

International

Pakistan accuses India of firing chemical weapons

Artillery duels continue in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, June 14: India and Pakistan exchanged heavy fire on their disputed Kashmir border on Monday, a day after India warned it was ready for war if necessary following failed peace talks, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Srinagar, claimed "substantial" Indian gains and said the Pakistani shelling will not "deter" New Delhi's efforts to evict Islamic guerrillas occupying strategic Indian heights in divided Kashmir.

"Those who have come to Kargil clandestinely clearly show that they have violated all bilateral agreements" and we will not rest in peace till they are driven out, he told Indian air force personnel here.

The prime minister later left for the Indian military base

of Udhampur.

A military source reported "heavy cross-border firing" in the mountains of the northern Gurez region and in others parts of Indian-controlled Kashmir.

The source also said "artillery battles" between Indian troops and the guerrillas were raging in the main conflict zones of Drass, Batalik and Kargil.

The air force launched fresh air strikes Monday, pounding supply stores and bunkers in Drass despite foul weather, sources in New Delhi said.

"The air missions started despite cloudy conditions," an air force spokesman said, and added that Mi-17 helicopters were being used "selectively."

India pulled out its Mi-17s

from Kargil after one of the gunships was downed by a Stinger missile on May 27.

The Russian-made helicopters, each armed with 150 rockets, were re-deployed recently after they were fitted with flares that distract heat-seeking missiles, the sources said.

India says the ground-air attacks are directed on the militiamen and Pakistani army regulars who crossed a line of control into Indian Kashmir in March and occupied key heights in the disputed territory.

On Sunday, Pakistan accused India of firing chemical weapons into its territory. However, a Pakistani military spokesman said, military sources did not give details of the weapons or of any causal-

ties.

India has rejected the allegation as "malicious propaganda".

Neither India nor Pakistan are known to possess chemical weapons, or to have used them in the past, and both countries are signatories to international treaties banning their use.

On Monday, the Indian media reported an exodus from several border villages in the northern state of Punjab, which adjoins Kashmir, because of war fears.

The Indian Express said there was "panic migration" in some villages in Punjab's Attari district, near the main Indo-Pakistani road border post of Wagah.

Migration had also been reported Sunday in the Jammu region in southern Kashmir.

Peace talks only after Pakistan pulls back, says Vajpayee

NEW DELHI, June 14: Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Monday said New Delhi was ready for peace talks with Islamabad but only after Pakistan withdrew its troops from Indian territory in Kashmir, reports AFP.

"For the last 22 years there was peace on this border. You have committed this aggression. You withdraw your troops and then we are prepared for talks," Vajpayee was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India in the Kashmir town of Udhampur.

Vajpayee said his Pakistan counterpart Nawaz Sharif had called him in the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar on Sunday and repeatedly asked

for steps to de-escalate the fighting in divided Kashmir since May 9.

"I asked him who started all this?" Vajpayee said.

"If they don't understand the language of peace, we will give them a befitting reply," he told air force staff earlier Monday during an address in Srinagar.

Vajpayee went to Kashmir on Sunday in a morale-boosting exercise. He had to cut short his visit due to Pakistani shelling in Kargil but told troops that while India wanted peace, it was also ready for battle.

The prime minister dismissed the Pakistani shelling during his visit to Kargil as immaterial.

Megawati's party confident of getting most votes

JAKARTA, June 14: The opposition Indonesian Democracy Party-Struggle (PDIP) of Megawati Sukarnoputri expressed confidence Monday that it will clinch most votes from Indonesia's landmark election, reports AFP.

The PDIP will come out as the largest party, party deputy chairman Kwik Kian Gi told a seminar here.

The party leads in the vote count but has urged members not to celebrate prematurely.

By midday Monday, the PDIP had around 37.9 per cent of the 37 million votes counted, about a third of the total.

Kwik said the PDIP had prepared a general guideline for policies to be proposed to the next president for the upcoming five-year term.

He said the guidelines had been compiled involving "many competent sources from outside."

"Discqualify Golkar and PDR because they have misused the social safety net funds," the statement said.

The Urban Poor Consortium, a non-governmental organisation, last month claimed it had proof that the two parties had used funds from the social safety net programme in their campaigns.

