



US President Bill Clinton (R) walks with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (L) outside Blair House following their nearly three hours of talks on ways to end fighting in Kashmir. Clinton and Sharif agreed that "concrete steps will be taken" to restore the Line of Control between Indian and Pakistan-held Kashmir. — AFP photo

Russian forces attack gunmen in Chechnya

MOSCOW, July 5: Russian forces on Monday killed "a large number" of Chechens when its helicopter gunships attacked gunmen near the separatist republic's border with Russia, reports AFP.

"We are delivering strikes without waiting until they attack us. What happened this night firmly confirms this," Interior Minister Vladimir Rushailo said in remarks broadcast on private NTV television.

Rushailo's comments came after a Kremlin meeting with Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

We noticed a group of 150-200 gunmen armed with automatic weapons, who clearly planned to attack our border checkpoints," Rushailo said.

We used helicopters and mortar fire. The gunmen suffered losses. As far as we can tell through intercepted radio dispatches a large whole number of them were killed."

UN worried about holding E Timor referendum

DILI, Indonesia, July 5: Anti-independence militiamen in East Timor ambushed UN police officers and stoned their helicopter, prompting the world body to question Monday whether a plebiscite on independence could proceed as planned, reports AP.

The confrontation between militia members and UN staff on Sunday followed an assault on a relief convoy in the town of Liquica, some 25 KM west of the territorial capital, Dili.

The confrontation was the most serious challenge to UN authority in East Timor by militiamen vehemently opposed to the holding of the referendum. UN staff were attacked and threatened in other towns last week.

Indonesian officials announced that Liquica's police chief was replaced Monday and said more Indonesian police would be sent to East Timor to beef up security.

In Jakarta, military commander Gen. Wiranto pledged that the security forces will protect UN personnel. "Security is being guaranteed by the Indone-

sian authorities, and the police and military will ensure it," Wiranto said after a meeting with jailed East Timor guerrilla leader Jose Alexandre "Xanana" Gusmão and visiting Nobel Peace Prize winner Jose Ramos Horta.

The plebiscite will determine the future of the former Portuguese colony that was invaded and annexed by Indonesia in the mid-1970s.

Citizens of the half-island province are to choose between remaining part of Indonesia as an autonomous region or full independence.

Violence has escalated in the months since plans for the ballot were announced.

Meanwhile, the latest attack on international humanitarian workers by militiamen opposed to a referendum on independence for East Timor raises fresh concerns about whether the ballot can go ahead, UN special envoy Jamsheed Marker said Monday.

"We're very concerned," about the attack, Marker told Australian Broadcasting Corp. Radio.

BRIEFLY



UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sadako Ogata gestures as she talks with an ethnic Albanian refugee boy, Monday in the refugee camp in Stenkovac, about his return to Kosovo. Ogata was to accompany a convoy of refugees back to Pristina. — AFP photo

Blast kills 1 in Istanbul: One person was killed and 24 wounded, five of them seriously, when a bomb placed in a rubbish bin in an Istanbul park exploded Sunday evening, the NTV television news channel reported. AFP says from Ankara.

Road accident kills 29 in Cameroon: Twenty-nine people died and many others were injured when two minibuses packed with passengers were in a head-on collision Sunday some 20 km north of Yaounde, the Cameroon gendarmerie said. AFP reports from Yaounde.

Attacks continue as Delhi sees no Kashmir pullout

NEW DELHI, July 5: India has seen no sign yet of a withdrawal by infiltrators on its side of the military control line with Pakistan in Kashmir, and is continuing with its military offensive there, a defence official said today, reports Reuters.

"There is no change on the ground. Our operations are continuing. There is no change in our military posture," the official said.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and US President Bill Clinton issued a joint statement in Washington on Sunday which said that "concrete steps will be taken for the restoration of the Line of Control."

India, which launched a massive air and ground offensive against the hundreds of infiltrators in northern Kashmir last month, said it could not comment immediately on the agreement.

"It will take time to get down to the ground level," the defence official said, referring to a possible withdrawal by the militants, which New Delhi says are largely made up of Pakistani army regulars. "I can't see it happening in the next hour."

The army said on Sunday that it had won a major victory against the guerrillas, taking Tiger Hill, which commands a vital stretch of highway.

However, a military official in Kashmir said on Monday that some ridges of Tiger Hill had yet to be wrested from the infiltrators and troops were continuing efforts to take them.

