

NATO launches fresh attack on Kosovo

Protesters besiege US mission in Beijing

BELGRADE, May 9: Despite criticism over its mistaken attack on the Chinese Embassy, NATO launched new attacks on military barracks, communications links and a strategic area of southwestern Kosovo where ethnic Albanian rebels are battling Serb forces, reports AP.

The Western alliance vowed Saturday the bombings would continue until Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic accepts an international plan to end the Kosovo crisis.

Leaders from non-NATO countries condemned the deadly embassy attack, and demonstrators in Beijing retaliated by throwing chunks of concrete and smashing cars at the US Embassy.

Late Saturday night, protesters broke into the US consulate in Chengdu, a southwestern city, ransacking the building and setting it on fire.

Yugoslav media said three Chinese were killed in the bombing, lowering an earlier report of four dead. Serbian television said a military attaché from the embassy was

fighting for his life.

On Sunday, a group of Chinese officials led by senior Foreign Ministry official Wang Guozhang arrived in Belgrade to investigate the attack.

Late Saturday, NATO missiles struck in Kosovo's Decan region, the state-run Tanjug news agency said.

The Kosovo Liberation Army has reported it is trying to open a corridor in that area to smuggle fighters, weapons and other supplies from nearby Albania to relieve pressure on KLA units running out of ammunition.

The private Beta news agency said NATO jets struck the Yugoslav army barracks in the center of Kragujevac, 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of Belgrade. Beta said 20 people were injured, one seriously.

NATO jets blasted a railway station near Kraljevo in central Serbia and fired two missiles at the main highway between Belgrade and Nis, Yugoslav media reported.

Witnesses said a NATO missile struck a bridge Saturday in downtown Nis, a central Ser-

bian city where cluster bombs killed 15 and wounded 60 the day before. The bridge over the Nisava river was heavily damaged but did not collapse.

Nis Mayor Zoran Zivkovic said windows at the Greek consulate were shattered and the roof damaged, according to Beta.

NATO jets fired up to 10 missiles at targets near Gnjilane in northern Kosovo, Tanjug said.

It also reported that NATO jets attacked a television relay station on Mount Rudnik, 70 kilometres (45 miles) south of Belgrade, and knocked two private television stations of the air in the region.

NATO missiles also struck a communications tower on Mt Kosmaj early Sunday, some 20 kilometres (15 miles) south of Belgrade, knocking at least two television broadcasters off the air, Tanjug reported.

Another attack by several missiles was reported on an agricultural complex near Kovacia, a mostly ethnic Slovak community 15 kilometres (nine miles) north of Belgrade. Ser-

bian television reported extensive damage.

Two missiles also destroyed the post office in Uzice, 125 kilometres (80 miles) southwest of Belgrade, damaging a nearby theater, library, health clinic and cutting telephone links to the rest of the country, Tanjug reported.

Another report adds from Beijing: Thousands of angry demonstrators besieged the US Embassy in Beijing Sunday for a second day of rock-throwing demonstrations against NATO's bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia.

In Chengdu, a city in western China, demonstrators burned a US consulate on Saturday. The consul's residence was badly damaged by fire and windows were broken, but no Americans were injured, US Embassy spokesman Tom Conney said Sunday.