DPRK patrol ships cross again into ROK waters

SEOUL, June 14: A tense cat-and-mouse stand off between the rival Koreas in the Yellow Sea entered its eighth day today as North Korean patrol ships crossed again into South Korean waters, a defence ministry spokesman said, reports Reuters.

"All seven ships had retreated to northern waters on Sunday but two crossed the border again at around 6:00 am (2100 GMT) on Monday. The two have remained in our water since then," the spokesman said.

Another defence ministry official said the two North Korean vessels were about 3.5 km (two miles) inside the Northern Limit Line (NLL), which forms part of a buffer zone.

He said South Korea had deployed seven navy boats against the North Korean ships.

North Korea agreed on Sunday to meet United Nations Command officers to discuss the confrontation.

An official at the UN Command said the meeting was expected to take place on Tuesday at 10:00 am (0100 GMT) in the border village of Pannmunjom. The exact time would be fixed on Monday, he said.

But Vice Defence Minister Park Yong-Ok said the navy was trying hard "to prevent an escalation of tensions" between the two Koreas, still technically at war following their 1950-53 conflict.

Senior GNP officials argued the navy's "lukewarm" response showed "serious defects" of Kim's overzealous appeasement policy.

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Off the Record

She is very different from Di

LONDON: Sophie Rhys-Jones, who marries Britain's Prince Edward Saturday, said in BBC interview she was very different from the late Princess Diana, although she acknowledged a physical resemblance between them, reports AFP.

Her husband-to-be, meanwhile, said the couple would never play on his resemblance, which he said had been hyped up by the media because it brought in revenue.

Rhys-Jones, 34, has asked not to be given the title of princess so as to avoid any further comparisons with Diana, divorced wife of Edward's elder brother Charles, who died in a car crash in Paris in 1997.

The marriage of Rhys-Jones and Edward, 35, is to be held in the chapel of Windsor Castle and not in the more prestigious Westminster Abbey. But it will still be broadcast live on BBC television and watched by 8,000 guests.



Former "Spice Girls" Geri Halliwell signs autographs to Filipino patients during her visit at the Marie Stopes clinic for reproductive health care for women in suburban Caloocan city yesterday. Halliwell is in Manila to inspect grassroots women's health programs funded by UNFPA as part of her first official fact-finding tour since her appointment as a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Goodwill Ambassador. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Mine kills two children in E Timor

At least two children were killed in a suspected landmine blast in East Timor on Monday, witnesses and a hospital nurse said. AFP reports from Dili.

Residents in Becora, in eastern Dili, the troubled territory's capital, said three children were killed by a landmine while playing in the hills there, but only two bodies had been found. The body of one child, nine-year-old Jose Manuel Soares Borges, was taken to his family home nearby to prepare for his funeral, an AFP photographer said. Another boy, whose identity was not given, was brought in a coma to Motael church but died shortly afterwards, a nurse at the hospital said. Residents in Becora said the area where the boys were playing was used as a base by pro-Indonesia militias during attacks on the pro-independence movement last month.

SLA frees 4 Lebanese prisoners: Israel's proxy defence force, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), announced today that it had released four inmates from Kham prison in Israel's self-declared "security zone" in south Lebanon, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Further details on the identities of those released were immediately available. The releases came amid an atmosphere of uncertainty over the future of the SLA since Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak has committed himself to pulling all Israeli soldiers out of the security zone within one year of taking office.

Fijian parliament takes office: Fiji's new 103-member parliament took office Monday under a cloud of controversy over procedure likely to be referred to the country's High Court, AFP reports from Suva.

The dispute centres on the nomination of eight members to the upper house, the Senate, by opposition leader Inoke Kubuabola. The Senate is a nominated body with 14 of its 32 members picked by the great council of chiefs, nine by the prime minister and eight by the leader of the opposition. One comes from the island of Rotuma. Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and Kubuabola have clashed over interpretation of a new constitution requiring the opposition's eight nominees to reflect the proportionate size of each party in the lower house.

Floods kill three in Nepal: Heavy rainfall at the onset of this year's monsoon has killed three people and damaged property across Nepal, state radio said Monday. AFP reports from Kathmandu.

Two brothers were drowned in the Khungai canal in Rupandehi district, 390 kilometres south-west of Kathmandu, after two days of continuous rain, the radio said. It described how one brother had fallen into the flooded canal and a second had been swept away trying to save him. Twenty-eight houses were also said to have been destroyed by flooding. Elsewhere, a five-year-old boy was swept away by a flooded canal near the Butwal Highway, 260 kilometres west of Kathmandu, according to the report.

