

No sign of Milosevic's cracking NATO bombs Serb police HQs

BELGRADE, May 25: Despite NATO claims, Slobodan Milosevic was "cracking," there were no signs the Yugoslav president was willing to accept an allied-backed peace plan for Kosovo or that the crackdown against ethnic Albanians was easing, reports AP.

As the allied air war entered its third month, NATO bombed Serb police headquarters in downtown Belgrade early Tuesday. Serb media reported. The modern glass building had already been destroyed in an earlier allied attack on April 3. No explosion was heard in the new strike, which Serb media said was because several missiles that hit the headquarters did not explode.

Exposing just how far apart the sides are in agreeing on a peace plan, Yugoslavia's UN envoy declared Monday that NATO has no moral right to enter the country after its bombing campaign and insisted that Belgrade must be a full partner in negotiations.

"It would be really unthinkable for one sovereign country to allow its own destroyers to play the role of peacekeepers," Vladimir Jovanovic said.

If NATO troops enter Yugoslavia, he warned that

"nobody could guarantee the safety of those people because of the outrage of the population." As a key precondition to end the bombing, the United States insists that NATO troops from the "core" of an international security presence in Kosovo that would ensure the return of more than 800,000 ethnic Albanian refugees who have fled Milosevic's forces and the continued NATO strikes.

Sergio de Mello, head of the UN fact-finding mission, said visits to more than seven Kosovo towns over three days showed conditions in the province to be "a lot worse than we feared."

Although mission members were unable to visit all the places they wanted, what they heard and saw was enough for a "picture of what went on. Everything indicates that there is an attempt to displace, ethnically cleanse Kosovo," he said, calling the scale of the crisis "gigantic."

Thousands more refugees have flooded into neighbouring Macedonia in the past few days. Many said they had tried to give up under the combined weight of NATO bombing and Serb police repression.

Serbian media claimed 100 people were killed in strikes Friday and Sunday on a prison in Istok in northwestern Kosovo. There was no independent confirmation of the Radio Belgrade report; 19 had earlier been reported killed.

Early Tuesday, NATO jets fired at Mount Cer, some 100 km west of Belgrade, where a key communication transmitter is located, Serb media said. It also reported strikes at the Batajnica military airport, northwest of Belgrade, and in the capital's suburb of Rakovica, the site of a large underground military complex.

At NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, Secretary-General Javier Solana said his belief that NATO should stick with the air campaign instead of considering a ground invasion was strengthened by Milosevic's international isolation and increasing internal dissent.

"We want to maintain the strategy at this very moment which is producing results rapidly," Solana said in an interview with Associated Press Television News.

He insisted NATO unity remained strong despite British calls to send in ground troops if necessary, and said Milosevic

"is cracking. No question about it."

While Milosevic's power remains unchallenged, there were new reports of war protests.

In the Serbian towns of Krusevac and Aleksandrovac, crowds of up to 2,000 people rallied Monday against the call-up of local men for military service.

And police in Cacak, some 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Belgrade, detained three leaders of an anti-war movement, according to the Montenax news agency in Yugoslavia's junior republic, Montenegro.

Reuters adds: NATO targeted its old opponent, the Serbian Interior Ministry in Belgrade, in a fresh round of air strikes today. Yugoslavia's official news agency Tanjug said the ministry was hit at 3:05 am (0105 GMT) although no explosion was heard.

Belgrade's Civil Defence Centre said the Central City Ministry building, already badly damaged in previous attacks, was hit just before 3 am.

The Yugoslav and Serbian interior ministries were the first buildings to be attacked when NATO aircraft bombed the Yugoslav capital for the first time on April 3.



A Macedonian soldier shows a way out of the Blace refugee camp near the border with Kosovo to a group of Kosovo refugees Monday. The UNHCR pressed Macedonia to keep taking in Kosovo Albanian refugees, after it said the authorities tried overnight to send new arrivals directly to Albania.

