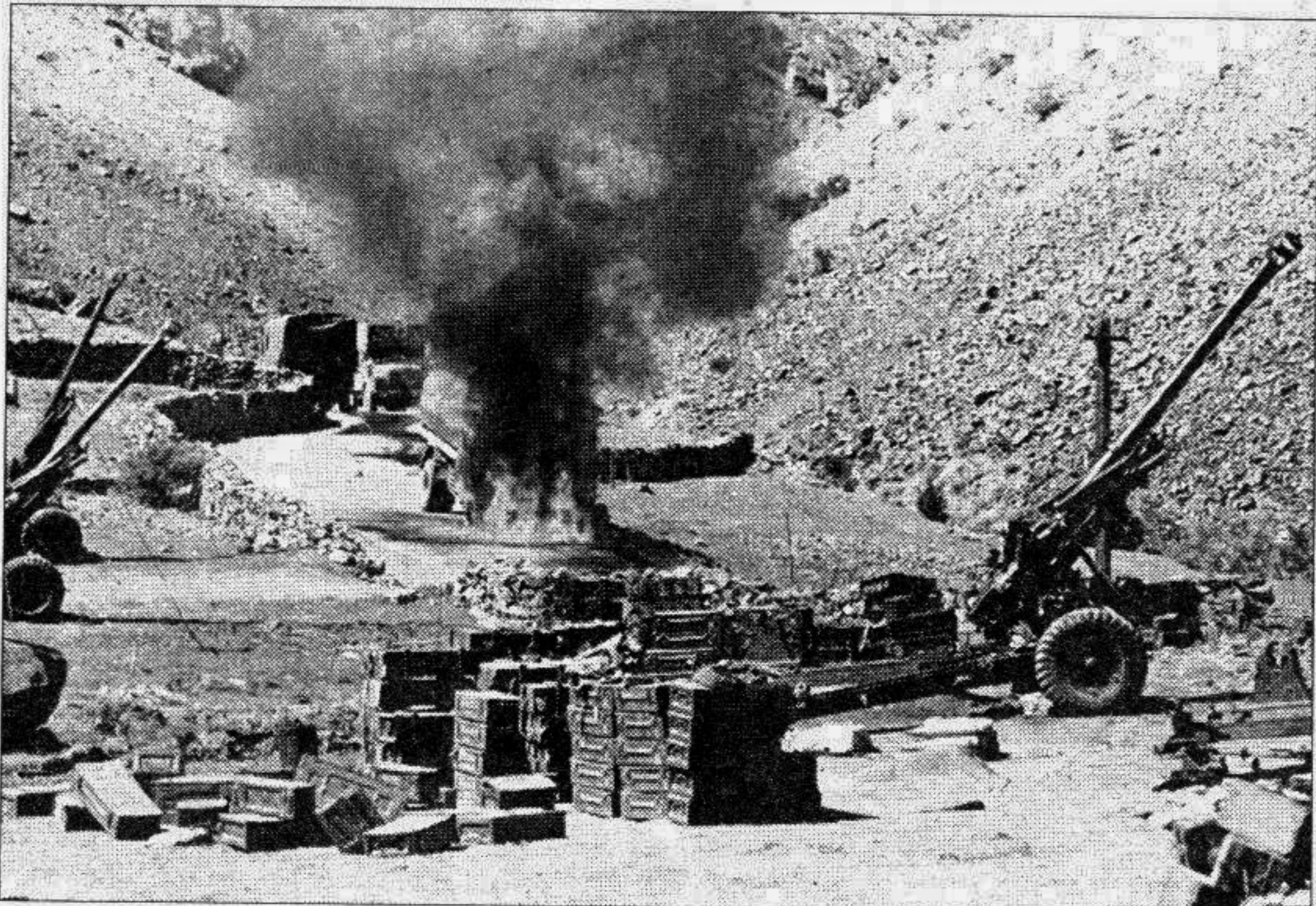


Kashmir battle far from over: Advani

KARGIL, India, July 6: Pakistani shells slammed into an oil tanker convoy on a crucial Indian highway Tuesday as fierce fighting over Kashmir mountain peaks continued despite an agreement in Washington that Pakistan would withdraw forces from India's side of a ceasefire line, reports AP.