Myanmar rebels claim territory in battle

MAE SOT, Thailand, June 14: Myanmar rebels today claimed they had taken control of territory around the former stronghold of drug czar Khun Sa close to the Thai border, reports AFP.

The leader of the Shan State Army's (SSA) southern region said the rebels took territory in fierce fighting with junta troops around the town of Homong just inside Myanmar.

The rebels are now in total control around Homong, Colonel Yawd Suk told AFP at a secret location on the border.

The fierce fighting earlier this month prompted Myanmar authorities to impose a nighttime curfew in border districts and to close all frontier checkpoints with Thailand.

Ecologists and the Liberals, which are on the right of the Belgian political spectrum, were the main beneficiaries of the swing against the government, registering big gains in both Wallonia, the French-speaking south of Belgium, and Flanders, the Dutch-speaking north.

No independent confirmation of his claims was immediately available, but Thai intelligence sources have reported heavy fighting between rebels and junta troops in recent weeks.

Two teams of privately-funded American researchers have begun experiments that could lead to the harvesting of human embryos, the daily reported.

Geron Corp. of Menlo Park, California is attempting to create the first batches of human embryos, while Advanced Cell Therapeutics of Worcester, Massachusetts, reportedly is attempting to clone embryos that would be part-cow, part-human.

Both companies hope to grow embryonic stem cells for medical research. Research into

Scientists closer to creating cloned human embryos

WASHINGTON, June 14: US scientists have stepped up efforts to create the first cloned human embryos, with the aim of developing new treatments to fight disease, the Washington Post reported Monday. reports AFP.

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There is currently a ban on federal funding for research using human embryos, but the practice is legal in the private sector, the Post reported.

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Migration had also been reported Sunday in the Jammu region in southern Kashmir.

Serb hardliners quit

Peacekeepers pour into Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, June 14: NATO troops poured into Kosovo on Monday on the eve of a deadline for the Serb pullout from the province, while in the western town of Pec, the German foreign minister said, British NATO forces, mean-

while, were investigating reports of a mass grave, believed to contain the bodies of murdered ethnic Albanians south of Pristina.

The peacekeepers face a tense and confused situation with thousands of ethnic Albanians giving them a hero's welcome as liberators while much of Kosovo's Serb population remained hostile and afraid of reprisals from people forced from their homes for "ethnic cleansing."

Adding to the tension is the body of an unidentified man found Monday eight kilometers (five miles) from Suva Reka, the German foreign ministry said. A press card was found with the body but the name was illegible.

The two journalists were shot dead Sunday by unidentified gunmen near the town of Stimlje, on the same road as Suva Reka, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) southwest of Pristina.

German troops are in charge of the sensitive southern sector of Kosovo which stretches from

Nick Clissitt said Sunday two Yugoslav soldiers and one Serb policeman were killed in clashes with the KLA, while Serb sources put the toll at two policemen and two Yugoslav soldiers.

British paratroopers also shot dead a Yugoslav reserve policeman, believed to be a Serb, after they were fired upon Sunday.

NATO leaders, meanwhile, appeared resigned to giving Russia an area of responsibility in Kosovo, in a deal similar to that which operates in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina, alliance diplomats said in Brussels.

They said the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation had agreed to let its generals resolve the immediate problems posed by Russia's unexpected presence in Kosovo, and its politicians define Moscow's eventual role in the province.

NATO diplomats said Russia was likely to be given either a separate area or one straddling the sectors already allotted to Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States. A Russian general would also have a post in the headquarters of the KFOR commander.

The border to Prizren, a town with a pre-conflict population of more than 100,000.

Troops shot dead a Serb sniper and seriously injured another in a shoot-out in the town centre Sunday. A German soldier was hit in the arm and two ethnic Albanians were also injured when the Serbs fired on a crowd.

NATO leaders, meanwhile, had pre-

pared a general guideline for the next president for the upcoming five-year term.

He said the guidelines had been compiled involving "many competent sources from outside."

The proposals were to be discussed during the seminar later Monday.

The PDIP will be one of the 48 political parties that contested Indonesia's first parliamentary elections since the resignation of former president Suharto last year.

Suharto's old ruling Golkar

DPRK patrol ships cross again into ROK waters

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