— AFP photo

LTTE plotting to kill Sonia

NEW DELHI, May 25: India's main opposition leader Sonia Gandhi is under threat from Sri Lankan Tamil rebels who killed her husband Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, news reports said today, according to AFP.

Intelligence sources told two newspapers that Sonia was being targeted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who feared she would launch an offensive against them if she came to power.

The Hindu newspaper quoted senior intelligence officials as saying the LTTE had resolved in an April meeting in Durban, South Africa, to kill Italian-born Sonia in a car bomb attack.

The meeting also reportedly came up with a suggestion to target the 52-year-old widow in northern India "so that the need of suspicion did not indicate the involvement of any south Indian groups or the LTTE," the Hindu said.

Former premier Rajiv Gandhi was killed on May 21, 1991 in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where several LTTE members are active, during an election rally. His killer was an LTTE woman suicide bomber.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has acknowledged the threat to Sonia Gandhi's life

over the weekend and said security around her had been tightened.

Sonia's Congress Party claimed an unidentified "fascist" group was trying to kill her.

Sources said the chief of an elite commando group charged with the security of senior Indian leaders as well as the president and the prime minister, had asked Sonia to be "extra careful" when she appeared in public and to be circumspect when accepting public engagements or chalking out tours.

The Indian Express said the Federal Intelligence Bureau last week intercepted two wireless messages between an LTTE activist in Madras, the capital of India's Tamil Nadu state, and another in Sri Lanka's Jaffna town, which revealed a plan to kill Sonia.

It said the LTTE "feared a crackdown on its bases if she became prime minister" after India's national elections in September-October.

Earlier this month, India's Supreme Court acquitted 19 Indians and Sri Lankans who had been previously sentenced to death by a lower court for involvement in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case but upheld the death penalty on four convicts.

'China stole all major US N-secrets'

WASHINGTON, May 25: China stole key data on every important US nuclear warhead made since the 1970s and even shared the secrets with US enemies, according to a US congressional report to be released Tuesday, reports AP.

After months of leaks to the news media, a special congressional panel under Republican Representative Christopher Cox was to release a 700-page report on Capitol Hill Tuesday morning detailing the allegations.

According to advance copies of the report:

- Stolen US technology allowed China to develop small nuclear warheads that can be used on highly mobile intercontinental ballistic missile systems.

- China stole guidance technology currently used in US missiles and advanced jet fighter airplanes.

- Chinese nuclear spying continues to this day as part of a massive effort to steal or buy US military technology.

- US counterintelligence agents began to look into spying at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico in 1995, when the CIA obtained secret Chinese documents that contained classified US nuclear weapons information. The CIA concluded that the document was provided by a Chinese double agent.

The report states that China gave weapons systems and

components based on stolen US technology to Iran, Pakistan, Libya, Syria and North Korea.

However, it does not specify which secrets China has passed on to other nations because that is classified information, Cox said.

After months of negotiations between Cox and representatives of President Bill Clinton, both sides agreed that a full 30 percent of the report would remain classified.

The New York Times described the Cox report as "a first-rate spy story. Trouble is, no one is sure what it means."

Facts surrounding the Chinese documents obtained by the CIA are so complicated they could be debated for years, intelligence officials told Times.

The newspaper quotes a statement by the Energy Department's current counterintelligence chief, Edward Curran, as saying that there is no secret information that US officials can conclusively say was stolen by Chinese spies.

Yet Cox, a conservative Republican from southern California, was adamant.

"Giving this information to the PRC (People's Republic of China) is like putting it into the stream of commerce," Cox, a conservative representative from California, said Monday.

"It will now wind up -- five years, 10 years, 15 years from now -- in the hands of terrorist regimes and rogue states," he

said.

China has not yet deployed any weapons resulting directly from the secrets stolen from the United States, which still has "overwhelming superiority," Dicks said.

The Cox committee also found that China successfully obtained secret nuclear-missile, aircraft and space-weapon technology over the past two decades, with much of the theft occurring at four US laboratories run by the Department of Energy.