An Indian civil patrol tanker burns after being hit by a Pakistani artillery shell Tuesday in the Kharbu section of Indian Kashmir. Indian forces fought fierce battles against Islamic militants in parts of Kashmir yesterday despite renewed hopes for a settlement with Pakistan. — AFP photo

US President Bill Clinton's meetings with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had raised hopes of a speedy end to the two-month battle in the snowcapped Himalayas. But India says there has been no sign of withdrawal and no letup in the nearly ceaseless shelling from both sides of the 1972 ceasefire line that divides Kashmir between the two nuclear powers.

Many people are saying the war is over. Indian Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani told a gathering of Hindu right-wing activists in New Delhi. "I say no it is not over. The military operations will continue until the eviction of the last Pakistani intruder."

India says it is fighting Pakistani soldiers from six Northern Light Infantry battalions and hundreds of Islamic militants who want to separate Muslim-majority Kashmir from India.

Pakistan acknowledges its forces are trading constant artillery shelling and targeting a strategic Indian highway. Islamabad says its troops have

not crossed the frontier although the United States, Russia, Britain, Germany, France and other countries have re-

jected those denials and called on Pakistan to withdraw the forces. When Pakistani shells

slammed into an oil tanker convoy on National Highway One, two of the trucks exploded in a ball of fire. Army engineers

worked to clear the obstacle while military and civilian vehicles were backed up for seven km on the only link between Kashmir's summer capital, Srinagar, and the remote battle zone.

India captured strategic peak 5,000-meter (16,500-foot) Tiger Hill on Sunday to evict fighters who could direct Pakistani artillery fire onto the highway and Indian military camps. Although the shelling had diminished, the hit on the oil tankers indicated that there may still be hundreds of Islamic fighters on vantage points up to four km inside Indian territory.

But the Indian Army is now focused on Batalik, the most difficult of three major battle-grounds, where soldiers say up to 300 Islamic fighters are entrenched on steep, jagged ridges at high altitudes.

India says it has pushed the intruders back three to four km all along the 140-km battle front since the heights were seized and stone bunkers were built in early May.

A Pakistani Army spokesman, Brig Rashid Qureshi, acknowledged his gunners still have a clear view of Tiger Hill and the highway and can target convoys.

Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif has not yet returned home after the meeting with Clinton in Washington. In Pakistan, a militant Muslim group whose members are fight-

ing in Kashmir warned the Pakistani prime minister not to make a deal with India.

