

DPRK building missile base near China

SEOUL, July 7: North Korea is building an underground missile base near its northern border with China, making the site difficult for US and South Korean forces to attack, a local newspaper said today, reports Reuters.

The Chosun Ilbo newspaper quoted an unidentified government official as saying North Korea was building the underground missile site in Younggeo-dong in North Korea's Yanggang province at the central part of its border with China.

"South Korea-US forces are anxious to come up with countermeasures since an attack at a time of emergency is impossible because the base is about 20 km from China," the official was quoted by the paper as saying.

He said it would be difficult to attack the base since its entrance faces China.

The paper said the construction of the base was about 70 per cent completed and it had 10 launch pads, each 20-metres (66 feet) long, leading to speculation they could be used to launch Taepodong I and Taepodong II missiles, now under development.

Last August, North Korea test-fired the three-stage Taepodong I, which flew over Japan and landed in the Pacific. Pyongyang said it was launching a satellite, which US defence officials later confirmed.

The Taepodong II's range would put the US states of Hawaii and Alaska within striking distance, defence analysts said.

Chosun quoted a military source as saying missiles fired from the new base could reach all of South Korea and most parts of Japan.

Hillary's first campaign for Senate race

WEST DAVENPORT, New York, July 7: Hillary Rodham Clinton has been to New York a dozen times this year as the nation's first lady, but on today's trip she's a candidate for the Senate, reports AP.

For her first official campaign appearance, Hillary chose the homestead of the man she hopes to succeed, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan. It is the first stop on what aides describe as a summer-long "listening tour" of the state.

Her aides said Hillary, the first-ever first lady to seek public office, hopes to blunt charges she is a political carpetbagger, having never lived or worked in New York.

With no fanfare, Hillary's campaign on Tuesday filed a single page with the Federal Election Commission in Washington, declaring that she had formed a committee to explore a Senate race. That enables her to raise and spend money for political travel, polling and advertising.

Moynihan's decision to retire after 24 years in the Senate cleared the way for her Senate bid.

The race to replace Moynihan is being eyed on the Republican side by New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and two congressmen from Long Island, Rick Lazio and Peter King.

Giuliani formed a Senate exploratory committee in April.

Hillary Clinton's decision to visit the Moynihan homestead brought a flurry of activity to the normally placid place. Workmen constructed an outdoor platform to hold the more than 200 reporters and television crews, some from as far away as Asia and Europe.

"Today, we're cleaning out the barn in case it rains tomorrow ... It's full of pigeon guano," the senator's wife, Liz, said on the eve of Hillary's arrival.

Her four-day swing through eastern and central New York, a traditional Republican stronghold, has generated enthusiasm from many Democrats.

US warns Russia not to sell arms to Syria

WASHINGTON, July 7: The United States warned Russia on Tuesday that it could lose American aid if it sold more lethal weapons to Syria, which Washington considers a state sponsor of terrorism, reports Reuters.

The State Department made the point publicly as Syrian President Hafez al-Assad visited Moscow for the first time since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

Assad was seeking to renew ties with Syria's former patron and acquire new weapons to strengthen his hand in long-stalled peace talks with Israel expected to be revived soon.

"In terms of arms sales ... we would be very concerned about any new Russian arms sales to Syria or to any other designated state sponsor of terrorism," State Department Deputy Spokesman James Foley said.

He noted that under US law, assistance could be withheld from the government of a country that transferred lethal military equipment to a country determined by the secretary of state to be a state sponsor of terrorism.

Despite the warning, Foley said Assad's visit could be a "positive" even if the aim is to try to build momentum for the Middle East peace process.

New Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has promised to inject new urgency into the search for Mideast peace.



Indian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi (C) prepares to lay a wreath honouring the remains of Captain Sumeet Roy, a casualty of the fighting in Kashmir, during a funeral ceremony Wednesday. Though India claims to be pushing back Islamic militant infiltrators steadily, the cost remains high for the Indian Army.

— AFP photo

Militants rule out withdrawal from Kashmir peaks

ISLAMABAD, July 7: The commanders of Islamic militants fighting in Kashmir Wednesday said they would reject any order by Pakistan to withdraw from the strategic peaks they have captured in Indian Kashmir, reports AFP.

"We reject any appeal by Pakistan to vacate our positions," Mohammad Salahuddin, chief of the United Front grouping 15 militant organisations, told a news conference here.

Salahuddin, accompanied by other "mujahideen" leaders, denounced a weekend Pakistan-US summit where Washington said it was assured the withdrawal of Islamic fighters from Indian Kashmir.