The technology was transferred during commercial satellite launches, according to the report. Also, high-powered computers sold to China have been used for military purposes, it says.

Meanwhile, a US congressional report alleging China stole US nuclear weapons technology was an attempt to poison ties between Washington and Beijing, Chinese officials said Tuesday.

This kind of report is surely aimed at poisoning the relations between the two countries," a foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao told a news conference.

He said China hoped the US government would "have a clear cut attitude on this."

A special congressional panel under Republican Representative Christopher Cox was to release a 700-page report later Tuesday.

Sonia consolidates her command

NEW DELHI, May 25: India's main opposition leader Sonia Gandhi today consolidated her stranglehold over a jubilant Congress Party after her dramatic return following the expulsion of three rebels who labelled the Italian-born widow a liability, reports AP.

Sonia, who withdrew her resignation as Congress president late Monday, was to address a mammoth meeting of Congress workers at an indoor stadium in New Delhi.

The meeting was delayed by at least an hour following massive traffic snarls around the venue, where police had to beat back frenzied Congress workers who tried to enter the stadium without authorised passes.

The 1,500-odd Congress activists invited to the meeting were clearly overjoyed that a member of the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty, which has led the 114-year-old party for most of this century, was back at the helm.

Meenakshi Natarajan, a Congress worker from southern India, said Sonia "returned to the party's leadership after a week of intense pressure from admirers, including mass resignations and threats of suicide, were prayers answered."

Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, a former federal minister, said Sonia's address today was the start of its electoral campaign for the September-October national elections.

"The election campaign is going to kick off today with Sonia at the top. We are all joyful, happy that she is leading us," he said.

A Congress leader from West Bengal said the electorate would now rally around Sonia Gandhi, adding that a wave of sympathy for outgoing Hindu nationalist premier Atal Behari Vajpayee, whom Gandhi helped topple last month, would wane.

"Sonia has given us a new hope. The little depression which had settled has died out. There is a new surge of sympathy for Sonia and the temporary sympathy for Vajpayee has been wiped out," he said.

Congress workers echoed the sentiment, shouting slogans such as "Millions of hands are raised in favour of Sonia," and "Sonia we want you as our prime minister."

Similar messages were emblazoned in banners around the stadium and along a one-kilometre stretch leading to the venue.

The 52-year-old Sonia resigned as Congress president on May 17 after three party rebels said her foreign origins should disqualify her from holding the office of Indian prime minister.

She changed her mind on Monday night, giving in to relentless pleas and appeals written in blood by Congress activists.



Sonia Gandhi greets members of her main opposition Congress Party at a mammoth meeting in New Delhi Tuesday in her first public appearance since her resignation from the party's leadership on May 17. The Italian-born Sonia withdrew her resignation on Monday after the expulsion from the party of three rebel leaders who questioned her credentials on account of her foreign origin.

— AFP photo

Blast kills 39 miners in Ukraine

KIEV, Ukraine, May 25: A total of 39 miners were killed in a underground gas explosion at a mine in Ukraine, officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

Another 48 workers were hospitalised with injuries, including two miners in grave condition, said a spokeswoman at the State Work Safety Committee in Donetsk, a coal-rich area in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine has the world's highest coal industry death rate, which is usually blamed on outdated equipment and miners' neglect of safety rules.

The industry has been devastated by the former Soviet republic's protracted economic decline, and mines lack the money to modernize equipment and improve safety.

Taiwan to hold drills to test revamped forces

TAIPEI, May 25: Taiwan's military is to hold month-long exercises to test reorganised units with the first exercise starting close to the Chinese mainland Thursday, the defence ministry said today, reports AP.

The ministry downplayed the significance of the drills codenamed "Han Kuang 15," describing them as routine.

Spokesman Kung Fan-ding said only part of the exercises would be live-fire while the others would feature kriegspiel — in which figures representing forces are moved about on a large map.

