

International

Jakarta agrees to 50 UN military officers

UNITED NATIONS, June 11: Indonesia has agreed to allow 50 unarmed UN military liaison officers to work throughout East Timor ahead of a ballot on the territory's future...

The agreement, reported Thursday to the council by Kieran Prendergast, undersecretary-general for political affairs...

The council was expected to adopt the resolution Friday. Ahead of the vote, the council received a briefing Thursday on the situation in East Timor...

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated repeatedly that a secure environment free of violence and intimidation is a prerequisite for the ballot.

Six Gulf states to review moves for better ties with Iran today

RIYADH, June 11: The six Arab Gulf states will on Saturday review moves to improve relations with Tehran after a blazing row between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates...

The sensitive issue will on the agenda of foreign ministers from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE at their meeting in Riyadh...

The situation in Iraq and the stalemate between Baghdad and the United Nations were also to be examined at the Riyadh talks...

UAE Foreign Minister Rached Abdallah Nuaimi "will inform his fellow ministers of his country's position on the rapprochement between Tehran and certain Gulf countries..."

Gunmen kill 2 soldiers in Aceh

JAKARTA, June 11: Two Indonesian soldiers were killed and six injured when they were attacked by 10 armed men in the troubled province of Aceh today...

The troops were killed in a 45-minute shoot-out when they were ambushed as they returned to the provincial capital Banda Aceh after guarding a delayed general election vote in Lamno...

Earlier in the week, four policemen were killed earlier in north Aceh.

The province is home to the Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh) movement, which has been fighting for an Islamic state since the mid 1970s and is said by the military to have threatened voters and officials in this week's poll.

Separatists and their sympathizers called for a boycott of Monday's election, demanding a referendum on the province's future instead.

On election day, polling stations in three districts either remained closed or failed to attract any voters. Efforts to hold a new vote on Tuesday and Wednesday also failed.

1,472 died in S African police custody in 2 yrs

JOHANNESBURG, June 11: A total of 1,472 people died from police action or in police custody over the past two years, a government agency said Thursday...

Neville Melville, who heads the Independent Complaints Directorate, released the figures at a seminar on a new law intended to combat excessive police violence.

The directorate was set up after apartheid ended in 1994 to receive complaints about a misconduct of police and other government officials. The figure is in line with a report released last year that estimated 60 people died every month at the hands of police.

The issue of police brutality lingering five years after apartheid's end emerged again earlier this year, when the BBC released videos showing white cops beating handcuffed black suspects. One of the suspects later died, but it was not clear if the beating or injuries suffered during an accident caused the death.

In a separate incident, a star soccer player was attacked and shot in the shoulder after police signaled him to stop his car.

Indian outrage over dead soldiers threatens peace talks

SRINAGAR, India, June 11: India staged heavy artillery assaults in Kashmir today amid growing outrage over the mutilated bodies of Indian soldiers returned by Pakistan...

Military officials said the mutilated bodies of six Indian soldiers were to be flown to New Delhi from Kashmir later in the day and shown to the press...

Defence sources in Kashmir said Indian troops were staging fierce artillery duels in northern Indian-controlled Kashmir, in Gurez sector.

They said that 13 Indian soldiers, including an officer, died in fighting Thursday in the Kargil zone and that 25 Muslim guerrillas had also been killed in the battle.

An official said Indian military casualties had risen to 98 dead, 317 wounded and 10 missing since the fighting broke out on May 9.

An air force spokesman said India conducted "restricted operations with a few flights but no bombing" in the battle zone Friday. He said this was due to bad weather and operational reasons.

India launched a major military offensive to oust the "intruders" early May and backed it up with air strikes which have continued almost uninterrupted since May 26.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Friday said the army was "giving a befitting reply to the challenge posed by our neighbour" and reiterated Saturday's talks would have only "one point of discussion", the "Pakistani intrusions into Kargil".

Vajpayee said the Indo-Pakistani border was "clearly defined" and "marked on the maps which bear the signatures of the representatives of both the countries," reiterating on the eve of talks that Pakistani "efforts" to raise the border issue "would not succeed."

Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz is due to have talks on Saturday with his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh...

On the eve of the talks, an outraged Indian media termed the "torture" of the six soldiers -- whose genitals, ears and noses were reportedly cut off and eyes gouged out -- an attempt to force India to cancel the dialogue.

Some newspapers said the incident could even threaten the dialogue between the foreign ministers.

"Now tell Sartaj Aziz to go back. Tell him we will talk to him when we throw his troops out of our homes. It is a question of a nation's self-esteem," the Pioneer daily said, under the headline "Barbarians".

The Times of India said the "torture" of Indian troops would "further vitiate the atmosphere" between the neighbouring rivals, who have fought three wars and staged tit-for-tat nuclear tests.