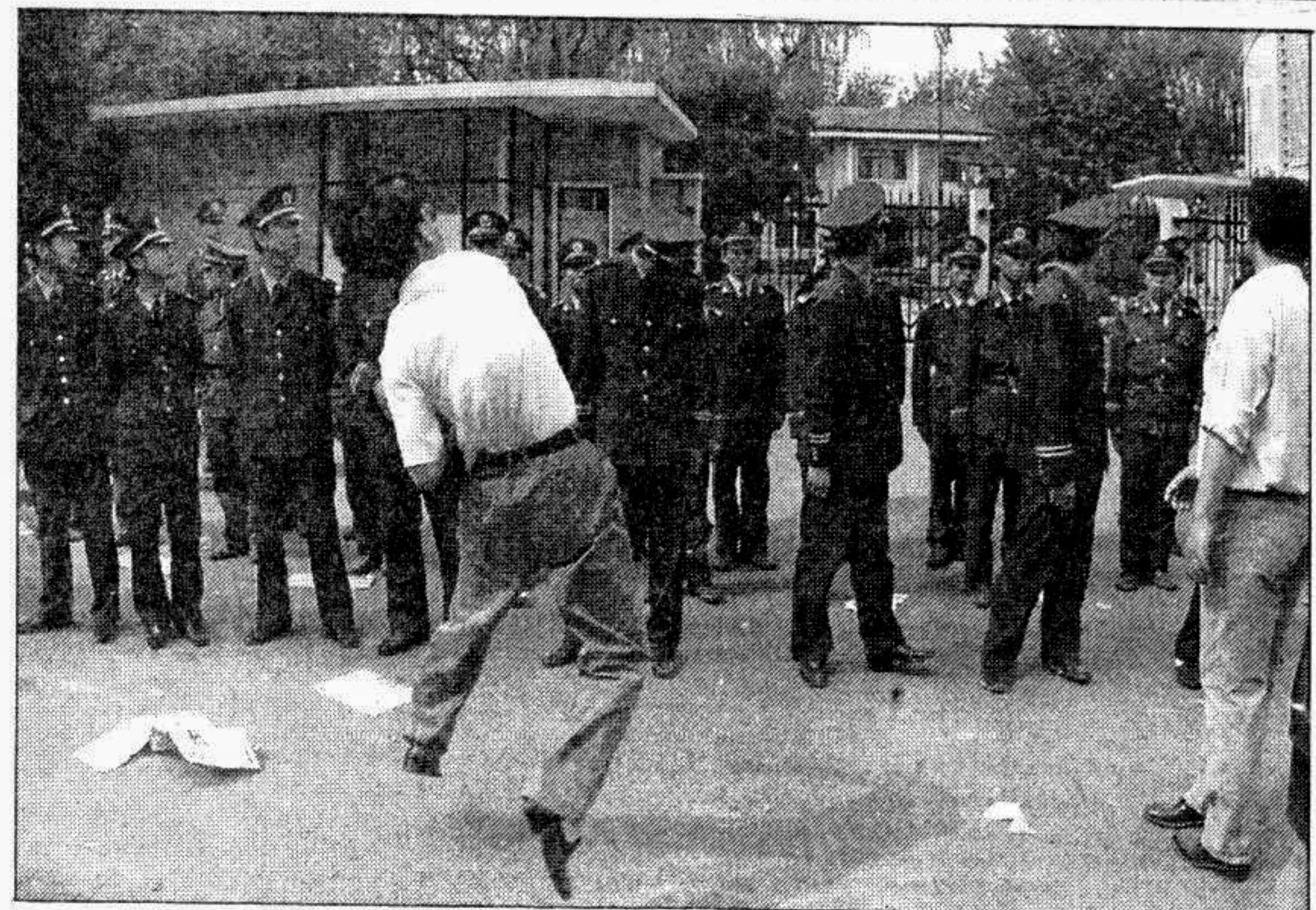
Police dispersed the protesters in Chengdu with tear gas, and the small number of staff members and their families were moved to another part of the city, the spokesman said.

In Beijing, thousands of demonstrators marched in a all-day procession past the gates of the US Embassy compound. Many hurled chunks of pavement and burning wads of newspaper at the buildings inside and shouted, "Down with the United States."

Large weekend protests against the US and NATO also were held in the cities of Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xian, Nanjing and Changsha.

US officials protested to the Chinese government and appealed for better security around the embassy, spokesman Conney said adding: "If we don't get more security the situation could slip out of control."

The communist government generally bans protests for fear they will escalate into unrest. But officials apparently felt that stopping people from publicly expressing outrage over the embassy bombing could further inflame them and possibly turn emotions against the government.



A Chinese businessman takes his rage out at the US by throwing rocks at the US Ambassador's compound while police watch in Beijing on Sunday, as protests continue for the second day. US Ambassador James Sasser, under siege from an estimated 20,000 protesters, expressed sorrow at the "tragic mistake" of an NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. — AFP photo

Upcoming polls in India

Congress may support CPI (M) at nat'l level to fight BJP

CALCUTTA, May 9: AICC General Secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad yesterday did not rule out the possibility of taking the support of the CPI (M) at the national level to fight the BJP, but refused to say if Congress would have any post-poll alliance with the Marxists, reports PTI.