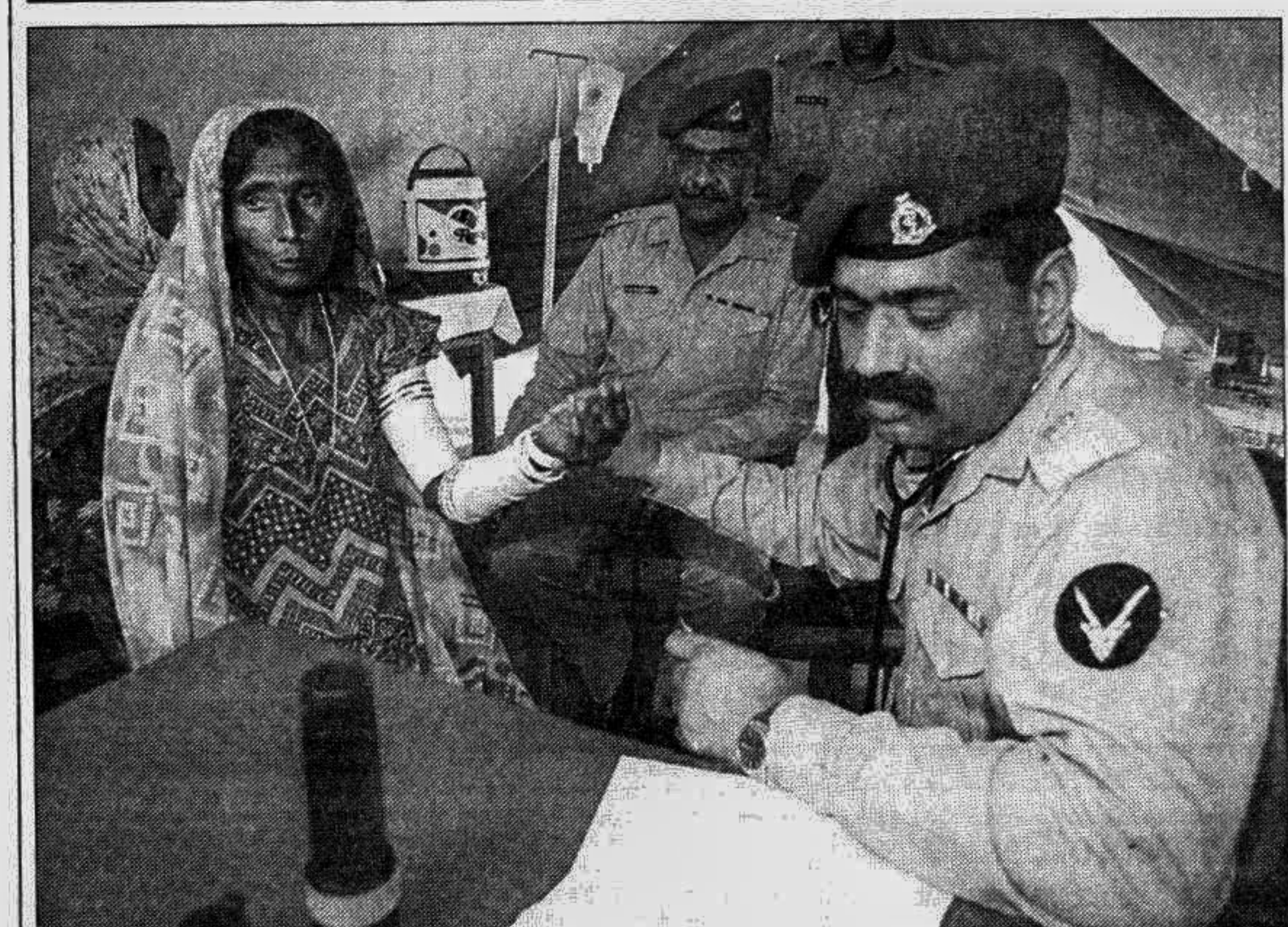
The first exercise is to begin in Kinmen (Quemoy) which is some 3,000 meters (3,270 yards) from China's Xiamen city at its nearest point, at dawn Thursday.