The communiqué was issued after a meeting between US President Bill Clinton and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

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India has stressed that its military operation in Kashmir will continue until the last

guerrilla has retreated to the Pakistan side of the border.

The fighting began in early May when India launched a massive offensive to evict guerrillas who had crossed the so-called Line of Control and set up heavily-armed mountain bunkers in Indian territory.

According to official figures, 283 Indian soldiers have been killed in the conflict compared to 542 on the other side. Independent observers say the figures are probably far higher.

Islamabad, which denies New Delhi's claims that Pakistani regular soldiers are involved in the fighting, has promised to "use its influence" and effect a withdrawal by the "Kashmiri freedom fighters."

The commitment was made by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during talks at the weekend with US President Bill Clinton.

In return Sharif asked for US help in resolving the long-standing Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir, which has sparked two wars in the past 50 years.

— AFP photo

Sierra Leone govt, rebels reach accord

LOME, July 7: Sierra Leone's government and rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) reached an accord Wednesday in Lome which is expected to be signed later in the day, rebel chief Foday Sankoh told AFP.

"I am going to sign an accord today. An accord has been reached," Sankoh said.

The announcement comes after marathon talks that began late Tuesday and lasted into the night among five west African heads of state and the RUF rebel chief, who first launched his bush war in 1991.

Sankoh gave no further detail on the nature of the accord, but a Togolese diplomat said that the agreement would be signed between the rebel leader and Sierra Leone's President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah later Wednesday morning.

Along with Kabbah, the presidents of Burkina Faso, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo hammered out the accord with the RUF during the night, the diplomat said.

The peace deal, which comes after six weeks of talks, was brokered by Togo, which holds the presidency of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

— AFP photo

British Prime Minister Tony Blair (R) greets Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif, during their meeting at No. 10 Downing Street in London Tuesday. The prime ministers were expected to discuss the deepening crisis over the India-Pakistan border dispute.

— AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Colombian peace talks postponed:

The latest phase of Colombia's stop-and-go peace process was postponed for two weeks less than 24 hours before it was due to start in a guerrilla stronghold in eastern Colombia, the government and rebels said Tuesday. Reuters reports from Bogota.

The delay came amid fresh claims by Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla warlords that the United States was preparing to intervene militarily in the long-running civil conflict that has cost more than 35,000 lives in 10 years.

— Indonesian polls result on July 21: Indonesia's electoral commission has set July 21 as the deadline for final result in the nation's first free parliamentary vote in 45 years, a report said Tuesday. AP reports from Jakarta.

"We have set July 21 as the tentative deadline," said Adnan Buyung Nasution, a deputy chairman of the commission, as quoted by the English-language newspaper Indonesian Observer.

On Tuesday — a month after the vote — the National Election Committee began tallying votes on the national level for the first time. During the past month, vote counting had been conducted on the provincial level.

Hutu rebel kill 3 in Burundi: Three people, all civilians, died when Hutu rebels attacked a bus travelling along Burundi's main highway, the military authorities said Tuesday. AFP reports from Bujumbura.

In an ambush staged on Monday, the terrorists launched a rocket on a bus travelling from Bugarama to Kayanza. Three bodies of passengers were found buried next to the wreckage of the minibus, a military source told AFP, without indicating what happened to the other passengers.

Philippines' volcano bubbles: Emissions of sulphurous steam from the rumbling Mayon volcano in the eastern Philippines are increasing, but officials said today there was no need to raise the alert level yet. Reuters reports from Manila.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said in a statement the 2,640-metre (8,000-foot) Mayon volcano was emitting about 4,660 tonnes of sulphur dioxide per day, up from about 1,000 tonnes last week. But it said it would maintain a Level 2 alert, meaning that an eruption could take place. A level 3 alert indicates an eruption within days.

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International

India to pursue diplomacy, military campaign in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, July 7: Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee vowed Wednesday to pursue diplomatic efforts to evict Islamic guerrillas from Kashmir, but refused to halt a military offensive in the Himalayan state, reports AFP.

At the same time, Vajpayee told a meeting of chief ministers that he was against any internationalisation of the 50-year territorial dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir.

Facing the most serious crisis of his 16-month premiership, Vajpayee said India was determined to drive out the guerrillas -- and what New Delhi claims are Pakistani troops -- occupying key hills in Indian Kashmir.

He also raised doubts over the pledge his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif made to US President Bill Clinton on Sunday to pull the fighters back over the Kashmir border.

"We are informed that Pakistan has agreed to withdraw," Vajpayee said. "We will watch for results on the ground."

"In the meantime our (military) operations shall

continue unabated."

However, he added the government had not ruled out a diplomatic resolution of the two-month conflict.