"It is too early to say. We are sure to get majority on our own," Azad told a press conference here.

Stating that CPI (M) continued to be his party's main opponent in West Bengal, he said "when it comes to fighting communal monster like BJP, Congress may cooperate with the Marxists on certain issues," Azad told a press conference here.

Announcing that stability would be the main plank of the Congress for the coming Lok Sabha election, he said that his party would not have any alliance at the national level. There might be some adjustments at the state level as was done in the past, but discussion for such adjustments has not yet been initiated.

BJP, Azad said, has accepted the defeat much before the election as it was going to the polls with 18 allies. BJP had pre-poll alliance with AIADMK in the last election but Jayalalitha had withdrawn support. So where was the guarantee that no

other ally would withdraw in future, he asked.

Describing the charge that Congress was responsible for the fall of the Vajpayee government as "totally false," Azad said that the government collapsed due to its inner contradictions.

The entire Opposition, he said, was united when the BJP-led government refused to order JPC on Bhagwat issue and discuss in parliament the corruption.

Sonia Gandhi's 'nationalistic credentials' under cloud

BANGALORE, May 9: Civil Aviation Minister Ananthkumar yesterday said the dual citizenship of India and Italy allegedly held by Congress President Sonia Gandhi had raised questions about her "nationalistic credentials," reports PTI.

Speaking at a special meeting of the Karnataka unit BJP here, he asked the party workers to "educate" the people about the "foreign origin" of Sonia Gandhi and the Bofors issues. Ananthkumar said the BJP was in favour of simultaneous elections to both Lok Sabha and the state assembly.

charges raised by Mohan Guruswamy.

BJP could not manage its allies. Had the Congress made any attempt, the Vajpayee government would have fallen much before, he said.

Allies like Trinamool Congress and AIADMK regularly threatened the Vajpayee government, he said adding that the BJP-led coalition has no moral right to rule the country.

Sympathy factor for the BJP had also gone. Now the people wanted a strong one-party government at the centre. Whenever a non-Congress government was installed at the centre, it collapsed, he said.

Azad also accused the Samajwadi Party of being hand-in-glove with the BJP and said that because of the SP and BJP, an alternative secular government could not be formed.

On the statement of SP general secretary Amar Singh that Sonia Gandhi did not understand Hindi of Mulayam Singh Yadav, Azad said "Sonia Gandhi speaks better Hindi than Mulayam."

On the possibility of Priyanka Gandhi contesting the coming poll, he said that no decision in this regard was taken although there was strong demand in the party.

Lahore HC issues notices to Pak govt

ISLAMABAD, May 9: The Lahore High Court yesterday issued notices to the government on a petition seeking the production of senior journalist Nizam Sethi who was arrested earlier in the day on charges of colluding with Indian Intelligence Agency Raw, reports PTI.

Justice Faqir Muhammad Khokar issued notices to the Deputy Attorney General and Advocate General of Pakistan's Punjab Province after hearing a habeas corpus petition filed by noted lawyer Asma Jehangir on behalf of Sethi's wife, Jugno Mohsin.

The petition prayed for the production of Sethi, editor of English weekly Friday Times. Before the court with direction to the government to ensure his protection the hearing in the case was fixed for Monday.

Talks soon for coalition govts in Wales, Scotland

LONDON, May 9: Labour leaders paved the way Saturday for talks to form coalition governments in Scotland and Wales after historic elections to parliaments there, reports AFP.

The results of Thursday's votes put Labour, which already runs the country from Westminster, comfortably ahead but short of an absolute majority to rule in the regions on its own.

Labour has already started taking soundings within the party as to what to next, but in both cases the Liberal Democrats are the most likely prospective coalition partners.

The Liberal Democrat caucus met Saturday in Edinburgh to discuss strategy and afterwards Jim Wallace, its leader in Scotland, confirmed it will seek to open talks with Labour.

"It has been agreed we open substantive talks for a partnership government for the first full term of the parliament," he told reporters.

2 Philipinas to get 700 lashes in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH, May 9: Two Filipinas have been sentenced to two years in jail and 700 lashes of the whip each for carrying out illegal abortions in the Saudi kingdom, a newspaper said Sunday, reports AFP.