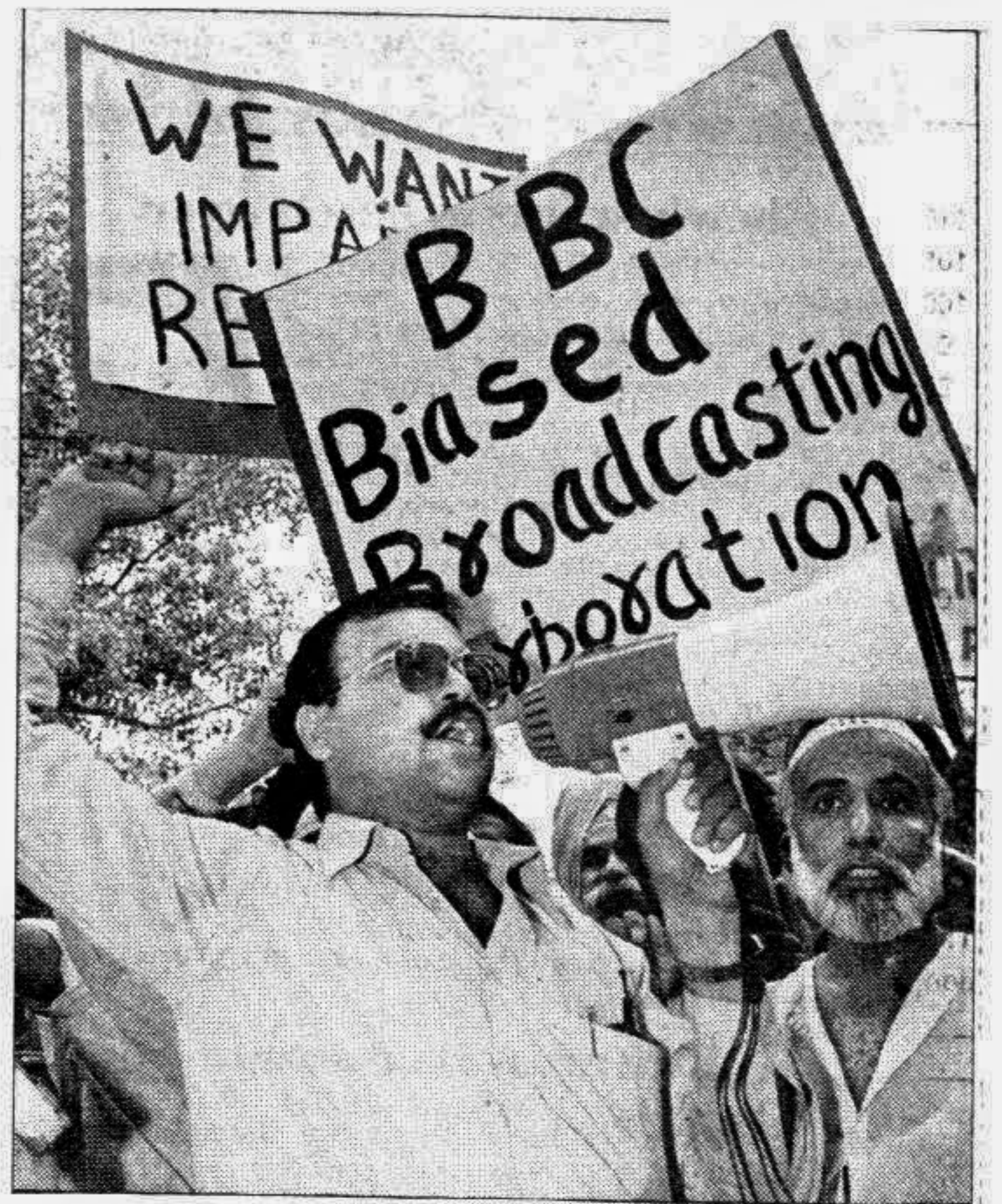
US officials said the two had agreed that Pakistan would take "concrete steps" to withdraw its forces from across the Line of Control in Kashmir. But those steps were not publicly spelled out and Indian officials said there is no evidence of any change on the ground.

Pakistan understands that where it is today militarily and internationally is in a blind alley," Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said Monday on CNN. "There is only one way to rectify it: Turn back from what they have done."

India says 486 Pakistani soldiers and 150 Islamic guerrillas have been killed in the fighting, while 265 Indian soldiers have died, 451 were wounded and 22 are missing. But Pakistan and the guerrillas have not provided recent casualty figures, and India's figures could not be confirmed.

Meanwhile, the two countries' diplomats continue to be detained in each other's capitals.

India said that Pakistan abducted embassy employee Yog Raj Viji from his car in Islamabad on Monday. On Tuesday, Pakistan said two of its embassy officials, Rao Akhtar Hussain and Mohammad Boota, were kidnapped from a New Delhi market and tortured by Indian intelligence officials.



Activists shout slogans during a demonstration near parliament Tuesday, condemning what they claim is biased reporting on the Kashmir situation by foreign media. India and Pakistan have been locked in a media war over the conflict in the disputed region of Kashmir, with Pakistan pushing for an internationalisation of the issue. — AFP photo

No improvement in Sino-US ties: Beijing

BEIJING, July 6: Relations between Beijing and Washington, strained by NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, have not improved recently, China said Tuesday, reports AFP.

"There has been no change in Sino-US relations since last Thursday," foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue told a regular news briefing.