"The possibility of talks being ruled out," it warned.

The Indian external affairs ministry said it will not "react in anger" and was waiting for post-mortem reports.

An Indian air force pilot was reportedly shot in the head and chest by Pakistani troops two weeks ago after his fighter plane was shot down near the Kashmir border.

The Indian Express hit out at Pakistani attempts to create a "war-like situation and inviting the world to Kashmir" and urged New Delhi not to rise to the bait.

Indian military sources in Kashmir, meanwhile, told the Press Trust of India Friday Pakistan was actively militarising its Kashmir border with an additional infantry division, a brigade and several artillery pieces and tanks being moved there.

They quoted intercepted wireless messages as their source and added the Indian army was planning a "major offensive" with the help of aerial information on guerrilla bases and camps.

NATO commander may reach Kosovo capital today

Belgrade, June 11: A first group of Russian peacekeeping troops entered Yugoslavia from Bosnia this morning -- a day before NATO forces are due to arrive in Kosovo...

NATO military sources in Macedonia confirmed that a token force of fewer than 100 Russian troops had headed to Kosovo overland from Bosnia.

They're going to get their feet on the ground first, that's what this is about," the source told Reuters.

While tensions continued between the Western alliance and Russia, which played a leading part in brokering an accord ending NATO's 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia, the news agency said a "significant number" of transporters and trucks crossed over around 10:30 am (0830 GMT).

In a story dated at the border between Bosnia and Yugoslavia, it said the vehicles, many marked with the "KFOR" sign -- the abbreviation for the international Kosovo peacekeeping force -- crossed at Pavlovic Cuprija near the Bosnian border town of Bijeljina.

It said they would go through Belgrade and head south to Kosovo, although their final destination was not known. The report did not say how many troops or vehicles were involved.

Earlier, a military source said that NATO's commander, British Lieutenant-General Sir Mike Jackson, expected to be in the Kosovo capital Pristina by Saturday afternoon after his forces secured the main road north from the Macedonian border.

Jackson planned to hold a news conference in Pristina at 1600 GMT on Saturday, the source said.

He said that the NATO plan called for the main E65 highway running from the Macedonian capital Skopje to Pristina to be made safe on Saturday.

British US German, French and Italian troops will take part in the thrust into Kosovo designed to restore peace to the southern Serbian province and allow hundreds of thousands of refugees to return.

In a sharp reminder of military and diplomatic hurdles still ahead, Russia made clear on Friday that it was still not happy in the aftermath of NATO's air campaign.

President Boris Yeltsin said that Russia's ties with the Western alliance remained frozen despite Thursday suspension of the bombing, although he did not rule out an improvement.

"Relations with NATO are frozen for the time being. As for the future, let's wait and see," RIA news agency quoted him as saying.

Talks in Moscow between Russian and US generals were suspended amid a deadlock over whether Russia would be allowed to police Serb-populated parts of Kosovo, a top Russian general said.

Leonid Ivashov, head of Russia's delegation at the talks, said the US side had asked for a time-out for further consultations. NATO says it must command peacekeepers in all of Kosovo, but Russia wants a sector of its own.

Earlier, US President Bill Clinton, in a televised address to the nation, declared victory in NATO's air campaign but said that the coming peacekeeping operation was dangerous.

He also said that Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was to blame for the Yugoslavs' suffering and the United States would give them no aid for reconstruction while he stayed in power.

NATO has massed some 17,500 troops on the borders of Kosovo, poised to march in on the heels of retreating Yugoslav forces.

The alliance's air campaign, the first action against a sovereign state in its 50-year history, began on March 24.

The Yugoslav withdrawal started the day after Belgrade finally signed a peace deal on Kosovo, where the West accuses it of pursuing a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign which has forced nearly a million ethnic Albanians to flee.

Serbian civilians in Pristina today nervously awaited the end of the pullout, which they fear will leave them exposed to ethnic Albanians bent on revenge.

Russian peace troops enter Yugoslavia

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Pawar warns against facilitating 'foreigner' to become Indian PM

MUMBAI, June 11: Nationalist Congress party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar last night exhorted people not to waste sacrifices of freedom fighters and Indian soldiers at Kargil to elect foreigners by facilitating a 'foreigner' to become Prime Minister of the country, reports PTI.

"The blood shed by freedom fighters was to force foreigners to quit India, not to facilitate foreign rule in the country" Pawar said, addressing a mammoth NCP rally at he Shivaji park in Dadar here.

At the outset of the public meeting, a two-minute silence was observed in memory of the soldiers killed in action against Pakistan-backed intruders in Kashmir.

The meeting was also addressed by NCP general secretaries P A Sangma, Tariq Anwar and its Spokesperson Devendra Dwivedi.

