8: The Pakistan Government yesterday finalised a programme of nationwide celebrations of the first anniversary of the country's nuclear tests on May 28, officials said, reports PTI.

A high level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also decided to observe the historic occasion as a day of takbeer, an Arabic word which signifies Allah's greatness, they said.

The programme approved by Sharif includes rallies, sport contests and song competitions as well as thanks giving prayers in mosques and hoisting of flags atop key government and private buildings.

Sharif will unveil a model of the Southwestern Chaghi Mountains where the nuclear devices were detonated.

The replica being built at the Faizabad entrance of Islamabad city will be 65 feet long 30 feet wide and 35 feet high, officials said.

At least 70 people were killed in the battle for the palace, the Portuguese news agency Lusa