"As for the issue of compensation, China and the US have had discussions through diplomatic channels," she said in reply to a question on when China would restart bilateral talks with the US on China's entry into the World Trade Organisation.

The NATO air strikes on the Chinese embassy in early May killed three Chinese journalists and injured 20 others, sparking nationwide anti-US and anti-NATO protests.

Floods kill 240 in China

BEIJING, July 6: Severe flooding along China's Yangtze River has killed 240 people, destroyed nearly half a million homes and caused billions of dollars in economic losses in the past few weeks, official media said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The 240 all died since late June in flooding which has affected the lives of an additional 60 million residents, Xinhua news agency said.

The floods had "adversely affected" some 3.5 million hectares (8.6 million acres) and "totally destroyed" 660,000 hectares (1.6 million acres) of crops, it quoted the Civil Affairs Ministry as saying.

A total of 480,000 homes had been washed away, while another 1.67 million had sustained heavy damage, it added.

Some 1.84 million people have been evacuated from affected areas and relief workers have mounted aid efforts and distributed 5,000 tents.

Direct economic losses now stood at 28.1 billion yuan (3.4 billion dollars), it said, though China's annual flooding season is only weeks old.

The ministry press release said Anhui, Zhejiang, Hubei and Jiangxi provinces had sustained the heaviest damage.

Tight security in Karachi as Jamaat calls strike against Kashmir pullout plan

KARACHI, July 6: Tight security was enforced in the Pakistan port of Karachi today in case of trouble from a strike by call by the main Islamic opposition party, Jamaat-e-Islami, against Sunday's Kashmir pullout plan, reports Reuters.

Scores of paramilitary rangers and police backed by armoured personnel carriers manned roads and sensitive areas in Pakistan's biggest city, but organisers said the protest got off to a slow start and little disruption was reported.

Rallies and demonstrations were called for today afternoon in Karachi, Lahore and the capital, Islamabad, against a US-Pakistan agreement that Kashmir mujahideen groups and Jamaat-e-Islami branded a "betrayal" of the nation.

Jamaat-e-Islami said the strike was aimed at ending Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's

government after he agreed with US President Bill Clinton to take "concrete steps" to end Pakistan's worst military confrontation with India over Kashmir in nearly 30 years.

Jamaat-e-Islami is the biggest and best organised of Pakistan's conservative Islamic opposition groups but has no members of parliament because it boycotted the last elections.

The call was backed by Kashmiri militant groups who termed the Sunday pact a sell-out of principles Pakistan has maintained for years and a betrayal of the "freedom fighters" operating inside Indian Kashmir.

Until Sunday, Pakistan had said it had no control over the mujahideen militants, to whom it gave only political and moral and no military or strategic support.

But Foreign Minister Sartaj

Aziz said in a Monday interview that the pact meant Islamabad would use its influence to pull them out and would link the move to the internationalisation of the Kashmir dispute after the US visit.

"If the mujahideen and the freedom fighters, as we call them, are going to be persuaded to withdraw, then they obviously would do so if the world is paying some attention to their concerns and their right of self-determination," Aziz said.

"If not they would not obviously respond to our appeal... because they say they have a right to be in Kashmir and they are fighting for their right of self-determination, so I think this assurance of some progress on Kashmir will give greater weight to an appeal that we may make to them to..." Aziz said.

Clinton said he would take a "personal interest" to try to nudge a stalled Indo-Pakistani

peace process back on track.

"Puzzled Pakistani newspapers called on the government to explain what Sharif agreed to do in Kashmir in his weekend dash to Washington."

The joint statement of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Clinton, as released by the White House, is likely to leave many in Pakistan bewildered," the Nation newspaper said.

"While our government spokesmen will, as usual, try to put all kinds of spin on this statement, the people have a right to know what the country has gained and what it has lost..." said the English-language independent daily, The News.

"Mr Sharif, after all, himself sought a meeting whose outcome, as is evident from the joint statement, is the very opposite of his own stated objective and recent rhetoric."