Film star Jeetendra, who was a star attraction at the rally, offered his good wishes to Pawar.

It was a massive show of strength by Pawar and his supporters, almost matching an election meeting addressed last year by his target of attack, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi.

An estimated crowd of two lakh people spilled over from the Shivaji Park of adjacent roads with large number of Pawar supporters from western Maharashtra and representatives from various states thronging the grounds.

A visibly elated Pawar got a rousing welcome with burst of crackers and slogan shouting by the crowd, which had waited at the venue from 1400 hours in heat.

The one-day convention, billed as the foundation session of the NCP at a defining moment of 'Indian history' unanimously adopted a six-page political resolution declaring the

Scuds were fired from an Iranian revolutionary guards' base called Muntazari at Khorramshahr, more than 800 kilometres (500 miles) to the south, according to the spokesman.

The Iraqi spokesman added: "These aggressive and stupid actions recall the senseless acts committed by the Iranian regime which waged war," with Iraq from 1980-1988.

The missiles were one of a "series of terrorist acts perpetrated by agents of the Iranian regime, including a truck bomb," on Wednesday.

Mujahedeen leader Massud Rajavi sent an urgent message overnight to UN chief Kofi Annan calling for "an end to these aggressions."

In a 90-minute programme aired by the Qatar-based al-Jazeera satellite channel, bin Laden expressed his admiration for the people who bombed American forces in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996 and said that all Americans are targets.

"They violate our land and occupy it and steal the Muslims' possessions, and when faced by resistance they call it terrorism," bin Laden said in an interview the Arab world's most popular television channel, watched by millions in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

It was uncertain when or where the interview took place. Sources at al-Jazeera said it was several months old, when bin Laden was living in a hide-out in Afghanistan. It was not clear why the interview was not aired earlier.

The government-owned al-Jazeera, accessible to satellite subscribers, regularly discusses issues usually untouched by Arab media. Satellite ownership is extremely common in the Gulf states, and access to the channel throughout the rest of the Middle East, North Africa and Europe puts the channel's viewership in the millions.

"I think that anyone who randomly wipes out people's files is totally obnoxious," the person, who asked to remain anonymous, said.

The Washington lobbying office of one major US corporation was hit on Thursday, receiving e-mail with the virus that appeared to be from company officials in other offices.

One recipient, unaware of the malicious nature of the e-mail attachment, ran the programme and lost numerous files.

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The computer bug is cleverly disguised as an e-mail that appears to be a response to an earlier message, borrowing a page from Melissa, which appeared as a benign e-mail and surreptitiously sent messages to other users.

"I received your e-mail, and I shall reply ASAP," the ExploreZip message reads. "Till then, take a look at the zipped docs."

New virus hits computers around the globe

SAN FRANCISCO, June 11: A new e-mail-borne computer infection swept the Internet on Thursday, showing up quickly in thousands of computers around the world and leading to the shutdown of some corporate e-mail systems, reports Reuters.

The new infection, "called the ExploreZip worm," can erase files from a users' computer, making it inherently more dangerous than the Melissa virus, which gained notoriety for its ability to spread quickly but not because it destroyed any data.

ExploreZip is known as a worm, not a virus, because it can't replicate itself. Computer viruses such as Melissa, which appeared in March, are written with the capability to reproduce through automation.

But even if it can't reproduce itself, it's spreading its destructive force quickly, experts said. Computers in the US, Germany,

France, Norway, Israel and the Czech Republic were invaded, said Finnish computer security firm Data Fellows Corp.

Network Associates Inc, the computer security firm, said it gave ExploreZip a "high risk" classification because the number of incidents doubled overnight and it has already shown up on thousands of computers. The company said it believes the worm originated in Israel.

The Melissa virus gained notoriety because it was the fastest-moving virus ever seen, and another recent virus, the CIH, or "Chernobyl" virus, in April, caused severe damage to a relatively small number of computers. "This worm combines the speed of Melissa with the destructive payload of the CIH virus," said Wes Wasson, director of anti-virus products at Network Associates.

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"I received your e-mail, and I shall reply ASAP," the ExploreZip message reads. "Till then, take a look at the zipped docs."

The computer experts warned users to delete that message. Users who respond by clicking on the attached file will launch the virus into their computer that will then destroy Microsoft Outlook, Express and possibly other e-mail related documents.

Leading computer security companies Network Associates (http://www.nai.com), Symantec Corp. (http://symantec.com) and Trend Micro Inc. (http://www.antivirus.com) all

Pak FM vows to seek peace in Kashmir

BEIJING, June 11: Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz told senior Chinese leaders today that Islamabad would seek a peaceful solution to the simmering conflict in Kashmir when Pakistan-Indian talks begin on Saturday in New Delhi, reports AFP.