Australia backs UN demand on East Timor

CANBERRA, May 25: Australian on Tuesday backed a United Nations demand that Indonesia take immediate action to curtail paramilitary intimidation and violence in the lead-up to an autonomy ballot in East Timor, reports AP.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Monday reported to the Security Council that Jakarta had not kept its promise to control armed militias roaming the former Portuguese colony.

Annan reiterated that the violence must end before he gives the go-ahead for the UN-supervised ballot on August 7 that will determine whether East Timor remains part of Indonesia.



A Pakistan Army doctor attends to a woman inside a make-shift medical camp in Ahmed Raju, some 240 km southeast of Pakistan's port city of Karachi Monday. Last week a strong cyclone badly battered the country's southern coast and left hundreds homeless and claimed more than 231 lives.

— AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Bus plunge kills 9 in Assam: AT least nine people died on the spot and 13 others were injured, some of them seriously, when the bus in which they were travelling plunged into a deep pond at Chayagang, near Guwahati Monday, PTI reports.

Official sources said that the Guwahati-bound bus from Nangal with 35 passengers plunged into a pond after its driver lost control. While 13 people were rescued, several others are feared to have been trapped inside as the police launched a rescue operation, the sources said.

Militants kill 4 in Algeria: Four people were murdered Sunday night by armed Islamic militants at Fedj Moussa near Skikda in eastern Algeria, informed sources said Tuesday morning. AFP reports from Algiers. The killers slit the victims' throats, mutilated their bodies and cut their heads off, the sources said. The four dead were from two separate families. Ten people were murdered on Saturday night at Si Mahdjoub, another isolated village located near Medea, 120 km south of Algiers.

ROK president names new spy chief: President Kim Dae-jung appointed former Defence Minister Chun Yong-taek to head South Korea's powerful spy agency on Tuesday, AP reports from Seoul.

The new director of the National Intelligence Service replaced Lee Jong-chan, who had led the agency for the past 15 months. Lee returns to politics to run for Parliament next year. Chun, 63, a retired three-star general, joined President Kim's then opposition party in 1995. As a lawmaker, he unveiled a series of military-related scandals that shook the ruling party and helped Kim win election in late 1997.

Netanyahu to seek fortune on US lecture circuit

JERUSALEM, May 25: In the wake of a crushing electoral defeat, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will bow out of politics later this week in order to write a book and seek his fortune on the US lecture circuit, aides say, reports AP.

Netanyahu, 49, who resigned as head of the Likud Party soon after exit polls forecast his landslide loss May 17, also plans to surrender his seat in the 120-member Knesset at a Thursday meeting of the Likud Central Committee, aides said Monday.

Spokesman Aviv Bushinsky said Netanyahu felt "it's better to step down for a while and not be involved, and then he'll see if he wants to return to politics."

Netanyahu planned to write a book about his three years in office and had offers to address business groups, universities, Jewish organisations and institutes, many in the United States, media adviser David Bar-Illan said.

Time-Warner Books in New York said they are releasing on June 15 a hardcover book called "A Durable Peace: Israel and Its Place Among the Nations."

New axis between India, Russia & China emerging

MOSCOW, May 25: A trilateral axis between India, Russia and China appears to be emerging on the Kosovo issue with New Delhi and Moscow underlining that the similarity of approach of the three countries in the wake of NATO bombings on Yugoslavia could form basis of a joint action in international fora, reports PTI.

This became clear after yesterday's meetings External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh had with Russian leaders, including Victor Chernomyrdin, special envoy of President Boris Yeltsin on Kosovo and Secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council Vladimir Putin.

During the meetings, Singh noted that India, China and Russia have independently come to a point of view on developments in Kosovo which showed overlap in their approach. This, he suggested, should form the basis of an action the three countries would take at international fora.