Floods, mudslide kill 42 in Nepal

KATHMANDU, July 6: More than 40 Nepalese are now known to have died in floods and mudslides caused by torrential rain, Nepal Television said today, reports AFP.

It said Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka told Parliament that 42 people had been killed in various areas.

They were swept away by floods or buried alive in their homes by mudslides which had also blocked roads to the capital.

Along the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway 224 km west of the capital a truck was buried along with at least two people and possibly more, a Home Ministry source said.

A steel suspension bridge was swept away at Gunda village, 190 kilometres (120 miles) west of Kathmandu.

Some 22 districts have been hit, the source said.

Pakistan protests beating of embassy officials

ISLAMABAD, July 6: Pakistan Tuesday lodged a strong protest with India over the arrest and "torture" of two officials from its diplomatic mission in New Delhi by Indian intelligence agents, officials said, reports AFP.

A foreign office statement said the officials were picked up late Monday and illegally detained for three hours.

They were subjected to "severe interrogation and torture," it said, adding both had suffered "serious injuries including fractures."

The Pakistani foreign ministry summoned the Indian High Commissioner, G. Parthasarthy, and handed over a note verbal about the incident to the Indian government, it said.

The note said under international conventions and bilateral accord the Indian government was responsible for ensuring the safety and security

of the officials of the Pakistani High Commission.

Pakistan also urged the Indian government to ensure that the intelligence agencies act in accordance with the diplomatic and established norms, the statement said.

The Indian intelligence should "desist from intimidating the personnel of the Pakistani mission," it said.

The Commission in New Delhi has lodged a formal complaint with the concerned police station and raised the matter with the Indian ministry of external affairs, it said.

The incident, the second in a week, came amid tensions between the two countries with their rival armies engaged in clashes along the Line of Control dividing the disputed state of Kashmir.

The Indian government last week expelled a Pakistan embassy official.

BRIEFLY

Lost sat found in Siberia: A Russian military satellite which disappeared off radar screens shortly after launch on Monday has been located in southern Siberia, still attached to its rocket, Itar-Tass reported today, AFP reports from Moscow.

The Raduga-1 communications satellite was launched from the Baikonur space base in Kazakhstan but mission control lost contact with the device after lift-off. It was found in Russia's Altai region, near Mongolia, Itar-Tass said. The report gave no details about the condition of the satellite or the launcher, a Proton-K.

Barak to meet Clinton in US: Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak and US President Bill Clinton agreed in a phone conversation on Monday to meet soon in Washington, Barak's spokesman said, Reuters reports from Jerusalem.

Barak, who will be sworn in as prime minister today, told Clinton he also intends to hold talks or meetings "in the coming days" with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah. "Barak and Clinton agreed to meet in Washington in a short time," the spokesman said without specifying a date.

Albanian immigrants held in Greece: Greece said Monday that 512 Albanian illegal immigrants had been arrested in the northwestern Greek region of Epirus over the past three days in a nationwide crackdown on illegal immigrants, Xinhua reports from Athens.

The illegal Albanian immigrants would be deported in the coming days. The crackdown on illegal immigrants, mostly Albanian men, comes after a meeting of the Greek government Council on Foreign Affairs and Defense on Friday, which decided to hire about 2,500 more police officers and border guards in a bid to curb illegal immigration in the country.

Italy intercepts ship with 700 migrants: Italian navy Tuesday intercepted a ship with 700 illegal immigrants on board off the port of Bari on the country's southeast coast, navy spokesmen said, AFP reports from Rome.

The vessel is now under escort and being taken to the nearest port on the Puglia coast, the navy said. There were no immediate details about the origin of the immigrants. Meanwhile, police said that about another 100 illegal immigrants, mostly Iraqi Kurds, landed along the Puglia coastline overnight.

British troops sent to N Ireland

DRUMCREE, Northern Ireland, July 6: Helicopters rushed British troops to a Northern Ireland flashpoint overnight to stop Protestant youths breaking into a Roman Catholic graveyard, witnesses said today, reports Reuters.

The village of Drumcree was quiet again early today after a second night of short, running confrontations between Protestant youths and security forces.