"While our armed forces are doing everything to throw out the armed intruders, we are also engaged diplomatically to achieve the same purpose."

"The objective is one and only one. It is the complete and unconditional withdrawal of the intruders from our side ... There is no other objective and no other subject that we are discussing."

Vajpayee's remarks were a clear warning that while India might accept mediation to end the current fighting, it would reject any interference in the overall Kashmir debate.

"We have made it clear there is no room for third-party involvement," he said, adding contacts with western countries over the current situation had a limited brief.

"This is not internationalisation of the Kashmir question since they (Western countries) all recognise that this is a bilateral matter to be settled between

India and Pakistan."

India launched its military operation in Kashmir in May. Pakistan denies any involvement in the incursion, saying the armed men are Moslem insurgents fighting to end Indian rule over Kashmir.

The fighting has led to hundreds of deaths on both sides, and fuelled concerns of an all-out war between India and Pakistan, which conducted nuclear tests in May last year.

The two countries have fought three wars, including two over Kashmir.

Wednesday's meeting of chief ministers was the first multi-party forum to discuss Kashmir since fighting erupted in the state.

The opposition has supported the war effort, but has criticised the government's failure to check the large-scale incursion by Islamic forces into Kashmir.

On Tuesday, opposition leader Sonia Gandhi, addressing a public meeting ahead of coming elections, launched a bitter attack on Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist-led coalition.

Anti-Milosevic protests spread across Serbia

BELGRADE, July 7: De-

mands for Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic to quit spread on Tuesday to Serbia's second and third largest cities, while former Belgrade mayor Zoran Djindjic led an anti-government rally to warn of civil war if he stays, reports AFP.

The two countries have fought three wars, including two over Kashmir.

It was the first time a city council had openly called for Milosevic's departure.

Some 1,500 people clashed with riot police in the southern Serbian town of Leskovac following the jailing of a television engineer who had interrupted broadcasts to call for an opposition protest.

Some protesters attacked the house of a local official of Milosevic's Socialist Party, smashing windows and breaking down the surrounding fence in protest at the 30-day sentence for Ivan Novakovic.

Djindjic, head of the Serbian Democratic Party, told some 5,000 people in Uzice, southwest of Belgrade, that Serbia was heading for a civil war unless Milosevic went immediately.

He sketched out an emergency programme of measures to follow Milosevic's departure.

"We must not let ourselves get involved in the last war Milosevic has yet to provoke, the civil war," said Djindjic, who returned to Belgrade on Sunday after a two-month absence.

He has to go immediately, without bargaining, with no choice."

The rally, held under the slogan "Now or never," ended after an hour without incident.

Police did not intervene although the protest was banned. The crowd who had answered a call for the Uzice rally, issued by the Alliance for Change (S2P) opposition coalition, was blessed by a Serbian Orthodox priest.

In June, the Serbian Orthodox church also demanded resignation of Milosevic and other top Yugoslav officials.

Protestors in Uzice carried signs reading "Milosevic, stop defending us! Serbia deserves better."

"We want changes," "Now or never" and "Milosevic, what is next?"

Djindjic urged the people to "transform" their dissatisfaction to a general people's movement aimed at freeing the Serbian people from slavery."

Undated file picture of Turkish Minister of State for the Economy, Hikmet Ulugbay, who sustained serious injuries when he tried to commit suicide in Ankara early Wednesday. Ulugbay had shot himself in his home and was rushed to hospital after he was found by his wife and his son.

Health Minister Osman Durmus said later, Ulugbay was in a stable condition and his life no longer in danger.

— AFP photo



Former rivals, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak (l-r), his wife Nava and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara, toast at the Prime Minister's Office during the official changing-of-the-guard ceremony in Jerusalem Wednesday. Barak plans to meet Middle Eastern leaders and US President Clinton in the next two weeks as he tries to restart the peace process.

— AFP photo

Barak moves swiftly on peace track

JERUSALEM, July 7: Waiting no time honouring promises to revive the stalled Middle East peace process, new Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Wednesday set quick summit meetings with Yasser Arafat, US President Bill Clinton and Arab leaders, reports AFP.

He said the meeting with Arafat would take place on the Israeli side of the Erez crossing between Israel and the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip.

Taking office Tuesday night, Barak told parliament, "An historic chance for peace has been given to us."

"We can expect difficult negotiations, but if we find the same determination on the other side, no power in the world will stop us," he said.

Arafat welcomed Barak's statement and the arrival of his dovish government after three years of acrimony and peace-making deadlock under conservative prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We are ready to work together to achieve the peace of the brave which we signed