Al-Iqtisadiya said the sentence was handed down by an Islamic court in the Red Sea port city of Jeddah.

The women, both in their 30s, were found guilty of performing abortions at home on women over three months pregnant, it said.

Under the Islamic sharia laws enforced in Saudi Arabia, abortions are not allowed except for medical reasons, especially if the mother's life is in danger.

A Somali woman and her husband were also arrested earlier this month for carrying out illegal abortions.

— AFP photo

Taliban recapture Bamiyan city

KABUL, May 9: The Taliban today recaptured the central Afghan city of Bamiyan from the opposition northern alliance, Taliban information minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttaki told AFP.

"Bamiyan was recaptured today after the operation began from two sides, to the north and south of the city," he said.

Four soldiers loyal to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance are reported to have been killed and another 20 injured when jets of the Taliban militia bombed Bamiyan city in central Afghanistan Saturday.

The militia had lost the city to the pro-Iran Hezb-i-Wahdat faction of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance amid a reported uprising on April 21.

Bamiyan, a stronghold of mainly Shiites, Muslims was earlier seized by the headline Sunni Muslim militia in September last year.

The Taliban militia today confirmed heavy fighting was continuing in northern Kunduz province and around the strategically important Selang Tunnel.

"An offensive from Bangi (Kunduz) was repulsed. Some of the enemy personnel including commanders were killed or captured," the militia said in an official Radio Shariat broadcast.

The statement followed claims by the opposition Northern Alliance that it had captured Dawra Khanabad and a power plant at Bank-i-Barg in the same province.

Khanabad is a district which links Kunduz to Takhar and the provincial capital of Taloqan, where the alliance holds an extensive support network.

Independent sources have confirmed heavy Taliban aerial bombardments in the area.

Pakistanis crowd for Indian visas

ISLAMABAD, May 9: Under a merciless summer sun and the eyes of baton-wielding police, thousands of Pakistanis are queuing in chaotic conditions so get Indian visas after a recent thaw in relations, reports Reuters.

"The police beat me with batons and forced me to give up my place in the queue, where I was for six hours," complained 57-year-old Riazuddin, after police intervened to control more than 2,000 anxious visa seekers.

Riazuddin, is among some 2,000 people who have applied to visit relatives in India.

Most said they wanted to visit sick relatives or family members they could not manage to see because of problems

in getting visas during years of tense relations between the two neighbours.

Tense rhetoric, border clashes and the Kashmir issue have made for uneasy relations, which led to the closure of each other's consulates in Karachi and Mumbai several years ago.

But moves to normalise relations in February by Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee have created a huge demand for visas.

Mothers with infants camp on the pavement outside the Indian High Commission in Islamabad for days, sometimes weeks, creating huge crowds which spill over onto a main road through capital's diplomatic enclave.

Former Khmer Rouge chief executioner arrested

PHNOM PENH, May 9: The Cambodian government announced Sunday that missing former Khmer Rouge chief executioner "Duch" has been detained in the west of the country and whisked to the capital, reports AFP.

Legal sources said Kang Kek leu, recently tracked down by reporters living freely as a born-again Christian and aid worker before disappearing last week, was likely to face charges relating to his bloody role in the "Killing Fields" regime.

"We found him in Battambang, and now he is in Phnom Penh in a very safe place with good hospitality. His rights are being respected," chief of national police Hok Lundy told AFP.

"We are waiting for the working day to come and for the courts to commence with their work on the case," he added.

A close aide to Prime Minister Hun Sen vowed Duch would be provided full protection, attempting to allay fears expressed by rights groups and the United Nations that surviving

rebel leaders may attempt to silence Pol Pot's former security chief.

Since the dramatic uncovering of Duch, who ran a notorious Khmer Rouge torture centre during their brutal rule, fears have mounted for his safety after he expressed willingness to tell all about the rebel rule that left up to two million dead.

Heat wave claims two lives in Madhya Pradesh

BHOPAL, May 9: Heatwave has claimed two lives in Madhya Pradesh with day temperature soaring to 42 degree Celsius in several parts of the state, reports PTI.