Chernomyrdin, after his talks with Singh, told reporters that Russia was prepared for implementing a coordinated policy of the three countries on the issue. We are already pre-

pared for such an activity, he said.

A spokesman of the External Affairs Ministry said that the three countries are keeping in touch with each other. Approach on a pressing matter like Kosovo is a healthy development, he said.

In an apparent reference to the strategic partnership pact India and Russia are to sign later this year, the External Affairs Minister told the Russian leaders that the two countries have a strategic partnership, which might not be formally in place so far.

Another highlight of Singh's visit was his address to the Moscow State University for International Relations.

The kind of unilateralism being seen in the Balkans under the so called regional initiative of NATO was fundamentally flawed and was doing irreparable harm to the region and a grave wrong in global affairs, he said.

In the address Singh said mindless barbarity in the name of preservation of human rights is totally illogical... this example should not be emulated anywhere in the world.

India playing down border clashes

SRINAGAR, India, May 25: Seeking to dispel notions of Kashmir becoming a nuclear flashpoint, the Indian government is playing down the exchange of heavy artillery fires with Pakistani soldiers in the Himalayan mountains where suspected Pakistani guerrillas have holed up, newspapers said Tuesday, reports AP.

New Delhi hopes its army will be able to cut off supply lines to the 500 infiltrators — it won't say if they are soldiers or guerrillas — who have seized positions high up in the mountains of Kargil along the disputed border, the reports said.

New Delhi is describing the fighting as a local one because it wants to dispel the notion that the area could become a flashpoint for another war between the two countries, both of which are declared nuclear nations. The Hindu newspaper reported.

New Delhi is also keen to maintain that recent efforts by India and Pakistan to thaw relations — embodied in a declaration signed by their prime ministers in Lahore earlier this

year — are not seen as a failure. In the last two weeks, armies of both nations have fired a barrage of mortars and heavy artillery on the mountainous Kargil and Drass areas.

The Indian government accuses Pakistan of firing to help the infiltrators — it won't say if they are soldiers or guerrillas — to sneak into Kashmir, the territory over which both nations have fought for 51 years.

The infiltration is being viewed in India as a failure of its intelligence agencies, the Times of India newspaper quoted unnamed officials as saying.

Brijesh Mishra, a former career diplomat and currently the prime minister's Principal Secretary, told a television interviewer Sunday that Pakistan's elected government may not have been aware of the plans of its secret service agencies to send people across the border.

An estimated 15,000 Indian soldiers have moved into the Kargil region, the main centre of the fighting.

Resumption of ME peace talks a priority to new Israeli govt

JERUSALEM, May 25: Israel's new government will make the resumption of peace talks with Syria and the Palestinians a top priority but will not forge ahead at any price, a lawmaker close to Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak said Tuesday, reports AP. Labour party legislator Shlomo Ben-Ami spoke a day after Barak asked potential coalition partners to accept a 10-point plan that ruled out a withdrawal from all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and failed to mention peace talks with Syria and Lebanon.

The plan forms the basis of coalition talks that entered their second day Tuesday. Barak has 45 days to form a government.

The government Barak is establishing will be a government of peace, but it will be a government of a careful, skeptical and determined peace," Ben-Ami told Israel radio.

Ben-Ami said Barak has learned lessons from the past

seven years when Israel was ruled first by a narrow left-wing and then a right-wing coalition that deepened divisions among the people.

Ben-Ami said Israel's prime minister-elect is trying to establish the "broadest coalition possible" in order to have strong backing for difficult decisions he faces in the future.

The 10-point plan appeared aimed at appealing to hard-line parties, while providing enough flexibility to resume peace talks.

For example, Barak says he wants most of the Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to live in large settlement blocs under Israeli sovereignty — implying that small, isolated settlements would be dismantled.

Outgoing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, which promoted settlement building, is likely to have trouble accepting the idea of uprooting some West Bank and Gaza communities.