He said artillery fire was continuing across several sectors of the Line of Control, the

ceasefire line drawn in 1972 after the last of three wars between the nuclear-capable rivals.

Meanwhile, a leading Islamic militant group today dissociated itself from Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's agreement to defuse tension in Kashmir and said it would not withdraw from the region.

Pakistan may withdraw, but the Mujahideen (Holy Warriors) will not withdraw," Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, Chief of Lashkar-e-Taiba and head of the Markaz-ul-Dawa-wal-Irshad organisation, told Reuters.

Saeed said Sharif did not speak for his organisation, one of several which have captured strategic heights in India Kashmir, in his talks in Washington with President Bill Clinton.

Pakistan should not accept any responsibility on behalf of the Mujahideen because those peaks are not in Pakistani Army or Pakistan government hands, but in our hands," he said. "This is our work after 10 years of sacrifices. He has no right to assume responsibility."

And if he (Sharif) does that he would lose his trust as people are fully behind the Mujahideen. This will become a problem for him politically. It is quite obvious that Nawaz Sharif was unable to truly represent his people in Washington.

A joint US-Pakistani statement said "concrete steps" would be taken to restore the Line of Control dividing Indian and Pakistan-held Kashmir to wind down the worst military standoff between India and

Pakistan in nearly three decades.

AFP adds: The Indian army is battling to advance on a new front in Kashmir where armed Muslim infiltrators stand between its forces and a strategic glacier, military officials said Monday.

Senior commanders in

Batalik, 57 kilometres north of Kargil, said troops were attacking in several sectors to flush out what they say are Pakistan-backed militias and clear a way to the Siachen glacier.

They said a 16,000-foot peak near Batalik was recaptured overnight Saturday in fierce fighting that inflicted heavy casualties on both sides.

India launched a massive military offensive on May 9 to push back the guerrillas who had set up mountain-top bunkers on the Indian side of the Line of Control dividing Indian- and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. The initial thrust of the campaign was near Drass, where troops on Sunday took the strategic Tiger Hills which overlooks the Srinagar-Leh highway.

The road is a lifeline for Indian troops fighting in Kashmir and on the 23,000-foot (6,969-metre) high Siachen glacier.

Drass was our first priority," said one military official. "Now the operations will focus more on the Batalik sector."

"Compared to Drass where the sides are steeper, the Batalik ridges are sheer and higher, so that any advance, especially through snow, is difficult," he said.

An Indian Air Force



Activists of the Communist Party of India - Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) shout slogans as they brandish anti-war placards during a demonstration Monday. The CPI-ML protested against the current conflict in Kashmir, and what it deems as growing intervention on the part of the US.

— AFP photo

spokesman said air strikes had been carried out on Monday on unspecified targets around Batalik.

During its last war with Pakistan in 1971, India wrested

control of the Turtuk region and in 1984 and 1987 occupied commanding heights on the Siachen glacier, forcing the rival Pakistani army to camp on exposed ground on the icy

wasteland.

The infiltrators are in Batalik to perhaps avenge the Turtuk humiliation and our successes on the Siachen," the official said.

Suharto files case against Time magazine

JAKARTA, July 5: Lawyers for Indonesia's former President Suharto today lodged a multi-billion-dollar defamation lawsuit against Time magazine for an article that said he had amassed a \$15 billion fortune during his 32-year rule.

We have handed over the documents at 10 O'clock this morning and now we are waiting for the date when the trial can begin," lawyer Juan Tamuburon told Reuters by telephone.

Meanwhile, former Indonesian president Suharto said Monday he had no choice but to file a multi-billion-dollar lawsuit against the US magazine Time after it accused him and his family of sitting on a fortune.

"It was not only an insult but also slander. It was not only me that has been slandered but also the Indonesian nation," Suharto told the ANTV television private television channel.



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak (R) toasts with his Foreign Minister designate David Levy (L) and other guests during the wedding of Levy's daughter Orly in Petah Tiqva Sunday. For Levy, it was a day of double celebration as he was appointed by Barak to serve again as foreign minister, a post he held under two right-wing governments and now again under the Labour leader.

— AFP photo

Joining coalition govt was a mistake: Jayalalitha

CHENNAI, July 5: AIADMK Supremo Jayalalitha last night admitted that she had made a grave error by having an alliance with the BJP in the last elections and assured minorities that she would never again commit the same mistake.