"It was almost a rerun of the previous night but a bit more low-key. About 300 youths were involved," said one witness.

On Sunday night, youths

threw stones at security forces and police fired one plastic bullet.

Troops and police saturated the village to try to avert a repeat of the violence of previous years that has marked the annual march by the pro-British Orange Order.

Northern Ireland authorities on Monday banned an Orange Order parade from entering a Catholic area in south Belfast next week.

The Orangemen had wanted to parade along the Irish nationalist Lower Ormeau Road next Monday.

Algeria starts releasing FIS prisoners

ALGIERS, July 6: Algerian prisons began releasing thousands of Muslim militants on Monday under a mass Independence Day pardon issued by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika — the first fruit of a peace deal between the government and a Muslim guerrilla faction in June, reports Reuters.

But a senior official of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front, told Reuters that by evening "only 300 were freed from 10 prisons across the country — 30 detainees per jail."

The delay dampened hopes raised by Bouteflika's announcement on Sunday, he said, declining to be named in line with a government order barring FIS leaders from talking to the media without prior authorisation.

"We have all the reasons to

doubt the intentions of government leaders after what happened today," he said.

A military official said the process was slow because prisoners had to fill out documents before they left.

Those convicted of major violence, like murder, rape and bomb attacks during more than seven years of bloodshed, are excluded from the amnesty.

Justice ministry officials said about 5,000 prisoners will go free.

Some 30 detainees walked out the high-security Serkadji jail on the heights of Algiers, scene of a bloody battle between elite government troops and militants five years ago in which nearly 90 prisoners died.

Pentagon undergoing renovation

ARLINGTON, Virginia, July 6: In a blocked-off sector of the Pentagon, hidden from view, hundreds of workers are toiling on a major Department of Defence initiative, reports AP.

Is it a top-secret military operation? No.

The 56-year-old Pentagon is being renovated.

Before work began last year, no major renovations had been done on the Pentagon since it was completed in 16 months on January 15, 1943. The building, a national landmark, is showing its age. Rusty water pipes occasionally burst. Old electrical wires and short-circuit. Lead paint chips fall from windows. Asbestos tiles cover many floors.

The renovation costs are expected to reach 1.2 billion dollars. That tab could soar to \$1.34 billion when the price of relocating employees and building temporary offices is added.

Everything — from the plumbing and air conditioning to the bathrooms and medical clinic — is being rebuilt, overhauled or rewired. The entire 29-acre (12 hectare) building will be gutted and rebuilt from the basement up.

About 100 million pounds (450 kilos) of debris will be removed.

Iraq demands expulsion of NZ demining expert

BAGHDAD, July 6: Iraq's foreign ministry demanded on Tuesday that the United Nations recall a New Zealand demining expert within 72 hours, accusing him of trying to destroy Iraq's crops by planting locust eggs, reports AFP.

It is the first such incident since UN arms inspectors left Iraq in December 1998 on the eve of US and British air strikes.

The ministry called in the UN humanitarian affairs coordinator Hans von Sponeck and gave him "a memorandum asking for the departure of the New Zealand national from Iraq within 72 hours," the official INA news agency said.

The ministry accused the New Zealander of putting "locust eggs, a fatal insect for harvests, in the Kharan region" close to the Iraq-Iran border northeast of Baghdad.

An official from the United Nations office in Baghdad confirmed the Iraqi demand, saying the memorandum had been handed over on Tuesday morning.

The foreign ministry said the New Zealander, who supervises the demining programme in the northeastern province of Sulimaniya, had "in April buried cases containing locust eggs, fatal to cultivation."

Residents in the region unearthed the cases and saw they contained locust eggs. This criminal and immoral act is aimed at sabotaging the Iraqi economy.

Israeli army prepares for fresh WB pullout

JERUSALEM, July 6: The Israeli army has drawn up detailed plans for further pullbacks from the West Bank in the expectation that new Prime Minister Ehud Barak will press ahead with implementing October's Wye River agreement, public radio reported Tuesday, reports AFP.