Two tribals including a woman died due to sunstroke on Friday at village Banna in Pichhor Tehsil of Shivpuri which recorded day temperature of 44 degree Celsius, official sources said.

The victims were identified as Sabu and Lakshman, sources added.

Atonement money to wartime slaves

Japanese fund to stop payments to ROK women

TOKYO, May 9: A Japanese fund set up to give compensation cash to South Korean women used as wartime sex slaves will stop handing out money after persistent opposition from South Korea, a report said here Sunday, reports AFP.

The Asian Women's Fund, a private body set up with Japanese government subsidies in 1995, will stop offering money to South Korean "comfort women," the Yomiuri Shimbun said.

But the fund will continue to offer payments to women of other nationalities forced into Japanese military brothels during the World War II.

Historians say up to 200,000 women, mostly from Korea, but also from China, the Philippines and Indonesia, served in Japanese army brothels during World War II.

The fund has offered lump-sum financial support of two million yen (16,000 dollars) called "atonement money," to

each of the victims by using donations from Japanese citizens. It also offers to pay three million yen to each victim as medical and welfare support over five years from a state budget.

Actual payouts started in 1997 but only seven of 152 eligible South Korean women are known to have accepted the money.

Many of the now-elderly women victims who survived the atrocities have refused the payment, demanding instead official state compensation.

Japan has refused such state compensation, saying the issue was settled with the 1965 treaty on basic relations between the two countries.

The South Korean government also launched its own support programme in 1998 to former sex slaves, excluding women who receive payouts from the Japanese fund.

BRIEFLY



A monkey squeezes its body through an opening in a slit fence in Chroy Changva village east of Phnom Penh on Sunday. Although held in captivity as a pet this monkey is one of the lucky ones as Cambodians eat monkey brains as a delicacy with many ending up on the dinner plate in restaurants. — AFP photo

Maoist rebels kill 2 in Nepal

Suspected Maoist rebels opposing Nepal's constitutional monarchy shot and killed two soldiers in a remote Himalayan district, news reports said yesterday, Reuters says from Kathmandu.

The incident took place on Friday night in Rolpa district, about 450 km west of Kathmandu when suspected rebels attacked a security team guarding ballot boxes from last week's general election, Nepali daily Kantipur said. No one has claimed responsibility for the attacks, the paper added.

2 killed on Russian border

Russian border guards killed two men trying to cross into Tajikistan from Afghanistan, a news report said yesterday, AP says from Moscow. The soldiers spotted the two men trying to cross the border near the Paydzhikent checkpoint Saturday night and tried to detain them, but the suspects opened fire, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. Border guards later found two automatic rifles and several clips of ammunition on the bodies.

Dick Bogarde Dead

Dirk Bogarde, the British matinee idol who went on to win international acclaim with classic roles in films like "Death in Venice," died of a heart attack on Saturday at the age of 78, his family said, Reuters says from London.

Bogarde was also a prolific writer with seven volumes of autobiography and seven novels all becoming best-sellers. Queen Elizabeth, who knighted Bogarde in 1992, said she was saddened by the news of his death.

Imelda back to palace

MANILA, May 9: Glittering with diamonds, Imelda Marcos entered the Philippine presidential palace today for the first time in 13 years, riding a bullet proof limousine into the place where she and her late husband-dictator had ruled for two decades, reports Reuters.

And for almost three hours today, the flamboyant former first lady looked as if she had never been away.

"I am back... and how providential. It's Mother's Day, a day of love," Marcos told reporters before walking up a state to receive a trophy for being an "ideal mother."

Turning 70 in July, Marcos's

widow was among 30 Filipinas named for the award by a Manila civic group. One of the awardees was a modest 81-year-old dressmaker with 10 children.

Organisers said Marcos was chosen for the award for helping her children become successful in their careers and for her projects for the poor during her years in power.

It was the first time Marcos had been to the 19th century palace since enraged mobs hounded the family into exile in Hawaii in a 1986 "people power" revolt that ended the iron-hand rule of Ferdinand Marcos.

UN official faces mammoth task in East Timor

DILI, East Timor, May 9: The first UN police officer of an estimated 300-strong force has arrived in East Timor, but few in the troubled territory expect their presence to guarantee a tension-free autonomy vote, reports AFP.