Aziz met with Parliamentary Chairman Li Peng and Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan during a day of consultations on the Kashmir issue and other issues of common concern, China Central Television reported.

"We hope to seek out channels for a peaceful solution through the resumption of dialogue with India," Aziz was quoted as saying.

Aziz late Friday afternoon returned to Islamabad.

Aziz is scheduled to hold peace talks with Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh in the hopes of resolving the increasingly tense situation in Kashmir.

Singh will then brief the Chinese when he arrives in Beijing on Monday for a previously scheduled two-day official visit.

Pakistan releases 109 Indian fishermen

KARACHI, June 11: Around 109 Indian fishermen left for their country today after Pakistan released them amid heightened tensions in the disputed Kashmir region, officials said, reports AFP.

Officials said a Pakistan maritime security agency ship escorted the Indian fishermen to the high sea.

The fishermen were arrested last year for illegally fishing in Pakistani waters.

J.J. Parmar, deputy director of India's Fisheries Department who arrived here last week to receive the fishermen, thanked the Pakistani authorities for keeping the Indians in 'good condition'.

"It has been for the first time that our boats are kept in good working condition," Parmar added.

Ghazanfar Ali, an official of the Fishermen's Cooperative Society of Pakistan said the two governments had adopted a lenient view towards the fishermen straying into each other's waters.

They have also agreed the detained fishermen would not be treated as criminals.



A group of ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo wave as they say goodbye to their country, leaving for central Albania on Thursday in Kukes. Yugoslav troops were Thursday rolling out of Kosovo, opening the way for the end of the 11-week-old NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia.

Fierce fighting in Lanka

COLOMBO, June 11: Thousands of Sri Lankan soldiers mounted another offensive against Tamil Tiger guerrillas today, a day after fierce fighting that left nearly 100 killed on both sides, official sources said, reports AFP.

Government soldiers began advancing towards positions of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the district of Mannar after consolidating in newly taken areas since mid-May, officials said.

"The operation is underway," a military source here said adding that they were awaiting details from the battle front located some 350 kilometres north of here.

The latest military action followed intense fighting further north near the town of Paranthan where the defence ministry said troops had killed 45 guerrillas for the loss of 16 soldiers.

Another 29 soldiers were wounded in fighting that involved long-range artillery and mortar bomb attacks, officials said. Military sources said the casualties on both sides were closer to 100.

However, the LTTE's clandestine Voice of Tigers radio Friday said they lost only seven of their fighters and claimed having damaged an aircraft involved in Thursday's fighting.

Thursday's clashes were triggered when soldiers mounted a combined land and air offensive against the positions of the LTTE near the town of Paranthan, the defence ministry said.

Neither side opened fire during the confrontation, he told reporters.

S Korea drives DPRK ships away

SEOUL, June 11: South Korean navy vessels today drove four North Korean patrol ships out of the South's territorial waters in an escalation of a five-day standoff in the Yellow Sea, reports Reuters.

"We adopted a bump and push tactic between 11:40 am and 12:10 pm (0240 GMT and 0310 GMT) which pushed three North Korean patrol boats back into their territory," said Col Hwang Dong-kyu, spokesman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

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The Iraqi spokesman added: "These aggressive and stupid actions recall the senseless acts committed by the Iranian regime which waged war," with Iraq from 1980-1988.

The missiles were one of a "series of terrorist acts perpetrated by agents of the Iranian regime, including a truck bomb," on Wednesday.

Iraq accuses Iran of firing missiles

BAGHDAD, June 11: Baghdad on Friday accused Tehran of firing three long-range missiles into a military base of the Iranian People's Mujahedeen in Iraq and threatened a riposte, reports AFP.

"The Iranian regime carried out a cowardly attack against Iraq by firing on Thursday at 8:45 p.m. (1645 GMT) three long-range surface-to-surface missiles at one of the bases of the People's Mujahedeen," a government spokesman told the Iraqi News Agency.

"Let the Iranian regime be warned against continuing these aggressive actions which constitute a dangerous escalation and a threat to the sincere efforts made to restore good neighbourly relations."

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Algerian rebels kill 14

FOURTEEN people were killed overnight by Islamic extremists in the Medea region near Algiers, a security force spokesman said Friday. The bloodbath occurred in Sidi Naamane, some 70 kilometres (40 miles) south of Algiers, AFP reports from Algiers.

The directorate was set up after apartheid ended in 1994 to receive complaints about a misconduct of police and other government officials. The figure is in line with a report released last year that estimated 60 people died every month at the hands of police.

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Lanka's ruling coalition wins regional polls

COLOMBO, June 11: Sri Lanka's ruling People's Alliance coalition won the Southern Provincial Council election but fell short of gaining a majority of the 55 seats on offer, officials said today,