It was to make amends for my mistake that I brought down the BJP government and I can assure you that I will never again have any truck with the BJP in future," she said, addressing the "Muslims" right to live conference organised by the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK) here.

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The TMMK's conference, with the twin objective of uniting political parties opposed to the BJP-DMK front and raising

the demand for reservation for Muslims in education, employment and legislatures, was attended by representatives of all major parties barring the CPI(M) and those in the DMK front.

Tamil Maanila Congress was represented by the opposition leader in the assembly, S. Balakrishnan, who avoided sharing a platform with Jayalalitha by finishing his speech much before she arrived on stage.

Jayalalitha utilised the opportunity to categorically deny any allegation against her that she had sent AIADMKmen to participate in the "kar seva" at Ayodhya that led to the demolition of the disputed structure there in 1992.

Terming it as a lie often repeated by her detractors, she said she had taken a neutral stand at the national integration council meeting in November 1992 by urging the leaders gathered there not to see it as a "Ram Janma Bhoomi vs Babri

Masjid" issue but rather to find ways to protect the interest of the minority while respecting the freedom of the majority.

Regarding the demand raised by the TMMK at the conference, she said she would work towards creating a consensus among political parties to fulfil these demands.

The demands, articulated in the form of resolutions, included 20 per cent reservation for Muslims in the Lok Sabha, 13 per cent in the Tamil Nadu Assembly and local bodies, 20 per cent in central government employment and 13 per cent in state government service, public and private sector undertakings and in higher education.

TNCC President Tindivanam K. Ramamurthy, CPI State Secretary R. Nallakannu, Indian National League leaders Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait and M. A. Latheef, Dravidar Kazhagam general secretary K. Veeramani and leaders of smaller parties in the state participated in the conference.

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Russia, NATO resolve row over peace force

MOSCOW, July 5: Russia and NATO have removed all "obstacles" in the way of the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Kosovo, the Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement Monday, reports AFP.

"The results of the talks will allow the effective and fruitful military participation of Russia in KFOR," the defense ministry said.

The sides confirmed that there are no obstacles to the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Kosovo.

The statement added that Kosovo's Pristina airport was ready to receive Russian planes carrying troops effective immediately.

The negotiation process between Russian general chief of staff and NATO about the presence of Russian forces in a Kosovo peace mission is complete.

Although Russia and the United States clinched a deal in Helsinki last month on the deployment of 3,600 Russian

troops in KFOR, new disagreements had surfaced over the presence of the Russian contingent.

Some 120 paratroopers that were to fly to Pristina at a military airport in Ivanovo, east of Moscow, as Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania continued to deny them permission to enter their air space.

Hungary, a NATO country, and the two other states, refused to grant Moscow clearance to overfly their territories after consulting with NATO, which insisted that details on the role of the Russian peacekeepers had to be worked out.

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Sunday was to see the beginning of a deployment that would bring the total up to 3,600, still far less than NATO's planned 50,000 but enough to have a significant presence on the ground.

But Washington persuaded Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria to close their air space to Russian troops on Saturday.

Blair seeks Protestants' support

LONDON, July 5: British Prime Minister Tony Blair Monday sought to win the crucial support of Northern Ireland's Protestant unionists for his peace blueprint, which they have so far branded a betrayal, reports AFP.

After making a statement to the British parliament on the plan, Blair may meet members of the province's key Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) at Downing Street to urge them to back the plan, his office said.

The British government was encouraged by Sunday's unexpected trouble-free Protestant parade through Portadown, west of Belfast, where security was boosted to stop violent clashes between marchers and Roman Catholic residents.

The pro-British unionists, who form the majority in the province, now have two weeks to back the plan, as does their chief rival, the political wing of the IRA, Sinn Fein. Without such support, the plan collapses.

Almost as soon as Blair and his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern unveiled their so-called "Way Forward" for the embattled province on Friday, it was

assailed by senior unionists who said the two premiers had been deceived by Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams.

They feel betrayed by the plan which asks them to abandon their long-held demand that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) lays down its arms before unionists form a power-sharing government with Sinn Fein.

Under the plan, unionists would set up a power-sharing government with Sinn Fein on July 15. Only after this would the process of disarming the IRA begin.

Critics point out that not only are unionists being put in the unenviable position of making or breaking the peace, but they will be pushed out of power if the government is suspended should the IRA renege on the plan.

Not so, according to Blair, who Monday told unionists that they could continue with the power-sharing government and remain in the assembly without Sinn Fein.