Om Rathor, an Indian national and advisor to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on police matters, arrived here Saturday to pave the way for the rest. Dressed in civilian clothes, he went straight into talks with a group of UN technical advisors in a Dili hotel.

With just three months until polling day and pro-Indonesian militias controlling events on the ground, no one is overly hopeful the neutral force can ensure a free and fair vote on self-determination.

At an early morning mass Sunday, Dili Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo told a congregation at his residence that the UN police were on the way.

"You have a choice, vote according to your conscience," he urged his followers.

It conscience alone dictates the outcome of the vote, East Timor is likely to opt for independence on August 8 after two decades of bloody resistance to the Indonesian occupation.

The military-backed militias, however, seem bent on making the choice -- and the work of the UN officers -- as difficult as possible.

The road from Dili to Liquisa shows the obstacles the UN police are facing. Red and white Indonesian flags fly from houses whose residents whisper that they are being forced to fly them.

Liquisa itself provides bloody testimony to the enormity of the peace-keeping task. It is home to a churchyard where at least 25 refugees were hacked to death last month by the feared pro-Indonesia Besi Merah Putih (Red and White Iron) militia, which still controls the area.

"It's workable, but it's going to be tough," said Australia's ambassador to Indonesia, John McCarthy, of the UN force

India's nuclear blasts lose their impact

NEW DELHI, May 9: One year ago on Tuesday, India began a series of underground nuclear tests that sent shock waves around the world, and raised fears of a South Asian arms race as neighbouring Pakistan followed suit, reports AFP.

News of the three tests on May 11, 1998 and two more on May 13 unleashed a wave of national rejoicing, amid the widely held belief that India had finally taken its rightful place on the world stage.

But a year later, little if any of that euphoria remains.

The Hindu nationalist-led government which ordered the tests was ousted by a parliamentary vote of confidence last month, while many of the international sanctions imposed on both India and Pakistan remain in place.

According to political analyst Ajit Bhattacharjee, the tests failed to realise any tangible gains, and were an unaffordable luxury in a country where one third of the near-one billion population lives in abject poverty.

"Is it worth spending so much money simply to effect a balance with Pakistan and reduce the prospects of a conjugal war?" Bhattacharjee said.

He also mocked the Hindu nationalists' contention that the tests had sent an effective warning to Beijing that India would not stand by while China pushed ahead with a military modernisation programme.

"China exploded their first nuclear device about 35 years before we did it again last year, so they have an insurmountable advantage," Bhattacharjee said. "Moreover, they are far ahead of us in their economy."

The tests attracted global condemnation and the Indian government was widely blamed by domestic critics for failing to get across its message as to why India felt they were necessary for its national security.

"I have never seen India so disadvantaged," Bhattacharjee said.

Nevertheless, outgoing Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party continues to refer to the

tests as one of the "golden achievements" of its 13-month coalition rule and plans to highlight the event during campaigning for the September-October general elections.

According to Uday Bhaskar, from the independent Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, the BJP strategy is well-founded.

"In real politics, power respects power," Bhaskar said. "We have crossed the Rubicon and we should not be apologetic about something we should have done decades ago. We have to carry the whole thing forward."

Bhaskar also argued that the tests had achieved two important strategic objectives.

"Pakistan had gone covertly nuclear in 1986-87. We had to smoke them out and we did. We also exposed Pakistan's military relationship with China," he said.

Despite the tests, India remains firmly barred from official membership of the exclusive global nuclear club -- comprising Britain, China, France,

Russia and the United States.

At the same time, it is under intense pressure to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, halt further fissile material production, strengthen export controls and exercise mutual restraint with Pakistan in weapons development.

International concerns that the tests dangerously raised the stakes in the long-standing enmity between India and Pakistan have also led to louder calls for third-party arbitration in their bitter dispute over.

For the average Indian, the tests have had little impact, apart perhaps from some enlarged sense of national pride.

"We do not think it has benefited the common man," said Madhukar Pandhe, leader of the national CITU trade union umbrella group.

"Both Pakistan and India are destroying their economies by putting huge amounts in non-developmental expenditure," Pandhe said, adding that the tests had, for the most part, "been counter-productive."