Chief of staff General Shaul Mofaz met with senior commanders last Thursday to discuss implementing the US-brokered land-for-security agreement with the Palestinians and examined various possible pullback maps, the radio said.

The agreement required Israel to withdraw from a further 13 per cent of the West Bank in three stages but outgoing prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu froze implementation in December after just one small pullback.

An army spokesman contacted by AFP declined to confirm or deny the report.

The Hebrew daily Haaretz reported that Barak intended to commit his government to implementing the Wye accord in full even though he would rather launch straight into negotiations on a final settlement with the Palestinians.

In policy guidelines made public Monday, Barak adopted the language of the outgoing right-wing government in insisting that his administration would implement peace agreements while ensuring the Palestinians also comply.

"The government will respect agreements Israel signed with the Palestinians and will insist that the Palestinians implement the agreements too," the guidelines said.



Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak speaks to the Labour Party central committee meeting in Tel Aviv after the committee approved his ministerial list Monday, one day before the list is presented to parliament. — AFP photo

Russian troops fly to Kosovo to join peacekeepers

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, July 6: Elite Russian troops flew to Pristina on Tuesday after Moscow resolved a row with NATO over its role in the Kosovo peacekeeping operation, reports AFP.

The first of two Russian IL-76 planes which left from the Pskov military air base early Tuesday arrived here with 20 paratroopers, according to a Russian media report.

Officials in Moscow said another two flights were due to arrive later Tuesday from Severny military airbase at Ivanovo east of Moscow, bringing the total to four.

But at Pristina airport, Lieutenant-Colonel Stephen Harrison of the British contingent of KFOR said there would be a total of three Russian flights on Tuesday, plus a UN aid flight.

The Russian units will form part of the core of the Russian contingent in Kosovo, where NATO is leading a peacekeeping mission following its 11-week air war to end Serb repression in the province.

Russia's participation in the NATO-led peace mission has been fraught with complications since the first Russian peacekeepers outflanked NATO troops by arriving in Pristina first on June 12.

The commander of the German KFOR troops, General Fritz von Korf, said Tuesday that Russian KFOR troops would be deployed in Orahovica district, southern Kosovo.

He did not expect Russian troops to reach full strength until late July or early August.

The area is currently policed by Dutch peacekeepers. Several thousand Serbs live there in a tense co-existence alongside the ethnic Albanian community.

In Russia, General Nikolai Stakov, the chief of staff of the airborne troops, told NTV television that 300 Russian troops and military personnel would arrive in Pristina during the day.

They would join some 200 peacekeepers who took over the Slatina airport in the Kosovo capital last month and about

100 support staff.

The Russian planes were grounded over the weekend after Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria refused, at NATO's request, to allow them to use their airspace.

NATO moved to put the brakes on the Russian deployment to ensure that a number of technical details on the mission were cleared up.

The row was resolved Monday after two days of talks in Moscow between Russian and NATO military experts.

Demonstrators demand Milosevic's resignation

BELGRADE, July 6: Some 20,000 people demonstrated Monday evening in the town of Leskovac demanding the resignation of President Slobodan Milosevic, the independent news agency Beta reported, says AFP.

The demonstrators originally gathered to demand the resignation of the chief government official in Leskovac, a town 250 kilometres (150 miles) south of Belgrade.

But the turnout developed into an anti-Milosevic demonstration, with the crowd chanting "Slobo go!" and "We want change!"

The meeting was called by a television engineer, Ivan Novkovic, who went on air last Thursday to appeal to the population to demonstrate Monday

against the local chief government official, Zivojin Stefanovic, a member of Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party.

Police did not intervene at the demonstration although it was not officially permitted.

Army reservists stationed in Kosovo during NATO air attacks addressed the crowd demanding that the local television, run by the Socialist Party, report on the demonstration, Beta said.

Beta also reported that opposition figures had launched a campaign in Belgrade Monday to force Milosevic to resign.

The campaign, dubbed "The time has come for us to part", is organised by independent trade unions and some 40 non-governmental organisations grouped together in the body